



*Working
with and
Engaging
Communities
to end
Child
Marriage*

CREDITS

Concept and Overall Guidance

Susan Wilkinson, Simavi
Sever Džigurski, Simavi

Compilation and Coordination

Arundhati Bhattacharya

Technical Support

Archana Bilung, BVHA
Debananda Mohanta, VHA
Madhu Kumari, NEEDS
Md. Azam, Save the Children India
Poonam Kumari, NEEDS
Snehadri Jana, CINI

Content and Copyediting

Neeti Kanungo

Layout and Designing

VHA Team
The Idea Workshop

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Acronyms

GKS	Gaon Kalyan Samiti	SBCC	Social and Behavioural Change Communication
GPCPC	Gram Panchayat Child Protection Committee	SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions	SMC	School Management Committee
PTA	Parent Teacher Association	VHSNC	Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Community
MNCP	Marriage: No Child's Play	VLPC	Village Level Child Protection Committee
MTBA	More Than Brides Alliance		

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Preface



Working with and engaging Communities to end Child Marriage is a document through which the More Than Brides Alliance, India desires to share some valuable learnings during the implementation of the five year long girl-centred Child Marriage Programme **Marriage: No Child's Play**.

The programme set an objective to transform the social norms that perpetuate the Child Marriage practices in our society, through active participation of the community stakeholders. This document provides insights of experiential learning gained by engaging diverse community stakeholders towards achieving the objective of the programme. In addition, it throws light on the principles and strategies that the programme introduced to engage and motivate community stakeholders to realize the importance of girls' education and employability skills. The document also reflects the scope of improvement, highlights the limitations of the programme and learning experiences as illustrations. It makes some robust recommendation for engaging community stakeholders in future Child Marriage programmes in the country.

I. Introducing More than Brides Alliance and the Learning and Knowledge Harvesting Initiative



More Than Brides Alliance 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).

In 2016, the Alliance (MTBA) came into existence with a girl-centric Child Marriage programme 'Marriage: No Child's Play' with the support from The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Global Alliance partners are represented by Save The Children, Oxfam Novib, Simavi in The Netherlands and the Population Council, US. The Alliance operationalized the programme in five countries namely Mali, Niger, Malawi, Pakistan and India through country level Alliances.

In India, the country level Alliance is represented by Save The Children (SCI), Population Council

Marriage: No Child's Play

The programme Marriage: No Child's Play differentiates itself from other conventional Child Marriage programmes by virtue of its integrated and holistic approach. Rather than focusing on policy and legal reform, the programme uses ecological systems approach an, to emphasise on the lived reality of girls. It takes into account the socio-cultural influences around the girls in their



“ MTBA empowers
the decision making of young people
regarding marriage & SRHR.
”

(PC) 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). India Alliance is implementing the programme in 11 development Blocks across the four States in the country i.e., four blocks in Bihar, two blocks in Jharkhand, three blocks in Odisha and two blocks in Rajasthan.

community which informs and often determines decisions regarding marriage – if, when and to whom. It puts an emphasis on improving the lives of adolescent girls and an equal focus on creating an enabling and sustaining community environment. The girls can express their opinions and pursue their aspirations without any societal fears and restrictions.

Learning and Knowledge Harvesting Initiative

Learning and Knowledge Harvesting (LKH) is a unique initiative of the Alliance. Its purpose is to reflect on the contributions, impact and limitations of the programme approaches and practices. In order to conceptualize the process, the Alliance in India collected and analysed all the existing learning products and developed a Discussion Paper, which recommends ten potential learning products. However, the Alliance agreed to develop three most suitable documents.

products. This document is developed in a complete participatory manner, involving all the Alliance partners. A working group including one representative from each of the five partners of the India Alliance was involved extensively to develop this product. This working group organised frequent meetings to discuss and describe the entire journey and to distil the most significant experience and learnings, which were compiled and documented accordingly.

“Working and engaging with communities to end Child Marriage” is one of those three learning



The integrated and holistic nature of the program finds expression in the MTBA's Theory of Change structure around the following seven outcome areas



Empowering at-risk and already married adolescents, girls in particular, with life skills education, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information, and peer support groups



Enhancing access to formal education opportunities and improving girls' retention in school



Enhancing access to economic and income generating opportunities for girls and their families



Enhancing access to improved child protection systems



Increasing access to quality, youth-friendly SRHR services



Increasing community collective action to change social norms that perpetuate the practice of child marriage



Promoting supportive legal and policy frameworks

II. Importance of Working with Community in Child Marriage Prevention Programmes





In India, marriage is considered to be the most important social institution and recognised as a crucial and significant part of life. It is honoured as an ultimate ritual of establishing a family through which the society perpetuates. Within it, naturally and biologically, a female preserves the responsibility of giving birth to the next progeny, which creates a huge demand on her life.

Women and girls are considered to be responsible to embrace and exhibit all kinds of detrimental social norms. Considering the fact that fertility naturally declines as a female gets older, the marriages are intended to solemnize at an early age. Further, there is a high value placed on the virginity of girls before marriage while premarital pregnancy is perceived as a potential risk for the reputation of girls. The families and the community impose various restrictions on the girl's behaviour and freedom. All these factors contribute significantly to the cause of early marriages in the country.

