



'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School'

Anchoring efforts to end child marriage in **Kandhamal** district



Smt. Anu Garg, Principal Secretary DWCD and MS

The state-level 'Advika – Every girl is unique' programme is a renewed commitment towards the empowerment of adolescent girls through education and life skills. Advika will be a common and coordinated platform for linking all schemes targeted at all adolescent girls of Odisha in the 10-19 years age group, across the State, in and out of school. It is the best example of the highest political commitment towards adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage and all kinds of violence.

The State Strategy Action Plan on ending child marriage rolled out in 2019 is a convergent plan of action for line departments, partner organisations including CSOs, and communities. We have formed a State Steering Committee on ending child marriage under the leadership of WCD department with membership from key line departments such as Home, Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water, Education, Skill Development, Health, Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, and representatives from UNICEF, UNFPA, and Action Aid. System strengthening is imperative for the success of these measures. Along with ending child marriage, the state is committed towards empowering adolescents, especially our young girls, to ensure that they are safe, secure, and have access to all facilities and services.

The State of Odisha gladly recognises the commendable efforts of district administrations towards adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage. Currently, as many as 1,700 villages have been declared child marriage-free by district administrations. I extend my thanks to the district administrations and the entire team. We are committed to ensure a bright future for our adolescents and work towards achieving the SDGs.



Shri Aravind Agrawal, IAS, Director DWCD and MS

Since our State and DWCD&MS are committed to and envision making Odisha child marriage-free by 2030, we are focusing on prevention mechanisms. District-level proactive interventions resulted in more child marriage cases being reported to the State. Frontline workers like AWWs, ASHAs and ANMs along with women's SHGs members are now more vigilant in their communities and many child marriages are being prevented. We have also involved religious leaders, local NGOs, CBOs, youth leaders, adolescent volunteers/collectives etc.

One of the key learnings for the department is that community ownership, working with partners as well as ownership by the local government in taking the campaign to end child marriage forward are invaluable. Secondly, system strengthening in terms of effective functioning of existing structures and mechanisms at various levels in the communities has played a crucial role. Thirdly, preventive measures are equally important to end child marriage.

Hearteningly, as many as 387 child marriages were stopped across Odisha in the COVID-19 lockdown period. Stopping child marriage requires proactive intervention, along with constant follow up with the victims. I encourage all districts to work consistently towards adolescent empowerment and weed out the practice of child marriage under the umbrella of Advika so that our youth can realise their aspirations and contribute to the welfare of our State.

Child marriage in Odisha

Odisha has seen a marked reduction in the prevalence of child marriages in the last decade. As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015-16, 21.3 per cent women in the age group 20–24 years in the state were married before 18. While this is lower than the national average of 27 per cent, the wide variations between districts are a cause for concern.

Child marriage disproportionately impacts young girls. It curtails their education and limits their economic opportunities. Early marriages lead to early childbearing and increase their risk of complications during pregnancy. Young married girls are unable to complete their education which limits their economic opportunities and mobility and increases the likelihood of domestic violence.

There is compelling evidence that girls who are out of school, are more likely to get married before 18 years. Educating girls is one of the powerful tools to enable them to avoid child marriage. This calls for programmes that prioritise retention of girls in schools along with addressing child marriage.

State-wide efforts to end child marriage

The Government of Odisha has launched massive efforts to address the situation of child marriage in the State. It constituted a High Level Committee, under the chairpersonship of the Principal Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), to review the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 and Odisha Prohibition of Child Marriage Rules, 2009, and formulate and roll out the State Strategy to end child marriage.

DWCD and Mission Shakti (MS), Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSPCPR), UNICEF, UNFPA and Mr. Ghasiram Panda¹ are members of this Committee. The Odisha Prohibition of Child



21.3% women in the age group 20–24 years in the state were married before 18 years

'Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls' is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5) formulated by the United Nations in 2015. Action towards achievement of this goal would affect the outcomes of the other SDGs. Of the nine target areas of SDG 5, Target Area 3 spells out elimination of harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

The efforts being made by the Government of Odisha are in alignment with SDG 5, to eliminate child marriage from the State in a systematic and time-bound manner.

