

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN

A JOINT INITIATIVE OF JEETA AND KSCF-US

JEETA has been actively engaged in the "Access to Justice for Children" initiative across 300 villages in the Barkote block of Deogarh district, as well as in the Banei and Lahunipara blocks of Sundargarh district, in collaboration with the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, US. This program aims to tackle various child protection concerns such as child marriage, child labor, child trafficking, and child sexual abuse within these communities.

To facilitate this endeavor, JEETA has deployed 30 Community Coordinators across the aforementioned villages. These coordinators play a crucial role in identifying and reporting child protection issues within their respective communities.

To ensure the effective implementation of the project and to address child protection issues comprehensively, JEETA adopts a collaborative approach. This involves working closely with district-level departments, as well as with local bodies such as the District/Panchayat/village authorities, to create a unified front in safeguarding the rights and well-being of children at the grassroots level.

Area of Intervention:



JEETA working on Deogarh and Sundargarh districts
District: Deogarh
Block: Barkote
GP: 20 Gram Panchayat
Village: 150

District: Sundargarh
Block: Banei and Lunipada
GP:
Village: 150

Work Strategy:

Child Marriage:

- Through awareness helping people understand and learn about why child marriage is wrong.
- Getting pledges from villagers and local leaders to stop child marriage in their community.
- Providing help with laws, social support, and technical advice to prevent child marriage.
- Keeping track of information and stories from the field to understand the problem better.

Child Labour:

- Working in partnership with the district labor office and community-based organizations (CBOs) to raise awareness about child labor.
- Identifying children involved in labor and helping them enroll in school while providing compensation.
- Rescuing children from hazardous or abusive work environments.

Child Trafficking:

- Partnership with local authorities, child protection units, labour offices, and police to raise awareness and provide legal help.
- Figuring out which children are most at risk and connecting them with programs and schemes that can help.
- Keeping an eye out for signs of trafficking and working to stop it.

Child Sexual Abuse:

- Creating awareness among children about sexual abuse in school and through clubs.
- Helping victims of sexual abuse with legal advice and compensation.
- Making sure legal processes move quickly and provide support for victims and their families.

Case studies:

Child Marriage: "From a Child Bride to Daughter"

Background of the case: Ajay Jena resides in Barkote block of Deogarh district with his elder son, Krushna Jena, who is 20 years old. Approximately a year ago, Krushna met Mamali Padhan, the 17-year-old daughter of Pritabasha Padhan, who lives in their nearby village. Over time, they became friends, often meeting at village carnivals and markets, eventually falling in love. However, their world was shaken when a marriage proposal arrived for Mamali after a year of their relationship. This news shattered the hearts of both Krushna and Mamali, leading them to decide to run away from home. Their plan was to stay together for some time before returning home, hoping that their families would then be compelled to accept their marriage. Consequently, they fled to Krushna's aunt's house in Talcher village of Angul district.

Intervention: Upon learning of the situation through a local source, our Child Support Worker (CSW) visited Krushna's house to discuss the matter with his parents. However, the boy's parents claimed ignorance and were unwilling to engage in conversation about the issue. Similarly, attempts to gather information from Mamali's family were met with refusal, as they expressed their disapproval of her actions and declined to discuss the matter further.

After gathering information from villagers and speaking with friends of Krushna and Mamali, we approached Ms. Lili Pradhan, the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) of Barkote block, Deogarh district, to discuss the matter. The CDPO, in turn, engaged with the Anganwadi Worker and Cluster Resource Person of Bijaynagar village. Subsequently, our counsellor, Ms. Subhsmitta, along with the Anganwadi worker and Cluster Resource Person, visited Krushna's house. However, they found that Krushna had left Mamali behind and had gone to Talcher, where he works as a driver, fearing legal repercussions.

Together with the Anganwadi worker and Cluster Resource Person, we attempted to reason with Krushna's parents, who tried various tactics to dissuade us from taking action against their son. Despite their insistence that Krushna and Mamali were now married and should not be separated, we emphasized the negative consequences of child marriage on both parties. We discussed the potential health risks for Mamali and the adverse impact on Krushna's life, including the possibility of imprisonment.

Following extensive discussion, Krishna's mother agreed that Mamali would live with them as their daughter, while Krushna would stay away in Talcher. It was decided that once Mamali turns 18 and Krushna turns 21, they would be married, but until then, they would remain apart. In the presence of witnesses, she signed an undertaking to this effect and requested that no legal action be taken against her son. Since then, Krushna has stayed away from Mamali due to fear of imprisonment, while Mamali resides with Krishna's family. With Mamali's desire to continue her education, Krishna's family plans to enroll her in the upcoming academic period.

Casestudies:

Stop Child Marriage in Samaj(Community): If one person's mindset changes, the community will change.

Deogarh is a district rich in nature, with 43% of its population belonging to various tribal communities such as Kishan, Munda, Bhuyan, Oram, and Gond. During our Child Marriage Free India campaign under the Access to Justice for Children Programme, we focused on the Barkote block of Deogarh district. We observed that the majority of people in the 150 villages of Barkote block adhere to their community's rules for marriage and other traditional functions. Specifically, we noted that 1,136 households of the PaudiBhuian Samaj reside in 32 villages within the Barkote block, where marriages predominantly occur within the community. We identified previous cases of child marriage and elopement within this community.

