

GOOD PRACTICES IN **CHILD-FRIENDLY** LOCAL GOVERNANCE



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Last but not the least we would like to especially acknowledge and thank Dr Soumen Bagchi, Social Policy Specialist at UNICEF ICO, for leading this entire initiative and driving the agenda of child-friendly local governance.

We would like to thank the many other colleagues and partners whose names are not listed in this short note but whose contributions were invaluable.

MESSAGE BY THE SECRETARY

सुनील कुमार, आई.ए.एस.
सचिव
Sunil Kumar, IAS
Secretary



भारत सरकार
पंचायती राज मंत्रालय
डॉ. राजेन्द्र प्रसाद रोड,
कृषि भवन, नई दिल्ली-110001
Government of India
Ministry of Panchayati Raj
Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road,
Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi-110001

MESSAGE

India is striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through committed, planned action and monitoring at the National, State and Local Levels. Vital to this agenda, is the work of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) to localize action on the SDGs through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

The Flagship Scheme of the Ministry - Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) – has been revamped to build the capacities of PRIs for good governance with focus on participatory Gram Panchayat planning and implementation focusing on attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. This will help Gram Panchayats (GPs) to initiate, mainstream and institutionalize children's voices and youth empowerment, especially of adolescent girls, in village-level decision making.

The Expert Group, constituted by MoPR for Localizing SDGs, focussed the actionable agenda for 2030 under 9 themes for PRIs. Theme 3 is vital for child participation and child rights and aims to create "Child Friendly Gram Panchayats for promoting equality in child service delivery in Villages". This lays emphasis on empowering children, adolescents and youth - especially girls - as a pre-requisite to achieve all the SDGs.

It is a welcome initiative of UNICEF to collaborate with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to develop this 'Compendium of good practices on child friendly local governance' to facilitate cross learning and demonstrate exemplary initiatives by Panchayats for making grass roots governance responsive to priorities of children. My best compliments to the UNICEF Team led by Ms. Cynthia McCaffrey, Representative, UNICEF India Country Office for developing this compendium.

I am sure this compendium will be enormously beneficial for the States, Panchayats and other key stakeholders and will inspire them to ensure that the voices of children, adolescents and youth are heard while shaping decisions at various levels.


15.2.23
(Sunil Kumar)

MESSAGE BY THE REPRESENTATIVE

United Nations Children's Fund
73, Lodhi Estate,
New Delhi – 110003
India

Telephone +91 11 24690401
www.unicef.org



MESSAGE FROM REPRESENTATIVE, UNICEF INDIA COUNTRY OFFICE



India and UNICEF share the strong conviction that the empowerment of children is the key to prosperity, development, and a vibrant democracy in rural India. And we are privileged to support the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in its standard setting work to advance the Sustainable Development Goals for every child by localizing actions through the Gram Panchayat.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which India has signed and championed, guarantees the right of every child to express their views, to ensure that policies and decisions are responsive to their needs. This is to ensure that policies, schemes, and programmes are inclusive and relevant to the needs and aspirations of children and adolescents.

However, since the adoption of the CRC, and specifically Article 12 pertaining to children's and youth's participation, research reveals that children's and youths' voices often remain invisible in development programmes, and family and society welfare services. To address this gap, governments across the globe are taking various initiatives to ensure that decision makers actively listen to and collectively work towards addressing issues concerning children including adolescents.

I am pleased to note the strong partnership developed by the UNICEF India Country Office and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR). UNICEF is committed to creating the space so that children's voices are heard through grass roots level interventions, and are mainstreamed as a part of the village level planning. I hope Panchayats and related stakeholders will benefit immensely from this compendium of Good Practices on Child Friendly Local Governance developed based on UNICEF's interventions across the country.

Cynthia McCaffrey

MESSAGE BY THE ADDITIONAL SECRETARY

डॉ. चन्द्र शेखर कुमार, आई.ए.एस.
अपर सचिव

Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar, IAS
ADDITIONAL SECRETARY

Tel.: 011-23725301
Email: cs.kumar@nic.in



पंचायती राज मंत्रालय
भारत सरकार
टॉवर-II, 9वां तल
जीवन भारती बिल्डिंग,
नई दिल्ली-110001
MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
Tower-II, 9th Floor,
Jeevan Bharati Building,
New Delhi-110001



MESSAGE

It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, under its Flagship Scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) has embarked upon its campaign for Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

The theme of Child Friendly Villages for making all development efforts child sensitive and adolescent-inclusive, and targeted towards equal rights for youth is fundamental, and must be universally integrated for optimal and timely achievement of the child related SDGs.

I am happy to note UNICEF India's contribution in developing this 'Compendium of good practices on child friendly local governance'. This draws on a judicious mix of different types of interventions rolled out in Panchayats, for attaining all the objectives of child friendly villages as a part of Theme 3 in a child sensitive governance work culture.

I hope that these case studies will be closely studied and optimally adapted to the various state contexts and adequately scaled up by the States. This will also help to integrate and mainstream children's issues in village level planning and programme implementation, and facilitate increase in responsiveness of Gram Panchayats on issues related to children among Gram Panchayats.

सशक्त पंचायत सतत विकास

15-2-2023
(Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar)

MESSAGE BY THE DEPUTY REPRESENTATIVE



United Nations Children's Fund | India Country Office
UNICEF House, 73 Lodi Estate, New Delhi – 110 003
Telephone: (+91) 11 24690401 | Facsimile: (+91) 11-24627521 | newdelhi@unicef.org | www.unicef.in

MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY REPRESENTATIVE, PROGRAMMES

UNICEF INDIA



At UNICEF, we believe that what India achieves for children today will be the defining story of the global achievement of the SDGs for children by 2030. And we believe this work starts with the empowerment of children as stakeholders in rural governance.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has taken decisive steps to strengthen Panchayats across India through making planning and governance more participatory, equitable, representative, and accountable for all residents, across communities. The need for making Panchayats child friendly is recognized in Volume 2 of the Report of the Expert Group on Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commissioned by MoPR. The report underlines the need for child friendly panchayats, covering SDGs 1 through 5 on No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-Being; Quality Education; and Gender Equality. I am pleased to note that UNICEF has been an integral part of the initiative undertaken by MoPR towards mainstreaming the voices of children in grass roots governance.

I compliment the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for prioritizing children and issues affecting them at the local level through participatory process which included mainstreaming of Bal-Balika Sabhas. I am happy to note that UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry in developing this compendium of Good Practices in Child Friendly Local Governance that showcases a range of initiatives rolled out by UNICEF in collaboration with government partners, Gram Panchayats and communities across India.

Children at the heart of India's landmark Gram Panchayat system can be force multipliers – not only for the full realization of their own rights, but as the bedrock of national growth through healthy, safe, and prosperous villages.

I thank MoPR for this opportunity to work with the Ministry and the State Departments of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj and other concerned departments for promoting child friendly initiatives and providing all support in rolling them out across India.

MESSAGE BY THE JOINT SECRETARY

आलोक प्रेम नागर
ALOK PREM NAGAR



संयुक्त सचिव
भारत सरकार
पंचायती राज मंत्रालय
JOINT SECRETARY
Government of India
Ministry of Panchayati Raj
11th Floor, Jeevan Prakash Building
25, Kasturba Gandhi Marg,
New Delhi-110001
Tel.: +91-11-23356556, +91-11-23354816
E-mail: ap.nagar@gov.in
Mob.: 9418007426



Dated: 15th February, 2023

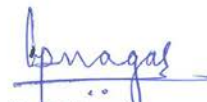
MESSAGE

It gives me immense pleasure to present the 'Compendium of good practices on child friendly local governance' with the hope that it will inspire States and Gram Panchayats to initiate, mainstream and institutionalize the cause of promoting child sensitivity and youth empowerment, especially for adolescent girls in village level decision making.

The agenda of child friendly villages and youth responsive governance is well exemplified by the impressive strides made by the Panchayats as learnt from various work done by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in partnership with UNICEF. Scaling up of child friendly initiatives across the country will also establish that the Theme 3 being championed by the Ministry for Localizing SDGs through PRIs, is an achievable agenda for action under Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojana (RGSA) – our Flagship Scheme. Child Friendly villages is a common platform to help attain the SDGs through local action by the Gram Panchayats - the institution of local self-governance.

Our heartfelt appreciation to our partner UN Agency, UNICEF, in developing this compendium to promote the objectives enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child focused on survival, development, protection, and participation through a decentralized and participatory approach.

May this endeavor of making villages child and youth friendly gather momentum across India!


(A. P. Nagar)

MESSAGE BY THE CHIEF OF SOCIAL POLICY

United Nations Children's Fund
73, Lodhi Estate,
New Delhi – 110003
India

Telephone +91 11 24690401
www.unicef.org



MESSAGE FROM CHIEF SOCIAL POLICY & SOCIAL PROTECTION UNICEF INDIA COUNTRY OFFICE



Childhood is a precious and beautiful phase of life, but is too easily compromised when the needs and voices of children are not incorporated into the local decisions which affect them on a daily basis. This is why the Ministry of Panchayati Raj's initiative to scale and institutionalize mechanism where children's voices are adequately heard in local development planning is so noteworthy and commendable. In this way, children's priorities are identified and integrated into village level planning and decision making. I thank the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for this and also for involving UNICEF in this journey.

It is universally recognized that children have rights that are inalienable and indivisible. The United Nations through its Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted in 1989, affirmed an expansive set of rights for children. It is this human rights treaty, ratified by 192 nations, that explicitly recognizes children as rights-holders. India too is a signatory to the CRC and upholds child rights through various State and national legislations.

Child friendly local governance thrives to address children and adolescent linked local priorities, ensure adequate resource allocation for these priorities, create platforms for children and adolescents to build their leadership skills and be part of the local governance processes, and assess whether the schemes and programmes are effectively and efficiently delivered to achieve the SDGs through a monitoring mechanism led by children and adolescents.

I am sure that this compendium of Good Practices in Child Friendly Local Governance will immensely strengthen cross learning among Panchayats and promote children and adolescents' engagement in local level planning and governance. They will add greatly to addressing children- and adolescent-linked local priorities, creating platforms for adolescent girls to build their leadership and be part of the local governance processes, and integrating children and adolescents' priorities into the village development plans.

Hyun Hee Ban

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Anganwadi	childcare centre under Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) scheme of Government of India
Bal Manch	children's forum
Bal Samvad	children's dialogue
Bal-Balika Sabha	children's forum/assembly
Bal Panchayat	children's representative body in a village
Bal Sarpanch	president/head of Bal Panchayat
Bal Up-Sarpanch	vice-president of Bal Panchayat
Bal Sangopan Yojana	scheme of Government of Maharashtra for providing allowance to poor and orphan children
Balmitra	'friend of children', volunteer supporting the children of migrant families
Gram Sabha	a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls within the area of a Gram Panchayat (mandated by the Constitution of India)
Gram Sakha/Sakhi	village friend/volunteer
Gram Sangathan	informal village body
Gram/Gaon Panchayat	village level elected local government
Jal Jeevan Mission	Government of India's mission/scheme for ensuring potable drinking water supply on long-term basis to every rural household and public institutions
Kishori Balika Diwas	Adolescent Girls' Day
Mahalla Shala	community school
Mahila Sabha	women's assembly

Mission Antodaya	convergence and accountability framework aiming to bring optimum use and management of resources allocated by 27 Ministries/ Department of Government of India under various programmes for the development of rural areas
Mitra	village-level volunteer
Nal Se Jal	government tap water scheme
Nari Suraksha Samitti	women's safety committee
Nari, Sishu Unnayan O Samaj	
Kalyan Upa-samiti	women, child development and social welfare sub-committee (One of the Gram Panchayat level Sub-Committees in the State of West Bengal)
nukkad natak	street theatre
Palle Prakruthi Vanam	village nature park
Panchayat Samiti	rural local government (panchayat) body at the intermediate (Block) level in India
Panchayati Raj	Three-tier system of rural local self-government in India
Pradhan	head or chief
Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana	Government of India's affordable housing scheme to ensure housing for all
Rojgar Sahayyak	village-level official under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
Sarpanch	head of Gram Panchayat
Sishu Gaon Sabha	children's forum
Udita	one who has risen
Udita corner	adolescent girls' area
Ward Sabha	ward assembly

A young child with short hair, wearing a red vest over a checkered shirt, sits on a wooden plank. The plank is supported by two old, worn tires. The child is looking to the right. The background is a solid blue color with a large, light blue diamond shape. The word "INTRODUCTION" is written in white capital letters on a blue rectangular background within the diamond.

INTRODUCTION

Children constitute 39 per cent of India's population. Global evidence shows that investment in children has intergenerational benefits. Yet, the needs and rights of children are often not given the attention they deserve by local governments. Creating child-friendly local governance will address this imbalance and ensure that children's voices are heard and their perspectives taken into account on decisions that affect their lives.

Local governments have the power to create environments that are safe, supportive and empowering for all children through proactive and inclusive engagement as well as targeted investments in essential services such as education, nutrition, healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene. The adoption of child-friendly governance practices will help to promote greater equality and social justice, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are pleased to present the 'Compendium of Good Practices on Child Friendly Local Governance'. This compendium of case studies highlights the excellent work of various UNICEF divisions and state offices across the country, in collaboration with panchayats, government departments, civil society organizations and communities. The case studies featured all demonstrate replicable initiatives taken up by local- and state-level institutions for upholding the four critical pillars of child rights: survival, development, protection and participation. The interventions cover a gamut of issues including child-friendly Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), disaster resilience, water, sanitation and hygiene, Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and communications for social and behavioural change (SBC).

This compendium of exemplary, real-life scenarios has been developed to promote the crosspollination of ideas and knowledge, and to inspire those who are committed to advancing the child-friendly local governance agenda. Whether you are an Elected Representative of your panchayat, a local government official, community leader or concerned citizen, we hope that the information and insights contained in these pages will galvanize you to take action and work towards a brighter future for our children.

Case
Study



MAINSTREAMING BAL-BALIKA SABHAS AND MAHILA SABHAS INTO GRAM PANCHAYAT DEVELOPMENT PLAN PREPARATION

Assam, Rajasthan, Sikkim and
Telangana (2022–23)

Theme: Participation

Summary

This project sought to localize SDGs and prioritize women’s and children’s issues in village-level development planning processes by establishing *Mahila Sabhas* (women’s assemblies) and *Bal Sabhas* (children’s assemblies) and integrating their outcomes into Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present a global agenda with a timebound approach for member nations of the United Nations to achieve them by 2030. However, local actions – based on local, needs-oriented planning and optimal utilization of resources – are key to achieving these goals. Local governments are critical for visualizing the SDGs in the local context and aligning them with local priorities. The People’s Plan Campaign, initiated by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India, aims to bolster people’s participation in the development of the GPDP to empower marginalized groups, particularly women and children, and achieve the SDGs. The campaign is a combination of consultation and negotiation, with the aim of making women, children and other vulnerable sections of society a central focus of the GPDP.

In this context, the MoPR and UNICEF India Country Office launched a collaborative effort to localize the SDGs by prioritizing issues concerning women and children, among other local needs, and integrating them into the GPDP. The intervention envisaged organizing Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas in selected *Gram Panchayats* (GPs; village-level elected government) and establishing a model to be replicated across the country.

Scope

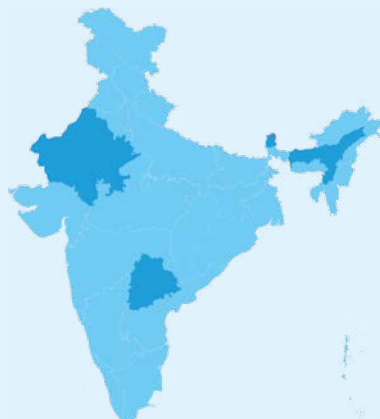


Intervention Coverage

States

- Assam
- Rajasthan
- Sikkim
- Telangana

40 GPs of **10** districts overall



Sketch map for design purpose only



Objectives

The key objectives were as follows:

- ❖ To ensure mainstreaming of Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas in local governance and planning
- ❖ To identify women's and children's priorities in the targeted GPs and integrate them into the GDPDs on a sustainable basis.



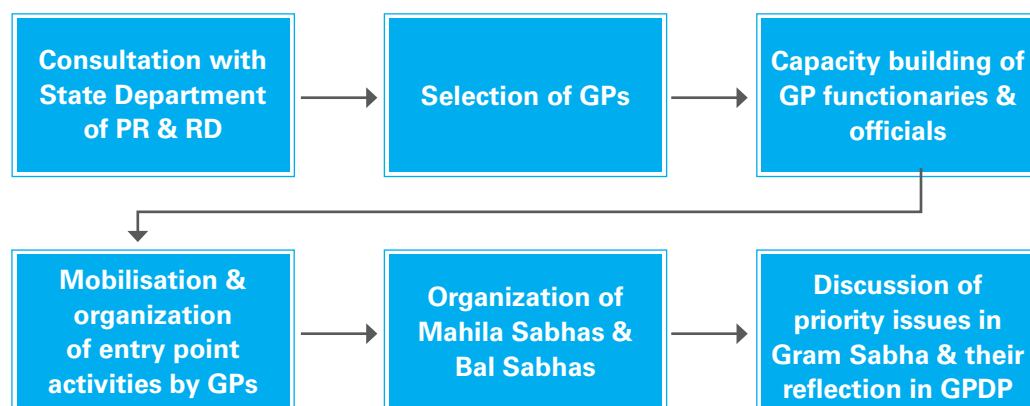
Implementation design

The MoPR and UNICEF collaborated with the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj to implement the intervention (see Figure 1 for the implementation process). The State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) was the nodal agency to implement the intervention in selected states. In consultation with the State Department of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, SIRD selected the GPs for organizing Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas. After selecting GPs, SIRD organized a sensitization/training programme for key stakeholders, including district- and GP-level elected representatives and officials. Participants consisted of GP representatives (President and Ward Members), head teachers, self-help group (SHG) members, *Anganwadi* (childcare) workers (AWWs), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs).

After the awareness workshop, GP functionaries were advised to organize community mobilization activities to make the communities aware of the processes and the benefits of Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas.

The Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas were to be organized in three two-month phases in each GP, over a total of six months. In each phase, the GPs organized one Mahila Sabha and one Bal Sabha, organizing three of each overall. The GPs announced the dates and the location of the meetings. Locations were chosen to be convenient for all sections of society. Apart from the President and the Secretary, officials from the line department – including Child Protection Officers, Block Development Officers, AWWs, ANMs, ASHAs and, in some cases, police officials – also participated in the meetings. Women and children participants discussed the key issues pertaining to their security and welfare and these issues were communicated to the GP for further action. The expectations were that selected issues would be taken to Gram Sabhas (general village assemblies) in January 2023 and become part of the GPDP.

Figure 1: Implementation process flow



Note: : PR: Panchayati Raj; RD: Rural Development; GP: Gram Panchayat; GPDP: Gram Panchayat Development Plan.

Processes

Overall, GPs successfully followed the process for organizing these events. The first positive outcome was that each GP organized the mandated number of Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas, with good participation. The GPs organized sabhas in neutral public spaces to maximize turnout, in GP offices and/or schools, and each GP conducted mobilization activities beforehand, although the mobilization activities varied across the GP. This indicates that GP mobilization activities depended on the resources (human and financial) available and the local context. A few GPs organized rallies for women and children, while some used printed material (banners and pamphlets) and door-to-door campaigns to introduce the initiative to citizens and invite them to events. As part of the strategy, GPs engaged with community-based organizations (CBOs) for Mahila Sabhas. Since the CBOs are well-organized and active in the village, it is easier for GPs to engage with them, and allow them to influence others.

Similarly, for Bal Sabhas, GPs engaged local schools, which introduced children to the initiative through entry-point activities such as drawing, singing and sports competitions. For Bal Sabhas, one boy and one girl were nominated as Presidents. The Presidents, in consultation with other children, schoolteachers and GP functionaries, decided the agenda of each Bal Sabha and also moderated the meetings.

The GPs prepared the agenda for each Mahila Sabha and Bal Sabha and took minutes. During the second and third rounds of meetings, it was observed that discussions on certain points were ongoing, which was considered a good sign for the deliberation process. The Mahila Sabhas were attended by GP representatives (Presidents and Ward Members) while the participation of line departments was less predictable. Block- and district-level officials working in health and child protection participated in a few meetings, but village-level front-line workers – school teachers, ASHAs, AWWs and ANMs – were regular participants. The participation of officials from the line departments enables participants to seek solutions to certain problems (if not all) immediately. A few GPs innovated by including folk singing in the sabhas or organizing information sessions for women about schemes and programmes.

SIRDs deployed local Field Facilitators and Field Coordinators to help GPs conduct and monitor these events. SIRDs provided a standard reporting protocol for each event and Field Facilitators and Field Coordinators helped the GPs maintain event records. However, records of mobilization activities and meeting proceedings varied in terms of quality and comprehensiveness.

Results

Table 1 shows the average number of women and children participating in Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas. The sample includes 21 Mahila Sabhas and 31 Bal Sabhas. For both, the average meeting duration is more than an hour, slightly longer for a Mahila Sabha. On average, five to six speakers raised issues during the sabhas. Initial assessment of the intervention indicates that participants were given a platform and an opportunity to raise their issues and problems. It is encouraging to note that the average number of speakers in Bal Sabhas is higher than Mahila Sabhas.

Table 1: Attendance and speakers

	Mahila Sabha	Bal Sabha
Average no. of participants in a sabha	76	67
Average duration of a sabha (minutes)	82.62	79.84
Average no. of participants raising issues in a sabha	5	6
Average duration of a participant's speech in a sabha (minutes)	20.57	14.29



Women and children raised a variety of issues pertaining to their needs (Table 2). It is important to note that most of the issues raised by women and children in their respective sabhas were collective in nature. This indicates that the participants were able to put aside their individual interests and advocate for collective issues and problems. Notably, children raised issues of social concern such as domestic violence, child marriage and child labour. This indicates that a forum like Bal Sabha has the potential to counter harmful social norms and contribute to overall community development. Other important demands put forward by children were playgrounds, libraries, science and computer labs, and music and dance classes, which align with the New Education Policy 2020 to diversify the syllabus to promote holistic development.

Table 2: A snapshot of major issues raised by women and children

Mahila Sabha	Bal Sabha
Roads and streets need to be constructed and existing ones need to be repaired and maintained	Need for a playground in the village
Lack of Anganwadi centres and workers	Need sports kit
Lack of school teachers	Schools should organize music and drama classes
Need more loans for enterprises and businesses	Need for library facilities in school and village
Lack of access to benefits under Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana (PMGAY)	Need for science and computer lab in school
Need vocational training to improve livelihood options and income generation	Need for streetlights and electricity
Domestic violence should be controlled	School maintenance required
Early marriage should be prohibited	Furniture in the classrooms is needed
Strengthen drinking water facilities	Cleaning of the toilets
Ensure food availability under Public Distribution System (PDS)	Construction of separate toilets for boys and girls
Repairs to school building required	Streets are often muddy and require cleaning; children find it difficult to navigate the journey to and from school
Water tank required for the village	Due attention to be given to child labour
Community and individual toilets required	Dustbins required in the village

Mahila Sabha	Bal Sabha
Community meeting halls required so that women can organize collective meetings	Drainage should be cleaned regularly
Drainage should be cleaned regularly	Health facilities should be made available in the village
Preventing incidents of unwanted sexual remarks or advances made by men to women in public places (colloquially known as 'eve teasing')	Domestic violence and early marriage should be stopped

The issues raised by the women reflect their social development. Aside from societal issues such as domestic violence, early marriage and the uncontrolled sale and consumption of liquor, women demanded vocational training, access to credit and bank linkages, and community-focused amenities such as meeting halls and community toilets. Women remain focused on issues of livelihood and income generation, paying substantial attention to adverse social norms.

While the issues raised by the women and children are subject to discussion in Gram Sabhas, and appropriate action points are supposed to be integrated with the GDPD, in all states GPs took immediate action to try to resolve certain issues. Women and children expressed the need to continue with this system so they have a forum to raise their voices and, more importantly, ensure they are heard. While there are areas of improvement to make these community forums more agile and responsive, these community forums have proved vital and must continue.



Next steps and sustainability

- ❖ Provisions should be made in the State Panchayati Raj Act for the conduct of Bal and Mahila Sabhas.
- ❖ States should issue guidelines for the conduct of Bal and Mahila Sabhas.
- ❖ Each GP should have a mobilization plan for each phase of the Bal and Mahila Sabhas.
- ❖ Each GP must prepare an activity report of the mobilization activities. Some GPs have already prepared written reports. However, some only contained photographs of the events.
- ❖ Financial resources need to be earmarked at the GP level to enable the GP to organize these sabhas.
- ❖ Attendance of frontline workers/local officials from the line department is required at Bal and Mahila Sabhas.
- ❖ Provisions should be made to include school dropouts and children involved in child labour, if any, in Bal Sabhas.
- ❖ Formal proceedings of the Bal and Mahila Sabhas must be presented in the Gram Sabha and relevant points must be integrated into the GPDP.
- ❖ Some of the issues/demands raised in these sabhas should also be reflected in the development plan of Intermediary Panchayats (block- and district-level panchayats).



In the second Bal Sabha organized in the Morampalli Banjar GP (Badradri Kothagudem district of Telangana), the children highlighted the lack of a water supply to the school, including the toilets. They also spoke about the school not having a boundary wall. They asked that a boundary wall be constructed around the school to make it a safe space for children and that water facilities be arranged. These issues were raised in front of the panchayat by elected representatives of the Bal Sabha but the issues were selected democratically by all school children. During the Bal Sabha, the panchayat promised that these issues would be resolved. Later, the School Management Committee and the panchayat pooled funds for the construction of a school wall, which was completed within a month. For the water facility, the borehole, water pipelines and connections were all repaired. Seeing their demands met in this way gave the children a sense of agency and empowerment, which has strengthened their belief in the platform of Bal Sabhas.





In No. 26 Bongaon GP (Nalbari district, Assam), through the medium of Mahila Sabhas, the women have found a platform to come together and strengthen the SHG movement. The platform has given the women a way of receiving information about their rights, various beneficiary schemes and ongoing activities in the village. But, most importantly, it has given them a voice. A major demand that resonated with most women was for better livelihood options. They urged the panchayat to arrange for a common space for women to come together and work in SHGs. They also asked for more tools to earn their own livelihood. The panchayat promised the women a room in the panchayat premises and sewing machines to help them generate an income. Funds were later allocated for the purpose and construction began on an SHG meeting room. Many sewing machines were also purchased, which will be distributed to the SHGs.

The platform has also given the women somewhere to come together and talk about domestic violence. They expressed their hesitancy at coming forwards and talking openly. Since coming to the Mahila Sabhas, however, they found a sense of community, which gave them the confidence to help the women in their village who were suffering silently. With the support of the Panchayat and the local police, the women have started a *Mahila Suraksha Samiti* (a committee formed by women to protect themselves) which also holds rallies in the village against domestic violence.



In the Bal Sabha in Aswapuram Gram Panchayat (Badradi Kothagudem district, Telangana), a twelfth-grade student asked for plants and greenery in the school. A young girl raised the problem of girls being harassed on their way to school by some local men. The panchayat thanked the children for sharing these problems. They promised to bring saplings for the school from the government nursery under the *Palle Prakruthi Vanam* scheme of the Telangana government. On the issue of harassment, they encouraged the children to inform the local authorities, who would be made aware of the issue and asked to take action.





Two cycles of Bal Sabhas in Thingling Khechuperi GP (West District, Sikkim) were held in August and September 2022. Children were mobilized through their schoolteachers and the Field Facilitator of the SIRD. They were encouraged to participate in an election campaign for the Bal Sabha representatives and each candidate was encouraged to identify the major issues for children in their school and community. Reema Rai stood for the position of Prime Minister and called for a sanitary napkin dispenser in the school. She won her campaign and, in the first Bal Sabha, the demand was raised in front of the panchayat, which promised to allocate funds for the dispenser. By the second Bal Sabha, a machine had been installed in the girl's bathroom. Reema Rai and other children felt a sense of achievement at this. The student community came to believe in the platform of Bal Sabhas and the children took ownership of the cause and created a WhatsApp group to discuss the issues in their school and their community. They use the app for discussing issues across the schools. Some issues are prioritized and then presented in front of the panchayat. The children have now decided to organize a Bal Sabha on the 14th of every month.



In Bhankri GP (Karauli district, Rajasthan), the Sarpanch and Ward Members acknowledged the issues raised by children. They promised to support the children on the matter of child marriage and held an open discussion around the issue, encouraging the children to resist such practices. In some other villages, the children's demands led the panchayats to provide status updates on the delivery of various activities and to give reasons for any delays.





