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**GUIDELINES FOR  
CREATING CHILD MARRIAGE FREE  
GRAM PANCHAYATS IN RAJASTHAN**





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# Abbreviations

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| ANM    | Auxiliary Nurse Midwife                            |
| ASHA   | Accredited Social Health Activist                  |
| AWC    | Anganwadi Centre                                   |
| AWW    | Anganwadi Worker                                   |
| BBBP   | Beti Bachao Beti Padhao                            |
| BDO    | Block Development Officer                          |
| BEO    | Block Education Officer                            |
| BPL    | Below Poverty Line                                 |
| CMPO   | Child Marriage Prohibition Officer                 |
| CPC    | Child Protection Committee                         |
| CSO    | Civil Society Organisation                         |
| CSR    | Child Sex Ratio                                    |
| DC     | District Collector                                 |
| DCPO   | District Child Protection Officer                  |
| DEO    | District Education Officer                         |
| DWCD   | Department of Women and Child Development          |
| GPDP   | Gram Panchayat Development Plan                    |
| Gol    | Government of India                                |
| GoR    | Government of Rajasthan                            |
| ICDS   | Integrated Child Development Services              |
| IEC    | Information, Education and Communication           |
| MSS    | Mahila Shakti Samooh                               |
| NFHS-4 | National Family Health Survey-4                    |
| NGO    | Non-governmental Organisation                      |
| PCCRCS | Pink City Cycle Rickshaw Chalak Sanstha            |
| PCMA   | Prohibition of Child Marriage Act                  |
| PEEO   | Panchayat Elementary Education Officer             |
| PRI    | Panchayati Raj Institution                         |
| RKSK   | Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram                |
| SAG    | Scheme for Adolescent Girls                        |
| SDM    | Sub Divisional Magistrate                          |
| SHG    | Self-help Group                                    |
| SMC    | School Management Committee                        |
| SSAP   | State Strategy and Action Plan                     |
| UN     | United Nations                                     |
| VHSNC  | Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee |



# Child marriage and its effects on the girl child

Rajasthan has the third highest prevalence of child marriage in India as per Census 2011. The proportion of girls getting married before the age of 18 stands at 35.4 per cent in the state [National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4]. The Census also points to district-wide variations in these figures, with 14 districts showing higher prevalence as compared to the state average.

An interplay of a wide range of issues ranging from social norms and traditions to economic compulsions is responsible for child marriage. Caste, class and religion come into play when deciding the marriage of a child, especially a girl child. Added to this are the unequal status of the girl child and gender-based discrimination.

Women also lag behind in literacy with only 56.5 per cent being literate in Rajasthan (NFHS-4). Girls are deprived of secondary and higher secondary education for reasons related to lack of access to school due to distance or safety-related issues. Child marriage compromises the agency of a girl child and has a bearing on every subsequent decision that she takes, severely limiting her options and ability to take decisions. In the long run, child marriage impacts the health of a woman. As per NFHS-4, around 6.3 per cent women between the ages of 15-19 years were already mothers or pregnant.

## An umbrella strategy to prevent child marriage



The Government of Rajasthan (GoR) has shown its commitment to address the challenge of child marriage through its various programmes and policies. The Rajasthan

State Strategy and Action Plan (SSAP) for Preventing Child Marriage was developed in 2017 taking into cognisance the social, cultural and economic issues that have a bearing on child marriage in the state. It is an overarching strategy, which reiterates a commitment to the policy framework at the central and state levels, along with the programmes aimed at addressing issues related to child marriage, child protection, child rights and adolescent empowerment (*refer Annexure 1 for a list of the programmes*).

The SSAP has proposed a differential approach to tackling child marriage depending on the severity of the issue in districts. It has categorised districts in three groups – high,

medium and low prevalence. The strategy suggests intensive measures in high prevalence districts, an accelerated pace of change in medium prevalence districts and sustained good efforts in low prevalence districts.

## Gram Panchayat: The vital planning hub for the community

The SSAP brings focus on the Gram Panchayat as the closest link to the community and a crucial unit of local self-governance. A Gram Panchayat can play a decisive role in influencing social norms and traditions. It facilitates access to education and economic opportunities among marginalised groups to address child marriage.

The strategy calls for strengthening the involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and functionaries to address child marriage and stresses utilisation of Gram Sabhas to influence the mindset of the community. The strategy recommends a Gram Panchayat and community-led approach. This document outlines the guidelines for Gram Panchayats and the processes they should follow to create and declare a Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat.

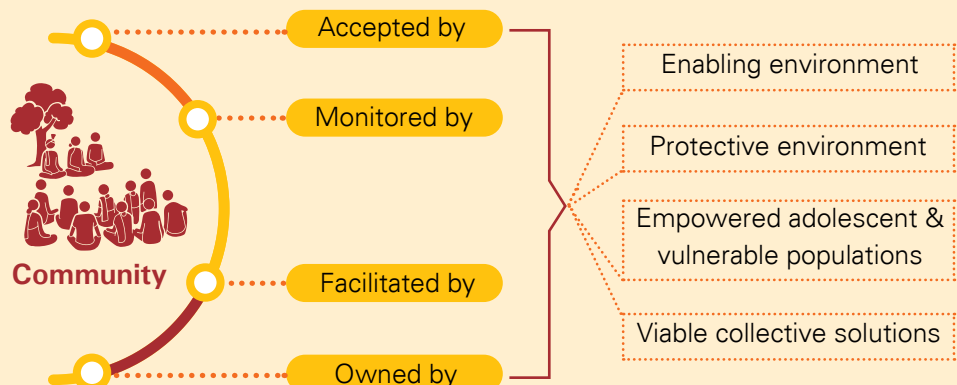


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## Approach to making a Gram Panchayat child marriage free