Marriage Rules, 2019 were resultantly formulated with specific amendments.

The Committee has wide representation, which includes Departments of Schools and Mass Education, Higher Education, ST and SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare, Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water, Home, Health and Family Welfare, Sports and Youth Services, Skill Development and Technical Education, Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disability and Law.



¹ Programme Manager at ActionAid



The State also launched a multi-sectoral Strategic Action Plan (2019–24) to ensure coordinated efforts by multiple departments to eliminate child marriage. The High-level Committee tasked district administrations to develop contextualised District Action Plans (DAPs) for smooth implementation of the State Strategic Action Plan.

Notable efforts by the Government of Odisha after laying this crucial groundwork for ending child marriage have been:

Regular training of functionaries

More than 5,000 District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs), Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs), Protection Officers (POs) and District Child Protection Officers (DCPOs), One Stop Centre, CHILDLINE staff and supervisors have been trained on an ongoing basis. During the COVID-19 period, webinars and online training sessions have been conducted at state and district levels to continue the capacity building efforts across all 30 districts.

Issuing guidelines at district, block and panchayat levels

The guidelines mandate the formation of District/Block/Panchayat Level Child Protection Committees/Task Forces on Adolescent Empowerment and Ending Child Marriage. They also provide a clear outline of roles and reporting formats for the Committees/Task Forces.

Launching Advika programme

To maximise the impact of all its schemes across adolescent girls of all ages, the

state government launched the 'Advika' programme on October 11, 2020 on the occasion of International Girl Child Day. This state-wide programme, launched in partnership with UNICEF and UNFPA is envisaged as a renewed commitment towards the empowerment of adolescent girls through education and life skills. The programme will serve as a common and coordinated platform for linking all schemes targeted at adolescent girls within the state. It aims at making vibrant and adolescent friendly 'Kishori Diwas' (Saturday sessions) by imparting life skill education to deal with their day-to-day challenges and issues, and creating a space for girls to express themselves and find solutions to their problems. It provides them with the opportunity to become aware and connect with relevant social protection schemes for them and their families.

Tiki Mausi Kuhe!

Tiki Mausi, the mascot of DWCD, is a gregarious and empathetic protagonist. She is like a second mother to children. Tiki Mausi has extensive knowledge about issues related to women and children. She loves to talk to people and raise their awareness on key positive social behaviours and practices! The mascot ties together communication efforts around adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage.



Spearheading implementation of State Strategic Action Plan in Kandhamal

Kandhamal district, located in central Odisha, lies in a high altitude zone with inaccessible terrain and hilly ranges. The district is mostly inhabited by Scheduled Tribes (STs) who form 51.96 per cent of the total population. A majority of these belong to the Kondh (93.3 per cent), Gond (2.99 per cent) and Kotia tribes (1.05 per cent). The inaccessible terrain restricts development opportunities for these Particularly Vulnerable and Tribal Groups (PVTGs), making it one of the most backward districts of the State with 47.2 percent of households in Below Poverty Line (BPL) category (District Annual Plan Document, 2013-14, Kandhamal). The considerable difference in the literacy rate for males (76.93 per cent) and females (51.94 per cent) shows that substantial improvement is required to retain girls in schools. Girls who drop out of schools are more likely to get married, and as per NFHS-4, in this predominantly tribal district 22.1 per cent women aged 20-24 years were married before 18.

The district administration in Kandhamal has made systematic efforts to take the State mandate forward. A District Task Force (DTF) was formed in 2019 to develop an inter-sectoral and convergent District Action Plan (DAP) by involving all the relevant stakeholders.

The DAP builds on the state Strategic Action Plan and ensures focused efforts at district, block, gram panchayat and village levels. As

part of the process for operationalisation of DAP, the district administration with technical support from ActionAid organised a campaign 'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School'. The campaign was held in schools and involved students, teachers, support staff and volunteers to mobilise action at scale.