**Case
Study**

2

**COMMUNITY RESOURCE
CENTRE**

A UNIQUE INITIATIVE

**UNDER PROJECT
COVIJAY**

Assam, Chhattisgarh, Madhya
Pradesh and Maharashtra
(2022)

Theme: Survival and development

Summary

Community Resource Centres (CRCs) have empowered people devastated by the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic with knowledge and support to give them access to services and benefits. The project has set up a total of 204 CRCs in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, as a part of Recovery Initiatives under Project CoVijay.

Project CoVijay is a joint programme between UNICEF India Country Office and Polaris Foundation (through its social impact enterprise, Mission Samriddhi) to strengthen the *Gram Panchayats* (GPs; village-level elected government) to be better prepared for and able to respond to COVID-19 and other seasonal hazards, with the coordination of multiple stakeholders and partners.

Approach

The COVID-19 *Mitras* (village-level volunteers) operated at the GP level and managed these CRCs, along with other awareness, preparedness and response activities. The CRCs were able to connect members of the community to various services, schemes and programmes.

As is often the case, the government implements numerous schemes to help the poor, needy and distressed but, despite being eligible, people do not access them due to a lack of awareness about the schemes and their eligibility criteria, the application process, and so on. This was a problem even before the pandemic, but COVID-19 brought a range of new vulnerabilities and issues. Accessing the government social service schemes became the best way for many people to resolve their problems. However, people needed support throughout the process to access their eligible benefits and recover from their problems. Once the CRCs were opened, communities had a one-stop-shop for seeking support.

In most GPs, the CRC was opened inside the GP office itself; the panchayat President, who was already familiar with project CoVijay and the benefits of CRCs, offered the use of one of the GP office rooms. The CRC put up posters and gave out leaflets to disseminate information and build awareness. In some GPs, the CRC was located at the *Anganwadi* (childcare) Centre or at the state primary school. Where space was scarce, COVID Mitras used their own homes.

Results

A COVID-19 widow's experience of finding stability and hope

Roshni Sarthi, wife of the late Sudama Sarthi, who died at the age of 29 years, is a resident of Usraut GP, Raigarh, Chhattisgarh:

"I was devastated after I lost my husband to the second wave of COVID-19. CoVijay team gave a new ray of hope in my life. Now, I am a beneficiary of the widow's pension scheme and I am able to take care of my little child."

Thanks to the local CRC, Roshni also now receives livelihood training to start a business and her financial situation is stable. Similar life changing experiences were experienced by other members of CRCs.

CRCs bridged the gap between people and services in the following ways:

- ❖ Providing correct information about the services available in the GP
- ❖ Helping people with forms, filling them in and helping people to get the right supporting documents
- ❖ Following up on each case with relevant government line departments and continuing to support applicants, especially the vulnerable and those with additional needs, until they receive their benefits
- ❖ Maintaining a register of people who benefited from the CRC.

The CRCs allowed community members to benefit from a wide range of government schemes, including:

- ❖ Sukanya Samridhi Yojana
- ❖ Mission Vatsalya
- ❖ Bal Sangopan Yojana
- ❖ Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme
- ❖ Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension
- ❖ Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Beema Yojana

- ❖ Atal Pension Yojana
- ❖ Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Beema Yojana
- ❖ Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
- ❖ National Family Benefit Scheme
- ❖ Janani Suraksha Yojana
- ❖ Manodhariya Scheme (Maharashtra only)
- ❖ SNNANA (Swa-Nirbhar Nari Atma Nirbhar – Assam)

A widow's experience of turning over a new leaf

Ranjana Praveen Nehare is from Zadgaon, Wardha district, Maharashtra. She was forced to turn over a new leaf after her husband took his own life, leaving Ranjana with two children – a 10-year-old girl and an 8-year-old boy – to look after.

“My life had ended that day, when he chose to end his. I had to continue to live just because of my kids. It was more than shock – I was scared, how was I going to bring up my children?”

Before, Ranjana had been working at the Anganwadi Centre in the village and her husband had been working as a driver. Both had a steady source of income and their children went to a convent school in Wardha. After her husband's death, Ranjana could not afford the fees so moved them to a local government school.

With the help of the Sarpanch and team CoVijay, Ranjana now has a support system in place. She has encouraged several people to come to the CRC and seek help with their problems – she takes solace from helping others. She improved her communication skills by dealing with various government officers and, leveraging her new knowledge of government schemes and links with various departments, she applied for a widow's pension and a childcare scheme. Currently, she and her children receive both her widow's pension and Bal Sangopan Yojana, a childcare allowance. This extra financial support has helped her significantly, allowing her to turn over a new leaf.

“I started to work again... for my children,” she says. “I must give a good life to Arushi and Shreyas... just the way me and my late husband once dreamt.”

Lessons learned



It is important to ensure accessibility, as well as availability. A range of government entitlements exist to help the poor and needy. Often, however, people in the community are not aware of the process to access them. There is a need to simplify the process of accessing these entitlements. Here, the CoVijay team played an important role in helping and guiding people.



During the disruption and multifaceted impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, when people's survival was at stake, the CRCs helped people to access their government entitlements. Rather than viewing people as survivors/victims and distributing relief and support, it is important to make them aware of their rights and motivate them to play an active part in community development.

Next steps

Communities can become more resilient when the people who live there are involved in planning. This requires that people are aware of their rights and actively take part in planning, implementation, and monitoring process. CRCs run with support from the GPs have shown that they can play a crucial role in improving service delivery by bridging the gap between services and service seekers. It would be critical to further strengthen these CRCs stationed in GP offices and develop them as 'one stop information dissemination centre' for all government schemes and services.

We look forward to creating further awareness and scaling up the CRCs to create more resilient communities.

COVID VACCINATION
AGE-12-14 YEARS

GUPS CHATIKONIA



Case
Study

3



CREATING CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES DURING FLOODS IN DHEMAJI AND MAJULI

Assam (2019–20)

Theme: Protection,
participation and survival

Summary

UNICEF, in collaboration with Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) of Dhemaji and Majuli, District Panchayat Resource Centre (DPRCs) of Dhemaji and Majuli and Civil Society Organization (CSO) Partner Rural Volunteer Centre (RVC), has been promoting the concept of risk-informed Gram Panchayat development planning in Dhemaji and Majuli, where participation of children in the GPD process has been streamlined and risk-informed development schemes that are critical for enhancing community resilience to disasters are promoted.

Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) for emergencies are community-based structures designed to provide integrated services to children affected by disasters. Based on a demonstration model of CFS by Rural Volunteer Centre, supported by UNICEF, CFS has been promoted as a scheme for flood-prone GPs.

Context

Assam is incredibly rich in water, with a network of 48 major rivers and 128 small rivers originating from the hills and mountains around it. Riverine flooding has been an annual phenomenon in the state. In recent years, the nature and extent of flooding has undergone major changes due to erratic rainfall, expansion of flood plains, infrastructure development and other factors.

Flooding routinely affects development and leads to internal displacement as people resort to living in government-run relief camps or on other high ground such as roads, embankments or raised platforms. It is estimated that around 10–30 per cent of Assam's population is affected by floods each year and 40 per cent of them are children.

Providing essential services and supplies during floods is a major task for administrators in flood-affected districts. Despite their best efforts, displaced children often fail to get the attention they need. Routine services for children get disrupted and a host of new risks and deprivations emerge as children take shelter in makeshift or other temporary arrangements.

Scope

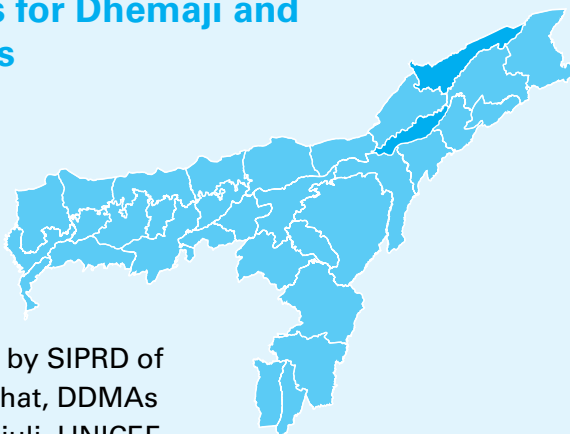


Demographics for Dhemaji and Majuli Districts

Coverage

2019–20: **10** GPs

2021–22: **40** GPs



Initiatives taken up by SIPRD of Lakhimpur and Jorhat, DDMAAs of Dhemaji and Majuli, UNICEF and Rural Volunteer Centre

State-level manuals and training notes were developed to make GPDs risk-informed, and the partnership ensured that risk-informed GPDP capsule modules were integrated into PRI member training at the block level.

The Government of Assam initiated a campaign called ‘People’s Plan’ to ensure that each GP in the state had a GPDP. SIPRD invited RVC to facilitate risk-informed GPDP modules during training of PRI members and officials from 25 GPs in Dhemaji district and 8 GPs in Majuli district. Further intensive support was provided in 6 GPs of Dhemaji and 4 GPs of Majuli. This effort continued in 2020 as well.

With support from UNICEF, the team of mobilizers from RVC worked with PRI members in their respective areas to conduct a participatory planning exercise. One of the critical components of the participatory process was to engage with children through Sishu Gram Sabha, a platform that enables children to discuss their needs and present their requests to the PRIs for incorporation into the GPDPs.

Aim



Mobilize communities



Build capacities and support PRI members in addressing the different dimensions of DRR within the GPDP process



Objectives

- ❖ To encourage and demonstrate children's participation in the GPDP process
- ❖ To capacitate PRIs on making GPDPs risk-informed
- ❖ To facilitate and support incorporation of risk-informed actions/schemes in GPDP

UNICEF and RVC firstly aimed to understand and address the needs of children and young people during flooding, particularly relating to the disruption of routine services and their psychosocial well-being. Valuable experience was gained in implementing CFS, a community-based mechanism in which temporary structures were built using bamboo and tarpaulin on pre-identified higher ground (safe from floods). Community-level frontline workers were trained and engaged to provide services to children during and after floods, ensuring continuity of care and protecting them from physical and psychological harm.

The ASDMA and DDMA of Dhemaji and Majuli decided to use this experience to implement a pilot initiative for CFS in relief camps. Though the pilot was successful and translated into a state-level policy, it emerged that, in communities that are flood prone but where people often prefer to settle on higher ground within their village (outside of formal camps), it was also necessary to build the local capacity to respect children's needs and construct CFS in public areas.



Results

- ❖ Children's active participation in 40 GPs led to the conceptualization and development of a Charter of Demands by children. In this Charter, children demanded specific actions in line with the CFS Framework and submitted it to the GP President for inclusion in the GPDP. The charter was an outcome of rounds of discussion amongst children in *Sishu Gram Sabhas* (infants' assemblies).
- ❖ As a result of the interventions, flood-prone GPs have gradually started to include CFS in their GPDPs. Six GPs have included CFS in their GPDPs in 2019–20.
- ❖ While this is a start, it demonstrates that there is potential for other GPs to include CFS in their plans in the future. An example is the Ramdhan Dikhari Panchayat, which included the construction of a number of CFS in its plan of action for 2019–2020. The panchayat constructed CFS in 2019–2020 at No.1 Badalpur village. UNICEF and RVC trained frontline workers – including Accredited Social Health Activists, *Anganwadi* (childcare centre) workers and school teachers from the villages – on the operationalization of CFS and their role, based on state-level Standard Operating Procedures developed jointly by ASDMA and UNICEF. The CFS initiative in this village supported 35 children during the 2019 flooding and 38 children during the 2020 flooding. The frontline workers operationalized and managed the CFS, with the help of affected families who were taking shelter nearby. At present, the CFS is acting as a school building as Badalpur Bodo Lower Primary school was eroded by the Brahmaputra river. Recognizing the importance and success of the initiative, the district administration named Ramdhan Dikhari Gram Panchayat the best child-friendly GP.



“

I was involved in the community-led process to create a CFS in 2018 and donated a few pieces of bamboo for the construction of it. I was amazed to see the utility of that temporary structure where children continued learning and received services from the Anganwadi workers during floods, when generally these are disrupted. Looking at these advantages and benefits and the demands from the people, and particularly the demands of the children of the village raised during the Gram Sabha, we decided to convert the temporary structure into a permanent one and thus included the construction of a CFS in our Annual Action Plan. The Panchayat Secretary and the Ward Member of No.1 Badalpur supported the inclusion. In 2019, during the GPDP process, with support from UNICEF's partner, Rural Volunteer Centre, we organized a first-of-its-kind Sishu Gram Sabha (infants' assembly), where children unanimously demanded the construction of more such spaces. We took their demand seriously and included the construction of CFS at No.1 Uluwoni and No.2 Uluwoni in our action plan for 2020–2021. This is a new undertaking for us, and we endeavour to make our GPDPs in subsequent years more informed of risks and, accordingly, to adopt action plans that address them.

— **Leena Doley Regon, President of Ramdhan Dikhari Gram Panchayat, Dhemaji, Assam**

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The CFS constructed at No.1 Badalpur Village is now functioning as a lower primary school as Badalpur Bodo Lower Primary has been damaged by the Brahmaputra river.

Identification number	Scheme name	Scheme ID	Period
1	Construction of CFS at No.1 Uluwoni village, Ramdhan Dikhari Panchayat, MSTD Block, Dhemaji	-	2019–2020
2	Construction of CFS at No.1 Uluwoni village, Ramdhan Dikhari Panchayat, MSTD Block, Dhemaji	-	2019–2020
3	Construction of CFS at Balijan village, Rajakhana GP, MSTD Block, Dhemaji	36349670	2020–2021
4	Construction of CFS at Milon Tirtha village, Bahir Jonai, MSTD Block, Dhemaji	41947854	2020–2021
5	Construction of CFS at Tari Kachari village, Bahir Jonai, MSTD Block, Dhemaji	36418333	2020–2021
6	Construction of CFS at Gine Mahmora Village, Bahir Jonai, MSTD Block, Dhemaji	36349283	2020–2021



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Lessons learned



GPDP is essentially a planning exercise designed to streamline local development planning and improve the utilization of resources available at GPs. Because the focus of a GPDP is on development, it does not necessarily consider risks related to disasters and their impact on the sustainability of schemes/projects. Moreover, the prioritization of development schemes/projects is complex and identified through consultative exercises and the political prerogatives of the elected representatives.



It is vital that we recognize the importance of disaster risk reduction in addressing the basic needs of communities. Skillful facilitation that promotes consensus and recognizes and prioritizes the most suitable and high-impact interventions holds the key.



The concept of CFS has huge potential for improving the continuity of services to children. Indeed, most routine services can be carried out by frontline workers without interruption if they can access affected communities in a conducive environment. While the scheme, at its most basic level, can be a low-cost infrastructure project, the bigger picture includes community participation, stakeholder engagement, localized preparedness and systematic work to reduce the deprivations faced by children.



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Next steps

While CFS provide one example of risk-informed actions taken by GPs, a range of other actions are planned to improve emergency shelters and disaster-resilient water and sanitation infrastructure for uninterrupted services in the future.

Sustainability

Risk-informed GPDPs as demonstrated in the GPs of Dhemaji and Majuli have significant potential to be scaled up in disaster-prone districts. The support of ASDMA and SIPRD is already creating momentum for this.

The model of CFS is also a standard good practice that has proven to be effective in the GPs where it has been implemented. There is significant potential to replicate such schemes in other flood-prone districts of Assam.





Case
Study



4

**MAINSTREAMING
THE ROLES OF**

**BAL-BALIKA SABHAS
AND MAHILA SABHAS**

**INTO GRAM PANCHAYAT
DEVELOPMENT PLAN
PREPARATION IN NALBARI**

Assam (2022)

Category: Participation



Summary

As part of its continuous efforts to enable and enhance active engagement of children and women at the *Gaon Panchayat* (village council) (GP) level, the State of Assam initiated the UNICEF-supported intervention on ‘Mainstreaming the roles of Bal-Balika Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas into GPD preparation’. This project was a collaborative effort of the MoPR, UNICEF India, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), and the State Institute of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, Assam.

The objective of the initiative was to increase participation of children and women in local governance through institutionalization of Bal-Balika Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas so that the priorities of children and women are identified and integrated into the GPDs on a sustainable basis.

This intervention was based on the premise that, if children and women are aware and have knowledge of their rights and entitlements, and if they have an improved capacity to effectively raise their voices on platforms like Bal Sabha and Mahila Sabha to enhance their participation on child- and women-centric issues, then, in turn this will contribute to the integration of these issues in village development plans, including the GPD and other line department plans.



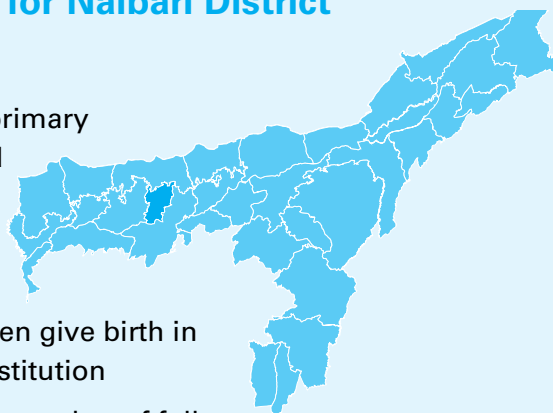
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Scope



Demographics for Nalbari District

Highly flood-prone
Agriculture as the primary means of livelihood



Health



92% women give birth in medical institution

Increase in number of fully vaccinated children (12–23 months) from **49%** to **66%**

27% of children stunted

15% of children wasted

27% of children underweight

SRHR



28%

Child marriage



53%

Anemic pregnant women

WASH



68%

Population using improved WASH facilities

Education



42%

Women with 10 or more years of schooling¹

Given the above, 26 No. Bongaon GP was chosen as one of 10 GPs in Assam selected for the project. These GPs were identified in consultation with the Secretary and Director of SIPRD and district-level officials, including CEO Zilla Parishad and the Principal of the SIPRD Extension Training Centre.

¹ District Fact Sheet for Nalbari and Assam, National Family Health Survey 2019–20, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare: https://nhm.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/nhm_lip_in_oid_6/menu/document/nalbari_2.pdf.



Objectives

The overall objective of the project was to enhance the participation of children and women in the GPs. To achieve this, key strategies included building the capacity of different government functionaries at the district, block and panchayat levels; community engagement; and increasing the participation and collaboration of different stakeholders.



Strategy

The first phase of the project began in July 2022. The Nodal officer from SIPRD headquarters and the faculty members of Extension Training Centres (ETCs) held an in-depth discussion of the project with the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members and other stakeholders of the GP. This was followed by extensive orientation of PRI members, block-level officials, SHG members, Accredited Social Health Activists and *Anganwadi* (childcare) workers of the GP.

Following the orientation, *Ward Sabhas* (ward assemblies) were organized at each of the 10 wards in the GP. Three awareness programmes were organized in schools to spread awareness among children about Bal Sabhas and their functionality.

On 30 July 2022, a 'Children Panchayat Committee' was formed, comprising 20 children (10 girls and 10 boys) representing all 10 wards. The children on the committee were selected

The GPDP 2023–2024 includes the repair of three classrooms – one of the children's requests that emerged from the 2022 Bal Sabha.



jointly by the Ward Member, SHG member and AWW, with permission from the children's parents. To create awareness of the Bal-Balika Sabha and Mahila Sabha, the GP conducted a rally on 9 August 2022 and on 15 August various children's competitions took place, with more than 100 children participating. Similarly, Ward Members visited each household in their respective wards to invite women for the Mahila Sabha.

In the first Bal Sabha, children brought up issues such as the need for extra classes for poor students, banning tobacco in schools, repairing classrooms and the development of playgrounds. To address school-related issues brought up at the meeting, the GP President organized a meeting with the Principal of Bongaon Higher Secondary School, which led to initiatives such as the repair of classrooms being included in the GPDP 2023–24.

In the second and third Bal Sabhas, a number of solution-centric discussions took place around planting and propagation in the villages and at schools, monitoring substance misuse among school students, and the need for sports equipment in schools.

The door-to-door awareness campaigns about the requirements and the purpose of Mahila Sabhas helped to ensure the meaningful participation of women. In the first Mahila Sabha, women discussed issues that impacted them specifically in their GPs, and access to different schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission and Orundoi. In subsequent Mahila Sabhas, the GP President elaborated on the objectives of the meeting and emphasized the need to discuss and find solutions to social issues that concern women. Based on the discussions in the Mahila Sabhas, women presented their demands to the GP President.

Results

- ❖ **Created a safe space for participation and discussion:** Initial anecdotal evidence shows that Bal-Balika Sabhas serve as an interactive and safe platform for children, where they have the chance to interact with their peers and raise and discuss issues that impact their lives as well find a space for recreational activities such as dance, poetry and singing. Children can participate in their development by initiating activities such as planting local fruit trees and building bamboo fencing to protect the plantations.
- ❖ **Repairs requested by children included in GPDP:** One of the early results is the inclusion and approval of the children's demand for repairing three classrooms in GPDP 2023–2024.
- ❖ **New sports equipment provided by the Sports Department:** Based on children's demands raised in the Bal Sabha, the GP asked the District Sports Office to provide sports equipment for three schools. These three schools have since received the sports equipment from the department, early proof of the links established between the GP and line departments.
- ❖ **Establishment of Nari Suraksha Samiti:** As a result of the discussions in the Mahila Sabhas, a GP-level *Nari Suraksha Samiti* (women's safety committee) was formed. With the help of village organizations, the GP President initially selected 70 active women from all 10 wards. From those, the Nari Suraksha Samiti was formed of 20 women, including SHG and non-SHG members. Its first meeting was held in December 2022. Selected members from 21 village organizations of the GP are working as coordinators of the committee and conduct meetings with SHG and non-SHG members on different issues related to women. The initiative is being supported by the GP President and Officer in Charge of Belsor Police. The committee has formed a WhatsApp group that members can use to discuss and inform the committee of any issues relating to women and children in the village.



Lessons learned



One of the key lessons learned from this project is that GPs need to engage closely with the process of organizing the Mahila and Bal Sabhas, including preparing a carefully considered agenda for discussion in the meetings.



It also emerged that engaging SHGs in the Mahila Sabhas helps to further galvanize communities when it comes to addressing issues relating to women.

Next steps and sustainability

- ❖ UNICEF and its partners plan to build on the success of this initiative, taking account of the lessons learned. There is an ongoing need for sustained engagement with different line departments at the GP, block and district levels, to ensure tangible results emerge from the discussions in the Bal-Balika Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas.
- ❖ A convergence plan of action can be developed by the GP to look into and address the issues raised in these community platforms. The project's initial results demonstrated that engagement by the GP is critical for achieving women- and child-centric results at the GP level. There is also a need for capacity building of the GP members to shift their thinking from being an 'implementor' of the GPDP to favouring holistic growth and development of the GPs, in collaboration with the line departments.
- ❖ It is imperative that interventions continue to deliver results. The sustainability and continued enthusiasm of the communities, particularly children and women, and their active participation can only be sustained if the solutions proposed are implemented within a reasonable timeframe.



Case
Study

5

FLOOD RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

THROUGH COMMUNITY FACILITATION AND RESOURCE CENTRES IN CACHAR

Assam (2022)

Theme: Development and survival

Summary

UNICEF collaborated with the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) Cachar and Deshabandhu Club, a non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Cachar, to support the government's response and recovery efforts after the Cachar floods in Assam in 2022. Community Facilitation and Resource Centres (CFRCs) were piloted in three Gaon Panchayats (village-level elected local government) (GPs) by DDMA Cachar, in collaboration with the Zila Parishad (district council) and Inter Agency Group Cachar, led by the Deshabandhu Club, and with technical support from UNICEF. The objective was to help communities to understand the eligibility criteria for compensation packages and rehabilitation schemes and to assist with the application process, including necessary documents, departments to be approached and the approvals process. The goal was to improve access to disaster-recovery assistance.

CFRCs play an important role in the delivery of 'information as aid' for people affected by floods. The concept has gradually expanded to include resilience building to better prepare communities for future disasters. Inspired by the positive community response, the DDMA and Zila Parishad are in process of opening CFRCs in a further 15 GPs during the first quarter of 2023, with plans for further expansion.

Background

In 2022, severe flooding affected new areas of land and had a massive impact on lives and livelihoods in the area. The first wave of flooding, which started in May 2022, resulted in extensive damage and disruption in the North Cachar Hills and Barak Valley districts while the second wave, which started in June, affected 32 of the 35 districts. Cachar was among the worst affected districts with 1.45 million people impacted by floods, including around 370,000 children from 826 villages. Over 300,000 people including 70,000 children resorted to relief camps during these two waves of flooding. In Cachar, 746 houses were damaged and over 12,000 hectares of arable land was affected, according to DDMA Cachar. The district had not seen such flooding in decades and faced multiple complexities in managing the situation, including its immediate aftermath.

In collaboration with stakeholders, the DDMA has been at the forefront of the response. UNICEF has been working with DDMA and civil society organizations to deliver a multi-sectoral response program. As the floods receded, recovery became a mammoth task because of the scale of the damage. UNICEF deployed high-level technical assistance to support the social sector with recovery planning at a district level, and also expanded its partnership with Deshabandhu Club to support DDMA-led recovery action at the field level.

Scope



Development of CFRCs

Objectives

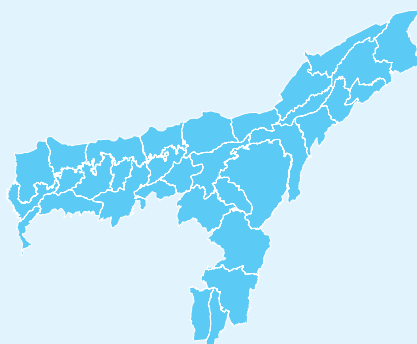


Localize the administration's recovery efforts

by ensuring the reach of recovery information.



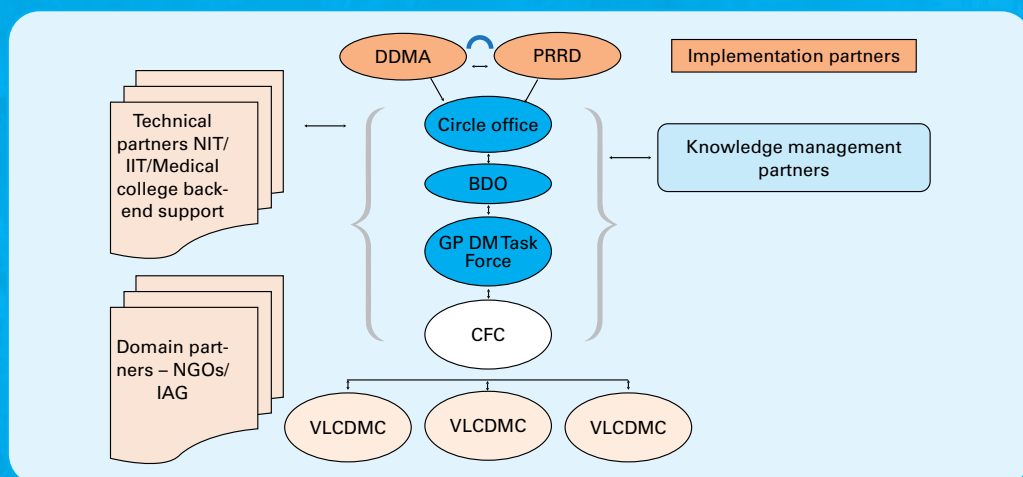
Monitor the rehabilitation process, enabling the District Collector to take timely action.



It was inspired by the Village Information Centres (implemented after the Gujarat earthquake of 2001 and the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004) that provided a feedback loop to understand field-level concerns and formulate policy.

The CFRCs in Cachar is instituted at the GP level under the stewardship of the Panchayath President/Wad Member and Block Development Officer and is housed within the GP Office or its premises. It is managed by volunteers from Inter Agency Group, Cachar and members of Self Help Groups from the community itself.

Structure of CFRCs



Note: BDO: Block Development Office; DDMA: District Disaster Management Authority; GPDM: Gaon Panchayat Disaster Management; IIT: Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati; Med. College: Silchar Medical College and Hospital; NIT: National Institute of Technology, PRRD: Panchayati Raj and Rural Development; Silchar; IAG: Inter Agency Group, Cachar; VLCDMC: Village Land Conservation and Disaster Management Committee.



Objectives

The CFRCs in Cachar are designed to meet the following objectives:

- ❖ Function as an information and knowledge-sharing bridge between the administration and affected communities to ensure that the affected communities are aware of their entitlements and able to access them smoothly.
- ❖ Build decentralised, community-centric platforms that provide for two-way communication between the affected communities and service providers.
- ❖ Enhance the capacity of affected communities in making informed choices about their development.
- ❖ Build a resilient community that is increasingly able to withstand shocks and stresses to their system.



