

# Women Rise Up Against Child Marriage

**A women-centered approach to build  
community ownership and strengthen systems**





# About PCI India

Project Concern International (PCI) India, a Global Communities Partner, has been working in India since 1998. Our mission is rooted in community realities, we co-create and scale sustainable solutions to complex development. We drive interventions to transform the lives of communities at scale by solving complex social issues - partnering with governments, private sectors, and development organisations.

Our decades of deep community connection have equipped us to discover the root causes of social and developmental challenges faced by the communities, including the marginalised ones. Through our evidence-based programming and sophisticated measurements, we design solutions that are efficacious and scalable. We are recognized for providing high-quality technical assistance to both national and state governments.

We have maintained a diverse portfolio in India, with a presence in more than one-fifth of all districts in the country, reaching over 7.7 million people in 2019-20 alone. We are supported by a multi-disciplinary, passionate, and competent team committed to translating our dreams into realities.

For more information, please visit <https://projectconcernindia.org/>

## Our Value Proposition



## *Abbreviations*

- BLCPC: Block Level Child Protection Committee
- BLO: Block Level officer
- CLF: Cluster Level Federation
- DCPU: District Child Protection Unit
- ICPS: Integrated Child Protection Scheme
- IDI: In-Depth Interview
- JSLPS: Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society
- NRLM: National Rural Livelihood Mission
- PCI: Project Concern International
- PCMA: Prohibition of Child Marriage Act
- PRI: Panchayati Raj Institution
- SAC: Social Action Committee
- SHG: Self Help Group
- VO: Village Organisation

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## *Publication Rights:*

The document contains the processes that were undertaken by PCI India and JSLPS team as to develop leadership of CLF members to address issues of continuity of education of adolescent girls as a strategy to curb child/early marriage in Jamtara, Jharkhand. We encourage learning from this document to be used for non-commercial purposes by appropriately quoting/citing as given above.



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## Executive summary

'Women rise up against child marriage' was a year-long (2021-22) initiative which PCI India executed in the Nala block of Jamtara district in Jharkhand in partnership with Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS), with financial support from Cummins Foundation and mentoring from Rise Up. It is layered upon the Cluster Level Federation (CLF) body of the 3-tier structure of Self-Help Group in the rural communities.

Through this initiative, we tested, piloted and scaled up an unique approach to address issues related to child/early marriage. The approach empowers women leaders who are members of Cluster Level Federations (CLF) under Self-Help Group (SHG) structure (many of whom are also mothers of adolescent girls) to become leaders of change in their communities, take ownership of addressing social issues such as child marriage and girls' education, and participate in state systems at the block and district level eliciting a stronger response from them. The purpose of this booklet is to share this approach with you: the theoretical frameworks it is based on, the methods used and evidence of its effectiveness in building women's leadership, community ownership and addressing the issue of girls' education and early/child marriage.

The 'Women rise up against child marriage' approach nurtures a collaborative style of leadership amongst women leaders and facilitates their journey of empowerment by enabling their access to resources and building agency for them to be able to define their own goals and achieve them. If we break this down further, what it entails is this: awareness building & sensitisation on social issues, access to relevant information as evidence from community and primary stakeholders, exposure to systems and services (police stations, helplines etc.), engagement with duty bearers and skill building (communication, negotiation, evidence building) through experiential learning.

Through the initiative, capacities of 150 women leaders were built for them to be able to take action against early/child marriage of adolescent girls in their communities. Apart from this, capacities of 15 women leaders (Social Action Committee members)<sup>1</sup> were specifically built for them to engage with the Block Level Child Protection Committee (BLCPC) to demand quality services for adolescent girls to continue education and thus avoid child/early marriages.

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<sup>1</sup> Placed within each CLF, the Social Action Committee (SAC) is an essential body, with a mandate to work on social developmental issues.

This resulted in 2 women leaders from Nala block participating in BLCPC meetings where they raised issues and shared recommendations for action in their communities/block. Further, women leaders have already started taking action against early/child marriage and other violations against women and girls in their communities. Also, what's even more encouraging is that the impact of the approach has gone beyond this and also positively impacted the overall functioning of the CLFs and their presence in communities. This impact is being acknowledged by the women leaders themselves, the community at large and by duty bearers. The scaling up of the approach across the remaining 5 blocks of the Jamtara district through the support of the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) is testimony of this impact.

