



CHILD FRIENDLY VILLAGE
FRAMEWORK FOR
FUTURE ACTION
FOR ENDING
CHILD LABOUR



GLOBAL MARCH

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



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Glossary

Bal Mitra Gram	Child Friendly Village
Bal Panchayat	Children's Council
Gram Panchayat	Local self-government organisation in India at the village or small-town level
Sarpanch	Village head
Up-Sarpanch	Village sub-head
Mahila Mandal	Women's group
Panchayat	Oldest system of local government in Indian subcontinent, consisting of wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the local community
Yuva Mandal	Youth Groups

Introduction

While we as the world and the development community have made significant progress in many areas from reducing poverty, to reducing deaths from malaria, to making greater investments in renewable energy, we still have much to do in terms of protecting the rights of our youngest population – our children. Millions of children across the world are toiling in work, often in deplorable conditions. They are denied of their childhood and basic rights such as access to education, safety and leisure, among others. Many are trafficked to work in slavery like conditions not only within their countries, but also across borders. Globally, as many as 168 million children continue to be engaged in child labour, with 85 million of them in work that is hazardous for their wellbeing and development (International Labour Organization, 2013). Further, as many as 264 million girls and boys across the world remain out-of-school, many of them toiling in work (UNESCO, 2017).

Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) – a worldwide network of non-governmental organisations, trade unions, and teachers' associations has been working to protect, promote and realise the rights of such children engaged in child labour, and ensure that all children receive free, good quality and meaningful education. The evolution of Global March which began in 1998 with an 80,000 kilometre physical march involving children, youth and adults marching through Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Europe calling for a stronger international treaty on child labour has since then achieved historic results through coordinated efforts at the national, regional, and international level.

As a part of its goal for ending child labour, including its strategy to support as well as promote good practices/models that contribute to ending child labour, Global March Against Child Labour has been running a project in India titled, "**Child Friendly Villages in Rural India**". The main objective of the project is to foster strong and organic grass-roots civil society structures by engaging and empowering children, young people and the community at large, promoting civic engagement, sustainable development, and democratic values to particularly address the issues of child labour and illiteracy.

This project is being implemented along with Global March's India partner – **Bachpan Bachao Andolan**¹ (BBA) in 20 villages and 7 hamlets of Jharkhand, Karnataka and Rajasthan, the states where BBA already has its presence. Within these states, the project is covering identified villages in three districts – one each in Jharkhand (district Koderma), Rajasthan (district Alwar) and Karnataka (Chamarajanagar). Moreover, the project intervention villages cover caste and tribal villages.

The project is modelled on BBA's **Bal Mitra Gram**TM (BMG) or **Child Friendly Village**TM (CFV) intervention² - a novel and a pioneering concept that was adopted by BBA under the aegis of Nobel Peace Laureate and founder of BBA, Kailash Satyarthi in

¹ Registered as Association for Voluntary Action (AVA) in India

² The model has essentially been conceptualised as Bal Mitra Gram, but for this paper the term – Child Friendly Village would be used to appeal the global audience.

2001 to make villages and wards in India child labour free, where every child could attend school.

This is in conformity with the broad objective of BBA, which stands for total elimination of child labour, ensuring education to all children and empowerment of communities through collective action and democratic participation towards addressing common problems, using a rights-based approach³. 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) that serves as an effective tool to influence the decision making process and ensuring the participation of children at the micro level.

The intent of this paper is to develop a framework for Child Friendly Village intervention by taking evidence from the field, which is generalised enough, so that actors working in other contexts to address child labour and ensure education can use the same. Of course, it goes without saying that actors operating outside India would need to model it or adapt it to fulfill their needs. However, once a framework is available, it also becomes clear for organisations carrying out interventions in a locality to deviate from the existing framework and work on the strategy required.

Therefore, the two broad objectives of this paper are:

1. To document the Child Friendly Village intervention, which is based on a rights-based model, as it brought changes in intervention villages in three states of India - Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Karnataka under the project; and
2. To develop from the evidence, a rights-based framework of Child Friendly Villages that may support replication of this intervention beyond these three states

While the paper is seeking to develop a framework for Child Friendly Villages, this requires evidential support from the field. For this purpose, the present paper comprises data from the three intervention states in India where Global March is implementing the project through its India partner BBA. Therefore, while the evidences will focus on specific collective action oriented results related to the community issues, it is the reflection on process and embedded-ness of the intervention of Child Friendly Villages in the wider institutional context that will provide the framework for intervention in other states in India.

Social Exclusion and Rights of the Children

The solution to child labour is not straightforward in a country like India where historical exclusion and social injustice prevails on the grounds of caste, gender and religion. Even after almost 70 years of independence, India continues to face challenges in

³ Rights-based approach or the human rights based approach is a framework for the process of development based on the international human rights standards. The focus of this approach is to eliminate discrimination and inequalities that impede the process of development. In contrast to service provision approach, the rights-based approach seeks to empower individuals and communities for long-term social change.

protection of children, mainly due to years of historical exclusion and marginalisation of certain communities. Disadvantaging certain groups from childhood contributes to the inter-generational cycle of poverty and illiteracy and also has tragic personal consequences for the children.

For instance - there are estimated to be 170-200 million *Dalits*⁴ constituting 17% of the India's population at the bottom of the caste system, typically considered 'low' and 'impure' based on their birth and traditional occupation, facing multiple forms of discrimination, violence, and exclusion from the rest of society (Census of India, 2011). *Dalit* children make up the majority of those sold into bondage to pay off debts to dominant-caste creditors and Dalit women and girls face the triple burden of caste, class, and gender and have often been sexually exploited.

The marginalisation of socially excluded communities often leads to violation of children's right to development and protection and denial of free and quality education and adds to the vulnerability of children, forcing them into social evils of child labour and crime. Let us take one example of data collected by BBA on trafficking of children in India. Since 2008, the organisation has meticulously maintained a data management system for all children rescued from child labour in multiple raids organised by the organisation with the help of police, the labour department and district administration. Since BBA began to use the data management system to record details on all rescued children, the organisation has recorded details for 9090 children⁵. Out of these children, 4054 children were from Muslim background constituting almost 45% of all rescued children. Considering that Muslims constitute 14.5% of the total Indian population (Census 2011), their proportion in trafficked children is much higher in comparison to their population size.

BBA has also kept data, where the caste to which the children rescued by BBA belonged to can be verified. Out of the total of 649 children for whom the data is available, only 182 children (28%) are from the general categories. Rest of the children are from Other Backward Castes (39%), Scheduled Castes (27%) and Scheduled Tribes (6%). This data demonstrates that in most instances of trafficking, it is children from the Muslim communities, followed by Other Backward Castes, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities, who form the majority of the victims of trafficking, when we eliminate responses where the caste of a child could not be verified.

This situation gets further reflected in the trafficking of women for forced labour. While there is sufficient anecdotal evidence that points to prevalence of trafficking rings for trafficking of girls for domestic slavery in states and districts with higher Scheduled Tribes population, unfortunately there is little evidence gathering nationally to develop comprehensive data for victims of trafficking in general and victims being employed as domestic servants in particular.

A paper developed by the V. V. GIRI NATIONAL LABOUR INSTITUTE in India corroborates this observation. Thus, in most instances where trafficking of children

⁴ A term used for the members of lower caste in India

⁵ Data as on 12 April 2017

happens in India, it disproportionately affects women and children primarily from marginal communities. Therefore, the intersectionality of caste and gender has a significant bearing on the nature of forced labour, slavery and trafficking in India and eventually on the notion of social justice. It is against this backdrop and in this context that the Child Friendly Village intervention was conceived and developed, aiming at approaching the interrelated issues of poverty, education, caste and gender to be dealt with simultaneously for substantive progress towards creating rights-based approach for protection of children and welfare of communities.

This social inequality has also historically been responsible for illiteracy in India where the illiterate population is today larger than the country's population at the time of Independence in 1947. Even today, the dropout rates at the primary schooling level are still high (IDH-UNICEF Working Paper 6, 2010). Drop-out rates in classes I-VIII is 42.39% (Children in India-2012); 50% women between 20-24 years were married before 18 (National Family Health Survey-3); 452,679 cases of trafficking were reported but prosecution launched only in 8% of cases (Government of India, 2013); 90,654 children go missing annually, with 16,595 investigated (Missing Children in India, 2011); and 4.9 million child labourers (National Statistical Survey Organisation (NSSO), 2009-10) continue to work in exploitative conditions.

