



INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

MARRIAGE:
NO CHILD'S PLAY

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Introduction

More Than Brides Alliance, India presents Innovative Practices - a learning document to inspire and share learnings with the development practitioners and civil society organisations which are collaborating to end Child Marriage in the country. The Alliance had been implementing Marriage: No Child's Play (MNCP) programme in the country for five years, with 2020 being the final year.

The Alliance has tried to jointly reflect, compile and share the programme experience and learnings of this five-year journey in order to strengthen the design and implementation of future Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) and Child Marriage programmes. This necessity has led to Learning and Knowledge Harvesting (LKH) initiative which has some significant and relevant learning products to offer. The current learning product is one of the prominent outcomes of LKH initiatives.

About More Than Brides Alliance

More Than Brides Alliance (MTBA) is a global consortium of more than 30 International and National civil society and research organisations. The Alliance instigates to empower young people, in particular adolescent girls, to decide if and when to get married and to make informed choices about their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). The Alliance (MTBA) came into existence in the year 2016 with a girl centric Child Marriage programme "Marriage: No Child's play". This approach was in contrast to the other conventional approaches used so far, as its focus was on improving the lives of adolescent girls by empowering informed decision-making ability including SRHR.

In India, the national level alliance comprises of Save The Children (SCI), Population Council and Simavi's partners Bihar Voluntary Health Association (BVHA), Child In Need Institute (CINI), Network for Enterprise Enhancement and Development Support (NEEDS) and Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI). In India, the Alliance is implementing the program in 11 prevalent high Child Marriage development blocks across four States in the country.

Implementation Areas of MTBA in India

Bihar

Disrict : East Champaran
Block : Raxaul
Implementing Partner : BVHA

Disrict : West Champaran
Block : Majhaulia
Implementing Partner : BVHA

Disrict : Sitamarhi
Block : Riga
Implementing Partner : SCI

Disrict : Gaya
Block : Mohanpur
Implementing Partner : SCI

Jharkhand

Disrict : Deogarh
Block : Sarwan
Implementing Partner : NEEDS

Disrict : Dumka
Block : Dumka
Implementing Partner : CINI

Odisha

Disrict : Ganjam
Block : Khaliokote
Implementing Partner : VHAI

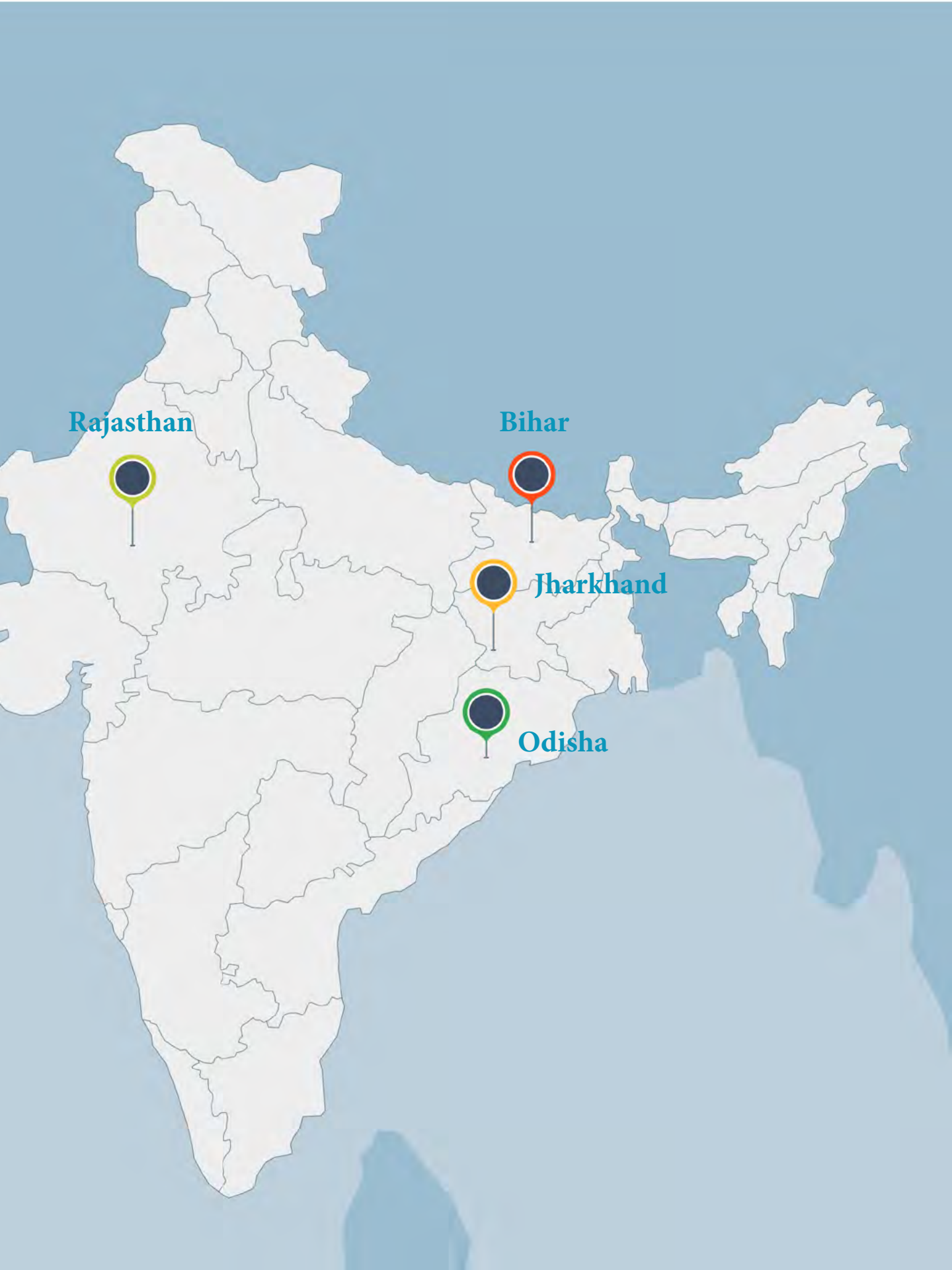
Disrict : Kandhmal
Block : K.Nuagaon
Implementing Partner : SCI

Disrict : Nuapara
Block : Nuapara
Implementing Partner : SCI

Rajasthan

Disrict : Tonk
Block : Piploo
Implementing Partner : SCI

Disrict : Jodhpur
Block : Osian
Implementing Partner : SCI



Rajasthan

Bihar

Jharkhand

Odisha

Overview of Innovative Practices

This learning product speaks about eight distinct innovative approaches of the MTBA, India. The India Alliance addressed these practices as “innovation” because these were not part of the programme implementation plan but were developed in consultation with programme stakeholders, in particular the MTBA adolescent girls. All these participatory methods resulted in promoting and sustaining the girls’ agency at the community level. Additionally, it informs and guides about various community level practices which when integrated in the programme, could reverse Child Marriages in the community.

- **School Management Committee (SMC)-** Engaging Adolescent Discussion Leaders of Kandhamal District of Odisha- SMC has proven to be one of the powerful monitoring mechanisms to promote efficient functioning of SMCs. This innovative practice has substantially prevented drop out of girls from schools.