It is now essential to scale-up the entire model to other geographies in the state to bring a significant shift at the system and community level. The combined change at both levels, will ensure that adolescent girls continue their education upto tertiary levels and a decrease in the incidence of child/early marriages.



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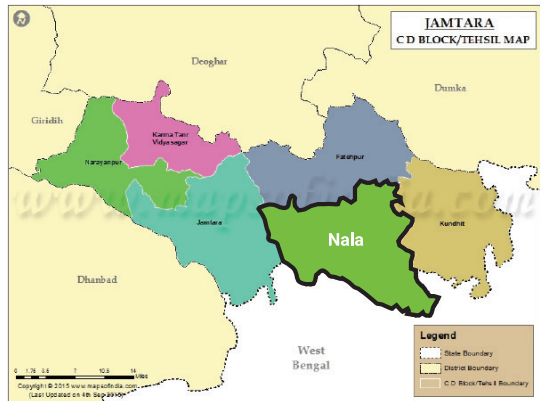


## What's our approach?

Early/child marriage is still a reality and India has the largest number of child brides in the world - accounting for a third of the global total.<sup>2</sup> While over the years numbers have declined, they are still high and factors like the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in more and more girls being pushed out of schools and into early/child marriage.<sup>3</sup>

Diverse efforts are going on at various levels, by different stakeholders and through multiple approaches to address the issue of early/child marriage which traps girls in a cycle of violence. PCI India through this booklet brings a unique approach to address issues related to child/early marriage that we tested, piloted and scaled up through our 'Women rise up against child marriage' initiative. Our approach empowers women leaders who are members of Cluster Level Federations (CLF) under Self-Help Group (SHG) structure (many of whom are also mothers of adolescent girls) to become leaders of change in their communities, take ownership of addressing social issues such as early/child marriage and girls' education, and participate in state systems at the block and district level eliciting a stronger response from them.

'Women rise up against child marriage' was a year-long (2021-22) initiative which PCI India executed in the Nala block of Jamtara district in Jharkhand in partnership with Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS<sup>4</sup>), with financial support from Cummins Foundation and mentoring from Rise Up.<sup>5</sup> It is layered upon the Cluster Level Federation (CLF) body of the 3-tier structure of Self-Help Group in the rural communities.



Source: <https://www.jharkhand.gov.in/>

<sup>2</sup> Ending child marriage and adolescent empowerment | UNICEF India. (n.d.). UNICEF. Retrieved June 30, 2022 from <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/end-child-marriage>

<sup>3</sup> 10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage due to Covid-19. (2021, March 7). UNICEF. Retrieved June 30, 2022 from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/10-million-additional-girls-risk-child-marriage-due-covid-19>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.jslps.in/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://riseuptogether.org/>

## Child/early marriage of adolescent girls: What's the context in Jharkhand?

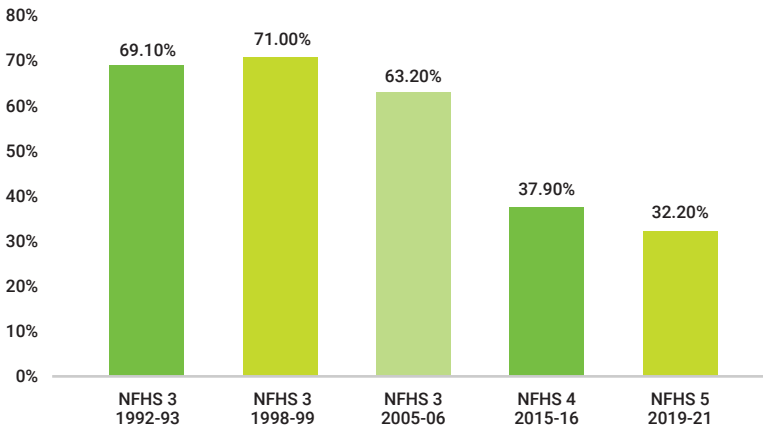
- As per, National Family Health Survey - 4 (NFHS-4) conducted in 2015-16, Jharkhand witnessed as high as 38% of women aged 20-24 married before turning 18 – the legal age of marriage for girls in India, as against the national average of 27%. Even in the recent NFHS-5 data, the number continues to be high even though it has declined to 32.2%.
- The education data of the state also corroborates the similar grim status. The District Information on School Education - DISE 2017-18 and 2018-19 shows a decreasing trend in overall school enrolments in secondary and higher secondary classes along with 12.9 and 17.7 percent for girls' dropouts in secondary and higher secondary schools (DISE 2018-19).
- During our (PCI India) interaction with women leaders of Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) and Village Organisations (VOs) - both part of the Self Help Group (SHG) federation structure in Jharkhand, India, the following issues were identified:
  - Poor access to schools and education facilities: Girls need to travel a long distance on foot every day to attend school or a tuition class. The average one side distance from home to school is around 4 KM. There is hardly any public transport system. Water logging during the rainy season is a common problem. On both sides of the road, tall grasses offer easy hideouts for miscreants.
  - Leaders and members of community institutions are aware of the legal age of marriage both for boys and girls, but hardly know what are the penal provisions or measures that one can use to prevent such marriages. In general, there is a lack of confidence and trust to deal with the legal or police system or call any helplines for such issues.
  - Caste-based adherence to gender norms coupled with a lack of agency among adolescent girls causes the prevalence of early/child marriage in some caste groups. Sub-castes practise regressive social norms which are harmful to women and girls; early/child marriages go unnoticed due to their small demographic presence.
  - The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) responsible for decentralised planning and local governance hardly attach priority to these issues and requirements. Women have low to no participation in Gram Sabha meetings and social issues like early/child marriage or girls missing or dropping out of school are hardly discussed. Village development

