

Effective Linkages to Government Schemes

through Block Level Children and
Adolescent Resource Centres in Gujarat

A PROCESS DOCUMENT



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Abbreviations

ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
BCPC	Block Child Protection Committee
BRC	Block Resource Coordinator
CAARC	Children and Adolescents' Resource Centre
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer
CLPR Act	Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act
CRC	Cluster Resource Coordinator
DCPO	District Child Protection Officer
DCPU	District Child Protection Unit
DRDA	District Rural Development Agency
G2C	Government-to-Citizen
GRC	Gender Resource Centre
GSCPS	Gujarat State Child Protection Society
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
ICPS	Integrated Child Protection Scheme
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
ITI	Industrial Training Institute
JJ Act	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act
MIS	Management Information System
POCSO Act	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
SBI	State Bank of India
SC	Scheduled Caste
SDM	Sub Divisional Magistrate
SJED	Social Justice and Empowerment Department
SMC	School Management Committee
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TDO	Taluka Development Officer
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VCPC	Village Child Protection Committee



Chapter 1

The backdrop



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The state of Gujarat situated on the west coast of India, accounts for 6% of the country’s total area and 5% (60.38 million) of its population, making it rank tenth in the country. It is one of the most urbanised states in India, with 47% urban

population. However, the eastern tribal belt and the northern dry region remain underdeveloped. The reliance of these regions on agriculture for a living has placed them on a delicate trajectory with erratic income and poor health

indicators. Apart from high levels of malnutrition and poor indicators for education, the tribal belt reports high incidence of child marriage and child labour, especially since many districts witness significant in- and out- migration.

Banaskantha district is located in north Gujarat, adjacent to Rajasthan. The area is marked by strong social norms which give low value to girls’ education and empowerment. The socio-economic condition of households is dire and this is the 8th lowest ranking area in the country as far as girls’ literacy is concerned.

Banaskantha	
3,116,045	total population
1,250	villages
7,02,288	adolescents with literacy rate 89.6%
Sex ratio 936	females per 1,000 males
66.39%	literacy rate
47.9%	women married before 18 years
24.9%	child marriage prevalence and
6.6%	child labour prevalence in 10-14 years age group

Source: NFHS-4 (2015-16)

Chhota Udepur

12,16,846 total population

1,64,934 total child population

87.6% Scheduled Tribe (ST) population

536 GPs and **889** villages

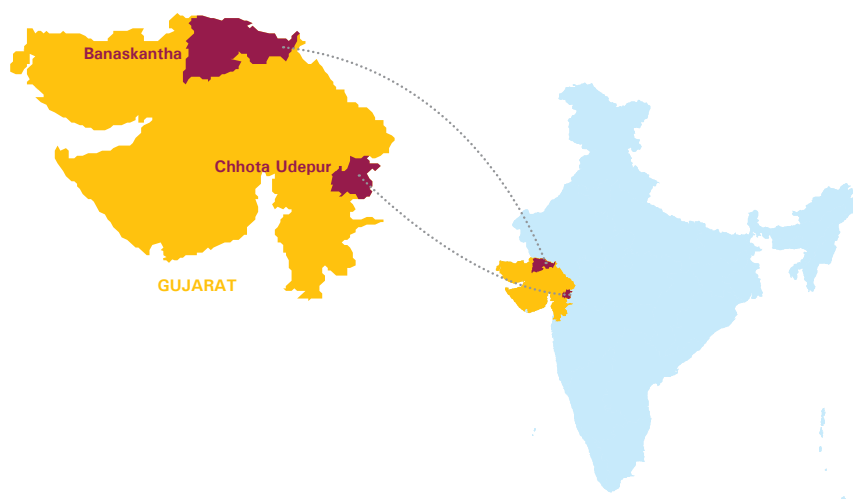
43.51% total literacy rate

Sex ratio **989** per 1,000 males

Source: 2011 Census

Chhota Udepur district borders Madhya Pradesh and has the third largest tribal population in eastern Gujarat after Narmada and Tapi districts. Comprising of six talukas (Sankheda, Kavant, Naswadi, Chhota Udepur, Pavi Jetpur and Bodeli), it sees large-scale out migration. Like most districts which are marginalised and have lower access to services, its development indicators are low, especially those relating to education, health services, socio-economic standards and infrastructure services.

The district has high incidence of child labour with underage children engaged in cottonseed industries, banana plantations, mineral mining and agriculture. Apart from paid work done outside the home, it is common to find young children, especially girls, indulging in unpaid and unacknowledged work within the home (caring for younger siblings, carrying firewood and feeding domestic animals). The high level of migration in the area contributes to children dropping out of school and taking long leaves of absence. Child marriages are seen in nearly all blocks except Sankheda and Bodeli. Girls are perceived as a burden and there is high societal pressure on getting them married to a respectable family even if they are not of marriageable age.



Both districts have the common practice of paying “bride-price” which can be as high as INR 3-5 lakhs which the groom’s family is expected to pay to the bride’s family. This practice creates complications like debt and bonded labour which the groom and new bride must later repay. The practice of “atta-satta” is also prevalent wherein a young girl (who is yet to cross the legal marriageable age) is clandestinely married off while another legitimate marriage is being conducted within the family. The child marriage fails to get noticed since everyone is more focused on the main wedding. Often the child bride is sent off to another city or state and the matter is closed.

These social practices create a web of discrimination and exploitation, compromising the safety and security of adolescents and young adults. Child labour, malnutrition, harassment while going to school, poor menstrual hygiene, ignorance about sexual and reproductive health and feelings of inadequacy while shouldering the responsibility of marriage are the stark issues that both adolescent girls and boys face.

1.1 Rationale for setting up Children and Adolescent Resource Centres at block level

UNICEF has been supporting adolescent empowerment initiatives in Banaskantha and Chhota Udepur since 2009. During the course of intervention, a thorough listing of central government schemes showed that there were 65 central and state government schemes which were applicable for children and adolescents. Field level discussions also showed that most community members in the districts were unaware of these schemes and their application processes and therefore unable to avail of the benefits.

Block level Jan Seva Kendras are government centres which aim to bring e-governance to citizens. These one-stop centres provide Government-to-Citizen (G2C) services to citizens so that they can submit applications for schemes, procure affidavits and certificates, right to information services and

make land revenue and other payments to the government. The major objective of the Jan Seva Kendra is to offer services for the issues covered under the Citizen's Charter and to extend these services to cover issues concerning health, education, agriculture and animal husbandry etc. Jan Seva Kendras

operate from block headquarters, offer wide coverage of services and make services faster, efficient and transparent. The Kendras positively engage all stakeholders including citizens, government officers as well as technology providers for continuous upgrade of facilities, processes and quality of services.

In Gujarat, Jan Seva Kendras provide one stop solutions for 102 public services. However a dedicated set up for children (through their caretakers) and adolescents to avail of services that are specific to their demographic including seeking clarifications to doubts, determining their eligibility status and undertaking the process to access services/benefits related to various schemes. Connecting them from village to taluka to district therefore assumed prime importance in an attempt to increase the uptake of government services. A reliable single window system was needed so that all children and adolescents could be connected to the entire bouquet of services and schemes that were relevant to them.