- **Lahanti Learning Centre-A Ray of Life -** This approach speaks about learning centres which were established in Block Jama of Dumka (Jharkhand) with an objective to improve the learning outcomes of the drop-out married and unmarried girls and to mainstream them in the formal education system. However, in addition to formal education, it gradually adapted to offer a range of opportunities like life skills education, SRHR, information on multi-sectoral government schemes and services, self-defense training, vocational training recreational opportunities such as arts and sports.

- **Hunar- The Ability to Lead Own Life-** Hunar is the initiative through which interested girls in the adolescent groups (formed under the programme) were provided training on artificial jewellery and jute bag making. The girls exhibited their handmade produce at a block level exhibition in Bettiah (District West Champaran). The highlight was a Fashion Show, where girls dressed up by wearing their own handmade jewellery and held their own hand made jute bags.

- **World Menstrual Hygiene Day- Celebrating Through Wall Mural -** This story reveals the importance of Mural/wall painting in breaking the silence and myths around menstruation. In Block Sarwan of Deogarh District, both adolescent boys and girls together celebrated the World Menstrual Hygiene Day by transforming the MHM knowledge into amazing and vibrant artwork on the community walls.

- **Information Dissemination Centres -** A platform for Adolescents, the Project established adolescent friendly spaces known as Information Dissemination Centres. Here adolescents could congregate and access ready information related to entitlements, social protection schemes and health services, particularly related to adolescent sexual and reproductive health. This innovation showed us that MTBA girls took the responsibility to monitor the functioning of an IDC systematically.

- **Radio Power -** This approach communicates about the experience of how radio programs emerged as a unique and effective community engaging tool. In Majhaulia and Raxaul Blocks of Bihar, the MTBA girls were inspired to develop their own script and broadcast with their original voice over.

- **Empowering Girls Through Training on Social Media-** The story speaks about how innovative use of communication and media could amplify the voice of adolescent girls, particularly those at the risk of early marriage. In Sarwan Block of Deogarh District (Jharkhand), girls were provided training on prudent usage of communication tools and various social media tools.

- **Child Marriage Free Village Declaration-** This is a powerful example of a joint community initiative. This was introduced by the programme and was made a part of the Gaon Kalyan Samiti (Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee) monitoring system to restrict the incidences of Child Marriages in the implementing villages in Khalikote Block of Ganjam District (Odisha).



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समय 10 बजे से 02 बजे तक

**Lahanti
Learning
Centre-
The Ray of
Education**

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ନିମ୍ନଲିଖିତ

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Dumka is one of the most remote Districts of Santhal Pargana Division and has the distinction of being sub-capital of Jharkhand State. This tribal dominated district of the State is the habitat of mainly Santhal tribes, which constitute almost 49 per cent of the total population of the district. Santhali people are mostly engaged in daily labour work and seasonal agricultural activities for their livelihood. They migrate to nearby states for their livelihood due to limited access to regular livelihoods, meager availability of resources and lack of income generation opportunities in the district. As a result, Santhalis continue to live the legacy of historical exploitation while navigating uneven development even in current times.

According to the Census 2011, total female literacy rate in Dumka is 49.6 per cent. The situation is worse in project implementation Block, Jama, where the female literacy rate is only 38 per cent. From the above data it is clear that a large number of girls dropped out from schools before completing elementary education (Class VIII) and subsequently got married before the age of 18 years. This is one of the most crucial underlying cause behind Child Marriages in Dumka, especially within Jama.

Child marriages alter lives irrevocably. At a fundamental level, they represent violation of children's rights through disruption of education, shrinking of access to resources, opportunities and escalating risks to physical and mental health, safety and well-being.

In Jama Block, where the programme was implemented, there was no alternative education facility available for out-of-school adolescent girls in the age group 15-19 years. Although many of them have a dream to pursue studies and complete their education.

During the interaction with out-of-school adolescent girls in Jama, the programme team found that they are interested in reconnecting with education and want to continue their education further. But they do not know how they may be mainstreamed into education again. While talking to their parents, the team found that parents and in some cases, even in-laws / husbands of married adolescent girls were interested in continuation of education of their daughters / daughters-in-laws/ wives. Keeping the demand of the community and dreams of adolescents in mind, the programme initiated a discourse within the organization.

It was found that the solution lies beyond establishing a learning center, instead a holistic package is required to deal with their learning gaps, alternates to link them further either with formal or informal system of education. As this was a unique and a first-time innovation in the State, it aspired the programme to launch this concept with a small group of out-of-school girls.

Significant Outcomes

Reconnected with Education

85 out-of-school at-risk adolescent girls, including 11 married young women, who had dropped out of school are reconnected with education and got the opportunity to complete their secondary education.

More Enrollment in under SRHR

Lahanti Learning Centers emerged as important, safe spaces for girls offering a range of inputs (life skills, SRHR, information on multi-sectoral Government schemes and services, self-defense training, vocational training and access to recreational opportunities including arts and sports) apart from education.

Improved Self Confidence

Self-confidence and negotiation skills of out-of-school adolescent girls have improved.

Enrollment in (NIOS)

11 students of Lahanti Learning Centre were enrolled in National Institute of Open School (NIOS) to complete their secondary education.

Preventing Early Marriages

Their marriages have been delayed and thus, make significant contribution to prevent early marriage.

Lahanti Learning Centers were initiated with an objective to support out-of-school adolescent girls (15-19 years) to bridge the learning gaps and provide academic support to them to complete their secondary education from National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). Some experts were engaged to develop the materials to bridge their learning gaps and bridging modules up to level-5 were developed. The team engaged dedicated facilitators to extend regular support and guidance to girls. The capacities of facilitators were built to the extent that they could guide the girls at varied levels with ease and could pay individual attention to each enrolled girl.

During the course of implementation, it was realized that some innovative activities need to

be added to the existing activities of this center. to break the monotony of regular classes and engage the girls purposefully in the centre. This gave birth to the idea of upgrading the centre as a safe space for adolescent girls where they can enjoy their "we" time.

So, along with academics, training on life skills, knowledge on SRHR issues with the help of audio-visual aids, vocational training etc. were included in the curriculum. The response from the girls and the support from community was overwhelming and kept the team motivated to make the center more vibrant. Finally, self-defense training was also included to enable holistic empowerment of adolescents enabling them to make improved life choices.



Hemanti Soren was married when she was in Class VIII. She failed in mathematics and that was the end of her educational journey in the year 2009. She was enrolled in Lahanti Learning Centre in 2019. The support and guidance extended by the centre raised her confidence. Now she does not feel scared of mathematics. Instead, she is confident enough and claims that she can help her children in their studies more than she would have managed to do before.

In her words, "We learn. We play games. We draw and do painting. We learn by doing, enjoying with friends. When I was at home, I didn't have so many friends. Now I have my own dreams. As long as this center is open, I will come here".

Further, other opportunities were explored with the District and Block Administration to set up Lahanti Learning Centre within the Block administrative office in addition to the ones inside the school buildings. The programme team had multiple rounds of interactions with District and Block Administration, and convinced them into active collaboration. Hence, the innovative journey called Lahanti Learning Centre was started in one of the remotest blocks of Jharkhand with the government.