plans rarely plan for the education and skill development requirements of adolescent girls.

- As per a study conducted by International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) in Jharkhand – Out-of-school girls are 3.4 times more likely to be married or have their marriage fixed than girls still attending school.<sup>6</sup>
- India has a Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) (PCMA), which mandates all Indian states to appoint Prohibition Officers to report and prevent early/child marriages and provide relief and justice to victims. In Jharkhand, the Block Development Officers (BDOs) have been appointed as Child Marriage Prohibition Officers. In addition, as part of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), Jharkhand has set up district, block and village level child protection committees. However, the implementation of PCMA at the local level has been slow and ineffective and these committees need to work in close coordination with the communities to prevent early/child marriages and address any form of child exploitation.

## Jharkhand: A Snapshot of Child Marriage

% of women 20-24 years years married before age of 18 during the time of survey (Jharkhand)



\*Jharkhand was established as a separate state from Bihar in 2000

<sup>6</sup> Achyut, Pranita; Khurana, Nalini V.; Reddy, Hanimi; Gautam, Abhishek & Verma, Ravi K. (2020). *Raising Her Voice: Agency and Aspirations of Adolescent Girls on Marriage – Evidence from Jharkhand, India*. New Delhi: International Centre for Research on Women.

# What was our starting point?

## Existing body of work and partnerships

PCI India is already building agency of mothers to support their adolescent daughters to fulfill their aspirations for higher education and economic independence, and reject regressive norms of early/child marriage in Jharkhand through a programme called 'Umang'. Building on the strength of SHGs, it takes the approach of empowering the women collectives to bring normative shifts at the community and household level. 'Women rise up against child marriage' was layered over the Umang programme in Nala block of Jamtara district and built through the existing partnership with JSLPS.

## Theoretical frameworks

Our approach aims to build transformative and collective leadership of women that advances women's participation, leadership, and rights. We believe that both inside and outside dimensions of leadership go hand in hand for women to be able to put their agency to use, access the resources and achieve personal and political goals. Based on Oxfam's report on transformative leadership for women's rights, the leadership style that our approach nurtures among women leaders is collaborative.<sup>7</sup> This critical theoretical framework was the foundation for our leadership-building work with CLF members. Here's what this leadership style looks like:

### **The future is collaborative**

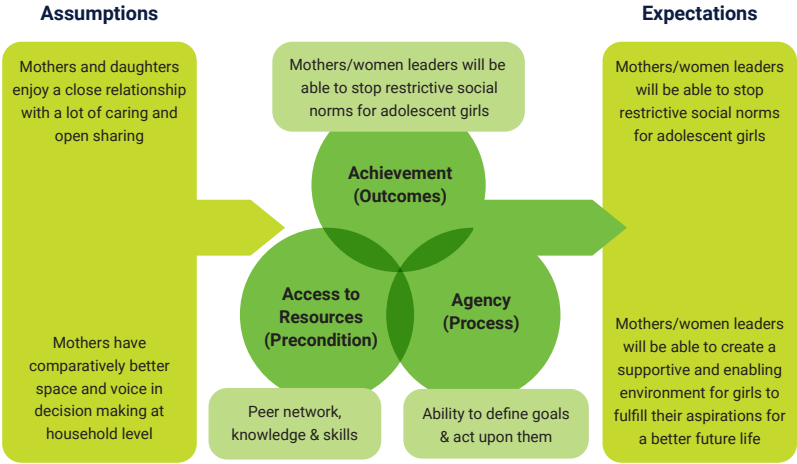
- Believe power is greatest in a collective team
- Openly share information and knowledge
- Encourage suggestions and ideas from the team
- Facilitate brainstorming with their team
- Enable their team with immediate time and resources
- Allow roles and responsibilities to evolve & fluctuate
- Seek to uncover root causes of issues
- Offer immediate & ongoing feedback with personalized coaching

