

A New Dawn

Inspiring stories of how communities in eastern Uttar Pradesh reclaimed and protected children's rights



**EASTERN
UTTAR PRADESH
CHILD RIGHTS
PROJECT 2010-15**

unicef 

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Preface

A vibrant industrial and agricultural region, the state of Uttar Pradesh has struggled with one of the highest infant and child mortality rates in India. As per Sample Registration System (SRS) 2014, the infant mortality recorded in the state was 50, much higher than the all-India rate. According to the Annual Health Survey (AHS) 2012-13, the neo-natal mortality rate was 49, and the under-5 mortality rate was 90¹. While the state has made significant gains on several key indicators over the past decade, according to Census of India 2011, the child sex ratio has deteriorated to 899 per 1,000 from 916 per 1,000 in 2001. One third of the state's population lives below the poverty line and the state has the highest number of children who leave school to work². UP also has the largest proportion (20.5%) of Scheduled Caste (SC) population of all the states of India³.

Over 20 per cent of India's child workers belong to Uttar Pradesh, most of whom work at odd jobs, in factories and in the carpet industry for meagre wages. Their labour plays a key role in supplementing their families' scant incomes.

One of the main reasons for the high prevalence of child labour in these sectors is the burden of debt, which forces families to send their children to work. Low literacy rate of 69.72% in the state further compound the problem⁴.

In Uttar Pradesh, UNICEF has taken several initiatives to promote child rights, in particular the rights to education and protection. The Eastern Uttar Pradesh Child Rights Project (EUPCRP) was implemented during the years 2010-2014 with the central objective of creating a protective environment for children in three districts of the state - Sonbhadra, Mirzapur and Jaunpur, with a particular emphasis on their rights to education and protection.

The key outcomes for the project were quality education available for all children in the 6-14 years age group; child protection structures in place addressing child rights, and child protection issues, especially child labour; knowledge enhanced and attitudes changed of families and communities in the project villages for the promotion of child rights and

¹ Annual Health Survey, Uttar Pradesh, Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2012-13

² Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 'Census of India', 2011, <www.censusindia.gov.in>

³ Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India; Release of Primary Census Abstract; Data Highlights

⁴ UNICEF, 'Breaking free from child labour', <unicef.in/Story/640/Breaking-free-from-child-labour>

the protection of children against violence, exploitation and abuse; enhanced access to service providers and social protection schemes by vulnerable families and women empowered to champion/promote the rights of children, especially those from socially excluded groups.

Specific interventions in the project included identifying and enrolling out-of-school children while building a protective net by way of strengthening social protection systems, setting up and strengthening child protection structures as per the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and building awareness around a Child-Friendly 10-point Agenda. The project was implemented in 5,160 villages across the three districts.

The five-year journey of EUPCRP with approximately 35 partner implementing agencies has brought many changes, big and small, in the lives of communities and children. While the project has achieved an impact across macro-indicators of child rights, there have been many individual and community successes that have contributed richly to the tapestry of child rights-strengthening structures across the intervention districts.

This booklet presents a vivid glimpse into some lives touched by the project interventions. The

stories include triumphs over the challenges of child marriage and child labour, strengthening of village-level child protection committees (CPCs) and School Management Committees (SMCs), improvements in the quality of services provided at *Anganwadi* centres and increased participation and agency of children and adolescents in decisions that directly affect their lives and futures. Communities have embraced the project interventions wholeheartedly and involved themselves in the work of securing child rights with gusto. They have become more empowered and aware. Having organised themselves at the village level, they are able to engage with stakeholders at the Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) and block levels, thereby ensuring sustainability at the village level for securing and promoting child rights. The booklet aims to present a snapshot in time of the interventions, individuals, children, community members, community leaders, community-level bodies and structures and other components which define the success of EUPCRP.

The support extended by NGO partners and village-level stakeholders across the three districts have strengthened this document. The genuine warmth of communities who participated in the project is truly inspiring and forms the underlying chord of all the stories presented in the booklet.

Village-level child protection structures in EUPCRP

As part of EUPCRP, child protection structures were formed at the village level to address child rights and specifically child protection issues, especially child labour. These groups are community-based and community-led. Awareness building through periodic trainings of members of these child protection bodies has resulted in the empowerment of these groups to handle all issues related to child rights, such as child marriage, child labour, education, child trafficking, violence and discrimination against children, health and nutrition. The Child Protection Committee (CPC), Women's Group (WG), *Bal Sangh* or *Bal Panchayat* and *Mahila Champions* have created an impact on the lives of women and children in particular and the community in general. In addition, the School Management Committee (SMC), which was formed under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, also partners with the village-level child protection groups. These village-level groups meet on a periodic basis in an organised manner and conduct public discussions and awareness building events for the villagers.



Child Protection Committee

The CPC comprises 11 members. These members include the *Gram Pradhan* or elected leader of the village, the *Anganwadi Worker* (AWW), a teacher of the local government school, the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), a member of the SMC, two youth representatives (a girl and a boy) and local social workers.



Women's Group or *Mahila Mandal*

The WG or *Mahila Mandal* comprises 10-15 women of the village, including the ASHA and the AWW. All the WG members were capacitated to have good communication skills and they were adept at mobilising the community. The members were given the title '*Mahila Champions*'/'*Women's Champions*'/'*Bal Mitras*'.



A Women's Group meeting - A platform to address child rights issues



Bal Sangh or Bal Panchayat **(Children's Committee)**

The *Bal Sangh* or *Bal Panchayat* is a group comprising 30-35 children of the village. The members hold interactive discussions on issues related to child rights. The *Bal Sangh* puts forth issues that they cannot handle at their level and convey these to youth representatives in the CPC. The youth representatives then take up the case at the CPC level.



School Management Committee

The SMC, a body created for democratisation of schools and for guardians and local communities to play their due roles in shaping and running the schools, was used as a platform. As part of EUPCRP, the SMC members received training on child rights, with a focus on child education. The SMC consists of 15 members of which 11 are guardians and/or guardians of children, 50 percent of whom are women. Four of the members include a ward member, Auxiliary Nurse-Midwife (ANM), *Lekhpal** and headmaster of the school. The SMC meets once a month, monitors the functioning of the school and prepares and recommends the School Development Plan. Among other responsibilities, the SMC also ensures the enrolment and continued attendance of all children in the neighbourhood.

* *Lekhpal* is the village-level revenue official responsible for keeping land records.

List of abbreviations

AHS	Annual Health Survey	MCP	Mother and Child Protection
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse-Midwife	NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist	OBC	Other Backward Class
AWC	<i>Anganwadi</i> Centre	PHC	Primary Health Centre
AWW	<i>Anganwadi</i> Worker	RTE	Right to Education
BDO	Block Development Officer	SC	Scheduled Caste
BEO	Block Education Officer	SDM	Sub Divisional Magistrate
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer	SMC	School Management Committee
CHC	Community Health Centre	SRS	Sample Registration System
CPC	Child Protection Committee	ST	Scheduled Tribe
EUPCRP	Eastern Uttar Pradesh Child Rights Project	TC	Transfer Certificate
FIR	First Information Report	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
GSS	<i>Gram Shiksha Samiti</i>	VHND	Village Health and Nutrition Day
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services	WG	Women's Group
ICPS	Integrated Child Protection Scheme		
IFA	Iron and Folic Acid		
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi <i>Balika Vidyalaya</i>		

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Making children visible

A story of how a village in rural areas of Eastern U.P. recognised its responsibility to secure children's future by taking the simple step of birth registration

"I never imagined that there would come a time when every parent in my village would understand the importance of registering his/her child's birth," says Shankar, a resident of Bakia village in Madiyaun block of Jaunpur district.

Ask any inhabitant of Bakia about the importance of registering children's births and his/her awareness will leave you impressed. Bakia boasts of a remarkable record. The births of nearly 90 per cent of the children born in this village last year have registered their births



Birth registration certification is one of the basic rights of a child

and obtained birth certificates. This is no mean achievement for a community which, until last year, was blissfully unaware of the vulnerability of their children without birth certificates.

People in Bakia belong either to the OBC or the SC communities. They eke out a living by engaging in marginal agricultural activities, animal husbandry or daily wage labour. It took months for the village CPC to make them understand the importance of registering children's births.

The CPC organised meetings, awareness building activities and camps to educate the community about the importance of documents that serve as proof of age and identity. The villagers were made aware that their children were likely to face discrimination and unequal access to basic services, such as health and education, if they did not possess



Recently, 187 birth certificates have been issued to children in Bakia

these documents. They were also informed that it is the first legal right of a child and a compulsory document as per Registration of Birth and Death Act, 1969.

Children too influenced the people of Bakia. Fifteen year-old Satyam Kumar, a member of the CPC, says, "I went from door to door and told people that they need to get birth certificates for their children."

Lack of awareness about the importance of birth registration was not the only spoke in the wheel. The community was unaware of the new and simplified process of procuring birth certificates.

Hirawati Devi, a WG member, explains, "Earlier, birth registration meant multiple trips to the block-level government office and cumbersome

"Earlier, birth registration meant multiple trips to government offices and cumbersome paperwork. The process took weeks and often involved paying bribes to various officials."

**Hirawati Devi, WG member,
Bakia**



Nearly 90% of the children born in Bakia village last year have had their births registered and obtained birth certificates. The villagers now know that a birth certificate is a compulsory document that can ensure access to several government schemes as well as protect them from exploitation of various kinds.

paperwork. The process would take weeks and often involved paying bribes to various officials.” This also implied loss of wages for the days that would be spent hanging around at the government office, clearly an unaffordable luxury for the villagers. Advocacy efforts resulted in the District Registrar authorising the ANM to issue birth certificates to children even after 21 days of their birth during the campaign period.

Following up on this simplified procedure at the district level, the CPC stepped in to educate the community that now, they needed to fill up a birth registration form, affix a stamp worth

Rs. 2 and submit it at the Assistant *Panchayat* Office to process delayed registration of births.

In order to cover school going children who did not have birth certificates, the CPC galvanised school authorities including school teachers and ensured that all children enrolled were given birth certificates.

Recently, 187 birth certificates have been issued to children in Bakia. Interestingly, the success is not limited to Bakia. Approximately 45 villages in Madiyaun have covered tremendous ground in registering births, with coverage of 70%-80%.

An unexpected spinoff of this awareness is the active participation of villagers in seeking more information and demanding better services, especially from the ASHA, ANM and AWW. “Earlier, the AWW would not distribute the Take Home Ration (THR) regularly, but now we demand regularity in distribution. We are also claiming essential rights of our children such as immunisation services,” says Madhuri.