In addition, in the Indian communities, the practice of dowry (bride price), exogamous marriage and importance of high fertility at a younger age stimulate the early marriage practices. This arrangement and custom of marriage also prevent the majority of the families to financially invest on the girl's overall development as the expected contribution to their natal home is compromised. Hence, giving birth to a girl child also implies significant economic risks for the family.

As per the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation of the country, the sex ratio of India is 108.176 (meaning that India has 924 females per 1000 males). The persistence of adverse sex ratio is mainly because of a high preference for sons. There are various socio-cultural and religious reasons for preference of a male child over a female child. The most prominent psychology of seeking a male child is the financial security to be extended by a son in old age to have provision for food, medical help and residence. Since childhood, in majority of the families, boys are provided with better access to nutrition, health services, education and ownership of family assets. The female counterparts are kept in the background and engaged in all kinds of household chores including providing care to younger siblings. This implies continuous deprivation. This creates several barriers and negatively affects the social and economic opportunities of a girl child.

Child Marriage is deeply rooted in socio-cultural practices of the community particularly those in the low resource setting. Therefore, it is essential to engage and work with the community to end Child Marriage. However, challenging the rigid traditions like patriarchy, discrimination, coercion, social customs and norms requires focused and participatory action at the community level. Hence, since the inception of the MNCP programme, a collaborative and concerted effort was developed towards involving all actors at the community level.

III. Programme Insights on Key Community Stakeholders and Their Influence on Girls' Lives

In order to ensure an enabling and conducive environment for girls in the community, MTBA India tried to understand the prominent community members who largely influence the life of girls, either directly or indirectly. The programme recognised and extensively involved Parents, In-laws, influential leaders (like Religious leaders, Caste Panchayats, and Community Traditional Leaders), government grassroots platforms such as Panchayati Raj Institutions

(PRI), Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Community (VHSNC)/ Gaon Kalyan Samiti(GKS for the state of Odisha), Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC)), Gram Panchayat Level Child Protection Committee (GPCPC) and Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Most importantly, the programme involved adolescent boys and men through MTBA boys' clubs and government youth clubs respectively.

Parents and In-Laws

There is no denial that parents and in-laws play a significant role in the girls' lives. They take the major decisions on behalf of their daughter (in-laws). This could be the continuation or even the discontinuation of education and whom and when to marry. More often, the parents and in-laws thrust their freewill on the girls to close down all doors of opportunities for her. Without understanding her aspirations and allowing her to explore her skills, they often force her into unending household chores and push her for early child bearing.

The consequences are more severe in tribal communities where girls migrate with their families for livelihoods. Their lives are put at risk with various kinds of verbal, sexual and mental abuses. Despite the matriarchal structure in place, the incidences of adolescent girls or mothers being abandoned by their husbands or cohabiting

partners is emerged as a serious concern to be addressed.

It is important to understand that in the areas where the programme was implemented, the inter-generational detrimental social norms are being followed religiously by ignoring their severe consequences on the overall well-being of the girls. The male members i.e., the grandfather, the father or father's elder brother being the bread winner is the head of the family. They take all the major decisions around marriages which are greatly guided by the social norms and customs followed in that particular community. In some of the communities, the families disobeying these traditional social norms face severe allegations and rejection from society.





Influential Leaders

The programme strategically engaged the gatekeepers of social norms, in particular the Religious Leaders, Caste Panchayats and Community Traditional Leaders. Often, they are the most respected figures in the community and are frequently approached for mediation and counselling for various community/family level problems. They have immense power to influence the thought process in the community

and decision making at family levels. Their positive attitudes and opinions towards girls' education and aspiration could create tremendous opportunity to reverse the child marriages in the community.



Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

PTA is a platform where, at a regular interval, a teacher can motivate parents to enhance their participation to improve the learning outcomes of their wards. Further, it focuses particularly on drop outs or at risk of drop out and encourages re-admission. Every school organises these PTA meetings on a regular basis. However, the frequency varies from monthly to quarterly across the programme implementing areas. A lack of participation has been observed and thus limiting the effectiveness of PTAs.

Many students are first generation learners of the family, leading to the low importance of education and parents' participation. Further,

economically vulnerable families cannot provide additional coaching fee to compensate for the inadequate teaching quality in the schools. Above all, parents, especially male members, do not see any immediate financial benefit from letting the children attend school, making them choose to engage their children in agricultural or seasonal labour work to earn family livelihood.



Government Grassroots Platforms for Community Engagement

Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI), Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Community (VHSNC), Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC) including Gram Panchayat Level (GPCPC) as applicable in the respective operative States, are government promoted platforms for community dialogues and actions. To remain aligned with National Adolescent agenda and to mobilize community effectively, it is important to engage the local self-governance structure (PRI) and the government grassroots level convergence platforms (VHSNC/GKS, VLCPC/

GPCPC). This contributes to collaboratively prevent and respond effectively to the incidence of Child Marriages. However, these government recognised grassroots level platforms need to be strengthened to establish an in-built flexibility and ownership of the programme in the community.



