

# Mobilising Adolescents and their Communities

The adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage programme in Odisha

A Process Document



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## **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.

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# Abbreviations

AAA	ActionAid Association
AE	Adolescent Empowerment
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
BBPM	Balya Bibah Pratirodh Manch
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer
CMPO	Child Marriage Prohibition Officer
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease – 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
DAP	District Action Plan
DCPO	District Child Protection Officer
DPMU-NHM	District Programme Management Unit, National Health Mission
DSWO	District Social Welfare Officer
DTF	District Task Force
ECM	Ending Child Marriage
FLW	Frontline Worker
GPCPC	Gram Panchayat Child Protection Committee
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
JJ Act	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act
NCC	National Cadet Corps
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-government Organisation
OSPCCR	Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights
OSCW	Odisha State Commission for Women
PCMA	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act
PO	Protection Officer
SAG	Scheme for Adolescent Girls
SC	Scheduled Caste
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SHG	Self-help Group
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund



# State and District-level Efforts to End Child Marriage



# Child marriage in Odisha

Odisha is the 11<sup>th</sup> largest state in India, with a population of over 42 million and an adolescent population of 8.3 million. Most of them live in rural areas with only 17 per cent living in urban regions. Nearly 21 per cent of the population in the state is tribal. The state of Odisha is entirely committed to ending child marriage. It has witnessed a marked decrease in the prevalence of child marriages in the last decade. As per the National Family Health Survey – 4 (NFHS-4) 2015–16, 21.3% 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%, the continued differential prevalence of the practice across districts is a cause for concern.

Social and economic pressures caused by poverty, age old traditions, illiteracy and practices such as dowry are the key drivers of child marriage, which drive families to opt for early marriages for their daughters. Adolescent girls are forced to drop out of school and marry early. Early marriage results in early motherhood further compromising the maternal and infant health. This vicious cycle denies adolescent girls the opportunities for building their agency and empowerment.

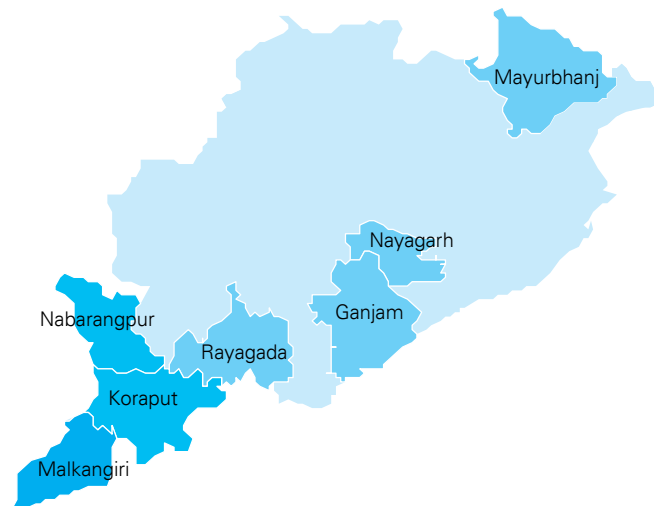
## State level efforts to end child marriage

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, 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.

## Districts in Odisha with more than 25% child marriage prevalence



More than half the districts in Odisha have a child marriage prevalence rate of more than 20%. Child marriages are reported to be the highest in Malkangiri at 39.3%, followed by Nabarangpur (37.9%) and Koraput (34.7%). The four other districts reporting more than 25% child marriage are Rayagada, Ganjam, Nayagarh, and Mayurbhanj.



*'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.**



## Key highlights of Odisha Prohibition of Child Marriage Rules, 2019

- Additional powers granted to Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) to grant them more authority for preventing child marriage. Powers and functions of Chief CMPO in the State were spelt out clearly for coordination with other departments and awareness building.
- District Collectors given responsibility of framing and implementing annual DAPs to prevent child marriage and ensure coordination between departments and key stakeholders for implementation of the PCMA, 2016 and Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (JJ Act), 2015.
- District Collectors assigned responsibility of consolidating CMPO reports to prepare quarterly district reports and then sending these reports to the Chief CMPO.
- District Collectors conferred with power to execute injunction under section 13 (5) of PCMA, 2016 in case of emergency, when there is no scope to move the Court.
- OSCPCR conferred with the power to monitor child welfare activities and implementation of laws.

The Department of Women and Child Development (W&CD) and Mission Shakti (MS), Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSCPCR), UNICEF, UNFPA and Mr. Ghasiram Panda<sup>1</sup> are members of this committee. The Odisha Prohibition of Child Marriage Rules, 2019 were resultantly formulated with specific amendments.

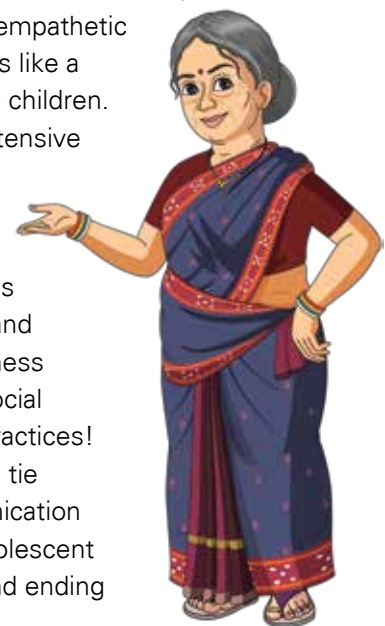
The committee has wide representation, which includes Departments of Schools and Mass Education, Higher Education, ST and SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare, Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water, Home, Health and Family Welfare, Sports and Youth Services, Skill Development and Technical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

The State also launched a multi-sectoral Strategic Action Plan (SAP) (2019–24) to ensure coordinated efforts by multiple departments to eliminate child marriage. The SAP is a time-bound five-year plan with a comprehensive approach to accelerate actions through coordinated efforts to eliminate child marriage. It aims to accelerate the efforts being made towards ending child

marriage and make the state child marriage-free by 2030 through cohesive and convergent efforts of various government departments, civil society and international agencies to reach out to communities and families to uproot this social practice. The High Level Committee

### 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 helps tie together communication efforts around adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage.



<sup>1</sup> Programme Manager at ActionAid

tasked district administrations to develop contextualised District Action Plans (DAPs) for smooth implementation of the state SAP.

Departments such as Police, Education, Skill Development and Technical Education and the judiciary will play a pivotal role in this SAP. The Plan envisages strong linkages among all stakeholders and coordination across all tiers of governance, with synergistic and coordinated efforts by multiple departments to achieve the goal of ending child marriage. UNICEF and UNFPA are providing technical assistance to the Government of Odisha in the implementation of this plan.

Harmonising and amplifying all efforts, the state government launched *Advika, Every Girl is Unique* on October 11, 2020, on International Girl Child Day with the primary objective of maximising the impact of all schemes targeted across age groups among adolescent girls. *Advika, Every Girl Is Unique* launched by the state government in partnership with UNICEF and UNFPA, aims to empower adolescents, both in and out-of-school, from rural as well as urban areas, through building their life skills, teaching them the value of nutritious food and informing them about their rights related to child marriage.



# Consolidating efforts for prevention of child marriage



The adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage (AE and ECM) programme in Odisha was started in February 2019, covering six districts – Koraput, Rayagada, Ganjam, Nayagarh, Kandhamal and Dhenkanal. It has now been extended to nine more high focus districts<sup>2</sup> with high child marriage. UNICEF, UNFPA and AAA are working closely with Department of W&CD and MS at the state level and with district administrations for effective implementation of programme activities to achieve the programme objectives.

The mandate of the AE and ECM programme in Odisha includes:

- Supporting formation/strengthening of District Task Forces (DTFs) on child marriage and adolescent empowerment
- Supporting development of DAPs, ensuring participation of all concerned departments with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities
- Supporting in outlining monitoring mechanisms

<sup>2</sup> Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Gajapati, Boudh, Subarnapur, Deogarh, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Balasore

- Supporting development of platforms for adolescent engagement and strengthening of new and existing adolescent groups
- Ensuring that adolescents avail services of programmes and schemes targeted for them
- Ensuring enhanced community participation.

## Capacity building of government functionaries

There has been a specific focus on building capacities of officials from various departments for prevention of child marriage. District administrations have organised trainings and orientations for key district officials on PCMA, its legal provisions and their roles and responsibilities in implementing DAPs on child marriage and adolescent empowerment. Participants in these district-level trainings included officials from all line departments including Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs) who are acting Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) in districts, District Child Protection Officers (DCPOs), officials from Police, Health and Education departments, as well as block level officials.

Orientation workshops have also been organised for non-government organisations (NGOs), women’s groups, Panchayat leaders, village-level traditional leaders, magico-religious practitioners (*Disaris*) and sorcerers (*Gunias*) to ensure their engagement and ownership in efforts to prevent child marriage. UNICEF, in partnership with AAA has supported the district administrations in conducting these trainings and orientations. Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) have also been oriented on child marriage in sector meetings.

### Forming and strengthening DTFs and developing Action Plans

As per the programme mandate, DTFs were formed in districts that did not have them. In districts where DTFs were present, they were strengthened or reformed as per requirement. The focus was on ensuring departmental convergence through adequate representation of all concerned departments. Regular meetings helped departments gain clarity on their specific roles, based on which they developed departmental action plans. These plans were reviewed by the district administration and then compiled into one DAP. UNICEF and AAA provided technical assistance to support the districts in developing their action plans. DTF meetings became an important forum

for departments to discuss convergent efforts to combat child marriage. Representatives of CSOs and CHILDLINE also participated in these meetings.



#### Process of DAP formation

- Format for developing DAP shared with all departments
- Orientation of district officials on convergent approaches and explaining their roles and responsibilities towards developing the action plan, its operationalisation and periodic monitoring
- Presentation and discussion on the DAP and action plans developed by different departments
- Approval of minutes and DAP by the District Collector/Magistrate and sharing with concerned departments
- Operationalisation of DAP by issuing circulars and organising outreach programmes
- Periodic monitoring of programme and compilation of data by concerned departments.



#### Some convergent actions planned and included in DAPs

- Developing special programmes to engage children through existing programmes and mobilising resources of various departments
- Creating a database of adolescents between 11–18 years, and tracking and linking them with various services to reduce vulnerabilities related to child marriage
- Extending counselling services and life skills education to support adolescents in coping better with vulnerable situations
- Tracking school dropouts, facilitating escort allowance and skill building of out of school adolescents
- Creating a large-scale awareness campaign through SHG members, frontline workers (FLWs) and adolescent platforms
- Orientation of FLWs on the impact of child marriage and the existing legislation
- Promoting Child Friendly Police Stations
- Periodic review of work by the concerned departments
- Consolidation and maintenance of a database

## Reviewing progress

- Monthly review meetings are being organised by the District Programme Management Unit, National Health Mission (DPMU-NHM) to assess the progress of activities conducted to reach out to adolescents through different services.
- District-level monthly reviews of implementation progress are being undertaken with Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) workers, including District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs), DCPOs and CMPOs.
- Sector-level meetings are being used to review the work of AWWs and Supervisors.