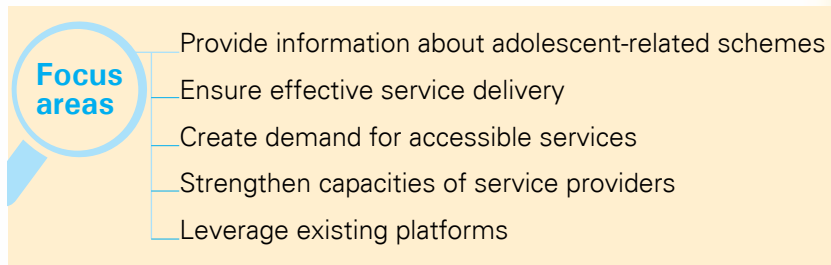
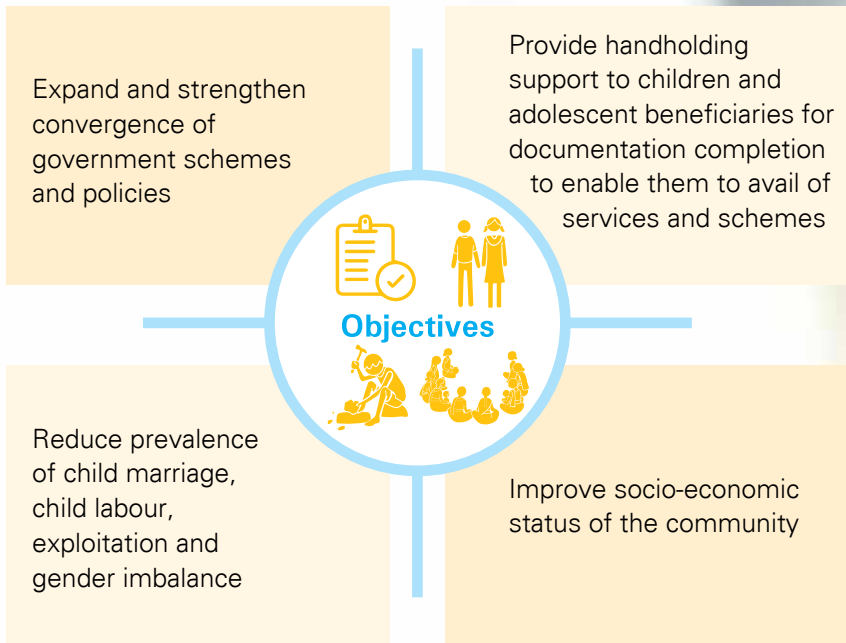
Recognising the fact that there was minimal utilisation of government schemes and services, UNICEF along with state and district officials and implementing partners in these two districts discussed the possibility of creating a dedicated centre at the block level in the form of Children and Adolescents' Resource Centres (CAARCs). The proactive role played by the district administrations of Banaskantha and Chhota Udepur in creating these block level centres was a major step forward. The initiative also responded to the felt need to have interdepartmental coordination and convergence at the block level which could be crystallised in the CAARC model. CAARCs would be facilitated to ensure timely services that could contribute to the development of children and adolescents. Given UNICEF's legacy of working with children and strong presence in the state, the Government of Gujarat mandated them with the task of "Building and Strengthening Resource Centres at Block level for Adolescent Empowerment and Participation" (CAARC) on a pilot basis at the block level for the 2018-19 one-year period. The pilot was implemented by UNICEF and its implementing partners with the help of the district administration. The CAARC block level mechanism was planned in continuation to the previous interventions in Banaskantha and Chhota Udepur to strengthen the system for adolescent empowerment.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

Recognising the fact that there was minimal utilisation of government schemes and services, UNICEF along with state and district officials and implementing partners in these two districts discussed the possibility of creating a dedicated centre at the block level in the form of Children and Adolescents' Resource Centres (CAARCs). The proactive role played by the district administrations of Banaskantha and Chhota Udepur in creating these block level centres was a major step forward.

1.2 Objectives, focus areas and outcomes



Outcomes

- Provide information to children, adolescents and their families on relevant schemes, policies and legislations
- Strengthen delivery of children and adolescent related social protection schemes
- Increase demand and build capacities among community stakeholders including adolescents to ensure smooth access to relevant schemes and services
- Develop and showcase a robust management information system (MIS) mechanism to inform scale up of children and adolescent related services
- Leverage existing platforms under different schemes, programmes and structures to create a children and adolescent friendly environment
- Strengthen capacities of service providers to deliver on the core objectives of CAARC

1.3 Geographical coverage

Both Chhota Udepur and Banaskantha districts were **covered completely** by setting up CAARCs in all the talukas.



Mounting a joint effort to implement CAARCs



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

Right from its inception, the initiative saw strong political will and administrative participation. Under the leadership of the District Collectors and Additional District Collectors, all the departments were informed to support the implementing partners in both districts. All launch functions of

CAARCs at the block level saw active participation of Sub District Magistrates (SDMs), Taluka Development Officers (TDOs), Block Presidents, Sarpanches, Talatis, Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs),

officials from health and social security departments, District Child Protection Officers (DCPOs), state representatives of UNICEF and representatives from villages. Each functionary committed to lending support to making the functioning of CAARCs a success.

2.1 Key steps

To achieve the objectives of the CAARC pilot, several steps were undertaken with the support of District Child Protection Units (DCPUs).

Step 1: Identifying implementing partners and developing a strong strategic focus

UNICEF partnered with Bhasha Research and Publication Centre in Chhota Udepur and Samvedna Trust in Banaskantha to establish and manage CAARCS. A baseline phase was undertaken by the implementing partners in which surveys were conducted in the districts in order to estimate the number of potential rights holders who would be able to access schemes and avail of services through CAARCs. The numbers of orphaned children,



The primary responsibility of both implementing partners was to establish CAARCs and run them effectively so that the pilot could achieve its expected results. CAARC staff were equipped with skills that were imparted through special training, educational visits and workshops. This helped them liaise effectively and coordinate with government officials and community members alike on issues related to children and adolescents.

drop out girls and differently abled (*divyang*) children were estimated and interactions were held with rights holders by the project team in order to gather information that would be necessary to shape the “how to” part of operationalising CAARCs. Outreach and advocacy was undertaken at block and community levels through participation in adolescents’ meetings, Anganwadi meetings, meetings of Cluster Resource Coordinators (CRCs) and Block Resource Coordinators (BRCs), Gram Sabhas and other community level fora. Based on the local challenges and the potential that CAARCs presented, the interventions were planned to achieve the following expected results:

1. Modeling CAARCs within block level Jan Seva Kendras across blocks of Banaskantha and Chhota Udepur districts
2. Strengthening delivery of various social protection schemes focusing on children and adolescents at block and Gram Panchayat levels
3. Increasing demand and building capacities among key community stakeholders including adolescents to ensure smooth accessibility to children and adolescent focused schemes and services
4. Developing and modelling a robust MIS mechanism to inform scaling up of the programme.



