

Supported by



Report on Social Mobilization and Communication on Prevention of Child Marriage

May, 2010



Implemented by



i-land informatics Limited
58/114, Prince Anwar Shah Road, Kolkata: 700045
Phone: 033- 2417 8516, Telefax: 033- 2417 8518
Website: www.banglanatak.com

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Preface

i-land informatics Limited, working under the trading style of banglanatak dot com, is working with support of Unicef for mobilising community and youth participation in prevention of child marriage. Between July and November, 2009 we worked in thirty villages across fifteen blocks of Malda for building awareness on rights of girl child and mobilising community led action for preventing early marriage. It was observed that building awareness among youth helped in mobilising action at grass roots to prevent child marriage. In April and May, 2010, a more intense campaign was undertaken in two blocks of Malda, namely Englishbazar & Manikchak to build awareness on the prevention of early marriage between April and May, 2010. This documents the activities undertaken and outcomes achieved.

Project Activities and Outcome

Capacity building of local folk artists for implementing campaigns

Malda has two popular forms of folk drama Domni and Gambhira. These folk forms were used to communicate on the problems of child marriage. The theatre shows at English Bazar were performed by a local Gambhira team Smirti Natya Sampradaya while the shows at Manikchak were by a local Gambhira team Loukik Srijani Domni Dal. Workshops were held with these teams to train them in designing campaigns and evaluating the impact of the shows by interacting with the audience to assess the level of understanding achieved. The two groups were involved in fixing show locations, finalizing schedules, facilitating adequate reach among target groups and holding post – show audience interactions.

Success story

The folk team *Samajsrijani Domni Dal* was hired by the Bazar Samity of Mathurapur GP to perform a Domni show in their Bazaar area during the Ganesh Festival. The folk team requested to perform a show on early marriage issue and felt that it will be effective for society. Initially the Samity did not want to take up this social issue. They wanted simple entertainment. But the team was finally successful in convincing them. On 17.04.10, evening (7:00 pm) the show was held and the audience strength was nearly 250-300. The performance of the team and the issue both were appreciated by audience and the Bazaar Samity. The post show question-answer session with the audience was an uniqueness they felt which is usually absent after any entertaining folk show.

Building awareness on child marriage using interactive theatre shows.

Schedule preparation : 60 street theatre shows were held in 60 locations at Englishbazar and Manikchak. The route chart was prepared in consultation with Panchayat Samity Sabhapati, Block Welfare officers and Village Panchayat members and staff. Folk artists actively participated in planning the campaign schedule. The overall plan was then shared with the District Social Welfare Officer. The schedule was also shared with NGOs working for life skill development of adolescent girls.

Area of Work : The following village Panchayats were covered by the campaign :

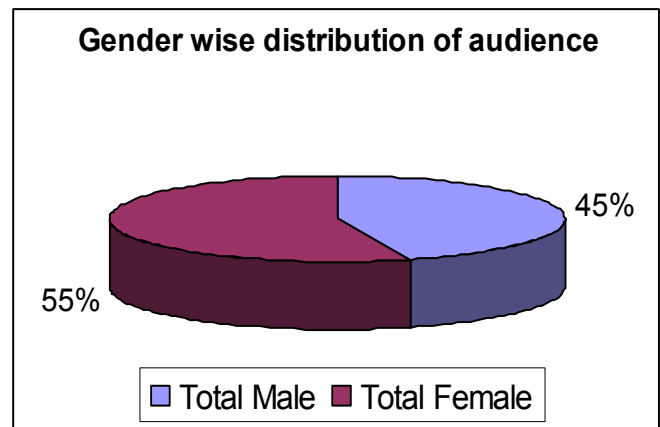
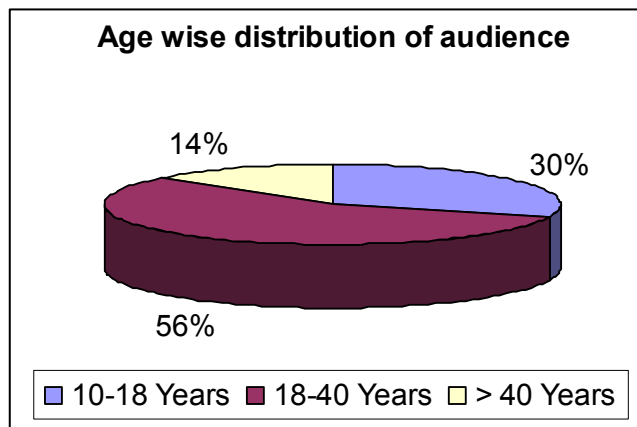
- English Bazaar : Phulberia, Binnodpur, Kazigram, Jadupur-I, Narahatta, Jadupur-II
- Manikchak : Manikchak, Enayetpur, Chawki Mirhadpur, Gopalpur,, Dharampur, Nurpur

