

Creating agency for adolescents through life skills and vocational training

Adolescents in Purulia district are provided a basket of customised services – life skills training, platforms for peer support through adolescent clubs, sports activities, vocational training and confidently run a community radio programme



Setting the context

West Bengal has shown a steady decline in the prevalence of early marriage over the past decade. Child marriage is one of the key reasons for the high rates of early pregnancy, anaemia among women and underweight among children under five. Child marriage is also a deterrent to education as is seen in the 79% completion rate of secondary education amongst 15-19 years who were married before the legal age as compared to 90% amongst those who remained unmarried. In Purulia, more than 30% of the girls married before 18 years are underweight and 81.6% of the child marriages take place in the bottom wealth tercile of households.

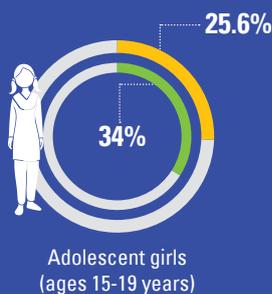
Since 2015, the Government of West Bengal (GoWB) is consolidating efforts to bring together multiple stakeholders to enhance the coverage of child protection interventions. Building on the work initiated in 2007 by the Department of Women & Child Development and Social Welfare (DWCD&SW), the spotlight has been brought on adolescents and their most pressing issues, namely education and health. These critical indicators have lagged behind due to several reasons, the most significant being childhood marriages and school drop outs.

Implementation of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) is being enhanced by the state government through formation and strengthening of Child Protection Committees (CPCs) at village, block and ward levels. The state government also implements a conditional cash transfer scheme called Kanyashree Prakalpa to incentivise secondary and higher education for adolescent girls between 13-19 years and thus contribute to delaying the age of marriage.

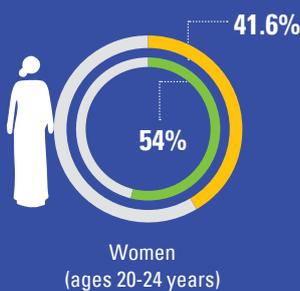
Key indicators

West Bengal

Decline in prevalence of child marriage



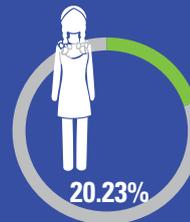
Adolescent girls
(ages 15-19 years)



Women
(ages 20-24 years)

■ 2015-16 ■ 2005-06

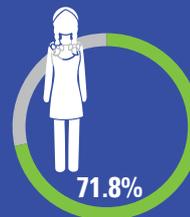
Purulia



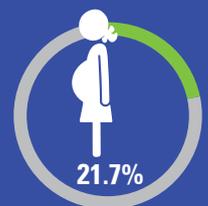
Adolescents



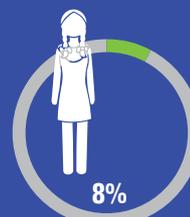
Women aged 20-24 years married before 18 years



Anaemia prevalence in adolescents
(ages 10-19 years)



Adolescent girls (ages 15-19 years) pregnant or mother



Dropouts among adolescents



Adolescent empowerment programme for Purulia – Building on collaboration

In 2015, the Adolescent Empowerment Programme (AEP) was launched in Purulia by the District Plan of Action for Children (DPAC) Cell formed as part of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to curb child marriages and re-enrol girls who had dropped out of school. A series of adolescent interventions were implemented in a phased manner including formation of Kanyashree Clubs, organizing Kanyashree football tournaments as part of sports for development (S4D), skills training under Kanyashree Swabalambi, and a community radio programme run by adolescent girls called Kanyashree Betar Sabha.

AEP framework

The AEP framework was developed by the Purulia district administration with support from UNICEF. A multisectoral, convergent approach was embedded in the framework which brought together key programmes and schemes such as ICDS and Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) for nutrition, Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) and SAG for health, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Right to Education Act (RTE) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Kanyashree Prakalpa for education, ICPS for protection and National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and other opportunities for skill development.