Numbers from states such as Jharkhand, Karnataka and Rajasthan where the Child Friendly Villages project of Global March and BBA operates, indicate the need for child friendly spaces in areas and communities most affected by social injustice. Jharkhand for example has the third highest student dropout rates at 12.62% - a rate much higher than national average; 2% of total child labour in India; and 1.65% of total out of school children (Children in India, 2012). The districts of Koderma and Giridih 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 alone has much higher student dropout 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 of Rajasthan demonstrates a higher level of literacy rate of 71% (Census of India, 2011), its child sex ratio has worsened since 2001 and it is amongst the districts in Rajasthan with high prevalence of child marriages. It also indicates that marriage below legal age is more in rural areas.

In addition to the underlying social issues afflicting these three intervention areas, the economic situation also needs attention. For example, the Unemployment Rate (UR) in India is estimated to be 13.3 per cent among age groups 15-29. Jharkhand has higher unemployment rate (22.8% - 10th position) than the national average falling much

before Rajasthan (8.8%) and Karnataka (5.2%) (NSSO, 2011- 2012).

Even though the Government of India has initiated various efforts to strengthen legislation, rehabilitation and protection of children, there is a need to strengthen families and communities to achieve micro-level community engagement and problem solving, by adopting child centric development practices to protect and empower children themselves with enforceable knowledge on their rights. It is in this context that the right to participation and protection of children be understood as quintessential to the concept and intervention of Child Friendly Villages as it is one of the most contentious and yet potentially powerful domains of child rights.

Collective Action

Promoting and protecting the rights of the children and ensuring their voices are not only heard but get translated into action, needs inclusive and collective interventions, more so when inequalities exist at deeper levels in society's structure. The government and the civil society have long tackled the issues of the children, in particular addressing the violations of their rights either by itself or collectively, without the active participation of the people and children themselves (Rahnema: 1992). However, it is increasingly being realised that without active participation of children, women and men, policy and programme initiatives will not deliver, certainly not in any inclusive way.

Participation of the target population helps in mobilising public awareness as well as building a strong sense of ownership of policies and programmes. It also creates greater transparency and accountability, holding responsible duty bearers on their promises. Such initiatives at the local level are also invaluable in bringing local issues, problems, aspirations and needs into sharper focus, so that indigenous fixes and organic solutions can be provided for them. In order to work towards creating such participation, collective action is needed where a number of people work together to achieve a shared objective.

It is also recognised that individuals often fail to act collectively to achieve a common good (Gillinson: 2004). This is primarily because of individual self-interests that may not coincide. One such example is the interest of caste in India. There are sociological and anthropological studies of the system that demonstrate how the caste hierarchy in India has had a significant influence on how people behave (Srinivas: 1962). Therefore, the notion of collective action is of great significance especially in a situation where structural inequalities such as caste continue to influence everyday lives including lives of children. Of course, it is not the argument in this paper to suggest that caste is the only structural and organisational principle that operates in rural India. The notion of gender is equally significant on how it shapes lives and expectations of children, young people and adult members of a community.

There are other reasons why collective action is of significance. Since collective action seeks to instil behaviour in a community to address common problems to realise change, in the Indian context caste and gender create boundaries across which interaction is non-existent or minimal as is the realisation of problems that are common

across caste and gender boundaries. This non-existing communication while being a primary reason for existing inequalities, compounds further inequalities once administrative interventions begin to take shape in a community. It is therefore not surprising that the communities that have faced economic, political and social marginalisation historically continue to demonstrate a higher level of marginalisation even though the Indian state is premised on welfare principles.

Children and women, who have had little power in patriarchal system in most of the India, continue to face the challenges in a modern and developing economy. One of the most crucial reasons is that the individuality of a child has hardly been appreciated in Indian society. The concept of a child's right to participate has been unconceivable for most and children as they are often viewed as – dependent and vulnerable, devoid of maturity and sense to take suitable decisions for their life.

On the contrary, ample experiences across the world demonstrate children's critical analysis of the reality, their maturity and precision in making decisions time and again. Empirical evidences show that wherever children's right to participation is ensured through creating systems such as Child Friendly Spaces, Children's Parliament (*Bal Panchayat*), Children's house (*Bal Sadan*), remarkable results have been observed. Children have raised voice against evil practices like child labour, child marriage and even caste and gender based practices (Kaushik and Nagvanshi: 2016).

It can therefore be concluded that in order to address the issues of the rights of the children, in particular child labour and illiteracy, the intervention should focus on the fault-lines based on caste and gender that exist in rural India. These fault lines also function as the fault-lines for trafficking and forced labour among historically marginalised communities, which requires an approach that addresses such drawbacks and keeps the children and communities at the focus of development paradigm. Collective action along with rights embeddedness and understanding is one such approach which brings children, communities and other stakeholders at a platform where they not only understand the organic relationship between their needs and rights but also participate democratically to reach and pursue sustainable solutions for prevention of violation of their rights and move towards development that is integrated and endurable.

Child Friendly Villages: Conceptual Foundation and Early Development

While describing the dehumanising effects of inequalities, Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1972) writes that '*the problem of humanisation has always been humankind's central problem; it now takes a character of an inescapable concern. The concern for humanisation leads at once to the recognition of dehumanisation not only as an ontological possibility but as an historical reality*'. Of course, Freire was writing in the 1970s in the Latin American context. Nevertheless, his critical analysis of pedagogy is helpful in understanding how inequalities subjugate communities that are historically marginal. This understanding will help us appreciate the conceptual

foundations of Child Friendly Villages, an intervention that seeks to tackle such inequalities that cause dehumanisation of persons through combining social justice and human rights approaches.

At the outset, it is important to understand that the Child Friendly Village intervention was conceived as a social intervention within the wider social movement called Bachpan Bachao Andolan (or Save the Childhood Movement) to embed child rights in rural communities across India with intent to prevent child labour and trafficking of children for forced labour. The intervention was expected to achieve this change through access to education for children and a dramatic but visible structural change in people's relationship with children resulting in protection of children in their communities. This conceptualisation of the intervention as a social movement was based on the recognition of caste, communal and gender based inequalities that continue to pervade India in general and rural India in particular. This conceptualisation was also based on the recognition that a wide scale movement was the only alternative to challenge deeply held social and cultural views. Therefore, the intervention seeks to alter behaviour of individuals and communities to overcome existing inequalities and realise social justice.

Ever since the organisation was established and began working on child rights in India, it recognised that persisting historical inequalities disproportionately affected children as well as girls and women from communities that are at the margin of Indian societies. Their historical marginalisation contributed to their exclusion from education, which then forced people to remain in poverty and the historical dehumanisation process as noted by Freire. This meant that a large number of parents were forced to send their children to urban areas or were condemned to live a life of slavery even where they lived.

This continuous flow of trafficked children to urban areas or areas with higher concentration of small- scale manufacturing led BBA to focus its attention on Direct Action, which involved taking children and at times their parents out of a situation of exploitation. However, despite several daring operations that were conducted on several occasions without the help of local administration or the police, the BBA movement and its members began to reflect on other methods of tackling the challenge of large scale trafficking of children such as through public awareness campaigns to raise awareness on the issue of child labour and education. It was in the year 1999-2000 when the need to develop an intervention in rural India to prevent child trafficking was felt. While mass mobilisation as a strategy was effective in reaching large numbers in a short duration of time, BBA needed an intervention that was localised and of greater intensity.

To this end, it was imperative to develop an institutional structure with defined activities to ensure that the process was standardised and amenable to external assessment and documentation for replication.

Rural India, which still comprises of more than 60% of the total Indian population, is the largest exporter of trafficked children for child labour. There are several reasons for this, most important being illiteracy and poverty which function as the push factors for people to consider seeking employment in urban India. It is also in the rural India where the education infrastructure is in its most dire state with dysfunctional schools and absent

teachers. There is research that demonstrates that lack of educational opportunities functions as one of the factors that forces parents to choose sending their children to work⁶.