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Processes

CFRCs were introduced after a consultative process, as follows:



Conceptualization: The idea was conceptualized jointly by the UNICEF technical assistance team in Cachar and the DDMA team. It was presented to Zila Parishad and then consultations took place with the Inter Agency Group Cachar. On consensus, the concept was presented in a meeting of the DDMA chaired by the Deputy Commissioner, where it was approved for implementation. A decision was taken to initiate and test the feasibility of the CFRC in three GPs, and then to scale it up based on learnings.



Preparation: Representatives from the DDMA, PRRD and IAG formed groups to begin preparations. IAG volunteers were trained to prepare a baseline database for the CFRCs. Equipment such as computers and printers were sourced using contributions from corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. Emergency and social security schemes were mapped (including development schemes that can support recovery, exclusive recovery-related programs, the process of application, formats and eligibility criteria etc.), with extensive engagement from line departments. Communication materials were then developed for the various schemes.



Ceremonial Inauguration: The CFRCs were inaugurated by the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar on 18 October 2022. The events were designed to ensure optimum participation from a wide range of stakeholders to expand the role and scope of the CFRCs. Line departments also received exposure through this event by supporting it.



Operationalization: The CFRCs started functioning as an interface between the communities, Panchayati Raj (three-tier system of rural self-governance) Institutions (PRIs) and line departments. Households received information and support to access various schemes through the CFRC. Additionally, community-level actions were carried out, including the Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of households and community assets, especially camps for disability screening and certification, and sectoral consultations to identify specific sectoral needs and priorities. Various recovery programs implemented by NGOs and CSR agencies were also linked to the CFRCs.



Scaling Up: Currently DDMA is working with partners to operationalize 15 more CFRCs in flood-vulnerable GPs. More partners have been enrolled to support this initiative. The engagement and role of CFRCs is gradually being expanded to include village-level risk assessments, the preparation of village DRR plans and implementation of community engagement campaigns around rights and entitlements.



Post-disaster information gaps affect people's access to the assistance flowing in from various sources. CFRC is a promising concept and will play a crucial role in filling those information gaps by being the interface between the community and the administration.

—H.P. Fernandez Block Development Officer, Borkhola Dev. Block, Cachar



Results

The intervention has had excellent initial uptake by communities.

- ❖ As the pilot GPs were among the worst affected by floods, the CFRCs are helping to connect the affected vulnerable households with available schemes, behaviours and resources to aid their recovery.
- ❖ Because of the integrated approach, community-based interventions such as disability screening camps and medical camps have also been better attended, while increased awareness, access and empowerment have improved problem-solving skills.

Although these are only initial results, the leadership of DDMA, the ownership and openness of the Panchayat and Rural Development Department, the coordinated engagement of CSOs, and the involvement of community-based organizations such as SHGs appear to be main elements of a successful model for scale up.

Sustainability

With its tried-and-tested feasibility, shared mandate and promising initial results, the CFRC model is very interesting for stakeholders. While NGOs provided the community mobilization and engagement, corporations pitched in with support (such as providing office equipment, technical expertise in GIS mapping, etc.). Meanwhile, at the state level, the Assam Disaster Management Authority has shown interest in exporting the model to other districts, and the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission has also been contacted to potentially become a partner in the initiative and further promote scale up.

**Case
Study**



DEVELOPING A RESILIENCE INDEX

FOR LOCAL ACTION

Bihar (2020)

Theme: Development and survival

Summary

This project to measure disaster resilience saw the development of a context-specific ‘Resilience Index’ for local action, with an associated application for monitoring risk and planning disaster management initiatives, particularly resilience building work. The initiative was trialled in 40 villages across five districts.

The measurement of disaster resilience – both responses to disasters and their outcomes – is a constant challenge for disaster management professionals around the world. While there are frameworks available to measure disaster resilience at national and sub-national levels, there are very few frameworks for localized action. Localized action is key to developing community resilience, but it requires tools to help communities analyse their hazards and develop their local capacity, thereby developing resilience and preparedness.

UNICEF Bihar worked with the government, communities and the Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices to develop an index to address this challenge.





Objectives

The main purpose of developing an instrument for measuring communities' resilience was to enable disaster risk reduction (DRR) interventions to focus on location-specific risks and resources to enhance a community's ability to bounce back from adversity. The instrument, developed in 2016, was pilot tested on the yardsticks of reliability and the consistency of its outcomes. The instrument is intended to be flexible and broadly applicable: the indicators developed can be customized to fit many different local contexts.

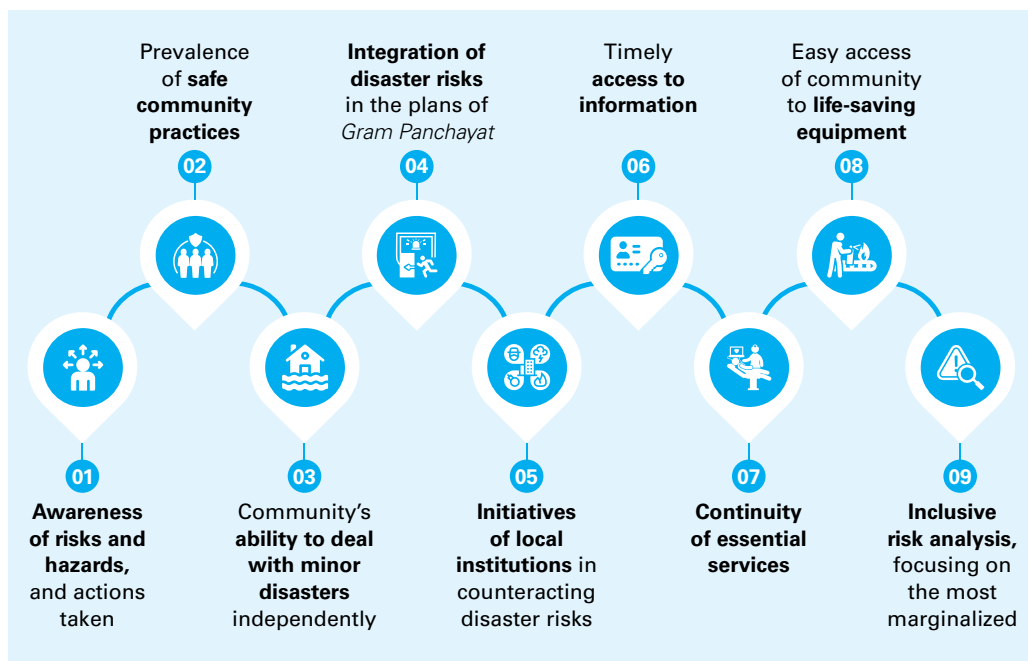


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Methodology

UNICEF and Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices jointly conducted consultation sessions with the government and civil society organizations (CSOs) working in the field and developed a rough list of indicators that could inform the index development. This was shared with communities in order to capture their understanding of hazards, capacity to respond, risks and community wisdom in dealing with the disasters. The following nine areas were included in the Resilience Index as indicators.

- ❖ Disaster awareness, practice
- ❖ Practice of safe behaviours
- ❖ Management of hazards
- ❖ Governance of risk factors
- ❖ Community initiatives for reducing risks
- ❖ Availability of timely information
- ❖ Continuity of essential services
- ❖ Accessibility of life-saving resources
- ❖ Protection of disadvantaged identities



These nine indicators were further divided into several variables and sub-variables, all of which were given equal weightage. The relative weightage of each variable was calculated and an average score for each indicator was determined. The average of all indicators together gives the index considering equal weightage of all indicators in the index. The index value was given a range of 0–1, with a maximum value of 1.

Digitization: This was then developed into an android application called Resilience 1.0, which is simple to use and easy to access.

Field testing: The application was field tested and, once consistency was achieved, implemented. The instrument can be self-administered and independently used by anyone with a smartphone and access to the internet.

Longitudinal study of disaster resilience programme in four districts of Bihar: In partnership with the government and community, UNICEF implemented this project to build the capacity of community and community institutions to improve their disaster resilience. It was implemented by CSO partners on the ground in five disaster-prone districts of Bihar. A longitudinal study was conducted by the Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices in order to capture the changes over three years. Resilience 1.0 was used to capture baseline data in 2016 and endline data in 2019. This covered selected villages across the five districts of Darbhanga, East Champaran, Madhubani, Sitamarhi and Supaul.

The assessment sought to grade communities in terms of their ability to bounce back from the adverse impacts of any disaster and produced an index (along with a report card) that could be disaggregated for the various indicators of a resilient community. It emphasized the importance of disaster risk and hazard awareness, safe community practices, capacity to deal with minor disasters independently, integration of disaster risks in local development plans, initiatives of local institutions to counteract disaster risks, timely access to information, continuity of basic services in the wake of a disaster, easy access for the whole community to life-saving equipment and inclusive risk analysis focusing on the most marginalized.

Capacity building: The application was piloted in 2016 in 72 villages and the same 72 villages were again assessed in 2019 (longitudinal study). Panchayati Raj (local, rural self-government) Institutions (PRIs) were a key part of the pilot programme. PRIs in most disaster-prone states/districts can use this application using the nine indicators or may add/change indicators to suit their context. The application can also be used if PRIs have planned specific interventions around resilience building.

UNICEF Bihar has implemented a Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) intervention model, which also had a detailed capacity building framework of a Village

Disaster Management Committee (a community institution with representation from PRIs), PRI representatives, front-line functionaries, DRR Catalysts (self-motivated community volunteers) and the community at large.

Results

Overall, the two studies mark a positive change of 0.035 points on a scale of 0–1 between 2016 and 2019, in terms of the resilience of these communities. The most remarkable positive change was observed in the continuity of services, followed by the accessibility of life saving resources and practice of safe behaviours.

Resilience indicators	Average index score 2016	Average index score 2019	Percentage change
Disaster awareness	0.613	0.736	20.1%
Practice of safe behaviours	0.399	0.497	24.6%
Management of hazards	0.782	0.783	0.1%
Governance of risks	0.586	0.706	20.5%
Community initiatives for reducing risks	0.684	0.469	-31.4%
Availability of timely information	0.840	0.614	-26.8%
Continuity of services	0.286	0.583	104.1%
Accessibility of life-saving resources	0.410	0.526	28.3%
Protection of risk-prone identities	0.758	0.758	0.0%
Overall	0.595	0.615	3.3%

Next steps

Disaster resilience index is a valuable tool for Gram Panchayats (GPs; village-level elected local government) for supporting communities to become better prepared and more resilient to shocks that emanate from catastrophes. It provides a comprehensive assessment of a community’s ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. The critical next step would be to streamline use of this tool for situation analysis conducted during preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans. Efforts would be made to scale up use of this tool to identify strengths and weaknesses of the GP’s disaster resilience efforts and use this information for prioritizing investments under GPDPs to make local level planning for disaster resilient. This tool and the resilience application have huge replication potential for any social investors interested in funding disaster management initiatives, particularly for resilience building. As next step, efforts

could be made to use the DRI to bring together stakeholders including government agencies, corporates and non-profit organizations to work together towards a common goal of increasing disaster resilience of the village communities.

Sustainability

The application has been developed in two languages (Hindi and English) and for android-based mobiles. The application has various sections pertaining to each of the indicators. The application can be used only at GP level. The average aggregated score of all the GPs would represent the resilience index of the block and subsequently the districts.





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Case
Study



**AN INNOVATIVE
APPROACH TO
STRENGTHENING
CHILD-FRIENDLY
GOVERNANCE**

Chhattisgarh (2021–23)

Theme: Development
and participation



Summary

UNICEF launched the Chhattisgarh Panchayat Network for Children (CG PANCH) in June 2021 with more than 100 *Sarpanches* (heads of *Gram Panchayats*, village-level elected local governments), in the presence of three Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and the district administration of the Bastar region. Since then, CG PANCH has already reached out to 3,843 of the 11,657 Sarpanches in Bastar, who represent more the 7 million people (including around 3 million children) across 13 out of 14 districts² falling under the Fifth Schedule Area of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA).

CG PANCH was created for and by the Sarpanches, managed by district-level advisory councils (DACs), and headed by a Chief Convenor, Deputy Chief Convenor and five or six advisors selected by Sarpanches. The DACs meet every month, share learnings, and plan actions for ensuring the rights of the child. UNICEF, through its partners, has been providing technical support to CG PANCH for organizing these meetings and technical sessions. Currently, the secretariat for CG PANCH's day-to-day activities is hosted by UNICEF's partners. CG PANCH has developed its own logo and is working on the principle of shared objectives and mutual learning.

Between August 2021 and December 2022, CG PANCH organized 174 interactive learning sessions for 3,670 Sarpanches and elected representatives on Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) and provided direct handholding support to more than 100 Gram Panchayats (GPs) in 2021 and 55 GPs in 2022 for the preparation of child-friendly GPDPs. These sessions included topics related to children's rights, services and social protection. CG PANCH organized 12 DAC meetings for mutual learning, created 13 WhatsApp groups with 2,306 Sarpanches for sharing information related to children, shared 89 creatives and video clips on child-related services and social protection schemes and published 11 issues of a digital magazines called *Panch Sambaad* (six in Bastar region and five in Surguja region). Furthermore, CG PANCH organized 1,548 murals with slogans on the rights of the child and created a cadre of more than 4,000 volunteers called *Bal Sangwaris* who will be trained on issues related to child rights and help elected representatives to improve outreach services to children. During 'World Children's Week' (14–20 November 2022), CG PANCH organized a one-day takeover of Panchayats in 150 villages and held Bal (children's) Olympics in 900 villages and *Bal Sabhas* (children's assemblies) in 100 villages, with participation from more than 1,300 children.

In the 2020 local self-government elections, most elected representatives were young first-timers and their understanding of GP functions focused largely on the construction of infrastructure. Through CG PANCH, there has been an enormous change in the elected representatives' understanding of social sector issues, including those related to children. Based on its success, CG PANCH plans to expand to all districts of Chhattisgarh.

² When CG PANCH was launched in 2021, 13 of the total 28 districts in Chhattisgarh were in Fifth Schedule Areas of PESA. With the formation of new districts, the total number of districts increased to 33 in 2022. Since one of the PESA districts is split into two districts, the total number of PESA districts has increased to 14.

Context

Being so close to the people, they are not merely implementers of the central/state government schemes and programs but also key actors with autonomy and agency. PRIs should therefore be strengthened as institutions of local self-governance with full control over their own physical, financial and human resources.

However, there are several gaps between the role of Panchayats in law and the actual status of PRIs in the institutional framework for governance. Some of the key challenges are (i) limited knowledge among Sarpanches about their roles and powers as elected representatives, especially in tribal areas and with women representatives because of low educational status, feudalistic social order, gender bias, etc.; and (ii) lack of exposure and understanding of social themes, issues, governmental provisions, and best practices, especially on issues related to health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and child protection.

Scope



CG PANCH Alliance

Managed by the Sarpanch

Principles Followed



Shared vision, common cause, ownership and trust



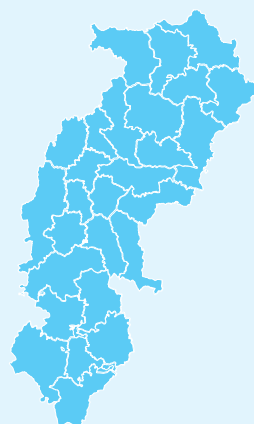
Strong leadership



Regular review and planning



Diverse membership and regular engagement



Network Members*



3,843

Total



> 40%

Women
Sarpanches

*as of 31 December 2022

CG PANCH's logo reflects commitment to children and women.



Objectives

With better knowledge and capacity, Sarpanches can make positive changes to the lives of children and women in their GPs. Therefore, while the primary objective of CG PANCH is to bring elected representatives, especially tribal and women Sarpanches, together for collective learning and information sharing on social issues, the ultimate goals are to (i) create child-friendly GPs, where all children enjoy their rights to reach their full potential, and (ii) improve child-related indicators on health, nutrition, education, WASH, child protection and social protection. With the sensitization of Sarpanches

and Panchayat-level elected representatives on issues related to children, several Panchayats have started working on various rights of the child such as their rights to survival, development, protection and participation.



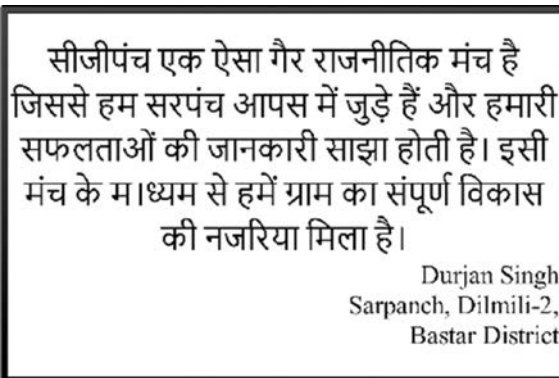
Orientation of community and Gram Panchayat Facilitation Team on Child-Friendly activity aligned GPDP

हमारे पंचायत में महिला एवं बाल विषय पर ज्यादा ध्यान दिया गया है जो सीजीपंच के द्वारा संभव हो पाया। ये पंचायतों के लिए एक उपयोगी मंच है। हम इस पहल के लिए यूनिसेफ और बीएसजेवीएस की सराहना करते हैं।

Shyama Kumari Dhruv
Sarpanch, Sonarpal,
Bastar District

Approach

UNICEF conducted several exploratory field visits, workshops and interactive sessions with Sarpanches, elected representatives, government officials and civil society organizations (CSOs) to develop the concept of a 'PRI alliance'. CG PANCH formation meetings were then held in 13 districts, where Sarpanches discussed the vision and mission of the alliance, common issues for collective action, rules and regulations, the role of members, etc. In the meetings, officials were elected, and district-level alliances were given formal shape. Based on deliberations in these meetings, a number of innovative concepts were developed and implemented (see Results) to empower Sarpanches on social sector issues, especially relating to women and children.



Results

Regular dialogue and face-to-face events for incremental learning:

In each district, the alliance convenes quarterly meetings. The idea of these meetings is to sensitize village leaders about issues related to children such as health, nutrition, education, sanitation, protection,



social protection, etc, through an incremental learning approach. In each meeting, the secretariat provided by NGO partners of UNICEF – namely Bastar Samajik Jan Vikas Samiti (BSJVS) in Bastar region and Manav Sansadhan Sanskriti Vikas Parisad (MSSVP) in Surguja region – facilitated the sessions. Between September 2021 and December 2022, 174 interactive learning sessions took place, with 3,670 Sarpanches and panchayat-level Elected Representatives participating. The sessions covered

thematic areas as well as functional skills to enable Sarpanches to play an effective role in improving the well-being of women and children. Many of the topics focused on the indicators of child-friendly GPs: the processes for conducting a *Mahila Sabha* (women’s assembly), *Bal Sabha* (children’s assembly) and special *Gram Sabha* (general village assembly) on child-focused themes;

the importance of maternal/child health, nutrition, education, WASH, child protection, social protection and COVID-appropriate behaviour; the 15th Finance Commission devolutions formula; and how to link vulnerable groups with social protection schemes, etc. The interactive learning sessions were organized by master resource persons and subject matter specialists from UNICEF.

सीजीपंच हमें हमारी महिलाओं और बच्चों के मुद्दों को समझने में सहयोग कर रहा है। साथ ही इन मुद्दों का समाधान करने में अवश्यक जानकारी प्राप्त हो रही है। यह एक अच्छी पहल है।

Hari Har Sahani
Sarpanch, Dhanora,
Bijapur District

Handholding support in preparing the GPDP: In 2021, UNICEF and its partners helped more than 100 GPs prepare their GPDP in accordance with guidelines. Most of these 100 GPs prepared the GPDP having followed the recommended steps; formed GP planning facilitation team, conducted situation analysis, gap assessment and resource mapping, organised Bal Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas and passed the final resolution to pass the GPDPs in Gram Sabhas. In their annual plans, many panchayats included several low-cost and no-cost activities for improving services for children.

In 2022, the GPDPs were prepared according to the framework of the Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs). At the panchayat level,



the LSDGs have been classified into nine themes, and theme 3 focuses on making the GPs child friendly. The Government of Chhattisgarh has identified 55 GPs for the preparation and implementation of child-friendly GPDPs. Through CG PANCH, UNICEF is providing technical support for the preparation of these GPDPs in accordance with the guidelines issued by Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India. UNICEF is also supporting GPs to develop an indicator framework for monitoring the implementation of planned activities. As well as this, CG PANCH organised orientation sessions for 270 Sarpanches on the processes for preparing a GPDP and the concept of child-friendly GPDPs.

Panch Sangwari (youth volunteers): CG PANCH identified more than 4,000 local youth volunteers called Panch Sangwari. Around 1,500 of them have been oriented on issues related to children and the rest will be oriented soon. The youth cadres have been mobilizing and facilitating women and tribal Sarpanches and helping them to mobilize children for Bal Sabhas, hearing children's concerns and bringing them to the Sarpanches and spreading messages about child rights.

Panch Sambaad: The alliance secretariat has published 11 issues of its digital magazine, Panch Sambaad. Each edition has about 4–5 pages covering topics of interest to Sarpanches. The regular columns are (a) 'Janbo Appan Yojna': details of social protection schemes for women and children; (b) 'Mola Dekhal Ehan Panchayat': stories of change by dynamic panchayats; (c) 'More Kahani More Jubani': sharing positive development initiatives by Sarpanches for women and children; (d) 'Bital Mahina': news covering important activities and events in panchayats; (e) 'Aabo Sikhnun': lessons on useful apps/software for e-governance; and (f) 'Vividha': miscellaneous information.

Social media outreach: With UNICEF support, CG PANCH has created its own social media platforms including a website, Facebook page, Twitter handle, YouTube channel and WhatsApp groups. So far, 13 district-level WhatsApp groups have been formed with participation from 2,306 Sarpanches. Since September 2021, 92 creatives and information posters have been posted on WhatsApp groups, YouTube, Facebook, etc., and 613 tweets have been posted by the CG PANCH twitter handle (@cgpanch2021). In 2023, the alliance will provide handholding support to members on how to use these tools for incremental learning. As well as the creatives, Sarpanches have discussed several issues on WhatsApp groups, posted best practices and shared knowledge products, making the platform highly interactive.

Advocacy through IEC: To sensitize Sarpanches and panchayat-level elected representatives on issues related to children, more than 100 creatives and short video clips were prepared and posted on the alliance's website, Facebook page, YouTube channel, Twitter and WhatsApp groups. The 'Sarpancho Ke liye Pustika: Sumajik Suraksha

Yojanayen’ (Pocketbook for Sapanches on Social Protection Schemes) was prepared, to be shared with 7,000 elected representatives. The pocketbook provides information on provisions, eligibility and where to apply for various social protection schemes. Also, wall hangings with information on social protection schemes have been put up at 1,000 *Panchayat Bhavans* (panchayat offices).

Celebration of World Children’s Day: CG PANCH’s commitment to children and women was reflected in the way its members celebrated World Children’s Day in the week of 14– 20 November 2022. More than 1,600 Sarpanches painted their villages blue (blue marking the anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Children took over the chair of Sarpanches for a day in more than 150 villages. Sarpanches organised Bal (children’s) Olympics in more than 900 villages and Bal Sabha in around 100 villages. In total, more than 13,500 children participated in these events.



Lessons learned



The most recent local government elections were held in early 2020 and a majority of the elected representatives at the panchayat level were young first-timers who had no prior training on the Panchayati Raj system. Only a few had a clear understanding of social sector issues.



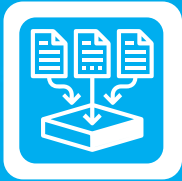
The Government of Chhattisgarh has very good institutions at state, district and block level for training and capacity development of Sarpanches. However, after the local government elections in 2020, the majority of the Sarpanches have received only one training on the formulation of LSDG-compliant GPDPs.



Because of these issues, Sarpanches are generally inclined to focus on infrastructure development when preparing GPDPs. CG PANCH provided an excellent platform for sensitizing Sarpanches on issues such as health, nutrition, education, child protection, child-friendly GPs and social protection, and including those issues in the GPDP.



Initially, with support from UNICEF, CG PANCH organised incremental learning sessions through online platforms such as Zoom, TeamSpace, etc. However, most grassroots-level elected representatives are not confident using online communication tools. CG PANCH therefore took a two-pronged strategy, starting with offline training and then using educated youths and students to show the Sarpanches how to use the online communication tools. However, it will take a long time to make the PRI representatives conversant with e-tools.



Data on panchayat-level allocations and expenditure are not generally uploaded to the online portal on time; as a result, there are huge mismatches in the figures. Although in 2021 more than 100 Sarpanches formulated GDPs with activities for children and women as well as low-cost and no-cost activities, these were dropped while uploading to the eGramSwaraj (the web-based portal for PRIs). However, in 2022, Directorate of Panchayat, Government of Chhattisgarh, (DoP-GoCG) has issued a letter to the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in seven districts, where 55 GPs have taken a Sankalp (resolution) to make their GDPs child friendly for financial year 2023–24, in line with LSDG theme 3.



In Chhattisgarh, because of the low population density and low economic base, the GP's own source of revenue is very low. This can also be attributed to the lack of knowledge among panchayat-level elected representatives about the panchayat's powers of revenue collection. CG PANCH has started advocacy to develop awareness among elected representatives of their powers of revenue generation.



Furthermore, most committees (such as the Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee, Village Development Committee, Village Level Child Protection Committee, School Management Committee, etc.) have been formed but are not active so there is a need to activate these bodies.



In almost all panchayats, Sarpanches as heads of local government are not aware of their role in monitoring activities undertaken by line departments. As such, there is no mechanism for monthly reviews of panchayat- and field-level governmental functionaries by Sarpanches. CG PANCH could provide handholding support to Sarpanches in conducting monthly review meetings with field-level functionaries for monitoring panchayat-level activities.

Next steps

UNICEF and the Government of Chhattisgarh have signed the Joint Rolling Work Plan (RWP) 2023–24, which includes technical support for creating child-friendly GPs. Under the RWP umbrella, UNICEF and DoP-GoCG will work through CG PANCH on the following, to strengthen LSDG theme 3 of creating child-friendly villages:

सीजीपंच के पहल से हम सरपंचों को मिलकर विकास कार्य करने और उसे समझने में बहुत सहयोग मिला है। ये एक अद्भुत मंच है जिसमें ज्ञान भी प्राप्त होता है और विकास कार्यों में तकनीकी सहयोग भी मिलता है।

Anand Markam
Sarpanch, Dhobanpal,
Sukma District

Support the formulation of model child-friendly GPs in 55 panchayats:

Through the CG PANCH platform, UNICEF will provide technical support for the following in all 55 panchayats: (i) orientation and handholding support for the formulation and alignment of GPDPs with LSDG theme 3; (ii) preparing an indicator framework for monitoring the progress of LSDG theme 3; (iii) preparing an LSDG theme 3 baseline report and action plan for child-friendly GPs; and (iv) preparing a progress report on LSDG theme 3.

Development of guidelines: UNICEF will develop guidelines (i) for alignment of GPDP activities with LSDG theme 3 goals; (ii) on how to conduct a Bal Sabha and a Mahila Sabha; and (iii) for inclusion of low/no-cost activities in GPDPs. These guidelines will be used in the 55 model GPs and, based on learnings, it will be revised for use in the whole state.

Orientation of panchayat elected representatives: UNICEF will continue to support the orientation of elected representatives in the panchayats on social protection schemes and social sector issues related to children such as health, nutrition, education, social protection, child protection, etc

Activation of village bodies: UNICEF will support the activation of village-level committees, facilitate monthly village-level review meetings of line department functionaries, and share best practices with Sarpanches.

Expansion of CG PANCH: UNICEF will support the expansion of the alliance into all districts of the state as well as the launch of its website, the creation of training videos about child-friendly GPs and other thematic issues, and updates to the pocketbook and information banners about social protection schemes.

Sustainability

- ❖ CG PANCH is based on the principle that it is “of, for and by the Sarpanch”, which is key for its sustainability. All CG PANCH activities are strategized and managed by Sarpanches themselves; they work together, as one, with shared objectives and goals.
- ❖ Capacity development and knowledge sharing through interactive learning sessions are helping to expose Sarpanches to success stories and have generated huge interest among them on social sector issues, especially those related to children. Some of the Sarpanches have even been circulating posters about their commitment to children and women as part of their advocacy for the next elections. This positive attitude that puts child-friendly GPs at the centre of their work will help to sustain momentum.
- ❖ Once GPDPs are implemented and results are visible, it will lead to a virtuous cycle as members of CG PANCH start to implement the activities with greater enthusiasm and make it their mission to create more child-friendly panchayats.



Case
Study



**INTEGRATING LOCALIZED
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS
INTO GDP IN SELECT GRAM
PANCHAYATS**

Gujarat (2022–23)

Theme: Development

Summary

This pilot project in Dahod district of Gujarat state aimed at building the capacity of 20 GPs (*village-level elected government*) to align their GPDs with the nine themes of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) for localizing the SDGs.

