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marriage**

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Government of Gujarat

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# **EFFECTIVE LINKAGES TO GOVERNMENT SCHEMES**

**THROUGH BLOCK LEVEL CHILDREN AND  
ADOLESCENT RESOURCE CENTRES IN GUJARAT**



## CONTEXT

Resource centres for children and adolescents were set up in Chhota Udepur and Banaskantha districts in a one-year pilot to provide information on adolescent related schemes, create demand for accessible services, strengthen capacities of service providers and help children and adolescents to utilise these services.

**The initiative helped increased access to adolescent related schemes and generate awareness about adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage.**



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

The state of Gujarat situated on the west coast of India, accounts for 6% of the country's total area and 5% (60.38 million) of its population, making it rank tenth in the country. It is one of the most urbanised states in India, with 47% urban population. However, the eastern tribal belt and the northern dry region remain underdeveloped.

The reliance of these regions on agriculture for a living has placed them on a delicate trajectory with erratic income and poor health indicators. Apart from high levels of malnutrition and poor indicators for education, the

tribal belt reports high incidence of child marriage and child labour, especially since many districts witness significant in- and out-migration.

**Chhota Udepur district** bordering Madhya Pradesh, has the third largest tribal population in eastern Gujarat and high incidence of child labour with underage children engaged in cottonseed industries, banana plantations, mineral mining and agriculture.

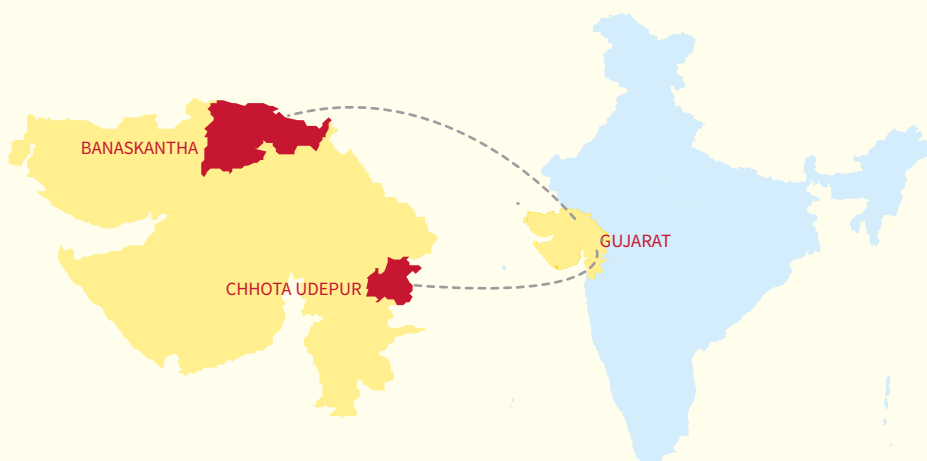
**Banaskantha district** located in north Gujarat, adjacent to Rajasthan, is marked by strong social norms which give low value to girls' education and empowerment.

### Issues hampering adolescent empowerment in the 2 pilot districts

Paying "bride-price" as high as INR 3-5 lakhs which the groom's family is expected to pay the bride's family and putting pressure on the new couple to repay

"Atta-satta" where a young girl (yet to cross legal marriageable age) is clandestinely married off while another legitimate marriage is being conducted within the family

Child labour, malnutrition, harassment while going to school, poor menstrual hygiene, ignorance about sexual and reproductive health and feelings of inadequacy shouldering responsibility of marriage.





## Rationale for setting up block level resource centres

Block level Jan Seva Kendras are one-stop centres that provide Government-to-Citizen (G2C) services to enable the general population to submit applications for schemes, procure affidavits and certificates, right-to-information services in addition to helping them make land revenue and other payments to the government. They operate from block headquarters, offer wide coverage of services and make delivery faster, more efficient and transparent. In Gujarat, Jan Seva Kendras provide one stop solutions for 102 public services. However a reliable single window system was needed so that all children and adolescents could be connected to the entire bouquet of services and schemes that were relevant to them.

UNICEF has been supporting adolescent empowerment initiatives in Banaskantha and Chhota Udepur since 2009. To improve utilisation of government schemes and services, UNICEF along with state and district officials and implementing partners discussed the possibility of creating a dedicated centre at the block level in the form of Children and Adolescents' Resource Centres (CAARCs). The proactive role played by the district administrations of Banaskantha and Chhota Udepur in creating these block level centres was a major step forward. The initiative also responded to the felt need to have interdepartmental coordination and

**The pilot CAARC initiative responded to the need for block level interdepartmental convergence. The CAARC model facilitated delivery of timely services contributing to development of children and adolescents.**

convergence at the block level which could be crystallised in the CAARC model.