### Some district-level initiatives

- Ganjam district – Nirbhaya Kadhi programme
- Koraput district – Aparajita campaign
- Kandhamal district – ‘No to Child Marriage and Yes to School’ campaign
- Subarnapur district – Child Marriage Free Villages campaign

District administrations operationalised their DAPs in 2019 through special programmes and campaigns. Other districts too designed special campaigns around the theme of prevention of child marriage. These campaigns specifically focused on mobilising community leaders,

community members and engaged adolescent boys and girls. Every district administration aligned its priorities with the state-level commitment and reached out to the community and adolescents through special efforts.

Though these campaigns and programmes were developed as time-bound activities, with technical support from UNICEF and AAA, today they are owned by the District Administration as action oriented continuous campaigns.

[Section 2 of the document elaborates on some of the successful campaigns.](#)

## Bringing synergy between adolescents and community members through interface and engagement

### Formation of a traditional leaders' forum

Traditional leaders have an important place in the social fabric of Odisha and wield significant influence in bringing socio-behavioural change. The programme recognised them as effective agents of promoting leadership among adolescents and building their agency to challenge cultural practices that encourage child marriage. They are also able to monitor child marriages.

Consistent and long-term engagement was done with traditional leaders to build their commitment against child marriage. Some of these leaders include: Jati Samaj like Paudhibhuyan from Sundergarh; Gadba and Kondh from Koraput; Soura from Ganjam; Tailik Baishya and Rangani



## Participation from 40 traditional leaders

- Koraput district: Parenga Paraja and Mulia *samajs*
- Kandhamal district: Kui, Brahman, Christian, Rangani, Sundhi, Kumbhar and Kaibartya *samajs*
- Nuapada district – Paharia and Bhunjia *samajs*
- Dhenkanal district – Juanga and Munda *samajs*
- Ganjam district – Gopal *samaj*
- Rayagada district – Jatapa and Tailika *samajs*
- Nayagarh district – Barik *samaj*.

20 traditional leaders who took proactive steps in their samaj to address children's issues were felicitated during the state-level meeting of traditional leaders.

from Kandhamal; and Jatapu Dora and Soura from Rayagada. Every district level initiative and campaign recognised their role and included them as one of the influencers in the campaign activities.

At the state level, a two-day forum of traditional leaders was organised by AAA with support from UNICEF Odisha in November 2019. Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSCPCR) and Odisha State Commission for Women (OSCW) participated in this meeting. It saw participation from as many as 40 traditional leaders from different communities. Another important step taken during this meeting was the formation of a state level committee with members from various traditional *samajs*.

These traditional leaders participated in discussions on their role in ending child marriage. They were oriented on the PCMA and legislation for prohibition of child marriage, government mechanisms and structures for child protection.

### Formation of Balya Bibah Pratirodh Manch

Active engagement of adolescents was sought by district administrations with outreach through offices of District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) and frontline workers such as Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), AWWs and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs). District-specific campaigns mobilised adolescents and elicited their participation in building a child marriage-free society.

District-level platforms of adolescents who said 'no' to child marriage were formed in some districts including Ganjam, Kandhamal, Subarnapur and Dhenkanal. These platforms have been appropriately named '**Balya Bibah Pratirodh Manch (BBPM)**'.

District administrations encouraged discussions among members of the Manch on strengthening the forum, mobilising other adolescent members from the community, building their awareness and encouraging them to pursue their dreams. These Adolescent Ambassadors were invited for dialogues with key government officials such as CDPOs, Supervisors, members of Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), health officials and DSWOs to put across their points and recommendations.

BBPM provides support to the district administration by:

- Facilitating formation of adolescent groups at block, GP and village levels to involve other adolescents
- Supporting frontline workers in the process of tracking adolescents and making coordinated efforts to prevent child marriage
- Engaging with self-help groups (SHGs) to create awareness in the community
- Providing peer support to fellow adolescents.

BBPM members were felicitated by the district administrations. They also helped develop communication material such as slogans on the ill effects of child marriage.





In Ganjam, the district administration felicitated **25** adolescent boys and girls who said 'no' to child marriage. They were given certificates of appreciation.

- In a group work session, adolescents shared their aspirations of leading lives with equality, freedom and protection, and called for opportunities to realise their potentialities.
- They developed slogans in Odia for use in the campaign against child marriage.

### Outreach to adolescents

Outreach to adolescent boys and girls was done through the DSWO office and BBPM members. Further, at the village level, AWWs and other frontline workers built their awareness on child marriage and adolescent empowerment, and encouraged them to participate in community-based activities. The specific focus of these efforts was to link adolescents to various services related to health, education and skill

building. Through such interactions, adolescents were provided counselling services to help them cope better with the situations that affect them and, where appropriate, link them with suitable government schemes/programmes/services for their welfare.

The unique and innovative approaches designed by district administrations kept a specific focus on outreach and engagement with adolescents



### State-level meeting of adolescent collectives

A 3-day state-level meeting of adolescent collectives was organised in November 2019, which brought together 40 adolescent boys and girls from seven districts of Odisha (Ganjam, Nayagarh, Koraput, Kandhamal, Dhenkanal, Rayagada, Khurda). These adolescents underwent a leadership building training on 'Theatre of the Oppressed'.

The state-level meeting also facilitated strengthening of the state-level BBPM with inclusion of more members and reformation of state-level committees. Youth champions were encouraged and provided a platform to share their learnings, issues and challenges, as well as their needs and demands.



through various campaigns and activities, in schools, through special Gram Sabha sessions and the outreach programme by frontline workers.

Platforms of girls and boys, along with mixed platforms were identified in the districts for further engagement with adolescents. Engagement through ICDS and Biju Yuva Vahini

gained precedence since they have the largest coverage. The district administrations covered adolescents in other platforms too through existing programmes and campaigns. A total of **14,96,773** adolescent girls and **22,45,161** adolescent boys were engaged with and their capacities built in the adolescent empowerment and prevention of child marriage programme through all these platforms.

**Actions taken in six focus districts (Koraput, Kandhamal, Ganjam, Nayagarh, Rayagada and Dhenkanal) to build awareness on legal provisions for prohibition of child marriage among community leaders, members and adolescents (Till Dec 2019)**

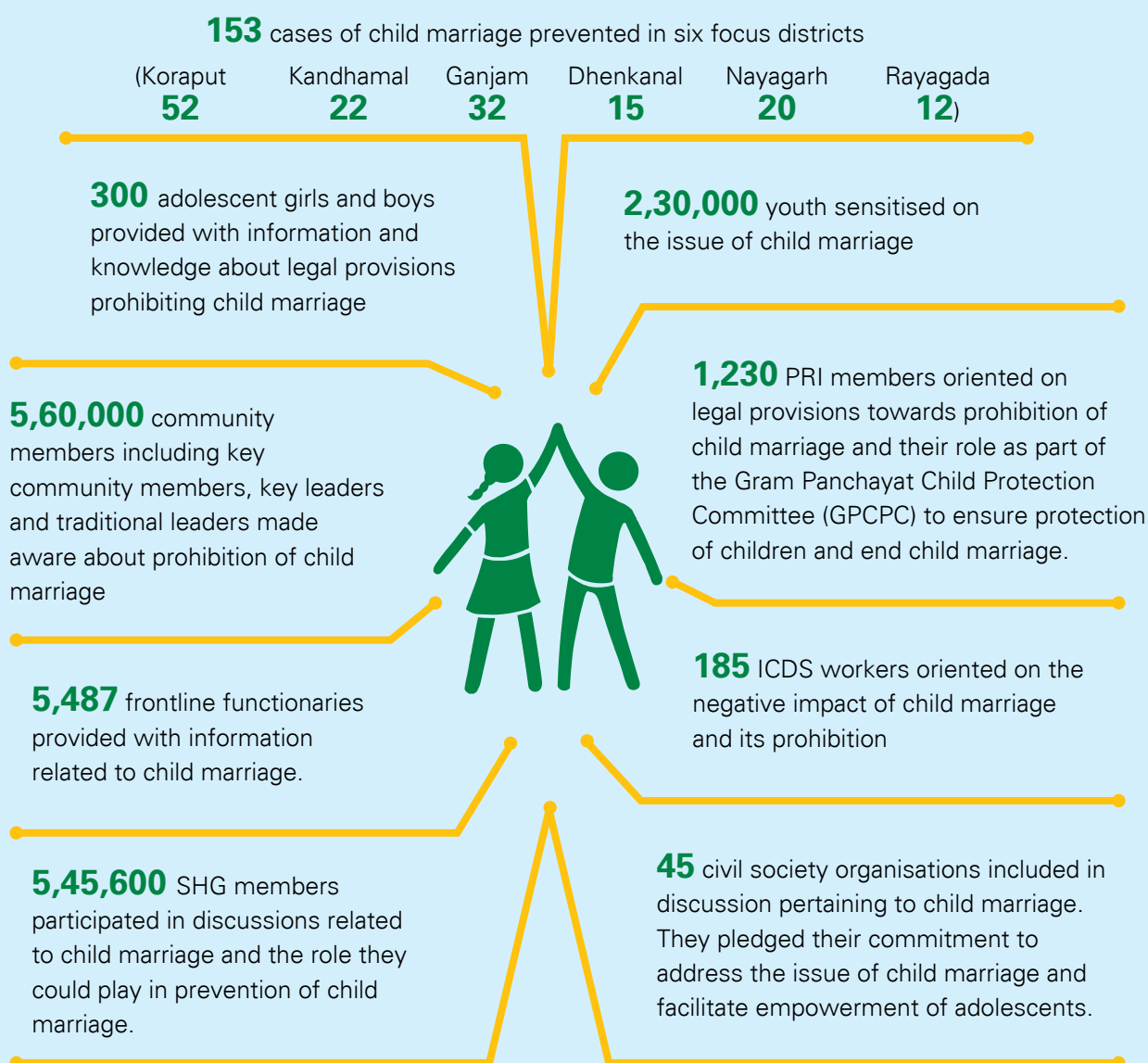




Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

### 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 administrations 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. Thus, 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.

These initiatives have given local communities a greater acceptance of local adolescent and youth leadership. It has also provided these trained volunteers with the confidence and tools needed to engage with their communities in emergency response.



### Young volunteers leading COVID-19 response

The district administration in Koraput mobilised and engaged:

**1,30,560**

Aparajita campaign adolescents and youth

**2,000**

Biju Yuva Vahini volunteers

**1,000**

NYKS volunteers

**50**

National Cadet Corps (NCC)

**100**

volunteers from civil society organisations (CSOs).

# Learnings

- The highest political commitment of the state on ending child marriage and adolescent empowerment is key for implementing a sustainable model of adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage.
- Development and rolling out of the SAP not only brought the focus of all districts on ending child marriage and adolescent empowerment but also paved a way for the districts to customise strategies based on their local context in their DAPs.
- Issuing letters from the state level and capacity building of key state and district level functionaries brought clarity in the reporting mechanism from district to state levels.