Clearly, children’s identity and children’s rights have become a talking point in the villages in Madiyaun. And this is just the beginning.



Empowered WG members in Navtolia leading the change

Winds of change

A group of women who have never been to school, created a model of change by catalysing entire villages to adopt new behaviours and promote children's rights

A dirt track along a looming transmission tower leads into Navtolia, a modest hamlet in Chopan block of Sonbhadra district. The structures in this quiet habitation are semi-*pucca*, and from one of them, the echoes of women

engrossed in a discussion can be heard. These are the members of Van Devi (meaning 'Forest Goddess' in the local language Hindi), a WG that has transformed the social landscape in and around Navtolia.

In Navtolia, ante-natal care was never a priority. Child births took place at home and maternal mortality was high. Immunisation was perceived to make children ill, child marriage was normal and education was not considered important.

The women are discussing topics as varied and vital as reproductive health, institutional delivery, breastfeeding, nutrition, hygiene, child marriage and girls' education. None of them have ever been to school. Till a few years ago, most of them had never stepped out of their homes for any purpose other than for household or agricultural chores. Today, they are a successful, dynamic group that has influenced social and behavioural patterns and attitudes not only in their own hamlet but also in the adjoining villages.

It all began when Van Devi was chosen as an ideal platform to advance the cause of child rights in the hamlet as part of EUPCRP. The project systematically equipped the 15 members with knowledge, skills and understanding on child rights.

It was not easy though to make people break out of patterns, question traditions and cut

through the many myths and fears. With a population comprising OBCs and SCs, most men in Navtolia and the adjoining villages work either in stone quarries or on farms. Ante-natal care was not a priority here. Child births took place at home and maternal mortality was high. Immunisation was perceived to make children fall ill. Colostrum was to be 'fed to Mother Earth' and, therefore, faithfully released to the ground. Girls were married off at a tender age, and by the age of 15 or 16, they would have become mothers. Education was hardly a priority despite the fact that the government school is just half a kilometre away.

The women of Van Devi realised that there was a lot of work to do. Recalls Ishrawati Devi, "Each of us took the responsibility of bringing about change in 10 households. Armed with our newfound knowledge, we spread out into Navtolia to educate, convince, persuade and change." They even led by example. WG member Sukhwari made sure her daughter-in-law gave birth at the Primary Health Centre (PHC). Her granddaughter, who is all of two years old, is fully immunised.

The next step was to involve those women who had made behaviour changes in their lives, such as accessing ante-natal and post-natal care, availing institutional delivery facilities, immunising

Home visit where WG members proved instrumental in behaviour change



their children and breastfeeding exclusively. These women became the next link in the chain of change agents and influenced several more. Then, the government school was chosen as a point from where a positive buzz was generated and spread along social networks. Women from the adjoining villages of Salbhanwa, Dhawai

“Each of us took the responsibility of bringing about change in 10 households. Armed with our newfound knowledge, we spread out into Navtolia to educate, convince, persuade and change.”

**Ishrawati Devi, WG member,
Navtolia**



Dandi, Judwani and Patwad attended meetings and discussions that were led by Van Devi members.

Today, Navtolia and its adjoining villages are a transformed landscape. Ante-natal and post-natal care is seen as imperative. Men and women are aware of birth and post-natal complications. In the past two years, all births here have taken place either at the PHC or the Cement Factory hospital. There is not an infant or child who remains unimmunised. Colostrum is now regarded as the newborn’s first meal. Every infant is breastfed exclusively for six months. Even breast hygiene is a serious issue for women here.

“We’ve also worked hard to make people here realise the importance of education for children. Attitudes have improved considerably, and gender discrimination has reduced tremendously,” voices Chhutki Devi. Deepa, a young member of the WG, narrates how she convinced her father-in-law to call off her 14-year-old sister-in-law’s marriage.

Information, community mobilisation and collective action has transformed the women of Navtolia into champions of social change. The impact and influence of the efforts of Van Devi is visible across villages and promises to be maintained and sustained by these very communities.



The AWW helps women in the village maintain their immunisation cards

Sentinels of disease

Child protection structures and health workers secure life-saving immunisation services for children and mothers in Gosaipur

As Archana Pathak, the village AWW, looks out at the rain gently falling on the porch of her house, she thoughtfully says, "If the rains do not come in time, the crops will not grow. In the same way, if children are not given vaccines at the right time, they are at risk of contracting fatal diseases." Archana's words ring true for the village of Gosaipur in Raipur block of Jaunpur district.

Gosaipur is inhabited by communities belonging to other backward classes (OBC), such as the Yadav, Badhai, Mali and Teli. Until recently, immunisation coverage here was abysmal. A complex set of factors including poor service delivery, lack of awareness and myths and misconceptions have contributed to this. The myths existed despite a high literacy rate of 70 percent in the village. There were other factors

Poor service delivery, lack of awareness and myths and misconceptions contributed to the abysmally low immunisation coverage in Gosaipur.

as well. During the monsoons, water logging and pot-holed roads severely affected accessibility, further jeopardising immunisation services. This had a tragic fall-out on children who remained unprotected from preventable childhood diseases.

The matter was taken up with gusto by the CPC and WG and resonated with the community members who were often disappointed by the poor services available at health centres and *Anganwadi* Centres (AWCs). The common complaint was that vaccines were never available. With the support of these groups, Archana applied to the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) for a steady supply of vaccines. The child protection committee motivated the ANM to visit the village regularly and administer vaccines to children as well as expectant and nursing mothers. The village *Pradhan*, a dynamic leader, also pitched in and was able to create a groundswell of support. All the while, Archana

along with other CPC members continued to raise awareness levels amongst community members on immunisation, talking spiritedly about its benefits and dispelling myths around it.

Such a concerted and coordinated effort to boost demand and supply of immunisation has worked wonders. Currently, all children in Gosaipur are immunised and every mother has a Mother and Child Protection (MCP) card.



Children of Gosaipur village are now regularly immunised



The AWW in Gosaipur utilises her rapport with community women to counsel them about government health services

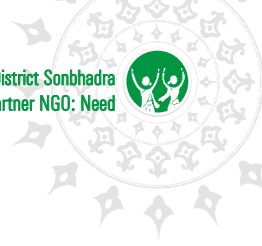
With a sense of pride, Indrawati Devi, one of the members flaunts her MCP card, which looks well-used. For her, it represents the protection and well-being of her children.

Health workers ASHA and ANM now regularly conduct home visits and inform families about polio rounds and other immunisation events.

Home visits by the ANM, supply of vaccines, and monitoring of MCP card entries were regularised. Polio rounds and immunisation events were publicised in advance.

They carefully monitor MCP card entries as well. All villages in the *Gram Panchayat* are now covered in the immunisation rounds conducted every two months.

The collective efforts to boost immunisation seems to be just the beginning for the CPC and WG members. Enthused, they are now planning to address other issues of the village such as setting up a school and a *Panchayat Bhawan*. Hand-in-hand with community health workers, they are committed to improving the quality of life of children and mothers in Gosaipur.



Boys, not grooms; girls, not brides

A remarkable story of how a resolute and persuasive rural community acted to thwart a child marriage in their village



CPC members of Karad pursued a strategy to stop the marriage of a 16-year-old girl

In the summer of 2014, a motley group of individuals created a stir by agitating against the impending marriage of a 19-year-old boy in their village Karad in Chatra block of Sonbhadra district. This was odd in a village where child marriage was a deep-rooted, socially acceptable practice. What followed was historic.

The group was the CPC, which was championing the rights of children, that had never been considered as a serious issue in this region. It was in one of the CPC's open discussions in which all villagers could participate that the 19-year-old's marriage was discussed.



The youth too were actively involved in bringing an end to the practice of child marriage in Karad



Madhuri, *Gram Pradhan* of Karad also participated in sit-ins outside the would-be groom's house

Says Dharmendra Kumar, a 22-year-old member of the group, "We discussed the fact that the boy was a child and had not attained the legal age for marriage. It also came to light that the girl he was going to marry was only 16 years old."

As a first step, the CPC verified the authenticity of this information from the boy's relatives. Its members then unanimously decided to take up this matter and visited the boy's home to meet his guardians and sensitise them about the negative impact of marrying children before the legal age. "We counselled them on the adverse impact of early marriage on their education and physiological and emotional growth," recalls Dharmendra.

This meeting, however, failed to convince the boy's guardians to call off or even postpone the marriage till the children attained the legal age to marry. Says Madhuri, the *Gram Pradhan* of

the village, "The boy's father was ill and feared that he would not live to see his son marry. They did not see anything inappropriate in bringing home a 16-year-old bride either".

The CPC then held a joint meeting with the WG. "We decided to organise a sit-in right in front of the boy's house till the marriage was called off," said Urmila, the ASHA in Karad.

"We discussed about the boy who was going to get married. He had not attained the legal age for marriage. Even the girl he was going to marry was only 16 years old."

**Dharmendra Kumar,
CPC member, Karad**



“On the first day, we sat in for six hours. The sit-ins continued for the next couple of days. The family countered our actions with the unthinkable,” she recalls.

“They would pour water in the lane leading to their house, to make it wet and muddy. This would make it difficult for us to reach their house. They even splashed cow dung all around their house so that we wouldn’t be able to stand there! But we didn’t give up,” said Dharmendra shaking his head.

A hopeful moment soon arose when the boy’s elder brother who had also been married as a child supported the CPC’s decision to delay the marriage. He explained to his father and other family members how he had felt burdened by the responsibilities that came with early marriage. His father understood but did not relent as he was concerned about the money that had been spent on invitation cards. Moreover, they had already accepted gifts from the girl’s family.

The CPC counselled the boy’s family against the child marriage. When that proved ineffective, they held sit-ins outside the boy’s house which was unprecedented in these regions. They even counselled the family of the teenage bride-to-be.

Soon, news reached the girl’s village. The CPC members visited the teenage girl’s family and explained to them the harmful consequences of child marriage and its legal implications. Consequently, the girl’s family called off the marriage.

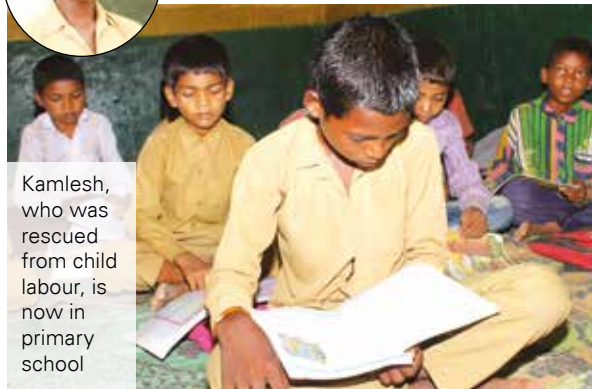
The determination and persuasiveness of the CPC had triumphed. Today, Karad is known for its zero tolerance towards child marriage. Neighbouring villages too have not reported a single case and the community has become the watchdog.