Anchoring activities under one umbrella

The DAP uses an integrated approach to strengthen existing structures and promote engagement with adolescents, parents, community members, and government functionaries.

Strengthening district's response to child marriage

- Ensuring proper coordination with line departments
- Conducting regular meetings at district, block and village levels
- Organising intensive campaign for awareness
- Preventing child marriages with community support



Building capacities and strengthening existing structures

A district-level orientation was organised to orient key officials on their role in the prevention of child marriage. Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members, ICDS workers, Self-help Groups (SHGs), Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Auxiliary Nurse

What makes 'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School' campaign unique?

The campaign 'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School' is unique as it builds on the premise that education is one of the most powerful tools to enable girls to avoid child marriage. Girls who drop out are more likely to get married and have children, which further prevents them from continuing formal education. The 'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School' campaign is centered around and delivered through schools. The aim of the campaign is to make schools a vehicle to end child marriages. It promotes girls' retention in schools through regular interactions with students, parents and teachers. The campaign involves working closely with the Education Department in a planned and systematic way, with the shared goal to promote retention and reduce incidences of child marriage.

Midwives (ANMs) were sensitised about the impact of child marriage and legal provisions for its prohibition. The orientation also delved into the district's critical role in preventing child marriages.

Participants in orientation

- Officials from all line departments including District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), officials from Police Department, Health Department, Education Department and block level officials
- Traditional leaders, NGO representatives, CHILDLINE workers

2,100 AWWs trained on

- issue of ending child marriage
- linking adolescents with existing government schemes



Leveraging influence of traditional leaders

Given their role as influencers and decision-makers, traditional leaders were engaged in mass awareness activities, sensitisation and advocacy efforts to change community perceptions and norms around child marriage.

Meetings and discussions were held with caste leaders to inform them about the harmful effects of child marriage and gain their support. The results were promising and many traditional leaders joined hands with the district administration.

- 12 leaders from diversified communities and 3 members of Legislative Assembly, Government of Odisha took a collective pledge on 24 August, 2019
- 25 traditional leaders participated in the District Level Forum of Traditional Leaders in December 2019

“I have asked community members, adolescent girls and SHG members of my own community to take part in the campaign and create awareness. In the monthly meeting, I talk about the issue of child marriage. A resolution was passed in the meeting not to get girls married before 18 and boys before 21.”

Narendra Kumar Sahu

Kula Samaj Leader, Balliguda GP and block

Key DTF members

- Superintendent of Police (SP)
- Member Secretary, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)
- Project Director, District Rural Development Authority (DRDA)
- Chief District Medical Officer (CDMO)
- Project Administrator (PA), Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA)
- District Information & Public Relations Officer (DIPRO)
- Assistant District Medical Officer (ADMO), Public Health (PH)
- ADMO, Family Welfare (F/W)
- District Programme Manager (DPM), National Health Mission (NHM)
- District Panchayat Officer
- District Project Coordinator, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)
- District Education Officer (DEO)
- District Welfare Officer (DWO)
- District Small Saving Officer
- District Social Security Officer (DSSO)
- Chairperson, Child Welfare Committee (CWC)
- District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Child Protection Unit
- District Employment Officer
- General Manager, District Industry Centre (DIC)
- District Programme Coordinator, Mission Shakti
- District Labour Officer
- District Sports and Youth Officer
- District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO)
- District Coordinator, CHILDLINE
- All CDPOs-cum- Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs)
- NGOs - Jagriti, Save the Children, Subhadra Mahatab, Banabasi Seva Samiti, Baliguda, SWATI, ActionAid
- All Block Development Officers (BDOs)



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

Intensifying on-ground efforts

To accelerate change at the community level, the district administration launched a campaign to mobilise adolescents and parents. The campaign focused on the importance of girls' completing education and delaying marrying until after the legal age. Various activities were launched at the village and block levels.

a. Child Rights Gram Sabha: A specific gram sabha on child rights was organised on Gandhi Jayanti and students from government schools discussed the issue of child marriage. In all, **171 gram panchayats** organised these special gram sabhas that integrated child marriage in its agenda.

b. School awareness drive at upper primary and high schools: A massive campaign 'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School' was planned and rolled out in schools.