As the key unit of decentralized and participatory rural local self-governance, *Panchayati Raj* (three-tier system of rural local self-government) Institutions (PRIs) play a central role in identifying local issues, and planning and implementing interventions to achieve developmental outcomes. Equipping PRIs to align with SDGs will make them effective vehicles of social change and rural development, which is at the heart of this intervention.

UNICEF office for Gujarat and its implementing partner, School for Social Entrepreneurs India, took an action-learning approach to building the PRIs' capacity for inclusive development planning and implementation. The principle of 'Leave no one behind' was central to this pilot programme. The experience gained has the potential to build a better future for all community members by localizing SDGs in PRIs.

Background

PRIs were granted constitutional status by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which seeks to address people's needs and aspirations at the local level with enhanced participation and democracy. With government funding for public goods and services, local area development and planning is a key function of the PRIs.

Integrating the SDGs and their perspectives into the development planning process is vital as it will provide institutional frameworks that are aligned with global and national priorities. However, this is only possible if the local leadership is aware of, prioritizes and focuses on the achievement of SDGs. This requires leadership skills, vision and the ability to mobilize and form partnerships – but above all, it requires the capacity and willingness to take action.

The training on SDGs should go beyond the 17 goals and targets and should be viewed from the perspective of fundamental skills and competencies that are required to deliver the goals by 2030.

– **National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog**

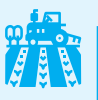
Scope



Demographics for Dahod District

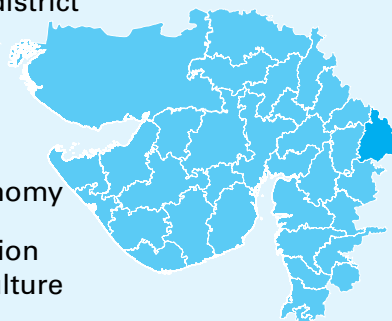
Intervention carried out in Dahod district

Agriculture



The **backbone** of economy

90% of the ST population dependent upon agriculture in monsoon season



Population



2.13 Million

Total



75%

ST



45.46%

Literacy rate



75%

Anemic women aged 15–49 years



87%

Anemic children aged 6–59 months

According to the Human Development Index, the district is poor in terms of education, health and quality of life.

A total of 20 GPs from three blocks – Dahod, Jhalod and Garbada – were identified for the intervention, most of them close to the border with Madhya Pradesh. The GPs include underdeveloped, developing and developed villages, and were selected based on the project's reach and the willingness of GP sarpanches (heads of GP) to participate. Above all, it was the enthusiasm of the respective sarpanches and their eagerness to support the exercise that guided the selection.

S. N.	Block	Gram Panchayat
1	Jhalod	Gultora
2		Sarada
3		Saayan
4		Dola Khakhra
5	Garbada	Jambua
6		Gangada
7		Bhiva
8		Gulbar
9		Nelsur
10		Vajelao

S. N.	Block	Gram Panchayat
11		Maatava
12		Rayanfalia
13	Dahod	Sakarda
14		Rajpur
15		Chosala
16		Doki Dungra
17		Navagam
18		Dharmarda
19		Salapada
20		Kotadakhurd



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Objectives

The goal of the intervention was to build the PRIs' capacity for inclusive, SDG-integrated development plans and fulfil the mission of leaving no one behind.

The key objectives were as follows:

- ❖ Conduct a situation analysis along with a needs assessment in selected GPs
- ❖ Build the capacity of PRIs to understand the SDGs by training elected representatives from select GPs
- ❖ Develop a panchayat-level blueprint for integrating SDGs into local development plans.



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Methodology

Article 243G of the Constitution provides for the “Powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayat” and is intended to empower GPs and enable them to prepare their own plans and implement their own schemes for economic development and social justice. With a mandate to envision, plan and implement GPDPs, they play a significant role in the effective and efficient implementation of programmes and schemes of national importance for the transformation of rural India.

The challenges that the SDGs tackle are diverse and complex, and the integrated and transformative nature of the goals requires a multidisciplinary and innovative way of working at national, regional and local levels. Various toolkits and resources have been created to target different audiences in local languages, but it is now necessary to go beyond awareness generation and training. There is a need to bolster the institutional capacity of PRI members to take action in order to achieve the SDGs. Hence, an action-learning approach was followed in this project.

- ❖ **Step 1:** Meet with government stakeholders at Panchayati Raj Department and Dahod district and seek support for the localization of SDGs in GPDPs. Identify target districts and GPs for intervention.
- ❖ **Step 2:** Mobilize a strong and skilled project team with diverse expertise.
- ❖ **Step 3:** Gather information and data on development indicators and collect the latest GPDP for all 20 GPs. This includes a need assessment through Focused Group Discussions, key informant interviews, transect walk, meetings, situation analysis and identifying resources.
- ❖ **Step 4:** Review and analyse information collected, clean data and prepare summary reports for each GP, including the status of each theme and a list of aspirations gathered from the field, such as potential innovations, new ideas and best practices. Review current social and economic status, social infrastructure, provision of basic amenities and benefits under various government schemes.
- ❖ **Step 5:** Build capacity and train the Sarpanch and other members of each GP on the nine themes and how to align GPDPs with the themes for the localization of SDGs. Training also focused on team building and collaboration, problem-solving and decision-making skills, developing an awareness of how individual behaviors, attitudes and assumptions impact on decision making.
- ❖ **Step 6:** Prepare draft GPDPs, integrated with the nine thematic areas (as per the format and template prescribed by MoPR).

Results

The initial phase of the intervention made a number of important findings, including the following:

- ❖ There was a lack of understanding of the SDGs and the nine MoPR themes for localizing SDGs.
- ❖ There was limited awareness of the process of GPDP preparation.
- ❖ Functional, GP-level standing committees were inactive or non-existent.
- ❖ GPDPs focused on using the 15th Finance Commission grant only for activities such as the construction of roads, buildings and drainage networks.
- ❖ No social development activities were included in the GPDPs.
- ❖ Due to limited irrigation facilities, a lack of local manufacturing and cottage industries, self-help group enterprises, and clusters (farm-based producers and artisan groups), the majority of farmers and local people in the region did not have a regular income from agricultural or agri-allied activities.
- ❖ Poverty, lack of proper nutrition, poor access to safe water for drinking, cleaning and washing, the practice of open defecation and low levels of awareness were resulting in a high prevalence of diseases in some areas.
- ❖ Inadequate infrastructure in *Aganwadi* structures resulted in poor hygiene conditions.
- ❖ There was a low level of literacy in the communities (52 per cent across the 20 GPs).
- ❖ There was a need to improve both infrastructure and services in the Primary Health Centres.

The intervention achieved a number of results, including the following highlights.

- ❖ Facilitated a rapid assessment of earlier GPDP processes in the selected panchayats
- ❖ Created an enabling and conducive environment for the selected panchayats to prepare participatory, decentralized, integrated and holistic plans at the GP level
- ❖ Increased awareness of the importance of enhancing local community participation and reflecting their demands in GPDPs
- ❖ Helped localize SDGs through GPDPs, since the planning process was SDG informed.

Excerpts from the training



My village faces hurdles with rising rates of migration and increasing dependence on cities for a better standard of living and opportunities. Before attending this training, I had no clue how to curb rural-urban migration. Now, I've realized that if I'm able to provide job cards, quality education and better agricultural and housing facilities within the village itself, young people will have an opportunity to flourish and grow.

— **Damor Gorabhai, Sarpanch, Kotadakhurd GP, Dahod**



After listening to vision statements from other stakeholders, I have realized that policies and programmes related to children and women must be prioritized in my ideal village too.

— **Chouhan Sumitra Ben, SHG Leader, Navagan GP, Dahod**



If we're not able to make use of the existing government schemes and programmes on a priority basis, it will continue to pose multiple challenges for our villages. With the given number of schemes and government entitlements, we can achieve a much better state for ourselves.

— **Saratbhai Bariya, Sarpanch, Rajpur GP, Dahod**



Next steps

- ❖ Reinforce the primary purpose of development planning at the GP level through structured interventions.
- ❖ Handholding of 20 GPs:
 - ❖ A one-year intensive handholding process could be undertaken for these 20 GPs to support the implementation and monitoring of activities planned under the GPDPs.
 - ❖ Two youth leaders from each GP could be identified and trained as *Gram Sakha* and *Gram Sakhi* (village representatives) respectively.
 - ❖ Implement a cascading mentorship strategy to promote thematic GPDPs, dovetailing the concept of child- and women-friendly villages.



Sustainability

For the intervention to be sustainable, capacity building and training of all relevant stakeholders is vital. A robust training module and framework should be used, which can be experiential and implemented as an immersion exercise. Above all, what is really needed is motivation, so the elected representatives are inspired to achieve these goals.

We suggest using the '**MOVE model**' for strengthening the PRIs, as follows:

Motivation to self-actualize

The Sarpanch and other elected representatives in the GP hold leadership positions that come with responsibility, power and respect. The need to self-actualize means improving their own well-being in order to reach their full potential. They need to be encouraged to engage with the training and make fulfilling their own potential an act of personal motivation.

Optimism to achieve

Elected representatives of the GP do not receive a salary to support the welfare and development of their village. So what do they get in return? This question cuts to the fundamentals of democracy: "of the people, by the people, for the people," as Abraham Lincoln said in his famous Gettysburg Address. Collaboration should be encouraged with local leaders and role models who have demonstrated success in their pursuit of excellence. Such leaders have great potential to help and give hope to others, who can in turn emerge as role models.

Vision with values

A strong shared vision is needed to forge a pathway that all members of the PRIs can follow. Effective leadership at every level is needed to raise the bar and call for action – and it can only be achieved by visualizing how everything at the grassroots level is connected to this overall vision.

Entrepreneurial mindset to take action

This is an essential skill to be built through the training of GP members, especially the Sarpanch. Leaders at the local level need to be seen as successful and caring, and this can be combined with a problem-solving, action-oriented and empathetic mindset. These are entrepreneurial traits that can be instilled into a person through effective training.

Case
Study



**CHILD-FRIENDLY,
GENDER-SENSITIVE,
CLIMATE-CHANGE-
ADAPTIVE AND RISK-
INFORMED**

**GRAM PANCHAYAT
DEVELOPMENT PLANS IN
GIR SOMNATH AND KUTCH**

Gujarat (2022–23)

Theme: Development

Summary

UNICEF set out to strengthen the Gram Panchayat (elected village-level local government) (GP) by enhancing channels of communication for the most vulnerable communities. UNICEF coordinated with local partner agency to pilot child-friendly, gender-sensitive, climate-change-adaptive and risk-informed Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) in the most vulnerable GPs in Gir Somnath and Kutch districts. The project was designed to address not only climate- and disaster-related risks but also to provide a way for the most vulnerable to raise their voices about climatic and environmental hazards and shocks as well as local development.

To roll out the pilot, Taluka (subdistrict) Resource Groups (TRGs) were formed at local level to demonstrate the new approach on four fronts: i) Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), ii) climate change adaptation (CCA), iii) child responsiveness, and iv) gender sensitivity. Concerns like shifting rainfall patterns, extreme weather events and their associated impact on the livelihood and well-being of communities were key subjects of discussion.

With this intervention, UNICEF educated and mobilized communities to develop an understanding of, and to make demands on, local governments. The intervention empowered communities to address climate and disaster risks and to provide child- and gender-sensitive infrastructure and services. It also equipped, capacitated and enabled local governments to reduce and prevent the impact of disasters on human development and ultimately to ensure the sustainable development of the communities they serve.



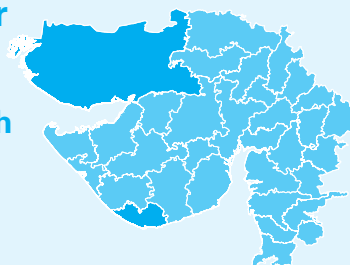
Scope



Demographics for Sultanpur and Manaba villages

Sultanpur: Una Block, **Gir Somnath** district

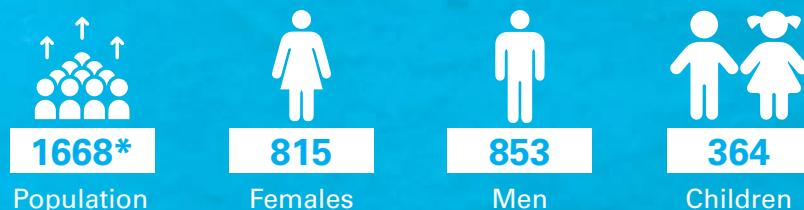
Manaba: Rapar Block, **Kutch** district



Sultanpur



Manaba



**all water is provided by a dedicated pipeline to the village by JJM, DDWS.*

Given its proximity to the coast, Sultanpur was severely affected by Cyclone Taukte in 2021. In the last 20 years, the village has faced numerous incidents of flooding and three droughts, and before that was affected by the 2001 Gujarat earthquake.

Manaba is at tip of the gulf of Kutch, surrounded by small rivers, cutting it off from the rest of the country when it rains upstream. This makes it prone to earthquakes, cyclones and severe drought. During the 2001 earthquake, the village lost its buildings and 10 people lost their lives. Additionally, there has been a noticeable increase in desertification and the ground water is saline. There is a small earthen dam that helps irrigate the surrounding land during winter but the primary source of water is rainwater. Minimal agriculture is still practised in Manaba – the majority rely on short term labour on the salt pans or they become fishermen. The semi-arid/desert conditions severely affect women and children: in the summer, water sources dry up so people rely on rainwater harvesting techniques, with 17 ponds around the village.

Approach

In 2021, Kutch district was keen on enhancing its disaster resilience, a fact it communicated to UNICEF. In requesting support, the district asked for their GPDP to be updated in accordance with the current climate and disaster risks.

Based on their commitment to improving local resilience, UNICEF partnered with the Organization for Development Education (UNNATI) to devise an operating framework and template to make GPDPs risk-informed. These new risk-informed GPDPs would help to identify sector-specific needs/gaps such as water, housing, livelihood, power and road infrastructure. In addition to this, they would consider health, and women's and children's development and education.

UNICEF/UNNATI conducted orientation meetings with the Gram Panchayats (GPs) and the communities. These covered the community's role in the GPDP and its due process, and the overarching goal, which was to integrate health, women's and children's development and education, and climate and disaster risks into the local GPDPs. Within this, participants discussed climate issues such as heatwaves, dry patches and cloud bursts, to better understand how climate change is affecting livelihoods, in particular the lives of children and women.

In **Sultanpur**, the GPDP planning process involved a walk with GP representatives, facilitators from UNNATI/UNICEF and community members who could help identify natural resources (land, soil, water, forest cover), utility services and community infrastructure (schools, Anganwadi (childcare) Centres (AWCs), and Primary Health Centres (PHCs)). The purpose of this was to explore the issues, assess the resources available and urge community members to identify ways of improving their resilience.

In **Manaba**, the process began with hamlet meetings where the community could learn about risk-informed GPDPs, followed by focus group discussions with service providers such as teachers, AWWs, PHC personnel, ASHAs and PDS and also children.

In both villages, this was followed by focus group discussions with service providers such as teachers, children, Anganwadi workers (AWWs), PHC personnel, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Public Distribution Systems (PDS). Specific points of discussion were childcare, nutrition, take-home rations, drinking water, social protection, education and electricity. An introduction to DRR for schools was given to AWWs, teachers and GP members, and youth volunteers with training on disaster response and DRR were identified to address gaps in the local capacity to respond. Actively engaging the youth in this way gave them a responsibility and cemented their role in emergency response.

The proposed plans were shared with the villages in general meetings, highlighting the issues, discussions and solutions presented for each sector. Having incorporate the agreed action points, the GPs then finalised their new risk-informed GPDPs.

Results

- ❖ The TRG and other GP functionaries were oriented on the importance of decentralized and participatory planning, as well as child-friendly and gender-sensitive GPDPs. With support from local PRI members, the trained groups developed an action plan for the new GPDP, highlighting DDR measures in key infrastructural and services-based schemes of the relevant departments. The local community and PRI members also participated to identify the village's key issues around nutrition, health, education, protection, livelihood, etc.
- ❖ An assessment developed by UNICEF in partnership with UNNATI helped TRGs to evaluate their community's climate and disaster risk, child-friendly and gender-sensitive components, which helped to ensure the GP development plans were more risk informed and comprehensive. The involvement of the community in focus group discussions enabled them to understand the role and scope of a GPDP.
- ❖ The local civil society organizations (CSOs), which were already working with the local community, were capacitated to develop risk-informed GPDPs with the support of local PRIs and community members through participatory planning. To further this agenda, these CSOs were trained on the importance of a risk-informed GPDP with a specific focus on child-friendly, gender-transformative and climate-aware actions.

Community responses in Sultanpur

Nitin Solanki, Sarpanch: Nitin was involved throughout the process and considered it a lesson for life because he had never previously looked through a disaster-resilience lens. He noticed that usually, post-election, there was a disconnect within the village – but instead the entire village came together around the GPDP planning process.

Kanchanbehen, *Mahila Sabha* (member of women's council): As a ward member, she was happy to see the community's involvement. She hoped that future GPDPs would be just as comprehensive and inclusive of women and children as this was. Questions and discussion points on the GPDP template also encouraged the community to provide solutions and not just to identify problems, she said.

Jausukhbhai, community member: He said that there was initially apprehension among community members and women, as they felt that solutions would not be implemented. During the process, however, they realised that the majority of the solutions did not require a lot of resources. Hygiene and preventive health care, for example, were identified as low-cost actions that could be taken by all women in the village.

Bhagatbhai Bamanya, community member: He felt that careful facilitation was important to make sure that everyone could share their concerns. The detailed analysis of every sector made him feel like everyone's perspective was heard, especially with the direct engagement of children. He learned that development actions could include preparing for natural calamities, whereas previously he had thought this was out of his hands.

Community responses in Manaba

Rishikesh Damor, Principal: Before the new GPDP, the students at his school were squeezed into two rooms because the other three rooms were under construction. When the community visited, they agreed to provide alternative rooms for the school children. Without the new template for the risk-informed GPDP, he felt that the community might not have known how to integrate child safety and continuous education into the development plan.

Mansook Bhai, agricultural labourer: He was glad he could voice his opinion on behalf of landless workers and migrant labours. He noted that usually only physical infrastructure was considered for GP development plans, but this time his livelihood and the nutrition of his children were also considered. Initially, he had been unsure how livelihoods, child nutrition, education and health could become a part of the village's development plan.

Fateh Khan, teacher: Her school does not have a compound wall and, considering that it is next to a road, this increases the risk to students. This process allowed her to add the school's safety into the GPDP.

Zamila Rauma, AWW: During the process, her AWC received a visit from project staff and members of the community to check the infrastructure. She found it refreshing that the village was assessing the quality of its education and nutrition, because GPDPs do not typically do this.

Next steps

In its next phase, the project will target the roll-out of all activities/actions that have been identified in the GPDP action plan, in collaboration with the relevant departments, TRGs and local community members. For advocacy, key indicators or a resilience score card would be developed based on four elements: i) Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) ii) climate change adaptation (CCA), iii) child responsiveness, and iv) gender sensitivity.

Sustainability

The concept of child budgeting will be introduced to help take stock of development investments for children and identify gaps in resource investment and utilisation.

Child and gender responsiveness is expected to be fully incorporated into the GPDPs by improving the functioning of Village Child Protection Committees and School Management Committees.



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Case
Study



COMMUNITY-LED OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF SCHOOL WASH FACILITIES

Gujarat (2022)

Theme: Development

Summary

Most schools struggle with the operation and maintenance of their WASH infrastructure. Dadiya Faliya Primary School in Surat district, Gujarat, sets an example of best practice under the leadership of principal Milan Mittal. The dedication of the principal, teachers and school children is evident, along with significant community contributions and interdepartmental convergence.

This case study highlights the successful initiatives used to improve the school's WASH infrastructure, including a number of innovations.

Dadiya Faliya Primary School: Awards and recognition

- ❖ 2017–18: 2nd placed district in the Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar (Government of India programme to recognize excellence in water, sanitation and hygiene) (SVP)
- ❖ 2017–18: Taluka Shresth Shaala Award (for best teachers)
- ❖ 2016–17: District Shaala Swachhta Award (for cleanest schools)
- ❖ 5 Star school as per SVP 2021–22

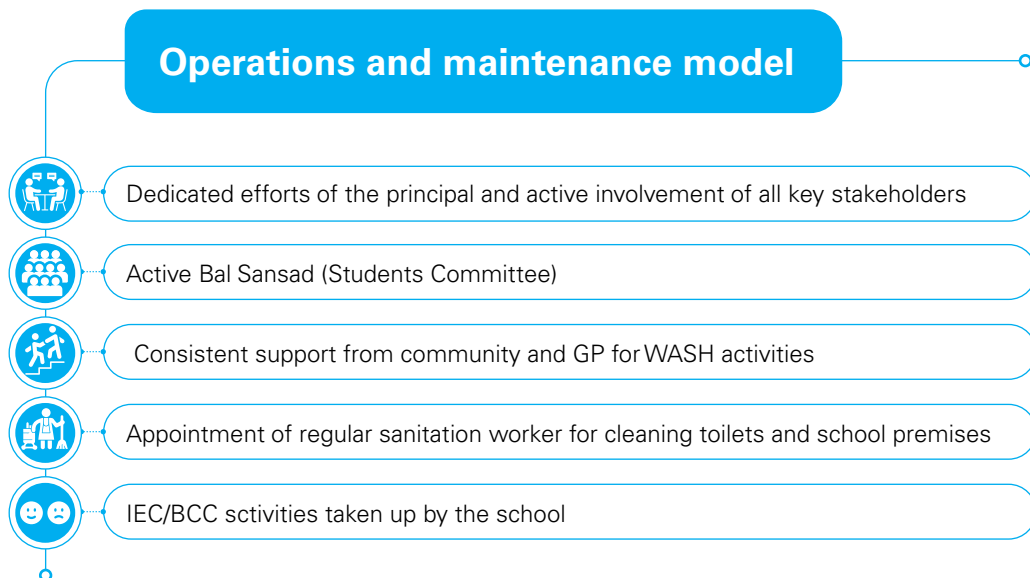
Context

Established in 1998, Dadiya Faliya Primary School in Umbhel village has 103 students (59 boys and 44 girls). Today, it is an astounding sight – a beautiful structure surrounded by colourful flags on the courtyard wall and lush plantations. But it has not always been that way. When Milan Mittal joined the school as principal in 2008, there was no functional toilet and the children used to defecate in the open.

The new principal advocated with the Gram Panchayat (village-level elected local government) (GP) for the construction of toilets – and, because of his advocacy, one toilet and two urinals were constructed using GP funds at the school in 2009–10. Further efforts resulted in the construction of more toilets and urinals using funds leveraged through corporate social responsibility (CSR) schemes and the Government of India's Samagra Shiksha programme.

In this way, Dadiya Faliya Primary School improved its WASH infrastructure and went on to become a model school. Its example reflects the unique dedication of the principal, teachers and students to the cleanliness, beautification and maintenance of their school.

Approach



School operations and maintenance model

- ❖ Dedicated efforts by the principal and active involvement of all key stakeholders
- ❖ Active *Bal Sansad* (students' committee)
- ❖ Consistent support from community and GP for WASH activities
- ❖ Appointment of sanitation worker for cleaning toilets and school premises

Active Bal Sansad (child cabinet): With guidance from the principal, the school boasts an active child cabinet. Students are divided into several groups comprising 20 students from years 3–5 in each. Each group is headed by a student Neta (minister) and led by a teacher. Each group is responsible for cleaning the school on a different day. There is a roster for cleaning and a rotation system in place.

Roles and responsibilities of Bal Sansad:

- ❖ Monitoring and sweeping the classrooms, office and school compound on a daily basis.
- ❖ Ensuring the cleaning and maintenance of toilets by janitors and reports any issues to the teacher in charge.
- ❖ Ensuring daily cleaning with soaping agents on specific days of Maha Safai (major cleaning).

- ❖ Daily emptying of dustbins and watering of plants.
- ❖ Supervision of sanitation worker for daily cleaning. (The sanitation worker is appointed by the village and paid for by the GP at 1,700 Indian rupees (INR) per month (of which INR 1,200 is covered by the school Swachhata (hygiene) grant and INR 500 is contributed by the Sarpanch).

Dedicated efforts by the principal and active involvement of all key stakeholders:

The principal, teachers, students and community members have all been a driving force behind the day-to-day operations and maintenance of the school WASH facilities. Also, the *Panchayati Raj* (three-tier system of rural self-governance) Institution (PRI) and School Management Committee (SMC) work in close coordination with each other on Swachhata and planning activities. Meetings of the GP are conducted on the school premises with participation from the school principal.

Consistent support from community and GP for WASH activities: The GP remains well informed about the day-to-day needs of the school, ranging from small consumables to minor repairs and maintenance. The GP provided 20 dustbins to the school and painted school walls with inspiring slogans, a new toilet block with toilet units and urinals (three of each), and a compost pit. Donors from the village have also contributed by providing handwash facilities and handtowels, and the school has created extensive gardens in the form of a kitchen garden, herb garden and flowerbeds.

Information Education Communication and Social Behaviour Change: Movies aimed at sensitizing children on best WASH practices are screened every Saturday. Monthly communications with parents motivate the community to maintain cleanliness at home and to use community toilets. Monthly door-to-door visits create awareness of WASH under the *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India) Mission (SBM), and parents discuss the significance of personal hygiene, school attendance and the health/nutrition of children during monthly parent-teacher meetings (PTMs). Since a majority of the parents are from an agricultural background, PTMs are normally conducted in the early morning or late evening to ensure maximum participation. Members of the SMC also participate in these meetings.



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Results

These initiatives have made the school stand out as an inspiration and source of learning for other schools in the cluster. It is a 5-star WASH-rated school, meeting the requirements for WASH infrastructure as set out in the Swachh Bharat: Swachh Vidyalaya (Clean India: Clean Schools) (SBSV) guidelines. It has gender-segregated toilets and urinals, 20 child-friendly handwash points at varied heights suitable for children of different ages, a reverse osmosis system for drinking water, waste management with underground drainage and colour-coded dustbins throughout. Wastewater from handwash points and the kitchen is now reused for plantations. While the school has adequate WASH facilities, their regular maintenance requires the attention and close involvement of students, teachers, SMC members, parents, and administrative staff.

The key outcomes are as follows:

An exemplary system: The school established a strong and sustainable model for the upkeep of WASH facilities.

Proper waste management systems: Dry waste from the school is collected by the panchayat vehicle and disposed of in a common landfill site. With the help of the GP, the school is also now able to compost its wet waste. The film screening about WASH best practices was particularly effective in encouraging people to put their waste into dustbins. Furthermore, these school cleanliness and hygiene initiatives have inspired the GP to start a door-to-door solid waste collection scheme in the village.

Awards and recognition: The school's holistic approach to improving WASH has won widespread recognition including 2nd placed district in the Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar in 2018, the Shresth Shaala Award (Best School Award) from Taluka panchayat in 2017–18 and the District Shaala Swachhta award in 2016–17 from the Gujarat Council of Education, Research and Training and the District Institute of Education and Training.



Lessons learned



Creating, maintaining and sustaining WASH-friendly schools requires the active engagement and leadership of all stakeholders. The dedicated involvement of the principal, teachers and children, along with community contributions and interdepartmental convergence, play a critical role in providing a child-friendly learning environment and sustaining positive WASH behaviours among children.



One of the school's initiatives, 'give back to society', involved voluntarily creating awareness of SBM, engaging with the community through Gram Sabhas (the GP electoral bodies) and active parent-teacher communication. This initiative was at the heart of the school's success in becoming an exemplar of cleanliness in the region.

Key features of the initiative



Dedicated involvement of students, teachers and SMC



Community contributions



Active SMC and PRI



Interdepartmental convergence



INDIA/2012/VISHWANATHAN

Next steps

The school has achieved good results in WASH through its sustained efforts. The The school has achieved good results in WASH through its sustained efforts. The following represent its next steps:

- ❖ Implementation of the 'Green School' framework by improving safe waste management practices, greening the school environment and using solar energy.
- ❖ Planning and implementing school safety interventions.
- ❖ Strengthening implementation of the school health programme, in convergence with the health department.

Sustainability

In order to sustain the infrastructure and practices, the school principal has made efforts to ensure the SMC and Bal Sansad to take ownership of the initiatives on an ongoing basis.

- ❖ SMC meetings are arranged around its members, based on their availability, to ensure maximum participation.
- ❖ The Bal Sansad includes children from three different year groups (Class 3–5) to promote learning and ensure a seamless transition from one year to the next.