Reclaiming childhood

A touching story of a child from a poverty-stricken tribal family, rescued from a life of arduous, menial labour and rehabilitated into a world where he can enjoy his rights.

On a cold winter evening, Sunita an EUPCRP worker, stepped into a tea shop at the marketplace in Sewka Dadh village to treat herself to a steaming cup of tea. She had just finished her work for the day and was heading back home. Sunita was taken aback when a young child came up to her and served her tea. On asking the child his name, he whispered "Kamlesh." Further enquiry about his family revealed that he lived in the neighbouring village Hathyar with his maternal grandfather, mother, three younger siblings, maternal uncle and aunt. The tea shop manager,



Kamlesh, who was rescued from child labour, is now in primary school

who overheard the conversation, told Sunita that Kamlesh was 13 years old when his father abandoned the family. Then his mother who was a worker in a nearby factory became the sole breadwinner.

"Would you like to go to school?," Sunita asked Kamlesh to which he smiled shyly. "I'll come to your home on Sunday to meet your mother and grandfather," she said and noted down his home address.

The villages in Myorpur block are dominated by ST communities where illiteracy and poverty combine to push children into child labour. Out of the 196 households in Hathyar, 127 belong to ST communities. Kamlesh belongs to the

"Kamlesh had left school and was living and working at the dhaba for two months. He would be washing utensils all day in cold water even during winter. He had no slippers or footwear and was not wearing any woollens."

**Dwarika Prasad,
Gram Pradhan, Hathyar,**

impoverished Gond tribe. None of the elders in his family are literate.

In the following days, Sunita contacted the CPCs of Sewka Dadh and Hathyar villages and informed them about Kamlesh's plight. Says Dwarika Prasad, the *Gram Pradhan* of Hathyar, "We came to know that he had left school and was living and working at the tea shop for two months. He would be washing utensils all day in cold water even during winter. He had no slippers or footwear and wasn't wearing any woollens. We decided that we had to take action and rehabilitate him."

Sunita along with the *Gram Pradhans* of Sewka Dadh and Hathyar and a few CPC members soon visited Kamlesh's home. Says Dhansaha, a CPC member, "We counselled his mother and grandfather and informed them about the harsh conditions in which he was living and working. We sensitised the family about his rights. We also informed them about legislation that banned child labour and told them that the entire family could face punishment." The CPC made Kamlesh's mother promise them that she would bring him back from Sewka Dadh the next day.

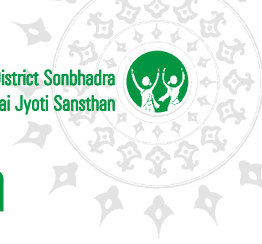
The next day, Kamlesh's mother brought him back home. The CPC then organised a village meeting in which all the villagers were invited. The agenda was Kamlesh's case and building awareness among community members about

Following Kamlesh's rehabilitation, the CPC and SMC of Hathyar village enrolled 53 children from the Baiga tribe in school.

the rights of children, especially those who were vulnerable. It was decided in the meeting that Kamlesh would be enrolled in the Primary School near his home. The villagers also took an oath never to make any child in Hathyar suffer such torment.

Kamlesh is now a student of Std V. He attends school regularly and actively participates in all school activities. His younger siblings are following in his footsteps and attend school. Most importantly, the entire community feels responsible and accountable towards the situation of children in their village. Following Kamlesh's case, in the year 2014, the CPC and SMC of Hathyar enrolled 53 children belonging to the Baiga tribe in school. The Baiga is also a socio-economically marginalised community that lives in abject poverty.

Says Ram Lakhan, the chairperson of the SMC, "We went to each child's home and convinced the guardians to allow their children to study at school." These 53 children are a testimony to the new-found commitment of the community to protect children's rights and ensure a life of dignity for them.



From the fringes into the mainstream

The active intervention of a WG saved children of a marginalised community from discrimination and abuse and integrated them into the education system

A precarious walk along a narrow and brittle mud embankment between fields is the only way to reach the hamlet in Mubarakpur village where the Musahar (literal translation 'rat eaters') community resides. The hamlet is an island, both physically and socially.

Mubarakpur is 26 kms away from Robertsganj, the bustling headquarters of Sonbhadra district. The hamlet of 30 Musahar families appears rundown. What brings it to life are the children as here bright as buttons. However, school and studies were not a part of their lives. They would enviously watch the other village children in school uniforms flocking to the local school. From afar, they used to watch as the school children ran around the sprawling playground.

The Musahar is a community that was traditionally considered the lowest among the Dalits. Historically, they have been subjected to social exclusion and discrimination. They are landless agricultural labourers and usually live on the fringes of villages as outcastes.

Says Lilawati, a member of Durga *Mahila Mandal*, a WG, "In May 2013, during one of our group meetings, the issue of non-attendance of children from the Musahar hamlet was brought up. It was important to determine the reason and we decided to take this up actively." The Durga *Mahila Mandal* WG was formed in the village as part of EUPCRP. Its members visited the hamlet and had a detailed discussion with the community.

The children's guardians told the WG members that there was a time when their children used to attend the government Primary School nearby but were regularly subjected to abuse, violence and discrimination by

Caste discrimination in school in the form of verbal and physical abuse led to fear and disinterest among children from the Musahar community and soon they stopped attending school.

children belonging to dominant castes and communities. Says Parvati, aunt to three brothers, Brij Mohan, Lal Mohan and Babloo, "Our little children would get beaten up by the village boys on the way to and back from school. We felt uneasy all the time. They would come back home hurt and bruised."

Rita, whose nephew Rohit stopped attending school, also explained the problem, "When we went to guardians of the violent children and complained about them, they threatened us."

Durga Mahila Mandal enrolled 19 children in the primary school. They also sensitised villagers about children's rights, violence against vulnerable children and caste discrimination.

The guardians spoke about caste discrimination that was prevalent even in school in the form of verbal and physical abuse. All this led to fear and disinterest among the children and soon they stopped attending school.



WG members in Mubarakpur helped boost school attendance of children from a socially excluded community

Says Lilawati, “It was a very sad plight, and without education, the children would, by default, inherit the legacy of illiteracy and poverty of their guardians and community. We knew that we had to do something.”

The WG then visited the government Primary School, Mubarakpur, and discussed the matter with the teacher, Ramakant. He assured them that if the children were enrolled again, he would ensure that no child would be discriminated against or abused by anyone. Meetings were also held in the community to which all villagers were invited. The issues of children’s rights, violence against vulnerable children and caste discrimination were discussed. These platforms helped sensitise the community.

In July 2013, *Durga Mahila Mandal* members enrolled 19 children from the Musahar community in the government Primary School and all their entitlements, including free books, uniform and school bag, were given to them.

As the children clutch their school bags excitedly, the Musahar community finds happiness in the thought that their children will no longer remain outcastes.



School has now been made accessible to children from the Musahar community



When women acted, the community benefited

Members of the local WG take steps to adopt and promote the practice of institutional delivery.

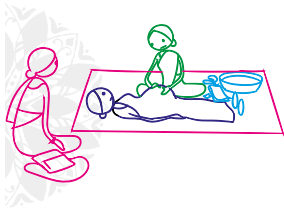
Madhuri smiles as the WG members in Kurethu cuddle her newborn son. She is a firm advocate of institutional delivery and says, "I gave birth to him at the Community Health Centre (CHC) in Dharmapur block. My husband and I had discussed the options and consulted our guardians. We agreed that delivery under medical supervision would give our baby and me the best chance of being safe and healthy." Her sensible words make even the hardest elderly women in the group nod their heads in favour of institutional delivery.

"Women have begun opting for institutional delivery and they are provided information about routine immunisation, counselling on breastfeeding, birth registration and other services."

**Rituben Bansi, ASHA,
Kurethu**

The village ASHA chimes in, "The formation of the WG has really worked wonders among the women of Kurethu. Earlier, they used to say, 'What is the need for immunisation? We don't need it. We've been delivering our babies at home for ages.'"

Nearly 98 percent of the population in Kurethu is SC (Dharikar and Chamar) and OBC (Yadav) while 2 percent belong to the General category (Savarna). The illiteracy rate here touches 80 percent and most people are engaged in farming. EUPCRP triggered and led the change from abandoning harmful practices to adopting safer, healthier ones. Women have been made aware of information relevant to their lives and are taking informed decisions. In the WG meetings, members discuss routine immunisation and its schedule, consumption of iodised salt, prenatal and antenatal care and intake of Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) tablets for pregnant women, among other things.



They also put all this information into practice. One of the major shifts that has taken place in Kurethu has been the move from home birth to institutional delivery. The women of Kurethu owing to several benefits that they are now aware of. They now know that the government provides a basket of services for expectant mothers registered at PHCs, CHCs or government hospitals, including vital medicines, qualified caregivers and monetary compensation. They also realise the risks involved in home births and accept that if complications arise during delivery, it will be difficult for the mid-wife to resolve these. This could prove fatal for the mother and the newborn. Manpatti, a WG member, points out, "A pregnant mother may fall sick if infections go unnoticed and aggravate into serious illnesses if she does not go for regular medical check-ups."

This process of behaviour change spread across the village as WG members took on the task of informing every woman and her family

Earlier, the women of Kurethu used to say, "What is the need for immunisation? We don't need it. And we've been delivering our babies at home for ages."



WG members of Kurethu village maintain their MCP cards well

about the benefits of institutional delivery. Each of the 12 members reached out to five households for counselling, thus covering a total of 60 households. Their efforts have, thus, improved access of women to reproductive health facilities, cutting across caste and class.

The women of this rural community have begun utilising the services at the AWC regularly for routine immunisation and nutrition and have also been maintaining MCP cards. The ASHA and ANM play an important role in all aspects of health and nutrition. Madhuri shows her well-worn MCP card and says that she keeps it carefully and gets it periodically updated by the ASHA. Community members are also aware of the government mobile health van numbers for general ambulance services and for pregnant women.



WG members hold meetings and counsel women in the village

People in Kurethu have also begun registering their children's births. They proudly claim that 36 birth registration forms were sent from the village to the Block office in the past few weeks. A positive outcome of the awareness and change has been the increased importance placed on children's education. Guardians now send their children to school regularly and the

WG members who are mothers attend SMC meetings.