Source: Collaborative Lead Training Co. [[www.collaborativelead.com](http://www.collaborativelead.com)]

<sup>7</sup> Kloosterman, Jeanette. (2014). *Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights: An Oxfam guide*. UK: Oxfam International. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/transformative-leadership-for-womens-rights-an-oxfam-guide-317242/>

Further, through our initiative, we worked on empowering women as individuals and as collectives. We derive our understanding of empowerment from Naila Kabeer's body of work. She defines empowerment as the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability.<sup>8</sup> According to Naila Kabeer, this can be achieved if a person has access to resources such as knowledge, skills and peer networks, and agency, which is the ability to define goals and achieve them. For us, the outcome is that women have an enhanced role in household decision-making and participation in public life which will eventually result in an enabling environment for girls to lead fulfilling lives

### Empowerment Framework



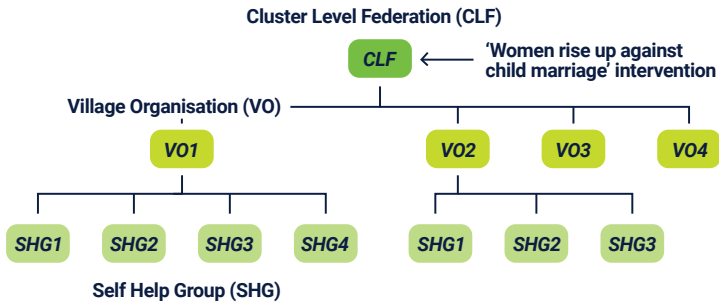
Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability.

*PCI's empowerment framework based on Naila Kabeer's model of empowerment*

8 Development and Change Vol. 30 (1999), 435-464. Institute of Social Studies 1999. Published by Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 108 Cowley Rd, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK.

# What did the initiative aim to achieve?

There are two structures that one must understand to fully grasp the ‘Women rise up against child marriage’ initiative: the SHG federation structure and Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS).



*The SHG federation structure*

The SHG federation structure comprises three layers: SHGs, VOs and CLFs, which are essentially women collectives. In Nala block, the SHG federation in which our initiative was placed is supported by JSLPS where women have organised themselves in these structures for savings and credit activities to improve livelihoods.

The ‘Women rise up against child marriage’ initiative was based at the CLF level and here’s why:

- It is the leadership body in the SHG federation structure.
- It has a Social Action Committee (SAC), an essential body, with a mandate to work on social developmental issues which directly connects with what we aimed to do.
- It covers geography larger than the VO.

The second structure that we need to understand is the ICPS. As mentioned above, as part of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme, Jharkhand has set up district (District Child Protection Unit - DCPU), block (Block Level Child Protection Committee - BLCPC) and village level child protection committees (VLCPC). The BLCPC and DCPU have quarterly and biannual meetings respectively.

The 'Women rise up against child marriage' initiative aimed to mobilise the BLCPC in the Nala block of Jamtara district in Jharkhand to take concrete actions to address the causes and consequences of early/child marriages, improve girls' education, and ensure that at least two women leaders from the local CLFs regularly participate in the BLCPC's meetings. Subsequently, PCI aimed to facilitate dialogue between the Nala block CLF leaders and the DCPU to share resources, tools, and lessons learnt from the initiative and advocate for replicating the 'Women rise up against child marriage' model in other five blocks of the Jamtara district.

The initiative had two main objectives:

- Develop leadership among CLF members to raise their voices and take action against early/child marriage and other violations of child rights in their communities.
- Build capacities of SAC members to engage with BLCPC to demand quality services for adolescent girls to continue education and thus avoid early/child marriages.