It was in this context that the national workshop was organised in 1999 under the leadership of Kailash Satyarthi where volunteers and activists from across India deliberated upon the intervention, which eventually developed into the framework of the Child Friendly Village intervention. Over the years, however, the framework of Child Friendly Village intervention has expanded in scope and has now become BBA's overarching intervention in rural India on protection of the rights of children. While this covers child labour and trafficking of children for forced labour, other aspects of child rights are now being addressed through this intervention including protecting local environment, gender inequalities, etc.

Fundamental to the Child Friendly Village intervention is the role that BBA has conceived between child labour, poverty and illiteracy. Of course this relationship functions within the context of historical marginalisation of certain communities as well as of girls and women.

When we look at expanding the framework outside India, such historical embeddedness of marginalisation and inequalities that leads to violation of child rights is a significant area of investigation and must precede any intervention effort. So while the intervention is seeking to encompass India's international obligations under International Labour Organization's Conventions, especially Conventions 138 and 182 that deal respectively with minimum age of work for children and the worst form of child labour, the scope of the intervention encompasses the entire gamut of child rights as highlighted in the UN Convention of Child Rights. However, the intervention does so within the socio-legal context of India seeking to undermine structural inequalities through a mass-movement. In the instance of Child Friendly Village intervention, therefore, the scale of intervention is similarly significant to achieve scale of change.

Returning to the relationship between poverty, education and child labour, while there is a general consensus in India as well as in several economic streams of thinking that poverty results in child labour, Kailash Satyarthi understood from his long and first-hand experience of rural India that poverty was also the function of child labour and ending child labour requires comprehensive interventions tackling interconnected issues. Again, this relationship needs to be verified across geographical boundaries. However, there is sufficient international research to suggest that this relationship holds true across several 'developing' countries besides India⁷.

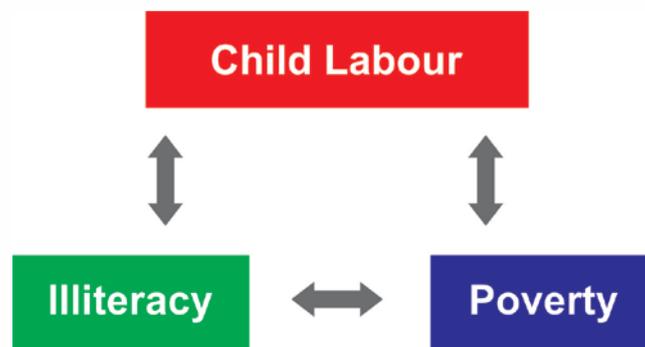
⁶ Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty. 2009. Migration and Education Linkages. Lessons from India and Bangladesh; McKenzie, D and H. Rapoport (2007), 'Network effects and the dynamics of migration and inequality: theory and evidence from Mexico', *Journal of Development Economics* 84(1): 59-98; Sainath, P. Everybody Loves A Good Drought

⁷ On relationship between poverty between child labour and poverty, please see Bastagli, Francesca (2010) Poverty, inequality and public cash transfers: lessons from Latin America. Background Paper for the European Report on Development (ERD) 2010 on Social Protection for Inclusive Development, European University Institute, Florence; Edmonds, Eric V and Norbert Schady. 2012. "Poverty Alleviation and Child Labor." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 4(4): 100-124; Nanjunda, D C (2009). *Anthropology and Child Labour*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications; Chandra, Anjuli. (2009). *Child Labour – A*

Unfortunately, for the children in India, the dominating view in the policymaking and even amongst the politicians continues to be that poverty results in child labour. This argument has resulted in two kinds of thinking about child labour within the Indian political establishment. While on the one hand the Government has maintained that child labour inhibits a child's development and therefore develops several programmes to ensure every child receives basic and minimum support for his or her development. On the other hand, the Government also stops short of complete ban on child labour for it accepts the argument that work of children is necessary to alleviate household level poverty. This argument maintains that it is only after parents are able to escape poverty that they will be able to protect rights of children in a household.

This view has remained unchanged, though not unchallenged, since India promulgated its first legislation on child labour in India, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act in 1986. In recent months, as the Government of India again brought another legislation in the Parliament to ban child labour in its entirety till 14 years, bringing the child labour law in sync with the Right to Education Act in India, several Parliamentarians were heard during the debate in the Parliament to argue for 'adolescents' (a term now part of the legislation on child labour in India) to be allowed to work in India to support their families emerge from poverty.

Contrary to the popular public opinion as well as convenient positioning by the politicians, BBA has maintained that child labour is the underlying cause of poverty. In his analysis, Kailash Satyarthi creates a clear circular relationship between child labour, poverty and illiteracy. This relationship may be demonstrated as below:



To put this simply, the analysis makes a convincing argument that in a knowledge economy, where higher skills correspond with higher wages and social mobility, denial of quality education will push parents to choose to send their children to work. This will eventually result in a child acquiring low skills since she/he was involved in earning a living than learning. This acquisition of low skills will force a child to seek employment at minimum wages (or even for less in the unorganised sector) even after becoming an adult. This will perpetuate the condition of poverty in that household forcing parents to send their children for work than education that they could not afford.

The Child Friendly Village intervention seeks to tackle this cyclical relationship in a

comprehensive manner. It looks at child labour in a holistic way, as a symptom of the greater malaise affecting society, such as poverty, structural unemployment, gender discrimination and exploitation, non-availability of education, environmental degradation, denial of access to natural resources, land inequality, migration, natural and human made disasters, development induced displacement, low wages for adult workers, lack of political will, communalism and caste discrimination, to mention a few. These are more often than not interlinked, in various permutations and combinations, which vary according to the region and the point in time.

The Child Friendly Village initiative is not only to prevent and eradicate child labour through collective action for systemic change, but it also encourages a participatory mode for the 'involvement of all' for the 'betterment of all'. The Child Friendly Village intervention is aimed at a sustainable approach for prevention and elimination of child labour by involving children in decision making processes at the community level, thereby translating their 'right to participation' through one of its institutional structure namely the *Bal Panchayat*.

Therefore, the Child Friendly Village action seeks to combine social justice and human rights approaches to achieve a more equal and just society. While on the one hand, the intervention organises communities into collectives to achieve common goals reducing embedded inequalities of poverty and gender, it also seeks to ensure access to human rights, especially child rights, through this collective action. Therefore, the Child Friendly Village action may be summarised as below:

1. **Rights awareness** – this is the first stage of community engagement work that the Child Friendly Village intervention undertakes. This involves outreach work with community members, including children, even before the formation of stakeholder groups, i.e., *Bal Panchayat*, *Yuva Mandal* and *Mahila Mandal*. This engagement work is the platform for increasing awareness of child rights in a village or a community.
2. **Rights understanding** – once a community is informed of child rights, the intervention is designed to develop activities that will lead to stakeholders gaining extensive knowledge on child rights that they can then share with others in a community. Similarly, activities are organised to help community members understand various challenges in their villages or communities and their implications for violations of rights of children. While child rights are constituent of the wider international human rights framework, they are distinct primarily because these rights deal with children, a constituency that is universally neglected in political discourse as well as in social lives in communities. Therefore, learning about child rights presents a unique situation to both the community as well as the field staff.
3. **Rights embeddedness**⁸ – at this stage, the stakeholder groups and a large part of the community has participated in various actions that result in collective action around a specific issue that pertains either to protection of children or improvement of the community life. This is also the stage where people begin to

⁸ To put it simply, rights embedded-ness reflects a situation in a community where child rights no longer remain a matter of conversation but become deeply held convictions, and the focus of the community shifts to their realisation.

define issues from the perspective of child rights. However, this is still the stage where activities are led by BBA staff.

4. **Rights realisation** – this is the final stage of the child rights framework where the action results in desired change. It is possible that this change is achieved with an active participation of the field staff. However, rights realisation that is led by a stakeholder group or the wider community will eventually be a sustainable change as an outcome of the intervention.

For any meaningful expansion of the intervention beyond its 'natural' setting, it is imperative that a feasibility study is carried out in a geographical setting to identify first the quantum of challenge that needs to be addressed followed by the institutional fit.