The laudable initiatives of this group of women of Kurethu reaffirms that women are capable of bringing about positive and progressive change in the community.



Adolescent girls from minority communities are now accessing education in KGBV

Equal opportunity for our daughters

Child protection bodies and school teachers unite and change mindsets to help girls from a minority community realise their right to education

“I love school and books. I want to become a teacher,” says Nazreen. She is one of the brightest girls in her class. Just a year ago though, education was a distant dream for her. She was not allowed to go to school, just like many of her friends in Jamouli village.

In Jamouli, there are 35 households from the minority community, constituting more than one-third of the total population of the village. Most of these families live in an isolated hamlet that can be reached by unpaved roads. Guardians would often cite the remote

Guardians would cite the remote location of the hamlet as a reason for not sending their daughters to school. They were also apprehensive about their safety at school.

location of the hamlet as a reason for not sending their daughters to school.

Fourteen year-old Nazreen calmly explains, “In my community, it is not considered important for girls to be educated. They are supposed to live behind a veil (*purdah*) and help their mothers and aunts in household chores. I dreamt of going to school but never imagined that my dreams would come true!”

The matter of these out-of-school girls was taken up by the CPC. Members deliberated long and hard on ways to address the problem of out-of-school girls.

“We wanted the girls to benefit from the Kasturba Gandhi *Balika Vidyalaya* (KGBV)[†] scheme, which provides for education of girls belonging predominantly to SC, ST, OBC and minority communities,” says Abdul Bari, a

[†] A KGBV is a residential school with facilities at the elementary level for adolescent girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and minority communities.

CPC member. “These are residential schools established by the government to promote education of the girl child and are especially meant for children from small and scattered habitations that are far from the nearest school.”

However, it was not easy to convince the guardians. “The KGBV is four kms away from our hamlet and the route is not safe. We cannot allow our girls to live somewhere else and risk their safety,” they would say.

“We sought the advice of Sunita Yadav, a teacher at KGBV,” says Saleem, another CPC member.

Recalling her predicament, Sunita says, “The people in the hamlet were not ready to listen to



The KGBV teachers and CPC and WG members together motivated parents of girls from minority communities

Twenty girls from the minority community in Jamouli are studying in a residential school. There have been no dropouts among them.

us, but we kept trying. They said, it was against their tradition to allow young girls from their community to step out of home and reside elsewhere. They also expressed apprehensions about their safety at school.”

The CPC members persisted. “We would sensitise them about the rights of the girl child and that education was equally important for girls and boys,” recalls Shabana, a CPC member. “We assured them that education was free of cost at the KGBV and that the school was safe and equipped with several facilities.”

When these efforts failed to make a difference, the CPC decided to influence mothers with support from the village WG. In the ensuing days, the CPC and the WG persuaded the guardians of the girls to visit the KGBV and then take a decision.

Nazneen’s father, Mohammed Hadis, admits, “On the insistence of the CPC and teachers, we visited the school and liked it.”

Tasbeera, Nazneen’s mother, remembers the visit to her daughters school, “The campus and the building were spacious. All basic amenities were available. The teachers were polite and cooperative. We were assured that our daughter would be safe there and consented to enrol her.”

The guardians of 11 girls had agreed to enrol their daughters. The former warden of the KGBV held a meeting with the guardians, after which the girls were formally admitted.

Tasbeera adds, “School has transformed Nazneen completely. She has become more responsible and confident. After seeing the change in her, other guardians also enrolled their daughters at the KGBV.”

At present, 20 girls from the hamlet are studying in KGBV. So far, there have been no dropouts. The KGBV teachers say that the academic growth shown by these girls in a short span of time has inspired them to enrol more girls from minority communities and regions having fewer opportunities.” The story of the girls in Jamouli is one of hope and optimism.



Women of Gangouli lead from the front

Women and child protection bodies in Gangouli village took on the task of addressing irregularities in implementation of the mid day meal scheme at the local government school.

Tough times don't last but tough people do. The women of Gangouli village in Suithakalan block of Jaunpur district have brought these words to life. This modest group recently fought a battle for their children and won hands down!

In Gangouli, most people are engaged in agriculture. The village is inhabited by families belonging to general and SC categories. Several SC households grapple with poverty and struggle to provide a decent life to their children.

The government Primary School and the AWC are located at a considerable distance from their habitation. The Primary School has a strength of approximately 60 children. Attendance is fairly high. "The mid day meal ensures high attendance," points out assistant teacher Ramkrishna Dubey.

Manjeet Kumar, a CPC member, explains "Many guardians in the village send their children to government schools because in addition to

"The mid day meal had not been prepared in the school for the past two months because the funds for purchasing raw materials had not been released to the authorities."

**Rajesh, CPC member,
Gangouli**



Mid day meals are now regularly served at the Primary School in Gangouli

getting an education, meals, books, uniforms and scholarships are provided. Those surviving on marginal agricultural incomes would not have been able to afford these amenities. Neither would they send their children to school.”

However, till a year ago, all was not well. “The mid day meal had not been prepared in the school for months. Children felt pangs of hunger all the time, thus affecting their concentration and interest levels in the classroom.” recounts Virendra Singh, Head Teacher at the Primary School.

“Another disturbing trend was children slipping out of school during school hours to eat at home,” says Manju, a WG member.

The academic performance of the school was adversely affected, and school attendance started dwindling.

The issue was raised in one of the periodic WG meetings. “The mid day meal had not been prepared in the school for the past two months because the funds for purchasing raw materials had not been released to the authorities,” explains Rajesh, a CPC member.

Members of the WG and CPC traced the problem to its roots and discovered that the



The AWW in Gangouli closely monitors preparation and quality of the mid day meal

democratically elected leader of the village, the *Gram Pradhan*, had been stalling the release of funds. When they met with him, denied outright that there had been any delay in releasing funds.

The WG then mobilised the villagers to file a written complaint against the *Pradhan* to authorities at the *tehsil* and block levels. A photocopy of the complaint that was drafted was shared with the *Pradhan*. Dreading action from block-level authorities and the villagers, the *Pradhan* ordered the immediate release of funds so that preparation of mid day meals at the Primary School could be revived.

A series of positive changes was triggered off. Not only did preparation and distribution of the

Ever since funds are being released on a timely basis, preparation and distribution of meals too have become regular.

mid day meal and become regular, a substantial supply of raw materials was ensured so that hot-cooked and nutritious meals were served. In addition, two cooks were appointed to prepare and serve meals to the children.

School authorities said truancy among children has reduced significantly. "Now that they receive nutritious meals every day at school, children are able to concentrate in class and look forward to school," avers Virendra Singh.



Mid day meal cooks appointed in Gangouli village through the efforts of CPC and WG members

Intervention by the WG and the support provided by the CPC has demonstrated the unparalleled strength and success of collective action in enabling change and reform.



Giving dreams of education a chance

Women Champions give wings to a 10-year-old's dreams of escaping child labour to study

From the window of her hut, Usha would gaze longingly at the children in her village excitedly walking to school. Usha lived in Bagheda village of Narainpur block in Mirzapur district. She was 10 years old and had never been to school. Her family was poor, and the children contributed to the household income. She hoped that some day, a miracle would happen and that just like the other children, she too could go to school.

Usha belonged to the SC community. Her father, Seachu, worked as a labourer at a brick

kiln. His wages were simply not enough for the family of five to survive on. He felt he had no option but to make his children work. Usha's older siblings had dropped out after completing primary school.

When Usha was eight, Seachu died of tuberculosis. Usha's mother, Nisha, then began working at the brick kiln to support the family. Toiling at the kiln for a paltry sum of ₹ 400 for every 1,000 bricks was not easy. The earnings were barely enough for their subsistence. She began taking Usha along to help with tasks such as breaking mud cobs and transporting sand. The thought that this would obstruct Usha's education never crossed her mind.



Usha and her mother, Nisha toiled at the brick kiln for a paltry sum of ₹ 400 for every 1,000 bricks. The earnings were barely enough for their subsistence.



The Women Champions of Bagheda soon came to know about Usha. According to Gulabi Singh, “We conducted a family survey in the village and Usha was identified as one of the many out-of-school children. We met Nisha and urged her to admit Usha in school. But she said she was helpless due to financial constraints.”

The Women Champions, however, were undeterred. They often interacted with Nisha and enlightened her about the importance of education for Usha’s future. They explained to her that the government provided not just free education but also uniform, books and mid day meals.

“We enlightened Usha’s mother about the importance of education for her daughter’s future. We explained to her that the government provided not just free education but also the uniform, books and mid day meals.”



**Gulabi Singh,
Mahila Champion,
Bagheda village**

Nisha sought the views of her elder children, both of whom had been forced to drop out of school. They fully supported this move, saying that their little sister should not suffer the same fate as them.

The efforts of Bagheda’s Women’s Champions finally bore fruit when Usha was admitted in Std IV in the government Primary School in the neighbouring village Kamalpur.

Usha’s school is a kilometre away from her village but she does not miss even a day at school. “I want to complete Std XII.” Thus began a new chapter in little Usha’s life. Nisha dreams big for her youngest child, saying, “I will educate her even after High school and help her become self-reliant.” Hearing her mother’s words, a smile lights up Usha’s face.



Children flock to school unhindered

A CPC's battle against child labour inspires a community of poor, landless labourers to pull their children out of work.

"My children should go to school and not work at construction sites. It is their right and not even guardians can take that away," says Sitara, a member of the WG in Ramdheopur village.

Some time ago, the situation was grim, with rampant child labour in this village in Dhobi block. The village has a significant population of Sonkars, an SC community.



Children of Ramdheopur village now lead a wholesome childhood

Unlike other communities in the village who are predominantly engaged in agriculture, the Sonkars are landless, construction workers and daily wage labourers. Insufficient resources and poverty forced the adults to look upon children as an economic asset. The children ended up assisting their guardians at work, thus deprived of education. Their health too became a casualty as children working at construction sites reported breathing problems and back aches after toiling in the dust and carrying heavy loads.

Recognising the grave threat that child labour posed to the children's futures, members of the village CPC and WG in the village decided to wage war against it.

Children from the impoverished Sonkar community assisted their guardians at work. Those working at construction sites reported breathing problems and back aches after toiling in the dust and carrying heavy loads.



They began by identifying those children who were out of school. To their shock and dismay, they found that out of the 75 Sonkar children in the village, approximately 50 had never been to school.