Men and Boys

Engaging men and boys is very critical to transform social and gender norms as well as for creating a favourable environment for women and girls' empowerment. They play a pivotal role in girls' lives as a father, brother, husband/partner and friend. These aforesaid relationships are indispensable in slackening the deep-rooted patriarchal structure of the society. As and when they emerge as torch bearers, the women and girls would be treated as a functional unit of the society and would be capable of infinite possibilities and achievement.



IV. MTBA Principles Towards Engaging Communities

Ensuring a social system that fosters collaboration, equity and freedom has always remained the prime motto of the programme. The programme created opportunities to engage people in action

and allows communities to take action. The three major principles which guided throughout are Social inclusion, Gender & inclusiveness and Effective communication with the stakeholders.

Social Inclusion

Across the implementing communities, special focus was laid on ensuring the socially excluded communities, such as Scheduled Castes (SC) including Dalits, Scheduled Tribes (ST), and religious minority groups. Since the beginning,

the programme planning, monitoring and evaluation aspects were designed accordingly and adapted to attain this.



Social Inclusion-Adolescent Profiling



The MTBA research partner Population Council's globally tested "The Girl Roster" tool was applied in the programme towards strengthening the girl-centred approach. Further, to ensure access for 100 per cent adolescents at risk of marriages and to meet the country specific needs, this tool was adapted by Save The Children India (SCI) and was introduced as the "Adolescent Profiling" tool. In addition, training was provided to other Alliance partners for collaborative execution.

This tool provides various crucial socio-economic information such as personal details, education status, access to social protection schemes, description of disability, family income and status. All this is required to develop a comprehensive support package for every adolescent girl in the MTBA peer groups. The adolescent profiling was conducted during the inception phase and was updated twice a year, hence enabling partners to include new adolescent members in the village. The uniqueness of this profiling is that it continues the monitoring of those adolescents who entered adulthood during the programme period. More importantly, this profiling includes 100 per cent adolescents in the implementation areas, thus, ensuring effective reach to the vulnerable pockets of the community.

Gender and Inclusiveness

Gender and inclusiveness remained an integral and cross-cutting theme of the programme's actions to challenge traditional patriarchal social norms and deep-rooted gender inequalities among the community. During the community meetings, opportunities were created to discuss and confront the patriarchal mindsets which perpetuate child marriages and obstruct the well-being of the adolescent girls. At the community level, the program strategically worked with and supported men and boys to embrace positive masculinity. To foster an enabling environment, the programme design included formation of peer networks of adolescent boys. Further,

these boys' groups were sensitized regularly about the negative impact of patriarchal social norms, gender discrimination and violence, Child Marriage and SRHR. On the other hand, the programme trained adolescent girls in sports like karate, football, cricket and other outdoor games. These girls were mostly first generation from their families to participate in outdoor games in front of their own community and were applauded by the male peers and parents/gatekeepers.



Gender Inclusiveness-Mixed Gender Sports



To promote gender equality through sports, NEEDS organised football matches in 14 implementing Panchayats in 2018 among the MTBA girls. The final tournament was organised at Sarwan, in the MTBA implementing Block in 2019. That was a mixed gender match where the rival team were boys' groups. Finally, one of the girls' teams won the tournament. However, the focus was more on participation and fun rather than on competition and performance. The girls were coached and trained through an expert. The male peers were engaged as supporters. Some MTBA boys' groups were awarded cricket kit for extending technical and moral support to the girls.

Effective Communication with Stakeholders

Across the programme implementation areas, a special focus was laid upon behavioural change outcomes. Throughout the implementation, communication tools were adapted and improved for effectiveness. In order to design and develop appropriate messaging for various target groups, each MTBA partner organisation conducted Social Behavioural Communication Change (SBCC)

Study. This SBCC study allowed for improving the messaging and means of communication towards establishing an inclusive and engaging mechanism. Audio-visual aids were mostly applied to make the community approaches impactful.



Effective Communication- Information on Wheels



Information on Wheels is a unique approach which BVHA introduced in the two implementing Blocks in Raxaul and Majhaulia (Districts: East and West Champaran) to disseminate information and sensitize the community on severe consequences of Child Marriages. A small van is decorated with various placards with both visual and written messages on girls' empowerment, various Government supported schemes to promote girl's education & employability

skills. Importance of reproductive health for girl's well-being, legal consequences of Child Marriages and significance of male participation through the various roles they play in a woman's life is also highlighted. In addition, related IECs (in flyers form) in regional languages are made available in the van for distribution among the community. This mobile information van is generally inaugurated by Block level government officers or Panchayat heads. The van travels for a certain period until the all implementation villages are covered. To attract the attention of the community, an audio message is played throughout. The van also stops at community junctures to interact with the people, during which the staff present in the van respond to the queries. Sometime feedback forms are also filled with the help of the community to understand their thoughts on gender norms and Child Marriage customs.