Step 2: Getting the project team in place

The human resource allocation was decided after considering the capacity of the implementing partners to cover the villages and blocks in the districts. The team structure of the CAARC pilot was planned based on an understanding of the objectives that had to be achieved. A Centre Coordinator and Outreach Coordinator were appointed to staff every CAARC after interviewing and selecting suitable candidates. The criteria for their selection was their understanding of child rights, government schemes and programmes for children and adolescents, communication skills including community mobilisation and rapport building, and knowledge of the local socio-economic and cultural context and issues. Preference was given to those who had been associated with implementing partners. The Coordinators were trained on their roles and responsibilities, child protection structures at the block and village levels and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) structures. They also interacted with district and block level officials from various departments such as Mamlatdars, TDOs, CDPOs, DCPOs, Extension Officers, officials from children’s homes, Gender Resource Centres (GRCs) at Mahila police stations, District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs), Department of Health and Family Welfare, Social Welfare, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Suraksha Setu, District Udyog Bhawan and Employment Bhawan.



Step 3: Outlining roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders

Under the guidance of the Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, the Director of the Social Welfare Department along with the Programme Manager of the Gujarat State Child Protection Society (GSCPS), Gandhinagar took all the decisions, besides overseeing the implementation and review of the pilot. At the district level, under the overall supervision of the Additional Collector and District Development Officer, government functionaries provided

support and direction to the intervention. The Department of Social Defence and the DCPU besides those deputed from ICPS and ICDS worked closely with UNICEF and NGO partners to induct CAARC Coordinators who looked into every step of the aforementioned process. The District Collector and the Additional District Collector performed oversight duties of the CAARCs being in charge of the Jan Seva Kendras and the responsibilities of the DCPU and UNICEF were outlined.

DCPU

Supporting functioning of CAARCs and accompanying on stakeholder visits

Providing resource persons for training staff deputed at CAARCs

Helping develop information, education and communication (IEC) materials

Distributing forms for sponsorship and Palak Mata Pita schemes

Conducting periodic visits to CAARCs and suggesting improvement

UNICEF

Leading the pilot through its implementing partners

Responsible for organizing, strategising, training and coordination with government officials

Supporting development of IEC materials and developing monitoring and reporting systems.



The Centre Coordinator was tasked with looking after the Centre's functioning and the Outreach Coordinators created demand and visibility by contacting people and providing them information on services, recording their feedback and concerns and following up with them. Their roles complemented each other with both Coordinators counselling community members on the need to send children to school, especially girls. They also advised them on not getting girls married till after they had attained the legal age of marriage, the various aspects of child abuse and on doing everything in their power to protect children of all age groups etc. They followed up through home visits, over the phone and through the Sarpanch and school teachers.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

Critical role of Coordinators in shaping the intervention

Centre Coordinators were available at CAARCs six days a week while Outreach Coordinators went around among community members to provide information to all potential visitors to Jan Seva Kendras (children, adolescents, parents and community members) on schemes related to children and adolescents, including details of the JJ Act, 2015 and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (CLPR

Act), 1986. They guided children and adolescents on collecting forms from concerned departments and helping them fill these online, depositing at the right counters and tracking the progress of applications. They maintained registers and recorded all activities and updates to share in monthly meetings of CAARC coordinators and in block level coordination meetings where stakeholders like AWW,

ASHA, Talati, teachers and nurses were present.

They made it a point to meet village leaders, including Sarpanches and requested them to identify rights holders and link them with CAARCs. They also actively participated in community level government programmes such as the Jan Jagran Sabha (night meeting) and Seva Setu wherein the District Collector introduced them to community members.



Step 4: Meeting district and block officials and getting their buy-in

Implementing partners met the respective District Collectors and briefed concerned officials about the CAARC programme while outlining the support expected from Departments. They also collected information on various schemes and programmes for adolescents and children, and to what extent they were being availed of and utilised. Following this, District Collectors were requested to issue government letters sanctioning office space for the CAARCs in the Jan Seva Kendras and urging departments to extend support in running the CAARCs. The district administration gave the go ahead to the DCPO to print and distribute IEC materials with information on various child and adolescent development schemes and programmes. Simultaneous monitoring of activities was also undertaken.



Step 5: Delving deeper to study existing scenario

Implementing partners studied existing schemes and listed nearly 67 programmes that provided direct benefits to children and adolescents. They also found that most community members were not aware of schemes/were not motivated to avail of them since they perceived the process to be cumbersome.



Key information related to schemes

1. All schemes related to persons with disability are under the purview of the District Social Defense Officer, DCPU
2. The District Social Welfare Department covered all schemes related to SC, ST and OBC categories including the Feeship scheme
3. The state level flagship programmes related to public awareness or 'Jan Jagran' are held under the chairpersonship of the District Collector in several villages (between 7-9 PM to gain maximum attendance). The District Collector and officials from various departments participate in these meetings to directly communicate and receive information.
4. The Palak Mata Pita scheme is a monetary benefit scheme introduced by the Social Justice and Empowerment Department (SJED), Government of Gujarat in 1971 and the amount of sponsorship was increased after 2001. This was launched immediately after the Gujarat earthquake of 2001 which left thousands of children orphaned. The rights holders in these cases received direct cash transfers of INR 3,000 in bank accounts of children till they attained 18 years of age. This monetary benefit helped the child continue education till 18 years and promoted family kinship care of the orphaned child.



The programme team was able to collect, collate and document information on these schemes and programmes and gain clarity on the various schemes and the need for fulfilling the eligibility criteria to access schemes and services.

Step 6: Training and capacity building of Coordinators



Orientation training for Coordinators

A one-day orientation was held for all Coordinators in September 2018 wherein they were imparted detailed knowledge on child protection and adolescent issues and schemes. Further, action plans were made which included selection of institutes for outreach mobilisation, list of meetings to be organized and information to be delivered at these forums, along with mapping vulnerabilities and identifying marginalised regions, castes and tribes. The training curriculum comprised of basic information on child rights, child protection, children related legislations, ICPS, adolescent empowerment programme of UNICEF, role of CAARCs and its team, and documentation and record keeping processes. Facilitators from UNICEF and DCPU imparted knowledge on the JJ Act, 2015, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 and other acts. At the end of the training, participants were asked to share feedback so that course correction, if any, could be done.

Action plans provide direction

Action plans were made at the end of the training session including the following activities that were undertaken after establishing the CAARCs:

- Map schools and institutes by reaching relevant institutions as part of outreach mobilisation through Block Resource Centres, technical and vocational institutes
- Reach rights holders through cluster meetings and interactions with help of ICDS, Department of Health and Family Welfare and Mission Mangalam supervisor at block and district levels



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

The CAARC team is seated at the tehsil so it is possible for community members to visit them and get proper guidance and also file and keep all the required documents there. Otherwise they would have to travel 100 to 150 kms for submitting just one document. Hence, they are happy with CAARCs.