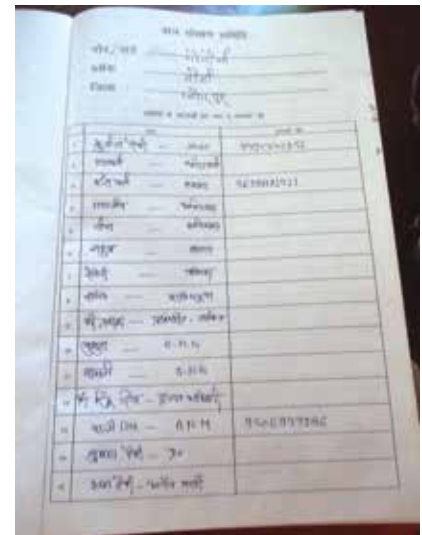
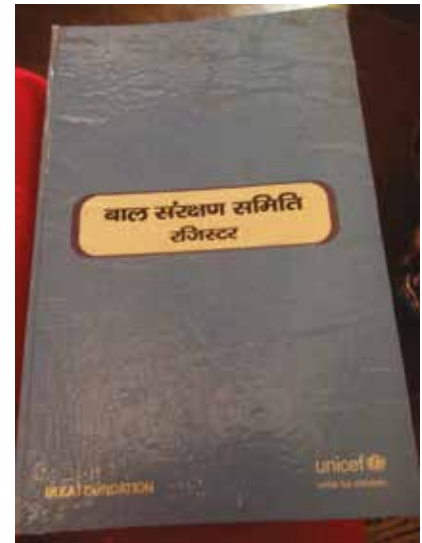
“The children would end up at places where they would be exploited for labour,” explains Dinesh, a CPC member. “They would even spend a part of their wages on street drugs.”

The CPC and WG members planned to bring about change gradually. After all, the children were contributing to household incomes, and it would be difficult to make the guardians accept anything new all of a sudden.

They decided to take small steps. The CPC members began by creating awareness on children’s rights to education, health and nutrition through a series of periodic meetings and discussions with the villagers. In the first set of meetings and discussions, child labour was presented as a major violation of children’s rights and a crime against law. Not only was the damaging effect of child labour on children discussed, but also the legislation banning it was explained.

In the next set of meetings, the members focused upon the situation in Ramdheopur. The situation of child workers was discussed and the negative impact of child labour was stressed upon. Guardians were made aware about the importance of education for children’s futures. They were urged to send their children to school.

In addition to these discussions and deliberations, the WG made door-to-door visits and disseminated messages to ban child labour.



The CPC in Ramdheopur carefully maintains records of their activities

The efforts of the CPC and WG bore fruit when guardians of working children agreed to withdraw them from work. Following this, approximately 50 children from the Sonkar community were enrolled in primary schools in the vicinity.

These carefully planned activities became the fulcrum of the CPC and WG interface with community members. They also helped instil faith in the child protection bodies. The efforts bore fruit when guardians of working children agreed to withdraw them from work. Following this overwhelming response from the community, approximately 50 children from the

Sonkar community were enrolled in primary schools in the vicinity.

The efforts of the CPC and WG in Ramdheopur created a ripple effect, and led to sensitisation of several villages in Dhobi block on child rights issues. Sonkars and other SC communities in nearby villages were specifically focussed upon to eliminate child labour.

The ensuing days witnessed many children from socio-economically weak communities being freed from child labour. Across villages in the *Gram Panchayat*, there has been a decrease in the number of drop-outs and out-of-school children. All this has created a conducive environment for the holistic development of children.



Demanding fair play

Cohesive action by a *Gram Pradhan* and the CPC helped them claim the rights of vulnerable children and women and demand accountability from the village health worker.

Chandrakala Devi, the *Gram Pradhan* of Laharchak, is reputed for her tireless efforts in reviving the AWC in her village. She is an enthusiastic advocate of children's rights and firmly believes that health services at the village level must be strengthened to lay a strong foundation for children's futures.

The village of Laharchak is a part of Dobhi block. It is blessed with large tracts of cultivable land and is well connected by roads. Most of the houses here are *pucca*, and the AWC is easily accessible to all. Till two years ago though, none of the 3-6 year-old children in the village attended the AWC.

"The AWC would not open for days together, and the AWW would visit only occasionally," recalls Asha, a village woman. "Irregularities and malfunctioning of the AWC affected not only children and adolescent girls but also pregnant and nursing mothers. They were being deprived of necessary supplementary nutrition and counselling services. The Village Health and Nutrition Day (VHND) was rarely organised," adds Preeti, a village woman.

The village of Laharchak is inhabited by people from General and SC categories. Children from all these communities attend the AWC. "It was an open secret that the AWW discriminated against children on the basis of caste. She took no interest in children and women belonging to the SC communities," reveals Preeti.

All this made the people of Laharchak very unhappy. Then, in 2012, Chandrakala was elected by the villagers as the *Gram Pradhan*. One of the first tasks that she took on was to pay surprise visits to the AWC. This, however, failed to create the impact she was hoping for. Incidentally, Chandrakala too belongs to the SC community.

"Irregularities and malfunctioning of the AWC affected children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and nursing mothers. They were being deprived of necessary supplementary nutrition and counselling services. The VHND was rarely organised."

Preeti, a resident of Laharchak

“The AWW would pay no heed to my requests to open the AWC every day. I felt frustrated but not discouraged,” recalls Chandrakala. “I kept ruminating over how to change her apathetic attitude. Then, it struck me that I should seek the help of the CPC.”

Chandrakala was as an active CPC member and raised this issue in one of the committee meetings. The CPC decided to take up this matter and a detailed plan was chalked out to achieve the desired outcomes.

“We decided to first attempt to resolve the matter peacefully,” recollects Shyam, a CPC member. The *Gram Pradhan* met with the AWW and apprised her about the numerous complaints against her. However, the AWW refuted all these complaints and refused to attend CPC meetings to avoid any further discussion on the issue.

With the AWW refusing to turn over a new leaf, the AWC in Laharchak continued to languish. Chandrakala and the CPC members decided that it was time to take strict action against the AWW. “We filed a written complaint to the CDPO and explained in detail about the malfunctioning AWC and the errant AWW.” Following submission of the complaint, immediate action was taken by ICDS authorities. The CDPO visited the AWC and



The proactive woman *Pradhan* revived the functioning of the AWC

The CPC submitted a written complaint to the CDPO who immediately took action.

gave strict instructions to the AWW to fulfil her roles and responsibilities sincerely. The AWW amended her ways, partly because she feared that action would be taken against her.

“The AWC is now functioning properly and the AWW is conscious that she is accountable to the people,” smiles Chandrakala. She is most happy for the women and children of Laharchak who can now claim their rights.

Currently, nearly all children in the 0-6 years age group attend the AWW and receive supplementary nutrition. The villagers appreciate Chandrakala’s leadership, and she in turn acknowledges the support of the CPC in her achievements.



Spare the rod and save the child

The CPC built awareness around the issue of corporal punishment and together with the villagers, created a child-friendly school environment in Ikauna.

When 8-year-old Amit refused to go to school, his guardians Sidhyawati and Vanshraj were confounded. The couple vividly remembers the long and frustrating week when their otherwise happy and obedient child stubbornly stayed at home. The mere mention of the word “school” seemed to upset him.

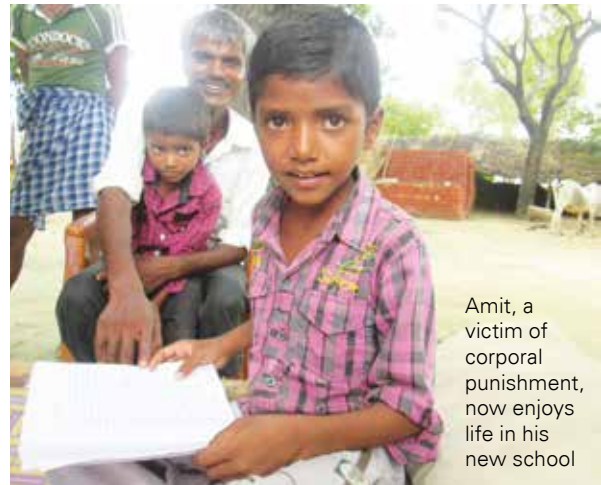
Says Vanshraj, “We figured Amit had a bad experience either in school or on his way back home.” When Sidhyawati cuddled him lovingly and probed him gently, he broke down. “Ma, masterji beat me. I don’t want to go to school ever again,” he cried.

Amit’s guardians were deeply disturbed. They approached the village CPC and discussed the

child’s experience at school and his emotional state. The CPC members enlightened the guardians that corporal punishment was a crime and banned by law. “We explained to the couple that it was a serious violation of children’s rights to suffer any punishment in which physical force was used and intended to cause pain or discomfort,” said Subhagi, a CPC member.

Soon, several villagers came to know about Amit’s condition. People were shocked. Corporal punishment had affected young

Corporal punishment had affected young Amit so badly that he could not even gather the courage to attend school. Finally, he was enrolled in another Primary School nearby.



Amit, a victim of corporal punishment, now enjoys life in his new school



Amit's parents have been protective of their children after the incident that almost scarred him for life

Amit so badly that he could not even gather the courage to attend school. Finally, he was enrolled in another Primary School nearby. This incident spurred a drive in the village demanding a ban on corporal punishment in schools. Soon, many more children revealed to their guardians that teachers at the government Primary School used to slap, spank and even flog them with a cane.

To establish a shared understanding on the issue, the CPC began to sensitise villagers about corporal punishment being a violation of children's rights and its negative impact. Amit's story was

discussed to help them understand how corporal punishment could scar children on emotional and psychological levels, thus impacting their education and other aspects of life.

The village of Ikauana is home to approximately 100 families belonging to the General, OBC and SC communities. All community members participated equally in these discussions. Soon, there developed an understanding and awareness among villagers across all caste groups that corporal punishment could result in serious repercussions for children.

The CPC and villagers together ensured that the school authorities and teachers ban all forms of corporal punishment, thus making the school child-friendly.

Next, the CPC met with the Head Teacher of the government Primary School in Ikauna and apprised him about the behaviour of the teachers. In the meeting, teachers accepted that when children misbehaved in the classroom, they would slap or cane them. The CPC members explained to the Head Teacher and staff members about its adverse effects on the well-being of children and warned



them about the legislation banning corporal punishment.

Several villagers were present at the meeting and they supported the CPC's stance that children should never be punished in school. The Head Teacher assured the villagers and CPC members that they would not punish any child thereon.