- *Pre-launch:* Prior to the campaign launch, small meetings were organised in each school to orient students about it and the future action plan.
- *Campaign:* Students were sensitised about the consequences of child marriage through discussions. They created banners and slogans which were

Campaign activities in schools

- Discussions about child marriage
- Discussions about different government schemes and programmes for students
- Oath ceremony during morning prayer
- Debate competitions on prevention of child marriage
- Essay writing and quiz competitions
- Mass pledging, hand-stamping and signatures
- One-act play on child marriage

displayed at prominent places in schools. Students showed their commitment to continue education and stop child marriage through mass pledging, hand stamping, and signatures. Co-curricular activities like debates, essay writing, and quiz competitions were also organised. Wall paintings were displayed on school walls to direct the community's attention towards the issue.

- *Involving parents:* Dialogue was initiated between parents and teachers through School Management Committees (SMCs) to generate awareness on the importance of investing in girls' education and preventing dropouts.

1,668 schools covering **1,52,000** students participated in the campaign 'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School'



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020



“As a result of the campaign in schools, children were sensitised about the ill-effects of child marriage and the problems that arise if married young. They are determined to say ‘no’ to child marriage and to continue their studies. They express that they will motivate others to keep studying and also talk to their parents about it.”

Brahmananda Rout

Block Education Officer, Daringbadi block



“Prior to the campaign, a village level meeting was organised in which the ASHA, AWW, adolescent girls, SHG members, teacher, and ward member participated. Responsibilities were shared among participant for the rally. The slogan ‘No to Child Marriage and Yes to School’ was the highlight of the campaign”.

Hrusikesh Pradhan

Community member, Jhimangia village
G. Udaygiri block



c. Mass awareness activities/events at community level:

Rallies were organised at the village level to garner the community’s support. Frontline workers, SHG members and adolescent girls played a key role in organising these rallies. The village head, ward member and teachers lent their support to the issue by participating. Slogans, posters and banners were used to disseminate key messages to the community.

d. Adolescent groups formed:

A district level forum of adolescents, the Balya Bibah

1,30,658 adolescents and **2,51,328** community members including PRI and village level committee members participated in various programmes

Campaign activities at community level

- Rallies at village and block level
- Counselling parents, family members, adolescent girls and community members
- Home visits by frontline workers
- Community oath ceremony
- Organising cultural events like Ghoda Nacha, Dasakathia, Pala for awareness
- Street plays
- Wall paintings
- Distribution of pamphlets, leaflets, posters to disseminate key messages



Pratirodh Manch (BBPM), was formulated to mobilise the youth in taking the agenda of combating child marriage forward. Adolescents were equipped with information on:

- Negative impact of child marriage
- Legal provisions for prohibition of child marriage
- Existing government programmes for adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage.

Members of adolescent collectives act as vigilant members and intervene if they find any vulnerable girl who faces the risk of child marriage



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

These adolescent collectives are actively engaged in advocacy and awareness raising efforts within their own communities. They conduct regular discussions with their peers, encourage them to continue education and negotiate with parents to prevent child marriage.

“I talk to adolescent girls and their parents about the harmful effects of child marriage. Along with a peer of mine, I have been able to convince parents and adolescent girls during home visits about this. I also tell them about the penalty of one lakh rupees and two years of jail if found guilty of child marriage.”

Geeta Desinayak
Adolescent girl, Lankagada village
Tumudibandha block

- **50 adolescents** participated in Adolescent Collective meeting presided by the District Collector (18 December, 2019)
- **14 Round Table meetings** with CDPOs, Sarpanchs and PRI members organised in different blocks by Antaranga – the youth mobilisation platform in Kandhamal
- **500 youth** at Antaranga Youth Festival collectively pledged to stop child marriage



areas, the campaign was implemented in the entire village. There was high involvement of community members who supported it at the village level. Adolescent girls, parents, SHG members, AWWs, ASHA, ward members and community heads actively participated in it.