V. Programme Strategies & Drivers towards Engaging Communities

Community Meetings

Community meetings were instrumental in influencing and strongly engaging with the decision makers of a girl's life. To spread the message widely, community level meetings were organized to build a strong rapport simultaneously with the Panchayat head and other government Frontline Workers. During these meetings, the community was sensitized about the legal implications of Child Marriages and its manifold effects on girl's life and well-being. Communities were also informed that those marrying at early age are generally more susceptible to domestic violence and deaths during childbirth. Besides creating awareness of the ill effects of Child

Marriages, the communities were also sensitized on the possible solutions of this regressive social norm. They were informed that educating girls can lead to many positive outcomes for economic development and poverty reduction. In addition, discussions were organised in community-based groups to create awareness on girl's education and entitlements through related government schemes. Moreover, consultations were done on the significance of employability skills and opportunities in a girl's life. Sessions were also organised with the communities on the importance of financial literacy and savings bank accounts.



Challenges and Solutions



In the initial phase of the programme, the involvement and acceptance at the community level was very low. During the meetings it was revealed that they were quite ignorant about the ill effects of the existing rigid practices. They chose to marry off their daughters early as they did not see any other better alternative available to secure their future. In addition, the community was also expecting to get some tangible assets or financial benefits from these meetings. So, initial dialogues on preventing early marriages were not appreciated. Considering the fact that the community has enormous confidence in the PRI members and other government Frontline Workers (FLWs), engaging and developing a strong rapport with them since the beginning of the programme helped to overcome this challenge gradually. On the other hand, as the programme goal was aligned with government stand, the FLWs continuously supported to create a society free from Child Marriages

LEARNING KIOSK-I

It is important to recognise that the girls cannot be taken as a homogenous category and their position varies depending on other social aspects in the society like caste, class, religion, region and language.

Social and vulnerability mapping emerged as a potential tool to engage the community. It helped them to understand the never-ending impact of the existing social norms and issues. Through this activity, the process a few community members become more responsible and connected to the cause.

Influencing Religious Leaders and other Rigid Gatekeepers

The programme intensively worked with religious and traditional leaders to influence and motivate them to disallow Child Marriages in their communities. Across 11 communities, the programme sensitized and inspired them to provide motivational speeches during the day of observations (like International Women Day, World Menstrual Hygiene Day) on the importance of girls' empowerment, including the significance of educating a girl child. Also about delaying marriage and risk of sexual and reproductive health morbidities and maternal mortality while married off at an early age. Moreover, they took initiative and made it mandatory to administer the official documents of age proof for both the

bride and the groom to reduce the chances of early marriages.

As the programme matured, it strategically included prominent gatekeepers like Mother-In Laws and Caste Panchayats (where applicable) towards reversing child marriages/consequences of child marriage and promoting girls' education and employability skills. In some of the implementing communities of the programme, regular meetings were organised with the mother-in-laws also, along with the husbands, to particularly emphasize on readmission of the married adolescents in the school, adopting family planning and engaging in vocational courses.



Challenges and Solutions



Engaging religious leaders and other gatekeepers in the community remained one of the most challenging tasks of the programme. The religious leaders were hesitant to disturb the deep-rooted sense of tradition, social obligation and expectations. They are used to avoiding the responsibility by mentioning that they are only the executors of family decisions. A series of group meetings and one to one counselling were organised to sensitize them about the social and legal implication of child marriages. Finally, due to programme's continuous lobbying and advocacy, the Child Marriage Prevention Act was endorsed effectively at the local levels. The programme continuously encouraged media coverage of the cases of violations as well as promoted the change agent. These two strategies remained to be instrumental towards making them a part of the programme.

Engaging Influential Community Stakeholders

Mother-in-Law and Daughter-In-Law Conference



This is a community level platform promoted by NEEDS (within the scope of MNCP) with an aim to promote family planning, delaying the first pregnancy, generating awareness on SRHR and importance of girls' education among the mother-in laws of adolescent and young married girls. This platform also created opportunities for guided discussions on various social norms and associated discrimination and taboos among two different generations of women.

After two years, through a consistent effort, 339 married adolescents, including newly wedded adolescents, joined the vocational tailoring unit operated through the programme. Additionally, 964 married couples (including both adolescent and few young couples) underwent counselling for better sexual health and family planning.

Campaigns Emerging as a Powerful Community Engaging Approach

Across the program's implementing communities, the campaigns emerged as an effective promotional action in translating programme's objective into sustainable actions. They provided an opportunity to increase awareness on the overwhelming impact of Child Marriages at a mass scale. To promote the campaigns, each Alliance partner used a variety of methods such as engaging and motivating MTBA adolescent girls and boys to make their peers aware of the rights

and entitlements; using creative approaches like wall paintings and street plays to inform and engage community through community led actions; or engaging religious leaders, parents and teachers as change makers to deliver positive messages on SRHR and Child Marriage, to name just few. For a wider reach and greater impact, mass media remained an integral part of the campaigns to convey the 'Zero Tolerance' message on Child Marriage.

