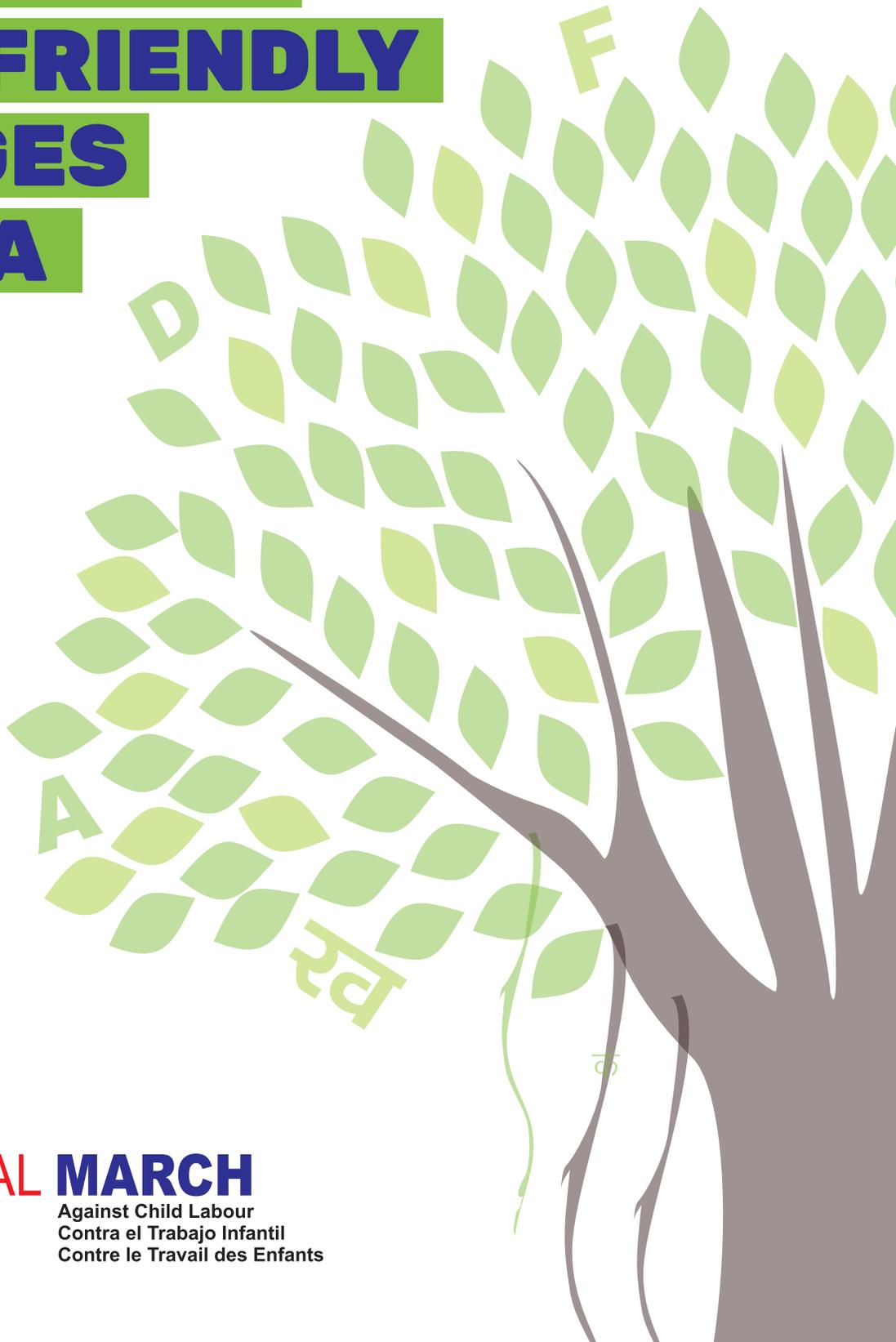


**IMPACT ASSESSMENT
OF PROJECT
ON CREATING
CHILD FRIENDLY
VILLAGES
IN INDIA**



GLOBAL MARCH

Against Child Labour
Contra el Trabajo Infantil
Contre le Travail des Enfants

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Executive summary

Bachpan Bachao Andolan's (BBA) *Bal Mitra Gram (BMG)* or Child Friendly Village (CFV) intervention seeks to make villages in India child labour free where every school-going child can attend school. With the involvement of the local community and participation of children to constitute *Bal Panchayat* (Children's Parliament), it serves as an effective tool to influence the decision making process and ensure participation of children at the micro level.

This innovative model has the objective to ensure freedom from exploitation and access to not only the rights of the children, but rights and services for the entire village community through enhanced rights awareness, community participation, self-governance and an overall strengthened society.

The Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) as a part of its strategy to support and promote good practices/models that contribute to ending child labour has been implementing the project titled "Child Friendly Villages in Rural India" in collaboration with BBA, replicating the Child Friendly Village intervention in 20 villages and 7 hamlets of Jharkhand, Karnataka and Rajasthan since January 2015. The period of this project was 30 months starting in January 2015 and ending in June 2017.

Thus, with the project coming to an end, Global March carried out an impact assessment of the project. The impact assessment also captures any good practices and lessons learnt from the implementation of the project that can be replicated in future projects on child friendly villages or other outreach models on child labour. The assessment also evaluates the robustness of the CFV model to address issues of addressing local environmental challenges through assessing the impact of the activities introduced in this project to build knowledge and skills of youth groups on environment protection. The impact includes case studies and success stories of change across the different stakeholders of a CFV such as children, youth and women's groups; individual households; local administration; key influencers (KI) such as like village head, religious leaders, and community at large.

Assessment methods included primary data collection from state activists, key influencers, and BMG stakeholders through qualitative tools. A qualitative study was conducted with a representative sample of 4 villages each in Jharkhand and Rajasthan and 3 in Karnataka, totalling 11 villages out of the 27 intervention villages. A discussion guide was prepared for 2 types of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – one with the state

activists and one with stakeholder groups. Different tools were prepared for each of the 3 groups of stakeholders (children, youth and women). A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared for in-depth interviews with key influencers. Secondary analysis from the project documents provided by Global March and BBA was also carried out. Indicators were studied and efficacy of each partner (KI, stakeholder, etc) was distinguished. This analysis also provided preparatory insights for developing qualitative tools.

Findings indicate that the BMG model is overall highly impactful in terms of achieving the main objective which is to constitute Child Friendly Villages. *Bal Panchayats* or the Children's Parliaments are the fulcrum of the BMG model and in their own right can be seen as independent agents of change. *Bal Panchayats* are pivotal in setting the narrative of the discussion during community meetings. Children's issues are often seen independent of people's caste, community and religious affiliation and thus are low conflict issues to bring communities together to form youth and women's groups. Even government authorities act faster and are keen to resolve children's issues.

The project design indicates that the overall success depends on the BMG activists more than any other component of the intervention. The activists are the implementing components between the design and impact of the project. Activists identified leaders within the village and assigned them proxy designations such as youth committee presidents, women's group president, group secretary, etc. These proxy designations instilled responsibility and accountability within groups and since holders of these designations were members of the community, trust in the BMG model was also established. It was observed that the project was successful in transforming the knowledge, attitude and perception of child rights in target villages and there was significant attribution by the people to the BMG model for having brought about this change.

Glossary and Abbreviations

Anganwadi workers – These are government appointed grassroots health workers

BBA – Bachpan Bachao Andolan

BMG – *Bal Mitra* Gram or Child Friendly Village

CFV – Child Friendly Villages

FGD - Focus Group Discussion

Key Influencers (KI) – Key influencers such as *Gram Panchayat Mukhiya*, school teachers, *Anganwadi* workers among others

SHG – Self Help Group

Stakeholder Groups – Children's Parliament, women and youth groups which are implementers of BMG activities in target villages

Approach

The report looks at the background of the project listing its objectives and components in order to understand the context with which the BMG model was incorporated and the impact and change it seeks to achieve. It looks at the larger problem that the model tries to address and the nuances of child rights issues across the three states. The report mentions objectives of the BMG model and looks at each objective as complementary to each other in trying to address the issues of child rights with a sustainable and replicable approach.

The methodology of assessment includes qualitative data collected from extensive fieldwork in target villages, including stakeholders groups, key influencers and other residents. The assessment looks at both – fulfilment of each objective to address specific components of the child rights issue and fulfillment of all objectives in addressing the issue of child rights holistically.

Section 1 highlights the process of how each objective was achieved. The section should be read with the societal, cultural, political and geographic context of target areas in mind. The section discusses nuances and qualitative details of what went into achieving the objectives including perspectives from the target groups, project implementers and the authorities.

Section 2 discusses the impact of the project in detail and the overall effectiveness of the model both in terms of achieving the objectives within the scope of the project as well as the sustainable and replicable approach of the model. It highlights the challenges faced by the project implementers, best practices that they adopted to tackle those challenges and the success of the overall project components. This section also indicates the way forward and should be read with scope for modification and/or adoption of the model to tackle community based issues in different settings.

The report also includes case studies to provide a detailed understanding of successful cases and insights into individual scenarios. Photographs from the field are also included to provide the reader a pictorial understanding of the socio-economic and geographic settings in which the BMG model under the project was implemented.

Background and context

The project

The Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) as a part of its strategy to support as well as promote good practices/models that contribute to ending child labour has been implementing the project titled “Child Friendly Villages in Rural India”. The project is modelled on Global March’s India partner Bachpan Bachao Andolan or BBA’s Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) / Child Friendly Village (CFV) intervention, which focuses on ending child labour, promoting education, and empowerment of communities for collective action towards common problems, using a rights-based approach.

The project’s aim is to foster strong and organic grassroots civil society structures by engaging and empowering the young people and the community at large, promoting civic engagement and sustainable development, and inculcating democratic values for ending child labour and promoting education. It is being carried out in 20 villages and 7 hamlets of Jharkhand, Karnataka and Rajasthan since January 2015. Within these states, the project is covering identified villages in three districts – one each in Jharkhand (district Koderma), Rajasthan (district Alwar) and Karnataka (district Chamarajanagar).

India continues to face challenges in protection of children despite proactive legislation and welfare schemes for children. Children below the age of 18 years account for nearly 40 per cent of India’s population. Not all children have benefited equitably from the remarkable progress and transformation that the country has witnessed in recent years. Tens of millions still face basic challenges of survival and healthy development. India not only has the largest number of illiterate people in the world (one-third of the world’s illiterates), but its illiterate population is today larger than what India’s population was at the time of Independence in 1947; and unfortunately, its school system is still producing illiterates, given that the drop-out rates in primary schooling are still very high.

Jharkhand has the third highest student drop-out rates at 12.62%, a rate much higher than national average; 2% of total child labour in India; 1.65% of total out of school children (Children in India, 2012). The districts of Koderma and Giridih in Jharkhand are mineral rich areas, but with poor access of the rights and services to the people, mainly, tribes.

Karnataka has 1.5% of total out of school children in India; 4.5% of total child labour in India and belongs to the group of states with more than 100,000 girl children employed (Children in India, 2012). The district of Chamarajanagar is situated at the intersection of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and is one of the lesser-developed regions of the state.

The State of Rajasthan has much higher student drop-out rates than national average; more than 8% of total child labour in India and highest number of girl children employed after Uttar Pradesh; thousands of girls married before 18 years of age, resulting in early pregnancies (Census 2011) and lowest gender parity in secondary level education at 0.64 (Children in India, 2012). While Alwar district demonstrates a higher level of literacy rate of 71% (Census of India, 2011), the child sex ratio in the district has worsened since 2001 and has high prevalence of child marriages. In particular, marriage below legal age is more in rural areas.