This innovation has been demonstrated with the adolescent girls in one of the remotest blocks of Dumka District, where many development indicators are even below national and state average. Most girls engaged in the centre belong to Santhal tribe who are shy in nature. They were out-of-school girls. The continuous and focused intervention with the girls enabled them to bridge their learning gaps and complete their secondary education through NIOS. The spectrum of services viz. academic support, life skill education, bridge education, training on SRHR, self-defense training, vocational training etc. were offered to the adolescents engaged with learning centers to ensure their holistic

development. This is an integrated-participatory approach taken under the project with the active involvement of government, parents, community and adolescent girls. It aims to make meaningful changes in the lives of at risk out-of-school adolescent girls by empowering and reconnecting them with education and skills. The learning centre evolved as an adolescent friendly and responsive space. The teaching learning processes focused on building a supportive environment. The education component was also a part of a broader array of inputs that respond to the needs, concerns and interests of adolescent girls. Most importantly, these centers were managed, run and owned by the students of Lahanti Learning Centre with the support of project staff. Such type of integrated strategy was crucial to deal with the child marriage and empower the out- of- school adolescent girls by reconnecting them with education and skills.

Later, the implementing partner organization replicated the Lahanti Learning Centre model in other ongoing adolescent programmes across various locations in seven districts in Jharkhand and one district in the neighboring state of Chhattisgarh.



School Management Committee-Engaging Adolescent Discussion Leaders for School Monitoring to Prevent Drop Out of Girls


Kandhamal is a tribal District situated in Central Odisha. It is located on a high altitude and its hilly topography renders some areas inaccessible. Owing to its terrain and demography, District Kandhamal is counted amongst the most backward districts of the State. Cultivating ginger, turmeric and collecting minor forest produce are the major sources of livelihood for the people of the district. The total literacy rate of the District is 58.37 per cent with significant disparity in the male (37.20%) and female (21.17%) literacy rates. Despite many existing dedicated programmes by the Education and SC/ST departments, promoting education for girls in the area remains a challenge. The likely causes leading to the dropping-out of girls are-the poor quality of education; irregularity and non-retention of teachers; and the quality and regularity of the Mid-Day meals.

The project has tried to address this issue through improving quality and access of education for girls. The strategy is based on the assumption that the girls need a safe, viable and more attractive alternative to early marriage.

A well thought process guided the entire initiative. 678 adolescents including both boys and girls attended a five daylong Life Skill Education (LSE) training module called 'Lalita & Babu', developed by the programme. During the training sessions, officials from the District and Block administration were invited to interact with the adolescent girls. The girls shared the issues and challenges they faced with the officials. This component instilled confidence in these girls to be able to communicate their grievances to the officials and get their problems addressed. In the month of June 2017, District Collector & District Magistrate (DM) Dr. Brunda D, IAS agreed to attend the Lalita & Babu training programme during which she spent two hours with the adolescent girls. During her interaction, she focused on Education, Health and Safety for girls. In the course of open discussion with the girls and the project team; she had a detailed conversation on the project's approach and the quality of education for girls in the Block. Later in the same month, a District-level consultation meeting was organised at Phulbani under the Chairmanship of Dr. Brunda (DM). The day-long consultation saw participation from District Education Officer (DEO), District Project Coordinator (DPC-SSA), Block Education

Officers, Block Resource Coordinator (BRC), Cluster Resource Coordinator (CRC), civil society and volunteers (girls). In the consultation, 33 Discussion Leaders (both girls & boys) along with Cluster Coordinators were also present. It concluded with the DM instructing to engage (Discussion Leaders) as volunteers to monitor quality of education for girls locally.

LEARNING

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- This system potentially helps to check irregularity and unauthorised leaves among teachers, it also improves the quality of mid-day meal and its quantity as per the prescribed menu chart by Government of Odisha.
 - Increase in the attendance of teachers drastically enhances the regularity among the students.
 - Maintaining of updated data in schools.
 - Establishing a good rapport with the school teachers.
 - Developing ownership among student and parents.
 - Accelerate the accountability of teachers.



Challenges

Initially, teachers in some schools from the intervention areas, were not allowing volunteers as they perceived them as a threat. Some teachers indulging in unauthorized leaves/absenteeism in schools, forced the monitors to send manipulated information. Teachers also opposed this monitoring in cluster, block and district level platform.

For effective execution of the process, an orientation was conducted by District Administration, Kandhamal for the Discussion Leaders. The orientation was facilitated by resource persons from Right to Education /Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan departments in Kandhamal. The participants (Discussion Leaders) were oriented to the methods of information collection and the use of SMS tool for sending messages to a dedicated mobile contact number fixed for the Block. Observations were reported immediately to District authorities through SMS in consultation with project personnel given limited access to mobile phones and network coverage. Progress of work was also tracked at the fortnightly meetings with district authorities. Finally, 33 Discussion Leaders (DL) from the intervention area were selected as volunteers for school monitoring. They have been assigned to monitor three aspects- a. Retention of Teachers, b. Retention of Students and, c. Quality and regularity of Mid-Day Meals.



This process has built the confidence, motivation and engagement of the Discussion Leaders to work for adolescent groups. Inspired by this change, the District Administration has developed a mobile application which will work in both offline and online mode to update the various school functioning related status in the central server. It is also GPS enabled to validate location and status. Now the mobile application is running on pilot basis in residential schools. The role of Discussion Leaders has been acknowledged towards improving the attendance and quality of Mid-day meals (MDM).

Outstanding performance by the DLs

As per the School Assessment status, around 100 schools of K. Nuagaon block were mapped by the 33 DLs to monitor schools on a day-to-day basis.

In one year (From July 2017 to October 2017), observation reports of around 40 to 55 schools were sent to district authorities on daily basis.





**Hunar- The
Skill to
Lead Her
Own Life**



Two Blocks of Bihar, namely Raxaul and Majhaulia of East & West Champaran Districts respectively are characterized by early marriage, early childbearing, poor pregnancy care, and therefore, poor pregnancy outcomes. People of Majhaulia are dependent on agriculture and daily wage work in nearby sugar factories. Raxaul is a neighbour to Indo-Nepal border and people mostly migrate to Nepal in search of work. Being neighbouring to the border, it makes both the Districts vulnerable especially for the girls as there are evidences of trafficking.

Before the intervention of MTBA, there was prevalence of early marriage. There was a belief that women or girls are meant only for child bearing and household work. The girls themselves were not convinced to receive vocational training for shaping their economic path and enriching their capabilities. They had no power to negotiate and they lacked in self-confidence. This inherently stopped them from keeping their desires and opinions in front of their family. There was an understanding among young and married young girls that they will not be allowed to go out and work and that they can only do menial work in agriculture sector—where the women's identity will largely be shrouded by the patriarchal society at large. Most of the families were not supportive to the idea of girl's employment and enrolment in any vocational training. Further, most of the existing training centres are located in the main town which is far from the village. Absence of frequent public transport makes regular travelling a challenge. In addition, the parents fear that their daughters might get into trouble or may be assaulted on the way. Because of this fear of the loss of her 'dignity', they restrict them from receiving such training. Due to the persistence of traditional gender norms, which seeks to ensure 'purity' of women and girls by protecting them from men other than their husbands and restricts mobility outside their homes.

The Government has come up with various vocational training programmes which are available at Block level but due to the above-mentioned reasons, the parents do not allow girls to go far from home. There is also a mindset that if the girls start earning, they will not obey the decision of the head of family. The men in this community, in general, have a restrictive opinion while young girls and women aspire to be economically empowered.