Balbhadra Gadhavi
DCPO, Chhota Udepur district

- Identify issues and share with Block Child Protection Committees (BCPCs) and DCPU departments and keep block officials and implementing partners updated, NGOs and the VCPCs
- Take up children and adolescent related agendas in Gram Sabhas and resolve issues using the platform of Sarpanch and Talati meetings
- Incorporate CAARC agenda in trainings organized by government at block level by collecting training calendars of Health, ICDS, DCPU, Education and other departments
- Disseminate IEC materials gathered from the government, UNICEF and partners and display them at strategic locations to create awareness through increased visibility and promote dialogue
- Reach most vulnerable populations through CAARCs and link rights holders with government schemes while focusing on specific relevant schemes for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations
- Use the network and awareness of frontline health workers to bring most vulnerable populations into the programme

One-day review training at the district level

Trainings organized by the Social Welfare and Child line staff focused on gaps and how these could be addressed. A meeting with district officials was organized to strengthen coordination and convergence. It was decided that Childline staff and CAARCs would work in planned coordination with DCPO.

Operationalising CAARCs at block level

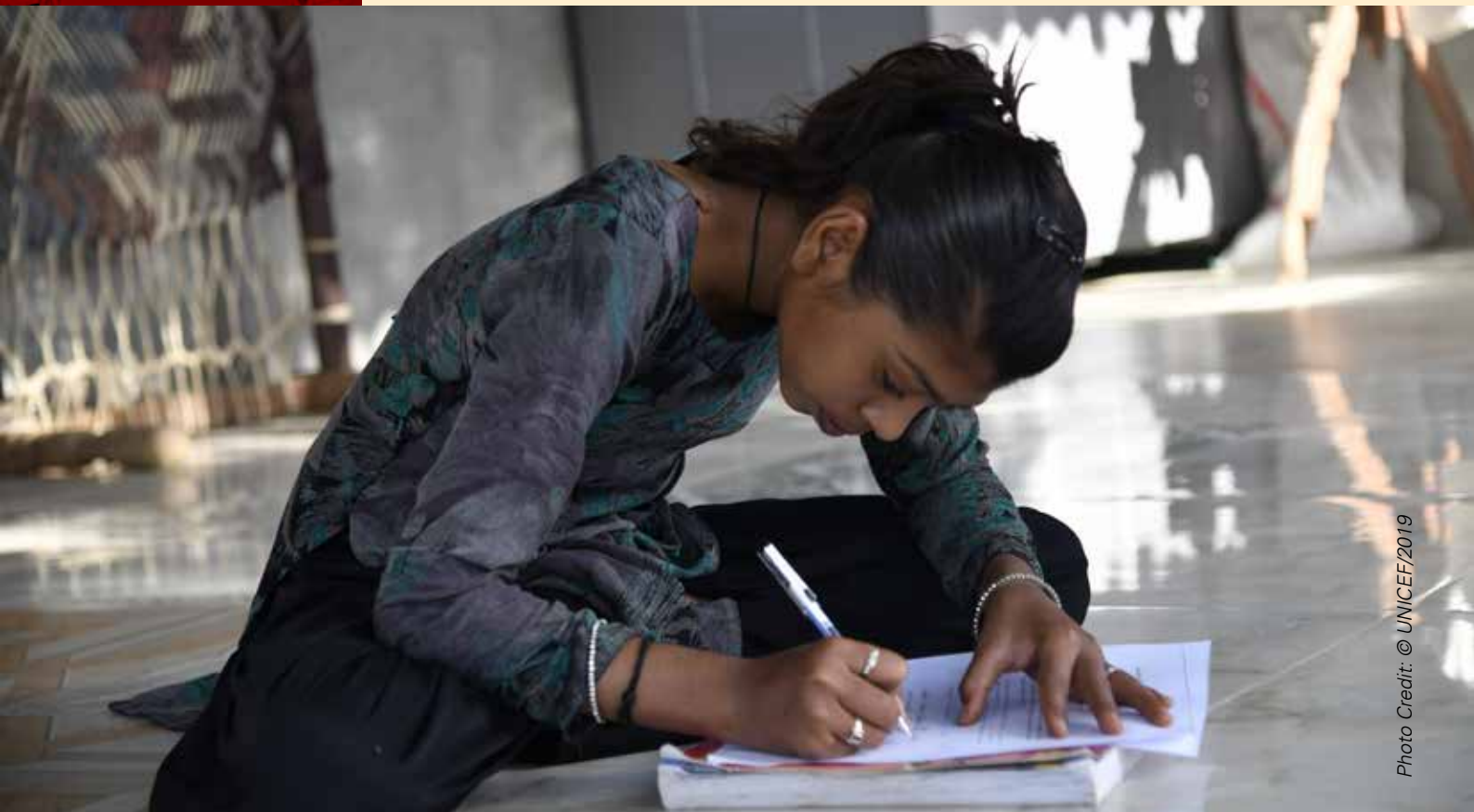


Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

CAARCs began to function across both districts. They were set up in the Jan Seva Kendras from September 2018 and information about the availability of these centres was disseminated through Outreach Coordinators,

district and block levels and the local influencers who had been contacted during the initial phase. Within no time, people began coming to the centres in large numbers with their applications and queries about various processes

and schemes. Additionally, those community members who visited the Jan Seva Kendras for other work like getting Aadhar and ration cards got to know about the new CAARCs and how the centres could be of use to them.

3.1 Reaching out to the community

Interacting with adolescent-specific stakeholder groups

To identify potential rights holders, Outreach Coordinators visited schools and Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), and met PRI members. Additionally, the CAARC teams regularly conducted meetings with adolescent-specific stakeholder groups that included adolescents themselves, teachers of secondary and higher secondary schools, ASHAs, AWWs, Talatis and nurses at the village level. Simultaneously, the Coordinators participated in Gram Sabhas and placed issues related to child labour, child marriage and child protection in the meetings.

Since the CAARC was running with the support of the Collector's office, it served as a major confidence boosting measure making it a lot easier to share information and guidance to rural folk, giving them hope and security. This meant that a lot of the messages would go down well with them and they would be encouraged to adopt desired behaviours that were aligned to the growth and betterment of children and adolescents.

Kalpesh V. Khant
Mamlatdar, Kavant block, Chhota Udepur district

CAARCs are well synchronised with UNICEF's mandate of working towards realisation of rights of children. Empowering adolescents will make them agents of sustainable change. The Centres generate discussions on issues and draw attention to services and schemes that are available for them. These CAARCs are the single window centres where all services and schemes are facilitated to be accessed by every child irrespective of whether s/he is marginalised. This will ensure that services reach the last mile child.

Dr. Laxmi Bhawani
Chief of Field Office, UNICEF Gujarat

Celebrations and special events

Special days such as International Women's Day and Children's Day were commemorated and community events organized to disseminate IEC materials such as leaflets, posters and charts and display them at vantage points for maximum visibility. These IEC materials helped to raise the curiosity levels of community members, provoking them to ask questions which frontline health workers, Coordinators and officials could then answer.