Introduction to *Bal Mitra Gram* (BMG) / Child Friendly Villages (CFV)

The Government of India has initiated various efforts to strengthen legislation, rehabilitation and protection of children. However, there is a need to strengthen families and communities to achieve micro-level community engagement and problem solving, adopt child centric development practices to protect children and empower children themselves with enforceable knowledge on their rights.

BBA's *Bal Mitra Gram* or Child Friendly Village intervention is a novel and a pioneering concept that was adopted under the aegis of Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, founder of BBA and Global March Against Child Labour, in 2001 to make villages in India child labour free where every school-going child could attend school. Since its development, BBA has intervened in almost 503 villages across 12 states of India with the involvement of the local community and participation of children to constitute *Bal Panchayat* (Children's Parliament), which serves as an effective tool to influence the decision making process and ensuring the participation of children at the micro-level.

Key aspects of the project are:

- Strengthening grassroots civil society structures for ending child labour, promoting education – Empowering the stakeholder groups which are representative of the community population, viz., children's council/Parliament (*Bal Panchayat*), youth groups (*Yuva Mandals*) and women groups (*Mahila Mandals*) to address child labour and other issues
- Collaborative problem-solving for access to and implementation of rights – Engagement of grassroots civil society structures and community and local authorities (eg - government departments such as education, medical, social welfare, etc.) for overall delivery of social welfare schemes and access to rights.
- Sustainable development and environmental sustainability – Empowering the community, especially youth to understand and tackle the local environment challenges. This has been a new element added in a CFV model, introduced in this project for the first time.
- Focus on democratic development at the village level - Inculcating democratic values, strengthening society and promoting dialogue, democratic development.

The innovative model of child friendly villages of BBA has the objective to ensure freedom from exploitation and access to not only the rights of the children, but rights and services for the entire village community through enhanced rights awareness, community participation, self-governance and an overall strengthened society.

The model hinges on civil society empowered structures/ groups, namely:

- *Bal Panchayat* or the Children's Parliament of elected child representatives, aged 8-14 years of age, from the village, with almost 50% representation of girls, to bring forward, discuss and resolve issues affecting the lives of children in the village with the involvement and engagement of Village Council / *Gram Panchayat* (grassroots administrative and governance unit at village level).
- *Yuva Mandal* or the youth group is the elected representatives from the young persons, aged 18 – 35 years of age, in the village to assist the village community in understanding of rights, access to these rights and entitlements and strengthening dialogue and democratic participation at the grassroots levels.

- *Mahila Mandal* or the women's group of elected women representatives from the village to identify, discuss and resolve matters that concern women and their lives, as well as provide a platform for mutual support and interaction of women in the village community. This fosters community building and strengthened dialogue and democracy among women community members.
- *Bal Mitra Gram* Committee or the Child Friendly Village Community is a cross-cutting group of key influencers and opinion makers in the village across religious, caste and community boundaries to support the formation of the child friendly communities, and liaise and negotiations with the *Gram Panchayat*.

Impact assessment

With the project coming to an end, Global March carried out an impact assessment of the project. The purpose of the assessment was to document the following:

Objective of the assessment

1) Capture the impact of the project and its activities, particularly to achieve the desirable changes such as in addressing child labour, access to education facilities and other government schemes, increased understanding and respect for children's rights, and progress made towards the objectives of this project, among other things. In addition, the impact assessment measured the success of the project, in terms of the achievement of the 5 fundamental criteria of CFVs:

- 100% of the village children do not work and are no longer in child labour
- 100% of the children are going to school
- *Bal Panchayat* is functioning and is recognised by the *Gram Panchayat*
- Youth and women's groups are established and active in the village

2) The impact assessment also captured any good practices and lessons learnt from the implementation of the project that can be replicated in future projects on child friendly villages or other outreach models on child labour. Among others, this included the following:

- Assessing the impact of the good practice of child participation and engagement through the creation of Children's Parliament for addressing issues of child labour, access to education and any other issues related to children;
- Assessing the impact of formation of a mixed youth group having both male and female participants for the first time in a CFV model.

3) The assessment also evaluated the impact and efficacy of the stakeholder groups - (Children's Council/Parliament (*Bal Panchayat*), youth groups (*Yuva Mandals*) and women groups (*Mahila Mandals*), and their dynamics vis-à-vis the community.

4) The assessment also evaluated the robustness of the CFV model to address issues of addressing local environmental challenges through assessing the impact of the activities introduced in this project to build knowledge and skills of youth groups on environment protection.

The impact assessment also includes case studies and success stories of change across the different stakeholders of a CFV such as children, other stakeholder groups, individual households, local administration and key influencers, and the community at large.

Assessment methodology

The assessment includes the following:

1. Secondary analysis of project documents: Key efficacy indicators were identified from the different project documents tools provided by Global March and BBA. These indicators were studied and efficacy of each partner (KI, stakeholder, etc.) was distinguished. This analysis also provided preparatory insights for developing qualitative tools.

2. Primary data collection from state activists, key influencers, and BMG stakeholders through qualitative tools. A qualitative study was conducted with a representative sample of 4 villages each in 2 states of Jharkhand and Rajasthan and 3 villages in Karnataka identified for the assessment. Overall the proposed research design per state was

- 1 Focus group discussion (FGD) with all state activists
- 1-2 in depth interviews with key influencers per village
- 3 FGDs with the 3 stakeholder groups in total

Assessment tools

A discussion guide was prepared for 2 types of FGDs – one with the state activists and one with stakeholder groups. Different tools were prepared for each of the 3 groups of stakeholders. A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared for in-depth interviews with key influencers.

Section 1 - Success of the project in achieving its objective

1. Strengthening grassroots civil society structures for ending child labour and promoting education

Primary evidence from visiting the BMGs suggests that the creation of BMGs has provided a first of its kind platform for villagers to discuss community issues with each other, especially issues of children such as child labour and education. In most of the villages, villagers admitted to not having any common platform for discussion until BMG activists advocated and assisted the villages in creating the different stakeholder groups

BMGs inculcate collective action and villages have reported to solidify as institutional units. Most women and youth group members reported that issues that couldn't be addressed as the authorities have addressed individual's problems when the entire village raised them. In Guddekere, Karnataka a member of the women's group recalled how she had faced inaction from the *Panchayat* when she took up issues on her own but the same issues were resolved by the *Panchayat* when the women's group sought attention to them. She shared, "I asked about solar fencing in the village, the requisition was filed but there was no action. There was no water for irrigation and I asked the *Panchayat* to provide us some water but again, I did not have anyone help me. There was a scarcity of drinking water so someone else informed the *Panchayat* but she also couldn't get any positive response.

However, since we have organised ourselves in the women's group, the *Panchayat* is much more attentive to us. We have got things done for the village that I couldn't do it on my own. Now the village has irrigation water under the *Ganga Kalyan Yojna*, we have a water tanker for drinking water; we even have hand pumps and bore wells – all newly constructed. People also realised that organising yourself in a group is critical if you want to demand your entitlements. The *Panchayat* pays attention to you, the local authorities also listen to you well. Collectively, we have also got *Aadhar* card for everyone, and now most of us will be able to access government loans."

Although, it could be assumed that target villages may have one or more government or non-government interventions that brought the villagers together to discuss welfare and/or community issues, most respondents informed that BMG was the first of its kind intervention in their villages. In some villages, there was evidence to suggest that there may be other community oriented programmes especially those backed by government support but none of them addressed children's issues specifically.

One of the first changes that a BMG brings to the village is the new-found assertion among community members. Across the 3 states, one of the first remarks while collecting data was the "rise in self-assurance" that villagers reported about their village level organisation. This assertion is common to participants of all

groups – women, youth and children. Even non-participants acknowledge the fact that forming groups in the village had led to increased advocacy of issues that were priorities for most individuals or families in the village but could not be addressed as a community. Respondents of the women and youth group in Chanako, Jharkhand reported communities have found it easier to share issues with each other in women and youth groups and have reported increased empathy as well.

Youth and women's group indeed function as civil society structures at the grassroots level. This is especially true for tribal villages in Jharkhand and Karnataka where the size of the village is small and often hamlets are clear markers of the distinct indigenous caste or communities living in them. The stakeholder groups therefore comprise of village patriots and literate/semi-literate males and females who want to bring positive change in the village and have some prior experience in dealing with the administration or Gram Panchayat. Interestingly, village elders are a group that seems to be missing in any of the 3 civil society structure in any of the three states. The age range of members is usually 21-40, as the focus is also on youth and women and not elders. Considering that elders are often more aware of Panchayat activities and could be more connected too, it remains to be seen if this conspicuous absence, benefits or hampers the tasks of these civil society structures.



Figure 1: School in Chanako, Jharkhand with newly built roof on the adjacent Anganwadi centre

The civil society structures are quite inclusive in terms of accommodating migrants, castes, indigenous communities about child rights but they try to address other issues as well. As one of the respondents in Bendi, Jharkhand shared, “there are many migrants among the youth and women’s groups, though women are more regular. The BMG activist encourages them to raise issues and find solutions themselves in the group meetings”. This inclusion helps the grassroots nature of the groups as many reasons associated with child labour or school dropouts are specific to communities, indigenous groups and their occupations. This

is specifically relevant for child marriage since many of the tribal communities practice child marriage as a custom and associate it with their cultural identity. For example in Kumbhityari, the *Turiya* tribe associates child marriage with its culture very strongly. The respondents reported that the tribe felt alienated when issues of child marriage were discussed and their participation dropped.

The activist had to persuade them to continue to be a member and participate in the groups after which they rejoined but talking to them on this issue continues to be highly sensitive.

The youth and women's group has led to more active participation of community members in school management. Due to illiteracy and limited information about school management, community members relied on school teachers and the local *panchayat* about information regarding entitlements for children. This often led to widespread lack of information about entitlements or grievance redressal. However, the BMG structured has tackled that problem.

As a women's group member in Gendwadih, Jharkhand informed, "I got to know from the activist that anyone whose children go to the school can become member of school management committee – so I become one. I have since then followed up with school administration on amenities, funds for school, grievances etc. I always ensure that quality of the school is maintained as per government's regulations. If the village is not united, how will we bargain for our children's rights".

Groups are often related loosely with the *gram panchayat* and sometimes with other interventions going on in the village but there was no instance where a formal civil society structure beyond the BMG group could be observed. Since the target villages are also remote, at least in Jharkhand and Karnataka, pre-existing civil society groups were not observed either. What is apparent in the nature of grassroots civil society structures is the absence of a strong formal binder. However, women and youth groups have brought people together and seem to have laid a foundation upon which formal civil society structures can be built. This was evident as the administration in the target districts also acknowledged that villages have learnt to express and articulate their demands and there is a significant rise in assertion of what each village needs. They also recognise women and youth groups as substantial advocacy tools at the village level. Respondents reported that authorities give them more time and listen to their issues with a greater attention span than before.

They added that authorities especially block and sub-district level officers have also welcomed the fact that the problems brought to them are clear and articulate and not vague. Since, these groups already have diverse participation, authorities also find it easier to reach decisions as they know that there is a low probability that a particular caste or community will oppose any administrative decision since they are themselves a part of the discussion process beforehand.

The groups have been highly effective in mainstreaming the issues of child labour and education at different levels of decision-making. All villages categorically state participation of diverse communities to recognise

that child labour is a societal problem. Even poorer households agree that children should continue school education.