Child Friendly Villages: Idea to Practice

As highlighted above, the Child Friendly Village intervention is a part of the wider social movement initiated by Kailash Satyarthi to uphold child rights in India. This intervention is delivered in a local area through extensive community engagement. The objective of the intervention is to introduce changes at the level of knowledge, attitudes and practices amongst community members, including children.

From idea to its translation, every social movement needs a pragmatic and programmatic framework that helps translate the social movement into concrete action for change. The Child Friendly Village intervention similarly has developed an extensive framework to achieve social change under the leadership of Kailash Satyarthi. This framework is discussed in detail below:

The core of the intervention is its unflinching focus on ensuing child rights in a community through effective community empowerment work. The actual content of community engagement is described in detail in a booklet published by Kailash Satyarthi on Child Friendly Villages and is titled *Bal Mitra Gram*. Central to the community engagement work in the view of Kailash Satyarthi is to develop a new relationship with children – a relationship of friendship.

The intervention is designed to achieve the following four objectives:

- There is no child labour in the community
- All children are enrolled in school and retained
- A Bal Panchayat (Children's Parliament or Children's Council) is elected to represent voices of children
- The Bal Panchayat is recognised by the elected village council

Each Child Friendly Village intervention is designed for three years, with the last year functioning as a 'follow up' year. At the end of second year, it is expected that the community groups developed during the first two years of the intervention will begin to take leadership position within the villages. In terms of impact, the intervention is normally designed for scale to achieve maximum desired change in a community. The

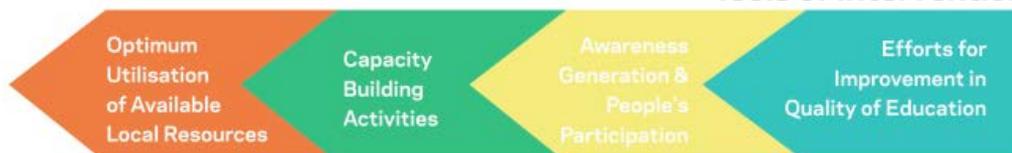
villages for intervention are normally located within a single geographical and administrative area to ensure uniformity with regards to administrative policies.

The intervention unfolds following the framework described below. Again, this framework is only indicative and has been developed for the rural context in India. However, broadly the framework will hold true for most instances where child rights violations include involvement of children in forced labour. What is equally important to note is that the framework is delivered by the staff that is hired to work at the field level as well as in a senior field positions. BBA has developed a separate training manual to support training of field level staff as well as staff in senior field positions. Therefore, any replication of this intervention outside the context of rural India requires development of a training manual for staff that is suitable for the social, political and economic context of the geographical area where intervention is planned. Moreover, since the training of staff on community outreach is closely linked to the ideological framework and organisational culture of the entire organisation, it is significant that the organisation develops such a resource in-house.

Child Friendly Villages Rights Based Approach



Tools of Intervention



Let us now look at the framework in detail:

Identification of a Challenge

The first stage of developing the Child Friendly Village intervention is to identify child rights related challenges by the organisation. This identification is based on various sources of information that is available to the organisation. This may include data published by other organisations and government agencies or a research commissioned by the organisation itself. This can also include information that is available to the organisation through its other outreach activities. For BBA, a large amount of information is passed on through field staff and other member organisations working in an area.

Once information from the field is processed, especially in situations where members of the community make information available, it is followed with a field visit to ascertain the situation first hand. Based on this field visit, the organisation begins the process of developing a suitable funding proposal. Alternatively, the organisation may deploy its own resources.

Identification of the Villages

Identification of villages or an intervention area is dependent on the issue that the organisation wishes to address. For example, working on child marriages will necessarily mean working in areas where child marriage is a major concern. Nevertheless, since at the core of the Child Friendly Village intervention is the issue of child labour, which is a widespread phenomenon in rural India, the following criteria are used:

- *Number of children engaged in economic activities/exploitative labour;*
- *Number of non-school-going children;*
- *Number of the people from the marginalised section of the society*
- *School and early learning infrastructure in the village*

Based on the above-mentioned criteria, villages that are child labour intensive and have the problem of out of school children are selected under the intervention. Addressing a challenge goes hand in hand with achieving a scale for intervention. Achieving a scale helps the intervention to retain the character of a social movement while at the same time increase the impact area multifold.

Collaboration with the Village Council Head and Ward Members

These are local level functionaries that are given constitutional mandate in India in their communities in order to improve local government. Involvement of villages in the governance process was expected to support the participatory nature of democracy empowering communities to be involved in local decision-making.

Collaboration with village leaders is also significant to communicate causes and implications of child labour in their communities and the link between lack of education

and the widespread exploitation of children as labourers. Often, the Village Councils work towards their agenda, and it does not have children as focus or even a part. Being decision makers and leaders of the village, it is necessary to involve them into the process before any activity in the village is taken up. Senior field staff or senior staff in the organisation largely carries out this activity.

Staff Hiring and Training

Once a geographical area is identified, the staffs hiring process begins in earnest. Since the entire intervention is based on engagement with the local communities, it is imperative that staff is hired from within the area where the intervention is located. This is primarily because the field staff will come with a broad understanding of the issues in a community as well as ability to speak in the local language or local dialect. Their social networks and local knowledge may prove handy in engaging the communities beyond the intervention area.

Training for staff begins soon as they are hired and before extensive field engagement begins. There are three important components to the training. First, communicating the organisational ideology, its rights-based approach and situating child rights within a wider social movement of BBA, and organisational culture to the staff. Second, role play and other methods to introduce the field staff to outreach work. Finally, it is about working with the staff to introduce the data management system as used by the organisation. The practice within the organisation is to organise training at different points of time for the entire staff along with empowering senior staff in the field to be able to train staff that may be hired during the course of the delivery of the intervention.

Baseline Survey of the Villages

Once the training of staff is complete, they are asked to begin outreach activities in villages allocated to them. The base-line survey through the use of household forms is an important way for staff to engage with the entire village community.

A baseline survey of the each village is conducted to collect the relevant information about the socioeconomic status, historical background and the developmental and educational strategies followed so far within a village. This data is then documented within the data management system of the organisation and helps in drawing parallels between two points in the intervention process- one when the intervention begins and two at the end of year two when the field staff begins the process of handover. This drawing of parallels helps the organisation to identify change in households as well as in communities through aggregating household data.

Since the intervention intends to bring behavioural changes in a community, it is also recommended to record such changes to augment assessment of the intervention at the closing stages. One such method that is used is the KAP assessment⁹ carried out at

⁹ KAP survey or Knowledge, Attitude and Practice survey is a survey methodology that began to become popular in family planning and population studies in 1950s. The KAP survey method supports quantification of information collected and use of two such surveys covering similar variables can help

the beginning and the end of the intervention. Comparison between the two surveys can highlight the extent of behavioural change in a community since the protection of children within communities is premised on an altered relationship between adults and children in an area.

Withdrawal of Children from Child Labour

This step is the core for all Child Friendly Village interventions irrespective of the area where it is delivered principally because child labour in rural India is a widespread phenomenon. In fact, a host of other child rights violations are linked to involvement of children in child labour. However, unlike the activity description, it is the most challenging activity in a village since it begins to fundamentally challenge the power structures in a community as well as in a household. This is primarily because the staff is unable to ensure an end to child labour till the time households and community leaders are unwilling to take proactive steps to bring this to an end. It is also significant since the Child Friendly Villages intervention is premised on community engagement leading to behavioural changes with minimal reliance on law enforcement.

It must be clarified here that while BBA has worked with law enforcement in the context of developing legislative framework for protection of children as well as protecting children who face exploitation, within the Child Friendly Village intervention such reliance on law enforcement can alienate a community.

In his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire writes that “...during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors...The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situations by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity.”

This perspective becomes apparent as soon as the engagement work begins to involve children, especially girls and women, from household heads and at times from community leaders. Therefore, it is natural for BBA staff to face resistance from within the communities and households whose children face violations of their rights.

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The staff on the ground seeks to address this challenge through a variety of ways and elaborate training and close supervision is required to ensure that first intervention in a community is supported by community leaders and elders.

Some of the specific activities include awareness campaigns including meetings with parents and community leaders, village council leaders, etc. Meetings with teachers are also held to enlist their support in removing children from labour and their enrolment in schools.