Three pillars

Adolescent boys and girls



To enhance knowledge, skills and peer group support for adolescent boys and girls so that they can take action to protect themselves from violence, exploitation and child marriage and make their communities safer

To encourage parents and community members to support adolescents in seeking information and services and decision making and also play an active role in creating a supportive environment for adolescents

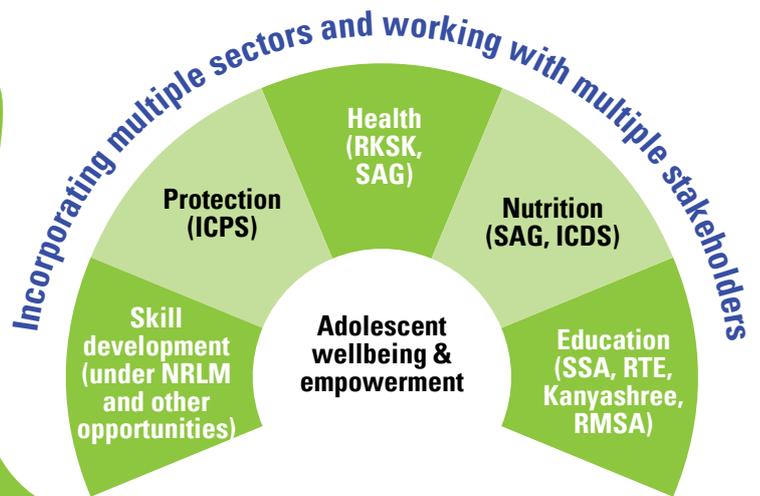


Parents and other community members

Government service providers



To work with relevant government service providers to strengthen implementation and enforcement of laws, policies, schemes and programmes for adolescents and to prevent their facing violence and exploitation



Strategies



Strengthening outreach through government schemes and platforms



Creating linkages across departments

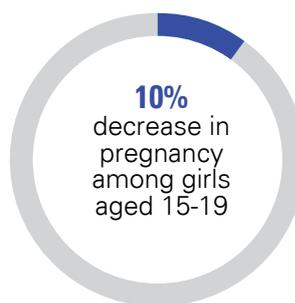
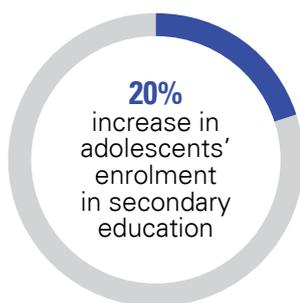


Working with media and information and communication technology (ICT) providers



Developing partnerships through non-government organizations (NGOs), community based organizations (CSOs) and other networks

Impacts envisaged



Adolescent boys and girls formed the first intervention pillar and were given specific focus

Empowering the first pillar

Imparting life skills through Kanyashree Clubs

Kanyashree Clubs were first formed in 2016 at the school level to generate demand for the Kanyashree scheme. Each club had 25-30 girls who received benefits of the Kanyashree scheme. Widespread publicity was also undertaken by and home visits, village meetings and increased school participation was sought to popularise the clubs. One Nodal Teacher at the school level was assigned the overall responsibility of identifying adolescent girls, organizing meetings and enrolling girls in clubs. Awareness was also stepped up through rallies, seminars and workshops. The topics taken up for discussion during club meetings included continuing education, combating child marriage, health and nutrition (including iron folic acid (IFA) tablet consumption), handwashing, sanitation and environmental conservation. Club meetings were used to disseminate information about

local Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics (AFHCs). Adolescent girls got an opportunity to express themselves. **Engagement with adolescent boys was also done in a conscious manner through formation of boys' groups and involving them in events and discussions.**

Creating a buzz

Life skills training and camps and important days like Menstrual Hygiene Day (May 28), Kanyashree Day (Aug 14), Handwashing Day (Oct 15) along with Republic Day and Independence Day were commemorated to provide greater visibility for adolescent empowerment activities.