As a respondent in Guddekere stated, “100% children got to school now. If we identify any children is out of school, we persuade them to go to school. We make sure that children are not out of school or at home idling.” The self-reported increase in the level of information about child rights issues is overwhelming. All villages irrespective of caste, location or size report that they are well aware of child rights issues and that BMG activists have been pivotal in creating awareness on these issues. As the *Sarpanch* of one of the *Panchayats* reported, “Information and awareness levels in targeted BBA villages are higher than other villages. Targeted villages have apparently distinct level of awareness compared to other villages in the same *Panchayat*”. This has also led to direct action by involving the vulnerable groups and motivating them to take correct measures. The motivations by the vulnerable groups to act might vary and sometimes fear or public shaming could be a factor that influences their actions. “Now guardians fear that if they do not send their children to school, there might be an enquiry,” as reported in Chennikatte, Karnataka by the school Principal.

The strongest reason for communities to continue to engage with activists and seek their assistance was technical support for civic engagement. Beginning with something as simple as writing applications, women and youth groups continuously seek support of activists in identifying the correct authorities for grievance redressal, procedures of information gathering from the government, filing complaints, and following up on their interaction with the administration. While groups acknowledge that they are better placed to initiate and complete their interactions with the administration, they still express the need of BMG activist’s support. They acknowledge that BBA’s brand equity, activists’ support and their own empowered status help them approach authorities with greater confidence and resolve matters. A respondent in Mangla district, Karnataka stated, “We know we are supported by BBA especially with relevant information, so we know we can act based on their information.” Many groups across the three states were confident that they can manage and administer the groups on their own, but almost each group adds a caveat that people might become less regular in the group meetings if the BMG activist withdraws from the village.

2. Collaborative problem-solving for access to and implementation of rights

The civil society structure that the BMG model has provided to the villages has been able to achieve desirable and measurable benefits. Evidence seems to suggest that in all three states, people have been able to articulate their demands, approach the administration systematically and follow up with them to access and receive the entitlements. The activists have been pivotal in this process and reliance on these activists continues.

The model has identified and organised groups, which have been able to constructively debate issues and look for solutions together as advocacy groups. The model has a strong training component where project staffs including activists provide training to stakeholders about how to sensitise the community on constructive engagement, their rights and entitlements and how to access their entitlements including processes of grievance redressal. Villages have recognised the value of collective efficacy and have used it to approach authorities that they would not meet before. One of the most common responses to collective

action was, 'we can do things as a group that we could not do as individuals – either due to fear, anxiety or lack of information support'.

The collaborative nature of collective efficacy is most evident from the fact that across the three states, a pattern of the process of grievance redressal has emerged. Communities have reported that the four steps that they take to solve any problem are;

1. Discuss the issue in the women or youth group meeting or the *Bal Panchayat*,
2. Identify the process of application and the correct authority with the help of the BMG activist, 3. Write to or approach the authority as a group with or without the BMG activist,
4. Follow up and monitor resolution of the issue, allocation of benefits.



Figure 2: A young Bal Panchayat member stands outside the newly constructed classrooms and walls of the school in Guddekere, Karnataka

Almost all respondents across villages have narrated a similar process of how they got their entitlements. This is substantial evidence to highlight that villagers have understood the narrative of the BMG model and methods of its implementation in collaboration with the Government. There seems to be standardisation of the processes, which indeed is an important determinant of success of any system.

A child respondent in Mangla district, Karnataka narrated, "it was simple to get a wall in the school constructed. We discussed with the youth and women's group and they helped us write an application to

the *Gram Panchayat*. We then took the application and discussed the issue with the *Gram Panchayat* who wrote to the Block Education Officer and in less than a month, the wall of the school compound was constructed.”

This standard approach appears in grievance redressal efforts of village members as well. If an issue is raised outside *Bal Panchayat*, the village discusses it, seeks help from the activist, approaches the concerned authority with the due process and follows up on the allocation of benefits. In Guddekere, Karnataka a respondent shares, “we helped *Bal Panchayat* to write complaints to authorities about the housing scheme as some houses got destroyed due to rain. So, the authorities heard them and provided new houses. Cases were filed through *Bal Panchayats* but were followed up by women and youth group”. She adds, “we had scarcity of drinking water. The women and youth group went to the *gram panchayat*. The *gram panchayat* arranged a drinking water tanker for the village. They had heard their complaints individually too but the impact was greater when they went as a group.”

Women and youth groups and the *Bal Panchayats* seem to operate in symbiotic relationship with the women and youth groups often acting as background support to *Bal Panchayats* especially when children are not able to articulate their problems or recognise how it can be addressed. Asha Devi decided to be on the School Management Committee to help children access their entitlements by working with school administration and the government. “I got to know that anyone whose children go to the school can become members of the management committee, so I also became one. I have ensured quality in whatever the government is providing,” she informed adding, “If we are not united, how we can bargain for our rights. At other times, *Bal Panchayats* often raise issues that are more relevant to general village welfare than being limited to child rights issues. As one youth group member in Gendwadih, Jharkhand explained, “*Bal Panchayat* has asked for better school uniforms and improvement in quality of the mid-day meals. However, they did not know how to approach it and the teacher was also indifferent.

The *Bal Panchayat* members shared that with the youth group in the village which in turn approached the school teacher and pressured on him to request for better amenities. The youth group also advocated with the administration which ultimately complied.”

The authorities also acknowledge that collective efficacy of target villages has improved and villagers know exactly what they want to demand and what the right process for access to those entitlements is. There were many examples reported by members of the community that stated their interactions with authorities and their success in achieving their objectives. “After being informed by the *Bal Panchayat* and discussing with the village, we went to District Collector (DC) and told him that they were not being paid Government scholarship for school children. The DC told them that he will open a bank branch near them. This was just 20 days ago,” reported a respondent in Bendi village of Jharkhand.

The collective efficacy often extends to beyond what the original objectives of the BMG project is. Administratively, issues are

sometimes escalated beyond the *panchayat*. A women’s group member in Gendwadiah, Jharkhand recalled, “During one of her field visits, Dr Neera Yadav, the Education Minister of Jharkhand, got to know about the lack of school uniforms and scolded the teacher about whom the children had complained. The whole matter got escalated when children complained about the lack of school uniforms, which are provided by the government. They had not received school uniform on 15th August, so had to wear casual dress. However, the Minister scolded the teacher and ensured that the students got the uniforms and the teacher started teaching.” Similar examples of escalation were reported in other states as well. Villagers in Rajasthan continuously engaged with the Block Development Officer when they wanted a well to be dug. They persuaded him to visit the village where he suggested that it could be done through the MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) allocation. Some *Bal Panchayats* in Karnataka are also being trained to do so during *gram sabha* field visits of BDOs, etc.

BMG initiatives are both popular and respected by local power centers. The *mukhiya* (village panchayat chief), shares, “People from villages approach us to resolve issues with the activists. Information and awareness levels in target villages are higher than other villages in the *panchayat*. One can easily notice it in interactions with target villages. The target villages are now assertive about their rights. BBA has influenced the situation of children. School enrolment and attendance was poor before but now almost all children in the target village attend school. We have realised that some children who didn’t go to school earlier are quite intelligent. It would be beneficial if we expand the BMG model to other villages.”

Collaboration among villagers through the youth and women's group has led to tangible benefits for the community. Chanako village, Jharkhand had received funds in the past to build the roof of the local *Anganwadi* center but the money was being embezzled. They wrote to the higher authorities but were informed that more funds could only be disbursed after two years. However, since the village required the *Anganwadi* center to function, they started a fundraising drive from local citizens within and outside the village. In about two months, they had raised enough amount and had the roof constructed. The *Anganwadi* has been regularly utilised ever since.

In some villages, engagement with the administration is a continuous process. The groups have learnt to prioritise issues and then systematically approach the *gram panchayat* or higher authorities by writing letters and following the processes. As one youth group member narrates, "We approach the *Sarpanch* (Head of *Gram Panchayat*) directly. However, we take support from women and youth groups to approach the authorities. The *Sarpanch* initially ignored us but we persisted and got things done. We rallied for *School Chalo Abhiyan* (Go to School Campaign). We also encouraged people to donate to schools. People donate chairs, tables, pen/pencils and cash as well. They have taken issues to village, block and district level. They even got it published in the newspaper. The *Sarpanch* said '*jo karna hai kar lo*' (do whatever you want). So the children communicated these words to other

members of the *panchayat*, about the *Sarpanch's* indifference and bad language. People are aware, so they can organise themselves for any issue. So far so good and it will be good. In the future too the children will take their learnings forward. I think they can carry on without BBA."

However, there are areas where the BMG structure is not sufficient to address the issues. Sometimes, it is because the people at important positions can influence public opinion. Like the teacher in a village told the people that they do not have permission to conduct extra-curricular activities. This teacher was also the head of teacher union so it was difficult to get things done with him. A villager recalled, "In another project much before the BMG, there were some opposition and complaint about his culturally corrupt practices, so maybe he wanted to prove his authority."

There are other cases where the issues are beyond the BMG's control but still become child rights issues. A women's group member in Guddekere, a remote village in Karnataka explained, "There are 8 members in the youth group. They meet monthly and discuss children's issues and problems they face while going to school. Sometimes they have to pay school fees (Rs. 200 - 3000/student/year - includes fees + bus pass), and if they want to send children to convent school, it will be even more expensive. Everyone is a wageworker. Without a bus, children are scared of animals. There is a government school but no school bus. We discussed issues in the group, took these problems to the *panchayat* but the *panchayat* is not responsive. The main problem is transport. Children are willing to study, but it is a risk. For attending secondary school they have to pay Rs. 50-60/day for commuting which is a lot. The cases of animal attacks on people have increased due to creation of water pond near the village."

3. Sustainable development and environmental sustainability

Context of environmental issue

The BMG model partnered with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) to deliver trainings to project staff/ activist and members of the *Yuva Mandal* and project staff about different environmental issues so that the communities could collectively identify priority challenges and find solutions to tackle them. Youth group representatives and activists were trained in environmental protection and utilizing the trainings to impart the information to the village stakeholders. The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) researched on identifying the complex relationship between the environment and the livelihoods of the communities in target villages. TERI then developed training modules customised for the local community stakeholders in a format they could best understand. Since some information in the modules was technical and the target stakeholders were being exposed to such trainings for the first time, techniques such as minimising text and using graphics were adopted by the trainers. The stakeholders were expected to transfer the knowledge in the training to other members of the community and the *Bal Panchayat* by engaging with them on environmental issues and identifying problem areas that the community was interested in tackling.

Environmental training intervention in BMG and it's impact

Saving forests, economic utilisation of timber and water management was key issues across the three states. Since villages in all three states are near or in a forest reserve, those initiatives complemented the village needs. Water management was a more pertinent problem in Jharkhand and Rajasthan due to the ongoing drought and the dry terrain in general, respectively.

Almost all school children and youth and women's groups recalled having attended environmental discussion sessions and there was evidence that each village implemented some or the other initiatives that was discussed during those trainings. There was evidence of cross learning, though limited among stakeholders, as suggested by youth group member in Jharkhand, "TERI training talked about waste management and we learnt how they are dealing with the problem of *kachra prabandhan* (waste management) in Rajasthan. It has improved our knowledge and we are also trying to improve the situation around our village and sharing it with other villages in the *panchayat*."