The pilot CAARC initiative responded to the need for block level interdepartmental convergence. The CAARC model facilitated delivery of timely services contributing to development of children and adolescents. Given UNICEF's legacy of working with children and strong presence in the state, the Government of Gujarat mandated them with the task of "Building and Strengthening Resource Centres at Block level for Adolescent Empowerment and Participation" (CAARC) on a pilot basis at the block level for the 2018-19 one-year period. The pilot was implemented by UNICEF and its implementing partners with the help of the district administration. The CAARC block level mechanism was planned in continuation to the previous interventions in Banaskantha and Chhota Udepur to strengthen the system for adolescent empowerment.

## Pre-implementation and roll-out phase

Since inception, the initiative has seen strong political will and administrative participation. Under the leadership of the District Collector, Banaskantha and the Additional District Collector, Chhota Udepur, all departments were informed to support implementing partners in both districts. Launch functions of CAARCs at the block level were well attended by Sub Divisional Magistrates (SDMs), District Child Protection Officers (DCPOs), Taluka Development Officers (TDOs), Block Presidents, Sarpanches, Talatis, Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), officials from health and social security departments, UNICEF and representatives of village level committees. Childline staff and CAARCs worked closely with District Child Protection Units (DCPUs), identified implementing partners and developed a strong strategic focus. Once the project team was in place, district and block officials were met and their buy-in sought to strengthen coordination and convergence.



### Objectives

- To expand and strengthen convergence of government schemes and policies
- To improve socio-economic status of the community
- To provide handholding support to children and adolescent beneficiaries for documentation completion, making it easier for them to avail of services and schemes
- To reduce prevalence of child marriage, child labour, exploitation and gender imbalance.

**Operationalisation of CAARCs brought regular interface with departments and communities. Relevant schemes were discussed and lists of rights holders drawn up. A joint movement ensued with all stakeholders contributing to expedite the process and share responsibilities.**



Photo Credit: © UNICEF / 2019

## Coordinators: Soul of the programme

Meeting the training needs of CAARC Coordinators was key to successful implementation of the pilot. A one-day orientation was held for all CAARC staff including Centre Coordinators and Outreach Coordinators in September 2018 where they were imparted basic information on:



Child rights



Adolescent empowerment programme of UNICEF



Child protection



Role of CAARCs and their teams



Children related legislations



Documentation and record keeping processes



Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)

Facilitators from UNICEF and DCPU imparted knowledge on the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 and other acts. Action plans were made which included selection of institutes for outreach mobilisation, list of meetings to be organized and information to be delivered at these forums, along with mapping vulnerabilities and identifying marginalised regions, castes and tribes.

## CAARC action plans



Mapping schools and institutes and expanding outreach



Reaching most vulnerable populations through CAARCs and linking rights holders with government schemes



Reaching rights holders through cluster meetings and interactions with help of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Department of Health and Family Welfare and Mission Mangalam supervisors at block and district levels



Identifying issues and sharing with Block Child Protection Committees (BCPCs) and DCPU departments; updating block officials, implementing partners, NGOs and Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs)



Including children and adolescent issues in Gram Sabhas, Sarpanch and Talati meetings



Disseminating IEC materials gathered from government, UNICEF and partners and displaying at strategic locations



Incorporating CAARC agenda in trainings organized by government at block level



Motivating frontline health workers to reach most vulnerable populations.

## Implementation phase

CAARCs began to function across both districts through the Jan Seva Kendras. Trained Outreach Coordinators, local influencers and select community members actively disseminated information about the Centres and various schemes and brought in adolescents and community members. They provided assistance in filling forms, submitting applications and active follow-up. Citizens who visited the Kendras for other work like getting Aadhar and ration cards were also informed about the new CAARCs and how they could be of use.

### Reaching the community

Interacting with adolescent stakeholder groups was the first step Outreach Coordinators took by visiting schools/Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). Meetings were held with Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members, adolescent groups, secondary/higher secondary school teachers, ASHAs, AWWs, Talatis and nurses at the village level. They participated in Gram Sabhas and talked of consequences of child labour and child marriage. Special events such as International Women's Day and Children's Day were celebrated besides community events where IEC materials were displayed.

### Providing guidance and handholding support

Counselling was an integral part of the initiative. Based on an initial assessment of the reasons for not accessing schemes, Coordinators conducted easy-to-understand sessions with girls (adolescents and young girls on verge of marriage), women (mothers who were abandoned, remarried or destitute), senior citizens (including widows), health workers (ASHAs, ANMs and AWWs) and teachers about the best-fit schemes for various stakeholders and assured that they would get all assistance in availing of scheme benefits. Strategies included outreach to tribal areas such as Kavant and Naswadi in Chhota Udepur. Joint outreach initiatives were planned with Childline, DCPUs, POCSO representatives and School Management Committees (SMCs). Survivors of sexual abuse were assisted to avail compensation and linked to government social protection and welfare schemes. CAARCs also collected application forms for schemes such as Palak Mata Pita and submitted these to DCPUs.