Ensuring regular review meetings

Regular monthly meetings were held by AWWs and ANMs at the gram panchayat level to share information about ongoing actions and address issues. The district administration played a key role in bringing diverse sectors together to ensure a coordinated response. Regular review meetings of the DTF were conducted to review the progress of activities against the commitment made in the DAP. These review

Adolescent groups were also constituted at the block level and round table meets were conducted with CDPOs, Sarpanchs and PRI members to discuss ways to prevent child marriages. The ‘No to Child Marriage and Yes to School’ campaign used a differential approach for urban and rural areas. It was led and supported by government officials in urban areas. The urban campaign was localised to specific areas and mainly directed at student participation. In rural

Drawing attention through convergence with other programmes:

- **300** adolescents oriented on the impact of child marriage and menstrual hygiene under Khusi programme
- Child marriage prevention integrated in the VHSND

meetings have supported regularisation of the data collection and consolidation process.

Celebrating success and sustaining efforts

The efforts made by the Kandhamal BBPM in preventing child marriages were amplified and publicly shared to motivate others. The Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSPCPCR) on its 8th Foundation Day felicitated members of the adolescent collective for their significant contribution to stop child marriages in the district.

The district administration foregrounded the issue of child marriage within existing government schemes and programmes like the Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSND). This convergence has kept the agenda of preventing child marriage at centre stage. The district administration also engaged with civil society organisations to synergise and coordinate efforts. Several members from these organisations participated in discussions pertaining to child marriage and shared their commitment to address the issue.



“During VHSND, adolescent issues related to health, nutrition and problems of child marriage are discussed. We inform community members about relevant government schemes and programmes. We also talk about the importance of continuing education and not getting girls married before 18 years.”

Premasila Jhankar

Sarpanch, Kelapada GP, Phiringia block



These collective efforts were reflected in the community’s increased commitment for supporting their girls’ education. Many parents encouraged their adolescent girls to attend school. As a result, the drop out rate of girls in the district has reduced and enrolment has increased. There is heightened interest among adolescents towards education. The campaign encouraged support for girls’ education as an effective method of preventing child marriage.

Challenges

Geographically, a majority of the district is under forest cover with poor road connectivity. The absence of infrastructure made it challenging to implement and monitor the campaign in these areas. Convergence of relevant stakeholders for undertaking such a campaign posed some challenges and required extensive planning by the district administration.

At the community level, initial reactions to the campaign were lukewarm. Initially, some community members did not accept the campaign both due to social norms and lack of knowledge about the harmful effects of child marriage. Regular meetings, counselling and home visits eventually convinced community members about the importance of sending girls to schools instead of marrying them young.

Engagement of adolescents and youth in COVID-19 response

The strong network of adolescents and youth developed as part of the programme was engaged by the district administration in COVID-19 response initiatives, to create awareness and demonstrate safe practices to communities such as social distancing, handwashing and use of masks.

The existing volunteer base, with training support by frontline service providers, was helpful in reaching out to a large number of people with information on prevention of COVID-19. Convergent and collective efforts of departments towards mobilising and training existing volunteers and engaging them

in the COVID-19 response supplemented the efforts of frontline workers in reaching people with information and services.

This has given local communities a greater acceptance of adolescent and youth leadership from their own community. It has also provided these trained volunteers with the confidence and tools needed to engage with their communities in such emergency responses.

The road ahead

The 'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School' campaign has promoted dialogues and discussion on issues related to girls' rights and child marriage. Nurturing youth as leaders in the BBPM has lent momentum to the campaign. The BBPM has successfully stopped 23 child marriages in the district.

- The campaign has **geared up the adolescent engagement process at the block and village levels**. It has provided adolescents with the platform to engage in discussions with community members and develop their leadership skills. Adolescents were given the opportunity to share their learnings, issues, challenges and demands at the State level meeting of adolescent collectives. This has empowered them to take responsibility for change.