In the days and weeks that followed, the guardians of children studying at Ikauna Primary School kept a check on their children's behaviour. They would closely observe if they were being punished by teachers. To their satisfaction, there were no more complaints of corporal punishment. This initiative by the guardians helped protect their children from violence and abuse. It also helped to create a child-friendly environment in schools. Guardians also began showing greater participation in the management of school affairs.

The message of eliminating corporal punishment was spread by the CPC in Ikauna to neighbouring villages as well. Thus, awareness about this issue grew and more and more guardians and school authorities are now working towards reducing cases of corporal punishment in schools.



Casting out discrimination

CPC members extended much-needed strength and support to children facing caste discrimination in their school in Hajipur.

12-year-old Priyanka loves going to school. She especially loves mathematics. Priyanka lives in Hajipur, a village in Jamalpur block of Mirzapur district. She belongs to an SC community of which there are several in the village. Like other children from SC communities, Priyanka was not conscious about caste hierarchy and the havoc it can wreak.

It is a small wonder that when they were discriminated against in their school, *Kanya Purva Prathamik Vidyalaya*, they were ill-prepared to confront it. When the sanitation worker who cleaned the toilets did not show

up for work, a teacher selected a few students, including Priyanka, for this task.

The children could hardly protest in the face of authority. What was particularly distressing was that only children from the SC community were asked to do this menial task. When some of them refused, the teacher scolded them and beat them with a bamboo stick. The brazenness of the teacher was compounded by the silence of the school authorities.

Caste discrimination was being practised in this school in several forms. Children from the SC

communities would be ordered to sit in the last rows in class while children belonging to dominant castes occupied the front rows. What was even more disturbing was that this was being done at the behest of the Headmistress, Malti Devi, who herself belonged to a dominant caste.

The fall-out was disastrous. There were a few such as Suman, a Std VIII student, whose guardians could afford to send her to a private school and promptly pulled her out. Other children who came from less privileged homes simply dropped out, unable to accept the humiliation.

The practice of making children from the SC community clean the toilets in school continued. Then, the matter was brought to the attention of the CPC during one of their periodic meetings on children's issues. Struck by the insensitivity of the teachers and the violation of child rights, CPC members visited the school and confronted the teachers. Caught out, the teachers admitted that they had made a few students clean the toilets. However, they denied that they



"I didn't like cleaning toilets. They smelled bad. I used to feel dirty all the time. The other girls in my class wouldn't play with me."

Suman, Std. VIII

The CPC set up a monitoring team of two members each from the CPC, the WG and the Bal Panchayat. As a safeguard, it was decided that these teams would be represented by all caste groups. A new Headmaster and sanitation workers were also appointed in the school.

had only selected children from SC families.

The CPC members decided that the discriminatory practices against children needed to end. They put in place a monitoring team comprising two members each from the CPC, the WG and the *Bal Panchayat*. As a safeguard, it was decided that these teams would be represented by all caste groups. CPC members also ensured the appointment of sanitation workers in school. Soon, a new Headmaster was appointed who not only shuns caste-based discrimination but is also keen to create a child-friendly environment in school.

The experience was no doubt a bitter one for Priyanka and her friends who suffered humiliation at the hands of their teachers. At the same time, the children will always be inspired by the united struggle against injustice, the support it garnered and their ultimate triumph.



Standing up for children

An inspiring story of how a community dealt with violence and abusive behaviour of a school teacher towards children

The primary school in Chitang village of Lalganj block in Mirzapur district was in a dilapidated state – broken boundary walls, rundown classrooms, non-functional toilets and a gate about to collapse. To add to the students' woes, the teachers were diffident and unresponsive to their needs. They were also abusive and violent. For the children of Chitang, school was not a happy experience at all. Not surprisingly, dropouts were common. The villagers had reconciled themselves to the situation and lacked the will to change things.

One day, 10-year-old Mamta was reading quietly in her classroom while the rest of her classmates were running around. Santosh Kumar Tiwari, a teacher, walked in. He flew into a rage at the commotion and gave vent to his fury by turning on the first student that came into his line of vision. That happened to be Mamta. Mr. Tiwari began raining blows on her. Bruised and visibly shaken, Mamta made her way home sobbing and narrated the entire story.

Mamta's guardians, Muktun and Bhailal Vishwakarma, were horrified and deeply pained by what their daughter had experienced. Mamta's father, who was a carpenter, met a CPC member Laxman and the *Gram Pradhan*



Parents of physically abused children bring the culprit to book

The primary school was in a dilapidated state, the teachers were diffident and unresponsive to their needs. They were also abusive and violent. School was not a happy experience for the children for Chitang, and dropouts were common.

and affused then about he incident. They visited the school and spoke to the teacher. However, Tiwari was not open to discussion. He turned belligerent and abused them.

Tiwari was infamous for his foul temper, abusive language and merciless beating of children. He was also irregular in attending school and often spotted in an inebriated condition. Anguished by his abusive behaviour, several guardians had submitted written complaints against him to the Block Education Officer (BEO). However no action had been taken to bring him to book.

Determined to take the matter to its logical conclusion, the *Gram Pradhan* reported Tiwari's behaviour to the CPC and the WG. They unanimously called for strict action against the teacher. A fresh complaint against Tiwari was submitted to the BEO for appropriate action. The CPC and WG members put pressure by regularly visiting the BEO's office.

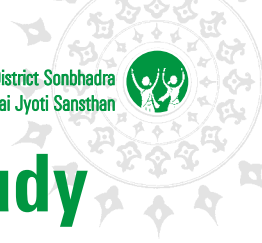
The CPC submitted a written complaint against the abusive teacher, Santosh Kumar Tiwari, to the BEO and exerted pressure. A surprise visit to the primary school by the SDM exposed Tiwari and he was suspended with immediate effect.



CPC members in Chitang village are vigilant and proactive in dealing with cases of child abuse

The Sub-divisional Magistrate (SDM) took cognisance and made a surprise visit to the school. Tiwari was found in an inebriated state and a bottle of alcohol was recovered from him. This sealed the matter, prompting swift and decisive action by the SDM. He issued an order to suspend Tiwari with immediate effect and initiated the process for appointment of another teacher.

The exit of the school teacher came as a huge relief to children and guardians alike. The school environment is now peaceful, the new teacher has proved to be excellent and the students are an enthused lot, inspired to study, rather than cowed down and worse, abused. There may be some old scars but the ebullience of youth and the promise of change that so many supporters around them are now invested in, spells a brighter future for the children in chitang.



Too young to marry, just right to study

The CPC steps in to save a bright teenager girl from becoming a child bride.

Shri Chandragupta Maurya Intermediate College is located near a busy marketplace in Madhupur, a village near Robertsganj, the headquarters of Sonbhadra district. Young Kusum, a student of Std X and a resident of Koilahiya, a hamlet five kms, away, is attending a science lecture. Two years ago, she had almost become a child bride.

Recalls Suresh Prasad Singh, Kusum's father and a farmer, "In the summer of 2013, when Kusum had just turned 14, we received a marriage proposal for her. We decided to go ahead with the alliance since it was customary in our community to marry girls off at that age."

Kusum belongs to the Maurya community, an OBC community traditionally engaged in agriculture. The five *bighas* of land that Kusum's father owns and cultivates is the only source of income for the family.

Kusum is a bright student and enjoys academics. "I had just completed Std VII when the marriage proposal was offered. Although I wanted to continue with my education, I couldn't help feel sorry for my father and our weak financial situation. The income from agriculture is meagre," recounts the soft-spoken

teenager. "I felt that marrying me off might reduce his burden to some extent".

Kusum's mother is Singh's second wife. After his first wife bore him two daughters, Singh remarried in the hope that his second wife would bear him a son. His second wife did bear him a son but after giving birth to three daughters.

Kusum's father voices a predicament that is deep rooted among farming communities in these regions. "Income from agriculture is not stable. It is better to fulfil the responsibility of marrying off our daughters at the earliest opportunity." Kusum's step-sisters had also been married off in their early teens.

When Kusum's marriage was being planned, she was studying in the local government Upper Primary School. Says Sanjay Kumar, an Assistant Teacher at the school, "When I came to know that Kusum was going to get married, I was concerned because Kusum is a very bright student and among the toppers in her class. It disturbed me as a teacher that she might not be able to pursue her education any further if she got married."



Kumar was an active member of the CPC in Madhupur. The CPC took up this matter and invited Kusum's guardians for a discussion. Her father revealed that the main reason for their decision was their weak finances. The CPC members held intense counselling sessions with Kusum's guardians, explaining to them the adverse consequences of child marriage and that Kusum was neither physically nor emotionally ready to become a wife and mother. They were also made aware of the fatal complications of early pregnancy and child birth.

Kumar adds, "We educated the couple about the rights of children, especially the girl child. We also told them about the legislation against child marriage."

Singh and his wife decided to call off the marriage and informed the boy's family about their decision. Says Kusum with a glint in her eyes, "I was thrilled when I came to know

"Income from agriculture is not stable. It is better to fulfil the responsibility of marrying off our daughters at the earliest opportunity."

**Suresh Prasad Singh,
Kusum's father**



The turn of events in Kusum's life has given the girls of Madhupur hope and aspirations

The CPC counseled Kusum's guardians that she was neither emotionally nor physically ready to become a wife and mother. They also told them that child marriage was a crime against law.

about my guardians' decision. I could continue with my studies."

Kusum's case resulted in an unexpected ripple effect. Her 19-year-old step-sister Parvati, who had been married off at the age of 15, too decided to resume her studies!

In Koilahiya and Madhupur, Kusum's journey from a prospective child bride to a bright, college-going teenager who aspires to be a teacher resounds, giving many a community member the inspiration to secure a happy future for their daughters.



A homecoming of sorts

Four children from poor families with dreams in their eyes were subjected to inhuman treatment and exploitation by a human trafficker only to be saved by the active intervention of the village CPC

In April 2014, the mysterious disappearance of four teenage boys from their home in village Karvaniya left their families distraught. A frantic hunt was launched at the homes of relatives and friends but they came up with nothing. Two of the boys, Chandan and Om Prakash, were brothers. Chandan was 17 years old and Om Prakash was 14. Kamlesh, a 16-year-old, was their cousin, while 15-year-old Vijay was a neighbour. The four of them were known to be as thick as thieves.

The boys belong to the Dom community, a historically marginalised social group and considered inferior even in the SC category. Says Babulal, father of Chandan and Om

Prakash, "We are illiterate and the only skill we have is bamboo weaving, which has been passed down from generations." The Doms live on the fringes of the village. They are landless and squat on government land. The abject poverty is undisguised. Most Dom houses are merely thatched roofs supported by four bamboo poles.