Since the initiative focussed on addressing systemic drivers and consequences of early/child marriage through policy advocacy, it was not possible to quantify the number of beneficiaries who will be directly impacted by the initiative in the long term. However, all families and more than 16,000 adolescent girls in Nala block are expected to benefit from this initiative. The initiative directly engaged 5 CLFs, which are supported by the JSLPS of Nala Block and comprise nearly 200 VOs and 1,100 SHGs, totalling 13,200 women members.





## What did the approach entail?

Women leaders from 5 CLFs were equipped with knowledge, skills and support to take action against early/child marriage and ensure girls' education in their communities using the following methods:



Classroom sessions

We conducted 9 interactive capacity-building sessions with 150 women from the 5 CLFs to enhance their understanding of the issue of early/child marriage and systemic gaps from different perspectives, awareness of laws and governance platforms/provisions, and how they can engage with BLCPC and DCPU to address these issues. The sessions focussed on:

- **Session 1:** The lives of adolescent girls in Jharkhand, the challenges they face including the impact of Covid-19 lockdown.
- **Session 2:** Government schemes catering to adolescents and young girls. The functions of the School Management Committee (SMC) and the role they played during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Session 3:** Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) 2006 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) 2012. Role of CLF leaders in ensuring that girls go to school.
- **Session 4:** Orientation on Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC) and their role in adolescent education. Mechanism of referring cases to CHILDLINE.

- **Session 5:** Usage of CHILDLINE (1098), issues it addresses and how help can be sought along with a practical session wherein CLF leaders were encouraged to call the helpline and check its functioning and cross-check its provisions such as 24x7 availability.
- **Session 6:** Domestic violence, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), the process of filing domestic violence complaints.
- **Session 7:** Dowry Act, where and how to lodge a complaint regarding dowry.
- **Session 8:** Women's helpline, one stop centres, practical session on using the helpline.
- **Session 9:** The importance of coordination between different government committees such as the Panchayati Raj & ICDS was stressed upon, and how to take up issues with these committees.

"Here, along with child marriage, we learnt about several other laws. We learnt about the Dowry Act, laws related to child rights, and the Domestic Violence Act. I liked it. I did not know about all this."

~

[CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, May 2022]





## Exposure visits

Practical exposure and engagement with the system is a critical exercise to build the confidence and trust of women on the system. This is a significant part of leadership development efforts as duty bearers get an opportunity to directly engage with community leaders and understand the areas and factors of dis-belief and hesitations. As part of exposure visits, women leaders were taken to police stations. They were familiarised with the process of filing a complaint, where different authorities sit etc.

"I went to the police station for the first time. We went around the whole station, I liked it. The station in-charge told us about laws, and how to file an FIR. I liked that they answered all our questions and also told us that we should come to the station when needed."

~  
[CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, April 2022]





## Women-led evidence generation

A 2-day workshop with 15 Social Action Committee (SAC) members from 5 CLFs was facilitated to co-create a tool for assessing factors that contribute to adolescent girls' vulnerability to early/child marriage, including disengagement from mainstream education. They were also provided with financial and technical support to conduct the assessment in 5 communities. This was followed by another 2-day workshop for them to review assessment findings and translate them into one block-level action plan to be used to demand action by Block level officials and PRI members.

SAC members covered 36 villages and 20 panchayats during the assessment and the villages were a combination of school and non-school villages. In each village, 3 data points were considered:

- School observation: Carried out in 10 schools (7 schools till class 10<sup>th</sup> and 3 till class 12<sup>th</sup>) with the support of Active Women<sup>9</sup> and teachers.
- Group discussions with unmarried adolescent girls (15-18 years): A total of 143 girls participated in these out of which 72 are currently school-going and 71 have dropped out of school.
- Group discussion with mothers of adolescent girls (15-18 years): A total of 181 women participated in these out of which 72 of them were mothers of school-going girls and 109 were mothers of girls who had dropped out of school.

The methodology ensured that participants came from a mix of social and economic backgrounds.

<sup>9</sup> Active Women are front-line workers or cadres responsible for facilitating SHG formation and strengthening activities.