Enrolment of All Children in School

After withdrawal of children from school, the next challenge for the staff is to ensure their enrolment in schools. In addition, the staff also ensures enrolment of all out of school children in schools. In India, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 provides for compulsory enrolment of all children between the age of 6 and 14 years. However, there are certain grey areas where the respective state governments need to legislate.

In a federal structure of India, where education is shared between the Federal and State Governments, the role of both parties is significant in formulation of legislation. These legislations are then implemented by the respective state Governments. The federal legislation always provides states to innovate within the framework of law and ensure that all legal requirements are met.

One significant issue that we see in schools in rural India is the conundrum between enrolment and attendance. In most instances, while attendance figures in schools show 100% enrolment, in several cases children do not attend classes. However, since this reflects poorly on the school administration, such situations are generally covered up. This situation at times results in children who are enrolled in a school but remain absent for various period of time. Such children are considered irregular in education but within the framework of legislation in India these children are also enrolled in their respective schools.

To tackle such situations, some states in India have now developed a policy framework to notify an irregular child as a dropout child if that child remains absent from school continuously for a defined number of school days. This period varies between states and may not exist at all in some other. What this policy instrument does is that it deregisters a child from school after a continuous absence for a defined period. Once this happens, the school is obliged to enrol that child again, which is considered a new enrolment. There may be a requirement for intensive engagement work with parents and children in case of children who are out of school than with children who are irregular. Add to that, as the definition of an out of school child varies between states in India, action around enrolment of an out of school child is therefore dependent on a state's policy framework as well.

Formation of Stakeholder Groups

Even before the formation of Children's Council or *Bal Panchayat* is the formation of stakeholders' groups – the *Mahila Mandal* (women's group) and the *Yuva Mandal* (youth group comprising of young men and women in a community). These groups

provide the support required by children to engage with a wider set of stakeholders in an administrative area. In addition, the formation of the two groups further strengthens engagement with two other marginal groups in any community – women and young people. This engagement is premised on the fault-lines of gender and patriarchy that pervade rural India where women and young people remain at the margins of decision-making.

The groups are formed through a process of self-nomination and election. However, the process of election for these groups is not as elaborate as it is for the election of a *Bal Panchayat* that reflects steps of a national or a local election. Nevertheless, the democratic foundations are critical to the functioning of a Child Friendly Village and therefore all groups are formed through a process of election.

Here, the process of group formation is simpler. Community members interested in forming stakeholder groups organise meetings where the significance of these groups is discussed by staff. Once members are convinced of and agree to be members of these groups, meetings are organised to elect office bearers to ease functioning of these groups.

The process of election involves members nominating themselves for a position which are then voted upon by other members. A show of hands may be required in a situation where more than one member nominates to a position of an office bearer. Each group works with three office bearers who are eventually responsible in ensuring effectiveness of these groups.

These groups work with the field staff for the first two years of a three year intervention on challenges identified by staff through engagement with the wider community that lead to violations of children's rights in that community. In the third year, the groups are expected to take leadership positions themselves leading to sustainable action in intervention communities.

More than sustainability associated with a project cycle and demanded by all major funders, the value of engaging stakeholders in participatory action is that it supports those members of a community who feel close to the values that the Child Friendly Village intervention expects to deliver. Since the intervention is embedded in a geographical area as a social movement, it is imperative that individual leaders are groomed to continue working in their own communities to prevent violations of child rights. It is the responsibility of the project staff to identify such individuals and groom them to be leaders on child rights in their communities by supporting them in improving their knowledge and altering practices of their communities over the project period.

Formation of Bal Panchayat (Children's Council) and its recognition

It is only when all children have been withdrawn from child labour and enrolled in schools, that BBA begins the process of engaging children in formation of children's councils in each village where the intervention is ongoing. A *Bal Panchayat* is expected to mirror the formation of a village council or a *Gram Panchayat*, which are

constitutional bodies of local self-government in rural India. Since children find no voice in local decision-making through the elected village councils, children's councils are expected to democratise the decision-making space in a village through increasing their engagement on issues that pertain to the entire community in general and children in particular.

Associated with the process of electing a *Bal Panchayat* is its recognition by the village council. This recognition ensures that *Bal Panchayat* is recognised by the village community as the representative voice of children in the village. It also helps the *Bal Panchayat* to participate in village council meetings where children can raise their concerns and ensure these are entered in the minutes of the meetings. Alternatively, children can invite a member of the village council to their meeting to apprise them of the challenges raised by children in *Bal Panchayat* meetings.

Formation of *Bal Panchayats* ensures participation of children within the Child Friendly Village intervention. It starts as a process of raising awareness amongst children of their rights and responsibilities. This then moves towards realising education for all children through participation of children in identification of children out of school or in child labour leading to enrolment of such children. Once, *Bal Panchayats* are formed, children begin to participate in collective action either on their own or with support from other stakeholder groups including the *Mahila Mandal* and *Yuva Mandal*. For the first two years, the outreach worker employed by BBA staff guides this process.

Bal Panchayats in villages therefore play a central role in transforming children from passive recipients of decisions made by their parents and other elders in the community into active change agents and leaders in their own right.

Creation of Advisory Committee

Normally towards the middle of the second project year, when most stakeholder groups have been formed and have become active, BBA develops an Advisory Committee inclusive of local functionaries, teachers, and postman, village and community leaders, elders amongst others. The Advisory Committee is the core stakeholder group that is expected to lead the Child Friendly Village intervention post completion of the project intervention. As the intervention is introduced in a community as method of social change, the stakeholder groups including the members of the Advisory Committee engage with the organisation taking steps in transforming lives of children in their communities.

As mentioned earlier, the Advisory Committee plays a significant role in ensuring the sustainability of the Child Friendly Village intervention. The Committee formulates plans and programmes post project intervention period and is responsible for executing all these plans in collaboration with other stakeholders. While the Committee is generally formed towards the middle of the second year of the intervention, in some instances these Committees may be formed where there is a demand from the community leaders to be involved in the entire process from the beginning.

Engagement with the Administration

This intervention activity embeds the Child Friendly Intervention within the administrative and institutional framework of India. This therefore is a critical engagement for the organisation as well as communities since through engagement with administration, realisation of rights is progressed. This engagement can take diverse form ranging from engagement to improve physical infrastructure in villages to ensuring implementation of welfare schemes to enabling rule of law for protection of children.

It is not that communities are unaware of the institutional framework within which they live. However, it is the lack of relationship with the administration and therefore reliance on leaders that reduces the democratic and participative space within village communities. Due to the lack of relationship between communities and the administration, the local leadership becomes powerful since they are seen as the go between the communities and the power structures.

The intervention seeks to create a sense of ownership amongst the communities and stakeholder groups of their own lives and support their engagement with the local administration. This is carried out through supporting stakeholder groups, including the Bal Panchayat, organising collective actions in their communities and seeking support from the local administration in completion of these actions.

Since Indian democratic structure includes functional village councils, there is an associated institutional framework that exists to support and complement the role of village councils. In this context, it is imperative that a community develops its relationship with the local administration, which will help it take future action, post the intervention.

It is also here where the intervention is embedded in the institutional framework of the Indian state as it seeks out collective action in collaboration with the local state functionaries. The intent of the intervention in this context is to support improvement of services and institutional practices for appropriate implementation of the legislative framework for sustainable action on protection of children. Any replication of the intervention beyond India therefore must first address the issue of the framework within which the intervention could be embedded for sustainable action.

Handover Child Friendly Village to the Advisory Committee

Finally, the process of handover is to be considered. The process of handover begins in the last quarter of the second year. Before the process begins, the Advisory Committee is constituted as discussed above. A Child Friendly Village is eventually handed over to the Advisory Committee once it has had time to engage with other stakeholder groups in the village. Since most members of the Committee are already in leadership positions either in the elected council or in their communities, the staff needs to engage with the Advisory Committee members to steer their leadership on protection of child rights.

The process of handover begins with collective village meetings, which are led by the Advisory Committee. In these meetings, the actual handover is discussed and a discussion on future roles ensues. Then a resolution is passed in the village collective meeting to designate the Advisory Committee to take up the role of steering the intervention in future. After this, staff withdraws from the active participation in the process and its role is limited to providing support as demanded by the stakeholder groups.