Gram Panchayats are the key unit of outreach for prevention of child marriage. They understand the pulse of the community and gauge their needs through various mechanisms of interactions. The community, under the active involvement and guidance of the Gram Panchayat, needs to play a pivotal role in becoming child marriage free. It should facilitate, own, accept and monitor the process (Figure 1). Alongside, other key stakeholders such as the Sarpanch and Panchayat members, religious leaders, faith leaders and other influential people in the community have to play a role too. Frontline workers [Sathins, Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Sahyoginis, Anganwadi workers (AWWs)] along with leaders and members of self-help groups (SHGs) are in constant touch with the community and understand their context.

Figure 1  
Community-based approach



They are critical to the process of changing the well-entrenched social norm of child marriage. They need to ensure an enabling environment to initiate a discussion with community members, intended to bring a change in the attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate this practice. Alongside, a protective environment is also required to provide a sense of security among community members, frontline workers and any other stakeholders who are keen to take a stand against child marriage. The voices of adolescents and vulnerable populations need to be strengthened through access to schemes and programmes, opportunities for education and avenues for their development.

### What is a Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat?

A Gram Panchayat which pro-actively ensures and encourages empowerment opportunities for all children with the specific focus to delay child marriage for girls to beyond 18 years and for boys to after 21 years for three consecutive years is declared as a 'Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat'.



## The phases of declaring a Gram Panchayat child marriage free

Three key phases characterise the process of declaring a Gram Panchayat child marriage free. They are the pre-declaration, declaration and post-declaration phases

Figure 2:

### Three phases of declaring Gram Panchayats child marriage free



#### PRE DECLARATION PHASE

Close work with the community to build a favourable environment



#### DECLARATION PHASE

Declaring the Gram Panchayat child marriage free



#### POST DECLARATION PHASE

Focused on monitoring and vigilance







## Phase 1: Pre-declaration

The first phase of the process, the pre-declaration phase is focused on building a foundation to create a Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat and is grounded in the community. Activities in this phase are geared towards building momentum among community members and ensuring their buy-in. Key influencers, community gatekeepers and frontline workers play a lead role in this phase. They make contact with the community and build dialogues with community members through various fora. Gram Sabha meetings bring all men and women together, Sathins, ASHA Sahyoginis and AWWs engage with women and adolescent girls in the community. They elicit responses on child marriage and build a dialogue around the subject, focusing on bringing a change in the mindset of the community about child marriage. They also facilitate access to schemes and programmes, which are aimed at providing social protection to vulnerable groups and enabling access to education.

Building momentum and creating a consensus around changing the norm of child marriage are key in this phase. The timeline for the phase is dependent on how deeply rooted and prevalent the custom is, size of the Panchayat and other social dynamics that are drivers of child marriage in the Gram Panchayat.

The ideal timeframe for the pre-declaration phase is six months to one year.



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## Phase 2: Declaration

The declaration phase is eye-catching and attention-grabbing, bringing the whole community together and announcing that the Gram Panchayat is child marriage free, while extolling the communities' efforts and urging them to retain the child marriage free status through their proactive and progressive approach.

The declaration phase is the shortest of the three phases of making Gram Panchayats child marriage free.



## Phase 3: Post-declaration

This is a critical period of two years for the Gram Panchayat to retain its child marriage free status. The post-declaration phase is focused on monitoring and vigilance.



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## Key steps to implement the pre-declaration phase



### Step 1: Initiating the process of community buy-in

The starting point of the pre-declaration process should be a meeting headed by the Sarpanch, in the presence of Gram Panchayat members, community gatekeepers, religious leaders and other influencers in the community. In the meeting, the Sarpanch should elaborate the concept of the Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat and the decision to make the Gram Panchayat child marriage free. S/he should hold a detailed discussion with this group of influential stakeholders on the need to make the Gram Panchayat child marriage free.

The number of meetings to be held to get the buy-in of this group would be dependent on their awareness and commitment to ending child marriage in the Panchayat. If a Gram Panchayat is already working on this issue, even one meeting would suffice. Otherwise, several meetings would be required to get the buy-in of community gatekeepers.

The timeline for this stage would depend on the severity of child marriage in the Gram Panchayat. Sarpanches can gauge and decide on the number of meetings they would require depending on the situation and openness in their Gram Panchayats to becoming child marriage free.



## Step 2: Building a Core Team

The Sarpanch should create a Core Team of some key members of this group, with her/him helming the team. The team should have 8-10 members and the Sarpanch should choose them keeping in mind the specific dynamics of her/his Gram Panchayat and the influence wielded by these prominent members of the community. It would be good to assign responsibilities within the Core Team, and decide on the regularity with which the Core Team should hold meetings and the monitoring measures to ensure progress towards making the Gram Panchayat child marriage free. Regular Core Team meetings would also help in discussing any challenges faced during implementation of activities, find collective solutions and ensure that the work continues smoothly. A designated space and time for these meetings would further help in formalising the Core Team. A specific day every week/fortnight/month – depending on the severity of the child marriage situation in the Gram Panchayat – should be decided to take stock of the situation, activities being undertaken and progress being made. Meeting proceedings should be documented in a register.