- **1,700** cases related to child rights were presented for hearing by NCPCR and OSCPCR at Phulbani
- 3-day State level meeting of adolescent collectives organised between 11–13 November, 2019
- Representation of adolescents from seven districts including Kandhamal
- Leadership building training on Theatre of Oppressed provided to the youth

- The campaign has **enabled village and block level committees to play a proactive role** in preventing child marriages. The database of adolescents has made it possible to map and track vulnerable children in the village. Several officials mentioned that the dropout rate of girls in the district has reduced and enrolment has increased. Ensuring that girls stay in school is recognised as one of the best ways to reduce child marriages or delay the age of marriage.
- The campaign has successfully solicited the **cooperation of traditional leaders in changing social norms**. They have started taking up the issue of child marriage in their monthly meetings with parents and community members. There is increased awareness of the harmful effects of child marriage in the community.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

“Several measures have been taken to prevent child marriage. A record of all adolescent girls and boys is kept which helps us to monitor if any child marriage is about to take place. Counselling is then given to parents, family members and adolescent girls. Committee members also support rescue operation if parents go ahead with the marriage.”

Manaswinee Mishra
DSWO, Kandhamal

Given the positive results, functionaries at the block and village level plan to organise more activities once the COVID-19 situation improves. There are also plans to amplify messages using social media to spotlight champions of positive behaviour and undertake efforts to promote girls' enrolment in higher education.

Since its launch, the programme has successfully engaged critical influencers, decision-makers and key stakeholders to achieve ground level results and meaningful change. It has built the capacities of all levels of the district administration for more harmonised action and accountability. With its coordinated and cross-sectoral approach, the programme has set the stage to reduce and eliminate child marriage in Kandhamal.

“As part of the effort to end child marriage and operationalisation of the District Action Plan, the district administration, Kandhamal initiated the campaign called 'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School' with the support of UNICEF and ActionAid. In this effort, many stakeholders like parents, women SHG members, community leaders, religious and traditional leaders were reached out to and mobilised through different interventions to take action against child marriage and support children towards continuing school education and beyond. This campaign was very significant and relevant to the context of Kandhamal where many people belong to the tribal community and dropping out of school consequently leads to child marriage. The campaign empowered adolescent girls and boys as change agents to bring social transformation. It worked on sharing information with communities on how the traditional practice of child marriage prevents children from enjoying their rights and adversely affects both girls and boys but brings perpetual discrimination against girls. The campaign focused efforts on supporting communities to realise the consequences of child marriage on the growth and development of girls and the risks associated with it. The traditional leaders were facilitated to appeal to members of their own communities to fight traditional practices and support children to continue education.

This campaign was effective in mobilising stakeholders from all sections of society who play an important role in marriage and can influence the community. In the campaign, each stakeholder played a vital role in mobilising communities and informing them about the importance of education and the impact of the traditional practice of child marriage. The campaign mobilised teachers and students from all schools in the district and created a momentum with their strong voice in support of continuation of education of both girls and boys to address the issue of child marriage. Also, the district administration ensured participation of children in the gram sabha on Gandhi Jayanti to share their issues and concerns that prevented them from enjoying their rights as children. In view of the impact of the campaign 'No to Child Marriage and Yes to School', the district administration will continue it by building massive awareness, mobilisation of different stakeholders, engaging traditional leaders, capacity building and skill development of youth and adolescents and strengthening their collectives. The administration will keep working to support children in continuing their education and chasing their aspirations”.

Dr. Brundha D., IAS
Collector and District Magistrate
Kandhamal, Phulbani, Odisha



Department of Women & Child Development
and Mission Shakti
Government of Odisha
Odisha State Secretariat
Sachivalaya Marg, Unit 2, Keshari Nagar
Bhubaneswar, Odisha 751001

unicef 
for every child

UNICEF State Office for Odisha
Plot No. 44
Surya Nagar, Unit 7
Bhubaneswar 751003, Odisha, India
Tel: +91 0674 2397977, 0674 2397980