Before the villages are handed over, it is expected that the Advisory Committee begins to take leadership of issues raised by other stakeholder groups including the women's group, the youth group and the *Bal Panchayat*. This assumption of leadership is required to ensure that the wider village and the stakeholder groups accept the leadership role of the Advisory Committee.

Tools of Intervention

This broadly is the framework that is used in each Child Friendly Intervention. Some of the tools that are used in the intervention are discussed briefly below:

Efforts for Improvement in Quality of Education

The Child Friendly Village intervention seeks to bring about a qualitative improvement in the formal education scenario. It has been observed that in most of the rural areas the quality of education being imparted is dismal. This happens due to teachers' absenteeism, lack of infrastructural facilities like school buildings, non-availability of textbooks and reading aids, etc.

Since the core of the intervention rests on improving access to education, a lot of effort is placed in the intervention on improving not only access to education but also the provision of education. This not only typically includes early learning and education infrastructure in a community but also seeks improvement in teachers' participation as well as improved resources for the education system as a whole. This may be addressed through engagement with the local administration to ensure effective flow of money or an issue may be addressed through engagement at a policy level.

Awareness Generation and People's Participation

Village community is the most important constituent within the Child Friendly Village intervention. It is both in terms of engagement for fundamental change in that community as well as building a leadership to embed sustainability for protection of child rights in their actions. Hence, it is imperative to include community members – men, women and children - into the intervention activities.

The intervention carries this through in two broad ways. In the first instance, community outreach is required to reach a cross-section of the village to better understand challenges that impede child rights in a community. This provides a spectrum of challenges the intervention is expected to experience. The second step is to organise various activities in a community and in the cluster of villages where the intervention is

being targeted. These activities are developed in conversation with the stakeholder groups and with their involvement.

The intent of the awareness generation programmes is to increase the influence of the intervention beyond the project location while keeping the intensity of awareness generation within the intervention area intact. As the intervention seeks to alter behaviour at a scale, awareness generation activities and events have a desired impact within and outside the intervention area. It is observed in many instances that people from villages beyond the intervention area seek out outreach staff and request either their participation in the intervention or organising awareness generation activities in their own communities.

Capacity Building Activities

Since the end result of the Child Friendly Village intervention is to instil collective action, some support is required to ensure communities are able to not only identify an issue but are empowered to take appropriate action. Thus, the intent here is to support communities for identification of issues in communities that have a direct or indirect bearing on upholding rights of the children. This may include supporting knowledge building on the rights that children have on education or protection of children from early marriages, etc. As part of the process, community members learn access to those administrative relationships most significant to address an identified problem.

In this context, the relationships communities develop with the local leaders, administration and other government functionaries become significant. Similarly, it is significant that communities are able to address an issue as a collective issue crossing caste, gender and religious boundaries. Therefore, the capacity building work in a Child Friendly Intervention is intimately connected with the overall outreach work, awareness generation work as well as engagement with local administration.

In the first instance, capacity building in Child Friendly Village intervention is not seen as something that is handed over to a community in a training room. Of course, there are sessions organised on specific and identified issues where subject matter experts are invited. For BBA, the capacity building work is also not a one way exercise since the field staff as well as the senior staff needs to go through the process of understanding the process of resolving a commonly identified problem. While the field staff is trained and receives regular supervision support from senior field and central office staff, the engagement process with the community and public institutions helps build knowledge base for field staff. This helps the staff not only work in their intervention area but also develop their understanding.

Therefore, the engagement process itself is the capacity building exercise where staff and community members and stakeholder groups engage with public institutions to collectively resolve identified issues. This is another aspect of the intervention that embeds the intervention within the local and regional institutions. Further, since the intervention is seeking collective action, there is recognition that implementation of the government programmes require building relationships.

Optimum Utilisation of Available Local Resources

It should be conceded that the resources at the disposal of the Government are

immense. However, there is ample research to demonstrate that these resources are not utilised in an optimum manner. In addition, there are corrupt practices and nepotism that is all too visible in rural India that tends to exclude people and communities from various government programmes. The intent of the Child Friendly Intervention is to secure appropriate implementation of the legislation including schemes designed to alleviate poverty thereby realising rights of communities in general and children in particular. The Child Friendly Village intervention takes a comprehensive view of the relationship between poverty, illiteracy and child labour as discussed above. The intervention seeks to tackle this ongoing relationship between the three variables and tackle them simultaneously. Therefore, the relationships developed with the local administration are significant since these can help people engage with appropriate functionaries to ensure access to government programmes.

Sustainable Change: Insights from Rural India

In this section, we discuss the intervention framework through concrete examples from the field. These examples will help us appreciate the impact of a democratic intervention like Child Friendly Villages and how the processes that are part of the intervention framework lead to realisation of rights in communities.

For the collection of data, field visits were organised in the three field areas of Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Karnataka spread over September and October 2016. For collection of data, an interview guide was prepared with some common questions. However, a few questions were added or altered to the guide depending on the stakeholder with whom a conversation was organised. In addition, supplementary questions were asked as necessary and cases were collected of specific action where such actions had either resulted in an outcome or resulted in collective action.

Efforts were also made to engage with local leaders as well as with local government functionaries, where possible, to seek their views on their engagement with the stakeholder groups in Child Friendly Villages along with their engagement on the issue of child rights. While these examples highlight to a great extent the implementation of the intervention in the project villages, these examples also serve as indication of the nature of intervention on rights framework.

1. Guwada Hanuman Village (Rajasthan)

Hanuman Garha is a village in Rajasthan where the intervention began in 2015. In this village the conversation took place with the *Up Sarpanch* (Vice President of the village council) named Hansa Devi about the challenge of an unpaved road, a major challenge for several years for the villagers.

The unpaved road in the village has been a major challenge for at least the last 15 years when for the first time it was raised by the villagers in the village council. Since then, the village has had to deal with the consequences of an unpaved road, which is almost 2 kilometres long. This has meant difficulty in reaching the nearest town for elderly for any official work or to the hospital for a pregnant woman. This has also

meant extreme difficulties during rains even for the young people in the village as the rainwater makes the unpaved road slippery. The people present spoke how they could not send their children, especially girls, for higher education since the higher school was in the nearby town and the unpaved road was their only connection. In view of the villagers, with whom the matter was discussed, the general impression was that there was a lack of interest in the village council as well as within the local administration that worked under the influence of the local politician. Since the village generally voted for a particular political party, which was not in power, the politician in power tended to neglect their demand.

The staff knew this situation and they were making efforts to work with the administration to ensure that the road was paved. However, this was proving to be difficult as they received little support from the administration. In addition, the current *Up Sarpanch* had little knowledge of the procedure that helped village council members to place an issue in the council meeting for action.

On further questions, he mentioned that he was never sent to any training programme after his election. The staff working in the village advised separately that the *Up Sarpanch* was not regular in meetings and therefore did not know when the training was organised. Moreover, as the council was unwilling to address the issue of the unpaved road, they also did not support the *Up Sarpanch's* engagement.

During the conversation, other issues were also observed. For example, while the villagers were of the view that political interference caused delay in addressing the issue, they also accepted that the *Up Sarpanch* was not proactive in addressing the matters. The conversation also highlighted the communication gap between the villagers and the staff, including capacity building need of the field staff. Finally, it was clear that the field staff needed to appreciate the political context within which the village council operated. Therefore, the strategy they developed in consultation with the villagers did not reflect the political roadblock that has hampered paving of the road.

In terms of the child rights framework embedded in the Child Friendly Village intervention, the village was aware of the problem that was causing problems to the villagers. However, with BBA's engagement, they also clearly began to articulate how the unpaved road was leading to dropping out of girls from education and its consequences on their education, marriage and general wellbeing. Therefore, engagement with BBA helped the community improve its awareness and demonstrate a higher level of understanding of child rights.

It was also clear that the engagement with BBA staff helped the community work collectively towards highlighting of an issue that was already a concern within the community with regards to violation of child rights. However, the lack of understanding of the political context on part of the field staff acted as a roadblock on realising a positive outcome for the community.