Frequent transfers of district officials had an impact on the progress of the programme, but also became an opportunity to learn some valuable lessons. The programme team intensified their efforts towards building a rapport, coordinating with the authorities and orienting them on the process of formation of DTFs and DAPs and continuously reiterated their role and responsibilities. This helped in strengthening the commitment of district officials. Department officials began to take onus and collectively work towards reducing child marriage in their districts.

# State and District-level Campaigns and Interventions





# Advika, Every Girl Is Unique

## State efforts to empower adolescent girls

Over the years, Government of Odisha has made considerable efforts to improve the condition and well-being of adolescent girls, through state-sponsored schemes and programmes. As per estimates there are 7.5 million adolescent girls living in the state. Some of the state-wide initiatives include:

Bicycle programme for girls attending class 10 and provision of hostels under the Adarsh Vidyalaya Scheme to break the cycle of school drop outs due to lack of safety and accessibility to schools in rural areas

- Nutritional programmes under Central government schemes such as Kishori Shakti Yojana (11-18 years) and Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) for school drop-outs between 11-14 years, implemented through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) under ICDS
- Skill development programme called Sudakya Scheme was initiated in 2017 to encourage adolescent girls to join technical institutes after completing class 10

- District-specific programmes such as Aparajita and Nirbhaya Kadhi have been initiated under the five-year state SAP to end child marriage.

While the efforts of Government of Odisha have had a positive impact on the education, health and general well-being of adolescent girls, most nutritional and non-nutritional schemes and programmes were targeted at specific age groups among adolescent girls and in select districts of the state.

## Positive results

✔ **Dropout rate** of girls at secondary level **reduced to 29%** in 2016-17 from 50% in 2014-15

✔ **20-point decline in child marriage** in a decade to nearly 27% in 2015-16 from 47.5% in 2005-06 (*NFHS-4 and NFHS-3*)





# Odisha's renewed commitment towards the well-being and empowerment of adolescent girls

## Launching Advika to maximise state efforts towards empowering adolescent girls

The state government launched 'Advika, Every Girl Is Unique' on October 11, 2020, on International Girl Child Day with the primary objective of maximising the impact of all schemes across adolescent girls in the state.

'Advika, Every Girl Is Unique' was developed and launched by the state government in partnership with UNICEF and UNFPA. It targets all girls in Odisha in the 10-19 years age group from rural and urban areas, in and out of schools. It renews commitment towards the empowerment of adolescent girls through education and life skills. The programme will

'Advika' means *unique*. The programme aims to educate and empower every girl child who is unique and should be able to make her own decisions regarding her life.

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.



**I wholeheartedly support and appreciate the Advika programme. I am confident that the initiative will reach out to and benefit several families. In today's concerning social scenario, I hope and believe that it will bring about a significant change. It will enable girls to fulfil their dreams and not neglect them. It will provide girls with a new perspective to life and their future. We can include all adolescent girls from rural and urban areas under one umbrella. The pocket book, calendar and videos have been launched keeping in mind that discussions on important topics following the calendar will be discussed in the Saturday meetings. The programme aims at empowering girls to understand and practise life skills in their own lives thereby preparing them to face all odds, giving them courage, empowering them to voice their opinions and live on their own terms.**

**Smt. Tukuni Sahu**

Hon'ble Minister, DWCD and MS, Odisha

**Women and girls have always been at the centre of our state policies. By launching Advika, we hope to make a positive impact on adolescent health, nutrition and skills as well as protect adolescents from all kinds of violence. When they become mothers in the future, we will be able to see a difference in them because we would at least have prevented child marriage and ensured good nutrition for them in our efforts to tackle the challenges that come with young motherhood and early pregnancies.**



**Smt. Anu Garg**

Principal Secretary, DWCD and MS, Odisha



Mission Shakti will be a very big part of the Advika programme. Our SHGs have a very big role to play as mentors, monitors and counsellors in the community for girls and boys. Since most rural and urban women are part of the SHG network, every week they can find out who has dropped out of school and why and take steps to bring these girls back. Child marriage can also be monitored by the SHGs. SHGs can also monitor adolescent girls in tribal schools, hostels and institutions on a weekly or fortnightly basis. They can talk to the girls and support them to speak about issues that they are afraid of bringing up or reporting.

**Smt. Sujata Karthikeyan**

IAS, Commissioner-cum-Director, Directorate of MS, Odisha

In line with the Mother and Child Protection (MCP) card, the Department of W&CD and MS is introducing the Kishori Card which will have information on weight, height, body mass index (BMI), haemoglobin level, consumption of Take Home Ration (THR), Iron Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation, referral and other services. It will also indicate important milestones in an adolescent girl's life. Similarly, the Kishori Kalendar which is being released today will be used as a guide and will have reference topics for weekly discussion in the assembly of adolescent girls at the AWC level. Skill development is also being focused on by linking government schemes for 17-19 year old adolescent girls to empower them financially.

**Shri Aravind Agrawal**

IAS, Director, ICDS and Social Welfare, DWCD and MS, Odisha

Mission Shakti is empowering and transforming the lives of over seven million women in the state. Advika comes as a fitting complement to Mission Shakti by addressing the very specific needs of adolescent girls who are often neglected traditionally and not thought of as a priority. I am really convinced that dedicated programmes such as Advika, can play an instrumental role in empowering adolescent girls with life skills and enhancing agencies so that they are informed and consciously involved in decisions regarding their bodies, their lives, and their world. The meaningful engagement of girls at all levels fulfils their right to participation and can catalyse their leadership.

**Smt. Argentina Matavel Piccin**

Representative, UNFPA, India and Country Director, UNFPA, Bhutan

Advika is really a noble way of bringing all the departments together to make the best impact for young people. Today we are here to renew our commitment to adolescents in Odisha, especially the young girls. We are committed to translating it into actions and all the sectors we work in will come together for that. UNFPA and UNICEF are really looking to partner with the state government even stronger and we look forward to continuing to support the state government's amazing work. I would also like to congratulate the government on the COVID-19 response, in ensuring that essential services, especially psychosocial care, reaches children and adolescents in these very difficult times.

**Dr. Yasmin Ali Haque**

UNICEF Representative to India



## Key activities

### Sensitisation and training of functionaries

Training is imperative to set the programme in motion.

- *State level sensitisation and roll out plan:* A virtual training for district functionaries on sensitisation and the roll out plan for Advika was organised. All 30 districts then identified master trainers to conduct training in cascade mode for field functionaries such as supervisors and AWWs.
  - *State Trainings of Master Trainers (ToMTs):* The first 2-day state training was conducted virtually on 15 and 16 December, 2020 on adolescent empowerment tools, facilitation skills and the uses of Advika resources. Master trainers from all districts will be given quarterly training on various sessions/themes of the Kishori Kalendar
  - *Project and sector level training:* Master trainers will conduct monthly training for supervisors at project level. The supervisors will then train AWWs in monthly sector meetings.
- Every Saturday, adolescent girls in the village gather at AWCs
  - Two girls assigned as Sakhi and Saheli (peer leaders) to assist AWW in disseminating key messages and information to families and communities
  - AWW holds discussions to engage adolescent girls as per the Kishori Kalendar
    - ◆ Weekly theme-based sessions using AWW pocket book, Kishori Barta, FAQs
    - ◆ Viewing sessions of short films and animated series
  - AWW engages with adolescent boys in separate sessions and identifies peer volunteers who can set positive examples to challenge gender stereotypes and harmful social norms.

### Community level implementation

After being trained in a cascade mode, the AWWs will hold weekly Saturday sessions with adolescent girls on 'Kishori Diwas' as per a specified Kishori Kalendar.



## Key stakeholders



Women's self-help groups (WSHG)



Gram Panchayat Child Protection Committee (GPCPC)

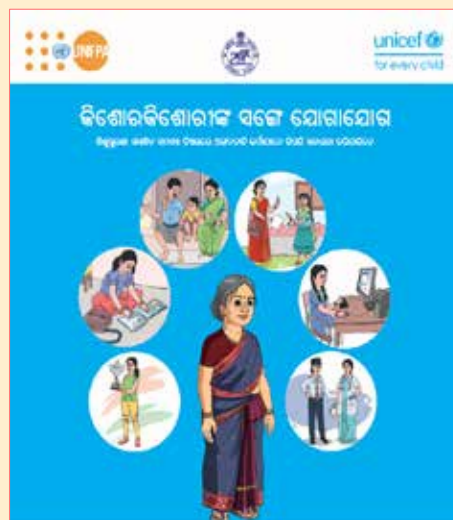


Peer leaders

## Resource package



**Kishori Barta** is a booklet with key messages on various adolescent health, nutrition, personal hygiene and protection topics etc. to engage effectively with adolescents during weekly Saturday sessions.



**AWW pocket book** is an illustrative book will guide AWWs on communicating with adolescents on child protection issues such as child marriage, child trafficking, child sexual abuse, and child labour. It also includes information on gender equality, nutrition, health, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and online safety. It helps AWWs to hold separate gender sensitisation sessions with adolescent boys.

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**Kishori Kalendar** is an annual calendar that describes specific month-wise topics based on which AWWs hold weekly sessions with adolescents. Each month-specific theme is discussed followed by an audio-visual spot/comic/tool etc. The themes include: nutrition and anaemia; know your rights and related legislation; gender-based violence; adolescent reproductive and sexual health; relationship and marriage; financial literacy, education and skill development



**Ama Manara Kichi Prasna** is a booklet that addresses FAQs related to important themes and subjects concerning adolescent girls.



**Multimedia package of 40 videos and animated films (new and adapted)** is a series of animated films, short videos, videos with the DWCD mascot 'Tiki Mausi', audio-visual spots, comics on various topics/themes mentioned in the adolescent calendar. These are used along with other communication materials during the weekly Saturday sessions.



The Advika programme is an umbrella to harness all the valuable efforts that have been conducted by the Government of Odisha to end child marriage and set adolescents on the path to empowerment. It speaks to the state government's vision of convergence and sustained efforts to improve the lives of adolescent girls, empower them by providing leadership at the state level and working closely with communities at the ground level in a concerted way.



### Monitoring and reporting mechanism

- CDPOs to monitor and report to DSWO
- DSWO to report to State Department using the structured reporting format/template
- State ToMTs will help in forming district-level resource groups to support district administrations in training, monitoring and reporting.

A **Management Information System (MIS)** is being developed to monitor Advika training and activities. It will include the following features:

- Detailed database of master trainers/ resource group and training details.
- Details of mapping and tracking of adolescent girls along with monthly calendar sessions conducted in AWCs is captured in it.
- Best practices, innovations, activities/sessions, case studies and photographs will also be captured.