A fortnight passed. One day, as the mothers of the young boys sat weeping and deploring their fate outside their homes along the road, a member of the CPC, Jogendra, who was passing by, took notice. Says Jogendra, "I urged the guardians to file a First Information Report (FIR) at the local police station."

Children who were forced into harsh labour and then rescued are hopeful of a happy future



15-year-old
Vijay



16-year-old
Kamlesh



14-year-old Om
Prakash



17-year-old
Chandan



Members of the CPC accompanied the boys' guardians to Rampur Barkuniya police station where an FIR was lodged.

Says the AWW of the village, "When the Sub-Inspector heard about the boys, the immediate suspect on his list was Parmeshwar." Parmeshwar was a local contractor residing in the neighbouring village of Dharamdaspur. He had the reputation of a human trafficker and had transported several children from poor families to states as distant as Haryana, Gujarat and Punjab by luring them with payments and promises of good living conditions and other benefits.

Around that time, Om Prakash Bind, a neighbour of the boys, received a phone call. It was Kamlesh sobbing over the phone. He urged Bind to rescue him and the other three from the clutches of a contractor. "We are trapped here and the conditions are inhuman. We haven't eaten properly for days and we are being made to work for 12 hours at a

stretch," he whispered. The only clue about the location that Kamlesh could provide to Bind was that they were in a detergent soap factory somewhere in Gujarat.

When the boys' families came to know about their plight, they visited the local police station along with the CPC members. By now, the Sub-Inspector was almost sure that Parmeshwar was responsible for the missing children. The CPC members along with a few constables went to Parmeshwar's village only to find that he had fled. "News had already reached him that the police were looking for him in the case of the four missing boys", says CPC member Rajkumar.

With the help of people in other villages from where boys had been trafficked and rescued, the police and CPC members zeroed in on the detergent factory. "The Sub-Inspector of Rampur Barkuniya police station made a phone call to the factory owner who agreed to let off the four boys," says Jogendra.

Finally, the day came when the four returned home. There were tears and joy in their homes. The next few days were spent in the happiness of the reunion.

Says Chandan, "It all seems like a nightmare. We met Parmeshwar at the weekly *haat* where

“We were made to carry, load and unload sacks that weighed at least 20kgs, and that too for 12 hours at a stretch.”

Om Prakash, rehabilitated child



we went to sell our bamboo products. He asked us if we would be interested in working in a factory at a monthly payment of ₹ 13,000. He told us that the work was light and easy and would not exceed eight hours. We were told all we had to do was fill packets with detergent powder.”

The four of them decided to take up Parmeshwar’s offer and left home. Says Kamlesh, “We thought the money would help our families.”

But their dreams were soon shattered. Om Prakash, the youngest of them, recounts their agonising experience, “We were made to carry,

After their rescue and return, three of the boys were enrolled in the local government school by the CPC and SMC.

load and unload sacks that weighed at least 20 kgs, and that too for 12 hours at a stretch.”

The dwellings were as oppressive and stifling. There was just one tap for several boys. Meals had to be cooked by the children themselves. Chandan narrates, “Some boys were from our village and neighbouring ones. They belonged to the Chamar and Musahar communities. It was hell for everybody. No one was paid a *paisa*. For food, we were given coupons to buy rice and potatoes. Each day was torturous.”

This went on for days until Kamlesh, who has never been to school, decided to find a way out. The talktime balance in his mobile phone was not enough to make calls and none of the boys had any money. He racked his brains and got a talktime loan he had heard about. The money would be deducted from his next recharge. This allowed him to make that crucial call to Bind and kickstart the process of freeing the four of them from torment and suffering.

Upon their return, members of the CPC and the SMC enrolled three of them - Chandan, Om Prakash and Vijay – in the nearby government school. The guardians feel optimistic that school education will give their children a brighter tomorrow. The boys have not stopped dreaming of a better life for themselves and their families.



Where out-of-school is out of the question

When all children in the 6-14 years age group from village Sendur began attending school, everyone sat up and took notice.

On a typical day, Sendur is recognisable even from a distance. The nearby hills are dotted with children in school uniforms earnestly scaling the hillocks to make their way to school in time for the 7:00 am assembly. What makes Sendur in Myorpur block stand apart from the neighbouring villages is the fact that not a single child in the age group of 6-14 years here is out of school.

Says social worker Vimal Bhai, "There was a time when not one villager here was literate. From 'zero literacy' to 'zero out-of-school', Sendur has come a long way."

The idyllic village of Sendur nestles snugly in the undulating hills of the Vindhyas. From the village, one can spot the thermal power stations located in the catchment area of the Rihand dam, which contribute to making Sonbhadra district the 'energy capital' of the country. The village comprises 642 households and 52% of these belong to tribal communities.

Despite its significant contribution to the country's economy, Sendur and its neighbouring regions remained backward in most respects. Poverty led to educational deprivation, and children would be engaged in economic activities, including domestic chores. Explains Jitender Singh, Assistant Teacher at Primary School, Sendur, "Economic, occupational and socio-cultural factors form the social context of education here."

EUPCRP with its focus on the rights of vulnerable children brought some significant

"Even with schools in close proximity, it took a lot of time and effort to convince guardians to send their children to school."

**Kanhaiyya Lal,
SMC chairperson,
Sendur Primary School**





Children of Sendur flock to school and set a record for their village

changes in school participation patterns in several villages in Myorpur, with Sendur topping the list. The SMC was used as a platform. There are four schools in the vicinity - Primary School Sendur, Junior High Belvadah and the government schools in Pipri and Anpara. Says Kanhaiyya Lal, the chairperson of SMC, Sendur Primary School, "Even with schools in close proximity, it took a lot of time and effort to convince guardians to send their children to school."

"There were two types of children who needed to be brought to school, those who will not be enrolled and those enrolled but not attending," adds Kusum, another SMC member.

The village comprises three hamlets – Mahrakhoti, Kathahwa and Chitaur - all of which are spread out. SMC member Rangita recalls, "We divided ourselves into three groups and went into one hamlet each. We talked to guardians and sensitised them about children's rights and the importance of education."

Another SMC member Laljee explains, "We enrolled those who were not. That was the first task. Then, we ensured that those who had dropped out or remained absent began attending school."

"If a child did not attend for seven days, a list was made. Next, we visited the children's

There were 178 children in the 6-14 years age group and all were enrolled in school. Of these, 88% belonged to weaker sections, i.e., SC, ST and OBC.

homes and ensured that they resumed attending school. In this way, we ensured attendance,” elaborated Kanhaiyya Lal.

Awareness rallies called ‘School *Chalo*’ (Let’s go to school) and walks were organised in which schoolchildren, teaching staff, the village *Gram Pradhan* and SMC members participated, shouting slogans such as ‘*Aadhi roti khayenge, school padhne jayenge*’ (‘We’ll go to school even on half a slice of bread’) and ‘*Sun mere bhai, sun meri behna, padh likh kar bada hai*

banana’ (‘Listen brothers and sisters, let us study and become worthy’).

Gradually, there was a transformation. Guardians began sending their children to school regularly. Attendance, which was not more than 40% before EUPCRP, shot up. In January 2014, in a survey undertaken by the SMC, it was found that all 178 children in the 6-14 years age group in the village were enrolled in school. A detailed report was presented to *Gram Shiksha Samiti* (GSS), a *Panchayat*-level education body that is headed by the *Gram Pradhan*. The GSS then declared Sendur a ‘Zero Out-of-school Village’.

The villagers are happy about the fact that their village has been recognised for high enrolment and regular attendance of children in school. Breaking out of the vicious cycle of poverty, educational deprivation and violation of children’s rights has not been easy but Sendur has emerged a winner.

Awareness rallies led by children enthuse everyone about the importance of education





Persistence wins

The CPC struck the right note in dealing with an unresponsive school system to ensure that eight young girls are able to make the transition from Primary to Upper Primary School

Sheila giggles as she remembers her teacher at the government Primary School in Bharpura, “She used to take naps in class. She made us prepare tea for her. We’ve even picked lice from her hair.” Despite the fact that the school environment was not perfect, Sheila and her seven friends loved to study and attended school regularly.



The CPC has ensured that procedures and paperwork in schools for transition and promotions are unhindered for the children

After completing primary school, the eight of them looked forward to attending the government Upper Primary school. They were informed by the Upper Primary school authorities that one of the requirements to secure admission was a Transfer Certificate (TC) from the Primary School. To the dismay of the girls, the headmaster of the Primary School informed them that their certificates had been misplaced. Initially, the guardians and the girls visited the school every day and requested for the certificates. But their plea fell on deaf ears.

“The Headmaster did not cooperate with us,” reminisces 15-year-old Anita. “He did not find it important to provide us with our certificates. In

To the dismay of Sheila and her friends, the Primary School headmaster told them that their Transfer Certificates had been misplaced.



CPC members of Bharpura fought sluggishness in administration to secure their children's rights

the absence of the certificate, we were denied admission in the Upper Primary school.

Laments Manju Devi, a parent, "We were pleading for the education of our daughters. We are illiterate and want a better life for them."

"After a long struggle, we gave up. We lapsed into the old routine of household chores, working in the fields and grazing our cattle," recounts Sheila. "I used to feel bad when I would see other children going to school.

The CPC members informed the Headmaster of the Upper Primary school that under RTE rules, a TC from the Primary School was not compulsory for admission into Upper Primary school.

I wanted to go to school so badly. Several people taunted us that we were simply idling away our lives. Those were bad days."

Two years elapsed, and hope diminished. Then in 2013, at one of the CPC meetings, an aggrieved parent shared his long struggle with the school authorities. The CPC members at once adopted an unequivocal stand to ensure that the girls get their right to education. They approached the Headmaster of the Upper Primary school who told them that admission was not possible without the TC from the Primary School. The CPC members were prepared for this response and informed him that under RTE rules, a TC from the Primary School was not compulsory for admission into Upper Primary school. In the face of this cogent argument, the Headmaster conceded ground. He asked the guardians of the eight girls to submit an affidavit. The CPC members supported the guardians in securing this.

It was indeed a moment to celebrate when Sheila and her friends were admitted into the Upper Primary school. They excitedly returned to doing what they loved most - studying. Many of them want to become teachers and improve school education in their village. Their guardians are visibly relieved and deeply appreciative of the support extended by the CPC.