Leveraging government platforms to reach out to the community

Once CAARCs became operational, sessions were held to popularise programmes and schemes of various departments. By creating an interface between departments and community members, the CAARC team used the opportunity to prepare lists of rights holders who wanted to access relevant schemes. Outreach Coordinators also identified beneficiaries at 'Jan Jagran Sabhas' that were held at night at the village level. Every month, Coordinators conducted meetings at the Centres and in villages to increase the number of visitors to the Centre.

3.2 Providing guidance and handholding support to rights holders

Interface and interaction

Because of community outreach and mobilisation, visitors began coming to CAARCs. They were provided with information about various schemes and counselled to understand the nuances of the scheme that best applied to their situation. Coordinators conducted easy-to-understand sessions with different stakeholders like senior citizens (including widows), women (mothers who may have been abandoned, remarried or destitute), girls (adolescents and young girls on the threshold of marriage), health workers (ASHAs, ANMs and AWWs). Key influencers in the village like teachers, principals, Sarpanches and Gram Panchayat members were also sensitised.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

Skill development and livelihood linkages

Livelihood opportunities for young people were also directly enhanced. Teachers of secondary and higher secondary schools in rural areas were informed about schemes related to children and adolescents. They dialogued with rights holders and linked them to available schemes and services.

- Livelihood training programmes for adolescents as per ongoing schemes
- Jan Shikshan Sanstha (Skill Development) provided beauty training
- Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) imparted training
- Sewing courses were popular
- Dantiwada Krushi University and National Institute of Open Schooling provided courses
- ToTs were conducted for school teachers on teaching life skills
- Career guidance was provided to adolescent boys and girls in school so that they could make informed choices about what to study and specialise in.

Establishing linkages with government schemes

The strategies included outreach to tribal areas such as Kavant and Naswadi in Chhota Udepur. Joint outreach initiatives were planned with Childline, DCPUs, Support Persons declared under POCSO Act, 2012 and School Management Committees (SMCs) that helped train teachers on child protection issues and facilitate survivors of sexual abuse to avail of compensation while simultaneously linking children and adolescents with government social protection and welfare schemes. CAARCs began collecting application forms for Palak Mata Pita scheme amongst others and submitting these to DCPUs. Commitments to resolve issues such as child marriage and issues in opening bank accounts were also made.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

Monthly meetings were organized with the project coordinator and Centre and Outreach Coordinators, strategies were developed and planning for field visits undertaken along with lists of stakeholders to be met with. The CAARC teams were guided on file maintenance and systematic recordkeeping of monthly reports, press coverage and

trainings. Coordinators were trained on filling monthly reports and these were consolidated into a single report for UNICEF.

Village-wise registers were maintained with detailed information, thus making it easy to refer back to specific cases. Monitoring at district level set the

pace for systematic roll out of review, feedback and evaluation. The District Collector being the Chairperson of the DCPU was responsible overall for monitoring. All reports prepared by the project coordinator were submitted at district level (including the DCPU) and to UNICEF. Overall, three types of monitoring mechanisms were followed.

4.1 Monitoring meetings of CAARC

Apart from well-planned meetings that were regularly held to apprise functionaries and project staff on progress, the Project Coordinator's good rapport with government officials who were invited to visit CAARCs regularly helped improve services and create an environment of effectiveness.

A well-structured monitoring mechanism was designed and efficiently implemented. Monthly meetings of all CAARC Coordinators were organized with the Project Coordinator to monitor and review work undertaken in the previous month. The Coordinator in turn held monthly meetings with ASHAs, AWWs, nurses, Sarpanches and Talatis, thus bringing everyone on board and making them accountable.

Project Coordinators made surprise visits to CAARC and submitted reports, meticulously documenting decisions taken and updates recorded at meetings. A joint meeting with the Mamlatdar and officials

of other departments served to initiate next steps and action points incorporating relevant feedback.

Monitoring of CAARCs by the DCPU (regular reporting to the Collector by DCPU) was a regular feature. Representatives, including the DCPO visited CAARCs a few times in a month, checked registers and discussed difficulties faced by rights holders.

4.2 Programme monitoring meetings and review meetings

Programme monitoring meetings were held in September in both districts in addition to the Project Review Visit and workshop that was conducted by UNICEF in April 2019.

- Two review meetings of all staff members were held with the DCPUs in September 2018 and April 2019.
- Half-day child protection review meeting organized in Chhota Udepur in November 2018.

During reviews of CAARC functioning undertaken by the District Collector with representation from line departments, detailed discussions were held on how to overcome hurdles encountered in the field and how other departments could strengthen coordination to further improve the functioning of CAARCs. This meeting brought all key stakeholders together at the district level to review existing programmes being carried out by the government and civil society in the arena of child protection and the following key actions were agreed during the meeting:

- Nodal implementing partner to work with Childline for joint outreach activities
- Implementing partner along with DCPU to review CAARCs and streamline applications and scheme approval processes
- Identify teachers and determine whether they need training in life skills counselling to reach children in schools. Work with SMCs at village level to reach CAARC rights holders (children and adolescents) and link them with government social protection and welfare schemes
- Link sexual abuse victims under POCSO Act, 2012 to avail benefits of compensation
- Collect Palak Mata Pita scheme applications and submit to DCPU with proper documentation
- Maintain records to track timely approval of scheme application processes and coordinate with Lead Bank Coordinator to resolve account holder issues in opening joint bank accounts
- Initiate dialogue with public leaders on child marriage, dowry and school dropout issues.

I have participated in two review meetings through the district administration department and can confidently say that good work is happening. If I were asked to rate the performance of CAARCs, I would easily give them a 9/10 rating.

Dr. M.M. Patel
Additional District Collector
Chhota Udepur district

The Centre has shown success in several domains like providing timely information, reporting/recording of important documents and connecting rights holders with schemes. These Centres will continue to function even after the project is officially over.

Sandip J. Sagale, IAS
District Collector, Banaskantha district



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

A project closure meeting with participation from department representatives and UNICEF reviewed progress made and outlined the way forward. Increased turnout at CAARCs was a positive indication of the pilot's success. Government departments were

appreciative of efforts made by CAARC teams at expanding the base of rights holders including those living in remote areas in the two pilot districts. CAARC team members were invited to participate in department level coordination meetings. The Mamlatdar made it

a point to regularly visit CAARCs to observe developments and provide feedback to department officials. Senior officials like the Additional Collector visited CAARCs and made a reference to its activities in his public meetings like the Jan Jagran Sabha and Seva Setu programmes.

5.1 Value addition at policy level

Earlier, in the entire district, barely 50 beneficiaries had availed benefits of the Palak Mata Pita scheme and now with the pilot project, more than 250 beneficiaries have been reached and these numbers are steadily increasing.

Dr. M.M. Patel
Additional District Collector
Chhota Udepur district

Effective use of existing village structures and systems

CAARC team members achieved success in resolving problems of children at the village level by enabling Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs), SMCs, teachers, Talatis and Sarpanches. Educating them and bringing them on board was a major achievement and on that would ensure sustainability since they would continue to advocate for enhancing coverage of schemes and monitor child protection issues even after the pilot had ended.