A woman or a girl has to face enormous criticism and problems when she decides to earn a livelihood. Breaking the social taboo and patriarchal stereotypes has severe implications. Balancing the burden of responsibility of both work place and domestic chores becomes tough. At the work place, it becomes difficult to accept the fact that women are equally capable of working as men. Sometimes, the earnings are taken away by their husbands and they have to hear negative comments from the society. There is always a suspicion among the family regarding her workplace and many times they are escorted to workplace just to ensure she is doing nothing 'wrong'.

Girls belonging to this societal setup are not allowed to move out of their homes as per their desires. Mostly girls are not given equal opportunities as boys. They are more likely to get dropout and have no accessibility to any skill development training. Girls remain uneducated with no skill and they are bound to become dependent and lack the confidence to make their own decision and choices. They become financially dependent for little things, enduring violence and ill-treatment. To break these regressive practices, it is important to break the old stereotypes of traditional female roles and encourage women and girls to embrace their incredible strength by becoming self-reliant.

The programme design enables to unite all the adolescent girls (including those who are at risk of marriage) in MTBA girls clubs/groups and provide them with an opportunity to recognize their own strengths at the cluster (Panchayat) level girls' forums. These peer groups provided them freedom and most importantly, a safe place away from their



Significant Outcomes

New Hope

The greatest outcome of this event is the shining faces of the girls with new hopes in their eyes, aspiring to become self-sufficient and recognised by the people.

Breaking Taboos

By walking on the ramp, the girls broke the taboos and societal norms which always dictated them to walk graciously, sit properly, talk politely, laugh silently and many more.

Financial Independence

They gained self-confidence, skills of creativity, enhanced their communication skills moreover they now have a desire to use their skills and work to earn for themselves and to support their family.

Community level Support

Their own parents and guardians/ communities who restricted them to participate, have now purchased their handmade products. This has given them a hope for a change in their lives.

homes where they can think and express their mind. This exchange forum at village and Panchayat level develop immense confidence among the girls so that their voices are heard. These not only bring transformation among the MTBA girls but also forced to change the mind set of their guardians who have restricted their mobility along with their access to higher education and employability scope.

This initiative was an unexpected dream for the girls. Neither the girls nor the audience had ever witnessed something like this. Raxaul and Majhulia are backward regions where many civil society organisations and also government are providing skill development training. However,

this initiative was different because the girls not only learned a new skill but it provided them huge self-confidence. They got a space to open up and did what they love to do. The training process changed them inside out and transformed them. They were the same girls who used to find it difficult to speak with the peers and families. The transition from then to now is remarkable. Even the parents who attended the event applauded them to encourage them. One girl's husband said that he will arrange for the raw materials for her so she could start making the items at home for selling. However, in contrast, there were few fathers who were still not convinced and considered it as waste of time.



In this scenario, the programme conducted a labour market study to understand distinct aspirations of the girls and the kind of vocational trades they wanted to pursue. A seven-day vocational training was organised mostly for out of school and married adolescents. There were 50 girls who received training on quilled jewellery and bags of jute and cord material. An expert trainer was hired and the girls were taught to sketch the designs on quilling jewellery as well as jute & cord bags. Initially, it was tough and exhausting for them to learn but soon they enjoyed making those beautiful earrings with their own designs.

Inspired by their hard work and dedication, it was decided to conduct a small fair where the products prepared by the girls were displayed and sold. It also included a fashion show by the girls with the support of the training agency. Regular rehearsal was done for the fashion show. At first during mock sessions the girls were quite shy for the ramp walk but gradually overcome from this. On the final day their parents, small business men and Block sub-divisional officer (Govt.) were invited to the fair. After the opening ceremony when the turn came the girls confidently with the beat of the music by wearing their own hand made jewellery and jute bags walked confidently without any hesitation and shyness in front of the audiences, their own community. Their products were also put for sale and local people came forward to purchase them. Happiness and satisfaction could be seen in their eyes they shared that it was for the first time they did public appearance, that too in a fashion show. One of the girls shared that she was never so confident about herself but that day she felt amazing and proud about herself. The amount they earned on that day gave them an identity and encouraged them to be self-reliant.

The Fashion Show Day



Providing residential training to the adolescent girls was a new experience at the organisational level. . Initially it was difficult to convince the parents for a residential training. So, some of the parents were invited to attend the training and see what the girls were actually doing. They further shared the details of the entire training and its benefits with other parents and guardians. Girls who are mostly thought to be burden and are vulnerable to early marriage were provided with new opportunity to learn some new skills to achieve remarkable things and realize their dreams. They also aspire to lead their lives with aspirations instead of just getting married. There is a need to provide space and platform for these girls so they can become equal and not be treated as burdens to the society. Some of the girls did not know what their aspiration were because they were never given an opportunity to think and work on it. Changes can be seen among communities though. Tough these are small steps, they are now allowing girls to learn new skills for their livelihood. People have understood that not only boys but girls can also be reliable and support their families. The support received

from the government stakeholders also helped in convincing parents to listen to their daughter's aspirations and give a chance to them. The overall lessons and experiences can be used to sensitize the community on girls' empowerment as well as it is an evidence to share with government departments and other practitioners. The same practice can also be replicated in the future adolescent programmes.

The sub-division officer Mr. Paswan was awestruck when he attended the Fashion Show. He congratulated the girls on their achievement and encouraged them to keep up their efforts and stand out in the crowd. He was glad and could not believe that the girls from village who used to be extremely shy were confidently walking on the ramp and were speaking so boldly in front of everyone.



**World
Menstrual
Hygiene Day-
Celebration
Through Wall
Murals**

Sarwan is one of the most vulnerable Blocks of Deogarh District (Jharkhand). The female literacy rate is 40.46 per cent which is significantly worse than that of men 62.26 per cent (Census 2011). The Child Sex Ratio of this Block is 955 (Census 2011). The influence of gender disparities and discriminatory social norms is very critical for understanding the poor education and health outcomes of this region. The social norms become more pronounced when the adolescent girls reach puberty. There are many taboos in the society regarding menstrual hygiene. Girls are asked stay away from the religious places, not allowed to play with male peers, sometimes are kept in isolation and are not allowed to touch food items such as pickles. Girls are identified as impure during her menstrual cycle. Moreover, the girls do not have proper access to puberty education and menstrual health. Sometimes such ignorance leads to severe infections and other health hazards such as reproductive tract infections (RTI).

In addition, within families it is advised to deal with menstruation as a secret concern. Daughters hardly share this with fathers or brothers or any other male member or peers. The girls in puberty generally tend to miss their classes as majority of government schools lack in functional sanitation facilities. This restricts them from managing their periods comfortably. Besides, as the matter (period) is dealt secretly in the society, peer

(boys) lacks the orientation of bodily changes and generally they tease girls if their dresses get spoiled during periods. Hence, during the programme's inception phase itself, it was realized that the girls need the community support to manage their menstruation privately and in a dignified and safe manner.

In this scenario, the programme focused primarily on improving the awareness on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) among the community and emphasized on men's engagement and sensitizing schools' authorities to mitigate the challenges in accessing functioning and separate toilets. Simultaneously, as per the programme design, the adolescent girls and boys groups formed and strengthened (under the scope of programmes) received regular training on SRHR including bodily changes, family planning, MHM and life skill education including gender. Few of the peer group leaders also become the members of Village Health Nutrition and Sanitation Committee (VHSNC).