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Case
Study



MARCHING AHEAD WITH THE CHILD-FRIENDLY VILLAGE AGENDA

IN AGALGAON AND
VIJAYPUR GRAM
PANCHAYATS

Madhya Pradesh (2019–22)

Theme: Participation and
development



Summary

This was an initiative to create more child-friendly *Gram Panchayats* (GPs; village-level elected councils) by creating *Bal Manches* (children's forums), engaging children in local development plans and educating all stakeholders and community members on the importance of child-friendly GPs.

Geographical coverage



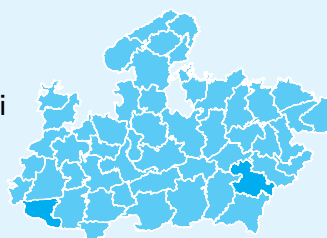
Demographics for Agalgaon and Vijaypur Gram Panchayats

Agalgaon

In Rajpur block, **Barwani** district

Consists of **3** villages: Agalgaon, Bajad and Nihli

Anganwadi Centres with **334** children (0–5 years) registered



Vijaypur

In Bijadandi block, **Mandla** district

Consists of **5** villages: Vijaypur, Piparia Mal, Godri, Kusmi and Baihargram

8 Anganwadi Centres with **216** children (0–5 years) registered

Education

Vijaypur



8

Primary schools



1

Secondary schools



339

Children enrolled

Agalgaon



8

Primary schools



1

Secondary schools



1

High schools



406

Children enrolled



22

Teachers



Context and objectives

As in many other GPs in Madhya Pradesh, children in Agalgaon and Vijaypur faced challenges due to the quality of their education and health services, limited sports and recreation facilities, outdated social norms and a lack of opportunities to participate in local decision-making. All of these factors were hampering the overall development of children in the GPs.

Gram Sabhas (general village assemblies) and GPs have a constitutional mandate to address the majority of these challenges through local, needs-based planning and the implementation of various government schemes and programmes. The 11th Schedule of the Indian Constitution entrusts children's development matters to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to enable them to ensure economic development and social justice at the grassroots level. However, until this intervention, the GPs had only prioritized the construction of basic infrastructure; child-centric priorities had never been given the attention they deserved.

Children represent the future of the nation, and the Indian Constitution provides them with the same fundamental rights as any other citizen of India. The Government of India has been taking the necessary steps to uphold their rights but, despite this, creating an enabling environment for children at the grassroots level has been a challenge. Indeed, dangerous and outdated social norms like child marriage, child labour and gender discrimination continue to hinder the development potential of the children in Agalgaon and Vijaypur GPs. Issues related to child health, nutrition, education, discrimination and atrocities against children as well as children's participation in local decision-making need to be addressed. To achieve this, strengthening the institutions that provide child-centric services is essential.

With support from the village community, the GPs undertook a number of laudable initiatives to improve the welfare of their children by becoming more child-centric. They implemented innovative interventions, for example mobilizing and bringing children together around a common platform and enhancing child participation in the implementation and monitoring of various development activities. These interventions brought about notable progress.

Approach

Creation of a Bal Manch

- ❖ Both Agalgaon and Vijaypur took the initiative to mobilize children and constitute a Bal Manch in every village in the GP, with support from UNICEF and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) who developed guidelines for forming a Bal Manch.
- ❖ All the villages organized meetings of the Bal Manch and both school children and out-of-school children took part. The meetings enhanced the understanding and awareness levels of children on various child-centric issues and schemes. They also educated children on their role in village decision-making and the overall development of the village and the GP.
- ❖ Prior to the constitution of the Bal Manch, stakeholders organized meetings with children and asked them to visualize their ideal village, school or Anganwadi. Through this process, the children brought up many issues which were not part of the village development plan. Efforts were made to convince the children that their aspirations could be aligned with the GP's vision and incorporated into the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) if the children could unite and submit their priorities in an organized manner to the Gram Sabha and GP.
- ❖ Children gradually came together and consulted jointly on identifying their problems and priorities. Subsequently, the identified priorities of children were included in the agenda of Gram Sabha and GP meetings so that suitable actions could be taken.

Formulation/preparation of child-centric activities/schemes through child participation

- ❖ Special attention was paid to increasing the participation of children in the Agalgaon and Vijaypur GPDPs. In each village, the Bal Manch conducted meetings and initiated discussions about their key issues and priorities. The children decided to collectively identify the problems they faced and propose plans for the villages to address them. In this way, they prepared a child-friendly GPDP. It was then up to the Gram Sabha to support the plan prepared by the Bal Manch. The local community gave their full support and the Gram Sabha approved all child-friendly plans prepared by each Bal Manch.

Participation of Bal Manch in Gram Sabha

- ❖ In Vijaypur, the Bal Manch not only prepared a child-centric action plan to improve children's well-being but also put pressure on the GP and Gram Sabha to ensure

promises and propositions were implemented. The Bal Manch submitted the action plan to the GP, requested approval and remained present during the Gram Sabha to seek agreement on the planned activities.

Review of implementation progress

- ❖ In Vijaypur, the Bal Manch monitored the implementation of the child-friendly action plan, to ensure the GP was acting on the problems identified by the children. Children in the Bal Manch also consulted with other children in the village to review the various points of the plan.

Positive engagement by the community

- ❖ In both GPs, efforts were made to make local communities more sensitive to issues concerning children. As a result, the communities not only accepted the child-centric plans but also supported them actively so that the child-friendly activities were incorporated into the GPDPs.

Proactive panchayat members

- ❖ The elective representatives (ERs) of GPs play a crucial role in the overall development activities of the GP. A number of initiatives were undertaken to sensitize ERs in Agalgaon and Vijaypur to the priorities of children and their rights to create an enabling environment for children. The ERs played a very positive and decisive role in the entire initiative.



Results

Local communities and ERs played a very important role in this child-led initiative. The overall awareness of and sensitivity to child-related issues increased in the communities and the ERs also came to understand the critical role a GP can play in addressing the problems and priorities of children. The following are some of the changes brought about by the intervention.

Results in Agalgaon GP

Education

Financial Year 2019–20

- ❖ Average school attendance was improved.
- ❖ A water tank was constructed at the primary and secondary school in Bajad for supplying drinking water.
- ❖ The playground was levelled at the school in Bajad.
- ❖ Repair work was completed at the school in Bajad.
- ❖ Quality of midday meals in schools was improved.
- ❖ Parents now visit schools more often.
- ❖ Four new guest teachers were appointed in schools.

Financial Year 2021–22

- ❖ Boundary walls were constructed at the primary and secondary school in Bajad.
- ❖ 3 *Mahalla Shalas* (community schools) were established by the GP during the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic to ensure continuous education for children. This was done with the help of young people from the community.
- ❖ Separate toilets for boys and girls were constructed in all schools.

Health

Financial Year 2019–20

- ❖ 11 of 15 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition were sent to a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre and their situation improved significantly.
- ❖ Three Anganwadi centres were improved with structural repairs and painting.
- ❖ Awareness meetings are now conducted where health issues can be discussed. The use of sanitary pads has increased due to this initiative.

Other issues

Financial Year 2020–21

- ❖ The GP pledged to prevent child marriage in the area.
- ❖ A Bal Manch was constituted in all schools in the GP.
- ❖ Children are now allowed to present their issues in the meetings of the Gram Sangathan (primary decision-making body in the village).
- ❖ Child-related issues are now submitted to Gram Sabhas through the Gram Sangathan. A Child Protection Committee has also been formed at the GP level to ensure a safe and nurturing environment for children. The Child Protection Committee is working to ensure the safety of all children.

Results in Vijaypur GP

Health

- ❖ Two children suffering from severe acute malnutrition were admitted to a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre.
- ❖ Increase in use of iron tablets by adolescent girls due to mass awareness campaign.

Education

- ❖ Fall in dropouts: There has been a decline in the school dropout rate due to a public awareness campaign. Children who had dropped out were also helped to re-enrol.
- ❖ Increase in school attendance: The overall environment in the GP has become more favourable towards education after an awareness campaign. Teachers are more punctual, school timings have been standardized and attendance rates have improved.
- ❖ Tree plantation drive on school premises: Fruit trees and shade-loving trees were planted on the school premises, with active participation from children.
- ❖ Distribution of books and school uniform: All children were given textbooks and a school uniform allowance was transferred to bank accounts.
- ❖ Improved quality, regularity and distribution of the midday meal in schools.
- ❖ A kitchen shed was constructed in Piparia Mal village – all other schools in the GP have a kitchen shed.

Early childhood development

Financial Year 2019–20

- ❖ Painting was carried out in Anganwadi Centres Vijaypur 1 and 2. Decorations, murals and educational displays were also put up.
- ❖ Water connection was provided in Anganwadi Centre Vijaypur 1 under the government's *Nal Se Jal* (tap water) scheme.
- ❖ Children of Vijaypur 1 Anganwadi centre were given clothes, bags, water bottles, pencils, etc.
- ❖ A shed for the Bal Manch was constructed at Vijaypur 1 Anganwadi centre.
- ❖ Electric connection and ceiling fans were installed in Vijaypur 1 Anganwadi centre.
- ❖ Construction of boundary wall at Vijaypur 2 Jamun Tola Anganwadi centre is underway.
- ❖ Kitchen garden and tree planting was completed at Anganwadi centres in Vijaypur 1, Piparia Mal and Baihar.
- ❖ Quality and regularity of midday meals have improved.
- ❖ Attendance of children, women and adolescents has increased in Anganwadi centres.
- ❖ Children have actively participated to prepare the GPDP.
- ❖ Boundary wall was constructed at Vijaypur 2 Anganwadi centre.

Financial year 2021–22

- ❖ New Anganwadi centre building was constructed in Pipariya Mal 2.

Financial year 2022–23

- ❖ Overhead water tank and water connection was completed in Vijaypur 1 and 2 Anganwadi centres.
- ❖ Problem related to water supply was addressed in Godri Anganwadi Centre through installation of water connection.

New equipment sourced for Anganwadi Centres in Vijaypur GP

Sl. No.	Name of equipment	Provider
1	Chairs and tables for children	Women and Child Development Department
2	Electrical fittings and fans	Vijaypur GP
3	Outdoor stage for the Bal Manch	Vijaypur GP
4	Boundary wall	Vijaypur GP
5	Almirah, white board, bed, umbrella, mattress, toys, shoes and socks for children, bags, slate, pencils, etc.	Women and Child Development Department
6	Water bottles for children	Freedom From Hunger India Trust
7	Wall paintings on every wall	Women and Child Development Department



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Developing a model Anganwadi Centre in Vijaypur

Vijaypur is developing a model Anganwadi centre, thanks to collaborative efforts by the Vijaypur GP, the Anganwadi workers and the Department of Women and Child Development. The Anganwadi centre is already performing better in terms of infrastructure, attendance and the health and nutrition status of its children. An average of 17–18 children now attend the centre every day.

The Anganwadi Centre 1 in Vijaypur is beautifully decorated and adorned with wall paintings and educational displays. It also now has a boundary wall, small garden, a stage for the children's Bal Manch and almost all the necessary equipment for health check-ups, education, sports and recreation. There are chairs and tables for the children and sports equipment as well as a playground. Day beds, lights and a ceiling fan have been introduced, as well as a kitchen garden and an Udita (one who has risen) Corner for adolescents – where sanitary napkins can be purchased at a nominal cost. All 15 registered pregnant women receive supplementary nutrition. And on the fourth Tuesday of every month, Kishori Balika Diwas (Adolescent Girls' Day) is celebrated with special services for adolescent girls:

Many people have helped in developing the infrastructure and procuring the equipment. The centre was declared as a 'Smart Anganwadi Centre' in 2017 by the Women and Child Development Department and continuous efforts have been made since then by the GP and the community to further develop it.



Counselling on health and nutrition



Provision of nutritional supplements for selected adolescent girls



Distribution of sanitary napkins through the Udita Corner

Next steps

Way forward

Gram Sabhas and Panchayats are constitutional institutions authorized to support children's development and address any issues related to the children in their respective panchayats. As members of the Gram Sabha, the community and community-based organizations are vital for making children's voices heard. Standing committees of panchayats and Gram Sabhas can raise children's issues, School Management Committees (SMCs) can raise education-related problems and Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNCs) can raise health-related problems in GPs. These committees need to be aware of their roles and responsibilities and of the funding available. Bal Manches and Village Organizations (VOs), formed under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission, can become change makers by raising any issues in PRI meetings and, subsequently, Gram Sabhas. Success stories and lessons learned by these groups should be shared at regular intervals with GP members and PRIs. Some other key initiatives that departments can undertake are:

- ❖ Capacity building/sensitization of stakeholders – PRIs, VOs, ICDS officials, AWWs, teachers, health officials, youth groups, Bal Manches, etc. – on various issues relating to children.
- ❖ Facilitation of and support towards PRIs and Gram Sabhas for child-friendly GPDPs.
- ❖ CSOs and other local groups can facilitate and support PRIs in implementing GPDPs and can also review and monitor the plans regularly. Child cabinet members can also participate in monitoring GPDPs.
- ❖ Awareness campaigns – Bal Sabhas, rallies, nukkad natak (street theatre), storytelling, wall painting and other activities – can be used to tackle various child rights issues.
- ❖ Regular committee meetings – Bal Manches, SMCs, VHSNCs – can be conducted with the support of local trained groups.
- ❖ Sharing experiences in terms of education, AWCs, health, PRIs, VOs, Bal Manches at workshops on a regular basis.



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Case
Study



A PANCHAYAT THAT LISTENS TO ITS CHILDREN

IN VHANNUR
GRAM PANCHAYAT

Maharashtra (2022)

Theme: Participation

Summary

Creating a child-friendly panchayat in Vhannur, Maharashtra – or *Bal Snehi Panchayat*, as it is called in the local language, Marathi – was a pilot initiative of the Government of Maharashtra, with UNICEF providing technical support, to improve local governance for women and children and increase children’s participation in decisions that impact them.

The initiative focused on building the institutional capacities of the local governments to plan, budget, implement and monitor using a child-sensitive lens, and promotes convergence and collaboration between various departments for holistic development. It leverages government staff and funds, socioeconomic structures, volunteers and existing legal and policy frameworks to make processes, systems and behaviour in institutions more child and gender responsive and bring all rights holders under the social protection net.

Children comprise 32 per cent of the total population in the state of Maharashtra but are mostly voiceless when it comes to many key decisions about their lives and the society they live in. They have no access to platforms and opportunities that would allow them to be heard and rarely participate in decision-making processes, even when the outcomes directly affect their present and future well-being. “They are children – what do they know?” was a common refrain when child participation in decision-making was discussed in *Gram Panchayats* (GPs; village-level elected councils).

There is a common misconception that children do not understand their own well-being, whereas adults do, assuming that children feel safe and secure in a village without actually asking them. The Vhannur GP in Kagal block of Kolhapur district tells a different story. Thanks to this joint initiative between the local government and UNICEF, children in Vhannur GP now not only have a lot to say about their needs, aspirations and problems, but also have many constructive suggestions on how to address them.

It is empowering to express my concerns in front of decision makers of the village about some boys throwing red roses on us on the way to school and harassing us.

—Female member of Vannhur Bal Panchayat

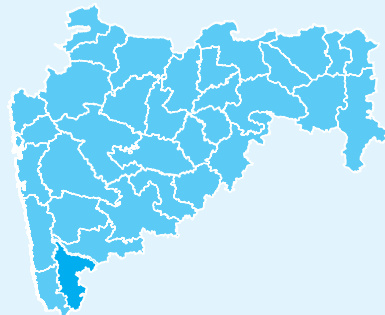
Scope



Demographics for Kohlapur District

Initiated in **Kagal block**

83 GPs covered



Implementation



Jointly by UNICEF and the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, based on learnings from studies around local planning and pandemic management, and other pilots around decentralized planning, child rights and gender programming.

Focus of the Initiative



Capacity building of elected representatives, functionaries and village committees on risk-informed, child- and gender-responsive governance and SDG-integrated local planning



Awareness generation around social protection programmes and facilitating social protection access through a block-level facilitation centre

The initiative took place in October 2021.

The project uses a mix of strategies to make Kagal block child- and gender-responsive, risk-resilient and socially secure. A web-based monitoring system to track child-related indicators was rolled out to ensure consistent monitoring and evidence-based decision-making. Additionally, it increased the capacity of SHGs and their federations to support the sustainability of the social protection facilitation centre. Child participation in governance was strengthened through Bal Sabhas (children's assemblies) and Bal Panchayats (representative bodies of children in a panchayat).



Objectives

The project sought to promote child- and gender-responsive, and risk-informed planning that is aligned with the SDGs in all GPs in Kagal, with better participation from the community, especially women and children. The goal was to build the capacities of elected representatives, functionaries and institutions to enable them to plan, budget, implement and monitor in an equitable and inclusive manner. The project also worked with SHGs, Village Organizations (VOs) and other community organizations to promote social protection access and participation in governance, and to ensure GP–VO convergence. The creation of a network of volunteers was envisaged to support local governments with community mobilization.



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Results

Along with many GPs in Kagal block, Vhannur now has a strong Bal Sabha and a democratically constituted children's body, the Bal Panchayat. The Bal Panchayat was formed in February 2022 by organising a Bal Sabha, where children themselves selected their representatives. The Bal Sarpanch, Bal Up-Sarpanch and members were elected democratically, ensuring representation from socioeconomically marginalized sections and gender equality. The Bal Panchayat has the same power as a GP and the children's democratic body is working closely with adult democratic bodies, with the GP and Bal Panchayat acting as equal partners in the village development processes. Vhannur Gram Panchayat ensures that Bal Sabhas are conducted before every Gram Sabha; 80–120 adolescents (aged 11–18 years) participate in these sabhas. In addition, Vhannur GP has been organizing informative sessions for children on a range of topics including child rights, democratic values, social protection, role of local bodies and service delivery institutions on a fortnightly basis since December 2021.

The success of the project can be seen in the way the GPDP process was carried out in the panchayat on 18 November 2022. The village planning process was an excellent example of the democratic engagement of children in the panchayat. It was a participatory process, engaging children throughout and enabling them to identify their problems and raise their demands. The process was led by children and facilitated by the GP. At the outset of the GPDP process, Vhannur organized a participatory safety audit and installed 'suggestion boxes' so that children could express their feelings, voices, problems and demands anonymously.

In the safety audit, children – including equal numbers of girls and boys for a gendered perspective – made a village map where they marked unsafe spaces in red. Other concerns raised by children were: harassment on the way to school, feeling unsafe in unlit public lanes/spaces, flooding due to leaks and overflows on public roads that affects mobility, and so on. It was not only the issues raised by children but also the process of identifying them that was important, both for children and adult duty bearers: children could identify their protection issues and entitlements, and vocalize them, while adults could understand their safety issues through an age, gender and child rights lens.

Children discussed these issues as well as their recommendations in detail at a Bal Sabha organized by the GP. This process increased general awareness of children's issues and improved the children's confidence in speaking out. The GP Sarpanch was "astonished" by the way children were able to identify their protection issues and he committed to addressing them.

Some of the child-centric demands that came up in the Bal Sabha included: clean toilets; the provision of sanitary napkins for girls; separate rooms for girls in school (to use during breaktimes); and clean drinking water in schools.

Interestingly, discussions around the children's demands led to more village-centric demands, which prompted one GP member to say, "Now it's easier for adults to plan for the village as so many issues we might have overlooked or not thought of have been identified by the children themselves". Some of the issues, like clean toilet and drinking water facilities, have been addressed by the Sarpanch while other issues have been listed to be taken up by the Gram Sabha.

Some demands raised by the Bal Sabha



Gym for girls



Steps to reduce concerns around stray dogs



Reading room (night times)



Reduced TV volume in houses at night to avoid disturbing study



Kabaddi mat in village



Guidance for students who want to pursue acting and improve their skills in the arts



Tin roofing replacement in school and installation of windows in school hall



Installment of CCTV on roads leading to school



Construction/maintenance of roads to the school



Reduced weight of school bags



Ensuring that drainage water does not mix with drinking water



Assisting poorer students with books, bags, shoes, etc.



Culvert on road to school



Planting of garden in the village

Lessons learned



Changes in the Vhannur GP's approach to local planning, community participation and engagement by the GP were evident and underscored the importance of improving child participation in GPs. Thanks to the capacity building of community programmes and improved monitoring, the GP gained a new perspective in terms of child rights, gender, social protection and the GP's role in addressing these concerns. By consistently engaging children through Bal Sabhas and Bal Panchayats, the GP ensured they made a meaningful contribution to development planning processes and ensured that children's issues were accurately reflected in the GPDP. In light of this, it is essential that GPs are trained to facilitate child participation with a focus on child rights, so that adults and children engage more productively with each other, and that GPs view development through a child-sensitive lens.

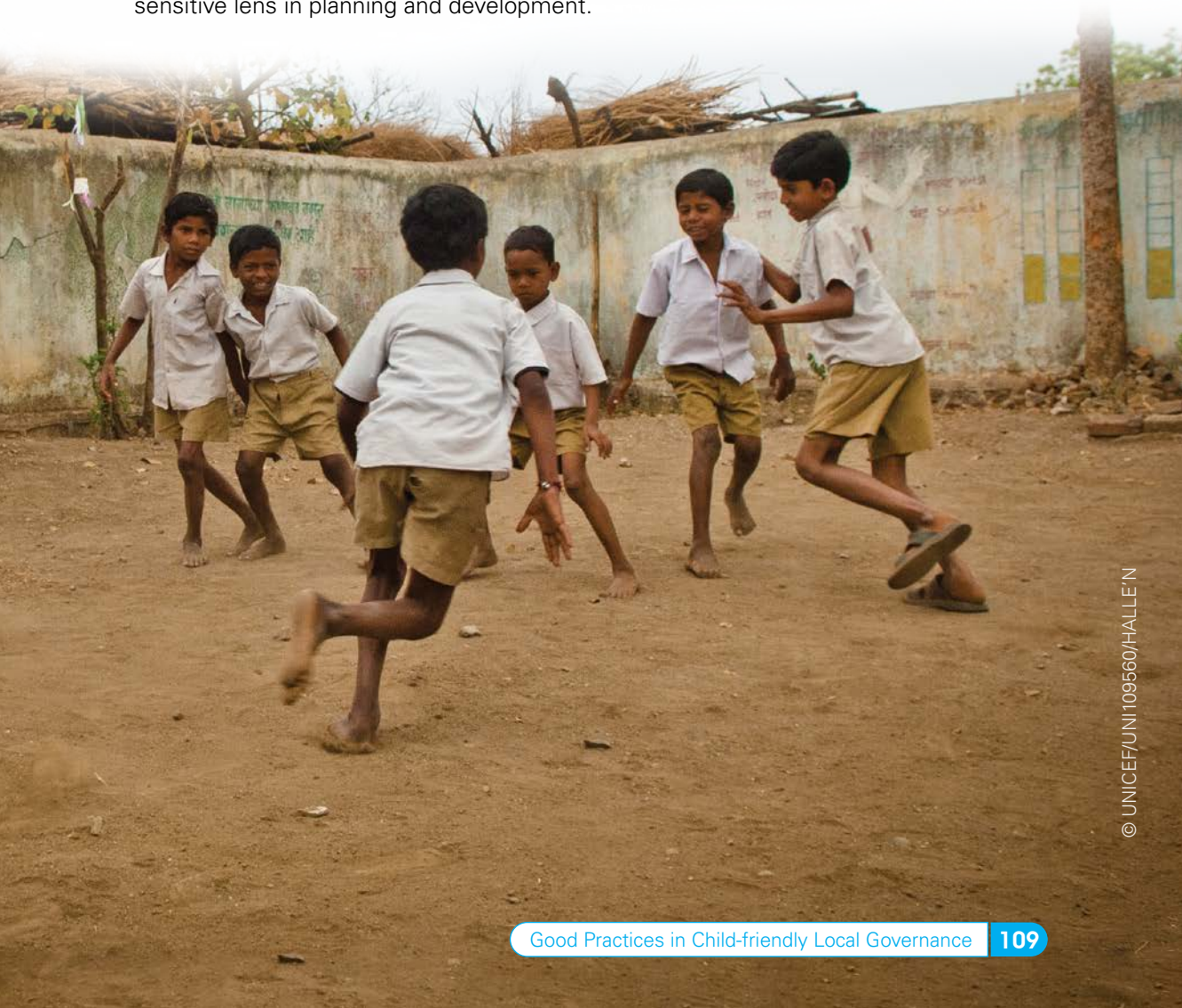
Next steps

Going forward, it is vital that Bal Sabhas and Bal Panchayats are formalized, and that standard operating procedures are developed, so that regular and systematic child participation is established across the state. Currently, about 18 per cent of GPs in the state have resolved to become child-friendly GPs under the SDG localization initiative. The model will be expanded to these areas as well as to all model and Navratna³ GPs, as per the SDG localization initiative. UNICEF will support the state in developing a number of demonstration sites in Pune and also develop capacity building modules for PRIs on the facilitation of child participation.

³ Navratna GPs are those that have chosen to work on all nine themes under SDG localization.

Sustainability

It is expected that the children's GP will have a life well beyond the term of the actual project. The respect shown by the GP for the voices of children has inspired confidence among the children. Children in Vhannur village have learned to speak up not only for themselves but also for their neighbours. It is expected that this is the beginning of a democratic wave among the children of Maharashtra, as it will motivate other children and encourage other GPs to adopt and promote child participation in decision-making – for the development and protection of children as well as the development of the village in general. Platforms like Bal Sabha and Bal Panchayat are a way forward for strengthening Gram Sabhas as well as building an aware and responsible citizenry. As a step towards this, advocacy efforts are underway to institutionalize Bal Sabhas in the state through legislative changes to the Maharashtra Village Panchayat Act. The state has also integrated child- and gender-responsive governance in the capacity building framework of PRIs, which will ensure that more GPs will have a child- and gender-sensitive lens in planning and development.



Case
Study



**KINSHIP AND COMMUNITY-
BASED CARE FOR**

**CHILDREN OF SEASONAL
MIGRANT WORKERS**

Maharashtra (2018–22)

Theme: Protection

Summary

A kinship and community-based care programme was piloted in 32 GPs (village councils) of Jalna district for children of seasonal migrant families, in collaboration with the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), Government of Maharashtra, District Administration of Jalna, UNICEF, Swaraj Gramin Vikas Pratishthan (SWARAJ) and the Society for Action in Creative Education and Development (SACRED). This programme is currently being replicated in 32 additional GPs across other blocks of the district.

Context

The kinship and community-based care services support children who stay back with kin – usually grandparents or other relatives but sometimes neighbours – when their parents migrate annually for seasonal work, for six months of the year. The services prevent the unsafe migration of children, ensuring that the children remain safe and protected in the care of extended families and continue to access services including education, health, nutrition, recreation and psychosocial care in their villages. Care arrangements with kin and support from the community not only prevents unnecessary institutionalization but also prevents disruption of children’s education, stops them being forced into child labour or child marriage and reduces their vulnerability to neglect.

The kinship care arrangements are supported by community-based care services, such as programmes to support education and recreation that can be delivered by trained youth volunteers from the village. These youth volunteers or Balmitras (friends of children) are part of the Village Child Protection Committee (VCPC). The Balmitra coordinates with the School Management Committee to monitor the children’s school attendance. Balmitras are trained to provide psychosocial support to the children and their caregivers and to help with any crisis that the child or kin may face.

Convergence and cooperation between local governance systems – the GP, VCPC, School Management Committees and functionaries like school teachers, Anganwadi (childcare) workers, ASHAs and youth volunteers – has helped to build a safety net for children and is the cornerstone for effective service delivery.

The GP is responsible for maintaining the Village Migration Register (VMR), which contains details of all members of migrating families: those who are migrating, those who are staying, and those who are responsible for the children when the parents migrate. The VMR helps the village-level systems make provisions for children who choose to stay in family-based care during the migration season.

Community-based care support has expanded to include adolescent empowerment, which tackles issues such as violence prevention, child marriage, access to secondary education, child labour and cleanliness and hygiene, with help from Anganwadi services and ASHAs. These adolescents gradually become leaders and champions of change in their communities.

Results

Starting with 547 children in 2014–15, the programme has benefited nearly 10,000 children from migrant families to date. Today, VCPCs with 601 members and 234 youth volunteers across the 64 villages are enabling children to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty, neglect and disrupted education by preventing children from dropping out of school and staying safe and well cared for in family and community-based care.

