



While the world is grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, instances of early marriage/fake marriage are increasing at an alarming rate in India. Women and girls from marginalised and vulnerable communities are most likely to be victims of such marriages. One such case was prevented in Chinberiya Panchayat of Jamui district in Bihar state. Jamui is one of the least developed districts in the state.

The early marriage of Rubi Kumari, a 15-year-old girl was averted through the efforts of the district administration and the UNICEF district coordinator on June 30, 2020. The District Coordinator was informed by the Vikas Mitra (frontline worker) of the hamlet about the impending marriage on that very day. The team tirelessly persuaded Rubi's parents and community members by explaining the ill effects of child marriage and its legal implications and Rubi's marriage was finally prevented.

Rubi is a member of the adolescent girls' group which was formed as part of the 'Child Marriage Prevention and Adolescent Empowerment' project. Her marriage was arranged with a 24-year-old man from a neighboring village. She did not want to get married but was forced by her parents because of their dire poverty. She belongs to the Mushara community which is among the most marginalised communities of Bihar and has very low literacy levels. Rubi studied till grade 5 and then dropped out. Her father is a daily wage earner and her mother is a home maker. Her 24-year-old elder brother is also a daily wage earner. He is married and lives in Jamui district headquarters. Her 12-year-old younger sister has also dropped out. Both Rubi and her sister help their mother in household chores.

After the child marriage was averted, community members from the hamlet have pledged that they will not promote or perform any underage marriages in the future. Rubi and her sister have now enrolled in a nearby school and are linked with the government scheme, MukhyaMantri Kanya Utthan Yojana.

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