In spite of all the robust efforts and the fact that MTBA girls were strongly advocating with the respective authorities for lack of sanitary products, the silence around menstruation was continuing in community. Girls and boys; Daughter and father; and sister and brother were still not comfortable to talk on menstruation.



*"Mahvari ko na mano
Pareshani ye hai nari
shakti ki nishani"
(Menstruation is not
a problem, rather it
is a sign of women's
power)*

**- Pradeep Adolescent
from a boys' group who
participated in the Wall
Mural Artwork**

The main objective behind this innovation is to initiate a conversation between girls (women) and boys (men) on menstruation and to break the hesitation. It was expected that

This activity would ignite some kind of discussion among the family members regarding menstrual hygiene. Further, this would help girls and women to share their condition with other members of the family easily.



- Individually both boys and girls got equal training on menstrual hygiene and SRHR issue. But they were not able to open up or they are not allowed to discuss these concerns with female members of the family.
- This innovation also engages the community as their consent was vital for this activity.

The most important learnings from this innovation were:

- As this is a sensitive issue to discuss openly, so the initial rapport building and sensitizing community on the issue of MHM actually paved the path for this innovation.
- Gradually through various project initiatives, the community learned and understood that menstruation is a natural process but it takes time and persistence to break the social taboos and myths.

On the eve of World menstrual Hygiene Day in 2019, Wall Mural/painting on menstruation was painted by MTBA adolescent boys and girls with the support of community was the innovation. This innovation has been implemented in four villages of MTBA intervention- Dahuwa, Nayabhadiyara, Madransare, Madhuadih. Due to the rigorous rapport building and previous sensitization, there were no arguments and negative statement or behaviour shown by the community. Wall painting was chosen as it is an interesting way to engage the community and to begin discussion on sensitive issues. This platform was utilized to understand and discuss menstrual hygiene related issues. In addition, during Menstrual Hygiene Day, adolescent girls conducted street play and engaged the entire community to make them understand about wall mural. Before this innovation, adolescent boys and girls were provided proper training on menstrual hygiene management and Mural art by an expert team. This was the first time when girls and boys together developed wall painting on menstruation in their own community. The most important thing was that everyone appreciated the innovation and showed their support by allowing their children (MTBA adolescents) to participate in this event for the entire week.

Significant Outcomes

Improved Conversations

The hesitation among boys and girls regarding MHM has decreased. They now feel comfortable when a female family members or peers share their problems and seek support from them.

Behavioural Change

Some kind of behavioural changes has been observed in the girls. The girls who use cloth now have become more cautious and are using only cotton clothes. They have become more conscious of the hygiene aspects.

Menstrual Hygiene

People started to understand that there should not be any myths or taboos related to menstrual hygiene.

Reduced Hesitation

Some boys now started to purchase sanitary pads for their family without any hesitation.

Prioritising Sanitation

Men gave priority to a functional sanitation facility at home along with a private space for cleaning and drying menstrual cloths.





The Power of Radio

Early marriage is quite prevalent in Raxaul (East Champaran) and Majhulia (West Champaran). Girls are mostly dropped out after middle school leaving them vulnerable towards early marriage. Most of the parents choose early marriage for their daughters in order to pay lesser dowry. There is a lack of awareness among people on child marriage and its ill effects on a girl child. There is a belief that girls are other's property and so parents don't invest much on their education and rather prefer to engage them more into domestic chores. Living in a patriarchal society, girls and women are often suppressed by the male dominance. There is no freedom. Most of the time they are not allowed to follow their dreams (singing, dancing, writing etc.) According to the parents, it is just a waste of time. They are not allowed to go against their parents will and have to accept the parents' decision as they cannot speak for themselves. The attitude of the community towards girls has made them lose their confidence and self-esteem.

Coming from a rural setup, the girls are not given freedom of choice and are not able to oppose the pressure of Child Marriage. During the programme period, it was seen that there are many girls who could only express their views confidently only when supported by peers. These girls had so many innate qualities, they were good spokesperson, had talents and ideas to bring change in the society but they lacked self-confidence. In the village, they have no privilege to showcase their talents and somewhere gender inequality too plays its role. Schools in village don't provide co-curricular facilities such as working on computers, stage performance and other exposure to personality development. It limits their talents, ideas and desire to do and think something new and out of the box. Majority of them have no one in their family who supports their skills and encourages them. There are girls who are good singers but their parents never allowed them to sing, rather discouraged them by indicating

Radios are common in rural areas and most of the families have access to it. Even people with some or no education can understand the programmes aired on radio just by listening to it. The girls were given an opportunity to run their own radio show for which they were given training. They were trained to write scripts and articles; their communication and presentation skills were enhanced. They were trained to add more drama in their speech. In a 4 day workshop, 55 girls participated and got an opportunity to work with a technical team and learned to record themselves. The entire programme was initiated by the adolescent girls who wrote the script and hosted the show. The Radio series was broadcast through national channel Vividh Bharati and people all over Bihar could listen to these shows. The programme had information on Child Marriage, series of dramas on early/forced marriage and education which describes the ignorance of parents as well as society on ill effects of child marriage. It also talked about how parents lure children to get ready for marriage. Each episode had a different theme keeping Child Marriage as the central message. In every show, small interviews of the real stakeholders such as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC) members, School Management Committee (SMC) members, religious leaders and parents were added to know their perspective on early marriage. Interestingly these interviews were conducted by the girls who were members of girls' groups formed by MTBA. The radio messages also contained inspiring songs composed by the girls' group on social issues like early marriage, dowry system, and female infanticide. It was not just an effort to spread awareness and to end early marriage through discussion programs, dramas, quiz but also to provide the community with useful information about the causes and repercussions of child marriage. The aim was to enable the girls to speak up and foster a deep change in the behaviour of the community which will encourage eradicating child marriage.

that these aspirations are not good for village girls. But the programme recognized that if these girls are given proper direction and platform, they can bloom in their village and community. So, to break the silence of the girls and stereotype thinking of parents, this initiative was taken ahead. Through the program initiatives, their self-confidence was built and the girls were encouraged to speak up their mind, even when things are against them. It was a source to empower them and enhance their hidden skills and talents.

Significant Outcomes

Medium of Expression

The event Radio Messaging emerged as a medium of expressing and sharing views and even challenges of the disadvantaged and vulnerable MTBA girls who are at risk of marriage. This Radio programme provided a doorway not only for the MTBA girls but even showed a path to the girls across the State that are dwelling the similar kind of situation but are alone. This initiative helped to break the vicious cycle and paved the path to come out from their cocoons of tolerance and spread their views and ideas of embracing freedom through various dramas and songs.

Building Confidence

This medium also provided girls an opportunity to work with a technical team, work in groups, and record their scripts, songs and stories. This built up their confidence and creativity, changed their views and they have started believing that they are unstoppable. Most of the time they are not given such an opportunity because of their gender as they have no such scope in their village.