Table 3: Provisions of the family-based kinship and community-based care solutions

Family interventions	Community/village interventions
❖ Identification of families to prevent unsafe migration	❖ Activation of volunteers, teachers, Anganwadi workers and PRIs
❖ Care options provided to families	❖ Counselling and awareness sessions for seasonal migrant families
❖ Consultative discussions to identify caregivers, with the participation of children caregivers	❖ Maintaining register of family details (Village Migration Register) at the GP office
❖ Home visits by Balmitras	❖ Training for community frontline workers and families
❖ Joint meetings with children and caregivers to assess needs	❖ Before- and after-school activities for supervised care
❖ Kin and foster families linked to benefit schemes	❖ Health camps
❖ Regular interaction and follow-up organised by Balmitras	❖ Groups for adolescent girls
❖ Crisis support and intervention	❖ Meetings and support for grandparents and kin (livelihood, psychosocial support, etc.)
	❖ Championing grandparents/caregivers

Next steps

Although kinship and community-based care solutions have proved extremely effective in preventing unnecessary institutional care for children of seasonal migrant workers, it is and will remain an informal care arrangement. The current work in Jalna focuses on enabling its scale-up through the capacity building of child protection and allied systems. The learnings from this best practice are being included into the state-level migration response by the State Level Migration Committee of the DWCD, of which UNICEF is a member.

Children's experiences of kinship and community-based care

Gajanan Bharat Kharat: Former child migrant and committed Balmitra

During his school years, 22-year-old Gajanan Bharat Kharat would join his parents during their annual seasonal migration, returning home only to do his exams. On completing high school, Gajanan began to work as an agricultural labourer. Things changed in 2017, when Gajanan got an opportunity to become part of the VCPC in Pande Pokhri GP, Partur block, as a Balmitra. He received training from UNICEF to mentor younger children in the village and identify those in need of additional support. His training not only gave him a deeper understanding of issues relating to child rights and protection but also provided him with essential skills for working with children. The training programme also revived his dormant love of education and Gajanan went on to get his Higher Secondary School certificate. Today, Gajanan is doing an undergraduate degree and continues to function as a Balmitra in his village. He works closely with the GP to maintain the VMR, which is kept in the GP office. As a Balmitra, Gajanan conducts regular follow ups with the children he assumes responsibility for, as allotted by the VCPC. He ensures the children attend school regularly and remain healthy, safe and protected in the absence of their parents. In addition to conducting after-school classes and recreational activities for children who stay in the village during migration season, Gajanan provides psychosocial support to caregivers and children. Gajanan goes out of his way to ensure children can attend school regularly and continue their education while remaining safe. His own experience has taught him the importance of education and he draws a sense of satisfaction from his reputation as a committed educationalist and social worker in the village.

Pooja Rathod: Adolescent animator and Balmitra

Pooja Rathod is a 17-year-old student in Standard 11. She lost her father when she was only 7 years old. Pooja was brought up by her mother in Hivara Tanda, a tribal hamlet in Badnapur block of Jalna District. Her mother encouraged Pooja to study and pursue her interest in sports. Pooja is a Kabaddi player and an expert in Karate. She first joined the adolescent program and then became a Balmitra (youth volunteer). During the COVID-19 pandemic, she contacted all Tanda residents, urging them to get vaccinated and informing them of COVID-appropriate behaviour, working alongside the ASHAs. She has also helped children in kinship care seek social protection support under the state childcare scheme, Balsangopan Yojana.

Pallavi and Rani: Staying with their grandfather

Pallavi, 14 years old, and Rani, 11 years old, are sisters from Aasangaon GP in Partur block of Jalna. Their parents are sugarcane harvesters who travel to far-off Solapur district for six months every year to earn a living. Pallavi is in Standard 8 and Rani in Standard 6. The children do not like to go away as life is very hard in the sugarcane fields and they miss out on studying. With support from their Anganwadi workers and Balmitras, they have been able to stay at home with their grandfather. While their grandfather works on their small piece of land, the sisters and grandmother cook together, clean the home and help each other with the household chores. Pallavi and Rani attend the education and recreation classes conducted by the Balmitras. Their grandfather said, "I don't have to supervise their studies, the Balmitras help out. Migration has been our lot, but it will not be the same for Pallavi and Rani."





Case
Study

14



COMPREHENSIVE

SOLID LIQUID WASTE

**MANAGEMENT IN
BHANDARA**

Maharashtra (2016–22)

Theme: Development

Summary

Sitepar village demonstrates how an active community and a motivated GP (village-level elected local government) can together transform their water and waste management facilities to develop a safe and secure water supply, efficient arrangements for solid and liquid waste, and a high standard of overall cleanliness in the village.

As a result of its transformation, Sitepar is progressing towards becoming a 'Water Sufficient Village' and 'Clean and Green Village' – two key themes identified in the Localization of Sustainable Development Goals.

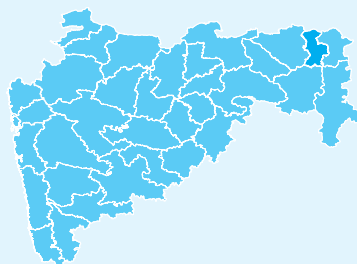
Scope



Demographics for Sitepar

A small village in Mohadi block of **Bhandara** district

20 km from the district headquarters



Population



675

Total



147

Village households

Context

Before 2016, the village had minimal facilities for water supply and sanitation: the entire village was dependent on point sources for water (hand pumps and wells); many families did not have toilets and open defecation was common; there was no system for the collection and management of solid waste, so waste was being dumped in the open; and there was no drainage system for greywater management, so greywater was discharged openly. The villagers faced health issues due to these unhealthy conditions.

The GP members understood the urgent need for a water supply and sanitation activities in the village, but they did not have any guidance or direction for it and had no idea of the process for setting up these facilities. In 2016, the GP members visited Mozri village in Amravati to see the unveiling of a statue of Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj. In Mozri, the GP learnt more about WASH and waste management and how to mobilize their community. Over six days, an extensive information, education and communication (IEC) campaign was organized by the GP, including activities around sanitation such as *Gram Safai* (village cleanliness) campaigns, student camps, street theatre, etc. All of these activities highlighted the importance of sanitation and community participation.

Results

The community was engaged in sanitation efforts and a village meeting was held immediately after the inauguration of the program to discuss the next steps. At the meeting, the community pledged to improve sanitation and cleanliness and to restore their natural environment. Tree planting began immediately – every household planted at least one tree outside their house on the roadside. This was followed by carefully planned and monitored activities to stop open defecation, sustaining Open Defecation Free (ODF) status, solid waste management, liquid waste management, maintaining overall cleanliness, etc.

Achieving ODF status and sustainability

As a first step, the construction and use of toilets was promoted in the village and all households without a toilet decided to construct one. A Community Sanitary Complex with reliable water supply was constructed by the GP for floating populations, migrants and labourers. In addition, community toilets were constructed with separate units for men and women, running water supply and hand washing facilities. The village was declared ODF in 2017. Ward members, villagers and students monitor the use of toilets to maintain the ODF status.

Water supply

A water supply scheme was taken up under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) which provided tap connections and water meters to 118 households; the remaining 29 households have their own sources. Water is supplied twice a day. A Reverse Osmosis (RO) water filter is installed near the GP and treated water is provided to the floating population, GP staff and labourers. The operation and maintenance of the RO unit is covered by GP funds. For a sustainable water source, rain water harvesting is carried out at the *Anganwadi* (childcare centre) and the school. Two community handwash units have also been constructed, using GP funds. A water tax of 900 Indian rupees (INR) per household per annum is levied. All households pay the tax regularly and in a timely manner, resulting in 100 per cent recovery.

Solid waste management

The GP has installed 14 community bins using 15th Finance Commission funds. It has made it compulsory for each household and each business to segregate dry and wet waste. Waste is collected from each household and business every week. A total of 32 households have their own compost pits for biodegradable waste and manure from the pits is used for kitchen gardens.

Household waste is brought to the waste management shed, which has nine vermicompost units for biodegradable waste and one chamber for storing plastic waste. This unit is well maintained. A sanitation charge of 50 INR per household per annum is levied by the GP with a recovery rate of 100 per cent. A total of 14 Nadeb composting bins (named after their inventor, Narayan Deotao Pandharipande) and pit compost units have been installed by the GP in public places. Some of these have been handed over to households for operation and maintenance. IEC activities for Solid Liquid Waste Management, such as wall painting and putting up boards and slogans, have also been carried out by the GP.

The *Rojgar Sahayyak*, the village-level official of the MGNREGS, is responsible for the operation and management of community composting units, a Resource Recovery Centre and community tree planting, and the MGNREGS provides for management costs.

An annual contract is given to two people for the collection of waste, cleaning of the CSC and cleaning of the marketplace. These people have permission to collect charges from shops in the market (ranging from INR 5–20, depending on the size of the shop) and all operation and management activities are done with these funds.

Plastic waste

For the collection of plastic waste, the GP came up with an innovative idea. School children are encouraged to collect plastic and put wrappers and other small plastics into a plastic bottle. They receive INR 10 for every bottle filled with plastic. These bottles are then used as decorations. Through its solid waste management initiatives, the village has engaged in environmentally sound management of all waste throughout the life cycle, in line with Target 12.4 of the SDGs.

Menstrual health management

For menstrual health management, the GP installed a sanitary napkin vending machine in the GP where adolescent girls and women can purchase napkins for INR 5 each. An incinerator has been installed near the Anganwadi where used sanitary napkins are disposed of. The GP earns INR 70–80 per month by selling sanitary napkins (with a profit of INR 2 from each one).

Greywater management

Of the total households in the village, 72 have kitchen gardens for the management of greywater. The remaining 75 households are now connected to covered drains, constructed with MGNREGS funding in 2016–17, and 27 plantations have been established above the drains, which has resulted in the partial absorption of the wastewater.

Two community soak pits have been constructed using MGNREGS funding at the end of two drainage outfalls, and three soak pits have also been established using SBM funds for managing wastewater around hand pumps. Scheduled cleaning of drainage is done twice a year, with GP funding.



Lessons learned



Sitepar GP has demonstrated that the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources, as prescribed under Target 12.2 of the SDGs, can be achieved in a participative and efficient manner.



Sitepar has showcased how a motivated community and GP can work together to transform a village into a *Sujal* and *Swachh* (water sufficient and clean) village in an astoundingly short period of time.



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Case
Study



ENHANCING **CHILD PARTICIPATION** IN OLANGA GRAM PANCHAYAT

Odisha (2022)

Theme: Participation and
development

Summary

In rural Odisha, GPs – village-level elected councils – can play a huge role in creating opportunities for children and the Panchayat can act as a catalyst for change. This initiative sought to enhance the participation of children in the planning phase of GPDPs, to ensure the Olanga GP includes children in their planning process.

The Olanga GP successfully identified the key issues relating to children through regular, well-attended meetings and discussions. The GP then took various decisions relating to children, strengthening its committees and their inclusiveness, improving the capacity of elected representatives and GP staff, and establishing a mechanism for transparency and accountability.

The Sarpanch (head of the GP), Akshaya Prasad Mohanty of Olanga GP in Bhadrak district, became a leading example and proponent of change – and has been selected as a Sarpanch for the second time. His assertive and constant efforts for the development of children lies behind the success of this Child Friendly GP .

Scope

For this initiative, UNICEF India worked with the Olanga Gram Panchayat

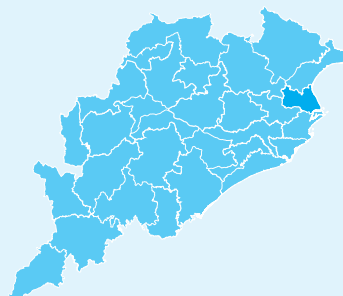


Olanga Gram Panchayat

Sadar block of Bhadrak district

9 kilometres from the Bhadrak district and block headquarters

Comprises **3** villages and **17** wards



Population



3256

Female



3448

Male



2556

Children

The initiative took place in 2022.



Objectives

This project focused on the improving the status of children by creating child-friendly infrastructure, improving education up to the age of 18 and supporting children's all-round development. The primary goal of the initiative was to support the development of Anganwadi Centres, which provide Early Childhood Care and Development services to children aged 3–6 years and support pregnant women and lactating mothers with various issues related to nutrition-related services, including information about diet.

The first phase of the initiative identified 5 of 11 AWCs for targeted support. The GP also worked to generate its own revenue (e.g. by developing and leasing out a market/retail complex, to generate an income from common or unused GP land), which it could use for the maintenance of child-friendly infrastructure in the GP.

As part of the initiative, Olanga GP sought to mobilize funding from all possible revenue streams, including corporate social responsibility resources, Local Area Development Funds, and the GP's own sources of revenue.

Inclusive Panchayats give voice to children's concerns and provide them with better opportunities.



Results

The results were far-reaching, and crossed multiple sectors including education, health, disability and inclusion, psychosocial well-being and nutrition. A number of highlights are outlined below.

- ❖ **Celebrated academic achievements:** The GP identified high-performing students and recognized and celebrated their efforts in front of community members on Republic Day and Independence Day.
- ❖ **Enhanced extracurricular activities:** The GP organized an annual sports competition and provided space for children's dance classes.
- ❖ **Improved access to social security schemes:** The GP worked with 1,288 households to ensure eligible children and their families had access to the different social security schemes, such as the National Food Security Scheme and the State Food Security Scheme.
- ❖ **Health and disability support:** Two male and five female children received support in accessing their disability pension, 1,287 households received support with Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana, and others received support with scholarships. Ramp facilities were also provided in the GP office, school and AWCs.
- ❖ **Reduced discriminatory norms:** The GP worked to reduce discriminatory norms around the value of girls by implementing the 'Advika – Every Girl is Unique' programme, a state initiative to empower adolescent girls aged 10–19 years, reducing their vulnerability and increasing their self-reliance.
- ❖ **Improved status of children:** The GP collaborated with various line departments, front-line workers and different committees (e.g. the SMC, Matru Committee, Gaon Kalyan Samiti, Anganwadi Jaanch Committee, Gram Panchayat Child Protection Committee and the Parent Teacher Association) to improve the status of children and raise their profile in decision-making processes.

The first step towards preparation of a GPDP is to organize a Gram Sabha, where the panchayat members and the community come together and pledge to cooperate towards the development of the panchayat. As part of the process, the Gram Sabha should pass a resolution to include all the concerns discussed during the event in their GPDP.

The resolution taken in Gram Sabha included various issues related to children's needs and how these can be incorporated into the GPDP planning process. The GP placed a strong emphasis on children's rights as a prerequisite for making its villages and communities more child friendly. The ability of the GP to identify the needs of the children and then to persevere in their responses to them, so that children's needs will be provided for in the years to come, was remarkable.

In this way, the GP has worked to ensure children are born healthy, remain healthy, receive a good education and are safe, irrespective of gender, caste and creed. It has initiated many admirable, free or low-cost initiatives and campaigns to fight child marriage, child labour, child trafficking, teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, gender discrimination and the dowry system. The GP has also taken steps to publicise the child helpline, 1098, in prominent places such as schools, GP offices and other busy places.

Lessons learned

Lessons learned during this initiative to engage children in the Olanga GP included the following:



It is important to include children in the planning process in order to consider and address their issues, particularly those relating to education, health, nutrition, sport and psychosocial well-being.



Children must be treated as equal stakeholders when it comes to the development of GPs.



Active Gram Sabhas play an important role in providing oversight for the implementation of plans.



To initiate changes, it is helpful if GPs have their own source of income. This can help to support innovative initiatives that might otherwise not receive funding – most government funds are restricted by certain regulations and conditions relating to their use, whereas a GP's own funding is flexible and can be used however it wishes.

Next steps

Olanga GP hopes to build on its achievements going forwards, while regularly reviewing where changes and improvements are required. The GP recognizes that it continues to face a number of challenges, including drug addiction. To address this particular issue, the Sarpanch has started to conduct meetings with the active involvement of self-help groups and youth volunteers at the hamlet level to create awareness on the harmful effects of drug addiction.



Children are the future of our family and nation. UNICEF has undertaken situational analysis and focus group discussion related to child rights with different stakeholders. I personally realized that it is the primary responsibility of panchayat to create a supportive environment for children including the right to survive, be cared for and protected by reducing the vulnerability of children, which leads the children to enjoy a happy and healthy childhood. I strongly believe that if children are given the supportive environment with required facilities, they will succeed beyond their dreams. Today's reader is tomorrow's leader.

— Akshaya Kumar Mohanty, Sarpanch, Olanga GP



Sustainability

In terms of levels of governance, GPs operate at the level that is closest to children. Their actions therefore have a unique power to uphold children’s rights. The Olanga GP has developed a number of strategies to support the sustainability of its efforts, for example strengthening committees by building the capacity of members and supporting regular meetings and reviews, so that the committees will independently advocate for children’s rights and inclusion going forwards. The GP will continue to champion and support its own sources of revenue for the repair and maintenance of child-friendly infrastructure and improved participation of children in all relevant aspects of local governance.

Olanga GP is an excellent illustration of a child-friendly GP, in letter and spirit. By learning from its experience, other GPs across the state will be able to increase their sensitivity and responsiveness to the rights of children, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.





Case
Study



PRADAN AND UNICEF **SOCIAL PROTECTION** PROJECT

Odisha and Jharkhand (2022)

Theme: Survival and
development

Summary

In India, rural, disadvantaged and marginalized communities typically find it hard to access their entitlements. Literacy levels, civic development and information are patchy, and vulnerable rural households – especially women and children – are often unable to access even basic services or social protection. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic further compounded this, exacerbating the social, economic and cultural hurdles that prevent access to government benefits. Democratic local governments are known to be effective points of delivery for basic services⁴ but community-based organizations (CBOs) – including self-help groups (SHGs) – can be viable alternatives⁵ for linking social protection programmes and services with those who need them, particularly in areas where development organizations have already mobilized networks of SHGs to support welfare measures – as seen in Kerala,⁶ Odisha,⁷ Bihar⁸ and Andhra Pradesh.⁹

Pradan and UNICEF India implemented a one-year pilot project from September 2020 to August 2021 to develop a new model for enhancing the capacity of local governments to deliver the benefits of state social protection programmes. The Pradan-UNICEF Social Protection Project (PUSPP) created new partnerships between panchayats (village councils), women’s SHGs and government line departments to ensure more women and children receive the benefits of state welfare schemes.

⁴ See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/communitydrivendevelopment/brief/Decentralization> (accessed 23 January 2023).

⁵ World Bank, ‘In India, Women’s Self-Help Groups combat the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic’. 11 April 2020, <www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/04/11/women-self-help-groups-combat-covid19-coronavirus-pandemic-india>, accessed 12 October 2022.

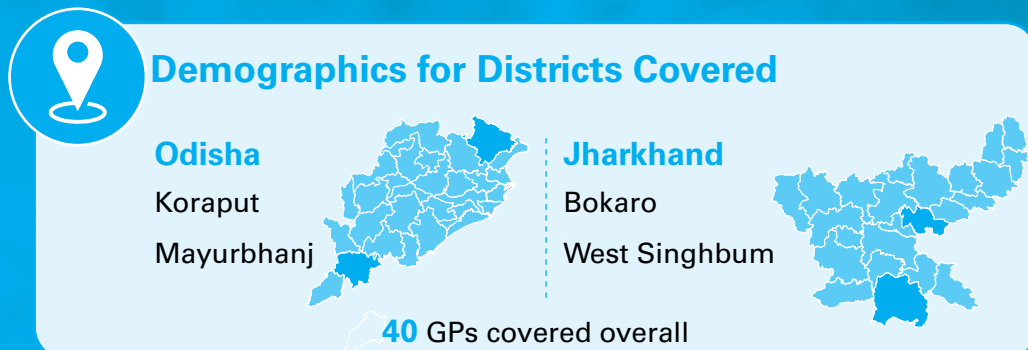
⁶ Green, Duncan, ‘How a Women’s Organization became ‘chief architects’ of the COVID-19 response in Southern India’, *From Poverty to Power*, 1 March 2021, <<https://oxfamapps.org/ftp2p/how-a-womens-organization-became-chief-architects-of-the-covid-19-response-in-southern-india/>>, accessed 12 October 2022.

⁷ See Mission Shakti Department, Government of Odisha: <<https://missionshakti.odisha.gov.in/programme/mission-shakti-loan-state-interest-subvention>>

⁸ Press Information Bureau (PIB), Government of India, ‘Community Kitchens run by SHG Women provide food to the most poor and vulnerable in Rural Areas during the COVID-19 lockdown’, PIB Delhi, 13 April 2020, <<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1613866>>, accessed 31 January 2023.

⁹ Thomas, Kurien, ‘Andhra Pradesh Community Self Help Model’, 2003, <<https://www.cgg.gov.in/core/uploads/2017/07/WP-77-92.pdf>>, accessed 31 January 2023.

Scope and methodology



The initiative took place between September 2020 and August 2021.

UNICEF partnered with Pradan, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that had a history of cooperation with SHGs in the pilot areas. Given the economic nature of SHGs and micro-credit groups, there is a risk that SHG networks start to operate as parallel power structures that strengthen welfare measures as a substitute for regular income. For this reason, Pradan’s role as the implementing agency was clearly defined to stop the legitimacy of democratic local governments (in this case, GPs) being eroded.

A baseline survey provided an overview of programmatic gaps:

- ❖ **Low awareness among potential beneficiaries in both Odisha and Jharkhand:** Typically, information on new or existing schemes was shared by GP members or during mass awareness campaigns by panchayats, but information was often missing or poorly understood.
- ❖ **High cost, long processing times:** Prior to the intervention, the processing time for an application ranged from 10–15 days in Koraput, Odisha, to 3–4 months in West Singhbhum, Jharkhand. While applicants incurred no direct cost, they incurred indirect costs, for example mediators, photocopying or travelling to block-level offices when panchayat officials could not help them.
- ❖ **No institutionalized mechanism, procedural requirement or process for tracking applications in Odisha or Jharkhand:** Applicants generally relied on face-to-face contact; follow-up and line-department liaison at the block level existed only in Jharkhand.
- ❖ **Absence of mechanism to address grievances:** Although every government programme/scheme should include a grievance redressal mechanism, beneficiaries were not aware of any such system in the pilot areas. In Tanr Mohanpur, Jharkhand, applicants said that the sarpanch (elected village decision-maker) and/or ward members would help them to resolve any issues informally. Many thought that

formal complaints needed to be brought to the block level, which put them off. While they were aware of the GP office grievance box, beneficiaries said they rarely raised complaints. When GPs did receive feedback, some were unable to collate/share them due to a lack of manpower.

- ❖ **Existing SHG capacity and activity:** Pradan was already working with the SHGs in the pilot areas on livelihood development and local governance, including citizenship, panchayat functioning and welfare schemes, but significant gaps around access to state benefits remained.

A key challenge was the limited capacity of GPs to adequately disseminate information about social security benefits, facilitate applications, follow up with applicants and process applications to ensure the timely receipt of benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the larger objective of creating a prototype for collaboration between SHGs and GPs, PUSPP took a participatory, bottom-up approach.





Objectives

The main objective of the PUSPP was to deliver the benefits of the following government social protection programmes to all women and children:

- ❖ **Pension Schemes** (old-age pensions, widow's pensions, disability pensions and single woman pensions)
- ❖ **Public Distribution Schemes** (issuing new ration cards, adding new members to existing ration cards, etc.)
- ❖ **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme** (issuing job cards)
- ❖ **Mamata Scheme** (nutritional support for expectant and lactating mothers, exclusively in Odisha). The six core programme interventions were as follows:



The six core programme interventions were as follows:

- ❖ **Increasing the capacity of SHG collectives and village organizations (VOs):** Pradan continued to work with SHGs on application processes and the operation of various welfare schemes to ensure members had a clear understanding of how the different social protection schemes worked.
- ❖ **Orienting GPs:** An orientation session increased GPs' awareness of the relevance, function and potential of collaboration with SHG collectives and strengthened the ability of the proposed GP Help Desk to reach the most marginalized, in line with their mandate. The GPs supported SHG collectives by identifying beneficiaries, processing applications and forwarding them to relevant officials at the block level; and coordinating between GP–SHG collectives and front-line functionaries.
- ❖ **Raising awareness among beneficiaries:** SHGs worked to raise awareness of various schemes among potential beneficiary groups and identify eligible beneficiaries. They also identified gaps in procedures and raised them at GP, block and state meetings.
- ❖ **Establishing a GP Help Desk:** A help desk made up of carefully selected SHG members supported potential/actual applicants with various schemes and facilitated and tracked their progress.
- ❖ **Establishing block-level Nagrik Sahayata Kendras (NSKs):** NSKs – equivalent to citizen's advice bureaus – acted as enablers of the programme by bringing block-level NSK officers and SHG federations together.
- ❖ **Establishing/activating feedback loops at the block, district and state levels:** Monthly meetings between CBOs, Panchayati Raj (the village self-governance system) Institutions (PRIs) and front-line functionaries helped VO Social Action Committees, GPs and GP Help Desks to document challenges and provided feedback to block- and district-level functionaries. **Line departments at the block, district and state levels** addressed ground level operational issues and ensured smooth programme implementation; and organized monthly review meetings to coordinate the actions of SHG collectives, GP representatives and block-level officials.

Empowering SHG members through social protection benefits

The Jalahanjar Panchayat in Koraput, Odisha, is dominated by tribal communities eking out a living from agricultural activities. Many SHG members would find it too daunting to speak up in Gram Panchayat Level Federation (GPLF) meetings and felt intimidated by government officials. As a result, many were effectively cut off from social protection benefits because the GPLFs were the bridge between government and the community at large. This intervention therefore aimed at (1) informing and facilitating the applications of SHG members and community members to access social protection benefits and (2) strengthening the role of GPLFs in securing benefits for communities.

Initial stages of the intervention involved conducting household surveys to assess access to social protection schemes. Findings highlighted a low rate of enrolment and access to benefits. For instance, although 28 per cent of households interviewed had access to a ration card, they were unable to access rations from the GP as they did not know who to contact. Therefore, SHGs and VOs were mobilized to participate in GPLF meetings and the GPLFs helped put in place measures to tackle rampant corruption by engaging with sarpanches and Block Development Officers.

The intervention was successful as the SHG members began attending GPLF meetings, *Palli Sabhas* (the smallest administrative units of the *Panchayati Raj* system), *Gram Sabhas* (general village assemblies), etc., with a renewed sense of agency and confidence and the GPLFs, in turn, realized the impact they could have by engaging with different public officials. Fund utilization by GPs is a challenge that these GPLFs plan to address in addition to strengthening linkages with local government officials.

Results

- ❖ Over 55,000 households reached overall
- ❖ Reduced time and cost associated with processing applications
- ❖ Generated benefits worth 51 crore rupees (US\$6.8 million)
- ❖ 100 per cent of GPs in intervention areas opening for more than three days in a week
- ❖ Rozgar Diwas (employment days) are regular in all GPs in the pilot areas.

The PUSPP model substantially increased the coverage of welfare programmes targeting eligible beneficiaries, especially women and children. The immediate results of the pilot

were (1) increased awareness of government social protection programmes, schemes, etc. among potential beneficiaries; (2) increased support during the application process for eligible beneficiaries; and (3) timely receipt of benefits. An assessment of the PUSPP intervention showed that it enabled significantly more people to access welfare benefits, when compared with other areas.

GP help desk: Helping a widow access her pension

Renu Devi is a resident of the Tand Mohanpur GP (in Jaridih Block, Bokaro District, Jharkhand), which largely comprises families that have been displaced due to mining and industrial activity. Most people here are daily wage earners or small business owners who migrate to urban areas to earn a livelihood. Renu's entire family was dependent on her husband, who sold bangles, but he passed away after an illness on 4 January 2018 leaving Renu and her six children with barely enough money for food. Renu was devastated after her husband's death. In the process of trying to get a widow's pension from the Government of Jharkhand, she was cheated twice and eventually lost the vital original documents that proved her husband's death.

In October 2020, during a Gram Sabha, the Mukhiya announced the establishment of a GP Help Desk at the GP Office to help villagers access entitlements, lodging, complaints procedures, etc. Puja Devi, who worked at the GP Help Desk, would visit households to ensure that eligible beneficiaries for social security schemes receive the benefits they are due. Thanks to Puja's help and persistence, Renu eventually completed her application and received her widow's pension for the first time in February 2021, three years after her husband's death.

Results: Intervention versus non-intervention areas

	Pilot area GPs	Non-pilot area GPs	Comparative analysis	Pilot area GPs	Non-pilot area GPs	Comparative analysis
	Number of people/households enrolled or having benefitted/GP			Benefit in terms of monetary value (lakh rupees)		
				45.17	5.63	8.02
Pension	86.4	18.66	4.63	10.36	2.23	
Ration card	61.6	9.33	6.60	3.23	0.49	
Job card	310.7	28.66	10.84	31.58	2.91	

Lessons learned

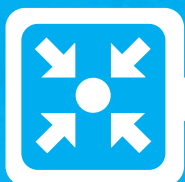
The PUSPP Project sought to mitigate the deprivation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by extending the coverage of new and existing social protection programmes at the GP level, thus enabling greater uptake of entitlements by eligible beneficiaries (women and children) in rural, marginalized households and communities otherwise dependent on remittances or daily wages. The project's efficacy, success and sustainability relied on three key features:



A credible development agency partner: Pradan's established relationship with the local community provided a strong foundation for engagement with the programme and a channel to support those working on the GP Help Desk.