Key messages

- Child marriage is legally prohibited for girls under 18 years and boys under 21 years.
- Physical and social problems posed by child marriage. The following problems of child marriage were highlighted:
 - o Severe health problems: anaemia, etc.
 - o Early pregnancy affecting health of newborn/ increased risk of mortality
 - o Many children adding to number of mouths to feed and leading to a vicious cycle of poverty.
 - o Domestic violence/ Sexual violence.
- Community needs to be proactive to stop child marriage and dowry. District and Block Social Welfare Office may be contacted for support.
- Boys and girls are equal.
- It is the parent's duty to provide the girl child with educational opportunities. Marrying off the daughter is not the sole responsibility.
- Children are trafficked under the guise of marriage to grooms in distant states. It is important to check the credentials of the prospective grooms.
- Contact Panchayat for availing of various schemes for girls and children from poor and deprived communities.
- Importance of registering marriage.

Campaign Reach

The shows reached out to more than 13400 people across twelve Gram Panchayats. Average audience per show was 200-250. The campaign successfully mobilised participation of possible stakeholders in prevention of child marriage at villages like GP members, ICDS workers, SHG members, teachers, Club members, students, members of CBOs. Members of families of girl children were mobilised to attend the shows. The following graphs show that the campaign had good reach among women and targeted age group.



Audience Response

Question answer sessions were held after the shows. All respondents could say that child marriage is illegal and girls who become pregnant in minor age are at a greater risk as they are not physically fit for motherhood. 93% said that it is the parents duty to educate the girl child. 80% said that education empowers girls for earning their own living. 93% said that they would contact the Panchayat if they learn about child marriage. 87% felt that they will work for building awareness among people on problems of child marriage.

Sensitisation workshops with village adolescents

12 workshops were held with both school going children and out of school girls. After the theatre shows the local club members, SHG members, members of CBOs & GPs were consulted to mobilize them and arrange workshops with adolescent girls and boys. In some cases teachers were enthused to participate in the workshops held in their locality after watching the shows. 420 participants attended the workshops. The objective of the workshop was to make the girls aware of their rights, problems of early marriage, vulnerability to trafficking and HIV/AIDS and to encourage them to take a leading role in sensitizing their peers. Discussions were also held on the various laws against early marriage, dowry, domestic violence etc. Participatory activities were held to bring about attitudinal orientation to work together for prevention of child marriage. Flip charts were used to sensitise them on problems of child marriage, sexual harassment, dowry and also women health issues.

Campaign Learning

Consultation with villagers including both adults and children highlighted the following factors leading to high prevalence of child marriage in English Bazaar and Manikchak.