Exposure to Extra-Curricular Activities

These girls mainly come from government schools and unlike private schools they do not have much exposure to co-curricular activities or performing on any platform. The girls were very excited about people listening to their radio series all over Bihar. School teachers, friends and parents who listened to the radio programme were astonished and impressed by the girls on being so vocal and encouraged. This type of activity to be organised to create awareness among the community. Their classmates also shared their interest to join the group to be part of such event.

It was quite difficult to convince their parents to let them participate in the event. Initially they were rigid on their decision but later after they were explained the benefit of such an event and its positive impact on girls which would help them in the coming days to build up their confidence. The parents were also called to participate in the interview and they found it quite useful and practical which made the whole process easy.

Through radio they reached out to their parents and society with whom they find difficult to share their desires of not getting married and wish to return back to school. They were able to communicate the harmful impact of Child Marriage as it robs their childhood and better opportunities from them. Earlier they had a thinking that no one is going to listen to them and nothing can be changed in their society but now they realize the power of mass media. Parents listening to the shows have changed their minds and are proud of their daughters. They have now

belief in themselves to run shows like this on their own and can change the regressive mindset of the society.

This event has influenced the minds of people in the community and parents are now quite aware of legal aspects and harmful effects of Child Marriage. The drama series on importance of education has enabled them to send their daughters back to school. Before the radio workshop, they did not allow their daughters to participate in it as they thought it as a waste of time. Initially, the parents who didn't allow their daughters to participate in the event, after listening to their programmes they were proud of their daughters and praised them for taking an initiative towards banning Child Marriage from their society. The girls themselves were proud and felt powerful; they never believed they could be part of a radio programme through which thousands of people will listen to them. Some of the girls have even planned to become an anchor and perform on stage.



Nothing could have been better than reaching to the community through the medium of radio and educate them on early marriage, gender issues that too lead by the girls. It was a good achievement that people all over Bihar could listen to the shows and like them. This boosted the girls and they derive confidence from such programmes. They have broken the cage of silence and suffering. The mentality of parents too has changed, Earlier it was difficult to convince them to allow their daughter to be part of the radio program. They were showed how working in radio shows can help the girls in building her personality and help her in higher education. At the organisation level, it was a new initiative as well as challenging to run

such a programme. This event was a learning for us from convincing the girls first and their parents, providing them with training, the whole show which was directed, written and acted by the girls. Their own community listening to the radio and appreciating the same the whole process could be instrumental to develop the confidence of the girls. It was overall a good experience to identify those girls and work on them and through them to influence the society. Sometimes as an organisation, we need to understand and identify the skills of the girls and try to encourage them so they can themselves bring change in their community as that is more effective and impactful than done by any outsider.

"It struck me hard when my daughter interviewed me and asked me if I am going to let her study and not think about her marriage? At this question I was bound to say yes. Saying 'No' would have been wrong not because I was in a show but for my daughter and many other like her. If I say yes then many parents will agree to this and this is how the wave of change will start".

**Gayatri Devi, mother of Punita Kumari,
Dhangarhwa ward 9**





Empowering Girls Through Providing Training on the Productive Use of Social Media

In the age of information, digital literacy is of utmost importance. But for majority of the adolescent girls in Sarwan, the one of the remotest Blocks of Deogarh District in Jharkhand, access to digital world is still unthinkable. For the last five years, the programme is engaging various stakeholders to create an enabling environment for girls. But when it comes to promoting digital literacy among the MTBA girls, it was even more challenging. Access to mobile phones was not only restricted due to discriminatory gender norms but was also coupled with poor and unstable livelihood. The situation was quite challenging.

The digital disparity among the community cannot be ignored. Purchasing a computer or mobile phone for girls' personal use was out of question. Parents/community were had a lot of misinformation about cyber-crime (unlawful act by using internet) which already had created an unknown fear among them. During counselling meeting with parents, they revealed the fear that through mobile phones, the girls may come in contact with strangers and eventually get in the wrong trap.

The programme team realised that not having access to technologies exacerbate the other important forms of inequality i.e., networking opportunities and access to information. Amidst all these discouraging conversations, the motivating part was that the MTBA adolescent girls were eager to learn digital skills and wanted to use those learning for their personal growth. In the beginning of 2019, the program organised computer literacy training. Gradually, through regular counselling, a few parents came forward and agreed to send their daughters for basic computer training course. But the girls who got trained on the basic computer skills tend to lose their skills as they do not have access to the tool at home or at community level.





Adolescent girls were provided training on digital literacy including accessing social media platforms like g-mail, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter. Before providing this training, keeping in mind the need of the girls, especially when they are introduced for first time to the digital world, an easy to learn digital literacy module was developed with the support of an expert team. Mainly girls with no or limited access to mobile phones were selected. The training was conducted during the pandemic. The trainees were also well informed about do's and don'ts of the digital world. A detailed session on cyber-crime was also introduced. They were also supported to create their own email account and a thorough orientation on writing e-mails.

The girls who received the training successfully were rewarded with an android handset. A mobile handset was of immense importance for them. They could continue their studies through virtual platforms which was on hold until then.

After completion of the training each trainee were provided responsibility to orient and train other 30 adolescents within a fixed duration.



To own a mobile phone was a dream for the girls but prevailing negative attitude regarding use of mobile phones had discouraged them. This training taught them a new skill among them and also provided access to a new tool or equipment. On the other hand, they also received guided instructions for proper usage of the internet and technologies. The training on social media also supported to change the mindset of few parents and they have started accepting that if used wisely then this skill would engage their daughters with productive results in the future- particularly when their daughters started accessing study material and online guides from schools. In addition, the power of technology was not only limited to these trained girls but they were sent back to the community with a mission to train other girls on digital literacy and to share this mobile handset among their peers to spread the message of digital knowledge across the community including the most vulnerable ones.

Besides, the digital literacy training has proven to be beneficial to establish contact with the MTBA adolescents during the pandemic. Virtual platforms were created with sub groups of girls to conduct sessions on SRHR and Life Skill Education.

The girls who received training have created a Facebook page named “Hamari Awaz” and also a Whatsapp group, where they share different activities conducted by them to accelerate the positive change in the community to enable girls’ empowerment.

After overcoming many odds during the implementation of this innovation, the organization learned that accelerating digital literacy among the community could be used as a potent tool to alleviate various social problems and gender disparity.



Child Marriage Free Village Declaration

Child marriage is both a symptom and consequence of the poor economic conditions and gender inequality persisting in different parts of rural Odisha and MTBA implementing Block Khalikote in Ganjam District is no different. Multiple factors have contributed towards the prevalence and persistence of Child Marriage in this area. It is an established fact that economics related to raising girl children and vulnerability owing to poor economic condition have often pushed the families to consider Child Marriage as a viable solution. The costs of higher education and even the prospect of losing a bright candidate as a groom sometimes compels poor families to marry

off their daughter at an early age. The element of safety and security of the girls, especially in their adolescent period has also contributed to the rate of prevalence of child marriage. During the community interface meeting in Khallikote Block, there were several incidences when the programme leaders encountered and counselled parents who considered a girl child as a liability to their family. Girls could not complete their school education due to several reasons like mobility restrictions, myths and fear associated with girls' puberty and also due to financial dearth and investing more on boys for education and employability.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, adolescent girls were facing the terrible problem of unavailability of sanitary napkins all across the implementing areas. Despite sanitary napkins being marked as an essential commodity by the Government of India, there was a huge scarcity of these during the nationwide lockdown. To mitigate this problem, discussion leaders prepared a charter of demand on the unavailability of sanitary napkins and shared with The Honorable Chief Minister of Jharkhand through Twitter.