Strong linkages with social protection schemes

Schemes like Palak Mata Pita had been launched prior to the CAARC pilot but community members were not aware of them. During the CAARC pilot, community members were informed about



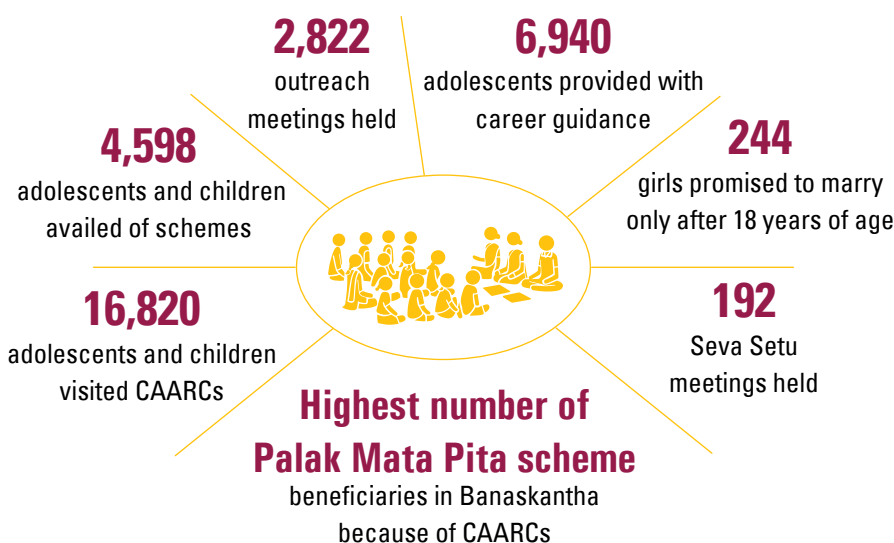
these schemes and helped to access their benefits. Seeing how this helped in increasing the number of rights holders, the Additional Collector invited CAARC Coordinators to support them with other public awareness programmes like Seva Setu meetings and Jan Jagran Karyakrams at the community level and special focus was provided for children and adolescent related issues. The CAARC teams also used Gram Sabha meetings to reach out to rights holders.

Monitoring processes to improve implementation

Regular monitoring, reviews and reporting by DCPUs, implementing partners and UNICEF at all levels enabled CAARCs to function more effectively. Many roadblocks and hurdles were thus managed in time, giving confidence to community members and increasing the number of beneficiaries for schemes such as Palak Mata-Pita, Kunverbai Nu Mameru and Mamta Taruni days' benefits etc.



Key achievements



Documentation completed, bank accounts opened

In Cheesadiya village, 18 kms from the Taluka Centre of Chhota Udepur, Jandubhai, a poor farmer subsisted on a one-acre plot of land with a family of eight members including his late brother's wife and children. The CAARC Outreach Coordinator gave him information about the Palak Mata Pita Scheme and asked him to prepare the necessary documents. Bonafide certificates of the children were obtained from

the village's Primary School and the previous school's leaving/birth certificate along with income documentation. To this was attached his brother's death certificate, Election Card and Aadhar card. Then a joint bank account was opened for Jandubhai and his beneficiaries. Jandubhai put everything on hold to complete the documentation and avail the scheme benefits, including his farming, labour

and animal husbandry. The process that began in September went on till December, which is when he began receiving monthly assistance of INR 3,000 for each of his children and he also got the benefits of the Widower Pension Scheme. Today, he provides information about schemes to those who are physically challenged and those who need funding support for education.



5.2 Programme related success



Improved awareness and increase in accessing schemes

Through coordination with VCPCs, frontline workers and adolescent groups, village level meetings were organized during which CAARC Coordinators interacted with adolescent girls and provided information and guidance on schemes. These adolescent girls then shared the information with other girls in their area and acted as change makers. The invigorated adolescent meetings made them aware about the ill effects of child marriage and early childbearing and their negative impact on their physical and mental health. Girls who dropped out of school were motivated and encouraged to re-enroll in school. More dialogue and sharing on adolescent related issues was set in motion leading to informal support groups being formed. All these efforts helped increase uptake of adolescent-specific services and schemes in both districts.



Creating a distinct identity

CAARCs successfully created a distinct identity in the Jan Seva Kendras out of which they operated. All information and services related to children and adolescents were provided free of cost. The efforts of CAARC teams in maximising benefits to beneficiaries by providing useful and relevant information and support were acknowledged by all stakeholders.



Ensuring end-to-end support

The crucial aspect about the CAARC model was that its follow up was not limited to distribution of forms to rights holders. CAARC teams helped community members along every step of the application process including procuring missing documents, guiding family members to relevant government offices and getting their ID proofs, Aadhar cards updated, names changed and bank accounts opened. Even though Aadhar card updation was not directly under the purview of CAARCs, the team facilitated its finalisation and follow up, thus creating a lot of goodwill in the community.

Feel good factor: Centre Coordinator

People in Kavant taluka of Chhota Udepur district face extreme hardship due to lack of basic health facilities and unemployment. Niruben Rathwa, resident of Bhumaswada village had completed her Masters and wanted to pursue a B.Ed. degree but marriage and the responsibility of raising her children kept her from pursuing her dream. She

joined as Centre Coordinator for the CAARC in Kavant block and helped widows get pension, young girls avail of schemes and guardians claim education support for abandoned/orphaned grandchildren in their care. She was able to get ID cards (ration and Aadhar) for many people which they had previously been discouraged about getting. She also contacted many tribal families personally, even in

remote areas and informed them about the Eklavya Model Residential/Sponsorship/Saraswati Sadhana/Mamta Taruni/Kunverbai Nu Mameru/Guardian Parents schemes. She told parents of adolescents about short-term vocational courses and many adolescents are now self-employed. Niruben feels fulfilled seeing people's satisfaction at having been able to access government's schemes.





Optimising human resources

Planned overall coordination between different levels of the project team was seen throughout the pilot implementation phase. Well defined roles and responsibilities of team members ensured that there was clarity and speedy redressal of issues. The trainings at the start of the pilot and ongoing reporting and monitoring proved useful in bringing all team members to a shared understanding of local issues and in being updated with the latest information. Commitment to the cause added a personal touch as Centre Coordinators and key influencers, including frontline workers at the community level understood the importance of the messages and how the future of adolescents could change and in turn bring prosperity to their homes and communities.

The efficacy of joint efforts of implementing partners gave a major boost to the programme and the inputs received from them also provided deep insights into grassroots operationalisation of government schemes.

Sandip J. Sagale, IAS
District Collector
Banaskantha district



Trusted implementation partners

Having experienced implementing partners rooted in the local milieu helped build strong rapport with community members and produce results. The ability of implementing partners to travel, make house visits in remote areas, bring in marginalised communities who live on the periphery and reach vulnerable children and adolescents brought a spark in many lives.