## Step 3: Conducting situation analysis

After securing buy-in from community leaders, the Sarpanch should organise a comprehensive situation analysis to understand the factors responsible for child marriage in the Panchayat. Frontline workers (including Sathins, AWWs and ASHA Sahyoginis) will play a very significant role in this exercise, since they are in close contact with the community and understand the challenges of convincing the community to stop child marriage.

The situation analysis will also help in designing a comprehensive strategy for the Gram Panchayat replete with the kind of activities that need to be taken up and the modalities to be followed to lead to the process of declaring the Gram Panchayat child marriage free. Along with frontline workers, this stage should include the Panchayat members, community leaders and influencers. Their inputs will help shape the

strategy adopted by the Panchayat to address the issue of child marriage.

The situation analysis exercise could be taken up in the form of a meeting with the abovementioned stakeholders. The meeting should be presided by the Sarpanch, with an in-depth discussion to understand and document the social, cultural, economic and religious factors, which contribute to child marriage in the Panchayat. It should focus on the following:



Detailed listing of all stakeholders who could be involved in various activities to reach out to the community and spread the message of ending child marriage



Discussion on and documentation of potential strategies to address factors leading to child marriage



Discussion on designing preventive measures



Methods of undertaking a comprehensive listing of all girls and boys in the Panchayat, with a specific focus on the 15-19 years age group since it is most vulnerable to early marriage.



## Step 4: Informing the community of the intent

Once influential community members have reached a consensus on prevention of child marriage and the strategic approach to take it up in the community, the Sarpanch should call a Gram Sabha meeting to inform the whole population of the village/s about the decision. In this meeting, the Gram Sabha should also be informed about the way in which the complete process would be approached and the activities that would be undertaken.

Whether this Gram Sabha meeting should be called subsequent to the situation analysis and planning process or later is a call that the Sarpanch and the Gram Panchayat members would need to take. Additionally, depending on the community's acceptance or non-acceptance of child marriage as a harmful practice, the Gram Panchayat would need to decide whether

the community should be informed about the activities in a Gram Sabha meeting or through a more gradual, interactive and one-on-one approach.



### Step 5: Mapping of vulnerable children

Though Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) can provide details of enrolled children and adolescent girls who are part of out-of-school *kishori* groups, the surveys undertaken for the Ujjyari Panchayat<sup>1</sup> programme can provide more systematic and comprehensive data on the educational status of children and adolescents between 3-18 years. Existing information can be accessed from records available with the Panchayat Elementary Education Officer (PEEO) or at AWCs.

As part of the Ujjyari Panchayat Guidelines issued in 2017-18, a household survey is conducted in every Gram Panchayat, twice a year (May-June and November-December). The survey aims to track dropout students in both academic sessions and enrol them in schools. As part of the survey, details of a child's age, school and admission, reasons for dropping out and other important family details are gathered. Ujjyari Panchayat surveys are carried out by school teachers, under the supervision of PEEOs. They provide important details about families and their economic backgrounds for a clear picture on why their children are dropping out of school.

This kind of information helps in mapping vulnerable families and children. It can be

**“ We have started focusing on our shortcomings. We regularly crosscheck our data and monitor schools. This helps us identify gaps and we try to plug them. I noticed that many students had stopped coming to school and found out that they felt their homework to be excessive. That's why I told the teachers to give them a feasible amount of homework to keep them engaged. We motivate students and inspire them to continue their education.”**

Gajanand Sevak, PEEO and Principal  
Rajakiya Uchch Madhyamik Vidyalaya  
Taliasar, Dungargarh block, Bikaner district

used to reach out to families which require counselling to send their children to school and provide them with handholding support to access schemes and programmes for their benefit. These schemes not only provide support to families to keep their children in school but also encourage meritorious girls with scholarships and bicycles, which are significant incentives to keep girls in schools.

This focus on schooling helps in motivating families to send their children, especially adolescent girls, to school and encourages girls to continue their education and not drop out in the middle. Completion of secondary education is a crucial factor that helps in delaying marriages.



### Step 6: Mobilising community through campaigns and awareness generation activities

Gram Panchayats need to plan activities to reach out to and mobilise communities. These activities and events need to be periodic, sustained and should be able to reach the maximum number of community members to ensure widespread message dissemination. Even existing forums such as meetings with women and out-of-school adolescent girls at AWCs, Gram Sabha meetings, meetings of School Management Committees (SMCs), Child Protection Committee (CPC) meetings, Bal Sabha meetings, *ratri chaupals*, *jajams* and school assemblies should be used to disseminate the message of prevention of child marriage. Sathins play an important role in this area as prevention of child marriage is one of their key mandates. Messaging on prevention of child marriage should be embedded in all their interactions with the community and specifically with women and adolescent girls. Similarly, ASHA Sahyoginis should also counsel the community on the ill effects of child marriage.