In India, there are various laws that prohibit and discourage age-old social practices that constitute a gross violation of human rights. Government of Odisha has been practicing many measures to prevent Child Marriage through its Women and Child Department and Mission Shakti directorates through 5 policies, which are-



In spite of all these attempts and provisions, the practice of Child Marriage is still active in the rural parts.

But many times, the culturally sanctioned customs surpass the legal barriers. The practice of Child Marriages which is still continued in the rural parts of the country are a perfect example of this. Although Child Marriage is illegal but people encouraging it are not aware of this being an offence. Marriages out of caste and religion in majority of the cases end in social deprivation and even lead to honour killings. In today's developed society, where girls have become pilots, soldiers, political leaders, businesswomen etc. it is high time to change the trend in the rural areas as well. They should be a part of the community decision making process even if this is still a dream for them. We realized a greater change is needed.

To reverse the social norms that perpetuate early marriages in the community, it is important to encourage the community itself to participate and build a system to confine such incidences.

This worked as an inspiration and motivated the programme team to initiate an action that is driven by community to hit the outdated social norms.

During the initial period, the programme staff was engaged in forming and strengthening adolescent girls' clubs (groups) about their rights. During this phase we identified that girls are very ambitious and capable of doing many things and if supported wisely can break the barriers of social restrictions. On the other hand, continuous discussion with the like-minded parents, villagers, service providers triggered a system which could regularly monitor and curb the Child Marriage practices in the rural areas.

This gives birth to the concept of declaring a village 'Child Marriage free' with a social recognition. Declaring any village as Child Marriage free is basically a participatory approach. Gradually the impact was so good that local government authorities and representatives had to also recognize this as a community process.



The process followed to declare any programme implementing villages as a Child Marriage Free Village is transparent and participatory. For any village to get this title, a village needs to qualify an assessment which was facilitated on a regular basis during the monthly meetings of the Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC)/ Gaon Kalyan Samiti (GKS). In these meetings, issues related to the service gap and its solutions were discussed in the presence of both service providers and community representatives. To make the process pertinacious, the programme developed a score card based on 12 indicators which is called Community Based Monitoring Tool (CBMT). Considering the concept of Child Marriage Free Village, an indicator was introduced in this monitoring tool which would report the cases of Child Marriage in the respective implementing villages. Hence, the Child Marriage indicator is also monitored every month, regularly for 24 months. If any village recorded no child marriage in these 2 years, then it was declared as a Child Marriage Free Village.

In a village level ceremony, the title is awarded to the entire village in the presence of PRI members, block officials and leaders of the village. The declaration ceremony is celebrated very warmly with several activities like taking oath to continue the legacy of a Child Marriage Free Village, cultural activities such as song and dance performance by MTBA girls, signature campaign and others.

Gradually, the community has started taking this responsibility to curb Child Marriage in their respective villages. This initiative has created a mass awareness that stopping Child Marriage is a cause of celebration and not an incidence of punishment.

The “Child Marriage Free Village” board displayed at the entrance of the village is an honour for the villagers.

The innovation has brought together all the beneficiaries, government stakeholders, community based organisations (CBO), key



players into a single platform. This approach has successfully built the ownership and has been able to transfer the responsibility to the community. As an effect, in mid-2020 in the Khallikote Block, 26 such villages have been awarded the title of Child Marriage Free Village in the operational area and at least another 50 per cent of the villages in the intervention area would be receiving this title by the end of the programme period.

This initiative has established a system in the society that ensures safe and secure future for the adolescent girls.

A good practice always lends a learning experience! The practice of Child Marriage Free Village is one of this kind of approach. This innovation has taught the villagers about responsibility and caring for a girl child in the society. Adolescent girls are now aware of their health rights as they are not forced to marry before completing 18 years of age. The implication of this innovative practice has helped the beneficiaries, communities, stakeholders,

support service providers, government and the project. Government of Odisha is planning to make the state Child Marriage free by 2030 in cooperation with UNFPA. Such best practices at the community level could drive the State Government initiative.

Kairasi Village & GP in Khallikote Block of Ganjam District is the second village in the Block that has so far resolved not to permit child marriages. During the tenure of Mr Prafulla Sahu (Sarpanch), the village was declared as Child Marriage Free Village and he considers this as one of the best achievements. 20 December 2018 was a special day in history for Kairasi Village when it was declared "Child Marriage Free Village". During the oath taking ceremony, Mr. Prafulla mentioned 'not to allow even a single Child Marriage and to put an end to this social evil forever'. The Panchayat of the village passed a resolution that pledges to end discrimination against girls and to treat them as an equal gender and encouraging and supporting the girl for higher education.



Information Dissemination Centres - A Platform for Adolescents

Intervention villages under 'Marriage: No Child's Play' Project in Bihar are in very remote locations due to which the people, especially adolescent girls lack access to many facilities. Studies reflected that many social issues like Child Marriage exist in these remote areas.. Mohanpur Block of Gaya District was identified as an area prone to school dropout. Due to this, the adolescent girls miss out on the opportunity to study and develop life-skills making them susceptible to early marriages. Access to education becomes limited to many girls after secondary school due to lack of facilities nearby.

Proper Guidance to set goals and achieve something in life to these girls is nearly non-existent. The baseline study findings in Bihar intervention areas show that though 90 per cent of the adolescent girls have never been to school,

nearly three-fifths are currently in school. Baseline studies also show that the overall median years of schooling successfully completed is 8; a fact that is supported by multiple factors, some of which have been delved into here. Adolescents, especially those who are out of school, often do not have adequate information about their rights, entitlements, and the services available to them. There is no platform, forum or center to access correct, complete and unbiased information at the community level for both in school and out of school adolescents.

Access of adolescents and young people to knowledge and information on Child Marriage and related issues is a key aspect that the project aims at strengthening. With that aim, the Project has established adolescent friendly spaces called as Information Dissemination Centers at the

Innovative Steps

Subscriptions were collected by the IDC protection committee to maintain the recurring cost. This decision was initiated with the adolescents of IDC committee. The committee plans to reach out to other parents in the future.

A suggestion box had been placed to receive any issues, concerns or suggestions raised by any adolescent. Feedback from this exercise was that adolescents wanted books related to general competitive examinations.

Ownership has been created among adolescents and community regarding the IDC. IDC committee (mostly girls) started contribution to maintain recurring cost for use of materials in the IDC. Adolescent girls contribute INR 5/- every month. Presently, 35 adolescent girls are contributing every month. Thus, total contribution comes to INR 175/- per month.

The adolescents and programme team together formed a 16-membered IDC protection committee to look after safety issues and ensure smooth functioning of the IDC. The committee members included AWW, ASHA, Ward members, CPC member, parents and adolescents support to adolescent girls. A monthly meeting was planned and a register was maintained for documentation.