Dramatic difference in the professional lives of adolescents

The lives of community members began to change as windows of opportunity opened up. Young people educated themselves on their career options and were assisted in finding vocational training programmes to match their aptitude and interest. Handholding support by CAARC teams helped them identify schemes that could specifically benefit them in order to find suitable employment avenues. Of particular note was the increased access to schemes provided to community members belonging to tribal communities and other marginalised populations, those living in far-flung areas.

5.3 Community level change



Earning goodwill

Household visits, community level interactions and discussions at Jan Seva Kendras by the specially trained CAARC staff proved to be a huge motivating factor for community members. People began to gain confidence in the government system and access benefits of schemes as rights holders. There was enhanced positive dialogue around child protection and adolescent empowerment issues.



Families prioritising education

From having a casual attitude or a low priority towards sending their children to school, families now began to realise the value of education. They started looking for other alternatives rather than making their daughters take long leaves of absence to tend to family issues or eventually drop out. The conversations around how education could transform lives of adolescents and open new vistas of opportunity, how adolescent girls could become better and healthier mothers through rejecting early marriage and earning their own income were promoted.

STORIES OF CHANGE

Re-admission in school



14-year old Arvind Thakore, from Nana Kapra village in Lakhni block of Banaskantha belonged to an agricultural family. He lived with his parents, uncle and grandparents. He was not very interested in his studies and

when he failed in Class 8, he wanted to stop studying altogether. During a visit to the vaccination camp at the AWC, he came in contact with Ronakbhai, a CAARC Centre Coordinator. On Ronakbhai's insistence, he

agreed to let him meet his parents. Together Ronakbhai and Arvind's parents motivated him to restart his education and once he agreed, Ronak helped him get re-admitted in Class 9.

Learning online skills

In the interior village of Nakhali in Kavant block of Chhota Udepur district, Kantuben Rathwa completed a course in computers along with her Class 10 exams. This was a rare feat in a village where most girls dropped out before completing Class 8. After attending a few CAARC

sessions and hearing some of the success stories, her father, Nakuliybhai Rathwa had told her for the first time that he loved her as much as his sons and would stand up for her if she wanted to pursue further studies. Her interaction with CAARC Coordinators made her curious about the online world and

how it was a gateway to a fascinating world beyond their village. The Centre Coordinator, Neeruben Rathwa told her that it was unusual for her to take up a computer course but if Kantuben persevered she could set an example for other girls in the community. The young girl did not disappoint.



Giving flight to their wings



28-year old Sonal Rathwa of Dhandhoda village in Chhota Udepur district married Mehul in March 2019. In September, she met Ekta Rathwa, Centre Coordinator of the block CAARC while travelling in a train. Ekta informed her about various schemes which she could apply for at the

CAARC and specifically about the Kunverbai Nu Mameru scheme that provided girls in the ST category with financial aid of INR 12,000 for their marriage. Sonal went to the CAARC where Ekta gave her a sample form and information about required documents and helped her prepare the file for

submission. Sonal submitted the wedding invitation cards from both bride and groom side, her ration and Aadhar cards, school leaving certificate, property tax receipt and the marriage certificate as evidence and soon received INR 12,000. Many girls like her are now following suit.



Empowering girls

In the CAARC pilot, specific focus was given to girls, especially those who were out of school. Once they became aware of their rights, they started voicing their opinions, turning into spokespersons for their families and influencing their parents and siblings. CAARCs helped them gain the benefits of schemes, thus giving them hope to dream of a future where they could have greater agency as they took major life decisions based on their own understanding, aspirations and comfort levels. After earning the appreciation of their families and peers, many of the girls became proactive about supporting other girls to assert for their rights, including availing financial benefits of schemes that they

Skill development for girls, a must for a secure future

Asha lives in a village in Banaskantha with her mother and five siblings. She lost her father when she was in Class 10 and had no choice but to drop out of school and supplement her mother's income. Both mother and daughter worked hard as

agricultural labourers to earn daily wages. The CAARC Outreach Coordinator met Asha at the village AWC. The Coordinator told Asha that livelihood training would soon be introduced in the village for adolescent girls in a new initiative. She enquired further as

she wanted a more stable source of income. She was instrumental in helping the Coordinator by convincing girls who had dropped out of school to enroll for the course. With support from Asha and the AWW, 35 girls registered for the three-month beauty treatment course.



Ending dependence on money lenders

8-year old Mamta Rathwa and 10-year old Kirtan lost their father to illness. Soon after, their mother remarried and left them in the care of her parents. Their grandparents were poor landless labourers who worked on 1.5 acres of non-irrigated land. To feed their family, they migrated to Rajkot to work on farms earning a daily wage of INR 150. Often, they turned to



the local moneylender to borrow money with interest as high as 40%. In January 2019, there was a Jan Jagran meeting in their village. Government representatives, the village head and the CAARC Outreach Coordinator, Bharat Rathwa came for the meeting where there was an orientation on government schemes including the Palak Mata Pita Scheme. A follow-

up meeting was held at the CAARC office wherein forms were filled and submitted in December 2018. They experienced some difficulties like opening joint bank account and getting income proofs but these were overcome and since January 2019, Mamta is getting INR 3,000 on a monthly basis and Kirtan's due amount is in process.

Ensuring significant gains

16-year old Anjali and 14-year old Nisha Panchal from Mota Kapra village in Lakhni block in Banaskantha were students of classes 10 and 11. They lived with their grandparents after their father's death and

mother's remarriage. The school Principal informed them about the scheme for adoptive parents. As they showed interest, the CAARC Coordinators Vaghoba and Bharatbhai made visits to their home to explain about the

scheme and helped them fill the form and arrange for the documentation. Their grandparents plan to use the money which they will receive every month for the education of their grandchildren.



were eligible for. By looking out for each other, they created a sensitive support system which gave them confidence and strength.



Giving people hope

What worked in favour of CAARCs was the dedication and perseverance with which Coordinators worked with families in their blocks to procure documents and make visits to government offices. Earlier even if families were aware of the concerned scheme, the entire exercise seemed so daunting that they would give up without even trying. The dedicated CAARC centres and outreach by CAARC Coordinators changed all that.



Once people saw their friends and relatives getting the benefits of and access to schemes, they also jumped at the opportunity, wanting to do whatever it took to claim what was rightfully theirs. This brought a positive energy and a hopeful attitude in the community.

Dr. M.M. Patel
Additional District Collector
Chhota Udepur district

Changing mindsets and embracing change

From family members to key influencers, frontline workers and adolescents themselves, the attitudes of rights holders towards availing of schemes began to change. The positive dialogue around child protection also contributed to increased awareness and sensitivity towards education, life skills and vocational opportunities for adolescents. Whether it was about giving girls an equal opportunity to study, saying no to child marriage and dowry or giving her a voice in major household decisions, the change in perceptions was evident. Community members also responded in equal measure appreciating the fact that there were now special teams supporting them in ways that would help bring qualitative changes in their lives.