# Nirbhaya Kadhi

## Child marriage in Ganjam

Ganjam is an agricultural district of Odisha. Around 78% of its population resides in rural areas and engages in agriculture as their predominant occupation. It has a high population density with a large geographical area. The coastal plain region of the district falls in the disaster prone area with high vulnerability due to natural disasters and poor economic conditions. The overall literacy rate in the district is 71%, with a noticeable disparity between male and female literacy rates. As per Census 2011, only 61.1% females were literate as compared to 81% males, indicating poor retention of girls in schools. Lack of education is one of the key drivers for early marriages in the district. According to NFHS-4, almost 1 in 3 (29.8%) women aged 20–24 years are married before 18 years, making it the district with the 7<sup>th</sup> highest incidence of child marriage.

## The Nirbhaya Kadhi programme in Ganjam

‘Nirbhaya Kadhi’ or ‘the Fearless Adolescent’ is an initiative launched by the district administration of Ganjam to give an impetus to the state leadership’s resolve to end child marriage. It was launched in September 2019 with the aim of reaching out to adolescent girls on a regular

## What makes the Nirbhaya Kadhi programme unique?

The programme’s unique focus is on continuous tracking and mapping of adolescent girls in the district to promote their retention in schools and bring the dropout girls into the education system. A survey of all adolescent girls in each village is conducted to capture information in specified formats. This information is maintained in registers and also submitted to the Panchayati Extension Officer (PEO). The *Anganwadi* Workers (AWWs) maintain village wise registers which are updated regularly to capture additional girls who fall in the adolescent age-group. This has enabled continuous mapping and tracking of adolescents in each village. The programme also aims to build institutional capacity by setting up committees at village, GP, block and district levels. Each committee is responsible for engaging with adolescent girls on a regular basis and monitoring their vulnerabilities. All the committees are required to review and track progress of activities on a regular basis. They are empowered to play a proactive role in adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage in the district. This has enabled the administration to synchronise efforts and sustain its commitment to end child marriage.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

# Accelerating action to end child marriage in Ganjam district

basis with information and knowledge, improving services of existing schemes, promoting adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage.

## Programme approach

Recognising the need to drive change at multiple levels, the Nirbhaya Kadhi programme incorporated a comprehensive strategy to deliver on its goal of reducing child marriage in the district.

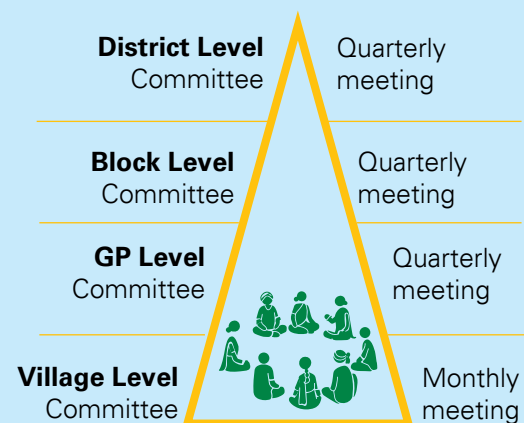
The key aspects of the programme include:

- **Convergence between various sectors** to provide context-specific solutions to end child marriage
- **Formation of committees** at village, Gram Panchayat (GP), block and district levels to play a proactive role in stopping child marriage
- **Coordinated implementation approach and collaboration** among stakeholders to build alignment and maximise impact
- **Sensitisation of staff**, law enforcement officers, key government officials
- **Strengthening** of existing structures
- **Creating awareness in the community** through motivating adolescents and engaging traditional leaders, parents etc.
- **Regular review meetings** for monitoring programme activities, tracking and counselling drop outs
- **Appreciation and felicitation** of champions.

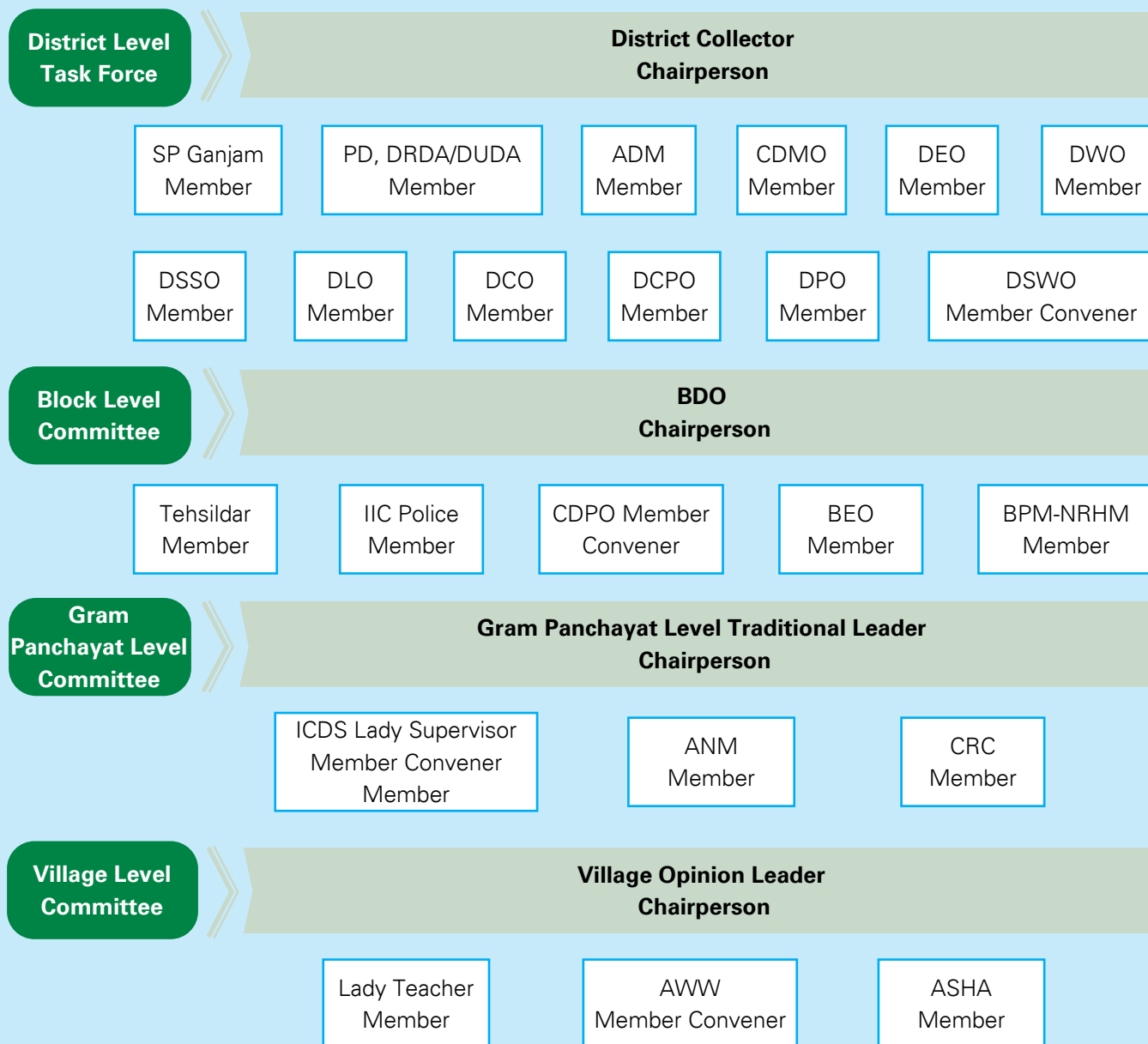
## Salient features of Nirbhaya Kadhi

- Track adolescent girls and boys in the district
- Monitor adolescent girls for their vulnerabilities
- Provide information, knowledge and counselling to girls on issues related to health, education and child marriage
- Generate awareness in the community towards the ill effects of child marriage.

## Frequency of review meetings under Nirbhaya Kadhi programme



## Institutional arrangement to support implementation of Nirbhaya Kadhi



### Key activities

#### Tracking adolescents

A village-wise list of adolescent girls (11–18 years) and boys (14–21 years) is prepared through a household survey. The list is kept at AWCs and shared at the district level to develop a detailed database of adolescents. This database is used for monitoring programme coverage, mapping vulnerable children and linking them to social protection schemes. The survey format contains useful information such as the Aadhaar numbers of adolescent girls, which are used to accurately track their age and monitor any incidence of early marriage.

**1,83,933**

adolescent girls between 11-18 years identified in the survey

Database of all adolescent girls available at village AWC, gram panchayat and district levels





## Format of 'Adolescent girls' survey for tracking by committee members at the village/ward level'

S. No.	Name of Adolescent Girl (11–18 yrs)	Name of Mother	Name of Father	Name of Village	Name of GP	Name of Block	Date of Birth	Age	Her Contact No. (if available); else parent's contact no.	Status of Adolescent (school/college going [SCG] or out-of-school/college (OSC)	Aadhaar No.	Remarks
1												
2												



The survey has helped us identify drop-out adolescents in the village. We invited the girls and their parents to a school counselling session and provide guidance to them. The girls have now returned to school.



**Manjushree Nayak**

CDPO, Sorada block, Ganjam district

### Observing Nirbhaya Kadhi Day

A specially designated Nirbhaya Kadhi day for the programme is observed on the third Saturday of every month to organise awareness programmes at the village level. Through the joint efforts of AWWs, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), *Kula Samaj* leaders and SHG leaders, adolescent girls are counselled on issues related to child marriage, sexual and reproductive health, personal hygiene and health. They are also provided information about existing government services and schemes, thus creating opportunities for further linkages.

Parents, ward members and SHG members are also part of these meetings.

### Saying 'No' to child marriage

A mass pledge campaign in schools and health establishments was conducted across the district in November 2019 to empower students to contribute towards ending child marriage. SHG members, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), ASHAs, and AWWs also took this pledge. Health establishments like CHCs, PHCs, Urban Health Centres, City Hospitals, and the MKCG Medical College participated and committed to preventing



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020





Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

**4,50,000** students from **3,614** government schools made a public declaration to say 'No' to child marriage

child marriage. In continuation, the Department of Education conducted an oath taking ceremony during prayer classes in schools.

### Organising regular engagement meetings

Engagement meetings have been regularised to prioritise action against child marriage in all departments. Regular monthly meetings are held by AWWs and ANMs at GP level to share information about ongoing actions, harmonise key messages, and collectively address issues. Awareness meetings are also conducted at block and district levels to sensitise vulnerable communities about the negative impact of child marriage on the development of children. These meetings are attended by *Kula Samaj* leaders, ICDS staff, SHG members, PRI members, village leaders, CHILDLINE staff and ANMs and demonstrate their shared commitment to end child marriage in the district.

- Monitoring of progress of activities done by ICDS workers in monthly meetings
- CDPOs and Supervisors actively engage in reviewing actions taken against child marriage at village and project level



**3,259 villages** and **1,83,933 adolescent girls** in Ganjam district covered through these awareness meetings

### Creating Balya Bibah Pratirodh Manch (BBPM)

A strategic advocacy forum was created to engage adolescents for creating awareness to combat child marriage in the district. Around 60 youth who said 'No' to child marriage participated in the '2<sup>nd</sup> District Level Adolescent Collective Meeting' held on 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 and were mobilised to advocate against child marriage.