Some key findings that emerged from **school observations**:

- 3 schools have classes till 12<sup>th</sup> while the rest have till 10<sup>th</sup>.
- Out of the 3 schools with 12<sup>th</sup>, only one had Arts stream. Arts stream is not available due to a lack of teachers.
- Lack of teachers found in most schools.
- 6 out of 10 schools did not have any female teachers for classes 9 and above.
- Half of the schools don't have maths, chemistry, or biology labs. The majority of the schools don't have a maths lab.
- Most schools don't have a grievance redressal mechanism.
- A few schools don't have computer labs, integrated science labs or libraries.
- A few schools don't have basic facilities such as chalk, duster and blackboards, ceiling fans, bulbs and tube lights.
- A few schools don't have a playground, clean washroom with functional water connection and drinking water connection.



Some key findings that emerged through group discussion with **adolescent girls**:

- Girls who are currently enrolled in schools did report positively on the school infrastructure such as the availability of blackboards, chalk and duster, desks and benches, computer labs, well-lit classrooms and libraries.
- 97% of these girls shared that they had a playground in school, whereas 79% said toilets in the school were regularly cleaned.
- Some of the major challenges in completing education that the school-going girls highlighted included school being far, inconvenience in travelling, parents not being financially sound and unavailability of books and uniforms.

Some key findings that emerged through group discussion with **mothers**:

- Mothers of school going girls acknowledged the benefits received by their girls. 82% of them reported that students received books, uniforms and laptops from the school, and 65% noted that girls were provided cycles from schools.
- They also shared some key issues that they faced during the Covid-19 lockdown which hindered girls from continuing their education: 81% of mothers expressed that there was no mobile or laptop available to pursue online classes and 53% of mothers shared that it was difficult for girls to study at home due to space constraints and lack of a peaceful family environment. Yet another 53% of the mothers said that their girls did not have the required technical know-how to do online classes.
- Reasons cited for girls dropping out of school were alike by girls and mothers both. Most girls dropped out due to lack of finances in the family and discontinued studies during the Covid-19 lockdown due to lack of resources for online mode of classes. Also, the reasons that were holding them back from going back to school were majorly lack of monetary resources and long distance from home to school which made travel a constraint for the girls. Moreover, some expressed that it had been a long time since they were out of touch with academics and hence did not consider rejoining school.

**Based on the situation assessment carried out by the SAC members, an action plan was made by them.** It included key findings of the assessment and recommendations for steps that can be taken to promote retention of girls in schools at least till 12<sup>th</sup> standard and to reduce the occurrence of early/child marriages. The general block level recommendations were focused on the following:

- Solutions to address challenges that emerged through the situation assessment. For example: A high school should be established within 5 km and a 10+2 high school within 7 km.
- Community awareness regarding early/child marriage and applicable laws.
- Victim protection and easy access to services, schemes & entitlements.
- Community participation in local governance to eradicate early/child marriage.

Since women leaders from various villages had carried out the assessment and made the action plan themselves, the plan included specifics which made it actionable. The action plan is a great example of the impact community ownership can have in strengthening systems to respond to social issues.

## Engagement with duty bearers

### Engagement with Block Level Child Protection Committee (BLCPC)

Two CLF SAC members were coached over 2 sessions to attend the quarterly meetings of BLCPC, raise issues related to early/child marriage, and demand their regular participation in the subsequent BLCPC meetings. They were equipped with communication skills, talking points and the ways and language to defend their demands/asks.

Meetings were set up on one to one basis with 7-8 BLCPC members (out of 14 total members) to share and discuss the action plan, and demand support for its implementation, and follow-up with them regularly. This included both physical and virtual meetings.

2 women leaders presented the action plan at the BLCPC meeting, and the plan was accepted by the committee. Further, a resolution was passed by the BLCPC that 2 CLF members will participate in BLCPC quarterly meetings.



## Engagement with District Child Protection Unit (DCPU)

The lessons learnt from the initiative were synthesised along with tools, resources, and recommendations and shared with district level officials with a request for replicating the approach in other blocks of the Jamtara district.

A session was conducted with 2 CLF leaders where they were coached to attend the DCPU's bi-annual meeting and present the initiative's learning, tools and processes in detail. The CLF leaders were acquainted with the work of various officers and how to raise issues with them.





# Community engagement

Two community events were organised, one on the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child (2021) and one on Women’s Day (2022). During the first one, women leaders who played a pivotal role in stopping early/child marriage or promoting girls’ education were felicitated in the presence of officials from the social welfare department, the labour department as well as PRI members. The district collector also delivered some sessions on the issue of early/child marriage.

On Women’s Day, the following topics were discussed:

- Child rights, sexual harassment, Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, Juvenile Justice Act. These discussions were led by District Legal Service Authority.
- A session on women’s harassment and the role of police by the Superintendent of Police.
- A session on government schemes for women and adolescents by Block Development Officer (BDO) and Circle Officer (CO).