Reducing vulnerability to exploitation

The vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment and demanding social norms drew entire families into debt that often was transferred from one generation to the next. Providing them with financial support through government schemes and facilitating the process was a major achievement of the project. It gave people confidence and also helped them avoid taking loans. Adolescents also became more proactive and aware of their rights while also taking positive steps for better futures.





Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

Most of the challenges faced by the CAARC team related to the socio-economic and cultural aspects that were deep rooted among communities in the two districts.

The systemic issues faced by the team related to existing bottlenecks like delays in getting paper work completed and procuring missing documents from different

government offices. While some of these were overcome, others have been flagged to the state and district officials who will take them up at an opportune time.

6.1 Programmatic challenges

Lack of documentation

It was a daunting task to prepare a list of rights holders who were willing to apply for schemes as they had not prioritised this earlier. After the documentation for rights holders was procured, the process of completing the paper work was undertaken which required meticulous planning. There were times when the application was complete and would yet get stuck for months. The enthusiasm of community members would wane but the Coordinators persevered and slowly began to reap the rewards of their hard work and patience. Another hurdle in schemes like Palak Mata Pita was related to its linkage with a joint account of the State Bank of India (SBI) (in many places there was no nearby SBI branch).

Difficulty in tracking applications

Without a tracking system in place, it was difficult to track approval of the applications processed by CAARC teams. The rights holders and their families had to make repeated visits to government departments to determine the status of their application.

Field level issues

Field problems such as travel to remote areas, difficulties in case management, regressive social norms and customs were impediments that slowed down the progress of implementation and uptake of services.

6.2 Social and cultural limitations

Tribal migration

Large scale migration posed a major challenge in districts. Tribal communities migrating for nearly eight months every year made it difficult for CAARC teams to reach them. Access, distance and reaching out to schools and colleges amidst social norms around education for adolescents, especially that for girls, were significant challenges.

Lack of awareness

Low literacy levels and low internet and mobile phone usage were constraints for community members while navigating the application process. For example, farmers had to go to the 'I Khedut' (I, Farmer) portal to submit an application and avail of the subsidy.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2019

Social norms

Given the prevailing social norms around adolescent agency, adolescent girls were often disallowed from stepping out of the house and hence deprived of continuing their education. It was difficult for the Outreach Coordinator to break that barrier and get families to consider the long-term benefits of educating girls and making them independent. Additionally, child labour and social norms like child marriage and dowry were common, thus posing a barrier to adolescent development, maternal and neonatal health. There were many cases of child sexual abuse in the district but were not brought to light because of the stigma.



7.1 Suggested recommendations

Partnering with district administration

Building on the progress made and awareness levels established, work must continue at the administration and community levels to ensure that the momentum is not lost and adolescent development remains a priority. Towards this end, events and programmes must continue to be organized and more focused IEC materials developed to ensure that there is dialogue and sharing especially in interior areas of the district. An ongoing assessment of the effect of IEC activities during the pilot showed that mid media activities were well received and also provided opportunity for further discussion and debate.

Expanding role of CAARCs

Going forward it will be beneficial if CAARCs become part of the Jan Seva Kendras, get full support of and are ultimately taken over by the government. These block level centres for children and adolescents need to be institutionalised within the existing government system.

Increasing coverage

It was clear that consistent efforts should be made to include community members and strengthen the adolescent development programme, which was the main objective of CAARC. Not only did the activities include issues that directly impact adolescent growth and development but also indirect issues that contribute to creating an enabling environment which is pro-adolescent in action, word

“ Before joining the CAARC, I lacked the confidence to speak in public, especially in front of senior officers. Now I can facilitate community meetings. During the Jan Jagran Sabhas and Seva Setu programmes, I had the opportunity to talk to the Additional District Collector and address the gathering in the presence of the District Collector of Chhota Udepur. I sought an appointment to meet the Mamlatdar and was overjoyed when he said that I could walk into his office any time and that he would be more than happy to help me. ”

Bharatbhai
CAARC Coordinator, Chhota Udepur district

and spirit. This would entail expanding awareness of health workers, school teachers, daily wage workers, migrants, religious leaders, local champions, PRI members, sarpanch and ward members, police personnel and village elders.

Empowering children through active Gram Sabhas

Active and effective Gram Sabhas are necessary and opportunities need to be created for adolescents and girls to speak up at this active forum. Every effort must be made to try and advocate for inclusive and child friendly Gram Sabhas that uphold the rights of adolescents and understand their current needs.

Capacity building of PRIs

A supportive role should be provided to the Sarpanch so that s/he can influence the community and proactively strengthening the education system prevalent at the village/Panchayat. By making the village head a leader who can champion the cause of adolescents, there would be a top-down approach that is in favour of young people.

Creating platforms for recognition

Success stories from the field should be shared and platforms created where the successful efforts of change agents can be publicly acknowledged and awarded. This would have a trigger effect with many more successes being recorded. Mid media can be used for dissemination of these stories.

Improving convergence of services at the block level

District specific interventions need to be developed and strengthened with improved convergence of services at the block level among the various departments. In Banaskantha for instance, more community level intervention is needed so that all children who lost parents could avail of foster parents' schemes and be linked to government welfare schemes. More awareness about Kunverbai Nu Mameru scheme is needed as efforts to prevent child marriage gained ground. Increased coordination with ICDS will entail maximising participation in AWC meetings so that adolescent girls in all villages may avail information on life skills training, vocational training and employment courses and link themselves with different government schemes. Finally, the number of child marriages and child labour cases in blocks need to be reduced through awareness generation for communities, leaders, organizations, Gram Panchayats and youth clubs so that adolescents attend school regularly and dropouts are reduced.

CAARC is already part of the government. The coming together of the two district administrations of Banaskantha and Chhota Udepur helped us pilot the initiative in a unique participatory manner. Adolescents in these locations stepped forward to honestly share their problems, expressing readiness and enthusiasm to access all services and skills through a single window mechanism like Jan Seva Kendras. The same can now be adopted by the government in all districts, thus ensuring that the last mile child gets information about schemes best suited to her/him along with requisite handholding support to access the same.

Lakshmi Bhavani
Chief of Field Office, UNICEF Gujarat



7.2 Conclusion

The CAARC established itself as a successful service provider and catalyst in the arena of adolescent empowerment and child protection. Being located within the government Jan Seva Kendra, there was greater credibility for the initiative. The project was undertaken with the vision of making it sustainable. It established the much-needed link between government schemes and community members with all government schemes related to children accessible through a single window. The challenges encountered during the pilot helped the team realise that it was critical to have a proper strategy and accurate plan before scaling it up. A more structured method of undertaking community mobilisation through social activities and other local networks was therefore important.

One of the most prominent successes of the pilot was the confidence and personal change seen in the Project Coordinators and programme staff post their joining CAARC. There was unanimous agreement that the trainings received were an eye opener for them. They went on record to say that in all their years of service no one had educated them so thoroughly. They now felt confident of talking to officials and helping community members access the benefits of schemes. Many were grateful for the personal growth they had experienced with improved communication, presentation and reporting skills.



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