2. Saleta Village (Rajasthan)

The conversation in Saleta village took place with the two leaders of the *Bal Panchayat*, one of which was a girl. As BBA staff works especially to engage girls to

participate in the *Bal Panchayat* activities, the conversation did look at the role girls have played in the activities of the *Bal Panchayat* in Saleta village over the past two years. At the outset, the two members were emphatic in explaining that there was a time when more boys than girls went to education. This situation had however changed in the past few years as more and more families began to send their children to schools.

The *Bal Panchayat* members did recognise the role BBA had played in supporting this transition since it began working in the village almost five years ago. The Saleta *Bal Panchayat*, in the view of its members, had taken proactive measures that pertained to challenges in the village on the violation of child rights. This included engaging with the community on child labour, child marriages, etc. The members mentioned that there was no instance of child marriage ever since BBA began working in the village.

The current *Bal Panchayat* was formed in September 2015. In the election process, 11 children stood for election and voting took place. Since its formation, one important action that the *Bal Panchayat* took was about appointment of teachers. In the school, there were a fewer teachers which caused significant problems for children. To address this issue, children initially discussed this matter in a *Bal Panchayat* meeting which was organised in support with BBA field staff and developed an action plan to remedy the situation. In the first instance, the *Bal Panchayat* members met the appropriate officer in the Block office. This step however did not result in any change. This prompted children to take a further action where they locked the school gate where they were supported by the village *Up Sarpanch*. This matter became quite well known in the area and the entire community gathered at the school at this symbolic step. This news was also published in the media but still the demands were not met. The children then wrote almost 150 postcards to the Minister of State for Primary and Secondary Education in Rajasthan. However, this step also did not result a positive outcome for the school.

Eventually, the *Bal Panchayat* met again and wrote a set of questions as the Right to Information application with support from the youth group to the state department of education. This action eventually resulted in the *Bal Panchayat* receiving information that the school had an allocated strength of five women teachers and seven male teachers. Soon, the appointments began to take place and at the time of collection of data the process was ongoing.

The *Bal Panchayat* members in the conversation described that they felt at ease on working with the BBA staff as well as local functionaries and administrative offices. They said that right to life, development, education and participation were the inalienable child rights that the *Bal Panchayat* wanted to protect. At the time of conversation, they were also concerned with the expansion of private education in the village and in surrounding areas where due to cost reasons parents were reluctant to send their daughters.

In this particular case, we can see all four aspects of the rights framework being met. While the awareness and understanding of the child rights was essential for the *Bal Panchayat* members to take action, their collective action (embeddedness) led to realisation of their rights.

3. Garh Basai Village (Rajasthan)

The conversation in Garh Basai village took place with the elected *Sarpanch* (village council head) named Balasahai Dhanka. Since the intent of this paper was to develop a comprehensive perspective of the *Child Friendly Village* intervention, it was decided to speak with stakeholders who provide leadership to their communities.

Balasahai was elected in 2015 as a young *Sarpanch* in his village. At the time of this conversation in September 2016, he was 28 years old. His background was in community engagement as he worked with a charitable organisation that provided free eye treatment to patients in rural area. This background eventually brought him in contact with BBA when the organisation began working in Garh Basai village.

When BBA staff approached him for the first time, he saw a clear fit between BBA's work as described by the field and senior staff in the field as well as his own vision for the village. However, as he explained, he learnt extensively on child rights through his engagement with the organisation. He described his vision for the village as one where children had the right to be educated, the socially and economically marginal communities felt that they were part of the mainstream, that poverty was eliminated through access to available government services and that the entire village community worked together to achieve improvements in their living environment in the village.

From a functionary of the local unit of a political party, Balasahai saw the transition to the post of *Sarpanch* as an opportunity to work for the community that had always supported him. He was proactive in his position and had been engaging with the local administration as well as local elected political leaders. This had helped him raise additional resources for his village, which already revived annual government grant. However, he felt that the money he received was not sufficient for all infrastructure related work in the village. This shortage of fund necessitated raising additional funds to complete work in the village. In the first year of his tenure, he worked for improvement of village infrastructure including laying of a water pipeline, boundary wall for the village crematorium, paving of roads, etc. For these activities, he worked with the local administration and with elected representatives to have access to additional funds.

He expressed his commitment to work with BBA and the work of *Bal Panchayat* through an action that he undertook on the advice of *Bal Panchayat*. When the *Bal Panchayat* in the village was formed, he was proactive in recognising its voice for all children of the village and had been proactive in its election process as well. In addition, he also supported the activities of the youth group that was formed through BBA's intervention in the village.

The *Bal Panchayat* in the village had brought to the notice of the village council of scarcity of water in a public place where village meetings could be held. The representatives of the *Bal Panchayat* met with the village council head and discussed the matter in detail. They also presented their case to the village council in writing. The village council head took initiative in this matter and ensured construction of a water tank in a public area for various village gatherings. He also organised a village cleaning campaign with the youth group of the village that brought different neighbourhoods in the village together for voluntary participation in cleaning the village. The youth group of

the village, which received the active support of the village council, conceived this campaign. In the first campaign activity, on the day of its launch, the village council head himself took part in cleaning a part of the village. Later, he also ensured that this campaign left a mark in the village and resulted in improved behaviour in the village through installation of a dustbin in each neighbourhood of the village.

The village council head was confident that the efforts that were initiated in the village under the Child Friendly Village intervention brought significant changes in the village and since BBA's work he no longer found a child out of education in his village. He was committed to work with the organisation in addressing all child rights violations in his village. He was of the view that BBA's interventions had brought about changes in people's behaviour that he felt would continue even after the intervention is over.

4. Sili Baori Village (Rajasthan)

The conversation in Sili Baori village was with three members of the *Bal Panchayat*. Unlike the *Bal Panchayat* in Saleta village, where the intervention had been ongoing for almost five years at the time of data collection, the *Bal Panchayat* in Sili Baori village was constituted in 2015. Therefore, the flavour of the *Bal Panchayat* in Sili Baori village and its actions was different from the one in Saleta village.

To begin with, one of the three members of the *Bal Panchayat* was a girl who had to challenge authority of her elders in the household to be able to participate in Bal Panchayat meetings as well as its activities. She managed this challenge with support from the field staff that worked with the *Bal Panchayat* and its members in the village. Still, the elders of the household did not completely agree with her actions and at the end of the meeting the *Bal Panchayat* member herself to highlight her commitment to the role she had chosen raised this situation.

Although the *Bal Panchayat* was formed only a year ago, there was much that the *Bal Panchayat* members had achieved in this short duration. There was a clear understanding of the components of child rights amongst the *Bal Panchayat* members that included participation in education for all children, no child labour, put an end of child marriages, etc. The *Bal Panchayat* members were in fact involved in preventing marriage of one child with support from the field staff.

Some of the problems that were dealt by the *Bal Panchayat* in the village existed even before the formation of the *Bal Panchayat*. One member was emphatic in suggesting that while she raised the matter of contaminated drinking water with the schoolteacher, there was little response from the teacher. The family members similarly did not support her in her efforts to get this problem resolved and children in school were forced to drink contaminated water.

With the introduction of Child Friendly Village intervention in the village and the election of *Bal Panchayat*, the children got a platform to address issues that had remained unaddressed.

The *Bal Panchayat* took up the matter of contaminated drinking water. In this matter, children felt empowered that BBA field staff continued to support their efforts in

resolving the matter. This was very unlike the situation they had seen in past when both school administration and parents were reluctant to support children in resolving the issue of contaminated drinking water.

With the help of BBA field staff, children learnt the process they could adopt to resolve the problem of the contaminated water in their school. While in past, few students spoke to the teachers and remained quiet once they received no response, this time the situation had changed. The *Bal Panchayat* met and discussed the issue of contaminated drinking water as a significant problem in the school. With the consent of all children who were members of the *Bal Panchayat*, the elected officers began the process of seeking solution to the problem.

They initially wrote an application to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) and apprised him of the problem. Within a stipulated time, the SDM met with the village Sarpanch (elected leader of the village council) and ensured that the problem was addressed. While in this process, the *Bal Panchayat* was supported by the field staff it was interesting to note that *Bal Panchayat* members were emphatic that they did most of the actions in which they were supported by the field staff. Of course, the *Bal Panchayat* members did not know the hierarchy when they raised this matter and here they received support from the field staff. In addition, they also received support from the field staff in organising a meeting with the SDM after which the water tank got installed. After this step, the *Bal Panchayat* leaders felt confident of meeting with the local administration officers in future.