### Imparting skills and linkages for livelihood trainings

Livelihood opportunities for youth were enhanced and school teachers informed about schemes so that they could dialogue with rights holders and link them to schemes and services. Trainings on sewing, driving and beauty training were facilitated through Jan Shikshan Sansthas (Skill Development) and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). Those wanting to pursue higher studies were guided to institutes such as Dantiwada Krushi University and National Institute of Open Schooling.

<sup>1</sup>Under this scheme, all orphan children between 3 to 6 years living in Gujarat, are eligible to benefit from a financial grant.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

### Enforcing reliable monitoring mechanisms

Monitoring at district level set the pace for systematic review, feedback and evaluation by the DCPU (regular reporting to the Collector by DCPU). Reports prepared by Coordinators were submitted at district level and to UNICEF. Monthly meetings with Centre and Outreach Coordinators were held and village-wise registers with line lists were maintained making it easy to track and update information. A half-day district Child Protection Review was also organized at Chhota Udepur collectorate bringing key stakeholders together at district level to oversee the work on child protection.

“ CAARC is a successful example of two of Gujarat's most backward districts joining hands to facilitate adolescents by helping them avail government schemes and services that were part of Jan Seva Kendras.

Lakshmi Bhavani  
Chief of Field Office, UNICEF Gujarat

### Unfolding successes

The pilot's success was evident from the marked increase in the turnout at CAARCs over the pilot period. There was widespread recognition and appreciation across government departments and offices of the work done by CAARC teams, especially with respect to creating awareness, expanding the base of rights holders, reaching those in difficult and remote areas and overcoming community resistance. As a result, CAARC team members became regular participants at department level coordination meetings. The District Collector and Additional District Collector visited CAARCs and applauded the efforts.



## Enhanced participation and results



**16,820** adolescents and children visited CAARCs



**2,822** outreach meetings held



**244** girls promised to marry only after 18 years of age



**4,598** adolescents and children availed of schemes



**6,940** adolescents provided with career guidance



**192** Seva Setu meetings held

## Key achievements

### AT THE POLICY LEVEL



#### Effectively using existing village structures

Problems of children at the village level were resolved by enabling VCPCs, SMCs, Teachers, Talatis and Sarpanches. They were educated and encouraged to advocate for the same, ensuring continuity in the post pilot phase.



#### Building strong linkages with social protection schemes

Schemes like Palak Mata Pita were launched prior to the CAARC pilot but community members were unaware of these. During the pilot, they were informed and assisted to access their benefits.

Additional Collector, Chhota Udepur invited CAARC Coordinators to support them with public awareness programmes like Seva Setu meetings and Jan Jagran Karyakrams at the community level. They were also asked to use Gram Sabha meetings to reach large number of rights holders.



#### Smoothing documentation and assisting in opening bank accounts

People were given support to get their forms correctly filled and their identification proofs were procured/made/updated. Once applications were submitted successfully, they were duly tracked and after documentation was completed, the bank accounts were opened.



#### Regular monitoring for greater accountability and efficiency

Regular monitoring, reviews and reporting by DCPUs, implementing partners and UNICEF enabled CAARCs to function more effectively.

### AT THE PROGRAMME LEVEL



#### Improving awareness and increasing access to schemes

Through coordination with VCPCs, frontline workers and adolescent groups, village level meetings were organized during which CAARC Coordinators interacted with adolescent girls and provided information on schemes and improving uptake of adolescent-specific services and schemes in both districts.



#### Creating a distinct identity

CAARCs successfully created a distinct identity in Jan Seva Kendras out of which they operated. All information and services related to children and adolescents were provided free of cost.



#### Ensuring complete support

CAARC teams helped community members with all application processes including procuring missing documents, guiding family members to reach relevant government offices and get ID proofs, update Aadhar cards, change names and open bank accounts.



### Optimising human resources

Well defined roles of team members ensured clarity and speedy redressal of issues. Trainings at the start of the pilot and ongoing reporting and monitoring proved useful in bringing all team members to a shared understanding of local issues and being updated with latest information.



### Trusted implementation partners

Having experienced implementing partners rooted in the local milieu helped build strong rapport with community members and produce results.



### Marked difference in lives of adolescents

Young people educated themselves on career options and were assisted in finding vocational training to match their aptitude and interest. Those belonging to tribal communities and other marginalised populations could also avail benefits that were due to them.