Engaging Influential Community Stakeholders

VHAI encouraged relevant amendment in Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of Caste Panchayats to prevent Child Marriages



Caste Panchayats/Councils are distinct and in some regions are more important than Gram Panchayats (PRI) in India. Most of the castes have their own panchayats to regulate community custom to promote and sustain traditional social norms. They play a crucial role in marriage negotiations as their permission is indispensable to solemnize marriages. Hence, in Block Khallikote, while implementing MNCP, VHAI strategically engaged different Caste Panchayats to get their support to prevent the incidences of child marriages. Even one of the caste panchayats revised the MoU and introduced a clause to check the legal age bar before initiating negotiation between families. Gradually, inspired by this Caste Panchayat, many others revised their MoUs accordingly.



Challenges and Solutions



Mobilizing men for active participation in campaigns was sometimes quite challenging. They do not feel comfortable to be part of the campaign activities like walking in the village, raising voice to protest against child marriage or taking part along with adolescents in an oath taking ceremony. Hence, during the campaigns, additional meetings were organised with the male members in the community halls to better understand their opinion about girls' empowerment and share the outcomes of the campaign. Initially, the community showed resistance to provide permission to their daughters to be part of the campaign, but it started changing when the MTBA peer group members convinced their parents. Later on, the girls were much appreciated by the community and parents to be a part of such campaigns.

LEARNING KIOSK-II

In a girl centred programme, the formation and strengthening of adolescent boys' groups is proven to be important to influence their attitudes at an early age.

Engaging men is quite challenging as they consider that SRHR and Child Marriages are the domain of girls and women. However, they are found more comfortable in discussing the issues in male groups instead in heterogeneous groups with females and adolescents.

Wall Murals

Wall murals/paintings evolved as one of the participatory ways of displaying messages. Primarily, MTBA peer group members and community were engaged to decide on the content and positioning of the wall paintings. The areas where communities gathered frequently such as the main road of a village, the community hall, Anganwadi centres, Panchayat Buildings and Block offices were chosen to display the messages. Such was their impact that the messages on prevention of Child Marriage or importance of

girls' education or SRHR influenced and guided the local community discussions even in the absence of programme team. The participatory experience was quite unique when MTBA adolescents were engaged to co-create the messages on the walls. In some of the implementing areas in Block Khalikote (Odisha), GKS (Gaon Kalyan Samiti) were mobilized to provide financial support for this community action through local level lobbying and advocacy.

Challenges and Solutions



The major challenge faced was to display messages about SRHR including information about menstrual and reproductive health, contraception, safe abortion and others on the community walls.. As the programme intended to spread the messages on prevention of Child Marriages and SRHR, getting a space on the community walls for these messages was itself an indicator of beginning of breaking the stereotypes. Initially, the support was extended by the PRI head and such messages were displayed in the village community halls. Gradually, many community members and even rigid gatekeepers of the community became flexible with such messages to be positioned on their walls. However, in some of the implementing areas, the messages including the information on Reproductive Tract Infection (RTI) symptoms, menstrual health and reproductive health were revised with some convincing terms in consultation with the Government health workers.



LEARNING KIOSK-III

Engaging communities was much easier and faster in those implementing areas/ pockets where the partners have already implemented programmes on SRHR or youth empowerment than the new areas.

Selecting appropriate community space to display the messages on Child marriages and SRHR is very critical for effective communication.



चाइल्डलाइन टॉक (1098)

1098 एक टोल फ्री नम्बर है एवं ये 24 घण्टे 365 दिन चलने वाली मुक्त और आपाजवलासीन राष्ट्रीय कोन सेवा है।

- कोई बच्चा बिना और अकेला हो।
- किसी बच्चे को आश्रय की जरूरत हो।
- कोई बच्चा खोया गया हो या गुप्त हो गया हो।
- किसी बच्चे का शोषण हो रहा हो।
- कोई बच्चा पीछा कर रहा हो।
- कोई बच्चा मर रहा हो।
- समझे पर किसी बच्चे का अपहरण हो रहा हो।
- बाल विवाह हो, मानसिक या शारीरिक हिंसा से परेशान हो।
- अगर किसी को बच्चा (ईर के भद्र, होम, गैरगैर, फेक्ट्री, दुकान याद या कहीं और) परबंदी कर रहा हो।

18 वर्ष से कम आयु के किसी भी बच्चे को परेशानी व मुसीबत में देखने पर चाइल्डलाइन टोल फ्री नम्बर 1098 पर कॉल करें।

नोट:
आपका नाम, नम्बर व पता गोपनीय रखा जायेगा।

चाइल्डलाइन टॉक (1098)

अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय बालिका दिवस

दिनांक: 11 अक्टूबर 2019

शिव शिक्षा समिति रानोली द्वारा
संचालित चाइल्डलाइन टॉक



Theatre or Street Plays

Theatre and street plays, being an Indian traditional media remain a very effective approach to mediate communication with communities. They have helped to establish a strong community connection as a means of girl empowerment. In the majority of the implementing areas, the girls from the MTBA peer groups were provided professional training to perform street plays

in order to educate their own community. The theatre would be organised in the open areas or community grazing areas to provide enough space for the spectators. However, in some implementing areas, the programme preferred to engage professional artists to create awareness among the community through traditional folk media.

