

Facilitating linkages to social protection schemes as a means to lower deprivations leading to child marriage



Social protection for adolescents

Government of Rajasthan (GoR) is committed to ending child marriage. One of the paths paved by the Government is to enhance the access of adolescents to schooling and education. To this end, the Government has launched a number of schemes and programmes to support children, especially the girl child, in economically weaker sections.

Schemes such as providing bicycles to girls focus on increasing access and encouraging retention of girls in schools. To celebrate the birth and encourage the education of girl children, the Mukhyamantri Rajshri Yojana has linked financial assistance to girls on achieving critical milestones. In the Aapki Beti Yojana, cash incentives are provided to girls from below poverty line (BPL) families enrolled in classes 1-12, who are either orphaned or have one parent. The Palanhar Yojana provides financial assistance for certain categories of vulnerable children to encourage

continuation of their education. The Mukhyamantri Hunar Vikas Yojana provides higher education/skill building avenues to rights holders of Palanhar Yojana. These are some of the relevant schemes aimed at building access to education, protecting the rights of girl children and preventing child marriage.

Increasing community awareness about schemes

Communities are informed about the schemes either by frontline workers such as the Saathins and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), at the panchayat level, by civil society organisations (CSOs) implementing projects in various districts or by volunteers. Schools also disseminate this information to children. Bringing these schemes closer to the community by building awareness and facilitating the application process is helping thousands of rights holders reap the benefits of these schemes and educate girls in the family.

Snapshots of success

A social protection champion

Some community members have been working ceaselessly to enable this access by helping applicants with complete and correct paperwork. Javed Manganiar from Sipahi village in Ridmaser panchayat of Bikaner district is one such agent of change. For the past 10 years, he has been working ceaselessly to ensure that the benefits of such schemes reach the community and help them access their entitlements. Working from a small room which serves as his office, he has stocked forms for all the schemes that can be availed by the community. People seek his help in filling the forms and he also assists them in case the documentation is incomplete or incorrect.

“In my panchayat, every widow is getting benefits from schemes that they are applicable for. I have helped around 176 people get benefits from pension schemes. Among them, many are widows, abandoned and physically challenged women. I also help with scholarships for children. I disseminate information which makes it easy for the parents to arrange necessary documents. I make the application forms available to them and help them to get the requisite signatures. Furthermore, I help them by guiding them to access the scholarships.”

Javed Manganiar, social worker
Sipahi village, Ridmaser panchayat, Bikaner district



Ripple effects of social protection

For 40-year-old Lali Devi, from Ridmaser panchayat in Bikaner, the importance of education is paramount. Having lost her husband, she had given up all hope that she would be able to educate her four daughters and one son. Thanks to the Laado project team, she got to know about the Palanhar and pension schemes, and very soon will start benefitting from them. She has also become a member of the self-help group (SHG) in the village and started making papads, along with taking up odd jobs to make ends meet. She is happy that she does not have to take her daughters out of school. Being uneducated herself, she knows how crucial education would be in helping her daughters stand on their own two feet and become independent.

“I used to ask my husband to get our daughters married, but he always said ‘it’s too early.’ Now, even I believe that their education is the first priority and I am happy that these schemes will give us the support to fulfil my husband’s dream of giving them an education.”

Lali Devi, community member
Ridmaser panchayat, Bikaner district



Ensuring mobility for adolescent girls

Fourteen-year-old Poonam Rajput was informed by her school teachers that she was eligible to apply for a bicycle through a government scheme. She applied and got the bicycle and today, she rides it to school confidently. Using the bicycle has cut her travel time to school to half.

“Earlier it was difficult for me to come to school. It would take me around 20 minutes of walking. But now with the bicycle, I can cover the distance in 10 minutes and I find it very comfortable.”

Poonam Rajput, Class 9 student
Rajakiya Uchch Madhyamik Vidyalaya
Toliasar gram panchayat
Sridungargarh block, Bikaner district

Conclusion

There are many stories of people who are facilitating access and also those who are benefitting from these schemes. Each effort and each success is a step towards encouraging education of the girl child. These schemes and

benefits, big and small, are drawing the attention of community members and adolescent girls to the importance of continuing education, giving them a push to complete their education and build a brighter future for themselves.



UNICEF's adolescent empowerment programming in Rajasthan focuses on increasing opportunities for education to reduce the vulnerability of girls and building their life skills to empower them with an enhanced ability to speak against early marriage and for child rights.

To this end, UNICEF is providing technical assistance to the Department of Women and Child Development, Department of Education and Department of Social Justice and Empowerment to build awareness, sensitisation and capacities among frontline workers and mobilise communities to make them active partners in planning and decision making. UNICEF is also strengthening the alliance

of civil society organisations towards ending all forms of violence against children and women.

In its adolescent empowerment efforts, UNICEF has also actively worked for inclusion of child protection programming in schools of Rajasthan and for out-of-school children, with components such as strengthening of adolescent forums in and outside schools, self-defence trainings in schools and by giving an impetus to the enrolment of dropout girls in Open Schools. UNICEF's programming is facilitating access to various government schemes and programmes influencing children's education, among economically weaker sections, to ensure that entitlements reach all children and they can continue their education.

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