Stakeholders displayed a keen empathy towards the environment across states and conveyed that saving the environment was extremely critical. "People know saving water and environment is important," is a common response of stakeholders across the three states. Across all states, it was reported that communities are more aware of rainwater harvesting techniques than others after engaging with activists and stakeholders. In places where local non-governmental organisations have worked towards constructing traditional and other rainwater harvesting structures, such as Gopalpura, Rajasthan, there was greater awareness about the benefits of this practice. However, stakeholders were not accurate in their responses about the exact benefits they would achieve with these initiatives in the long term.

Each state has adopted a unique method of addressing their environmental concerns. In Bendi, Jharkhand, when the wells dried up, the information about water filtering was shared with the stakeholders, which the activists knew from the TERI curriculum. The group also discussed village drainage management and rainwater harvesting in the school compound. In Gopalpura, Rajasthan, people have started a *Raksha*

Bandhan inspired festival where they take care of individual trees and tie a knot of promise to protect them from being cut down. In Sili Bawari, Rajasthan people have pledged to plant a tree on a child's birthday. There were some responses to suggest that people in the area might also be working on a drainage management system but stakeholders could not elucidate what exactly they were doing. There are some common practices too, like being aware of local threat to environment from illegal cutting and transportation of trees especially where corrupt practices might be involved. People across the three states have started practicing 'using dry timber only for their fuel needs rather than cutting wet wood'. Many villagers have shifted to gas cylinders under government schemes.

Villages in Karnataka provide a unique set of practices on environmental relationship and sustainability practices. There was evidence that villages have linked environmental protection with local livelihoods. In Lokkerre, villages have started planting *honge*. The oil of this plant is used as biofuel both in household consumption and for trade.



Figure 3: A woman making furniture out of Lantana

A women's group member shared, "We have planted *honge* around the playground which was earlier lying barren. Now we are using the plant to extract its oil which can be used to make bio-fuel. We sell it to a local contractor and earn some money. It is not a lot of money but it is better than nothing. We have also used this money to build local ponds." The Forest Department has also supported the villagers' activities and has provided them with assistance in kind near the village. The woman added, "the forest department provided us plants such as bamboo and eucalyptus to plant around the villages. Our women and youth group liked

the idea and we have planted it anywhere we could find some space .It has been going on for more than 2 years and we may have planted more than 10,000 trees”. “4 of our members had also attended TERI trainings,” she added.

In Guddekere, the groups informed that they had planted sandalwood trees, provided by BBA, on the recent World Environment Day in June 2017.

However, the most engaging evidence of environment protection is found in areas around the Mangla *panchayat* where environment protection coupled with sustainable livelihoods has curtailed forced migration and provided local livelihood opportunities. The community is engaged in making furniture and craft products out of a locally grown grass known as *Lantana*. The grass was infamous for harming soil productivity and poisoning cattle and was therefore treated as a weed. However, as one of the women and youth group member whose family is engaged in utilising *Lantana* for livelihood explained, “men from our family used to migrate for jobs in forest agriculture, with the Forest Department and sometimes migrated to far away areas. We worked with BBA and connected to the forest officials. Then with the help of BBA we received trainings from local experts that by removing lantana, and working on it, we could make baskets, dustbins, lampstand, chairs, tables and other craft items.”

It appeared from the responses that people have adopted many practices after TERI trainings. Though there is substantial excitement and interest in taking up environment initiatives, there is a lack of structured guidance that villagers could follow. This shortcoming was evident both in terms of identifying local issues as well as conveying what environmental initiatives imply. It also reflected in responses from those who attended the training. Their responses indicated that environmental initiatives through the BMG may not be exact in their nature at this stage and there was ambiguity among stakeholders about carrying environmental issues forward beyond aforementioned activities. Responses also suggested that although stakeholders recognise the link between environment protection and sustainable livelihoods, they do not have access to information or means of doing so at the local level.

According to some responses, TERI’s training and local initiatives were steps in the right direction but the methodology should evolve. As one youth group representative in Gopalpura, Rajasthan put it, “everyone wants to save the environment but there should a direct link between doing that and generating some income because it is a time-consuming effort.”

4. Focus on democratic development at the village level along with gender, hierarchy and other norms being challenged

Mangla panchayat has hamlets each consisting of different caste. Even within castes there are sub-castes and sub-caste level conflicts. There were frequent instances of caste based discrimination in schools. The activists had a tough time bringing the village to a common platform due to these reasons. However, the activist found a unique way to bring communities together by opening up the village to outside help that would benefit all castes – like medical interventions by other NGOs and financial inclusion programs. This approach helped as communities started sharing their issues with each other and soon realised that most communities had similar issues they wanted addressed. It was the first time that the village was negotiating with the *panchayat* for their entitlements. Once they noticed that as a village they were more assertive in demanding their rights, their belief in the BMG model also strengthened. Collective action has become normal practice since then and the village has the youth and women’s group work symbiotically with the *Bal Panchayat*. Together they have demanded and received infrastructure for schools, new school uniforms and construction of toilets in the school. The community has benefited by receiving income opportunities with the forest department, as well as got rid of child marriages in the area.

The biggest impact of the success of the BMG model would be in the long-term changes in knowledge, attitude and behaviour of the target community. Evidence seems to suggest that communities have undergone changes especially in terms of organising themselves to collectively discuss village level issues. In almost all villages, the activist starts making groups to discuss issues related to child rights, as per the project mandates. However, in all villages, it was common, rather prevalent, among villagers to meet at scheduled days to discuss about village welfare issues, which may or may not include issues relating to the rights of the children.

All activists pointed out that after an initial period of setting up groups, convincing people to join them and moderating the meeting discussions, the youth and women groups themselves have taken a lead and now do not require the activists to schedule their meetings or identify issues to be discussed or moderate at these meetings. With time, the groups mature and the discussions get diverse and more focused. “The groups start thinking about how to reach a solution to a problem. Initially they were not able to do that without support from the activist,” recalls Narayan Swami, the Project Coordinator for Karnataka. There is plenty of evidence to indicate that these groups have acted on several village level needs that were not limited to child rights issues alone.

Gender barrier is one of the first to be broken down under the BMGs. One of the first changes seen, in almost all villages, was the acceptability of men and women sitting together as part of the same social group and speak to each other and discuss without hesitation. It was reported across villages, especially in Jharkhand and Rajasthan, that initially there were reservations in the community about mixing of men and women and discussing issues at the same platform. However, gradually and often after much

encouragement of the activists, communities were able to put that aside and come together to the same platform. This change was more prominent for youth groups as it was uncommon for younger men and women to openly mingle and be at the same platform and given that the idea of having mixed groups for *Yuva Mandal* were introduced for the first time in BMGs under this project. 'In *Yuva Mandal* there was reluctance among females to sit with males but now they have become comfortable with the idea and freely put their points forward.'

Ending discrimination at the village level is also one extremely important barrier that the BMG model has broken. Participants have uniformly reported that there has been a change in the village environment for the better. Discrimination on the basis of caste, religion and tribes has gone through a dramatic shift and people recognise the significance of acting together as a unit rather than raise individual problems. In almost all villages, activists and group members responded, 'village environment has changed, discrimination has stopped, male – female discrimination has declined.' In schools too it was reported that there was discrimination on the basis of tribes and/or caste. There were instances where teachers discriminated against children. There were also some incidents reported about untouchability practices around the tribal villages in Karnataka that have ended as a result of the initiatives of the *Bal Panchayat*, as reported by respondents. One respondent in Lokkerre informed, "Children used to display discriminatory behavior earlier – untouchability, caste, etc. But not anymore. Now they eat and play together. Sporadic incidents of discrimination still persist in villages but not amongst children and when these children will grow up, they will change their society too. They bring their message home too." In Jharkhand, the villagers took this issue to the block level officers who instructed teachers to treat every child equally and responsibly. It was after such interventions that discrimination by teachers stopped. In schools too teachers were discriminating among the tribal and non-tribal children. After that they discussed this with block level officers. Then, the Block Development Officer (BDO) raised the issue with the teachers to resolve it. In Rajasthan, several villages had children visit each other's houses to have food and learn about each other's customs and to extend the message of inclusion and participation from all communities in the village.

One issue that stands out is liquor prohibition. Across all villages alcohol addiction was identified as a big problem in the village. In Jharkhand and Karnataka, the issue is much more imminent and women have raised the concern in many group meetings. Many villages have already discussed it in several group meetings and have proceeded to prohibit alcohol sale in and around the village area. In Karnataka, the problem is further skewed. There were small liquor shops within the local village market. Though the *Gram Panchayat* has banned the sale in the local market, some vendors continue to come from outside and sell. "It is a major issue that we are facing. They even filed a complaint in the police department, who then came and warned the men," recalls a women's group participant in Lokkerre. However, the activists state, "in all villages in Karnataka, alcohol addiction remains a big problem and more so for the females as it affects the productivity of males and many a time, female members in the household have to put more effort to earn daily wages and run the household." The issue has also created stress among the participants of the women and youth groups as the discussions on this issue seldom move forward and men do not seem interested in discussing this in detail. The low participation by men in the youth group was also evident in Karnataka. In Jharkhand though, activists have been able to completely prohibit alcohol sale near their villages.

Recognition and appreciation of democratic values is a critical aspect of the BMGs, which the model has been able to inculcate among target villages. Almost all respondents recognised the importance of the democratic process of election in the *Bal Panchayats* across the three states. There was no instance where a respondent was dismissive or skeptical about the process of *Bal Panchayat* elections. "Children learn

leadership which everyone appreciates.

It is important to support *Bal Panchayat* because informed children means they will do good for the community when they grow up,” stated a women’s group member in Silibawari, Rajasthan. Respondents were rather encouraging about the process and linked the children’s exposure to a democratic process and its importance and impact in the long run when later in life the children grow up and participate in the democratic process at the village, district, state or national level.

As one youth group member in Chennikatte, Karnataka shared, “Elections should happen because it cultivates leadership skills and also we know how elections are conducted.” Children have also understood the significance of each person having a voice and a vote where they could participate and influence who they thought were the right people to represent them.

Even when asked about alternative methods of electing members in the *Bal Panchayat*, the community was in favour of the current democratic process and against any other method which could involve biases based on caste, community, relationship with the teachers or political motivations. “Good for them to participate in elections so that they come to know about the importance of the real elections”, the youth group member added.

There are other subtler changes that the community has observed after the implementation of the BMGs. They note that the language of children has improved. ‘Influenced by abusive elements, children often used cuss words, especially in Jharkhand, but it has gradually improved as children now engage constructively in school as well as with the community’.



Figure 4 The Bal Panchayat in Hinsla, Rajasthan managed to get the school renovated with the help of women's and youth groups despite pre-existing caste based discrimination

Since there is greater emphasis on not marrying girls until they are at least 18 years old, people have been able to access government benefits from schemes that provide monetary benefits for girls who marry after they have turned 18. Another byproduct of collective efficacy is financial forecast and planning, though it is still at a nascent stage. The community has, gradually and through practice, devised methods to forecast financial needs of the village and budget village funds accordingly.

Section 2 – Best practices and way forward

A comprehensive overview of the practices under the BMG model along with an in-depth conversation with the stakeholders in the villages reflect some of the concrete best practices about the model.

Role of activists – challenges and best practices in project execution

The project design indicates that the overall success of the intervention depends on the BMG activists more than any other component of the project. The activists serve as the implementing components between the design and impact of the project. It is therefore imperative to understand how the activists went about implementing the project, the challenges they faced and how they found solutions and mitigated any risks.