## Monitoring and evaluation

All activities under the initiative were monitored through methods such as meeting reports, photographs, attendance sheets, questionnaires etc. Further, after 12 months of our initiative in Nala Block, we conducted in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 14 CLF leaders and members from all 6 clusters to understand the impact of our initiative. These exit interviews discussed the following aspects:

- Federation building and functioning
- Work done by CLF
- Perception of the community regarding the CLF
- Aspirations and challenges of members
- Knowledge: Roles and responsibilities of CLF leaders and members, issues and action plan to support women and girls
- Skills: Quality of leaders, communication and interaction, leadership

The findings of these interviews have been extremely encouraging and we have shared some key ones in the next chapter.





## What did we achieve?

### A critical mass of women leaders in Nala Block

150 women leaders who are equipped with knowledge, skills and a strong peer network to be able to address the issue of early/child marriage and ensure girls' education in their communities.

### Active participation by CLF members in the community

There is a reinforced spirit among CLF members to be active members of the community and ensure that issues are resolved quickly. The regularity of meetings and attendance of CLF members has improved and there's been a significant change in the type of issues that they take up now - with the range broadening and issues faced by women and girls becoming the main component. Reasons for this shift? Forming an identity for oneself in the community and having useful information. The following quotes from exit interviews<sup>10</sup> conducted with CLF members capture this:

“It will continue [even if monetary transactions are stopped within CLF] because we receive useful information, with which we try to bring some change in our village and VO. Due to CLF we have an identity now, they got a chance to move ahead in life, this is a source of information for its members” - [CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, IDI, May 2022]

“Now I think all CLF members create their own identity. There have been a lot of changes. Now I keep thinking about how I must raise relevant issues and find a solution for them. I discuss it with all members so that my CLF is known by all. The reasons for these changes are that we receive new information in all meetings about how different issues can be resolved, and whose support can be taken. This change in vision is due to the rise up session which takes place monthly, where we got to meet some officials and understand how to resolve issues.” - [CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, IDI, May 2022]

Our findings from the exit interviews conducted indicate that our approach has not only impacted the response of CLF members towards issues like early/child marriage, girls' education etc. but has also had a positive impact on aspects like the overall functioning of CLFs, their aspirations for the collective, and the relationship that CLF members share with the community and among themselves.

<sup>10</sup> After 12 months of our initiative in Nala Block, we conducted in-depth interviews with 14 CLF leaders and members from all 6 clusters to understand the impact of our initiative.

“One person from my village did not receive benefits under Awas Yojana, so he brought his application to the CLF. We spoke with the Panchayat Sachiv to support him and get his issues resolved.” - [CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, IDI, May 2022]

The responses captured during exit interviews show the growth of a collaborative style of leadership among CLF members:

“I share about things at my home with only some members, however, I am not able to share everything since there is pressure from my family. I share some things in the CLF since I need to find a solution. Without sharing, I will not be able to find a solution to it.” - [CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, IDI, May 2022]

“First, we try to identify and understand the issue for ourselves. Community members might say a lot of things, but we try to understand the truth from the VO or SHG. Next, we discuss with other CLF members and then we decide. We always work together to resolve issues. If we ever receive a case related to child marriage, child labour, sexual harassment, domestic violence, or dowry, we visit the home of the girl or woman who is facing this issue, try to talk to the parents or relatives. If they do not understand and the issue is not resolved, we discuss the issue in the Gram Sabha or consult with CHILDLINE or the local police station.” - [CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, IDI, May 2022]



The findings also captured challenges like some members still being scared of sharing issues in CLF fearing lack of support and there still being a lack of trust in CLF in some villages. However, it was encouraging that there were sufficient responses to show that these challenges are being slowly overcome.

## Early/child marriages being stopped

Knowledge about laws, helplines, and the process of filing complaints has helped CLF members to stop early/child marriages. And not just that, they are stopping other forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls as well, like girls dropping out of school and domestic violence!

“I liked it since I received new information every time. With this information, we could stop child marriages from happening around us. We could re-enroll dropped out girls in school. Stopped cases of domestic violence where husbands would get drunk and beat their wives. I would like to learn what steps to take when we don't receive our salary after working for a company.” - [CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, IDI, May 2022]

The findings from exit interviews show that CLF members have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities which includes supporting women and girls in their communities, and there was also a strong recall of their learnings from the classroom sessions and exposure visits.