Any local media which are popular among the community in the Gram Panchayat should be utilised by the Panchayat to propagate the

<sup>1</sup> A state-wide initiative launched in April 2018 in Rajasthan to ensure that Gram Panchayats are dropout free.

**/// We have taken *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)* as a challenge because the main component of this programme is to change people's mindsets. For that, it was necessary for us to reach out to society. We converged with non-government organisations (NGOs) and CSOs. We tried to link communities to the programme and made several innovations. For example, during marriages we added an eighth phera along with the seven pheras taken traditionally in Hindu weddings. In the eighth phera, we made the couple take a pledge that they would not undertake sex determination of the foetus. We started celebrating birthdays of girl children. Such efforts were undertaken in every district.**

**We started campaigns in many districts to encourage education of the girl child with campaigns like 'Aao School Chalein' and 'Apna Bacha, Apna Vidyalaya'. Besides these, people who have done tremendous work in the society for empowerment of girls have been honoured at the state level on the occasion of National Girl Child Day on January 24."**

**Jagdish Prasad**, State Coordinator  
Rajasthan State Commission for Women

message of prevention of child marriage. The media could be street theatre, folk dances or local art.

Rajasthan has seen some successful examples of campaigns to build awareness and change the community's mindset related to child marriage. Campaigns such as *Laadli Samman*<sup>2</sup> and *Laado Shakti* and *Samvardhan Abhiyan*<sup>3</sup> took a holistic approach and aimed at building awareness on child protection issues with a specific focus on prevention of child marriage and protection of the girl child. The campaigns succeeded in creating awareness among community members on child protection issues. They helped to build an enabling environment for holistic development of the girl child. Dropout and out-of-school children, and children vulnerable to child marriage and *gaunas* were identified and their families were counselled on the ills of discontinuing education and engaging in child marriage. Families eligible to benefit from social protection and welfare schemes were informed about the schemes and counselled on how to avail of their benefits.

Strategic information was disseminated through a myriad of activities such as *ratri chaupals*, caravans, rallies and street plays, signing of pledge cards by community members and distribution of brochures, pamphlets and informative materials among the community. District-level *Laadli Samman melas* ensured participation of thousands of community members and also served as venues for public hearing. Community members got a chance to

interact with block and district-level officials and discuss their grievances with them. Girls who had excelled in various fields and proved to be champions interacted with community members in these *melas* and discussed their journey with them. Campaign news and success stories of girls from these communities were circulated in local media and newspapers to bring focus on the issues of child protection and child marriage.

The media has played an important role in disseminating information on social issues such as child marriage among the community. Their outreach is deep and extends to the grassroots level. They can pick up stories from the grassroots level and spread them to a wider audience. In addition to the information, education and communication (IEC) campaigns, the media played a very effective role in spreading positive messages to change the mindset of the community.

The *Sanjha Abhiyan* which elicited the support of United Nations (UN) organisations and a wide range of civil society organisations (CSOs) reached out to communities everywhere and was very effective in spreading awareness on prevention of child marriage. These campaigns can serve as a prototype, though at a smaller level, for Gram Panchayats to design their awareness generation activities.

<sup>2</sup> The *Laadli Samman* campaign ran in three phases in nine districts of Rajasthan between 2014-2016.

<sup>3</sup> The *Laado Shakti* and *Samvardhan Abhiyan* was initiated in Tonk district in 2019, with a similar aim and approach as the *Laadli Samman* campaign.

**When I became the Pradhan, the number of child marriages in the block was high. People used to get their children married by taking pheras, while carrying them in their lap. We realised that there is a need to change mindsets. Hence, in 2015 with the support of Pink City Cycle Rickshaw Chalak Sangh (PCCRCS) and UNICEF, we undertook community awareness activities. Nukkad sabhas (community meetings) and nukkad nataks (street plays) were organised in every village. We organised rallies and disseminated powerful messages on ending child marriage and protecting girls. The messaging was very effective and resulted in prevention of many child marriages. This gave us confidence and we announced an award for Gram Panchayats, which would become child marriage free. With these efforts, our Arinya Kedar Gram Panchayat became child marriage free as well as free from drugs.”**

**Jagdish Gujar**, Pradhan (President), Block Panchayat Samiti, Tonk block and district



## **Step 7: Mainstreaming child protection issues in Gram Panchayat Development Plans**

The Government of India (GoI) has mandated all Gram Panchayats with preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), suited to their local needs and requirements. The process of preparing these plans needs to be comprehensive and participatory with special

attention to a wide range of development issues including primary and secondary education, technical training and vocational education, non-formal education, welfare of weaker sections of society, health and sanitation, and poverty alleviation programmes, among others.