Sports competitions, role plays and drawing/quiz competitions were organized to encourage adolescent participation and honour champions.

Kanyashree Clubs have given us a voice and shown us how to confidently question and challenge harmful practices that were keeping us from actualising our potential.

Salma Khatun
16-year-old girl, Udaan Kanyashree Club
Jhalda municipality, Purulia district

Alongside engagement was also done with existing SAG groups¹ at ICDS centres and key messages related to the dangers of child marriage, importance of education, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and handwashing were discussed by Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and adolescent girls. This helped them to relate to each other and adolescent girls felt comfortable in voicing their opinions. The girls were also provided training in theatre, street plays etc. and other communication related capacity building which helped them become confident.

Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2018

2,414 adolescent groups with **57,148** members

Life skills education sessions conducted with **57,148** adolescents

190 Kanyashree Clubs with **5,700** members

312 boys' groups with **6,721** members

282 adolescents and **278** teachers trained as master trainers on life skills education since 2017

143 out of school children re-enrolled

97 child marriages prevented

Reached **6,804** parents and **1,054** religious and other community leaders, **861** local self government representatives, **1,573** block level functionaries and **21,304** service providers

Supported formation of **344** multi-stakeholder CPCs (including children's representatives)

Kanyashree Prakalpa has proved to be a great motivation to bring girls back to school. Enrolments have improved and parents support their daughters' future plans just as they do their sons.

Soubhik Bhattacharjee, BDO
Barabazar block, Purulia district

¹ The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (commonly known as SAG) is being operationalised through ICDS. It combines adolescent reproductive and sexual health (ARSH), nutrition, mainstreaming adolescent girls who have dropped out of school, life skills and vocational training opportunities.

More than **5,000** adolescent girls empowered through sports like football, badminton and archery

1,436 adolescent girls and **154** adolescent boys received self-defence training

More than **6,500** adolescent girls participated in **5** consecutive Kanyashree Football Tournaments held from 2016 to 2020

5,490 Kanyashree girls visited AFHCs, banks, post offices, police stations and Panchayat offices.

Setting up the Barabazar Lakhshya academy opened doors for tribal girls to avail of services like free wi-fi, books from digital library and use the sports gymnasium.



Strengthening self-defence and physical abilities of adolescent girls

Existing gender norms and discriminatory social attitudes towards girls playing sports were challenged through Sports for Development (S4D) activities. Most girls living in remote areas used to experience insecurity while crossing desolate stretches. The self-defence and taekwondo classes taught them practical ways to defend themselves so that they could feel more secure. Club activities triggered behaviour change among adolescents on adolescent health and nutrition, legal rights and livelihood options. Sports was made an important part of the club's activity charter. Football teams participated and won awards at the block level.

Kanyashree football tournaments with competing teams from various schools in Purulia in 2015 and 2016 drew large audiences. Based on popular demand, the football tournament began to take the shape of a much awaited annual feature. In January 2017, a Kanyashree badminton tournament was also organized.

Shila Bagti, a student of RBB Girls High School, Joypur and captain of Joypur Kanyashree Football team, Purulia, won KFT 2016. She also represented India in the event 'Power of sports to shape the future of adolescents', organised by UNICEF and International Cricket Council at Colombo, Sri Lanka. Stepping outside her state for the first time, she is inspiring other girls to make sports a way of life.

Imparting vocational training through Kanyashree Swabalambi

Vocational and industrial training was provided to Kanyashree girls under the Kanyashree Swabalambi scheme and they were linked to other skill development schemes as well. Resources were mobilised by the district administration in convergence with Departments of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, Backward Classes Welfare and the private sector and loans were also provided by banks. The courses included sewing, handicrafts, beauty culture, spoken English, personality development, computers, self-defence, life skills, emergency rescue and legal rights. The vocational courses helped the girls to become more confident about their abilities to earn an income and life skills trainings empowered them.