- **Poverty and unemployment** are push factors. **Displacement owing to environmental reasons** is a factor at Manikchak. Families are forced to migrate as they are losing their land owing to rapid river bank erosion. In villages like Ballutola, Ashimtola, Barobagan, Jesharttola, Natun Dharampur and Nurpur in Gopalpur , Dharampur and Enaetpur GPs, families said that uncertainty of livelihood has led to wide prevalence of child marriage.
- **Poor status of women , lack of awareness on women's health and lack of family planning** are factors causing high prevalence , especially in Muslim communities. Average number of children per household is 3-5. These families try to get their girl child married as soon as possible. ICDS workers and ANMs shared that though they try to sensitize the girls and their mothers on the ill effect of early marriage, the male guardians overrule them and take family decisions. There is need for awareness programmes for men.
- Boys start earning living from around 16-17 years. Rate of drop out is high in both the blocks. Most of the boys give up their education and work as labourers in Malda town or in other states. They are then typically married off by their families.
- There is high vulnerability **human trafficking**. In Englishbazar -Jadupur I, Jadupur II , Narhatta and in Manikchak block Enayetpur, Nurpur and Dharampur GP may be especially mentioned. Marrying off young girls (Age 13-16) to grooms from distant states like UP, Bihar and Jharkhand is common. The parents do not even report to administration or police when the girls remain untraced.

Way forward

- There is need for a Help line so that girls and community members can get proper support if they want to prevent early marriage.
- Adolescent education empowering young boys and girls with life skills as well as knowledge of sexual and reproductive health is needed so that they are able to make better choices.
- There is need to focus on strengthening implementation of the schemes for vocational skill development and education of drop out girls in these villages.
- Campaigns through media as well as IPC on the ill-effect the early marriage and the law regarding child marriage, dowry, trafficking and domestic violence is required.
- There is need to develop a system for stronger law enforcement.

Campaign in Englishbazar Block

The following provides details on the show locations and total audience reach.

Audience Feedback

- The audience commented that main factors leading to early marriage in this block are societal pressure, dowry and elopement. When any child marriage happens in a village, health workers and members of SHGs take initiative to prevent it. This system however remains ineffective because of lack of support from GP and police. They commented that they would hence forth approach DSWO and BWO for further support.
- In Shudhalyapur (GP-Kazigram) it was learned that many girls get married as early as 12-13 years of age with grooms aged between 35-40 of age. Marriage proposals come from Delhi and Bihar. Some of the girls married off to distant states have remained untraced.
- GP member Dullu Rahman of Jadupur I declared said that he was inspired by the shows. He plans to take an initiative to mobilise the ward members to cross check marriage register and birth certificate of the brides. If any religious leader is involved in child marriage he would be penalized.
- Tushar Kanti Jha and Partha Pratim Sarkar , the Head Masters of Santadebya High School and Kazigram High School addressed that , previously they had taken initiative to prevent early marriage at their own initiative but had not been very successful. They said that schools may take up discussing issues like ill-effects of early marriage, dowry, need for marriage registration and laws related to domestic violence as part of life skill education curriculum.
- The ANM of Jadupur II GP mentioned that monthly meetings are held with adolescent girls about health and hygiene issues. Unfortunately men in the families remain unaware as well as reluctant to accept the importance of stopping the issue. Grass root workers of health and ICDS department felt that Village Panchayats need to organise awareness programme using mikes, posters and meetings on child marriage prevention law and dowry.

Workshop with Adolescents

Workshops were organised at schools , local clubs, village homes and community places. The following details date, location and number of participants in different workshops.

The participants shared the following :

- Schemes for SC, ST and OBC are unavailable from GP .The book grant facility is also unavailable. The poor families are unable to continue their girl's education despite their interest in studies.
- In many villages, religious leader are involved in child marriage. Parents and guardians are either scared or religiously or socially dependent on them.
- No help line available.
- School children mentioned that life style education & sex education are absent in their schools.
- Poverty is always not the issue. Lure of good money from prospective grooms across the state like Bihar and UP as well as societal pressure also are major factors.

The girls identified the following needs:

- Girls, who are educated try and protest against early marriage but are unable to do anything against their guardians. After attending the workshop and with the knowledge that child marriage is illegal and a punishable offence they said they will call either the police or DSWO if any case of child marriage takes place. They said they will also protest against the system of dowry.
- They will mobilize the girls and parents on registering their marriage.
- They will try to alert their neighbors and friends about trafficking.