### Engaging traditional leaders as allies

Traditional leaders were actively engaged in the programme to influence community members.

In their efforts to prevent child marriages, traditional leaders do not issue marriage certificates if under-aged adolescents get married



We take part in rallies. We talk to community members, parents and adolescents about the issue of child marriage. We also talk about the importance of education of the girl child. Nowadays, adolescent girls are becoming increasingly more aware and tell us about any plans of their families to get them married. They ask us to intervene and prevent the marriage.



**Antaryami Gauda**

Gauda Samaj President, Patrapur block, Ganjam district

Around 60 traditional leaders from 15 different caste groups participated in a district-level meeting. Later, they collectively formed a forum and agreed to support the district administration in its efforts against child marriage by:

- Providing information about any child marriage to AWWs, *Sarpanchs* and ICDS functionaries
- Coordinating with them to stop any marriage in their locality
- Facilitating awareness building activities in the community/village.

### Communicating the message

Home visits are being made by ASHAs, AWWs and SHG members to counsel parents on the ill effects of child marriage. Folk art, wall paintings, banners and hoardings, conducting rallies and audio announcements are the communication tools and methods used to generate awareness and engage in community dialogue.

### Celebrating and commemorating success

Successful efforts in preventing child marriage are amplified by spotlighting champions of positive behaviour. Their narratives are publicly shared so that they can resonate and motivate others. These champions are recognised and awarded for their efforts in larger forums.

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An award of **INR 5,000** is given to those who provide prior information about child marriage

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### Recognising and felicitating champions at district and state level forums

- 20 youth champions felicitated in 2<sup>nd</sup> District Level Adolescent Collective meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2019
- 6 youth champions attended State Level Adolescent Collective meeting at Bhubaneswar
- Ritu Nayak from Aska block was awarded by Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSCPCR) for raising her voice against her early marriage
- Barsa Rani Muni from Dharakote block was awarded by Department of Women and Child Development and Mission Shakti for stopping her marriage
- Mamali Adhikari was declared as the brand ambassador of the Nirbhaya Kadhi programme and was felicitated by the Honourable Chief Minister of Odisha.

### Catalysing change

Several community members have shared success stories of the work on the ground, including an **increase in awareness of community members** towards ill effects of child marriage. The efforts by the district administration have **prevented 45 child marriages** between January and December



Now people have become aware about child marriage and its problem. Parents have started giving equal importance to both boys' and girls' education. The interest of adolescent girls in higher studies has increased. Instances of child marriage have reduced to some extent at the village level. As a result of girls marrying after the legal age, low birth weight rates have come down.



**Simanchal Mandal**

BDO, Sorada block, Ganjam district



**“We recently stopped five such marriages in Podamari. 10 members of our SHG group (Manikeswari SHG) and the Anganwadi didi counselled the parents and were able to stop the marriages from being solemnised.”**



**Sabita Mohanti**

SHG leader, Podamari GP, Sanakhemundi block, Ganjam district

2019. Drop out girls identified through the survey have been admitted to schools after counselling their parents, thus giving these girls brighter prospects for the future.

The programme has provided adolescent girls with the opportunity to seek information and support on issues that affect them. More trust has now been built in local institutions, with cases of adolescent girls, school teachers and locals reporting instances of child marriage to AWWs, ANMs and traditional leaders. An FIR is also launched in case any instance of child marriage is found.

The key staff involved in implementation of the Nirbhaya Kadhi programme have started pitching the issue of child marriage in existing programmes observed in the village like Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Days (VHSNDs) and the Mo Gelha programme.

The commitment and contribution made by the district administration of Ganjam in driving the State’s mandate to end child marriage was duly recognised at the State level. On OSCPCR’s 9<sup>th</sup>

Foundation Day, OSCPCR and the Department of Women and Child Development felicitated the efforts made by the Ganjam district administration in 2019.

## Charting the future course

The *Nirbhaya Kadhi* programme has enabled creation and strengthening of child protection structures at village, GP, block and district levels and facilitated participation of key stakeholders in prevention of child marriages. Going forward, the programme aims to increase the community level ownership by identifying local role models and champions to lead the change.

The success of the Nirbhaya Kadhi programme has paved the way for its adoption by the Government of Odisha. The programme and the tracking system initiated in it will now be implemented at the State level. By leveraging existing schemes and engaging multiple stakeholders in various systems – school, healthcare, child protection services and the community – the programme shows high potential for replicability and impact to end child marriages across the State.

## Using social media to communicate and share updates

Along with traditional methods of engaging adolescent girls through meetings, the programme also leverages mobile use to engage them in areas with connectivity. Kiran Barik, an adolescent girl and a GP committee member in Ward No. 5 talked about using WhatsApp to be in constant touch with other girls, the ASHA and AWW worker, ANM and teachers. They have created a WhatsApp group in which messages to address child marriage are circulated.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020





Nirbhaya Kadhi" i.e. the fearless adolescents is the special initiative of our District to end child marriage and empower all adolescents to become fearless, ensure their rights and pursue their aspirations and dreams. All 1,83,933 adolescent girls in Ganjam district in the age group of 11-18 years should be Nirbhaya Kadhi and be able to say 'no' to child marriage and continue their studies and higher education. Child marriage is prevalent in our district, every fourth girl is forced to marry at an early age and we are at the seventh position in the State. As part of the effort to end child marriage and operationalisation of the District Action Plan, we, at Ganjam, initiated the campaign. In this effort, all stakeholders from every front like adolescents, parents, women SHG members, community leaders, religious and traditional leaders, teachers, PRI members and government functionaries are reached out to through different interventions to empower adolescents.

This campaign is very significant and relevant to the context of Ganjam where less value given to the girl child leads to child marriage. The campaign empowered adolescent girls and boys to become change agents and bring social transformation. The campaign worked to keep track of adolescent girls and boys through ICDS frontline workers and engage with them through the Nirbhaya Kadhi Committee to monitor conditions of vulnerability. Committees were formed at the village/ward/GP/block/district levels. As part of this campaign, every third Saturday of the month is called Nirbhaya Kadhi Day for effective Engagement and awareness generation to end child marriage and address other child protection issues.

I think this campaign is effective in terms of 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 providing a strong voice to adolescents to address the issue of child marriage. The campaign has now reached the ground level and all fronts of society. It will continue with more and meaningful participation from all with the targeted objective to end child marriage in the district. We will keep working to support children to continue their education, pursue their aspirations and become fearless enough to say 'no' to child marriage and ensure their rights.



**Vijay Amruta Kulange**

IAS, Collector and District Magistrate, Ganjam, Odisha



# Aparajita Campaign

## Child marriage in Koraput

Koraput is one of the districts declared as a Fifth Scheduled Area of Odisha<sup>3</sup>. The population in the district predominantly belongs to Scheduled Tribes (STs)<sup>4</sup>. Vulnerable communities, such as PVTGs, Scheduled Castes (SC) and STs, residing in remote and inaccessible pockets are underserved due to difficult geographical access, resulting in social and economic disadvantages, isolation, illiteracy, extreme poverty, malnutrition, migration distress, relocation, loss of livelihood and unemployment.

The literacy rate of Koraput stands at 49.21%, with the male literacy rate at 50.21% and the female literacy rate at 32.43%, indicating that most of the girls are out of school. Lack of education is one of the important causes for the high prevalence of child marriage in the district.

In Odisha, Koraput district has the third highest percentage of child marriage at 34.7%. Both SCs and STs have their own age-old custom of child marriage and rural Koraput has a higher percentage of child marriage than urban areas. Child marriage is prevalent among tribal communities of Kondh, Soura, Bhumiya, Bhotra, Durua and Gadava who reside in 14 blocks.

Extreme poverty also abets child marriage. An age-old custom among the tribals in Koraput called **Udulia Vivah** encourages teenagers to choose their own partners and elope. Their parents then search for them, bring them back home and solemnise their wedding.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

## Aparajita – A mega campaign

Having initiated full-fledged capacity building activities, the district administration came up with the idea of a campaign against child marriage to build visibility and awareness on the issue at all levels. Aparajita was launched in November 2019.

Aparajita is the name of a flower. The word also means 'undefeated'. It was considered appropriate to call the campaign 'Aparajita' as young girls have the potential to blossom and remain undefeated provided they have access to the right opportunities.

<sup>3</sup> Scheduled Areas are marked by a larger percentage of tribal population and a marked disparity in economic standard of the people, among other criterion. These districts are home to more than 60% tribal population in Odisha. Although highly resource rich areas, they are marked by poor socio-economic indicators

<sup>4</sup> The population of Koraput consists of 14.2% SCs (Dom, Generic Caste Dhoba, etc.) and 50.6% STs (Gadaba, Omanatya, Paroja, Saura, Bhumia, Bhottadas, Durua, etc.).

# A people's campaign to end child marriage in Koraput



## Why is the Aparajita campaign unique?

The Aparajita campaign adopts a multi-dimensional approach to understand the challenge of child marriage and intends to provide solutions in line with the SDGs and the International Convention for Human and Child Rights.

**Convergence is the Stepping Stone:** It is the outcome of convergence among all the 12 line departments of the district administration.

**Multi-stakeholder Coordination, Engagement and Partnership:** It includes development partners such as AAA and UNICEF, local NGOs, Child Line and ROTARY Club, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), as well as religious, caste and tribal leader forums.

**Flexible, Adoptable and thus Sustainable:** The campaign design is sustainable in nature.

**Massive and Last Mile Outreach:** It reaches out to the farthest person, covering primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders.

**Sensitive to the Local Content and People's Emotions:** It has been designed to take into account cultural sentiments of the community members.

**Comprehensive and Strategic Coverage of the Issue and Policy Solutions:** The campaign design deals prevention, protection, prosecution and rehabilitation aspects of child marriages.



## Key activities

### Developing the campaign blueprint

Aparajita campaign was visualised as an integral part of the District Action Plan (DAP). It aimed to bring focus on the issue of child marriage and enthuse both the administration and communities to stand up and act against it. It was helmed by DWCD and the DTF provided critical oversight on a regular basis. It was officially launched on Children's Day, November 14, 2019, at the district level.

Aparajita was planned as an **intensive 100-hour campaign** with a definitive beginning and end. Today, Aparajita is owned by the district administration as an action oriented, continuous campaign.







Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

### Translating plans into action at the block and community level

All 14 blocks launched the campaign on November 30, 2019. Every block prepared an action plan to combat child marriage, with the participation of key line officers including Block Development Officers (BDOs), Tehsildars, CDPOs, MOICs, representatives of police, social welfare organisations and development partners – UNICEF and AAA. CHILDLINE provided support in organising the campaign.