In the beginning, parents and community did not appreciate the idea of girls performing in front of the entire village. Street plays were introduced in the communities after adolescents' groups were formed and strengthening was ongoing. So, an initial rapport with the community was already established. This supported to conduct some follow up meetings with the parents (whose daughter was willing to participate) and some other villagers. During the discussion it was revealed that they were apprehensive that these Street plays would include improper dances with some kind of inappropriate (mainly sexual) expression or unrefined speeches. Several follow up discussions were conducted; scripts were shared, initially plays were organised in front of the parents and finally the restriction was lifted. However, in some of the Gram Panchayats in Block Khallikote (Odisha), the community did not appreciate the concept of girls performing in the street plays/theatre. In such circumstances, finally theatre professionals were hired and traditional folk media became the media to sensitize communities.

LEARNING KIOSK-IV

When early marriages are stopped, the socially most affected are the bride and her family as they are the ones who are criticised the most.





Strengthening the Government Grassroots Platform

Government grassroots level platforms such as Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNC) and Village level Child Protection Committees (VLCPC) have been strategically engaged to intensify the community actions for ensuring programme sustainability. VHSNCs and VLCPCs were provided capacity building training on their regular periodic role as per the State policy including SRHR. In addition, they were capacitated to take and initiate action; to identify and discuss the community problems related to child care and protection/health issues and plan for ways to mitigate. These two committees were provided with hand holding to prepare village level health action plans and

village level child protection plans. In order to effectively position VLCPCs for action against Child Marriage, they were provided training on vulnerability assessment, maintaining and regular updating of tracking register, rehabilitation process, being alert and vigilant in the community to constantly obtain information on Child Marriage and counselling the families to discourage such actions. As per the state policies, adolescents were involved as active members in these committees to discuss and address child marriage and child protection issues. In one of the implementing Blocks, for better understanding, the Government guide book in English was translated into regional language and was provided to VLCPCs/GPCPCs.



Challenges and Solutions



Despite having Government commendation towards strengthening these platforms, the biggest challenge was that these committees were unaware of their overarching role at the community level and hence were hardly able to justify their positioning. To exemplify, while VHSNCs focussed on effectively organising Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHNDs) and the immunization days, the VLCPCs were yet to be formalised at the village level. Due to lack of proper mentoring and capacity building support, there was very low awareness among the members about functions of the committee. Additionally, the respective committee members are designated frontline staff of respective government departments. Hence, they were wary of the additional responsibilities of the VHSNC work. The motivation among the members was also low because they do not receive any remuneration for organising the VHSNC or VLCPC meetings. However, the unanimous consent and support from the State and local level authorities and department of the government towards strengthening these convergence platforms remained very important to overcome this challenge. Later on, the key members of the VLCPC and VHSNC including the PRI members, ASHA, AWW and teachers recognized and appreciated the role of the programme in bringing them together to address the issue of Child Marriage. In Odisha, as per the State Government Advisory, Gram Panchayat Level CPCs form the primary structure.

However, there are challenges which still need to be overcome to ensure a strong protection system at the village level, even after the programme period. One such case was in Block Khallikote where GKS (VHSCNCs) were strengthened to perform in the capacity of VLCPC. The MNCP programme team is continuously engaging advocating for GKS to function as VLCPC. Contradictorily, the State Government has proposed SMCs considering that school is better positioned to ensure the basic rights of a child.

LEARNING KIOSK-V

It is essential to strengthen and capacitate the local Government bodies in particular Gram Panchayat (GP) and village level grassroots platforms so that they are adequate to reach out to the community with all its competencies as per the Government statutory guideline.

VHSNC(GKS)/VLCPC-The challenges related to the selection of the members, their training, supportive supervision, proper reporting and responsive feedback mechanism can only be improved with a strong will and action of the respective Government Department.

Involving Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) To Promote Girls' Education in the Community

PTAs provided a unique platform where programs could directly interact with the parents of the MTBA adolescents. Besides generating awareness on the importance of regular attendance at school, the programme took initiative to sensitize PTA members on Right to Education Act and on the approaches to negotiate with school administration if the school lacks in basic infrastructure like boundary wall, functioning toilets, safe drinking water sources and other essential provisions. In addition, the parents were also informed on various government sponsored scholarships and entitlements particularly available for promoting higher education for

a girl child. The programme systematized and emphasized the counselling with the parents of dropout students. During PTAs, the guardians are also inspired not to engage the children in agricultural and other seasonal work. At the community meetings, participating in PTAs is prioritized so that the majority of the parents of MTBA adolescents could appear regularly in these meetings. The teachers were motivated for home visits and random follow up were done for the drop out girl students. The frequency of facilitating PTAs by the programme varied from state to state but it was somewhere between twice to six times a year/school across the operational area.