Challenges

Initially the activists faced opposition from the community when they introduced the idea of sending children to school under the CFV model to them. Since some of the villages were in Naxal affected areas of Jharkhand, safety of children was a primary concern of parents. Safety of girls was of greater concern to the parents as they feared gender based crimes aimed at their children since the area had high incidents of such crimes. Even in villages of Karnataka, parents were apprehensive about sending their children to school as the school was far away and there were fears of animal attacks on children. In Rajasthan, the BBA intervention had been going on for a longer while, hence the activists did not report any such challenges. There were questions raised to the activists, which asked them to guarantee the safety of children. One of the activists Arif was asked, “will you take responsibility if my daughter is kidnapped by naxals?”

There were questions raised about the legitimacy of the programme and many villages misunderstood the objectives of the programmes. Many activists had to face questions about the integrity of the project as well as the monetary benefits for the activists. “What does the organisation get?” or “What are your real intentions for doing this?” were some questions that activists faced especially in Jharkhand.

There was resistance from special interest groups who had direct or indirect stakes in occupations employing child labour. Local contractors, mining agents, and middlemen often posed direct threats to the activists as well as those who agreed to participate in the women and youth groups. Some teachers, with dubious records and allegations of embezzlement by the community, also posed hurdles to the activists and tried to delay the project implementation. “The local activist was terrorised but did not give in to the demands of the local goons,” recalled the Jharkhand Assistant Project Officer.

There were occasional fundamental questions about the benefit of education in the absence of employment opportunities and poor quality of education. This was one of the most difficult questions for the activists to respond to and rose universally in all three states.

Selecting members and creating women and youth groups posed intra-community challenges. Caste, tribe and sub-caste combinations posed inclusivity challenges to the activists. They wanted to ensure that all communities were included in the youth and women's group. Caste based non-mixing practices complicated the situation for the activists who had to negotiate both collectively and individually with village members. As activists in Karnataka recalled, "There are sub-castes in tribal community. Also getting all castes in the same group is a problem. Even parents object to mixing of their children with children from other castes." In some villages, different caste groups wanted to undertake their own initiatives and not create an inter-caste group. "Group selection includes caste composition. They want to take it up on their own but need information assistance from activists. Like writing applications, reaching departments, etc.," the activists added.

Language and dialect diversities also posed challenges to activists. Some tribal groups had their own language and at other places, dialects of some villages were quite distinct from the mainstream language spoken. This hindered inter-community communication. The activists in Karnataka particularly faced this problem as the villages were on Tamil Nadu border and some dialects were different from others – "It is difficult in tribal villages to work and communicate as they have their own language from the *Adi-Dravida* lingual group".

Intra-community efficacy and lack of exposure to diverse languages in some villages meant that activists had to navigate additional challenges. Some communities were expressive with the activists but not with other communities due to history of conflict with each other. The activists in Jharkhand shared, "some communities share their problems with us but are reluctant to voice at the *Panchayat* meetings."

In all three states, activists had to include migrant populations which posed challenges pertaining to lack of proof of identity to avail any government benefits as they shared that "it was difficult to include migrants not just because they were new to the villages but also because they did not have any identity proofs. This limited children from receiving scholarship money, school dresses, mid-day meals etc."

As mentioned in this report before, many tribal populations had cultural customs which obligated families to marry their children before the age of eighteen. It was difficult to break ice with that population and convey the significance of allowing children to complete their education and not marry any child who was not at least 18 years of age. This problem was common with different villages in all 3 states – "This is a big problem for activists. We do not understand where to start and how to follow up."

At some places, the local activists face challenges, as they are also part of the same community they are trying to transform. In these situations, BBA has sought help from activists who were not local.

In Jharkhand, activists often faced local threats and obstacles they couldn't tackle. Since the villages are located around mining areas, local powerful people threatened the activists and the village he/she belonged to. However, the state project coordinator located an activist from West Bengal to set up BMGs. The threats from the powerful people in mining areas didn't apply to him as he didn't have a stake in local communities. This helped him set up the BMGs and other activists could carry on with his help.

Convincing parents to send their children to school that were further away from the village was a challenge. This was especially applicable for children who graduate from a local primary/secondary school and wanted to continue their education into senior secondary/high schools, which were located further from their own village. Convincing parents of girls posed tougher challenges. Activists also found such reservation, though for a different reason most probably, was also true for accessing health care. Communities were reluctant to access health care facilities if they were located far from the village. Activist in Rajasthan mentioned, "People are more willing to send their children only within the village but reluctant to send them to other schools. Same is the case for medical issues. They use their own medicines only."

A unique problem arose in high performing schools in Karnataka, which activists discovered a few months ago. Since the most active members of *Bal Panchayat* were in senior middle school (from Class 6th-8th), they all graduated to high school leaving their positions in *Bal Panchayat* vacant. Similar cases were reported by activists in Jharkhand and Rajasthan as well, but the problem was highlighted by all activists in Karnataka.

Other than the role of Activists, some further best practices that were recognised are:

Child Participation and engagement through the creation of *Bal Panchayats*

Bal Panchayats are the fulcrum of the BMG model and in their own right can be seen as independent agents of change. *Bal Panchayats* are pivotal in setting the narrative of the discussion during community meetings. Children's issues are often seen independent of people's caste, community and religious affiliation and thus are low conflict issues to bring communities together to form youth and women's groups. Even government authorities act faster and are keen to resolve children's issues. Overall children's issues bring communities together, decide narratives for group discussions and persuade authorities to act. *Bal Panchayats* should also be observed from the perspective of child participation. UNICEF describes the right to participation as a fundamental right of children. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child identified the right to

Children find the campaigning aspect of Bal Panchayats elections most interesting. Each candidate has their slogans and at times high decibel campaigns can catch the attention of high profile Legislators. In Gendwari, candidate Pankaj Singh won the election with 43 votes and his campaign promise of availing utensils for the school kitchen and regularizing the mid-day meal schedule. The runner up Bharti Kumari had promised to address teacher absenteeism. When the Education Minister of Jharkhand, Dr Neera Yadav travelled to the school for an event on the independence day amid the ongoing campaign for Bal Panchayat Election, the Bal Panchayat candidates informed her that students did not have school uniforms. She immediately ordered uniforms and acted to register a complain against the schoolteacher who had earlier ignored the demand from the students. The students received their uniforms within a week.

participation as one of the guiding principles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child¹. Article 12 of the Convention states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard, within the family, the school or the community. *Bal Panchayats* provide a working model that fulfills the objectives of the Convention, as children are encouraged to understand administrative processes of the schools and democratic values, especially during the *Bal Panchayat* elections. This understanding espouses participation in collectively expressing what they perceive to be their rights and assertively demanding their entitlements. It was evident from excitement around the process of elections and articulation of the election process and the significance of democratic values of the *Bal Panchayat*. Across the three states, members of *Bal Panchayat* acknowledged the importance of elections and the democratic process. It was interesting to note that most children, especially those above Class 6, could articulate the importance of elections and the functions of the *Bal Panchayats*. In some villages in Jharkhand however, members of the *Bal Panchayat* struggled to articulate and comprehensively convey what their functions as *Bal Panchayat* members were. Children recognise and believe that the *Bal Panchayat* election system is fair, and also that democratic system is important. A *Bal Panchayat* member in Gopalpura, Rajasthan describes, "It provides equal opportunity to anyone who wants to contest the election. If we have any other system, we are not sure if it will be transparent or unbiased. Maybe the teacher would nominate the *Bal Panchayat* members but then they might nominate only those who are closer to them or give them some advantage. There could be bias on the basis of caste or religion. But with voting, it is unbiased because we have to elect our representative ourselves".

Children are also able to foresee that learnings from *Bal Panchayat* elections will benefit them in the long run. They are aware of village *panchayat* elections and legislative assembly elections and can draw parallels in the different processes. The Mangla *Bal Panchayat* members in Karnataka state, "Elections are good in school because children get to learn about the election procedure at the village or state level. It is good to learn democratic process because even in the Education Department there is a Parliamentary Election Division. Elections are everywhere and if we want to contest in elections in future, we already know the process and how to vote or ask for votes."

¹Convention on the Rights of the Child, Fact Sheet, UNICEF. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Right-to-Participation.pdf>

The election campaigning particularly excites the children. There was considerable excitement about the process of elections and members as well as non-members showed great interest in the election processes and campaigning. The election campaigning itself was a vivid experience for most students and they could recall who got how many votes in detail even after almost a year of elections in most places. The school principal of Mangla, Karnataka recalled, "Children were excited. They were excited to see the ballot paper, how to vote, where to mark."

Children also recalled campaigning slogans and campaign promises. In Jharkhand, common campaign promises by the members in the last panchayat were; "if you will vote for me, I will favour you", "One assured to bring back all dropout children to school", "support children to get child rights, education rights, protection, living", "I promise to make toilets in school". Similarly, campaigners in Rajasthan offered advocating for, "school kavikaas" (development of school), "Girl's toilet", "new classroom floors", "new classrooms". In Karnataka, they had already identified issues for the next election, "new building", "teachers for each language", "100% student enrollment", and "sports equipment in school".

Observers note that Bal Panchayat helps to solve issues of children that could not be recognised and addressed through individual complaints. Across states, children regularly inform their teachers about child rights issues that they observe around them. As the school Principal in Mangla, Karnataka notes, "they inform me about dropout children, studies related issues, problems about compound, toilets, rooms and drinking water. They now openly express their opinions. It is only while teaching that the children are obedient otherwise they have full freedom to express." The School principal in Silibawari, Rajasthan shares, "school development is now rapid. Earlier there was no one to appeal but children can now identify problems, and can organise themselves and find solutions. Children gain experience, know how to vote." School administration uniformly recognises that children can collectively identify issues and constructively discuss to act toward solutions. Even non-member students contact Bal Panchayat members and continuously engage with them to identify and advocate on child rights issues. The teachers in Bendi, Jharkhand inform, "Children inform the Bal Panchayats about the problems they identify and think should be discussed. Teachers also listen when all the students raise an issue together. BBA has created a platform for children and Bal Panchayat is the best platform. Individual discussion does not help as much as a group representation does."

The standardisation process is practiced by Bal Panchayats across the states. They all explained the process of grievance redressal as, "first we discuss the issue in our meetings, then we take it to the youth and women's group and write an application with their help. We then go with them to the Gram Panchayat. Often we escalate the issue to the block level authorities with the Panchayat's help but sometimes we go directly with the youth group as well." This approach has yielded measurable benefits to the Bal Panchayats in all three states. Some of the most common rights and entitlements they were able to access were- addressing teacher absenteeism, better infrastructure in the school, availing government entitlements such as school uniforms and regular and good quality mid-day meals, government provided scholarships and construction of toilets in schools.

The standardisation process is practiced by *Bal Panchayats* across the states. They all explained the process of grievance redressal as, "first we discuss the issue in our meetings, then we take it to the youth and women's group and write an application with their help. We then go with them to the Gram Panchayat.