CLF members are participating in meetings regularly such as the Panchayat meetings and the Gram Sabha.

“We used to hesitate before. But now, after meeting and talking to several people, we do not hesitate. We do not face any challenges in expressing their opinion in these meetings and raise our points. We attend the BLCPC meetings where we discuss: child marriage, drop out girls, condition of schools, toilets, hiring female teachers, distribution of cycles - without any hesitation.”  
~ [CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, IDI, May 2022]



However, it hasn't been all that easy.

“There was an incident of child marriage in my area after which we called CHILDLINE. Police arrived while the wedding rituals were taking place so everyone was blaming the CLF members and threatened them that they would break the CLF. They had even dropped down to beating the CLF members. On the other side, we also faced pressure from officials. Villagers said that they would not allow us to enter the village. To resolve this, all community members were requested to sit for the Gram Sabha, where they were counselled. Now, the CLF is working well and so are the Rise Up sessions.”- [CLF member, Nala, Jharkhand, IDI, May 2022]

But, what's been brilliant to see is how CLF members have tackled this backlash by collectivising among themselves and fighting the pressure by deciding to use the law in their favour!



## Scale-up across Jamtara district

Women leaders presented their learnings and journey to DCPU members garnering support from the DCPU to scale up the initiative in the remaining 5 blocks in the district.

As of today under the scale-up, 2 CLF members have been oriented in each block to be able to participate in BLCPC meetings following the 'Women rise up against child marriage' approach and the approach has been integrated under the larger Umang programme run by PCI India.



## Encouragement from JSLPS

“The sessions conducted in CLF for the CLF leaders, as well as the information given to them through exposure visits, has increased awareness and knowledge in them, as a result of which the people of our block are opposing child marriage and further coming forward to educate their daughters.”

~

*[Ganesh Mahato, Block Programme Manager, JSLPS, Nala, Jamtara, Jharkhand, June 2022]*



“With the information given about the law through the session in CLF, women leaders are now aware and sharing with others as well. In addition, gaining a place at the block level child protection committee to keep the problem of adolescent girls or daughters has been a very commendable work. We have been able to do it. Its meaningful result will be seen in reduction in child marriage in the coming time.”

~

*[Uttam Kumar, District Manager- Social Mobilisation & Institution Building, JSLPS, Jamtara, Jharkhand, June 2022]*







## What have been the learnings? And, what lies ahead?

### Learnings

- With limited resources and time, we were only able to pilot this approach in one block. While the approach has currently been scaled up throughout the district by being incorporated in our larger Umang programme, we reiterate that women's empowerment and leadership need long-term investment of time and resources. Short-term inputs and outputs may be evanescent and need more holistic partnership in the empowerment journey to be sustainable.

#### The 'Women Rise Up Against Child Marriage' Approach



- Shifting the social and gender norms that underlie early/child marriage needs multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional intervention in a coordinated way across all levels of the socio-ecological model.
- Putting policies into practice needs systemic and political will and commitment. This is essential to bring a sustained change in the normative behaviours of the community.
- Women's collectives are best placed to track the safe passage of adolescent girls to adulthood, through completing their tertiary education, advancing economic independence and being ready to live a healthy adult life with dignity.

## Way forward

- We implemented the initiative – ‘Women rise up against child marriage’, to harness the potential of women’s leadership and the strength of women’s collectives in the form of Self-Help Groups. While in Nala we could see the success of our efforts, it is essential to scale-up the entire model to other geographies in the state to bring a significant shift at the system and community level. The combined change at both levels, will ensure adolescent girls to continue their education upto tertiary levels and stop any incidence of child/early marriages.
- It is high-time for a multi-sectoral coordinated attention to bring a normative shift in the regressive gender norms in the society. We cannot leave behind women and girls to fulfil our dream of a developed society and nation. Hence, active participation of women and girls in the social developmental agenda is essential.
- Social and gender norms should be the lens of further investment in this domain to be effective in shifting the norms with an empowering experience for women, girls and the larger community including men and the system.
- All systemic interventions for social development starting from policy formulation to execution levels, should essentially ensure meaningful participation of women and girls. Each district and state should ensure strict implementation of women and girls’ empowerment policies to strive to make it a gender egalitarian state with zero cases of early/child marriages.





All pictures used in this booklet have been clicked by the PCI team



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