The making of a woman *Pradhan*

Asha Devi could not have made it without the support of her family and the community-based child protection groups in Gangahra Kala

For Asha Devi, a resident of Gangahra Kala village in Lalganj Block of Mirzapur district, the days passed by in a whirl of household chores, sweeping, cooking, washing and attending to her children. Her husband was an agricultural labourer while her 54-year-old mother-in-law Sonkali Devi served as the village AWW. Then, in 2010, Asha contested the *Panchayat* elections and won the seat reserved for women. Gangahra Kala saw its first ever woman *Gram Pradhan*.

For Asha though, nothing changed. She had not studied beyond upper primary school and was far removed from the world of administration and governance that her position required.

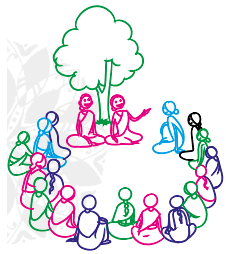
For a long time, Asha avoided the training sessions organised by the CPC and the WG to create awareness in the community on issues of children's rights. Then, in December 2012, she took the first step by participating in a training session for women *Pradhans*, followed by another in June 2013.



Village
Pradhan,
Asha Devi

Thus began a process of self discovery as also a growing awareness of the world beyond the home. Asha learned about her role and responsibilities as a *Pradhan*. She also became sensitive to children's issues. Her husband

Asha had not studied beyond upper primary school and was far removed from the world of administration and governance that her position as a *Pradhan* required.



“At the CPC and WG meetings, I received information on health and hygiene of women and children. Besides, I even became aware of issues of child marriage. All this opened my eyes and I felt the need to contribute to change.”

**Asha Devi, Pradhan,
Gangahra Kala**

supported her but the encouragement and push that she required to become proactive came from her mother-in-law. Sonkali saw in Asha a spark of interest in issues that were close to her own heart. She began sharing her experiences and insights in the area of

community service. Gradually, Asha began to take baby steps towards her own development and her role as the village *Pradhan*. She began to visit the AWC regularly and participate in the VHND to supervise the administration of vaccines. She even made surprise visits to the government school in the village to check on how children were being treated by teachers.

The mood is upbeat in Gangahra Kala as it exudes a new-found enthusiasm and energy. After all, the first woman *Pradhan* of the village has emerged from the shadows to take centre-stage in community development. Besides her mother-in-law, Asha Devi acknowledges the influence of the child protection bodies in the village towards her transformation.



CPC and WG members and a supportive mother-in-law helped Asha Devi become an successful administrator



Opportunity comes knocking

The CPC of Ramnagar opened the doors to a new life for a young girl, helping her leave behind a life of hardship

Eleven year-old Poonam squats in the courtyard of her *kuccha*, one-room dwelling, cleaning utensils. This is part of her daily routine. Never having gone to school, and often working as a farm labourer along with her mother, Poonam could hardly imagine a life any different.

Life had been exceptionally hard for the family residing in Ramnagar, a village in Pahari block of Mirzapur district. Already under the yoke of poverty, the family was dealt with a severe blow when four years ago, Poonam's father, Ramashankar,



Poonam and others like her now find themselves closer to achieving their dreams thanks to the CPC

left home, never to return. Poonam and her family were left traumatised and with no means to survive. Debt was another burden. Life

was rough. Poonam's mother, Kesari Devi, had no choice but to step out of home and earn a living. She began working as a farm labourer and took Poonam, her youngest daughter, along.

For Poonam, the sudden departure of her father left a void, which hurts even after so many years. She gets misty-eyed each time she talks about her father.

Poonam's self-image and her view of the future was conditioned by her immediate environment. She never knew that childhood was a time to study, play, enjoy and develop one's personality. She had seen her two elder sisters being married off in their early teens.

Eleven year-old Poonam had never been to school. She would help her mother at home with the chores and work on the farm to add to the family income.



CPC members convinced parents of out-of-school children to enrol them in school

One of them, who is a mother of two, was widowed at 23. She and her children were shown the door by her in-laws. The young widow had no option but to return to her mother's home in Ramnagar with her children.

Having witnessed her sister's life, Poonam's vision of her future was blinkered. She was reconciled to the fact that she too would be married off soon and would have to deal with what fate had in store for her. Then, the newly formed CPC discussed Poonam's case. She was out of school and being denied her right to education.

The CPC members met Poonam's mother to convince her to pull her daughter out of labour and get her admitted into school. Kesari refused and said that she would get Poonam married off early. It was clear that Poonam's daily earnings also helped the family.

The CPC members continued to pursue the matter relentlessly. They met Kesari several times and built awareness in her about the importance of education. They illustrated how education could have helped Poonam's widowed elder sister to become financially independent. The members even cited the examples of the ASHA, ANM and women teachers at the government school in the

village as educated women who had a control over their own lives.

Kesari finally agreed. Even though she had not been involved in such a discussion before, nor had her mind ever been opened up to such possibilities, her innate good sense grasped its worth. She saw this as an opportunity to ensure a better life for Poonam. It was a wonderful moment for Poonam too. Even though she had never been to school, the thought enthused her. She was aware that she was leaving behind a life that had been quite miserable.

At school, however, a hurdle awaited. The Headmaster of the government Primary School in Ramnagar refused to admit Poonam in the class appropriate for her age. The CPC members put pressure on the Headmaster but things went out of hand. Following an incident of misdemeanour on the part of the Headmaster, the CPC members took up the

The CPC members met Poonam's mother and built awareness in her about the importance of education. They cited the examples of the ASHA, ANM and women teachers at the government school in the village as educated women who had a control over their own lives.

matter at the block-level interface meeting. The BEO took serious note and intervened. Finally, Poonam was admitted in the age-appropriate class.

Poonam currently studies in Std VI. She looks forward to a bright future as does her mother. The community members are happy with the positive change in Poonam's life. It has set a precedent that will long be remembered and emulated.

Glossary of terms

1. **Gram Panchayat**

Under the three-tier system of democratic decentralisation of *Panchayati Raj*, the *Gram Panchayat* functions at the village level as the primary unit of local self-government. Every village with a population of 500 and more must have a *Gram Panchayat*. In smaller villages, a group *Gram Panchayat* for two or three villages is established. The size of population covered by each *Panchayat* varies from state to state.

The number of members of a *Gram Panchayat* depends on the population size and varies from 7 to 17. Members are elected by villagers for a period of five years. An adult with an age of 21 years and above is eligible for contesting the election and for voting in the same. One of the members is elected as *Sarpanch/Pradhan* and another as Deputy *Sarpanch*.

2. **Gram Pradhan**

The *Pradhan* is the President of the *Panchayat Samiti*. The *Pradhan* of the *Gram Panchayat* is elected by the persons of the *Panchayat* area from amongst themselves.

3. **Tehsil**

Tehsils are subdivisions of districts that contain 200 to 600 villages. The *tehsildar* is the chief member of the *tehsil* revenue department and is the preeminent official at this level.

4. **Block**

A block is a large sub-unit of a district. In some states, blocks are coterminous with *talukas* or *tehsils*. In other states, *talukas* or *tehsils* are divided into blocks.

5. **Other Backward Class (OBC)**

Other Backward Class (OBC) is a collective term used by the Government of India to classify castes which are socially and educationally disadvantaged. It is one of several official classifications of the population of India, along with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs and STs).

6. **Scheduled Castes (SC)**

“Scheduled Castes” means such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the Constitution of India.

<http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/coiason29july08.pdf>

7. Scheduled Tribes (ST)

“Scheduled Tribes” means such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of the Constitution of India.

<http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/coiason29july08.pdf>

8. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

The ICDS scheme is a Central scheme under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, which aims at the overall development of children under six years, through *Anganwadi* centres. It is one of the world’s largest programmes on early childhood care and development. A package of six services are offered under the scheme including: supplementary nutrition, pre-school non-formal education, nutrition and health education, immunisation, health checkups and referral services.

9. Child Development Project Officer (CDPO)

In an AWC, the AWWs are supervised by the ICDS Supervisor. The Supervisor, in turn, reports to the CDPO who is the ICDS official at the Block level. The CDPO works under the District Programme Officer or DPO. The CDPO is the coordinator of ICDS schemes at the block level, undertakes field visits, finalises

the monthly and yearly budget for each AWC and periodically inspects the AWCs under their jurisdiction.

10. Anganwadi Centre (AWC)

The *Anganwadi* is a government sponsored child-care and mother-care centre in India. It caters to children in the 0-6 years age group, pregnant women and lactating mothers. The word means ‘courtyard shelter’ in Hindi. They were started by the Government of India in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme to combat child hunger and malnutrition.

11. Anganwadi Worker (AWW)

The AWW is primarily responsible for service delivery at the AWC. She is a woman of the same locality having an educational qualification of middle school or higher. The AWW is assisted by an *Anganwadi* Helper (AWH) who is also a local woman.

12. Primary Health Centre (PHC)

PHCs are designed to meet the health-care requirements of the rural population. Each PHC covers a population of 1,00,000 and is spread over about 100 villages. As per minimum requirement, a Primary Health Centre (PHC) is to be manned by a Medical Officer supported by 14 paramedical and other staff.

One Health Worker (Female)/Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and one Pharmacist/Laboratory Technician/Nursing Staff is also available at the PHC level.

13. Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM)

The Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) is a multipurpose extension health worker who works at the interface of the community and the public health system. An ANM manages the sub-centre, which is the peripheral outpost of the Indian health system. At the village level, one ANM is mandated at a population of 3,000-5,000 for rural areas. She is expected to perform a large number of diverse preventive and curative functions such as motivation for family planning, immunisation, conducting deliveries and treatment for childhood illnesses. She is also expected to reside in the sub-centre village and remain available round the clock.

The Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) is recruited and trained in the study of health care of various individuals. Apart from healthcare, the ANM is also trained in upkeep of equipment, setting up of the operation theatres, providing timely medication to patients and maintaining records.

14. Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in India provides every village in the country with a trained female community health activist called the Accredited Social Health Activist or ASHA. Selected from the village itself and accountable to it, the ASHA is trained to work as an interface between the community and the public health system.

15. Village Health and Nutrition Day (VHND)

VHND is a monthly activity introduced by the National Rural Health Mission in all states at the AWC level as part of ICDS and is the first point of contact for primary health care. It works as a common platform for convergence amongst service providers of the Health and ICDS Departments and the community. The VHND is to be organised once every month (preferably on Wednesdays, and for those villages that have been left out, on any other day of the same month) at the AWC in the village. This will ensure uniformity in organising the VHND.

Photographs of individuals, including minors have been published with their consent.



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