Often we escalate the issue to the block level authorities with the Panchayat's help but sometimes we go directly with the youth group as well." This approach has yielded measurable benefits to the *Bal Panchayats* in all three states. Some of the most common rights and entitlements they were able to access were- addressing teacher absenteeism, better infrastructure in the school, availing government entitlements such as school uniforms and regular and good quality mid-day meals, government provided scholarships and construction of toilets in schools

Bal Panchayats have inculcated empathy among members especially among those who are motivated to seek education for their peers. Sili Bawdi had a history of caste discrimination and conflict. Instances of discrimination and prejudices were frequent and extended to the classroom. Children also reported instances of untouchability, both in the village and in the school. Since the village lacked unity, the activists also found it challenging to set up the stakeholder groups. As caste specific hamlets were situated far away from the village panchayat, children from those villages did not attend the school regularly. However, as the idea of *Bal Panchayat* and elections was introduced, children could relate to issues about their common welfare, irrespective of caste. After the *Bal Panchayats* were active, children started to reach out to families who did not send their children to school. Since children from all castes were in the *Bal Panchayat*, it gave confidence to those families about enrolling their own children. This also assured them that at least children in the school no longer supported caste based discrimination and that the inclusive environment in the school was now conducive for their children to attend and participate. As a result, 18 children were enrolled in the school for the first-time due to outreach from the *Bal Panchayat*. *Bal Panchayat*, with support of the activist, took other initiatives to reduce discrimination and prejudice within the village. On the festival of *Makar Sankranti* – a harvest festival – *Bal Panchayat* members went to each household as a group to eat, symbolising that children in the school no longer discriminated against each other and the village shouldn't either. With the help of the teacher and the activist, *Bal Panchayat* members also ran a postcard campaign to the authorities to demand more teachers in the school. The authorities responded by appointing 3 new teachers to their school. As teachers reported, 'caste based unity was unheard of in the village but *Bal Panchayat* changed that and now the village understands that beyond caste, there are issues that affect all citizens'. *Bal Panchayat* initiatives have also influenced the village community and people opened to the idea of women's and youth group. Women's and youth group report that instances of caste based discrimination have reduced significantly in the village.



We have got 4 walls in the school campus, main gate, toilets, a stage for the assembly, water tank and a hand-pump in the school and the number of teachers in the school has gone up from 5 to 8.” In Karnataka, *Bal Panchayat* members informed about what they have achieved in the last 2 years. “We have got a lot done in the school. We got the school compound wall constructed, we fixed the electricity problem in the school and the village, we got street lights on the village road, and an additional class 8th room was constructed after we requested the Education Department Commissioner in Bangalore.” Similarly in Jharkhand, the youth group recalls that, “there are no children are out of school anymore, roads are built with concrete, people are aware about cleanliness, people have availed gas cylinders, and boys and girls sit together in *Bal Panchayats* as well as in villages now.”

However, it is not always easy for *Bal Panchayat* members to identify and articulate what they think is their right. Participation in *Bal Panchayat* could be skewed towards older students. Children in higher classes participate in the *Bal Panchayat* overwhelmingly compared to their juniors. Older children recognise the importance of what they are achieving and are able to articulate what future demands could look like. They are also more straightforward in campaigning and putting their point forward to their teachers. As a teacher in Jharkhand notes, “Children in higher classes understand more. They understand that it is a suitable platform for them to solve their problems themselves.”

Bal Panchayat has made children quite expressive and visible. BBA organised rallies in each of the target villages and that has given children a lot of confidence. They do not shy away from putting their point across to the authorities. “We wanted our school situation to improve so we had a rally throughout the village, then wrote a letter to the *Sarpanch* which he took to the Education Department. The Education Department wrote to Rekha ma'am (the activist). This took one year but we got it done.”

There are some areas where it is difficult to determine the impact of *Bal Panchayats*. They are well supported by the women and youth group but there was no evidence to suggest that *Bal Panchayat* members would express the same confidence without activists and/or women and youth groups. The conversations and actions around environment sustainability are also minimal and except for activities like planting trees, there was not much evidence that *Bal Panchayats* actively and regularly engage on environment issues. There were also issues in Jharkhand and Karnataka that *Bal Panchayats* could include tribal issues and tribal children more proactively since the location of target villages is closer to tribal areas but the children from those areas do not participate in *Bal Panchayats* proportionally.

Efficacy of the Stakeholder groups

The responses from activists indicate that most of the activists took the route of establishing *Bal Panchayats* first and then taking the concept to the community to initiate the idea of youth and women's groups. Activists recognised that *Bal Panchayats* would not be isolated bodies and their activities will be interconnected with socio-cultural activities in the village. “It is not an isolated activity as it is interconnected with socio-cultural activities,” as one of the activist, Suman mentioned, “*Bal Panchayat* is pivotal in penetrating into social groups. With the help of children it becomes easier to talk to villagers. It is therefore necessary to have a *Bal Panchayat* before reaching out to the community.”

Before any formal structure of either the youth group or women's group can be discussed, activists built a strong rapport with the community by frequently and constructively reaching out to the community members. Activists in Jharkhand ensured that they had started helping the target villages in accessing government schemes and interacting with government officials. This allowed them to have a strong rapport with the people in the village and when they introduced the idea of youth and women's groups, villagers were receptive of the idea.

In all three states, there was a possibility of miscreants becoming part of the social groups. Activists kept a tab of people who could be included in the groups and filtered potential members.

In Jharkhand and some villages in Rajasthan, activists identified leaders within the village and assigned them proxy designations such as youth committee presidents, women's group president, group secretary, etc. These proxy designations instilled responsibility and accountability within groups and since holders of these designations were members of the community, trust in the BMG model was also established.

Some activists on the other hand created proxy-organisational structures like the *Chunav Sanchalan Samiti* (Election Coordination Committee) for *Bal Panchayats*. This ensured that community members participated in school activities and engaged with *Bal Panchayat* members. This engagement built additional pressure on the school administration to address issues raised by students. It also ensured that village members adopted the BMG model and the components of youth and women's groups as they had participated in one

of the primary components, *Bal Panchayat*. This approach also helped activists in engaging with less vocal groups and marginalised communities as their children were involved in the *Bal Panchayats* and children started talking about *Bal Panchayat* activities in their homes. Activists proudly narrated, “All groups have elected heads, anyone can bring forward issues, people may not be articulate but a little push stimulates their participation. To start the process of *Bal Panchayat* in a village, we first spoke to the villagers and created *Chunav Sanchalan Samiti* (Election Coordination Committee) and in the presence of the *Samiti*, we engaged with students to compete for elections. Election symbols were allotted, promotional materials were distributed, the villagers witnessed it all and this built immense trust with our target villages. *Adhyaksha* (President) or *Up-adhyaksha* (Vice-president) or *Sachiv* (Secretary) moderates the group.”

In Rajasthan, activists involved the *Gram Pradhans* from the initial stages and through them approached other stakeholders such as community influencers, and village elders. This ensured that the key influencers (power centres) in the village were already on board with the idea. This approach also helped in preventing any potential ego conflicts and the top down structure of engagement mitigated risks.

In Karnataka, activists worked closely with *Anganwadi* workers and took them on board with the idea. *Anganwadi* workers are government appointed health staff who provide basic public health support to the community especially for maternal and child health and vaccination programmes. Most *Anganwadi* workers are residents of their target village. Since *Anganwadi* workers have a very strong rapport with each household in the village, this approach helped activists secure strong endorsement to begin with. This strategy has been helpful throughout the project as well. Since *Anganwadi* workers are used to situations where there are possible male-female conflicts, given their work on maternal and child health and experience in breaking communication barriers, activists could always seek their support whenever they found themselves in awkward situations with the target community or families.

One practice used by the activists was to escalate issues to the government authorities. A common situation faced by the activists occurred when villagers sought direct help from the activists to avail government benefits. Many activists linked these queries with the local authorities such as the Block Development Officer (BDO) to correctly inform villagers about the help they were seeking. Activists used a similar approach in dealing with errant teachers in the school. “In schools too teachers were discriminating among the tribal and non-tribal children. We took it to the block level officers. The BDO then raised the issue with the teachers to resolve it and the teachers had to comply,” narrated activists in Karnataka. In some instances, activists supported the community members by informing them about the correct administrative processes and often connecting them to the right authority. As one activist states, “I also told and trained them about the administration process of demanding their entitlements.”

There were frequent instances when communities were apprehensive about mixing with other castes especially with those who they have had a history of conflict. Here many activists took a bottom-up approach. “First we discussed sub-caste level problems. Then got all castes together and told them the importance of coming together and voicing their issues together to the authorities. We brought all the community leaders together. Initially they did not allow any new person in the community, but they gradually opened up the villages to medical help and programs of other NGOs too,” recalled activists in Jharkhand. Activists also pointed out that success followed itself. Once the stakeholder groups started meeting and succeeded to mobilise opinion and actions, even deniers started joining the groups. Activists in Jharkhand shared, “Even people who are not part of *Yuva Mandal* approached us to address their concerns or discuss

in meetings. Some people mock in the beginning but once it starts getting operational, people also support it.”

Impact of Mixed groups

Under the project, mixed youth groups were created in the villages, which consisted of both youth and women participants in the same group. Through the project, this was initiated in a BMG model for the first time in a holistic way. This approach brought diverse opinions and priorities to the same platform. Issues specific to women’s and children’s rights could be discussed with a broader set of people comprising both males and females. It impacted mainstreaming issues in the village which would otherwise be considered women’s specific or children’s specific, only to be taken up only in women’s group or *Bal Panchayat*, respectively. With mixed youth groups, men also realised the significance of children’s rights which was earlier not part of the male discourse in villages. Mixed youth groups also improved advocacy to the authorities since now a larger and more varied group of people demanded entitlements for the village. Further, it goes without saying that mixed youth group contributed to greater gender equality with males and females engaging on a common platform to address community issues – something not seen very often in rural set-ups.

Overall success in achieving Child Friendly Villages (CFVs)

The overall success of the project in achieving Child Friendly Villages can only be assessed if all villages satisfy the 4 point criteria that constitute a Child Friendly Village: no existence of child labour, all children below 14 years of age are enrolled in schools, *Bal Panchayat* is functioning and is recognised by the *Gram Panchayat*, and youth and women’s groups are active in the village. It was observed that the project was successful in transforming the knowledge, attitude and perception of children’s rights in target villages and there was significant attribution by the people to the BMG model for having brought that change.

Mangla Higher Primary School was a good example of improved outcomes when the *Bal Panchayat* and School administration works together to demand school amenities. With the help of teachers, it had a high decibel *Bal Panchayat* election with each candidate contesting on very specific slogans – all targeting benefits to the school students. Some popular slogans were, “I’ll bring back school dropouts”, “I promise to have toilets constructed in school”, “I’ll stop child marriage in our community”, among others. This high decibel campaign caught the attention of the village *panchayat* and it took the demands of the children seriously. With the help of women’s and youth groups, the teachers got involved in the formal process of grievance redressal and helped children write structured applications the Education Department.

The organised collective effort led to a sustained pressure on the administration to resolve issues. This resulted in grievances escalated to the Education Commissioner who in turn directed it to the District Collector and Block Education officer. The school administration along with *Bal Panchayat* members had detailed discussions with the Education Department. Subsequently, the Education Department laid out a plan to fulfil the demands of the *Bal Panchayat*. Collective demanding of rights resulted in the Mangla school availing renewal of old school buildings, recruitment of teachers, drinking water facilities in the school, and school compound wall being constructed. Since the village was actively in the whole process, the village also benefitted in availing electricity in the village, streetlights in the *panchayat* area, drinking water facilities, and an eradication of child marriages in the *panchayat*. Moreover, sustained efforts have also led to eradication of school dropouts and enrollment and attendance of previously irregular or out of school children.

No child labour and 100% school enrollment

Almost all villages reported that child labour at the time of the assessment was non-existent. Among the villages where primary data was collected, respondents categorically denied existence of child labour while adding that child labour did exist previously in each of the villages and has been eradicated in the last two years.