Institutionalized SHGs and VOs: Well-established SHGs and VOs that functioned consistently were key to the success of the operations; indeed, the programme was less successful in locations without institutionalized SHG Federations and VOs. Moreover, institutionalized SHGs and SHG Federations greatly improved the sustainability of the programme.



A functional, block-level focal point: The presence of a functional, institutionalized block-level structure, such as the NSK in Jharkhand, was very effective in providing block-level support and follow-up. In the absence of such a structure in Odisha, significant and sustained efforts would have been needed to develop a block-level nodal point.

Next steps

UNICEF India proposes an expanded effectiveness trial across two or more states, incorporating lessons learnt, in collaboration with state governments and technical partners.

UNICEF India will aim to:

- ❖ Implement an expanded action research pilot model of GP-SHG collaboration for improving social protection delivery in rural areas.
- ❖ Assess the impact of SHG-GP collaboration in rural areas, specifically in (1) ease of access to social protection services, (2) inclusion of vulnerable households, and (3) improved coverage of social protection.
- ❖ Assess the impact of the pilot model on scalability and sustainability measurements.



There was a time when we were fearful about sitting with government officials; but now we sit with them on chairs on the same platform to discuss our struggles.

— Chanchala Nani, Jalahanjar GP, Odisha



Case
Study



ORGANIZING **BAL SABHA** AT SCALE

Rajasthan (2022)

Theme: Participation

Summary

Rajasthan's experience with the children's assembly, or *Bal Sabha*, began in 2019. The Education Department directed that school-led Bal Sabhas should be held in every government school, especially on the 'No-Bag Day', in rural areas of the state. In November 2019, the Panchayati Raj department introduced the concept of Bal 'Gram' Sabhas that would be led by the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). These Bal Sabhas were to be organized at the Gram Panchayat (GP) level prior to the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) Gram Sabha; it was expected that the issues raised by children would then be included in the GPDPs of the relevant GPs. The localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through PRIs further strengthened this mandate and the State Government continued to focus on the 'at-scale' organization of Bal Sabhas.

In 2022, the State Government dedicated the week of 14–20 November to organizing the Bal Sabhas and systematically capturing the voices of children to identify child rights issues to be addressed by the GPs through their annual GPDPs. In some places, the block and district administrations also organized Bal *Samvads* (events where children could meet district authorities and express their needs) to amplify the voices of children and create an enabling environment for children at the GP level to participate in local governance processes. This case study briefly captures the experiences emerging from this practice and identifies opportunities for further strengthening of the approach.

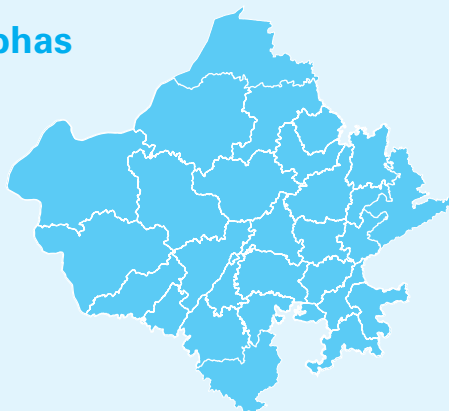
Scope



Organization of Bal Sabhas

A state-wide initiative

Structured to emphasize on issues that are captured, documented and linked with the GPDP



The initiative was started in November 2019.



Background and objectives

Research shows that one of the best ways of improving a country's development status is by engaging with all dimensions of child development – including engaging children in issues that relate to their own development. For this reason, establishing regular Bal Sabhas in Rajasthan state was the main objective of this pilot project.

India, as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, is committed to ensuring that all children enjoy their right to survival, development, protection and participation. The National Policy for Children (NPC), 2013, re-affirms the Government's commitment to realization of the rights of all children and recognizes every person below the age of 18 years as a child. The NPC recognizes the need for strengthening child rights governance and reiterates that the realization of the prescribed rights of children depends on the response of the local governments.

In 2019, the MoPR, in acknowledging the centrality of the role of PRIs in creating a conducive environment for children's healthy growth and development, constituted the 'Child Friendly Panchayat Award'. Subsequently, in 2022, the MoPR launched the nine themes of Localization of SDGs through PRIs, with Theme 3, Child Friendly Village.

The approach recognizes the need to work simultaneously on all four pillars of child rights: survival, development, protection and participation. More importantly, it emphasizes the need for children's voices to be heard and for due space to be given to children to participate in their own development and aspects connected to it. Accordingly, the approach emphasizes providing platforms and mechanisms for children to participate and to be recognized in the delivery of the rights of a child.



Results

Inception of Bal Sabhas in Rajasthan

In January 2019, the Government of Rajasthan Education Department launched Bal Sabhas to promote extracurricular activities and identify and resolve issues related to upper primary schools located in rural areas, and to bring about qualitative changes in education. Besides students, it was expected that teachers, parents and village elders would also attend the Bal Sabhas. The Bal Sabhas were expected to be organized on a Saturday, which was also observed as a 'no-bag day' in the state. Simultaneously, UNICEF supported the Panchayati Raj department in piloting Bal Sabhas led by GPs in Tonk, Barmer and Jaisalmer districts.

Based on the lessons emerging from the pilot, as well as the experiences gained from the school-based Bal Sabhas, on 20 November 2019 the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department launched the state-wide child-friendly GP initiative. The former Additional Chief Secretary of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, Rajeshwar Singh announced the formation of Child Protection Committees in every GP, constitution of Bal Panchayats and organizing bi-annual Bal Sabhas throughout the state, saying that "every child coming to this world comes with immense potential and it is our collective responsibility to help each and every child realize its full potential".

Following the announcement, the Special Secretary and Director Panchayati Raj issued directives for organizing Bal Sabhas in all GPs of the state. The order also mandated GPs to incorporate issues raised by children in the GPDPs for the financial year 2020–2021. As per the compiled data, in 2019, Bal Sabhas were held in approximately 70 per cent of the total GPs in the state.

The watershed year for institutionalizing child participation in Rajasthan

The inception of the Bal Sabhas in Rajasthan faced a major roadblock due to COVID-19 pandemic. As per Government orders, there was a blanket restriction on any form of assembly in 2019 and 2020, especially for children – schools and Anganwadi centres remained closed for nearly 18 months throughout the state. However, the launch of the Localization of SDGs through PRIs by the Government of India's MoPR proved to be a turning point, which renewed the impetus and focus on child participation in local governance in Rajasthan. The State Government prioritized four of the nine Sankalps, or Themes, which included Theme 3, Child Friendly Village.



The State Government issued orders for organizing special Mahila and Bal Sabhas in September 2022, which was followed by the standing orders on conducting Bal Sabhas throughout the state during the week of 14–20 November 2022, prior to finalization of the GPDPs for the financial year 2023–2024. The November order also included Standard Operating Procedures for Gram Sabhas as well as the reporting formats for compliance reports by the concerned Panchayat Samitis at block level.

During the various Bal Sabhas held across the state, the following issues emerged as some of the most prevalent. These should be addressed through regular programmes and GPDPs:

- ❖ Girl child education
- ❖ Prevalence of child marriage
- ❖ Access to school for children living in remote hamlets/dhanis (especially during rainy season)
- ❖ Need for parks and playgrounds
- ❖ Need for libraries
- ❖ Scarcity of drinking water (burdening children, particularly girls, with fetching water).

From Bal Sabha to Bal Samvad

As part of model-building efforts, UNICEF provided additional support by facilitating children's participation in Bal Sabhas in Mandrayal block of Karauli district, in collaboration with the Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement and Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj and Gramin Vikas Sansthan. Conversations with children during the Bal Sabhas revealed a lack of trust in government and PRIs to act on the issues raised by children during the Bal Sabhas. This gave rise to the idea of organizing a Bal Samvad in Karauli, where children can actually meet the district authorities, with their adult duty-bearers present, to create a conducive environment for proper focus on the children's demands and incorporating them into the GDPDs.

The Karauli Bal Samvad programme witnessed the coming together of nine government line departments under the leadership of the District Collector and approximately 2,500 children, representatives of women's self-help groups, Sathins, Anganwadi Workers, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives/Accredited Social Health Activists, and others. This was an opportunity for the children to share their experiences of participating in the Bal Sabhas and provided them with a space to share any concerns with the district authorities, including the District Collector.



Lessons learned



The Bal Sabha experience in Rajasthan clearly underlines the importance of political will and leadership for championing the cause of children. The initiative, which was launched by the former Deputy Chief Minister of Rajasthan, remains relevant and significant in view of the political commitment to make Rajasthan a 'child friendly' state.



One of the important lessons emerging from this experience concerns programming at scale. The Bal Sabha initiative in Rajasthan is at scale and therefore the focus for UNICEF is on approaches for improving the quality of Bal Sabhas, developing a permanent institutional basis for the initiative and linking Bal Sabhas with the Gram Sabha, and eventually with the local-level annual plan development process.



It is clear that there is no further need for pilot projects. Rather, at-scale implementation is advisable because the children have the necessary capacity to share their views to inform the local-level decision-making processes. This was demonstrated by the focused intervention in Karauli district, which confirmed that children have the ability to meaningfully participate in the processes that impact their well-being.

Next steps

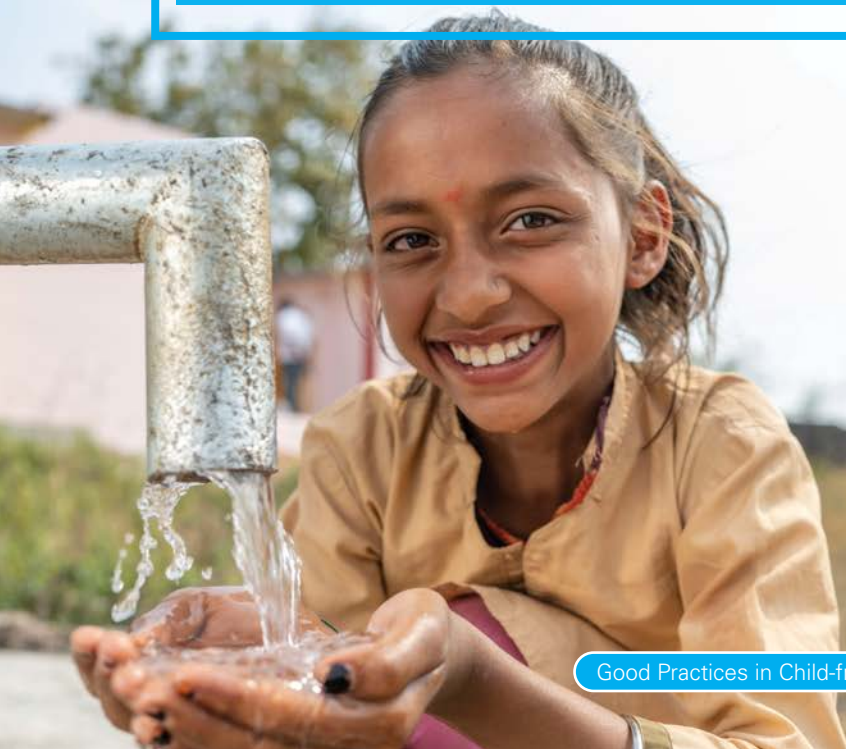
Going forwards, the Karauli Bal Samvad programme is expected to create a conducive environment for sensitizing key village-level duty-bearers on the concept and approach of child-friendly GPs, and the role they are expected to play in ensuring children's voices are given due space and weight in the plans and budgets of the GPs.

The Karauli Bal Samvad programme has triggered a chain reaction: for the first time, the Pradhan of Navalgarh Panchayat Samiti in Jhunjhunu district (also the state-level chairperson of Pradhan Sangh), Dinesh Sunda, organized block-level meetings of the Child Protection Committee on the issue of child-friendly GPs and pledged to develop all 46 GPs to be child friendly. The event was also attended by Dr. Rajkumar Sharma, an Advisor to the Chief Minister and Member of Legislative Assembly from Navalgarh Constituency. Similar initiatives have been proposed for Baran and Bundi districts in January 2023.



Children's voices need to be heard and given the space to participate in their development and aspects connected to it. We often use children as voices for communication of what we want communicated. It is time we provided the platforms and mechanisms for children to participate and to be recognized in delivery of the rights of a child.

—D.O. No. M-11015/ 124/2021-CB dated 31st March 2022



Sustainability

Children's participation in local governance is mainstreamed in the work of the Panchayati Raj department in Rajasthan. The sustainability of UNICEF's added contribution in terms of strengthening the processes and its outcome is ensured through the existing state mandate of making Rajasthan a 'child friendly' state. The experiences of supporting the state government in this area of work highlight a strong appetite among the elected representatives of the PRIs in the state to both anchor and champion the cause of children by providing space to children for participating in the governance function performed by the PRIs. The Bal Sabhas are notified through an administrative order/circular and facilitated by the Sarpach and PRI functionaries at the local level. The emerging role for UNICEF would be to work on tools and approaches that would help further strengthen the process of engagement with children as well as provide a more structured mandate through legislative changes.





Case
Study



CHILD-FRIENDLY

**PANCHAYAT
SANKALP ABHIYAN**

**CREATING AN ENABLING
ENVIRONMENT FOR
CHILD-FRIENDLY GOVERNANCE**

Rajasthan (2022)

Theme: Participation

Summary

The *Panchayati Raj* (three-tier system of rural local self-government) department announced 14–20 November 2022 as the week for organizing *Bal Sabhas* (children’s assemblies) across Rajasthan. The objective was to identify issues and concerns related to children and include the prioritized needs in the GPDPs for the financial year 2023–2024. To ensure that the *Gram Panchayats* (GPs; village-level elected government) follow this in both letter and spirit, there was a need to generate sufficient awareness and ‘buzz’ around Bal Sabhas. This led to the idea of organizing a Child-Friendly Panchayat campaign that could travel across the state, covering every district. The Honourable Chief Minister of Rajasthan launched the campaign on National Child Rights Day. Similar events were organized in every district headquarter to ensure that the concept of ‘child participation in local governance’ receives the desired support and commitment of the leadership at the district and sub-district level administration.

Scope

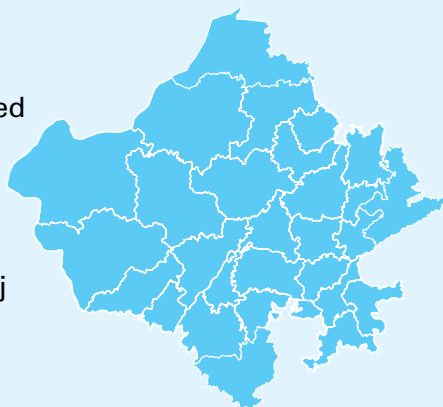


Demographics

33 districts and **585** GPs covered

One-month long campaign

One-day **workshops on the child-friendly GP initiative** organized by the Panchayati Raj department



Campaign’s reach



300,000

Women, men and children



982

Elected representatives

The initiative was launched on 14 November 2022.



Context and objectives

As grass-roots units of self-governance, GPs in India have tremendous potential for upholding the rights of children. Children's participation in the matters and functioning of local self-governance is a right in itself, and one that can lead to the realization of other rights. This is underlined by SDG 16.7, which emphasizes the need to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels."

Poor developmental outcomes, the absence of a dedicated forum for child participation, the lop-sided focus of GDPs on infrastructure development and inadequate coverage and quality of services are some of the key issues affecting children. To address this, the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department of the Government of Rajasthan launched the Child-Friendly Panchayat Initiative on 14 November 2019. The initiative aims to ensure that, "By 2030, Rajasthan will be a child friendly state through establishing child responsive local self-governance processes and practices ensuring every child, whether boy or girl, enjoys their childhood and reach their full potential through progressive realization of their rights."¹⁰

Stating that "no child should remain deprived of his or her rights in the state", the Honourable Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Ashok Gehlot, launched a campaign to spread awareness of children's participation in local governance in rural areas, as part of the Child Friendly Panchayat Initiative. The campaign, *Bal Hitaishi Panchayat Sankalp Abhiyan*, was a joint initiative of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj department, State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, UNICEF and the Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement.



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¹⁰ Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Rajasthan, Child Friendly Panchayat Initiative Handbook. Available at: [http://nirdpr.org.in/crru/docs/Governance/Child%20Friendly%20Panchayat%20Initiative%20\(CFPI\)%20-%20Handbook.pdf](http://nirdpr.org.in/crru/docs/Governance/Child%20Friendly%20Panchayat%20Initiative%20(CFPI)%20-%20Handbook.pdf)

Results

- ❖ In Kota, the District Collector launched the campaign that covered Panchayat Samiti Ladpura. On the third day of the campaign, a one-day meeting of key stakeholders was held in Alaniya.
- ❖ At the Bandaikui Panchayat Samiti in Dausa district, the sarpanches of Pichupada Kala, Paidi and Abhaneri GPs organized special Bal Sabhas and pledged to make their GPs child friendly.
- ❖ In Jodhpur, the campaign covered Bilada Panchayat Samiti, where special Bal Sabhas were organized in Malkosani, Padasala Kala, Bijasni, Bala and Ravar GPs.
- ❖ In Udaipur, the District Collector launched the campaign covering the Gogunda Panchayat Samiti, wherein the Brand Ambassador of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative was present and pledged her support for facilitating child-friendly processes in the district, in line with BBBP's objectives.
- ❖ The former Pradhan, Jagdish Gurjar, launched the campaign in Tonk district, which covered 20 GPs of Tonk Panchayat Samiti. Meetings with elected representatives, government functionaries and children were organized in Soran, Devpura, Harchandeda, Bamor and Devli Bhanchi during the campaign.
- ❖ The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Zilla Parishad Jhalavad launched the campaign that covered Jhalrapatan Panchayat Samiti. Discussions on key actions for making GPs child friendly were held at Kolana, Mandavar, Ropparail and Aktasa GPs.
- ❖ Special Bal Sabhas were organized in the Sapa, Lambia, Kherva, Baniyawaas and Bomdada GPs of Pali Panchayat Samiti during the three-day campaign in Pali district.
- ❖ The CEO of the Zilla Parishad Banswada launched the campaign that covered Sajjangarh Panchayat Samiti.
- ❖ Anta Panchayat Samiti in Baran district was covered under the three-day campaign, during which special sessions with children were organized with the support of Rajiv Gandhi Yuva Mitr in Batavada, Bijora, Palwasa, Bumbolia Kala and Badva GPs.
- ❖ A member of Legislative Assembly from Bassi Constituency, Shri Laxman Meena, launched the campaign in Jaipur Rural covering the Bassi Panchayat Samiti. Meetings on preparing child-centred GPDs were held at Mohanpura, Dudhli, Jhar, Khori and Baans Kho GPs.
- ❖ The three-day campaign was launched by the District Collector in Dungarpur covering the Bicchiwada Panchayat Samiti.

- ❖ The CEO of the Sirohi Zilla Parishad launched the campaign covering Sirohi Panchayat Samiti. The elected representatives from Gomli, Padeev, Udd, Barloot and Gol participated in the GP-level interventions and pledged to make their GPs child-and women-friendly.
- ❖ During the three-day campaign, women, children and elected representatives were sensitized on various aspects of child-friendly panchayat and government programmes and schemes at Hindoli Panchayat Samiti in Bundi district.
- ❖ Launching the campaign in Sikar district, the CEO of the Zilla Parishad lauded local efforts and described the campaign as an excellent opportunity to sensitize the community and spread awareness about the government's commitment towards the well-being of children in Piprali and Dhond Panchayat Samities of the district. Special Bal Sabhas were also organized in various secondary schools and a district-level workshop on child-friendly panchayats was organized on the final day of the campaign at the district headquarters.
- ❖ The campaign in Pratapgarh was launched by the District Collector and covered the Pratapgarh Panchayat Samiti. At the launch, the District Collector emphasized the need for generating awareness and for strict compliance of ensuring 100 per cent enrolment and retention of children in schools. The Rajiv Gandhi Yuva Mitr Programme (RYMP) interns actively participated in raising awareness of various child-related schemes of the state government during the campaign period in Pratapgarh.
- ❖ Launching the campaign in Nagaur Panchayat Samiti, the District Collector called for collective action to make Nagaur a child-friendly district. He reminded people that Nagaur is known for its role in establishing the Panchayati Raj system in India (in 1959, the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, inaugurated the Panchayati Raj system in Nagaur district) and it therefore has a shared responsibility to become the first child-friendly district.
- ❖ The Chief Executive Office of Jhunjhunu Zilla Parishad launched the campaign that covered Jhunjhunu Panchayat Samiti and organized special Bal Sabhas in Dayanand Purohiton Ki Dhani, Khajpur Naya, Hindali, Dhorasar and Budanda Kalan.
- ❖ In Sawai Madhopur, the police department took a keen interest in launching and supporting the campaign, emphasizing that a child-friendly panchayat is one where no child is afraid of the law enforcement agency and calling for child-friendly policing and police stations to be an important focus for the government. On the last day of the campaign, a district-level sensitization workshop on child-friendly panchayats was organized by the Panchayati Raj Department at the district headquarters.
- ❖ The CEO of Zilla Parishad Rajsamand launched the campaign that covered GPs in the Rajsamand and Khamnor Panchayat Samiti. The campaign team made special

efforts to visit Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) work sites to sensitize people to child-friendly measures that can enhance the participation of women in MGNREGS work.

- ❖ The CEO of Zilla Parishad Jalore launched the campaign that covered GPs in the Jalore Panchayat Samiti. Various school- and GP-level meetings were held throughout the three-day campaign in Jalore district.
- ❖ The Additional CEO of the Bharatpur Zilla Parishad launched the campaign that covered Sevar Panchayat Samiti. The campaign team focused on the dhanis of the Malah, Kumbha, Paar, Bacchamadi, Rudaikaran, Khemra and Udra GPs in the district.
- ❖ The Officer-in-Charge of the CEO of Bikaner Zilla Parishad launched the campaign, which covered various rural locations of the Bikaner Panchayat Samiti.
- ❖ The District Collector of Chittorgarh launched the campaign, emphasizing the need for children's participation in the Gram Sabhas for finalizing GPDPs so that their needs and aspirations are reflected in the final plans.
- ❖ The CEO of Hanumangarh Zilla Parishad launched the campaign that covered Hanumangarh and Sangariya Panchayat Samiti. He encouraged the RYMP interns to use the campaign as an opportunity to strengthen child-related schemes in the district.
- ❖ The CEO of Dhaulpur Zilla Parishad launched the campaign that covered Dhaulpur Panchayat Samiti. He emphasized that the campaign must focus on the constitution and strengthening child protection committees at the GP level.
- ❖ In Jaisalmer, the campaign covered the Jaisalmer Panchayat Samiti and focused on the remote dhanis and habitations within the GPs that were covered by the campaign.
- ❖ The Zilla Pramukh Ajmer, Shrimati Susheel Kanwar Palada, launched the campaign covering Kishangarh Panchayat Samiti. Innovative activities for children were carried out in Karked, Salemabad, Pinglod and Kuchil GPs.
- ❖ The CEO of Ganganagar Zilla Parishad launched the campaign that covered 20 GPs of Ganganagar Panchayat Samiti. He pledged to ensure that children's issues were duly incorporated in the GPDPs underway for financial year 2023–2024.
- ❖ The CEO of Alwar Zilla Parishad launched the campaign that covered Malkheda Panchayat Samiti. She said that women's and children's issues were being prioritized in the GPDPs currently being prepared by their respective GPs. She asked the campaign team to share any issues relating to children who migrate with their families at low season in the district and proposed an exploration of local solutions to engage these families in employment during the lean times.

- ❖ The CEO of Barmer Zilla Parishad launched the campaign that covered GPs of the Barmer Panchayat Samiti. He said that the district had made significant progress in improving child-related indicators between the National Family Health Surveys 4 and 5 and suggested that the campaign team focus on the dhanis to ensure last-mile coverage.
- ❖ The Additional CEO of Bhilwara Zilla Parishad launched the campaign that covered Mandal Panchayat Samiti. Special Bal Sabhas were organized in Sidiyas, Almas, Bhagwanpura, Keriya and Dhunvala GPs during the campaign period. A district-level orientation workshop on the child-friendly panchayat approach was held on the final day of the campaign.
- ❖ The District Collector of Churu launched the Child Friendly Panchayat Initiative and also chaired an orientation workshop in the district conference room. He urged officials to ensure that children are given the opportunity and space to participate in the GPDP process. He said that special Bal Sabhas should be held to seek suggestions from children, and that these suggestions should then inform GPDP.
- ❖ The CEO of Karauli Zilla Parishad launched the campaign that covered the remote GPs of the Mandrayal Panchayat Samiti. During the campaign special Bal Sabhas and events with children were held in Gadhi Ka Gaon, Langra, Bugdar, Shyampura and Nidar GPs.



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Lessons learned



The participation from the government officials, elected representatives and community was unprecedented and the fact that the campaign could cover a huge and diverse state like Rajasthan within a defined period of 30 days shows that administrative will and multisectoral support can produce the desired effect. Another important lesson was that the format of mixing a field-level community awareness approach with the district-level workshops was an effective strategy to ensure that field insights are immediately shared and discussed during a formal forum in the presence of a multi-department audience.

Next steps

The campaign will be documented, with a particular focus on the key needs and aspirations of children that emerged during the field-level interactions, and used for upstream advocacy on the need for institutionalizing child participation in local governance through changes in the legislation (i.e., Panchayati Raj Act and Rules of the State).

Sustainability

The campaign was conceptualized within the larger context of the People's Plan Campaign, which has a dedicated budgetary component on awareness generation. Having demonstrated the approach – a mix of community engagement, focused group interactions, village-level meetings and district-level orientation/sensitization workshops – it is expected that, going forward, the Panchayati Raj department will be able to sustain and replicate some of these components as part of the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) budget of the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan.



By 2030, Rajasthan will be a child-friendly state through establishing child responsive local self-governance processes and practices ensuring every child, whether boy or girl, enjoys their childhood and reaches their full potential through progressive realization of their rights.

— Vision Statement of the Child Friendly Panchayat Initiative in Rajasthan



Case
Study



**MAIN BHI BAL SARPANCH
INITIATIVE,
EMPOWERING CHILDREN
& AMPLIFYING THEIR VOICES**

Rajasthan (2022)

Theme: Participation



Summary

This was a joint project between UNICEF and the Future Society to conceptualize and launch a pilot of the Main Bhi Bal Sarpanch (MBBS) initiative. The project's key objectives were to sensitize elected representatives at the *GPs (village-level elected government)* level on the importance of Bal Panchayats (children's representative bodies); to inform children and young people about local self-governance processes, including their role in strengthening these processes; and to provide space and a platform to amplify children's voices so they can influence their future and give rise to more inclusive plans for the holistic development of their GPs.

Context

Child participation is widely acknowledged as one of the most important dimensions of children's rights. While 'participation' can refer to many different aspects of a child's engagement with the world around her/him, participation in the context of governance is often considered in relation to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Child participation can thus be defined as children (individually and/or collectively) engaging with opportunities to form and express their views and to influence matters that concern them, both directly and indirectly. Meaningful participation involves a transfer of power from adults to children, which transforms the status of children from passive recipients to active agents who are informed and able to influence decisions affecting their lives. From a rights perspective, there are strong arguments for the participation of children in the governance of their cities and villages. Child participation at the local level can lead to better services, more responsive local policies and plans, and a more effective use of local budgets in support of children's priorities.¹¹

Article 12 [of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child] recognizes a child's right to be heard or express views freely, to have his/her views considered seriously in decision-making and to have a government ensure the realization of these rights

—**Child Participation in Governance: A UNICEF Guidance Note**

¹¹ Child Participation in Governance: A UNICEF Guidance Note. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/UNICEF-Child-Participation-in-Local-Governance.pdf>.

In 2022, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (three-tier system of rural local self-governance) launched the nine themes of Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDG) through *PRIs*, with theme 3 dedicated to child-friendly villages. The guiding principles of child-friendly villages emphasize the need for children’s voices to be heard and due space to be given to children to participate in all aspects of their own development.

The Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Rajasthan, has already committed to creating child-friendly GPs as part of its larger agenda of creating a ‘Child Friendly Rajasthan’. In 2019, the state government launched this state-wide initiative with a focus on organizing *Bal Sabhas* (children’s assemblies) and Bal Panchayats. In 2022, following the launch of LSDG approach at the union level, the state government prioritized four of the nine themes, including theme 3, Child-Friendly Village. The annual capacity-building plan of the Panchayati Raj department includes training and capacity building of elected representatives, panchayat-level functionaries and other officials on child-friendly local governance processes. While Bal Sabhas are gradually being mainstreamed, especially by the annual GPDP processes, the idea of Bal Panchayats or regular interaction between children and GPs is yet to gain ground in the state.