This initiative is being implemented by GoR. While working towards becoming child marriage free, Gram Panchayats also need to

**We formed a committee comprising of the Sarpanch (President), Block Development Officer (BDO) (Secretary), Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), ASHA Sahyogini, AWW, Patwari and a retired officer. This team travelled to every ward and informed people using slogans and loudspeaker announcements about various government schemes. We took care to document issues raised by women and children. AWCs were inspected, immunisation data was checked, health centres were visited and registers were examined for data related to deliveries and access to schemes like Janani Suraksha Yojana among women. Similarly, schools were inspected and shortcomings were documented with the support of School Principals.**

**As a next step, we organised a Gram Sabha and shared these figures with the community. We also put forth our suggestions on how to address these problems, especially those related to women and children. We allocated around 60 per cent of the budget to such issues. We included work related to 29 departments in our plan, and took the support of the Education, Health, and Women and Child Development departments to accomplish tasks related to issues of women and children. The plan included infrastructure improvement in schools with allocations for playgrounds and construction of boundary walls, ramps and toilets in schools. It was approved by the Panchayat Samiti.**

**We have also constituted a CPC under the GPDP to prevent crimes against children. The CPC has two student members from school – a boy and a girl – and nine members of the GPDP committee. From time to time, we monitor their activities and sort out their problems at the Panchayat level. In every meeting of the Gram Panchayat, we prioritise child protection and adolescent empowerment related issues.”**

**Kamlesh Bairwa**, Sarpanch, Bharni Gram Panchayat, Tonk block and district

focus on taking up adolescent empowerment as a crucial theme within social development. Development of roads to improve access to schools, improvement in school infrastructure, and developing vocational and technical training institutes are some aspects that create an enabling environment for children and adolescents. Ensuring provision of toilets in schools is a key factor that helps adolescent girls continue their schooling. Being mindful of creating adolescent-friendly and education-friendly GPDPs would give a big boost to a Gram Panchayat's journey towards becoming child marriage free.



## Step 8: Engagement with adolescent boys and girls

In every Gram Panchayat, there are school and community-level fora that bring together adolescents and build their knowledge on issues related to child marriage, child protection and child rights – Meena and Gargi Manches for upper primary and secondary-level girls respectively, alongside Child Rights Clubs for adolescent girls and boys – as per the GoR mandate.

Girls from classes 3-5 are members of Meena Manches. They develop an understanding of child rights, right to education, social norms and building life skills through various activities of the Meena Manch. The Gargi Manch brings the attention of adolescent girls in secondary school towards the importance of enrolment and retention of girls in schools, and the restrictive social norms that keep them away from school. Adolescent girls and boys are included in these conversations around child

“**After I joined the Meena Manch, I learned that girls should not get married before the age of 18 and children should not be made to work in factories. When I return home from the hostel, I disseminate this knowledge to my family and neighbours. I also got to know about the Childline number (1098) in the Manch sessions. If I ever need to, I will not hesitate to dial the Childline number.**”

**Maya Nayak**, Girl in Class 8, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Jetsar village, Dungargarh block, Bikaner district

“**Sports have brought a lot of change in our village. Earlier, elders and brothers in the family would question girls for wearing jeans and trousers. Nowadays there is a change in their thinking. In fact, they encourage us to do what we want and say that we should aspire and reach our goals. Now people in our village say that girls are no less than boys. All this happened because we got the opportunity to play and excel in the field of sports.**”

**Pooja Siyag**, Adolescent girl  
Government Senior Secondary School  
Palana Gram Panchayat, Bikaner block and district

rights, child protection and child marriage in the Child Rights Clubs in schools.

At the community level, *kishori balika samoohs* (Adolescents Girls' Groups) are organised in villages by frontline workers viz. Sathins, ASHA Sahyoginis and AWWs. In the group sessions, girls are informed about their rights, delaying marriage, the ill effects of child marriage, and the importance of health and nutrition. Toolkits are available for both school and non-school based platforms to strengthen their understanding on the said issues.

Another adolescent platform is the Bal Sabha, a larger gathering which brings together adolescents from school and community-level groups. It is a forum for them to collectively present their thoughts and ideas before a larger community gathering, with the help of plays, skits and other creative media. Such fora have built awareness of adolescents related to child rights, the ill effects of child marriage and the importance of education for adolescents.

As part of the LAADO project<sup>4</sup> implemented by UNICEF, schools in select blocks of Tonk and Bikaner districts created a conducive environment to encourage girls to participate in sports, empower them and give them options to express themselves and make choices regarding their lives. Many of these girls excelled in sports and have gone on to become team members of district and state-level teams.

<sup>4</sup> LAADO project is being implemented in select blocks of Tonk and Bikaner districts of Rajasthan in partnership between the district administration, UNICEF and the implementing NGOs – Pink City Cycle Rickshaw Chalak Sanstha (PCCRCS) in Tonk and Urmul in Bikaner and Jodhpur districts.

Engaging adolescents through such fora and giving them opportunity to showcase their talent in diverse fields have shown positive results. Gram Panchayats too can build and strengthen such initiatives in their schools.



## Step 9: Strengthening child protection mechanisms

CPCs at village and Gram Panchayat levels are meant to keep a close watch on the needs of children in the community and enable access to viable solutions where needed. They are the ground-level monitoring bodies for prevention of child marriage, and thus their efficacy is paramount to make child protection mechanisms sturdier.

Discussions on child protection and child welfare issues in other forums such as Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs), SHGs, mothers' groups and school-based and out of school adolescent groups will

help build awareness and momentum around these issues.

Gram Panchayats need to work towards making child tracking mechanisms efficient. Child tracking registers should be maintained and updated regularly. Awareness and involvement of the community would help in keeping child tracking updated and in resolving such issues.

Capacities of members of CPCs, VHSNCs and SHGs should be built through orientations on child protection issues and specifically child marriage. This will help strengthen implementation of not just the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 and other child protection systems to prevent child marriages, but also other schemes and programmes focused on child welfare. When frontline workers are enabled with orientations and trainings, they help in mobilising the community and strengthening the mandate of Gram Panchayats.