However, it should be noted that though child labour per se may be non-existent, there may be indicators that suggest that the risk of a child falling into the trap of child labour has not been eradicated completely. As the Project Officer in Jharkhand clarifies, “child labour may not exist now, but an eye has to be kept on borderline child labour cases, as though it may appear that children are only engaged or supporting in household chores but may actually fall back into child labour.” The risk is higher in villages which are closer to mining fields. Jharkhand is at a greater risk as a lot of children rescued from child labour were rescued from mining sites. About 89 children were rescued from such sites in the last two years in Jharkhand and were enrolled in schools by project activists. The activists recalled, “We stressed on the importance of enrolling children in schools in our conversations with parents, but reaching out to villages by the activists helped more. They used to mine mica or timber but not anymore. They have forgotten about mica.”

However, being rescued from child labour does not imply that the child will enroll back in school. Stakeholders in Bendi reported that about 8-10 children did not attend school although reasons were not very clear, also since no child marriage had been reported since 2010.

In the nearby Gendwadih village, Jharkhand, children never went to school regularly but went to households for work instead. They were convinced by activists to go to school by warning them that there will be an enquiry if they do not go. The activists indicated that there was no fear among children about an enquiry and other villagers also did not know how to persuade those families. "However, with BBA's persistent efforts, 100% children from the village go to school", said a youth group member. In another village, the *Bal Panchayat* carried rallies for the last 2 years to convince people for school enrollment which led to 30 new enrollments.

In Guddekere, Karnataka, there are 4-6 children who are not regular to school and though reasons unknown, stakeholders were confident that it was not a case of child labour. Activists in Karnataka were adamant that there was no incidence of child labour anymore and no one is married before 18 years of age. They insisted that the actual age is now 20 years or more for females. In Mangla district, which has one of the bigger schools in the area, 14 new students were enrolled in the last year and further 22 children were going to school regularly and the activist claimed that the school had reached 100% enrollment.

In Sili Bawdi, Rajasthan, the *Bal Panchayat* carried out a rally to promote school enrollment and as a result, 19 new students were enrolled. The village now claims 100% school enrollment. There was an incident of a family who did not allow their a girl child to attend school in Hinsla but were convinced by the *Bal Panchayat* to do so. Gopalpura, Rajasthan had 45 new students rescued from child labour and enrolled in school.



Figure 9 Members of the ManglaBal Panchayat in the newly built classroom which they had demanded earlier

A functioning and recognised *Bal Panchayat*

Bal Panchayats functioned in all villages that were visited during the assessment. All the *Bal Panchayats* could perform their list of tasks. Regarding establishing the recognition of the *Bal Panchayats* by the Gram Panchayats from the field visits is difficult, given that was difficult to get time with the *Gram Pradhans* in all villages visited. Thus, alternative indicators were used to assess the same, the most prominent being the qualitative interaction of *Bal Panchayats* with *Gram Panchayats*.

Bal Panchayats in Karnataka were most expressive and vocal and could articulate their specific achievements over the last two years. However, *Bal Panchayats* in Karnataka also faced high attrition due to graduation of middle school members to high school, often a different school. The activists reported that children who graduated to high school had continued the tradition of *Bal Panchayats* in their new schools. *Gram Panchayats* in Karnataka seemed to be cooperative with the *Bal Panchayat* and there was evidence to suggest that *Bal Panchayats* were in constructive and regular interaction with the *Gram Panchayat*. One of the youth group members put it as, “Some *Gram Panchayat* members also invited children to attend *Gram Sabhas*. They give regular invitations to attend. Whatever the problems brought up by *Bal Panchayat* in those meeting, it is honoured by the *Gram Panchayat*.”

In Rajasthan, children were not as vocal as those in Karnataka. However, it could not be implied that they were any less productive than their counterparts in the Southern state. Children were articulate and clearly outlined what they had achieved in the last two years, girls being more articulate than boys. However, the Gram Panchayats seemed more hostile in Hinsla.

The Sarpanch did not budge to the demands of the *Bal Panchayat* members. *Bal Panchayat* members recalled, “the Sarpanch first ignored us when we told him that we wanted to organise a rally to encourage school enrollment, but we persisted and got it done. We rallied for school Chalo Abhiyan (Let’s Go to School Campaign). Sarpanch said ‘*jo karna hai kar lo*’ (do whatever you want). So, we took those words to other members of the Panchayat, about his dis interest and bad language.”

It is difficult to say that Hinsla’s *Bal Panchayat* was recognised by the *Gram Panchayat*. In nearby Gadhasai though, *Gram Panchayat* was more welcoming of the *Bal Panchayat*.

The BMG model also acts as a supportive agent of change for those trying to reform the system from within. Often the *Bal Panchayat* initiatives aid the school administration in availing entitlements by adding weight to the identified needs for the school infrastructure. The school Principal in Guddekerre revealed, “We had been writing to the Education Department for more teachers as we needed a couple of extra teachers in the school. We did not get a positive response for six months. However, when the issue was raised in the *Bal Panchayat* and escalated to the Education Department by the youth and women’s group, faster response from the Department was evident. The application went to the Deputy Director of Education and the school administration was approached to list their demands for the school. The engagement between the school administration and the authorities increased and within two months, the school received two new teachers, improvement in school infrastructure and even nearby schools benefitted as they also received new teacher appointments. When the *Bal Panchayat* escalates an issue, the stakes go up and the response increases. It also encourages school administration to engage with the *Bal Panchayat* constructively.”

Active and functioning youth and women’s group in each village

All villages visited for the assessment had active women and youth groups. The common feature of these groups being an overwhelming domination of women in these groups even after adjusting for bias that might have emerged due to timing of interviews. Karnataka’s women and youth groups were especially skewed in favour of women. Even during a focused group discussion in Chennikatte, men seemed indifferent to the proceedings while women spoke articulately. In villages which had livelihood linkages to environment protection, women seemed to dominate production and processing.

Women and youth groups provide substantial support to *Bal Panchayats* as the more literate elders help young *Bal Panchayat* members to write letters, go through processes, and follow up on availing benefits. There were challenges in creating these groups from scratch but none of the activists reported any long term difficulty in operating or guiding these groups.

These groups also provide negotiation support to *Bal Panchayats* whenever the latter has to communicate with other community members or government authorities. Overall, all villages can be described as functional child friendly villages with each component of the project working in tandem with the other.

Replicability of the BMG model

Women's group has provided autonomy to women across villages. One of the first decisions that women have taken across states is financial planning. This has been demonstrated in two distinct acts. The first act usually is to ban selling and purchase of alcohol around villages. This increases household savings for women as men don't spend limited household income on purchasing alcohol – also preventing them from addiction. Alcohol has been prohibited in all three states but continues to be a problem across the three as it can be procured through illegal vendors.

The other and more effective financial management step, though limited to a smaller number of villages, has been formation of self-help groups for financial inclusion. In Chennikate, women have organised small self-help groups, obtained *Aadhaar* card and opened bank accounts for their SHGs. This enabled them to access loan facilities from the banks at low interest for their children's higher education. Women deposit Rs 2/day or Rs 50/month and this small amount enables them to collectively fund higher education of children every year. Since there are only 1-2 children seeking this funding in their village, the money has been sufficient so far.

Empowering local human resource: The strength of the BMG model lies in establishing grassroots structures with **proactive citizens who are residents of target villages**. Local human resource is indeed a strength of the project as it enables customisation of methods and processes within the village. Each village is distinct in terms of how frequently the stakeholder groups meet and engage, size of each group, inter-group engagement, and interaction with respective *Gram Panchayats*. This allows activists the freedom to let people organise themselves according to the convenience of the community. This freedom is especially productive in absorbing local culture, traditions and festivals and linking them with BMG initiatives, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the model.

Conformity with existing democratic institutions: The BMG model works with existing institutions such as school administration, *Anganwadi* workers, *Gram Panchayats* and the authorities. This allows the activists to proactively engage with institutions wherever required. While the model has brought efficiency and transparency in these existing institutions by encouraging people to demand their rights and question those who may be obstructing the same, it works well with the official mandate of these institutions without conflict. This aspect is critical because the objective of these institutions, is also to deliver government entitlements efficiently.

With this advantage, the model can be replicated both, in design and across thematic areas.

Replicability across thematic areas: It can be argued that the model is suitable for any project that targets community organisation and collective bargaining of rights and/or entitlements. Even without a strong component of child rights, the model can be replicated as the youth and women's group are powerful agents of change and in fact cover the critical demographic required to engage and influence people. For instance, thematic areas such as livelihoods, safe migration, gender rights, adolescent education which require strong community engagement components, can be tackled by replicating the BMG/CFV model.

Replicability across resource settings: Similarly, the model can be replicated in different resource settings, more so in limited resource settings. Countries or states with focus on propagating child rights through community participation could adopt and if required customise the model to achieve similar results. Since the project works with existing democratic institutions for governance, the components can be restructured to work with those institutions. Even countries with different or non-existent *Panchayati Raj* systems could absorb these components to have the women's and youth group and the *Bal Panchayat* engage with lower bureaucracy or any existing form of governance at the grassroots.

Engagement as end benefit: The project does not have a monetary component but engagement and organisation as end benefits, which makes expansion and replication flexible. There may be monetary or in-kind benefits for the beneficiaries but they are availed through the government and not the implementing organisation. The focus on channeling community organisation to demand benefits from the government also reduces scope for corruption or influence by project influencers, in this case the activists.

Interaction with political influences: What is important to understand is the interaction of the model with political influences. In the target states, there was no instance of political conflict or obstacle for either the activist or the stakeholders. However, in settings where availing government entitlements is correlated with political affiliation, areas with high direct corruption and low monitoring of resource allocation, participation of stakeholder might reduce or availing end benefits may become less efficient. Having said that, creation of *Bal Panchayat* is a strong mitigating factor as it appeals to people with varied political affiliation as well as demands from children are met with a greater rate of response from authorities compared to those made by women's and youth group.

Way forward

The project could scope up-scaling the model to the *Panchayat* level rather than village level. There are regular and indeed essential interactions with the *Gram Panchayat* as institutional process which imply that government benefits are availed and grievances are addressed through the *Gram Panchayat*. There are also districts where there is a single bigger school for all villages of the *Gram Panchayat* rather than separate schools for each village. In such scenarios, it becomes essential to form *Bal Panchayats* in these bigger schools and streamline its process with those of the *Gram Panchayat*.

A quantified and organised curriculum that lists precise discussion points for the *Bal Panchayat* will also benefit the children. A target based approach with pre-defined criteria for an 'ideal' *Bal Panchayat* can be outlined and a module or list of activities can be created. It was often seen that beyond basic amenities, the *Bal Panchayat* can struggle to identify issues relevant to its function on a periodic basis. More often, *Bal Panchayats* identified issues as they arose. The BMG model could incorporate some customisable criteria

for a successful BMG and criteria for an 'ideal' school, which the *Bal Panchayat* members could aspire to achieve. It will also put pressure on the administration to comply.

Since the *Bal Panchayat* model exists in large and varied parts of the country, the BMG model could explore the possibility of creating a standardised method of measuring school function competency. There are other organisations that have to collect data across the country to identify how schools are performing or how learning standards or schools are evolving. The BMG model could explore the possibility of measuring the same since it specialises in organising students for collective efficacy of the *Bal Panchayat*.