Campaign in Manikchak Block

The following provides details on the show locations and total audience reach.

Audience Feedback

- Villagers were unaware of trafficking, but after watching the show they could relate the issue with early marriage. Local club members-CBO members and SHG members said that they would be alert and conscious when any marriage proposal comes from different states.
- Many club members and SHG members of Chawki Mirhadpur and Dharampur GP had huge grievance about lack of Panchayat support. They felt that key persons in the community like GP members, teachers and religious leaders support child marriage. Sometimes marriage registrars also do not reveal actual age. One Mabud Ali member of club at Kalindri village shared that a villager named Bator Tanti had organized his girl's marriage (age 13 years) with a groom from UP, and he also got a good sum of money from them. The club members protested and even called the police. Abu Taleb, the GP member requested these youths to let the ceremony continue as the poor family had received a fair amount of money and it would be further difficult for the parents to get their child married again.
- Illiteracy, ignorance about health & hygiene issues, poor family planning and poverty, are some major issues leading to early marriage. The villagers become migrant due to huge loss of land owing to widescale river bed erosion. They become landless, poor and have no other option as to seek job elsewhere. As soon as they settle in outside states, they tend to marry off their children. The villagers felt that frequent discussions by ASHAs and ANM may help.

Workshop with girls

Workshops were held in schools and library.

The adolescents shared the following

- Of the total marriage that takes place in Uttarpara, Kalindri and Ramnagar villages about 30-40% are child marriages. The general age of the girls during marriage is between 13-15 years.
- Marriage registration is almost nil.
- Marriage takes place with grooms from states like UP, MP and Bihar. 2-3% of the girls remains untraced.
- Domestic violence is relatively common for dowry and early marriage.
- Girls stated that more schools like SSK and MSK are needed in Paschim Sekhpura, Ramnagar and Kalindri.

- A major problem identified by the girls was lack of communication. News paper hardly reach these places.

The girls suggested the following :

- More awareness programmes are needed on laws regarding domestic violence, dowry and early marriage.
- A monthly or weekly meeting or session would be very effective for adolescent girls and boys by some health worker.
- Members CBOs, SHGs,GP members need to be mobilised for working to prevent child marriage.
- 24 hours help line should be available.
- Law enforcement agencies need to take punitive action against those involved in early marriage-dowry and domestic violence. Such steps will act as prohibitive against further such incidents

Annexure II: Photographs

Awareness campaign in Englishbazar block



Awareness campaign in Kazigram High School



Theatre show in Phulberia GP



Quiz session after the show in Narhatta



Member of Gram Unnayan Samity addressing the issue of trafficking at post show session in Barampur



GP members, CBO and SHG members watching show in Sudhalyapur village



Feedback taking from audience after show in Jodupur II GP

Awareness campaign in Manikchak block



Folk song being used during the theatre show



Villagers watching the show in Dharampur



Quiz session after the show in Paschim Sekhpura



Token gift given to the correct respondent in quiz session



Feedback taking from girls & boys in post show session in Dharampur



Problem sharing with teachers & club members in Enayetpur

Sensitization workshop in Englishbazar



Workshop at Gopinathpur on 25.04.10



Alertness exercise during the workshop in Santabaidya High School on 28.04.10



Workshop in Moslempur on 09.05.10



Participants writing their suggestions in Sudhalyapur on 02.05.10



Case study reading by a girl at workshop in Parbatta on 25.04.10



Workshop in Babupur on 27.04.10

Sensitization workshop in Manikchak Block



Workshop with girls in Kalindri on
09.05.10



Workshop with students of Dharampur
MSK on 10.05.10



Workshop at Ramnagar village on
11.05.10



Workshop at Paschim Sekhpura on
03.05.10



Girls discussing their action plan with
the flip chart during workshop in
Lalbathani on 30.04.10