“In our Gram Panchayat, we have a CPC. Recently, a mahila shakti samooh (MSSs) has been formed and is chaired by the Sarpanch. Girls and women can come to MSS meetings and openly express their problems without any hesitation. We also maintain a child tracking register, which is updated regularly. In our monthly meetings we take up adolescent and child-related issues ranging from child marriage to child labour and specific cases like a family's inability to pay school fees. We discuss actionable points and solutions in these meetings. We also provide active support to the community to ease access to schemes and programmes. Ward and community meetings are held to reach out to everyone and solve any problems that they might have.”

**Prahlad Chaudhary**, Village Development Officer  
Darda Hind Gram Panchayat, Tonk block and district

“CPCs have been formed in all Gram Panchayats. Committee members meet on a monthly basis and discuss issues related to nutrition provided at AWCs, the quality of mid-day meals and other relevant topics. I also make surprise visits to Gram Panchayats for monitoring. I check the CPC register and follow up with them on the regularity of meetings or any discrepancy that I might find.”

**Jagdish Gujar**, Pradhan (President)  
Block Panchayat Samiti  
Tonk block and district

“We have held orientations for frontline workers in our Gram Panchayat on issues such as child marriage, child rights, adolescent empowerment and education etc. The orientation on child marriage was so effective that in my Gram Panchayat there has not been even a single child marriage since 2015. Girls are more inclined towards education. My village has become aware of this and families have started focusing on girls. Community members have extended their full support to me and for the empowerment of girls.”

**Sushma Meghwal**, Sarpanch  
Jaisalsar Gram Panchayat  
Dungargarh block, Bikaner district





# Review and verification process



## Step 1: Preparing checklists to track community-level activities

While conducting all the activities to prepare a Gram Panchayat to become child marriage free, the Core Team needs to make a checklist for each of the activities that they have undertaken (*refer Annexure 2*). This information needs to be documented meticulously as it would be required at the time of applying to get the status of a Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat.



## Step 2: Filling application for Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat status

The state government can specify a time period (through a Government Order) for the process of declaring Gram Panchayats child marriage free. This could be a once-a-year process. The state government can inform Gram Panchayats through advertisements in newspapers and provide details of how to apply in the advertisements.

The application for declaration of Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayats can be made available on GoR's Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) website. This application should include formats and details of the indicators against which information would be required (*refer to Annexure 3*). The application should be filled by Core Team members and submitted on time.



### Step 3: Conducting verification process

District and block-level verification teams need to be deployed to verify the status of Gram Panchayats as child marriage free. The composition of the district and block-level teams can be as follows:

#### District-level verification team

- President, Zila Parishad
- District Child Protection Officer (DCPO)
- District-level DWCD functionary for child protection
- District Panchayati Raj Officer
- District Education Officer (DEO)
- Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) of the area
- Civil society representative nominated by the District Collector (DC)

#### Block-level verification team

- Block Development Officer (BDO)
- Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO)
- Block-level DWCD functionary for child protection
- Child Development/Protection Officer
- Block Panchayat Officer
- Block Education Officer (BEO)

- Tehsildar
- Civil society representative working in the block

Once the applications have been submitted, the DC needs to direct district and block-level verification teams to visit Gram Panchayats to validate the progress and award them with the Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat status.

The district and block-level teams will be in charge of the following monitoring tasks:

- Physical verification of applications and data provided with the application
- Visits to at least four schools and AWCs to verify records and infrastructure
- Visits to some households for physical verification of access to schemes
- Visits to some households for physical verification of education and child marriage status
- Preparation of a physical verification report for submission to the DC

Once a report has been prepared based on the figures submitted by the Gram Panchayat and findings of the verification visit, the final approval for declaration will come from the DC.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/ Abhinav Soni/2019

## Declaring a Gram Panchayat child marriage free

The declaration process should be a grand event, capturing the attention of the community. This helps in building a sense of pride and ownership among community members and boosts morale because of the recognition that the Gram Panchayat would get from the district administration. The Gram Panchayat can hold a big event on the day of the Gram Sabha such as a festival or any occasion where a large congregation of community members is assured.

Going by prior experience, such events have enthused community members, including parents and elders in the family, to come forward and take a pledge to refuse child marriage in their family.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/ Abhinav Soni/2019



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/ Abhinav Soni/2019

Adolescents too have taken this pledge at such events. Community members also collectively resolve to keep their village child marriage free. Adolescents and families who have refused child marriage have spoken of their experiences and been felicitated. In certain cases such events have been organised by Gram Panchayats with the support of CSOs working in their area. Larger events would require more elaborate logistical planning and

financial commitment; if the Gram Panchayat plans to organise a small event, planning may not require elaborate arrangements.

The Core Team should get together once the declaration process is over (at the most a week after the event, not later), and chalk out a plan for the post-declaration phase, with a detailed action plan and clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities.