The model faces a challenge in terms of withdrawing from villages. Although, youth and women's group claim that they can carry the BMG model on their own without any support from the activist, they always mention a caveat that participation may reduce due to a lack of an organiser. The model could develop a different withdrawal strategy especially one integrating the model with the components of *Gram Panchayat*. The environment and sustainability component of the project is expected to evolve in both precision and exactness over the course of time. The stakeholders could be supported by specific objectives, localised for target villages or districts. For instance, villages in Karnataka could have trainings focused on forest based livelihoods or non-timber forest produce and villages in Rajasthan and Jharkhand could have trainings customised for water conservation or water resource management for rain-fed area agriculture. As mentioned for the *Bal Panchayats*, a structured curriculum of community engagement on environmental issues will help activists to engage more productively with the community and reach specified objectives. Having said that, environmental initiatives undertaken so far could be considered a success given the short time span and the novelty of the initiatives. The BMG model is overall highly impactful in terms of achieving the main objective which is to constitute Child Friendly Villages. Going forward, whichever route the BMG takes, a strong emphasis on women's group and empowering women in general would benefit all the other components of the model. The success of the BMG model is pivoted around the functioning of the women's group. Even in areas where mixed youth groups were explored, women were the more engaged participants and were a strong binding factor in reducing caste based discrimination and emphatically advocating for child rights. There may be settings in which this model is replicated and/or upscaled, but the women's group will be pivotal to the success of the BMG model.

Annexures

Annexure 1: FGD Guide for discussion with Activists

1. Group organisation

- a) How easy/difficult was it to organise groups? Can you give me instances of hurdles and success stories? What made you decide to participate in the children's parliament?
- b) Did everyone participate in the meeting from the beginning. What was the drop out like? What efforts did you put to sustain the groups?
- c) How did the group moderation start? Did you directly help in moderating group? Any specific case?
- d) Are groups easily able to reach a decision? What was the process of conflict management?
- e) Did the teachers support in creating/moderating groups?
- f) What was the uptake of women's and youth groups? What were the main hurdles in convincing people to join the groups?
- g) Can you give me an example of one decision that the 3 groups have reached in each of your villages?

2. Group novelty/uniqueness – conveying the democratic process

- a) Did you find it difficult or easy to convey the importance of democratic processes to the stakeholders?
- b) How was the understanding of democratic processes different among children and adults?
- c) How was the uptake different?
- d) Did you find it difficult to engage with a particular section (caste/religion/age) over others? Was it the same in schools?
- e) Do you feel stakeholders show a distinct level of confidence and efficacy in addressing people's needs or voicing their own opinion?
- f) Do stakeholders happen to be proactive once they become part of a group?

3. Group efficacy

- a) Is there a distinction in knowledge and awareness levels of the village about issues?
- b) What is the consistency of events where stakeholders reach out to you for support compared to events where they resolved issues on their own?
- c) Can you give examples of issues in your villages where groups have actively advocated with authorities and brought a desired change?

4. Issues or action specific

- a) What is the difference between how each of the 3 groups act and resolve issues? Are they comparable? How and can you give cases?
- b) What are the most pressing issues that are frequently discussed?
- c) Are there issues which are common across villages?
- d) Can you give me some environment specific issues that were discussed and/or acted upon?
- e) Is it difficult/easier to engage on environmental issues? Why or why not?
- f) Do you think the problem of child labour still exists in village? Why or why not?
- g) Is there anyone in this group that used to work before or do you know anyone who did? How was the transition? Did the parliament or other groups help them?
- h) Do you think this the parliament and groups can run without BBA help?

Annexure 2: FGD Guide for discussion with *Bal Panchayat* Members

1. Group participation

- h) What made you decide to participate in the children's parliament?
- i) Did all of you participate in each meeting?
- j) Do you feel empowered/special being a member of the parliament? How is it different from being a regular student?
- k) What do you discuss in the parliament? Tell me something about how you reach a decision?
- l) Who decides the issues to be discussed in the meetings? How do you escalate issues?
- m) Can you cite some cases/examples in which school or village authorities acted after parliament advocacy?
- n) How do you get selected for the group? Do you think it is a fair process or anything that you would like changed? Did you enjoy the process of elections? Do you think there should be another way of selecting candidates?

2. Group novelty/uniqueness

- g) Do you think this group has provided a unique platform for discussing children's/your issues? How? If not for the parliament, do you think you could have discussed these issues in the school otherwise?
- h) Are you aware of the role of BBA activists? Are you in touch with them? How do they help you?
- i) Do you feel comfortable discussing issues in the parliament setting?
- j) Why do you think the parliament was necessary in schools?
- k) Was there any opposition to form parliaments? Who were the opposing stakeholders? How did you resolve or mitigate the opposition, if you did?
- l) Do you get special respect or recognition by your peers that you are a parliament participant? Can you give me an instance which made you feel so?
- m) Do your peers look up to you to bring or resolve issues? Can you give examples?

3. Group efficacy

- d) Do you feel informed about issues related to child labour? Is it easy to address those issues?
- e) Who all do you think are supporting stakeholders to make your job easier – in school or outside? (prompt activists)
- f) Do you think that discussing issues in the parliament gives you an advantage over taking up issues on your own?
- g) Have authorities listened to you more seriously as parliament than they would if you brought up issues alone or with your parents/others? Why do you think that is? Can you give me an example of that happening?
- h) How important is the democratic set up?/ Why do you think the democratic set is important? Would you rather have it another way?
- i) Is the parliament placed at a position in which it can affect outcomes or persuade authorities to act? Can you give me an example?

4. Issues or action specific

- i) Are you aware of the youth and women's groups? Have you participated in or observed any of their activities or collaborated with them? Have they reached out to you? Can you give an example?
- j) How do you think it has helped the cause of child labour or things that are important to you?
- k) Can you cite some examples where children's parliament alone or in conjunction with other group brought some change in the school/village at any level?
- l) Do you think the problem of child labour still exists in village? Why or why not?

- m) Is there anyone in this group that used to work before or do you know anyone who did? How was the transition? Did the parliament or other groups help them?
- n) Do you think there are environmental issues in the village? Have you discussed issues related to the environment? If so, what were the major issues?
- o) How different is the experience of discussing environment issues compared to child labour issues? Are you equally interested? Are decisions reached for both issues at the same pace?
- p) Is there any other issue that you think should be discussed but hasn't been yet?
- q) Do you think this the parliament can run without BBA help?

Annexure 3: FGD Guide for discussion with Women and Youth Groups

1. Group participation

- o) What made you decide to participate in the youth/women's group of BBA?
- p) Did all of you participate in each meeting in this village.
- q) I want you to think back and tell me about some of the key issues that you recall from those meetings.
- r) Who decided the issues to be discussed in the meetings?
- s) Can you cite some cases/examples in which authorities acted after group advocacy?
- t) How do you get selected for the group? Do you think it is a fair process or anything that you would like changed?
- u) Do you feel empowered or special within the village that you're a member of a group? Do you get respected or acknowledged for that? Can you give me an example?

2. Group novelty/uniqueness

- n) Do you think this group has provided a unique platform for discussing children's/village issues? How? If not for these groups, do you think you could have discussed these issues in the village otherwise?
- o) Are you aware of the role of BBA activists? Are you in touch with them? How do they help you?
- p) Do you feel comfortable discussing issues in the village? Do you feel the groups were required in the village? Why?
- q) Was there any opposition to form groups? Who were the opposing stakeholders? How did you resolve or mitigate the opposition, if you did?
- r) Do your peers look up to you to bring or resolve issues? Can you give examples?

3. Group efficacy

- j) Do you feel informed about issues related to child labour and environment? Is it easy to address those issues?
- k) Do you think that discussing issues as a group gives you an advantage over taking up issues on your own?
- l) Have authorities listened to you more seriously as a group than they would if you brought up issues alone or just your social group? Why do you think that is? Can you give me an example of that happening?
- m) Is the group placed at a position of advocacy in which it can affect outcomes or persuade authorities to act? Can you give me an example?
- n) As a village or as a social group (being a woman or being a youth) do you feel empowered to take more interest in village level issues? Can you tell me how it is different from not having a group?
- o) Is the process democratic? Why do you think democratic set up is important?

4. Issues or action specific

- r) Are you aware of the children's parliament? Have you participated in or observed any of their activities? Have they reached out to you? Can you give an example?
- s) How do you think it has helped the cause of child labour or environment?
- t) Can you cite some examples where children's parliament alone or in conjunction with your group brought some change in the village at any level?
- u) Do you think the problem of child labour still exists in village? Why or why not?
- v) Is there anyone you know who used to work before? How was the transition? Did the parliament or other groups help them?

- w) Have you discussed issues related to the environment? If so, what were the major issues?
- x) How different is the experience of discussing environment issues compared to child labour issues? Are people equally interested? Are decisions reached for both issues at the same pace?
- y) Do you think these groups and/or the parliament can run without BBA help on auto pilot?

Annexure 4: In Depth Interview of Influencers

1. Tell me about the social construct of your village?
2. What role have women's and children's group played in the village?
3. Do you think it is important to have those groups in the village? Why do you think so?
4. Do you actively interact with those groups? In what capacity do you engage with them?
5. Can you give me an idea about the activities carried out in the last one year by those groups?
6. Were those activities relevant to the needs of the village?
7. What has been the impact of those activities in the village?
8. What's your view on the collaboration of groups?
9. Can you give me cases of change that happened because of this process? It can include any beneficiary, a story, a hearsay etc.
10. What overall change do you see in the village level decision making process?
11. Who all is an important stakeholder to successfully carry out those activities?
12. These groups have a largely democratic structure, do you think it is important to have that? Do you think this model is a long-term solution?
13. Before the groups were formed, how did the village organize itself to bring issues to the attention of authorities? How were those issues resolved?
14. Do you feel stakeholders show a distinct level of confidence and efficacy in addressing people's needs or voicing their own opinion?
15. Is there is distinction in knowledge and awareness levels of the village about issues?
16. Have you interacted with the BBA activists? Do you think these groups would be possible without BBA support?
17. Do you think the problem of child labour still exists in village? Why or why not?
18. Do you think the village is poised to continue these groups with BBA support? Why or why not?

Annexure 5: List of villages

Panchayat	Block	District	State
Gajhandi	Koderma	Koderma	Jharkhand
Bendi	Chandwara	Koderma	Jharkhand
Bendi	Chandwara	Koderma	Jharkhand
Jarga	Koderma	Koderma	Jharkhand
Inderwa	Koderma	Koderma	Jharkhand
Jarga	Koderma	Koderma	Jharkhand
Bendi	Chandwara	Koderma	Jharkhand
Inderwa	Koderma	Koderma	Jharkhand
Kyara	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
Sili Bawdi	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
Saleta	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
Kyara	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
Malutana	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
Malutana	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
Sili Bawdi	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
Mangla	Gundlupet	Chamarajanagar	Karnataka
Mangla	Gundlupet	Chamarajanagar	Karnataka
Mangla	Gundlupet	Chamarajanagar	Karnataka
Mangla	Gundlupet	Chamarajanagar	Karnataka
Mangla	Gundlupet	Chamarajanagar	Karnataka
Mangla	Gundlupet	Chamarajanagar	Karnataka
Mangla	Gundlupet	Chamarajanagar	Karnataka
	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan
Gadhbasai	Alwar	Thanagachi	Rajasthan



GLOBAL MARCH

Against Child Labour
Contra el Trabajo Infantil
Contre le Travail des Enfants

Global March Against Child Labour (Foundation):

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Global March International Secretariat:

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