Parent Teacher Associations

Declaration of 'Drop out Free' Schools



To retain the adolescents in the school in consultation with School Management Committees (SMC) and PTAs, VHAI has developed an effective and participatory monitoring process. In this process, every month school performance is monitored stringently on some certain parameters including review of attendance and counselling of parents of absentee students.

A school is being acknowledged as drop out free school when it scores certain marks eligible for this status. However, a school cannot qualify for this status if in one year a single student is found not attending the classes more than 45 days even it scores well in other parameters of the weighing scale. Strengthening PTA platforms has supported to mobilize community members and to encourage the ignorant parents to encourage their wards to come to school regularly. In the VHAI implementing area, 26 such schools are awarded as drop out free schools.

Challenges and Solutions



Ensuring the presence of parents in PTAs was the biggest challenge. During the community meetings, emphasis was laid on the importance of education and regular attendance in school, particularly on girl's education to motivate the majority of the parents to attend the PTA meetings. Later on, the parents who started participating more often in the PTAs were inspired to motivate other parents particularly those whose daughters were poor learners or tend to drop out soon. This strategy helped to boost and improve the attendance of parents at the PTAs. However, engaging migrating parents is still a challenge.

LEARNING KIOSK-VI

During the agricultural period (sowing and harvesting) it is quite tough to ensure community engagement. In tribal pockets, family level migration has been observed for labour work.

In flood prone implementation areas, support under humanitarian ground helped to ensure the recognition and acceptance.

Government residential schools emerged as a potential solution to retain girls of the migrating families in the school.

Inter Personal Communication and Household Visit

Continuous negotiations and counselling at the family level has supported well to dismiss the majority of Child Marriages at the negotiation level. The significance of household visits by the programme team is more essential when marriages are stopped with the support of legal

interventions. Girls and their families also need long term support to ensure that the child is safe and cared for at home post stopping/postponing her marriage. Hence, in such cases frequent counselling and house visit has eventually supported appropriate rehabilitation of the girl.



Challenges and Solutions



The programme experienced that sometimes counselling with parents did not work and the families secretly left the village to solemnize the marriages outside. There are also incidences where the girls were not allowed to meet the programme team after marriages got cancelled when mediated through VLCPCs/GPCPCs. To overcome this challenge, the programme widely started encouraging and promoting Change Agents.

Involving and Promoting Change Agents

The programme identified parents/in-laws, peer boys and men, MTBA girls who supported to stop marriage supported for higher education or readmission in school or vocational courses. The programme promoted and cited the work and contribution of the Change Agents during various events and mass gatherings. The Change Agents were felicitated by Block and District Level authorities during various days of observation

celebrations under the scope of the programme. This is a powerful method of building the confidence in the community by letting them know that the administration will extend support to those to stand up against Child Marriage.

Gradually promoting Change Agents emerged as a solution to accelerate various community led actions.

LEARNING KIOSK-VII



Monitoring Tools to Accelerate Community Participation

CINI used the following monitoring tools to engage tribal communities effectively in the programme

Community Score Card-Traffic Light Tool

This tool is used to assess the quality and access of the Government entitled services (health, education, water and sanitation) in a participatory manner. The interesting feature of the tool is that the colours of traffic lights are used to quantify the services. This helps the process easier when literacy rate is not adequate. On the basis of the score cards received from both the stakeholders, the programme also facilitated the interface meetings to find a solution to the existing gaps.



Social Resource Mapping

In the community meetings, the VLCPCs were guided to lay down a visual map which depicts the social demographic profile of vulnerable adolescents. The tool was also equipped to identify the issues of child rights on protection.