Our Intervention:

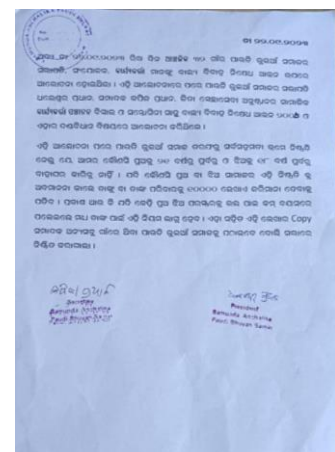
As part of the program, we implemented a strategy to sensitize community leaders and orient community members from the PaudiBhuia community to prevent child marriage, elopement cases, and early pregnancies. We conducted sensitization drives on child marriage through organized foot marches and cycling rallies in the 32 PaudiBhuia community villages, engaging in discussions on these issues.



Additionally, we arranged orientation meetings with community and religious leaders from the PaudiBhuia community to educate them about child marriage issues. Subsequently, we convened a meeting with members of the PaudiBhuian Samaj to address child marriage concerns, with the support of community leaders. During this gathering, we discussed the consequences of child marriage, the adverse effects of early pregnancy on both maternal and child health, and the existing laws against child marriage. Some community members also shared their experiences with child marriage.

Notably, a woman from the PaudiBhuian community named Droupdi Nayak, who survived child marriage at the age of 16, expressed her support for ending child marriage in her community.

Following regular interactions and meetings with community and religious leaders, a resolution was passed to halt child marriage within the PaudiBhuian community. They established rules to address this issue, stating that anyone marrying their son or daughter before the age of 18 for girls or 21 for boys would be considered guilty in the eyes of the PaudiBhuian community and would face fines. Furthermore, if any underage individuals elope and marry, their families will also be held accountable. This resolution was documented on the community's letterhead and circulated throughout different spaces within the PaudiBhuian communi



CASE STORY 3. A STEP TO STOP CHILD MARRIAGE

During a routine field visit, our team discovered a situation involving a 21-year-old boy named Babuli Kisan, son of Sunna Kisan (Father) and Phulmani Kisan (Mother), who is in a relationship with a 17-year-old girl named Barsa Kishan. Babuli brought Barsa to his village 15 days ago, and they are currently residing together in Babuli's house with the approval of their respective family members.

Our Intervention:

Upon learning of this situation, we visited Barsa's home in Kadodihi village of Sundargarh district and engaged in discussions with Barsa's parents, Surendra Kisan, about the matter. Surendra's family relies on daily wage labor, and they often face financial difficulties. During our conversation, Surendra expressed that elopement between young couples is common in their community and mentioned their financial struggles. Despite our attempts to address the issue, he remained resistant.

On another occasion, accompanied by the village-level Child Protection Task Force, we visited Babuli's house to engage with him and his family. We provided counseling to both Babuli and Barsa regarding the risks associated with child marriage. We emphasized that adolescent girls are not physically or mentally prepared for marriage and pregnancy, highlighting the potential health risks. We also pointed out that they belong to the same caste, and their families are supportive of their union. Therefore, we encouraged them to plan their marriage after Barsa turns 18. Both Babuli and Barsa agreed with our advice.

Subsequently, we facilitated a meeting between the families of Babuli and Barsa to discuss the legal implications of child marriage. We explained that under the Child Marriage Act, marrying before the legal age could result in imprisonment and hefty fines. Realizing the severity of the consequences, both families decided not to proceed with the marriage until Barsa reaches the age of 18. They signed an undertaking in front of the task force, agreeing that Barsa would continue living with her parents and pursuing her studies until she comes of age.

In subsequent conversations with Barsa's father, we learned that she has enrolled in class 12 at Kenabheta College, Kenabheta, Bonei block of Sundargarh district. We maintain regular communication with local stakeholders and our community social worker for updates on the situation.

Casestudy: Child marriage

Child marriage remains a significant sociological issue persisting in the tribal forest pockets of Sundargarh district, driven by religious traditions, social norms, economic factors, and cultural beliefs. It inflicts physical, psychological, and emotional harm upon children.

Following successful grassroots sensitization activities addressing child marriage, child labor, and child abuse, our Child Support Worker (CSW), Deepanjali Kisan, uncovered an imminent case of elopement and child marriage. Puja Kishan, born on 10/6/2007, daughter of Sira Kishan and Basanti Kishan from Rengali village (Barchuan), Gp-Daleisara, Ps-Mahulpada, Block-Lahunipara, Dist-Sundargarh, has been in a romantic relationship with Paramaswar Kishan, a 24-year-old from Alekhpur village, Gp-Kendrikela, po/block-Bonaigarh, Dist-Sundargarh, for the past year. They absconded from their village and stayed outside their community for 10 days.

Actions Taken:

The JEETA team took the case seriously and consulted with two Child Marriage Prevention Officers (CMPOs) of Bonaigarh and Lahunipara for immediate action and resolution. Counseling meetings were organized in their respective villages on 17.6.2023 and 19.6.2023, attended by local ward members, Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), Self-Help Group (SHG) leaders, and families in accordance with the Child Marriage Act of 2006. Our counselor provided orientation sessions to both the boy and the girl, highlighting the potential consequences such as pregnancy complications, social ostracization, and domestic violence. After understanding the risks associated with early marriage, they were persuaded, and an undertaking was signed by their parents. Presently, both the boy and the girl reside separately in their respective parental homes.

Some glimpse of the Stop Child Marriage in JEETA



Child Marriager Action Campaign



Sensitization Campaign on Child Trafficking



Sensitization Campaign on Child Marriage through PALA (Traditional song)



Sensitization Campaign on Child Marriage through Foot March



District level event on Child Marriage



District level Child Marriage event in collaboration with District Health Department



Child Marriage Orientation with Paudi Bhuian community



Sensitization Campaign on Child Marriage through Cycle rally



Sensitization Campaign on Child marriage in collaboration with District Administration



Observation of National Girls Child Day in collaboration with Govt. Schools



JEETA recognized by the District Administration for contributing to the children through JEETA's Access to Justice for Children Programme.