It was in this context that UNICEF, in collaboration with the Future Society, conceptualized and launched the MBBS pilot initiative.



Methodology

The MBBS initiative targeted children aged 15–18 years. Its guiding principles were to sensitize, encourage, enable and capacitate.

- ❖ Digital content strengthened the children’s capacity and understanding around local governance processes.
- ❖ A platform was created for bringing together children and elected representatives to democratically select a Bal Sarpanch (head of the Bal Panchayat).
- ❖ A mechanism was established for children to learn about their panchayat, including their expectations and opportunities for regular interaction.
- ❖ The most promising children were mobilized to engage with key policy makers and influencers at the state level and to formally submit the children’s demands in the form of a charter.

Results

The MBBS initiative was launched by the Honorable Minister of Women and Child Development, Mamta Bhupesh, in August 2022 and concluded at the end of December 2022. During this period, a physical presence was maintained in all seven administrative divisions of the state, covering eight districts¹² and representing nine legislative assemblies. More than 5,000 school children participated in the process directly and many more were reached through digital campaigns (including the dissemination of digital content via social media platforms). Bal Panchayats were held in ten GPs across the eight districts and one special Bal Sabha was held at the Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj Evam Grameen Vikas Sansthan (IGPR & GVS). Five training/orientation workshops were held with Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), and a three-day Bal Sarpanch Convention was organized as the culmination of the initiative.

The field programme began in Barangana GP in Nagaur district, which happens to be one of the districts where the Panchayati Raj system was launched by the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Following the launch, Bal Panchayats were held in Jairampura, Barangana, Rajawas, Kajra, Rangaisar, Rarah, Jawanpura, Chardana, Rohat and Kanhari GPs across the eight districts. During the Bal Panchayats, children demonstrating potential were shortlisted and given an opportunity to establish their candidacy for selection as Bal Sarpanch. Existing GP members, particularly the Sarpanch, facilitated the process and pledged to provide a space for the elected Bal Sarpanch to participate in the day-to-day affairs of the GP. Having weighing up the child candidates, the children of the village voted for and selected one to be the Bal Sarpanch of their GP.

¹² Baran, Bharatpur, Churu, Dungarpur, Jaipur, Jhunjhunu, Nagaur and Pali.



We wholeheartedly support the participation of children in the Gram Panchayats of the state and welcome the Bal Sarpanches to attend our monthly meetings.

—**Jairam Palsaniya, President of the Sarpanch Association**



The youngsters negatively perceive those involved in politics. This initiative will enlighten and inspire children to learn about ethical politics. I would seek help from the Bal Sarpanch before implementing any new plan in the panchayat.

—**Meenakshi Meena, Sarpanch, Rajawas GP**



Bal Sarpanches from the GPs who demonstrated potential leadership qualities were given a state-level platform to interact with a range of stakeholders, including senior government officials, MLAs, journalists, development sector professionals, etc. At each stage, the children were sensitized and educated on political rights and processes related to the three-tier Panchayati Raj system. Interacting with the MLAs (which cut across the party lines), the children learned about the democratic ethos and system of their country. These interactions were limited to the 30 children who demonstrated leadership potential across the eight districts of the state. During this phase, children were encouraged to sharpen their knowledge and understanding of their role as citizens in a grassroots-level democracy.

On 20 November 2022, World Children’s Day, the Bal Sarpanch had the opportunity to meet and interact with the Honorable Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Shri Ramesh Meena. The Minister encouraged children to participate in all democratic forums at the GP level and to freely speak their mind and make their voices heard.

He assured them that action would be taken on all the issues they had raised and encouraged them to also share their demands and concerns with his office. The children seized the opportunity to present a charter of demands based on the issues identified in their respective GPs.

The pilot culminated in a three-day Bal Sarpanch summit in Jaipur, 25–27 December 2022. Children attended training sessions and also got the opportunity to visit IGPR & GVS, Office of the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) and Vidhan Sabha (the State Legislative Assembly). The children interacted with the Chairperson of SCPCR, Sangeeta Beniwal, and the Secretary of Rural Development at the Government of Rajasthan, Manju Rajpal. During the convention, the children’s thoughts were collated to form a declaration, which was formally submitted to the Secretary of Rural Development and Chairperson of the SCPCR.



We will ensure the participation of children in all Gram Panchayats and make Rajasthan a model for the whole country.

— **Shri Ramesh Meena, Honorable Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Rajasthan**



Lessons learned



The campaign helped to create an enabling environment in the state, sensitizing different stakeholders (from elected representatives at the grassroots level to seasoned politicians at the state level) and children about the importance of child-friendly GPs.



The ten GPs where this initiative was implemented intensively have declared that they regularly take suggestions from children on their issues and engage with them routinely.



Significant media coverage in both print and electronic media has also been instrumental in creating an enabling environment that can be scaled up with state efforts.



The most important lesson learned during the campaign was that, if desired capacities are developed through greater political awareness and citizenship rights, children's potential for meaningful participation can be harnessed to enhance decision-making at the local level.

Next steps

The next logical step would be to advocate with the state government, based on these experiences, to institutionalize a mechanism that supports children's formal engagement with village panchayats and gives them a say in how the village conducts its affairs, particularly the GDP development and implementation process.

Amending the State Panchayati Raj Act and Rules for formally endorsing the organization of Bal Sabhas prior to Gram Sabhas would help to create an institutionalized space for children's voices to be heard and to ensure their suggestions are regularly incorporated into local development plans. Technological solutions such as the e-government initiative E-Mitra, which offers machines with access to 400 plus services and a digital interface for two-way communication, can be leveraged for children's orientation and capacity building.



Case
Study

20



CREATING A CHILD-FRIENDLY PANCHAYAT

IN KUNJAPANAI,
NILGIRIS DISTRICT

Tamil Nadu (2020–22)

Theme: Development



Summary

When a new President of Kunjapanai *panchayat* (village) in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu was elected, he brought in a number of new initiatives to improve children’s hygiene and sanitation and develop more child-friendly governance and institutions.

Recognising the role of *Panchayati Raj* (the village-level system of self-governance) Institutions (PRIs) in creating a conducive environment for the healthy growth and development of children, the Government of India’s Ministry of Panchayati Raj established the ‘Child Friendly Panchayat Award’ in 2019. Kunjapanai won the award in 2022.

A child-friendly panchayat addresses the following:



Healthy environment



Child participation



Child-friendly information



Environmental education



Playtime for children



Protection from climate change and damage to the natural environment

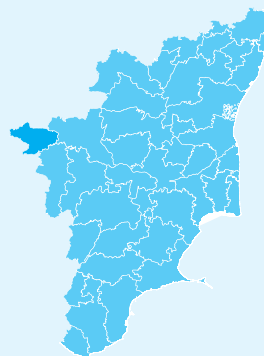
Geographical scope



Demography

Kunjapanai village, **Kotagiri block**, Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu.

Panchayat with **40** habitations with considerable SC and ST population.





Objectives

The main aim was to improve children's wellbeing in Kunjapanai by creating a more socially just and inclusive panchayat. Ensuring children access Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and attend Anganwadi Centres (childcare centres under the ICDS scheme) and schools is in itself a challenge, given the remote location of many of the habitations.

Thus, the key objectives were:

- ❖ Create an enabling environment for learning
- ❖ Increase attendance at Anganwadi Centres and schools
- ❖ Ensure good hygiene and sanitation in the panchayat
- ❖ Ensure growth monitoring and good nutrition
- ❖ Increase children's participation in sports and activities and improve learning outcomes

The panchayat president, panchayat members and ward members all worked together to ensure that attendance in Anganwadi Centres and schools improved and that these development goals were achieved.



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Approach

Creating a child-friendly village in Kunjapanai meant working with all child-related institutions in the area, including five ICDS centres, two health sub-centres, one Panchayat Union Council primary school, one government high school, one elementary school and one residential higher-secondary school.

Drinking water is also a challenge, especially in the hilly areas, and it was important that issues like this started to be viewed through a child-sensitive lens. There are currently 16 wells, 17 ground-level water tanks, two bore wells and 86 public water pipes – and only six individual drinking water pipe connections.

From the moment he was elected, the GP President of Kunjapanai worked tirelessly to improve cleanliness and hygiene in the village. In particular, he took extreme care to ensure that the surroundings of the schools and Anganwadi Centres were kept clean. The tribal welfare association runs a mini health clinic and the President made sure that it held regular clinics for children. The survival and health of the children, including routine immunisation, was paramount. Indeed, it was the provision of health care and cleanliness in all child-related institutions that helped the panchayat to win the award.

The President encouraged children to participate in regular Bal Sabhas (children's assemblies), where they were encouraged to speak out and work together to identify key issues and make their voices heard. When a child was absent from school, teachers would personally call their families to find out why. The Headmaster of the high school mentioned that the President went to great lengths to ensure the panchayat could be declared child friendly. For example, if children could not get to school due to the difficult terrain or during the rains, the President would arrange for vehicles to pick them up and drop them off again. This constant monitoring and follow-up meant that children could pursue their education without interruption.

Discussions with the different stakeholders in the panchayat revealed that the different schemes related to children could be dovetailed to improve access and outcomes. This holistic approach focused on creating an enabling environment for children's growth and development; an environment that was clean and hygienic and that recognized those who did well, which acted as an incentive to bring more children and households onto the road to development. In this way, elected representatives paved the way for more inclusive development in the future.

Results

Number of Children in the different Anganwadi centres			
	Boys	Girls	Total
Kottakambai	6	14	20
Waterfalls	7	9	16
Aadupettu	4	6	10
Nava-kunjapanai	14	19	33
Nava – Kozhikarai	15	15	30
	46	63	109

Supporting early childhood development and education: Anganwadi Centres now provide hot cooked meals for children, supplementary nutrition and take-home rations to ensure that pregnant and lactating women as well as children under 5 years get nutritious food. As well as regular growth monitoring, children in Anganwadi Centres receive regular small meals and snacks throughout the day. Deworming and IFA syrup is also provided.

Total number of schools				
		Boys	Girls	Total
Total number of schools: 6	Number of children under 18 years	228	268	496
	Govt High School	24	26	50
	Panchayat Union Primary School	25	35	60
	G.T.R Higher Secondary School- Kunjapanai	113	129	242
	Primary School Melthattappalam	1	5	6
	C.S.I Primary School.	36	30	66
	GTR School	29	43	72
		228	268	496

Promoting higher education: The Government Tribal Residential Higher Secondary School in Kunjapanai was established in 1953 and it is managed by the Tribal Welfare Department. The school has a boundary wall, electricity, a well for clean drinking water, functional toilets, a playground and a library with 203 books. The school has 20 working computers for teaching and learning and a kitchen for preparing midday meals. The school hosts several awareness programmes on children’s health and wellbeing. The President regularly organizes events and distributes prizes to the winners to encourage participation.

Free bicycles for school students: To improve mobility in an environmentally-friendly way, the President worked to ensure that all eligible children were given bicycles so they could get to school.

Free laptops for higher secondary students: Children in the higher secondary schools received laptops in order to improve digital literacy and connectivity.

Celebrating Independence Day: The President instigated Independence and Republic Day celebrations for school children, where he speaks about the importance of education

Government tribal boarding school annual celebration day: Children are encouraged to participate in various cultural and educational events and prizes are awarded to the best students at the tribal boarding school to encourage further scholarship and merit.

Namma ooru superu (making the villages superb, a cleanliness campaign): Children are encouraged to become green ambassadors at their schools by the president of the panchayat and schools are classified as 'clean and green' when waste is reduced, recycled and reused. Children are also encouraged to use composting and to establish kitchen gardens.



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Lessons learned

The main lessons learned from this panchayat are:



When the elected representatives are committed to the cause of children, change happens.



Creating an enabling environment with good infrastructure and hygiene facilities in schools will encourage children to continue with their education.



Overall monitoring of children's development can improve care and attention to ensure that every child blossoms.



Ensuring regular attendance in schools will encourage more children to enter higher education.

Conclusion

By focusing on three key areas, the President allowed children to enjoy a childhood where their rights were protected:

- ❖ The President was successful in his campaign to promote a more child-friendly panchayat by fulfilling children's basic needs for hygiene, health and education.
- ❖ The GP improved the health of children with regular health check-ups, ensured they had access to nutritious food at least once a day and addressed the problems children faced in getting to school.
- ❖ The GP created an enabling environment where children could not only survive but also thrive, developing their capability and creativity and participating in local events.



Case
Study



FINANCIAL AWARD ALLEVIATES

GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION AND BOOSTS EMPLOYMENT IN BARABANKI

Uttar Pradesh (2019–20)

Theme: Development



Summary

A state incentive scheme led a small community in Barabanki district to invest in improving their ground water infrastructure, with self-help groups (SHGs) providing water services and deliveries on an ongoing basis.

Chilouki Gram Panchayat (GP; village-level elected government) in Chilouki, Masauli block of Barabanki, received 700,000 Indian rupees (INR) from the Chief Minister's scheme to incentivize GPs, the *Mukhya Mantri Gram Panchayat Protsahan Puraskar*, for the financial year 2019–2020. This was a large sum for the small panchayat, which has a population of 2,200.

When it came to spending the money, there were competing priorities and the choice was not an easy one. Multiple issues were identified but priority was given to the mitigation of ground water contamination for two reasons: the investment required was large and could not be mobilized from any other source; and it was agreed that any investment in the panchayat should enhance local livelihood options, especially for women, and improving the water infrastructure would do this.



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Objectives

The main objective was to ensure safe drinking water was available to all households in the panchayat. The GP also wanted to provide sustainable livelihood options, particularly for women.



Results

A reverse osmosis (RO) plant was established in 2020. Since then, it has led to the following:

- ❖ Safe drinking water is now available for villagers at a nominal cost of INR 5 for 15 litres.
- ❖ The GP handed over management of the RO plant to SHG women, who earn money by selling water to villagers, as well as for commercial and local events at INR 20 for 15 litres.
- ❖ The GP employs three SHG women on a monthly salary of INR 6,000 each and a driver for water deliveries at INR 5,000.
- ❖ A share of the profit is retained by the GP to provide a source of revenue. The average amount sold per day is 150 litres to the village and 100 for commercial purposes, generating a daily revenue of INR 2,750, which equates to INR 82,500 per month. During summer months, that income goes up to around INR 138,000 per month.

Previously, scarcity of safe drinking water was a major challenge in Chilouki but the shortage of funding in this relatively small panchayat meant it was not a problem the community could easily address. Thanks to this INR 700,000 grant, and the village's subsequent efforts, clean water is now available in the village and there is a new source of revenue, both for the panchayat and for the women who manage the plant.



Lessons learned



Any business model should meet the twin objectives of creating a source of income for the panchayats and providing opportunities for personal growth and employment.



Panchayats that opt for similar models will require additional support in monitoring water quality. The water that is supplied will be free from microbial contamination. However, panchayats should be given information and other necessary support to prevent recontamination due to poor handling – for example during collection, transportation and storage.



Involving SHGs can ensure the sustainability of such an intervention, even beyond the term of the sitting GP President.



Case studies and available options should be documented in different formats for use during training programmes and modules and for dissemination through social media. Special efforts should be made to disseminate these among members of the community in the relevant GPs.

Next steps

GPs need to be empowered to implement technical solutions that can provide their communities with safe drinking water. The business model adopted by Chilouki could be disseminated for replication, alongside options other than an RO plant and the associated pros and cons.



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Case
Study



**A CREATIVE SOLUTION
TO BUILDING**

**CHILDREN'S AGENCY
IN GRAM PANCHAYAT**

**DEVELOPMENT PLANNING
PROCESSES IN SHRAWASTI**

Uttar Pradesh (2022)

Theme: Participation

Summary

The Salvariya *Gram Panchayat* (GP; village-level elected government) in Ikauna block of Shrawasti district invited children to share their ideas for local development, which were incorporated into the Gram Panchayat Development Plan.

During the GPDP process, *the Pradhan* (head) of Salvariya GP in Shrawasti received help from a local non-governmental organization in conducting Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises. As part of this, the Pradhan organized an event entitled Dream Village, where children aged 8–16 years were asked to envisage and paint their ideal village. In total, 120 children from the GP villages participated in the event.

Children were asked to explain their paintings to the elected representatives and their ideas were gathered and incorporated into the GPDP.



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Objectives

The main objective was to enable children in Salvariya GP to participate meaningfully and productively in the GPDP planning process and for their suggestions to be incorporated into the resultant plan.



Results

The first of its kind in the village, this event was widely appreciated by parents and received active support from the school. The school, children and their families, GP officials and other stakeholders all worked together to explore the children's demands. In total, 120 children participated in the Dream Village exercise, each producing a painting that represented their needs and desires.

One common thread across all 120 paintings of the children's dream villages was a playground. Based on this, elected representatives formed a consensus that the children should have a playground and incorporated it into the GPDP. Finally, the Pradhan mobilized funds through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme to construct the playground on panchayat land.



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Lessons learned



Often, children's contributions to development planning lack support and conviction. Two important reasons for this are: (1) that children's lack of agency has hitherto not been explored or acknowledged in a hierarchical society; and (2) that there is no easily adaptable and cost-effective way of involving children in the planning process.



The process of painting enhanced the quality of participation by the parents, school and various committee members. It was a simple and inclusive way of ensuring children participated in the GPDP.



With BalSabhas (children's assemblies) becoming institutionalized by the state, it is important that panchayats are empowered with different ways of getting children's attention and capturing their imagination, so they can be actively involved in the planning process.

Next steps

To build on the success of this project, examples of various activities, including guidance on how to mobilize the community and conduct the events, could be developed and disseminated among the GPs through various platforms and formats.

Sustainability

This initiative was conducted with the support of ward members and other front-line functionaries. It is envisaged that these individuals will continue to encourage children's participation in the GPDP process, through this or other related initiatives.

This particular initiative created a group of enthusiastic young children, parents and youth volunteers whose energy and engagement will also help to ensure the sustainability of the intervention. The experience of Salvariya has been shared in the local media and during training by the Department of Panchayati Raj for potential replication across the state.



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Case
Study



RESPONSIBLE

**PANCHAYAT-LED
OPERATIONS**

**AND MAINTENANCE IN A
SCHOOL IN GHAZIABAD**

Uttar Pradesh (2018–22)

Theme: Development

Summary

The Nithora Primary School and Upper Primary School, located on the same campus, has established its own systems for keeping the campus clean and hygienic through community participation. The local panchayat (village) has been instrumental in improving the school – so much so that the Norwegian Prime Minister recently visited to observe the self-managed system of sanitation and hygiene. This case study highlights the efforts of the GP (village council) in improving the school infrastructure.

Context

Nithora GP, located in Loni block of Ghaziabad district, is inhabited largely by socially and economically underdeveloped sections of society. Until a few years ago, most households did not have proper toilets and open defecation was common practice. In the few households where toilets were available, they were either not functioning or not near the house. A similar sanitation situation prevailed in government schools as well; the schools and Anganwadi (childcare) centres were all in deplorable condition.

In 2008, when the current head of the upper primary school Saroj Kumari joined, the site had neither a boundary wall nor a fence. The campus had perennial issues with water logging, thereby exposing the children to the threat of water-borne diseases, and the WASH facilities were in a terrible condition. She soon realized that maintenance of the WASH facilities was going to pose a substantial challenge.



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Intervention

The dedicated efforts of two women in particular – Saroj Kumari and the sanitation activist Komal Hadala – to involve the School Management Committee (SMC) in this issue brought about a significant transformation in the school. The GP Pradhan managed to get the *Nigarani Samiti*¹³ (vigilante committee) on board. Using panchayat funds, the vigorous efforts of the SMC achieved the following infrastructural changes:

- ❖ Construction of boundary wall around the school
- ❖ Construction of separate toilets for girls and boys
- ❖ Flattening and raising low-lying open spaces to avoid water logging
- ❖ Creating a well-maintained green space

Along with the teachers, Chahat Ram, an enthusiastic local leader and representative of the Pradhan, has been a key driver in the school's infrastructural makeover. As there was no specific budget for operations and maintenance, the school was struggling to stay functional, clean and orderly. Knowing the importance of hygiene for children, the local panchayat funded the costs of ongoing operations and maintenance and provided two regular full-time cleaning staff for gardening and cleaning toilets and classrooms.

Reviving school operations and maintenance

- ❖ SMC activated by the school head
- ❖ behaviour change promoted by *Active Bal Sansad* (students committee) monitors on a regular basis
- ❖ Consistent support for WASH activities from the local panchayat & community
- ❖ Panchayat funds mobilized for operations & maintenance costs
- ❖ Two regular sanitation workers appointed for gardening and cleaning of toilets & classrooms

¹³ Nigarani Samiti, meaning vigilante committee, is one of the key elements of #SwachhBharatMission to end open defecation. Motivators from the Samiti persuade people to stop open defecation, encourage the construction of toilets and make village communities aware of safe sanitation practices.

Operation and maintenance in action



SMC activation by the school in-charge



Regular monitoring of sustainable behaviour change by Bal Sansad (students' committee)



Consistent support from local panchayat and community for WASH activities



Mobilisation of funds by the panchayat for O&M costs



Appointment of two regular sanitation workers for gardening and cleaning of toilets and classrooms

Results

- ❖ Over the past few years, the school's WASH infrastructure has undergone a total transformation. It now boasts gender-segregated toilets, a separate toilet for children with special needs, a separate drinking water and hand washing unit, a clean and green campus with a boundary wall, and a team of proactive and enthusiastic teachers.
- ❖ **Remarkable increase in enrolment:** There has been a significant increase in admissions to the Nithora Primary School and Upper Primary School in the last few years, from 33 students in 2008 to 159 students in 2019 and 314 students in 2022.
- ❖ **International Recognition:** The school won international acclaim with the visit of the Norwegian Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, who was particularly impressed by the Bal Sansad. Describing the school as an inspirational model, she commended the government's commitment to quality education for all through infrastructural and behavioural transformation in schools.
- ❖ **Support from the GP:** Having understood the importance of hygiene for children, Nithora GP has been very supportive and committed to meeting the school's ongoing operations and maintenance costs.

Testimonials



My school is the best place of learning. We all work together to keep it clean and green. What we learn here we discuss with our family members. We keep our household toilets clean and always wash our hands after using the toilet and before taking a meal. It has become our habit now.

— Alisha, Class 8 student, Nithora Upper Primary School



I felt from the very first day that Komal had an intention of doing something out of the box. She started holding counselling sessions for students on health and hygiene issues. She accompanied me to the SMC meetings and motivated the community to participate in the school transformation process.

— Saroj Kumari, Head of Nithora Upper Primary School



If there is a will, there is a way. Panchayats have enough funds to take care of such small but important expenses like school sanitation and hygiene. Good infrastructure will have no use if the place is not clean. Support from the local panchayat can solve the issues of a lack of funding for operations and maintenance. We are thankful to our panchayat, which has been supportive so far.

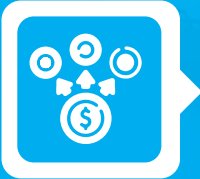
— Chahat Ram, local leader and representative of the village Pradhan



Lessons learned



The Nithora Primary School and Upper Primary School provides a classic example of good-quality education following a self-sustaining model of operations and maintenance, with strong community participation.



This provides a unique example of how panchayat funds can be used for a school's overall development.



During the school's transformation, it emerged that stakeholder participation, leadership and commitment are crucial for achieving the standards set by the government's 'WASH in Schools' programme.



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Case
Study

24



**RISK INFORMED AND
CHILD-CENTERED**

**GRAM PANCHAYAT
DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

A PILOT INITIATIVE

West Bengal (2020)

Themes: Survival and development

Summary

The risk-informed, child-centred GDPD pilot project, conducted June 2018–May 2020, was implemented by UNICEF in collaboration with the Department of Disaster Management and Civil Defence, the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, the Government of West Bengal and Practical Action Foundation. The project was implemented in the eight most disaster-prone *GPs (village-level elected government)* of four UNICEF High Priority districts (Maldah, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Purulia), to build evidence for scaling the project up to other GPs in the state.

Scope



Demographics for Districts Covered

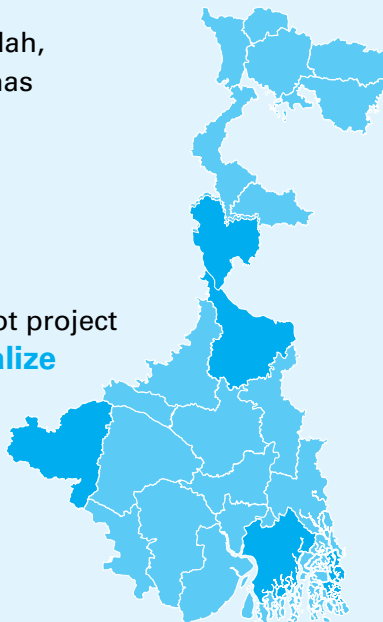
4 disaster prone districts: Maldah, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Purulia covered

8 of the most vulnerable GPs identified

Aim



To initiate the pilot project and **institutionalize learning**





Objectives

The pilot project was primarily undertaken to build evidence of risk-informed and child-centred GPDPs for evidence-based advocacy at the state level to support the scale-up of interventions to other GPs and districts of the state. The pilot project had the following broad objectives:

- ❖ To help some of the most disaster-prone GPs to develop risk-informed and child-centred GPDP, as a model for replication
- ❖ To develop a training module for the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs; three-tier system of rural local self-government in India) for capacity building, based on the lessons learned from model GPs
- ❖ To support advocacy with the State Government – especially through the West Bengal Disaster Management and Civil Defence Department, and the Government of West Bengal – for wider replication of the lessons learned from the model GPs.

To achieve these objectives, the pilot project adopted a three-pronged strategy: (1) awareness, risk analysis and baseline assessment of select GPs, (2) development of a risk-informed and child-centred framework and training module, and (3) piloting a risk-informed and child-centred GPDP.



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Results

The following were achieved:

- ❖ A baseline risk assessment was completed for all eight GPs.
- ❖ The baseline risk assessment was inclusive, completed with input from women and children.
- ❖ Based on a vulnerability assessment, a GP disaster risk profile was prepared.
- ❖ A training module for risk-informed and child-centred GPDP was developed.
- ❖ Capacity building sensitization workshops were conducted on the theme of risk-informed and child-centred GPDP. Workshops were conducted at block and GP level.
- ❖ A framework was developed in consultation with GP-level officials and PRI members to prepare a comprehensive risk-informed and child-centred GPDP.
- ❖ Preparation of a risk-informed and child-centred plan as a sub-plan of the GPDP.
- ❖ Development of child-friendly comic book on risks, child rights and child-centred GPDPs.



Lessons learned



During the pilot phase, by adopting participatory rural appraisal techniques, children, youth volunteers and elected representatives of the GP facilitated the process of creating a risk-informed and child-centred GDP in eight GPs. Relevant information from both primary and secondary sources was collected and compiled for preparing the action plans to reduce disaster risks for children.



The GP-level facilitating team (constituted for the purpose of facilitating the planning) supported the entire process of preparing action plans for children. In each GP, the respective women, child development and social welfare sub-committee, Nari, Sishu Unnayan O Samaj Kalyan Upa-samiti, led the planning process. Each Sansad prepared its own risk-informed and child-centred action plans based on the identified risks and vulnerabilities, which were subsequently compiled into a GP-level action plan for children.



To facilitate participation, focus group discussions were conducted at the Sansad level to understand the impacts of disasters on children. Youth club members, women's SHG members, teachers, government officials and the Village Child Protection Committee members (constituted under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme) were actively involved in the planning process. The process now needs to be scaled up across all the GPs located in disaster-prone districts of West Bengal. The GP representatives, youths and children need to understand the specific vulnerabilities of children in disasters and the significance of incorporating child-related risks into the GDPs. The tasks require a concerted effort from government and non-government agencies, PRIs, and the community, including children. Evidenced-based advocacy is required at state and district levels to bring in necessary policy changes to put children at the centre stage of development.

Next steps

The next step is to develop a strategy plan for scaling risk-informed and child-centred GDPDs to all geographical areas and administrative units affected by disasters.

Sustainability

These efforts by UNICEF, the State Government and partners will continue to yield results beyond the life of the intervention, based on the successful implementation of the following:

- ❖ Capacity building of PRIs on risk-informed, child-centred GDPDs
- ❖ Developing a pool of master trainers and other human resources for risk-informed, child-centred GDPDs
- ❖ Strengthening localization of SDGs in GDPDs, with a focus on Theme 3 – Child-Friendly Villages
- ❖ Translating of the training module on risk-informed, child-centred GDPDs into vernacular languages