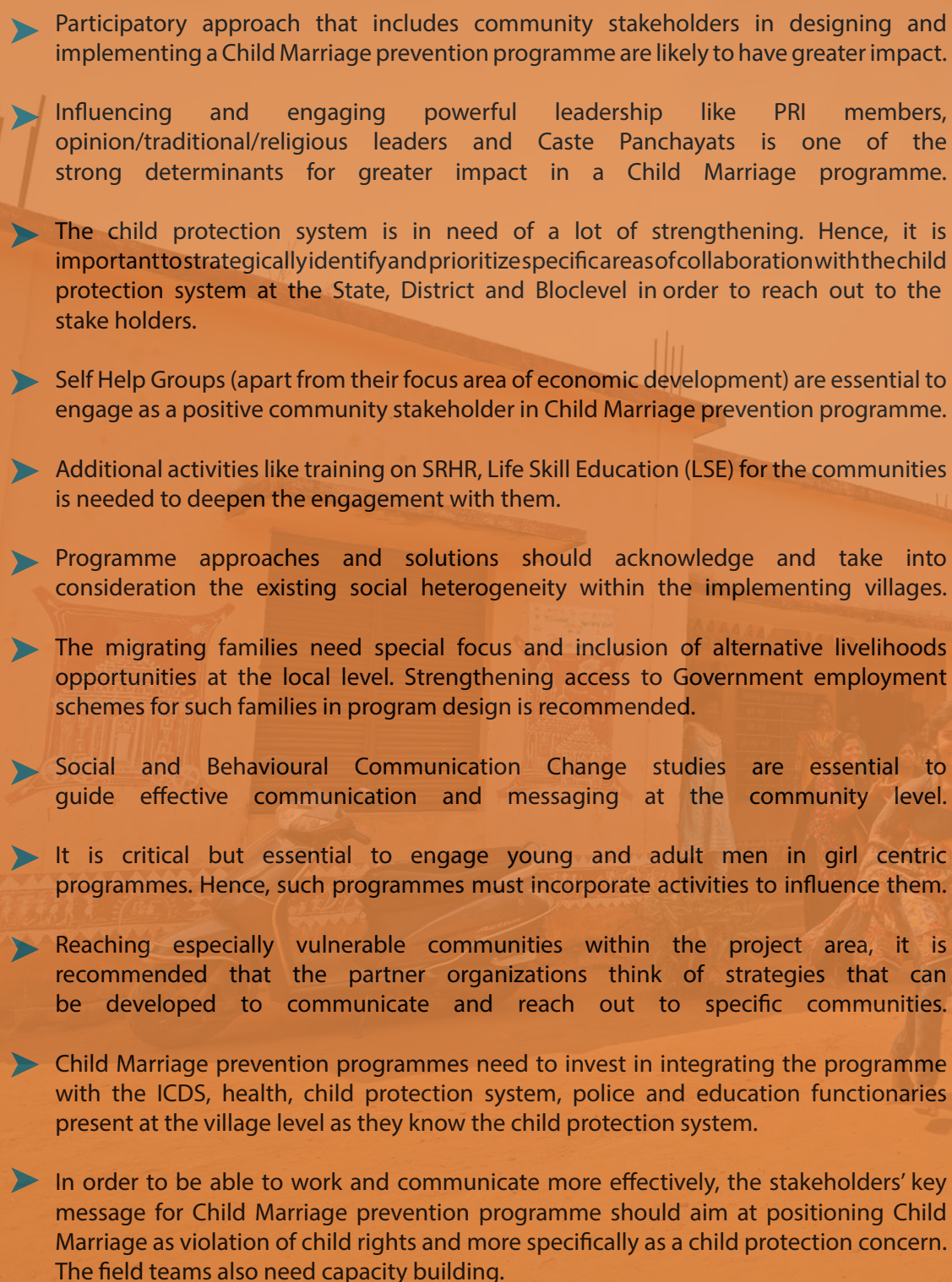
Vulnerability Assessment Tool

This tool was developed and executed with the support of MTBA adolescents. This tool supported the MTBA peer groups to understand as well as closely monitor the peer who is vulnerable and is at risk of marriage/cohabitation and act promptly when needed. This process of tracking vulnerable girls helped to build a strong bonding among the peers.



VI. Key Recommendations for Future Programmes for Children



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- Participatory approach that includes community stakeholders in designing and implementing a Child Marriage prevention programme are likely to have greater impact.
 - Influencing and engaging powerful leadership like PRI members, opinion/traditional/religious leaders and Caste Panchayats is one of the strong determinants for greater impact in a Child Marriage prevention programme.
 - The child protection system is in need of a lot of strengthening. Hence, it is important to strategically identify and prioritize specific areas of collaboration with the child protection system at the State, District and Block level in order to reach out to the stakeholders.
 - Self Help Groups (apart from their focus area of economic development) are essential to engage as a positive community stakeholder in Child Marriage prevention programme.
 - Additional activities like training on SRHR, Life Skill Education (LSE) for the communities is needed to deepen the engagement with them.
 - Programme approaches and solutions should acknowledge and take into consideration the existing social heterogeneity within the implementing villages.
 - The migrating families need special focus and inclusion of alternative livelihoods opportunities at the local level. Strengthening access to Government employment schemes for such families in program design is recommended.
 - Social and Behavioural Communication Change studies are essential to guide effective communication and messaging at the community level.
 - It is critical but essential to engage young and adult men in girl centric programmes. Hence, such programmes must incorporate activities to influence them.
 - Reaching especially vulnerable communities within the project area, it is recommended that the partner organizations think of strategies that can be developed to communicate and reach out to specific communities.
 - Child Marriage prevention programmes need to invest in integrating the programme with the ICDS, health, child protection system, police and education functionaries present at the village level as they know the child protection system.
 - In order to be able to work and communicate more effectively, the stakeholders' key message for Child Marriage prevention programme should aim at positioning Child Marriage as violation of child rights and more specifically as a child protection concern. The field teams also need capacity building.

- It is recommended that the Child Marriage prevention program needs to develop a strong media advocacy strategy. For example, using local television channels-interactive shows with community/ phone-ins could ensure greater scale-up of awareness.
- It is recommended that youth groups must play a more strategic role in prevention of Child Marriage in their routine activities, and Child Marriage can be taken up by youth groups in all the public events that they organize. Youth groups can also take up other social issues in their communities like alcoholism and domestic violence. They could also engage and work with SHGs on these issues.
- Functioning collaborations of VLCPC with religious leaders is recommended as a part of Child Marriage monitoring platform in the community.





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