Committees were formed at the **Gram Panchayat and village levels** to organise and monitor the campaign. Traditional leaders, ward members, teachers, frontline workers, *Disaris* (quacks), *Gunias* (sorcerers), adolescent ambassadors, and adolescent boys and girls were involved through regular Gram Panchayat and village level nodal meetings. *Disaris* and *Gunias* organised village-level programmes such as storytelling, song and dance performances.

**Information, education and communication (IEC) materials** developed at the district level were displayed in prominent areas in blocks and villages such as block-level offices, Gram

Panchayat premises, schools, courts at the block, subdivision and district levels, police stations, District Hospital and AWCs to build visibility around the campaign.

Every block organised a rally as part of the Aparajita campaign to deliver the message of ending child marriage to the community and to mobilise school students, adolescents and community members. **AWWs and ASHAs took the lead** in planning these rallies and in reaching out to the community. Every Saturday, they made home visits, handed the leaflets to families, explained the messages and answered queries. These messages were reiterated during Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Days (VHSNDs). Ward members, adolescents, village leaders and ANMs supported these initiatives.

Traditional leaders and Kula Samaj leaders closely coordinated with the Sarpanchs and took a pledge to end child marriage. They spoke at community-level functions, festivals and other such occasions, and remained in close touch with the CDPOs to keep them informed about the village events. Sarpanchs conducted meetings at the village level to create awareness



**Our block was the first one to launch the programme on November 28, 2019. We made communities aware of legal provisions and punitive measures against child marriage. We also organised awareness programmes at our local college to sensitise adolescents. ASHAs and AWWs are making home visits and sensitising people.**



**Arati Mohapatra**

Block Mission Shakti Coordinator, Boipariguda block, Koraput district



We gathered all adolescents from our village along with the Anganwadi didi and ASHA didi. Every Saturday, we organise rallies around the village on prevention of child marriage. Our adolescent group members make regular home visits. We make these visits even in the absence of the AWW and ASHA.

Members of adolescents' group  
Kamarbelgan village, Nandapur block, Koraput district

OLM's programme Swabhiman also became a vehicle to propagate Aparajita's key messages. As part of Swabhiman, the OLM community resource person conducts meetings with adolescent girls. The forum is now being used to discuss issues related to child marriage, in addition to health and hygiene. OLM reaches out to adolescent girls in schools too. Group meetings are organised, with some being exclusively for adolescents girls and in others, adolescent boys are invited too.



**Snehalata Parida**

OLM Block Coordinator, Koraput district

on child marriage. Adolescent girls and boys were motivated to be brand ambassadors of the campaign and link with more adolescents in their village.

Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM) actively engaged with adolescent girls and **took support from SHGs** to counsel parents of adolescent children and discuss the issue of child marriage. They conducted meetings in villages and counselled families. They also informed ICDS Supervisors, CMPOs and Police in case a child marriage related matter did not get resolved through counselling and needed further action. Adolescents with good oratory skills were selected and trained to carry the message further in their adolescent groups, friend circles and families.

The ST and SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Development Department took the campaign to its **residential schools**. Girls were counselled in their life skills education classes to inform the police in case they came across any instances of child marriage in their villages. Debates, drawing and slogan writing sessions, story writing and cultural activities were organised on child marriage.

Children made beautiful paintings on ending child marriage, which were shared by the ST and SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Development Department on its official Facebook page. These paintings received a lot of appreciation. Wall paintings were made based on stories written by the girls.







Building community awareness was a major challenge. The social stigma around marrying a girl at a later age is tough to break. Some areas in the district are also geographically hard to reach and connectivity is poor. In these areas, people soon forget the messages delivered during a campaign or a programme. COVID-19 has also affected the campaign. These have been some of the challenges that we had to deal with.



**Shri Debendra Pradhan**

Additional District Magistrate, Koraput district

**Adolescent ambassadors were felicitated** on large platforms, in the presence of state and district level dignitaries, with a cash incentive of INR 5,000 for informing the relevant authorities about child marriage in their villages and initiating FIRs.

Five adolescent girls from Laxmipur block, who had said 'no' to child marriage and worked against it were declared brand ambassadors of the Aparajita campaign and became role models for other adolescents. They were felicitated with 'Parab Sanman' at the district level Lok Mahotsav 'Parab' for their remarkable efforts. At the function, they shared their experiences and efforts to reduce child marriage. The girls were also rewarded at the state level.

## Mu Paribi - I Can (Young people's engagement platform during COVID-19)

During the COVID-19 situation, the district administration, with support of AAA and UNICEF, made efforts to create an online platform for adolescents and youth to share and discuss their issues. An online programme called 'I Can/Mu Paribi' was organised and adolescents and youth, along with SHG members were encouraged to share their issues, concerns, thoughts, and possible solutions to different problems. This helped in raising awareness and understanding about their issues and aspirations and the support they needed from the administration.

'Mu Paribi' was led by young people and engaged family and community members as supporters. Representatives from the community and families were invited to participate in the interactions and motivated to encourage others in the community to uphold child rights.

This online forum enabled interaction with youth icons and successful professionals; leadership training and critical thinking skills; orientation on child rights; and Call to Action and submission of recommendations on policy changes they recommend.

## Next steps

- District Rural Development Department has issued a letter to all BDOs to declare 'child marriage free villages' under the Aparajita campaign by passing village-level resolutions refusing permission to conduct any child marriage.



## Key successes

- The Aparajita campaign covered the two sub-divisions, **14** blocks, **240** Gram Panchayats and **2,049** villages of the district with adequate structural and functional apparatus and modus operandi, creating a chain of duties and response among people.
- It elicited participation from **4,50,763** adolescents and **2,65,280** community members.
- **3,264** Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), **2,607** ASHAs and **307** ANMs, more than **2 lakh** Mission Shakti SHG members, **5,400** Biju Yuva Vahinis and **2,345** NYKS volunteers were involved in the campaign.

- BDOs have ensured wall paintings in public buildings and structures (schools, AWCs and Gram Panchayat offices), with the message of 'Say No to Child Marriage, Yes to School' and other child protection issues, in the local language.
- Awareness and FIR drives have been launched on Udulia.
- More than **2 lakh** IEC materials have been distributed to adolescents.
- More awareness drives are being planned.



### Campaign highlights

- The Aparajita campaign has been selected for the **Prime Minister's Excellence Award**, which is a great motivator for everyone who has been involved in the campaign.
- Around **250** cases of child marriage have been prevented through the Aparajita campaign.
- **6** youth champions who said 'No' to child marriage have been declared ambassadors and provided with cash support of INR 5,000 from the Red Cross Fund.

### Looking ahead

Though the response to Aparajita was lukewarm at the start, it gradually picked up and different stakeholders and community members soon began to support it. There is now a clear realisation that ending child marriage is not a small task. It requires continuous and relentless efforts. The campaign has proved to be a successful model and its reporting structures are now more systematic which provides opportunities for institutional learning.

Largely, the community now realises that child marriage needs to end. Adolescent boys and girls are aware of the impact of child marriage. Many dropout adolescents have been re-enrolled in schools to complete their studies as a result of counselling during the Aparajita campaign. The district administration is planning to institutionalise Aparajita and establish an exclusive office for the campaign, with its own branding and logo. The campaign against the practice of *Udulia* will be strengthened. A grievance redressal mechanism will be set in place. Alongside, a programme to stop female foeticide and a scholarship programme to promote education of the girl child are also on the anvil. The seeds of change for adolescent empowerment have been sown in Koraput.

**Aparajita is the outcome of the collective efforts made by different departments of the district administration and development partners (ActionAid and UNICEF) who have been instrumental in rendering technical and professional support to the district administration to strengthen the DTF in achieving its aim of joint action against child marriage. I congratulate every member of the DTF for their contribution and their involvement in all the efforts towards ending child marriage in the district. The role of the District Social**

**Welfare Section was vital in running the Aparajita campaign. They were actively involved in convergence process, addressing issues related to child marriage, creating awareness and planning for further action at the ground level. In recognising the impact and effective collaborative efforts of the district administration in implementing the Aparajita campaign. Odisha State Child Protection Commission felicitated Mrs. Susama Mohapatra, CDPO-cum-CMPO, Koraput block for her excellent contribution towards the campaign, on their foundation day. The Aparajita campaign has been earmarked as a Coffee Table Best Practice for the prestigious PM Award for Public Excellence 2020 and SKOCH award 2020. It is a great achievement for the district administration.**

**Shri Madhusudan Mishra**

OAS (SAG), District Magistrate and Collector, Koraput, Odisha

# Creating child marriage free

## Child marriage in Subarnapur

As per NFHS-4, 22.2% women in the age group of 20-24 years are married before completion of 18 years in Subarnapur district.

Girls from socially and economically marginalised communities in the district are more likely to be at risk of dropping out of school and being married before they turn 18. There are barely 26 % women in the district who have had more than ten years of schooling.<sup>5</sup>

- Many parts of the district, including Tarbha, Sonepur, Ullunda and Birmaharajpur blocks are geographically located in drought-prone areas leading to high incidence of distress migration in the region.
- Castes and tribes such as Kolha, Kandha, Ganda and Sahara, Bhulia, Thanapati (Mali), Kumbhara, Gula, Kansari, Betra are more vulnerable to child marriage.



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

<sup>5</sup> [rchiips.org/nfhs/FCTS/OR/OR\\_FactSheet\\_392\\_Subarnapur.pdf](https://rchiips.org/nfhs/FCTS/OR/OR_FactSheet_392_Subarnapur.pdf)



# villages in Subarnapur

Reporting of child marriages in Subarnapur is very low. Only 54 cases were reported between 2015 and 2020. The DAP focusses on mobilising community involvement to report and prevent child marriages in villages in the district.

## Sustained efforts to end child marriage

The DAP developed by the district administration has incorporated measures to ensure focused efforts at the district, block, Gram Panchayat and village levels to help the administration to synchronise efforts, build alignment and maximise impact. Alongside, monitoring mechanisms have been made more stringent.

Ensuring the convergence of all liasoning departments including the health and ICDS departments, the district administration conducts a range of activities including rallies, oath taking

## District-level monitoring mechanism

- All activities under the DAP are monitored by the district collector.
- All line departments have the child marriage programme in their budget provision which is monitored by the district collector.
- A mechanism of interlinking departments has been set up for engaging drop out adolescent girls whose marriages have been prevented.

ceremonies as well as identifying adolescent champions for the campaign along with other stakeholders such as PRI's, Women self-help groups, Anganwadi workers and ASHA workers.

A district-wide programme was initiated in 2018 as a campaign to declare villages in Subarnapur 'Child Marriage-Free'.



**Convergence meetings are being organised with line departments at the district level and the District Collector provides leadership. All line departments have taken the responsibility to account for the child marriage programme in their budget provisions.**



**Asteria Kerketta**

DSWO, Subarnapur district







Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

## Child Marriage-free Villages – A community-led intervention

Enabling and facilitating convergence of district and community stakeholders to end child marriage in Subarnapur district, the programme hinges on community action and understanding to counter the challenge of child marriage.