Joining CAARC has given me confidence to speak in public and in front of senior officers. I can now facilitate community meetings and walk into their offices to draw their attention to problems and issues on the field.

Bharatbhai, CAARC Coordinator, Chhota Udepur

## AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL



### Earning goodwill and giving communities hope

Household visits, community level interactions and discussions at Jan Seva Kendras by specially trained CAARC staff was a huge motivating factor for community members whose faith in the government system was restored as they worked together to address child protection and adolescent empowerment issues.



### Convincing families to prioritise education

From having a casual attitude towards sending children to school, families began to realise the value of education. Girl child marriages were postponed and families pitched in when there was extra work at home without pressurising adolescents. Many children got readmitted to school.



### Providing skill development opportunities

With the help of ASHAs and other health workers and volunteers, CAARC Outreach Coordinators planned special vocational drives and skill development workshops for girls. Many girls joined courses like tailoring and beauty treatment and set up their own businesses.



### Changing mindsets and embracing change

From family members to key influencers, frontline workers and adolescents themselves, attitudes of rights holders towards availing of schemes began to change. The positive dialogue around child protection contributed to increased awareness and sensitivity towards education, life skills and vocational opportunities for adolescents.



### Reducing vulnerability to exploitation

The vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment and social norms drew entire families into debt that got transferred from one generation to the next. Providing them financial support through government schemes and facilitating the process was a major achievement. It also ended dependence of many families on exploitative money lenders.



Once people saw their friends and relatives receiving benefits from the schemes, they too began to cooperate and give their best to claim what was rightfully theirs. This brought positive energy and a hopeful attitude in the community.

Dr. M.M. Patel, Additional District Collector, Chhota Udepur

## Recommendations

### Partnering with district administration

Building on the progress made and awareness levels established, work must continue at the administration and community levels to ensure that the momentum is not lost and adolescent development remains a priority. Towards this end, events and programmes must continue to be organized and more focused IEC materials developed to ensure that there is dialogue and sharing especially in interior areas of the district. An ongoing assessment of the effect of IEC activities during the pilot showed that mid media activities were well received and also provided opportunity for further discussion and debate.

### Expanding role of CAARCs

Going forward it will be beneficial if CAARCs become part of the Jan Seva Kendras, get full support of and are ultimately taken over by the government. These block level centres for children and adolescents need to be institutionalised within the existing government system.

### Improving block and community level convergence of services

In Banaskantha for instance, more community level intervention is needed so that all children who lost parents could avail of foster parents' schemes and be linked to government welfare schemes. More awareness about the Kunverbai Nu Mameru scheme is needed as efforts to prevent child marriage gained ground. Increased coordination with ICDS will entail maximising participation in AWC meetings so that adolescent girls in all villages may avail information on life skills training, vocational training and employment courses and link themselves with different government schemes. Finally, the number of child marriages and child labour cases in blocks need to be reduced through awareness generation for communities, leaders, organizations, Gram Panchayats and youth clubs so that adolescents attend school regularly and dropouts are reduced.

### Increasing coverage

It was clear that consistent efforts should be made to include community members and strengthen the adolescent development programme, which was the main objective of CAARCs. Not only did the activities include issues that directly impact adolescent growth and development but also indirect issues that contribute to creating an enabling environment which is pro-adolescent in action, word and spirit. This would

entail expanding awareness of health workers, school teachers, daily wage workers, migrants, religious leaders, local champions, PRI members, sarpanch and ward members, police personnel and village elders.

### Empowering children through active Gram Sabhas

Active and effective Gram Sabhas are necessary and opportunities need to be created for adolescents and girls to speak up at this active forum. Every effort must be made to try and advocate for inclusive and child friendly Gram Sabhas that uphold the rights of adolescents and understand their current needs.

### Capacity building of PRIs

A supportive role should be provided to the Sarpanch so that s/he can influence the community and proactively strengthen the education system prevalent at the village/Panchayat. By making the village head a leader who can champion the cause of adolescents, there would be a top-down approach that is in favour of young people.

### Creating platforms for recognition

Success stories from the field should be shared and platforms created where the successful efforts of change agents can be publicly acknowledged and awarded. This would have a trigger effect with many more successes being recorded. Mid media can be used for dissemination of these stories.

## Conclusion

The CAARC established itself as a successful service provider and catalyst in the arena of adolescent empowerment and child protection. Being located within the government Jan Seva Kendra, there was greater credibility for the initiative. It established the much-needed link between government schemes and community members with all government schemes related to children accessible through a single window. The challenges encountered during the pilot helped the team realise that it was critical to have a proper strategy and accurate plan before scaling it up through a more structured method of undertaking community mobilisation through social activities and other local networks.