**“ We must bring the people and their valuable contributions to the spotlight. We started felicitating and honouring people for their efforts to boost their confidence and morale. We awarded Gram Panchayats which had worked towards declaring their villages to be child marriage free. We also conducted grand felicitation programmes that were attended by senior government officials and ministers. We helped Gram Panchayats in making their success stories heard and published their work. In this way, we encouraged other Gram Panchayats to come forward and make sincere efforts. Inspiration and encouragement are the two keys to get the work done.”**

Arvind Ojha, Secretary, Urmul Trust





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## Monitoring in the post-declaration phase

It is critical that the community does not slip back which is a real possibility if the momentum is not sustained. As the key stakeholder, the community needs to be vigilant. In the post-declaration phase, the role of the Core Team will become paramount, as it is their responsibility to ensure that the community's morale and commitment to remain child marriage free is high. The suggested period for this phase is at least two years from the day of the declaration.

Continuous vigilance and monitoring at the community level is important to maintain the child marriage free status. This period is a litmus test and reflects whether the change in the community has been superficial due to various checks for the prevention of child marriage, or whether there is a deeper transformation in mindsets, wherein the community owns the issue and looks at prevention of child marriage as their own mission.

The Core Team should work out a plan for systematic and continuous monitoring and interaction with the community to reiterate the message of prevention of child marriage. Specifically, families from vulnerable communities get their children married early primarily due to financial constraints. Hence, keeping track of these communities, ensuring that they are regularly getting the benefits of social protection schemes, and their children are regularly attending school is imperative.

Gram Panchayats will need to continuously ensure that the plans are responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups and adolescents. CPCs

/// ***There is a register at the district level to register information on child marriage. But once a child marriage has been stopped there needs to be continuous follow up to ensure that there is no child marriage. So far that follow up has not been very stringent. Through UNICEF, we are developing a software which would help us to continuously follow up. Even after prevention of a child marriage, this software would help us in monitoring the child until s/he attains legal age of marriage. Once the system has been ensured at the district level, we can collect information from the district level.***

PC Pawan (IAS), Director, Directorate of Woman Empowerment, DWCD, GoR

need to be vigilant and ensure that children are being provided an enabling environment. Adolescents, especially girls, need to be given a sense of security to ensure that they complete their schooling. Proper roads to access schools, a safe school environment, toilets and adequate infrastructure for schools would facilitate the process of convincing parents to allow their daughters to finish schooling.

Community gatekeepers and influencers, including religious leaders, faith leaders, and community leaders need to be kept engaged throughout pre-declaration activities and the post-declaration phase. Their buy-in and engagement will ensure that messaging for the prevention of child marriage will regularly reach the community.

The community's ownership also needs to be ensured at a deeper level, for them to take the initiative and dissuade any community members who still have a propensity towards child marriage.

The post-declaration phase needs to be

considered as a phase where the community slowly and steadily internalises the message of prevention of child marriage, not out of fear but because of an understanding that delaying marriage until after the legal age of 18 for girls and 21 for boys is important for their growth and development. Reducing its social acceptance will be an effective way of tackling child marriage.

Ultimately, the Core Team should work towards making it the community's movement, where they create their own checks.

At the same time, it is crucial for block and district level verification teams to keep track of child marriages in Gram Panchayats and other development efforts being made for the welfare of vulnerable communities, women, adolescents and children. Tracking the status of those children whose marriages were stopped would be critical to ensure that the families have not performed a child marriage secretly, which is often the case.

*(Post-declaration monitoring indicators have been listed in Annexure 4.)*

## **When communities own their child marriage free status**

Benisar village in Sridungargarh block of Bikaner district has been declared '**child marriage free**'. When I recently visited the village, community members apologetically told me about a recent child marriage case. The young girl was married off secretly by the family because her mother had died and her father was an alcoholic. When community members came to know about this (when the girl stopped going to school), the family was asked to explain in a Panchayat meeting. After the meeting, the Panchayat told the family that since the marriage could not be annulled, they had to ensure that the girl continued her education. The family agreed to this decision of the Panchayat.

This event displays intensive community monitoring and ownership. It shows the commitment, conviction and ownership of the community, which took up eradication of child marriage as its own responsibility. We simply did the job of creating awareness and facilitating meetings. The commitment that they showed was their own. Now, even if representatives change at the Panchayat or block levels, they will be forced to work on the issue of child marriage since communities are aware and conscious of the issue.

As narrated by **Arvind Ojha**, Secretary, Urmul Trust (UNICEF's implementing partner)

# Annexures



# Annexure 1

## Programmes and schemes for child protection, child rights and adolescent empowerment and prevention of child marriage

**Aapki Beti Yojana:** Financial assistance for girls from below poverty line (BPL) families – INR 2,100 for girls studying in Classes 1-8 and INR 2,500 for girls studying in Classes 9-12.

**Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** BBBP addresses the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of women empowerment over a life-cycle continuum. It is a tri-ministerial effort of the Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare and Human Resource Development.

**Garima Balika Sanrakshan Evam Samman Yojana:** An award launched to reward and recognise various individuals and organisations for their commendable work towards protection of the girl child.

**Janani Suraksha Yojana:** A centrally sponsored scheme, Janani Suraksha Yojana is a safe motherhood intervention under the National Health Mission (NHM), implemented with the objective of reducing maternal and neonatal mortality by promoting institutional delivery among poor pregnant women.

**Kishori Shakti Yojana:** It is a central Government scheme. The broad objectives of the scheme are to improve the nutritional, health and development status of adolescent girls, promote awareness of health, hygiene, nutrition and family care, link them to opportunities for learning life skills and going back to school, help them gain a better understanding of their social environment and take initiative to become productive members of society.