Gram Panchayat level. Here adolescents can congregate and access ready information related to entitlements, social protection schemes and health services, particularly related to adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

The IDCs have been established in the existing Government platforms to ensure sustainability and equitable access to all adolescents. This practice addresses the programme's outcome 1- young people are better informed about SRHR, including adverse effects of child marriage and empowered to voice their needs and rights. Establishment of IDC at the Gram Panchayat Level was planned with the idea of providing a platform where adolescents can come together, play and decide together. It provides a platform to build awareness on issues affecting them like entitlements, schemes, health services, etc. It has been promoting demand generation based on

their rights. It follows a need-based approach that grows out of discussions with adolescents and parents who are involved in it. Adolescents along with selected parents have been taking ownership to run the IDC with due support from project staff at this stage. The process followed is to establish joint initiatives with the community which brings people from different strata together on a common platform. It works as an IDC as well as a shared space that leads to multi-dimensional communication processes which is fuelled by multiple factors, some of which have been delved into here. Adolescents, especially those who are out of school, often do not have adequate information about their rights, entitlements, and the services available to them. There is no platform, forum or centre to access correct, complete and unbiased information at the community level for both in school and out of school adolescents.

The following processes were followed during establishment of IDC:

- Meetings with PRI, parents, teacher, ICDS members and adolescents were conducted to explain the need of an IDC, its concept and to allocate/ascertain a permanent physical space for adolescent children. People understood the concept and were very interested in participating in the program actively. Different stakeholders shared their views on what should be included in the IDC. The Project team also provided their valuable inputs. As per collective agreement, procurement was done.
- Project team with the support of the MTBA girls identified a safe space and easily accessible for IDC at the respective Panchayat after discussion with community influencers, teachers, and Frontline Health Workers (FHWs).
- The place identified was either at School or Anganwadi Centre. The idea was discussed with CDPO-ICDS for AWC and with Block Educating Officer for using the school premises. They were convinced with the idea and allocated rooms for IDC.
- Requisite permissions were obtained from District/ Block level officials to display information.
- Participating in the programme actively: Different stakeholders shared their views on what should be included in the IDC. The Project team also provided their valuable inputs. As per collective agreement, procurement was done.
- Programme team coordinated with frontline service providers, oriented them on the purpose and intent of IDC and the role they can play in maintaining the IDC and updating relevant information.
- IEC materials related to adolescents and schemes from District Level Health Office, District Child Protection Unit, education officials and other relevant departments were collected. Materials from Save the Children, Partner NGOs and other CSOs as required including modules, booklets, books etc were also collected.
- Displayed the material in an attractive and appealing way in addition to child safeguarding policy and emergency contact numbers.
- Engagement of girls with the programme has increased. More numbers of girls are visiting at the IDC and utilising the learning materials.
- Interface between girls and parents/community stakeholder has increased. The girls are taking decisions and raising their voice. There is direct involvement of girls and parents through IDC protection committee.

Access to information that can guide adolescent girls and help to organize them into groups is one of the greatest challenges in the rural areas. The social norms and customs are the key aspects that hinder establishment of a platform that is adolescent friendly, comfortable and accessible, provides necessary information about relevant entitlements, schemes and services and is a safe space for adolescents to congregate. IDC offers a valuable platform to support information in reaching adolescents in their villages, although it cannot be the cure to all problems. The project can use the IDC as a method to reach out to adolescents to provide education, prevent Child Marriage and provide information on health rights



LEARNING AND IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMES

- 💡 Protection committees can play a pivotal role in sustaining IDC.
- 💡 Plan to be made to use the centre for health-related activities by engaging FHW.
- 💡 IDC can be used for health-related activities by engaging FHW.
- 💡 IDC can be seen as centre where certain skills are taught (e.g., life skills, teamwork, self-confidence).
- 💡 IDC could be used as career and guidance centre.

Challenges

- It took time to reach out to parents to discuss the idea and involve them in the development of IDC, convincing them to come forward with necessary support and ownership along with their children.
- One IDC cannot cater to more than three to four villages as it is difficult for adolescents to reach the IDC from distant areas.
- Convincing all the parents of adolescents regarding collection of subscription to maintain recurring cost for maintenance of materials may be difficult and lead to demotivation of IDC protection committee.
- Project level challenge is to respond to queries/expectations that come up through suggestion box. For example, Adolescents of higher age group are getting sensitized about education. So, they want support for tutorial class, books for competitive exams like, general competitions, bank, railway etc.



Conclusion: Insights on Future Child Marriage Programmes

The learning and knowledge harvesting (LKH) initiative was conceived and later executed at the MTB Alliance, India with an objective to reflect and compile the learning jointly. The entire process of LKH itself had created a greater learning opportunity and re-emphasised that documenting programme knowledge is an essential part.

Further, reflecting on the LKH experience, it is important to mention that documenting ,disseminating programme knowledge and learning should be a continuous and integral part of any development programme. Documenting programme learning helps to highlight the areas of improvement and positively guide the programmeimplementation. Integrating participatory approach at the community level accelerates the scope of innovation and sometime learning from failures. Documenting learning when coupled with dissemination with targeted audience supports to reflect on the program evidences, generates new ideas and drives future practices.

Implementing a programme is associated with enormous challenges but offers huge learning even more when the challenges are not overcome. Hence, it is also important to gather and analyse the incidental negative outcomes of the programme. It provides a critical lens to improve and integrate context specific solutions in the programme design.

‘Innovation Practices’ is therefore a collection of some unique stories of Marriage: No Child’s Play programme which not only elaborates the innovation but reasonably describes the need for that change. In addition, it also highlights the potential impact of those innovation and tested strategies to manage negative situations or challenges.

The stories are a common thread which weave all the innovations together.They collectively talk about the various ways of facilitating dialogues at community level to improve youth participation and visibility. They narrate various approaches which could be devised to constructively challenge the existing social norms that perpetuate early marriages in the community. These also give us a broader spectrum on establishing and demonstrating ethics and integrity in the youth empowerment programme.

While moving forward into new venture, the MTBA, India recommends creating more opportunities to promote learning exchange among and within civil society organizations and translate those learning into meaningful programme development.

Some Common Inspiring Learnings

“Think out of the box” - Thinking beyond regular implementation plan is essential as new thoughts instigate innovation in practice- As seen in the example of Lahanti Learning Centre which offers more than just bridging courses and enable us to achieve multiple results.

“Promote participatory engagement” - Engaging community stakeholders in the programme planning and implementation phase helps building community ownership and acceptance for the program. As seen in the example of World Menstrual Hygiene Day- celebrated through Wall Murals. This also helps embed initiatives into communities and ensures the sustainability and continued community commitment.

“Promote context specific solutions” - An intervention that works in one village may not work in another. As the story on engaging adolescents to strengthen SMC to monitor and reverse the school dropout shows, designing context specific solutions is a precondition for success.

“Amplify the youth voices” -Strengthening youth agency is pivotal but it is equally important that they are provided with the right skills and access to various tools and techniques to communicate their unique ideas and opinions independently. The two stories on The power of Radio and Empowering girls through the productive use of social media resonates the same.

“Diversify and Demonstrate alternative solutions” - as “Hunar-The skill to lead her own life” story shows that girls at risk of early marriages have access to dignified and productive engagements when the programme strategically invests and creates adequate opportunities for them.

“Pause and reflect” - We know that local organisations are often under pressure to deliver and achieve. However, we learned that regularly reflecting on the experience and integrating learnings in the programme can significantly improve the implementation. In addition, it is important to collaborate with other civil society organizations /networks within and outside the country to share and exchange learnings.



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