### What makes the programme unique?

The 'Child Marriage-free Village' programme originated in Rugudipali village in Subarnapur after a discussion between Gitanjali Rana, the Anganwadi Worker (AWW) and Ghasiram Panda. The programme showed great success and the District Collector later gave support. The state then recognised the programme as a best practice and issued a letter to other districts on 12 June 2020 to take similar steps and mobilise communities to take ownership in creating an enabling environment for children, especially girls, towards ending child marriage. There started the silent revolution through the concerted effort of all Collectors and various stakeholders like line departments, UN bodies such as UNICEF, UNFPA and civil society organisations like ActionAid as well as district-specific innovative campaigns led by district administrations. After receiving the letter, the district administrations started identifying the vulnerable pockets/villages and took initiatives to declare villages 'child marriage-free'. The movement has successfully set the stage for reducing and preventing child marriage in the state.

The State also issued a letter to all districts for incentivising 'child marriage-free' villages and panchayats. The strategies adopted by districts included: i) strengthening the existing institutional set up at various levels (ii) community ownership through community-based tracking system (iii) vision building and motivation of key stakeholders and inter-sectoral convergence and (iv) adolescent engagement with promotion of a child-centric advocacy platform.

- **Convergence is the stepping stone:** It is the outcome of convergence among all 12-line departments of the district administration.
- **Multi-stakeholder coordination, engagement and partnership:** It includes development partners such as AAA and UNICEF, as well as religious and community leaders.
- **Sensitisation of government stakeholders:** Community outreach included sensitisation of staff, law enforcement officers, key government officials at district, block and village level during meetings.
- **Creating awareness in the community:** The programme is aimed at enabling community participation and intervention to stop child marriages. This was carried out by motivating adolescents, engaging traditional leaders and stakeholders such as temple priests, the marriage tent-house owners as well as parents.
- **Proper monitoring mechanism:** To ensure maximum outreach, weekly meetings at the village level are organised. All activities and outreach in a village are driven towards declaring it child marriage free. subject to a quarterly review at the district level.
- **Developing a reporting mechanism to track and stop child marriages:** Through a number of activities meant for community outreach and identifying champions, the programme aims to develop a robust mechanism wherein the community reports planned marriages and works towards counselling parents and families to stop them.

**Now 1,635 villages across the state have been declared as 'child marriage-free villages'**



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

## Key activities

### Tracking adolescent girls

A village-wise list of adolescent girls (11–18 years) and boys (14–21 years) is prepared through a household survey conducted by Anganwadi Workers. The list is kept at AWCs and also shared at the district level to develop a detailed database of adolescents. The database is used for monitoring programme coverage, mapping vulnerable children and linking them to social protection schemes.

### Organising weekly meetings at the village level

Village level meetings are conducted by the Lady Supervisor every week to share information about ongoing actions, harmonise key messages, and collectively address issues. It also serves as a platform to regularly sensitise members over issues related to adolescents and child marriage.

### Initiating a district-wide campaign called Sankalp

The district administration launched an awareness and oath-taking campaign called Sankalp in September 2019. The campaign envisaged a community-led campaign to spread awareness against the ill effects of child marriage among families and adolescents.

*Sankalp* means taking an oath to achieve a goal. The campaign motto is that every person must take an oath to prevent child marriage and give every girl child the opportunity to make the best use of resources available to her and choose her own path in life.

The district administration identified 43 ‘vulnerable villages’ and formed a “Village level Child Marriage Prohibition Committee” in each village within a week of the identification. The committee focuses on carrying out outreach activities as planned under the DAP, tracking and monitoring child marriages being conducted and creating awareness about legal provisions against child marriage among parents and

### Members of the Village Committee

- CDPO as CMPO
- Lady Supervisor, ICDS
- PRI member
- Government school teacher
- AWW
- ASHA
- SHG member
- Adolescent girls





adolescents. It also coordinates with district officials on criteria and activities to declare a village Child marriage-free.

Through the coordinated efforts of village heads, SHG members, ASHAs and AWWs, regular oath-taking events are organised at the village level where adolescent girls and boys are encouraged to take an oath to end the practice of child marriage. They are also sensitised on issues related to adolescent health during these activities. Parents of adolescent girls are encouraged to join these events.

### Community-led tracking and prevention of child marriages

Through the network of community outreach workers like SHG members, ASHA and Anganwadi workers who conduct home visits and participate in Village Health and Sanitation committee meetings, school teachers and adolescents, the village committee keeps a track

of child marriages being organised in the region. Parents and adolescents are counselled about the legal provisions against child marriage and are encouraged to cancel planned marriages.

### Driving the message home

Home visits are made by ASHAs, AWWs and SHG members to counsel parents on the ill effects of child marriage. Folk art, wall paintings, formation of human chains, banners and hoardings and conducting rallies are some of the methods used to generate awareness and engage in community dialogue.

### Declaring villages child marriage-free and celebrating success

All outreach activities under the district plan are geared towards declaring a village 'Child marriage-free'. The district administration identifies vulnerable pockets and with the help of the village committee, works towards ensuring it meets the criteria as drafted in the programme plan.

“The levels of awareness have increased within the community and we have been getting prior information about child marriages being held. There is also a visible shift in giving priority to education of adolescent girls within the community, ”

**Rakesh Pradhan**

District Consultant, Child Marriage & Adolescent Empowerment  
Subarnapur district



Successful efforts in preventing child marriage are highlighted by identifying champions of positive behaviour. These champions are recognised and awarded for their efforts in larger forums and include adolescents who approached community workers about their marriages as well as parents who decided to cancel the planned early marriages of their daughters. The narratives of the community and individuals are publicly shared so that they can resonate and motivate others.

### Celebrating successes

Of the 43 vulnerable villages identified by the district administration in Subarnapur, seven villages were declared free from child marriages on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti on October 2, 2020. Earlier in January 2020, Rugudipalli was declared child marriage free by the district administration. Through the efforts of the CMPO's and the village committee, these villages did not report a single child marriage in the last two years.

Criteria for a village to be declared 'child marriage-free' include:

- Formation of a Village Level Child Marriage Prohibition Committee.
- One case of child marriage was identified and stopped in the last two years in the vulnerable pockets.
- Not a single child marriage took place in these identified villages in the last two years.
- List of awareness programme/activities.
- Involvement of PRI Members on Prohibition of Child Marriage Activities.
- A team led by the District Child Protection Officer (DPCO) the facts and documents. submitted by the CMPO and the Village Committee submit a report to the DM and Collector cum Nodal Officer through DSWO for finalisation of the village.

### Catalysing change

Community workers and district staff testify that the programme has led to greater awareness about the ill effects of early marriage. Communities are



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020





My family was very poor and was not aware about the legal provisions against child marriage. I wanted to study further and not get married. It was only after regular visits from AWW and ASHA workers that they were convinced. My marriage was cancelled and I have undertaken a tailoring course under vocational training,

**Sukeshni Rana**

17-year-old adolescent girl, Rugudipalli GP  
Sonepur block, Subarnapur district

“It has given me confidence in my work and I feel motivated to work on preventing child marriages. It has given me courage to counsel with family members who planned for the marriage their children before legal age.



**Sarojini Das**

SHG member, Rugudipalli GP, Sonepur block, Subarnapur district

demonstrating increased commitment to support their girls’ education and delay marriage. Many parents encouraged their adolescent girls to attend school and adolescents themselves feel motivated to continue their education.

### Way forward

All districts submitted the process document along with the list of villages declared as ‘child

marriage-free’ by the district administration. In order to recognise the efforts made by district administrations towards ending child marriage, the State is gearing up to incentivise villages declared ‘child marriage-free’ for the year 2020-21. Besides this, the State is also preparing a State-specific standardised guideline mentioning the criteria and processes to be adhered to for districts to declare ‘child marriage-free villages’ and panchayats as well.



NOTE 8  
AD CAMERA

Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

# Sonepur villages declared 'child marriage free'

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sonepur, Oct 3:** In a first, seven villages out of 43 identified as most vulnerable in terms of child marriage in this district have the prestigious tag of 'child marriage-free village'.

In past years, the district had reported many cases of child marriages. Waking up to the alarming situation, the district administration took several initiatives to put an end to this evil practice. A movement in the name of 'Sankalp' is underway across the district. Under the movement, the administration is taking various steps to sensitise parents about the adverse impact of the early age marriages of their daughters.

Similarly, various programmes have been taken into hands to give the victims of child marriage a better and secured life. The administration has identified 43 villages as most vulnerable villages in terms of child marriage.

The administration's efforts have finally paid dividends. Seven of the 43 villages have become child marriage-free villages.

On the occasion of Gauri Jayanti, the district administration in association with Action Aid and UNICEF declared the villages as free from the heinous practice of marrying off children at a tender age.

The villages which have received the tag for the first time in the district are Janamura of Sonepur block, Sallipali of Ulunda block, Jampali of

## ENDING A SOCIAL EVIL



■ In past years, the district saw many cases of child marriages. Waking up to the alarming situation, the district administration took several initiatives to put an end to this evil practice. A movement in the name of 'Sankalp' is underway across the district with the administration sensitising parents about the adverse impact of the early age marriages of their daughters

■ The villages which have received the tag for the first time in the district are Janamura of Sonepur block, Sallipali of Ulunda block, Jampali of Binika block, Gajabandh of Dunguripali block, Kheramal of Biramaharajpur block and Surajmund and Bhurad villages of Tarabha block

Binika block, Gajabandh of Dunguripali block, Kheramal of Biramaharajpur block and Surajmund and Bhurad villages of Tarabha block.

Due to the steps the government

has been taking for the last two years, these villages have not reported even a single case of child marriage in the period.

Child marriage protection officer (CMPO) Sabita Dora, members

of the child marriage protection committees, teachers and villagers took a pledge not to allow child marriage in their village.

With a view to make all the 43 villages as free from child marriage, another initiative has been taken since July 2020.

Under this initiative, village level 'child marriage protection committees' have been formed at all the villages and every week activities like rallies, meetings and pledge taking events involving girls, youths, villagers, parents and women of SHGs are being organised.

The administration in association with Action Aid and UNICEF has formed task force and taken some more steps to check child marriage in the district, it was learnt.

The district-wide 'child marriage-free village' campaign envisaged by district administrations to prevent child marriage has successfully engaged critical influencers, decision-makers and key stakeholders within communities to achieve tangible results and meaningful change. It has also built capacities at all levels of the administration for effective convergence between departments. The movement has successfully set the stage for reducing and preventing child marriage in the State.