**Mukhya Mantri Hunar Vikas Yojana:** The scheme focuses on providing higher education/skill building programme to beneficiaries of the Palanhar Yojana and children staying in institutional homes (both government and non-government).

**Mukhya Mantri Rajshree Yojana:** A flagship scheme for financial assistance to girl children born on or after June 1, 2016. A total grant of INR 50,000 is provided in six instalments to parents/guardians of the eligible girls. Online payment is made to the account of the beneficiary through the Bhamashah platform.

**Palanhar Yojana:** A monthly cash transfer programme that aims to nurture, educate and provide health care to orphans and other vulnerable children (under the age of 18 years) in a family setting. Children who have lost either one or both parents, or whose parents fall into any of the following categories – divorced, abandoned or *nata*; imprisoned for life, or; suffering from HIV/AIDS, leprosy or disability. The cash received is conditional based on under-five children availing of services under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the older children being in school.

**Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK):** The RKSK programme has been launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for adolescents in the age group of 10-19 years and aims to target their nutrition, reproductive health and substance abuse, among other issues. It introduces community-based interventions through peer educators, and is underpinned by collaborations with other ministries and state governments.

**Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG):** It is a centrally sponsored programme of GoI aimed at empowering adolescent girls between 11-18 years of age by improving their nutritional and health status and upgradation of their home skills, life skills and vocational skills. The scheme also aims to mainstream out-of-school girls into formal and non-formal education.



# Annexure 2

## Pre-declaration checklist for district administration

- Mapping vulnerable children and families
- Listing girls and boys who have dropped out/never been to school
- Mapping community-based institutions for addressing child protection and adolescent issues
- Mapping number of adolescent girls and boys who need to access social protection schemes and programmes
- Mapping number of adolescent girls and boys who access these schemes and programmes
- Mapping infrastructure such as:
  - Primary and secondary schools
  - AWCs
- Condition of infrastructure
- Distance of service facilities
- Community mobilisation activities undertaken for prevention of child marriage. For example, total number of:
  - Street plays organised
  - Puppet shows organised
  - Wall paintings completed
  - Hoardings made and displayed
  - Community meetings held
  - Rath yatras* held
  - IEC materials (pamphlets/brochures etc) distributed
  - One-on-one meetings/counselling sessions

# Annexure 3

## Checklist for declaring a community child marriage free

The Core Team will collect the following information using data from the past one year. The team will collect this information periodically, track the indicators over a period of time and ensure that they reach desirable levels before the community is declared child marriage free. Data collected prior to efforts undertaken towards declaring a community child marriage free would serve as the baseline. The progressive checklists can then serve to indicate the effectiveness levels of the programme.

### School based information<sup>1</sup>

- Percentage of girls aged 6-10 years who are currently enrolled in primary school
- Percentage of girls aged 6-10 years who attend school regularly
- Percentage of boys aged 6-10 years who are currently enrolled in primary school
- Percentage of boys aged 6-10 years who attend school regularly
- Percentage of girls and boys who had dropped out from school and have been mainstreamed into primary school
- Percentage of girls aged 11-18 who are currently enrolled in secondary school
- Number of girls aged 11-18 who attend school regularly
- Number of boys aged 11-18 who are currently enrolled in secondary school
- Number of boys aged 11-18 who attend school regularly
- Number of girls and boys who had dropped out from school and have been mainstreamed into secondary school

### Marriages in the community

(The number has to be in the range of 80-100 per cent of the respective cohorts for declaration of child marriage free status)

- Community had reduction of 80-100 per cent of child marriages for a period of one year
- Hoarding endorsed by the Panchayat outside the village/community stating 'This is a child marriage free Panchayat/community' with the period mentioned

### Community awareness

- Number of community awareness activities, dialogues, meetings with parents/mothers' groups/ SHGs/CPC members/religious leaders, discussions with adolescents/groups, mid-media activities (among others) organised in the community in the last one year
- Number of household members who have participated in a community-based activity discussing child marriage (community theatre, etc.) in the last six months.

If these indicators are met consistently for a period of at least one year then the Panchayat/ community/village is officially acknowledged as 'child marriage free'. This acknowledgment should come from the district administration in the form of an official letter declaring the Panchayat to be child marriage free.

# Annexure 4

## Post-declaration monitoring indicators

The data is to be collected over a period of two-three years after the community has been declared child marriage free.

### **School based information**

- Number of girls aged 6-10 years who are currently enrolled in primary school
- Number of girls aged 6-10 years who attend school regularly
- Number of boys aged 6-10 years who are currently enrolled in primary school
- Number of boys aged 6-10 years who attend school regularly
- Number of girls and boys who had dropped out from school and have been mainstreamed into primary school
- Number of girls aged 11-18 who are currently enrolled in secondary school
- Number of girls aged 11-18 who attend school regularly
- Number of boys aged 11-18 who are currently enrolled in secondary school
- Number of boys aged 11-18 who attend school regularly
- Number of girls and boys who had dropped out from school and have been mainstreamed into secondary school

### **Marriages in the community**

- Community had no child marriage for a period of one year
- Number of cases of child marriages that have been brought to the attention of the CPC/police or similar authorities in the last six months



for every child

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