- Adolescent girls trained on tailoring, nursing and making organic colours
- Branding of organic colours as 'Ban Palashi' and market linkages created through Biswa Bangla, Ranchi Mall, Big Bazar and ISCON
- Specialised coaching organized for joint entrance aspirants
- Resources mobilised under the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) (Ananda Dhara scheme) and loans provided through banks

Encouraging adolescent participation on diverse media

A community radio initiative called Kanyashree Betar Sabha was begun in July 2018 by an implementing partner in Manbazar-2 block and later in Bagmundhi, Barabazar, Manbazar-II, Hura, Jhalda-M, Neturia blocks. It emerged as a platform for adolescent girls to share their stories through a community radio station called Nityananda Janavani at Laulara village in Pancha block. The radio station covered a 15 km radius and reached a population of over 120,000 community members. The radio programme drew attention to adolescent issues, providing information



I belong to the Santhal community and have been producing radio programmes since 2010. I represent one of the most economically disadvantaged groups and am committed to bringing their issues in the open. Every one of our programmes has received overwhelming feedback. We are now self-sufficient and ready to launch internet radio.

Srimanti
Producer of community radio programme

on Kanyashree Clubs, Kanyashree Diwas, ending child marriage, the value of continuing education and exploring other options beyond marriage.

An Android-based app called Uttaran was launched for providing information on adolescent issues such as menstrual health, hygiene, sanitation, nutrition. Its implementation at the district level provided audio-visual support through mobile phones in official meetings and other advocacy work. Trainings on using the app were provided through Anwasha Counsellors and peer leaders. It worked as a platform for adolescents to showcase their stories. A feature called SoS was newly introduced. It was linked to the District Police Control Room and provided a channel for the administration to respond to incidents of child rights violation.

Enhancing adolescent-specific services

A major change was wrought in the health-seeking behaviours of adolescent girls. The demand for IFA tablets increased and mostly all health services were being accessed at AFHCs. The supply side of adolescent services was strengthened through orientation for peer educators and recruitment of additional peer educators. Exposure visits were also conducted to local police stations and Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics (AFHCs) or Anwasha clinics as they are named in West Bengal.



Orientations of **287** adolescents selected as peer educators under RKSK (two boys and two girls per GP)

367 exposure visits

Orientations were also undertaken for Block Primary Health Nurses (BPHNs) and Anwasha Counsellors as resource persons for adolescent reproductive and sexual health and nutrition (ARSH&N) topics.

Initiating intergenerational dialogue through parents' groups

Adolescents were encouraged to share their concerns with those adults whom they felt they could confide in. Through communication activities and events, community members were sensitised to the need to listen to adolescent perspectives with empathy. Both adults and adolescents agreed that personal inhibitions and social norms of engagement between generations continued to exert an influence.

Bridging this intergenerational gap was factored into CPC functioning (with its predominant adult representation and only two child members). It was agreed that a favourable environment for intergenerational dialogue required constant engagement and efforts. Formation of parents' groups were initiated with significant participation by women and consistent efforts are being made to keep the groups active. Women's self-help groups (SHGs) were also identified as platforms to create an enabling environment for adolescents.



14 parents' groups formed in seven blocks

6,804 parents reached through meetings.

WAY FORWARD

Adolescent capacities and life skills are being strengthened through the AEP. They are able to express themselves through adolescent platforms and intergenerational dialogue enables them to bridge the communication gap with their adult counterparts. They are provided self-defence trainings and build their physical abilities and personalities through sports such as football and badminton. Counselling services at government AFHCs are being popularised and the AEP also supports ongoing strengthening of CPCs. These multi-pronged efforts are helping adolescents in Purulia see themselves as individuals with agency and voice their concerns while utilising opportunities to improve their futures.



for every child

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