### ଠିଆନାଳକୁ ଜିଲ୍ଲାର ପ୍ରଥମ ବାଲ୍ୟ ବିବାହ ମୁକ୍ତ ଗ୍ରାମ ଘୋଷଣା

ଦେବଗଡ଼, ୧୨।୧୦ (ରମିଘା): ଜିଲ୍ଲାର ଠିଆନାଳ ବ୍ଲକର ପ୍ରଥମ ପଞ୍ଚାୟତ ଅନ୍ତର୍ଗତ ଠିଆନାଳ ଗ୍ରାମକୁ ଜିଲ୍ଲାର ପ୍ରଥମ ବାଲ୍ୟ ବିବାହ ମୁକ୍ତ ଗ୍ରାମ ଘୋଷଣା କରାଯାଇଛି। ଠିଆନାଳ ପଞ୍ଚାୟତରାଜର ପ୍ରମୁଖ ଅଧିକାରୀ ଓ ଗ୍ରାମବାସୀଙ୍କ ସମେତ ଏକ ସମାବେଶରେ ଏହି ଘୋଷଣା କରାଯାଇଛି। ଏହି ଘୋଷଣାରେ ଠିଆନାଳ ଗ୍ରାମକୁ ଜିଲ୍ଲାର ପ୍ରଥମ ବାଲ୍ୟ ବିବାହ ମୁକ୍ତ ଗ୍ରାମ ଭାବେ ମନପତ୍ର ପ୍ରଦାନ କରାଯାଇଛି। ଏହି ଘୋଷଣାରେ ଠିଆନାଳ ଗ୍ରାମର ପଞ୍ଚାୟତରାଜ ଅଧିକାରୀ ଓ ଗ୍ରାମବାସୀଙ୍କ ସମେତ ଏକ ସମାବେଶରେ ଏହି ଘୋଷଣା କରାଯାଇଛି। ଏହି ଘୋଷଣାରେ ଠିଆନାଳ ଗ୍ରାମକୁ ଜିଲ୍ଲାର ପ୍ରଥମ ବାଲ୍ୟ ବିବାହ ମୁକ୍ତ ଗ୍ରାମ ଭାବେ ମନପତ୍ର ପ୍ରଦାନ କରାଯାଇଛି। ଏହି ଘୋଷଣାରେ ଠିଆନାଳ ଗ୍ରାମର ପଞ୍ଚାୟତରାଜ ଅଧିକାରୀ ଓ ଗ୍ରାମବାସୀଙ୍କ ସମେତ ଏକ ସମାବେଶରେ ଏହି ଘୋଷଣା କରାଯାଇଛି।

“While preventing child marriage, the girl’s family is typically counselled but we also need to work with the would-be groom’s family and make them understand that they cannot get their son married to an underage girl. This year, we have also roped in events managers like tent organisers, priests and caterers by sensitising them so that they say ‘no’ to those families who are opting for child marriage. The entire approach is multi-pronged and not limited to only one person or institution but all of civil society. People have started realising that child marriage is harmful and has to stop. We will also work with adolescents in a focused way so that they can also come forward and say that “Although our parents want it, we don’t!”. That’s the kind of atmosphere we are trying to create where everybody is free to come forward and talk about and prevent child marriage. Our ICDS mechanism is very active in this. CBOs and nodal officers have also been given all powers, they can stop child marriage, they can call the police and NGOs and they can directly get in touch with me, sub-collectors and other officials.



**Monisha Banerjee**

District Magistrate, IAS, Subarnapur district, Odisha



# 'No to Child Marriage & Yes

## Status of child marriage 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 who form 51.96% of the total population. A majority of these belong to the Kondh (93.3%), Gond (2.99%) and Kotia tribes (1.05%). The inaccessible terrain restricts development opportunities for these Particularly Vulnerable and Tribal Groups (PVTG), making it one of the most backward districts of the State with 47.2 percent of households in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category (District Annual Plan Document, 2013-2014, Kandhamal). In this predominantly tribal district 22.1% women aged 20–24 years were married before 18. The considerable difference in the literacy rate for males (76.93%) and females (51.94%) shows that substantial improvement is required to retain girls in schools.

The district administration in Kandhamal has made systematic efforts to take the State mandate forward. The DAP developed by the DTF ensures focused efforts at district, block, Gram Panchayat and village levels. As part of the process for operationalisation of DAP, the



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

district administration with the technical support from AAA 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 build the issue and mobilise action at scale.



## 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.

## Anchoring activities under one umbrella

The District Action Plan uses an integrated approach to strengthen existing structures and promote engagement with adolescents, parents, community members, and government functionaries. This involved building capacities of ICDS workers, SHGs, ASHAs and ANMs and strengthening the existing structures such as Panchayati Raj Institutions. The influence of traditional leaders was leveraged to strengthen efforts to eliminate child marriage.

# to School' Anchoring efforts to end child marriage in Kandhamal district



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, Kandhamal district

## 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.

## What makes the '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.





## Key activities

### 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.

### School awareness drive at Upper Primary and High Schools

The 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 displayed at prominent places in schools. Students showed their commitment

### 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



24-hour free emergency CHILDLINE phone number 1098 was displayed in the school



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 drop-outs.

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



**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, Kandhamal district



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

“ 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, Kandhamal district

### 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.

### Adolescent groups formed

A district level forum of adolescents, the Balya Bibah 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.



### 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

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.

Adolescent groups were also constituted at the block level and round table meets were

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

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

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 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 took active participation in it.



- **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.

### 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 meeting of the DTF were conducted to review the progress of activities against the commitment made in the DAP. These review meetings have supported regularisation of the data collection and consolidation process.

- **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 **7** districts including Kandhamal
- Leadership building training on Theatre of Oppressed provided to the youth

### 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 (OSCPCR) on its eighth 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





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, Kandhamal district

schemes and programmes like the Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSND). This convergence has kept the agenda of preventing child marriage at the 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.

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.



### Drawing attention through convergence with other programmes

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

### 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.
- 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



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 help in rescue operation if parents go ahead with the marriage.”



**Manaswinee Mishra**

District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO), Kandhamal district

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.

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 support of UNICEF and AAA. In this effort, a large category of stakeholders like parents, women 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 a significant number people belong to the tribal community and school dropouts consequently lead to child marriage. The campaign helped in building adolescent boys and girls as change agents and bringing social transformation. It worked towards sharing information with the communities on how the traditional practice of child marriage prevents children from enjoying their rights. It adversely affects both boys and girls but brings perpetual discrimination against girls. The campaign invested its efforts on making the communities realise the consequences of child marriage on the growth and development of girls and the risks associated with it.

In view of the impact of the campaign ‘No to Child Marriage and Yes to School’, the district administration would continue the campaign through building massive awareness, mobilisation of different stakeholders, engagement with the traditional leaders, capacity building and skill development of youth and adolescents, and strengthening their collectives. The administration would keep on working to help children continue their education and chase their aspirations”.



**Dr. Brundha D.**

IAS, Collector and District Magistrate, Kandhamal, Phulbani, Odisha

# Way Forward

In recent years, the issue of child marriage has gained increasing prominence in international and national development agendas. Over the years, the Government of Odisha has accelerated efforts to help change the lives of girls and young women across the State through its various schemes and programmes. However, ending child marriage is not an end in itself. There is a need to create alternative choices and options for adolescents in order to empower them.

The 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 (PR&DW), Education, Skill Development, and Health, Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSPCPR), and representatives from UNICEF, UNFPA, and ActionAid meets on the 29th of every alternate month to review the progress of the State Action Plan and implementation of PCMA. Through inter-sectoral and inter-departmental convergence and collaboration with State and non-state stakeholders, the Department of WCD and Mission Shakti (MS) aims to:

1. Empower girls by imparting information, skills, support and services through the Advika resource packages (AWW pocket book, Kishori Kalendar, Kishori Barta, and Tiki Mausi videos along with other communication materials and animated films/videos)
2. Promote adolescents' collectives and forums/ Balika Mandals/Balya Bibaha Pratirodh Manch
3. Improve accessibility, enhance girls' education and keep all girls in schools (thus delaying their early marriage)
4. Provide economic opportunities and incentives for girls and their families by linking with vocational and skills training
5. Maximise involvement of Mission Shakti SHGs and frontline workers such as AWWs and ASHAs to mobilise and educate communities (parents, religious leaders, traditional leaders etc.) to change harmful norms and practices and promote positive parenting
6. Engage PRI members in creating a child-friendly environment at village and panchayat levels
7. Mainstream and engage with boys to inculcate positive masculinity, promote equality and challenge gender norms and socially harmful norms

**Empowering adolescents:** Adolescent girls are being empowered through a life skills programme. The essential task of reaching out of school girls through social protection schemes and accessibility is being taken up through the Advika programme. It will be scaled up and intensified to include second-chance programmes for married girls for re-entry to school, which is presently neglected at the family and community level. These efforts require facilitation of a systems approach to achieve convergence of sectors and maximise the benefits to adolescents and their families.

**Mobilising parents and communities:** Many families and communities see child marriage as a deeply rooted practice which has been part of their culture for generations. Working with families and communities to raise awareness on the protection of girls' rights, positive parenting and improved access to services can change attitudes and reduce acceptance of the decision to marry girls as children. Building a better understanding of the continuum of the life of a girl (risk of violence before, during and after marriage), engaging men and boys for community level gender normative change and employing social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) can bring gender transformation and help men and boys see

the benefits of a community which values and supports girls and women to fulfil their aspirations.

At the district level, the following activities are being planned:

- The District Work Plan of the 16 most vulnerable districts of Odisha will be incorporated with a plan for supporting programmes, including parenting, to prevent child marriage, abuse and violence against children.
- The District Work Plan that supports programmes including parenting to prevent child marriage, abuse and violence against children will be rolled out/operationalised by member departments of the DTF and a monitoring mechanism needs to be ensured for implementation of the District Work Plan.
- The Advika adolescent programme will be rolled out in 16 most vulnerable districts of Odisha while ensuring that a monitoring mechanism is in place.
- Frontline workers and community structures of the 16 most vulnerable districts across Odisha will be trained on using the Advika resource package, including COVID-sensitive capacity building package (Tarunya, A&YE toolkit) on child protection and adolescent priorities including ending child marriage and ending violence against children.
- Adolescent boys and girls of the 16 most vulnerable districts will be engaged through volunteering, civic engagement, and life skill programmes as part of the empowerment process.
- The capacity development package for frontline workers and community structures that focuses on child protection priorities and adolescent engagement will be rolled out at the district level.
- Child protection functionaries across the 16 most vulnerable districts of Odisha will be provided with training and capacity building support for integration and implementation of the parenting package.
- Community members including adolescents and parents will be mobilised to take part in all activities that address child protection priority issues like child marriage, violence against children, child trafficking, child labour, gender-based violence, abuse, and exploitation of children.
- Adolescent girls will be linked with social protection schemes and programmes like vocational training, career guidance, life skills, financial literacy, and BCC.

Biju Patnaik, a true statesman, freedom fighter and an illustrious son of India, was the architect of modern Odisha and the leader of post-independence Odisha. He was a man of the masses and a visionary. In 1992, he left this quote for the people of Odisha:



**In my dream of the 21st century for the state, I would have young men and women who put the interest of the state before them. They will have pride in themselves, confidence in themselves. They will not be at anybody's mercy, except their own selves. By their brains, intelligence and capacity, they will recapture the history of Kalinga.**









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



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