A significant intervention that the *Bal Panchayat* carried out in the village was related to appointment of teachers. To address the problem of paucity of teachers in the school, the *Bal Panchayat* organised a meeting and agreed to proceed with this issue. The elected members then met with the village *Sarpanch* who expressed the inability to help children.

With support from the field staff, the children then spoke with the youth group in the village. The youth group then took the responsibility of engaging with the education department while the *Bal Panchayat* decided to write postcards. The youth group and the children wrote to the education department as well as to the District Education Officer. This action eventually led to selection of new teachers for the school.

5. Chanako Village (Jharkhand)

Villages in Jharkhand demonstrate a set of challenges that are not seen in Rajasthan. For example, the general topography of the area where the intervention is being implemented is fundamentally different from Rajasthan. Since the district of Koderma is situated within the Chota Nagpur plateau, the challenges of access and movement/transport are considerable. The active Naxalite movement in the area adds to the complexity and safety of the field staff operating in the area. Finally, an intensive reliance on mica collection in some of the most interior parts of the Koderma district challenges the intervention and the field staff to embed the rights framework in the community.

Chanako village actually fits the description well. The village is almost 15-16 kilometres

from Koderma town located away from the main road. The road connecting the village was unpaved and slippery after the morning rain. Even for a four-wheel drive, it was a struggle to travel the short distance of a few hundred meters to reach the village. It is important to contextualise the villages in Jharkhand since the local conditions strongly influence the way communication is possible between villages and communities.

One significant challenge that was visible on the day data was collected in the village was inability of a few school-going children to reach their schools. The rain had caused severe problems for children to reach their schools, as they did not even have bicycles. The villagers are generally poor, living on collection of mica in the surrounding areas. The children in the village were expected to receive bicycles to improve access to schools after an application was filed. In addition, when a team from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) visited the field area, a separate application was prepared and a representation was made to it. However, children were yet to receive bicycles.

In the conversations in Chanako, a meeting was also organised with the village School Management Committee (SMC) head who was elected unopposed in the village. A young man in his early 30s, he had lived in cities before he decided to settle in the village. Since then, he has worked in his fields, which are rain fed and have no permanent source of irrigation. This has meant that the village council head has had to devote a lot of his time to agriculture to ensure that enough grain is available to the household for the rest of the year.

This engagement in agriculture has also meant that he has not managed to devote sufficient time in his position as SMC head, something he openly admitted. This has affected his engagement with the SMC, the panchayat as well as with the community he represents. For example, he had little knowledge of the procedure of moving an application within the SMC or the panchayat. In addition, he has had no training provided by the government on how to discharge his responsibilities as the SMC head. Despite that, relying on his own motivation, he raised several village issues in the panchayat meetings and presented applications. However, there was no action taken on these applications.

During the conversation, where other members of the community were also present – including members from the stakeholder groups – the village council head was open about the challenges he has faced to ensure that problems of Chanako villages were addressed. One such example was the lack of roof in the village *Aanganwari* (early learning centre for children in the age group of 0-5 years) building.

When nothing else worked, applications to the appropriate authorities were made twice; the villagers themselves contributed money to repair the roof. The village youth group and the women's group led this action. Eventually, a part of the building managed to get a tin shed that now allows for food to be cooked for children who do come to *Aanganwari*.

While the Sarpanch was keen to carry forward the work that he began as head of the SMC, there were also challenges that he foresaw for himself. Despite the support of the

field staff, he had a distance to travel in the village as well as in his position as the SMC member. While he was aware of broad contours of what child rights and child protection meant, there were aspects where he was unclear and needed continued support from the field staff.

Therefore, while the field staff had helped the village community gain knowledge and understanding of child rights and supported their collective action to improve the condition of the *Aanganwari* building, realisation of child rights requires efforts made by the community and community leaders where Chanako still falls short.

6. Ghortappi Village (Jharkhand)

It was not until recently that a road connecting Ghortappi village with Gajandi/Koderma was paved. This has eased movement between the village and other parts of the district. Nevertheless, the village continues to face a massive challenge in seeking support for the village school.

In 2006, new school building was sanctioned in the village and the contract was awarded to a private contractor. For reasons unknown to the villagers, the contractor left the school building incomplete and since then the school building has remained as such. As there is no roof and the structure is incomplete, the building is unsafe and therefore children have to study under a tree come rain or sun.

The community has made several efforts even before the Child Friendly Village intervention was rolled out in the village. They wrote 3-4 applications to the District Commissioner (DC) of Koderma. However, the efforts by villagers made little impact on the administration. The argument from the administration remained that it was difficult to seek funds for a new school building from the state government, which had already released funds for this purpose.

When the field staff began the process of community engagement, this matter came to the forefront and has remained a major challenge for the community. Despite the hardship that children face in attending village school, BBA has ensured that all children are enrolled in school and regularly attend classes. However, the twin challenge of school building and lack of permanent teachers continues to test the work of the staff and the community.

To address this matter urgently, BBA wrote to the DC on two occasions. In one such intervention, the senior staff from BBA central office met the DC in September 2015. There were assurance of support and action by the DC until a new DC replaced him in early 2016. Keeping in mind the challenges the villages were facing due to inadequate monitoring mechanism placed by the local administration and failures of the administration in other villages as well, BBA worked with NCPCR (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights) to organise a visit to the area. In June 2016, such visit was made possible where the villagers presented their case to the NCPCR visiting team. On their orders, the district administration was forced to find an alternative. At the time of collection of data, the district administration was seeking additional funds for a new school for Bendi panchayat, within which Ghortappi falls, to ensure completion of the building in the village.

The situation in Ghortappi is symptomatic of the lethargic attitude of the local administration, which is not uncommon in rural India. While the Child Friendly Village intervention seeks to develop relationships between the communities and the administration to facilitate implementation of government programmes, at times the situation may require advocating with appropriate national bodies to ensure child rights are protected. In such a situation, the intervention requires support from the local community since the advocacy must ensure community participation for sustainable future action on child rights.

7. Gendwadih Village (Jharkhand)

The conversations in Gendwadih village involved participation of the youth group and the women's group in the village. The conversation highlighted major changes that had been ushered in access to education for children in the village. The problem began when the villagers began to seek access to school records and other provisions that school was expected to provide to children under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Act. This process began after the intervention developed women's group and youth group in the village and they raised the matter of teachers asking for Rupees 10 for each child to open the bank account to which children were expected to receive their scholarship money and other services. Challenging this requirement by the schoolteachers opened up other aspects of the school provisions that people began to challenge in the village.

It was not until the intervention began to be operational in the village that leaders from the two stakeholder groups thought of becoming members of the School Management Committee (SMC). The members were emphatic in their explanation that they had little knowledge about the SMC, its function as well as their powers as members of the SMC to ensure improved access to education for the children. After challenging the teachers for collection of money for opening of the bank accounts, the group members met with the field staff to discuss this matter. Enquiries from the banks disclosed that the money was a nominal amount that banks used to open bank account of a child and then this money was credited to the child's account. This information was then cross checked by the group members with those who had opened their accounts and in most instances found that money was credited to the account. However, this incident did mean to the villagers that teachers were not clear in explaining the process to them.

This was reflected in another matter, which pertained to distribution of school dress to children. The group members had identified certain irregularities with the purchase and distribution of the school dress to children. The initial quote as well as the cloth that was sought from a supplier differed from the final cloth that appeared to be cheaper. The villagers checked with the supplier and this appeared to be the case. Members in the SMC then refused to cooperate with the teachers in placing an order for the school dress and its distribution.

Since most teachers in the school were no longer in conversation with the villagers, after conversation with the field staff, a para-teacher in the school gave the phone number for the local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) who is also the minister of education in the state government. The villagers then took an appointment to meet her

and went to see her. However, at that time the minister could not meet the villagers due to certain urgent matter she had to attend. Nevertheless, the members submitted the application to the officers working with the minister.

After a few days, when the minister visited the village, the schoolteachers left the school unattended. This prompted the minister to order the district level education officer to address this matter urgently. Following this, the District Superintendent of Education (DSE) visited the school as well as the village and gathered information about this matter and the matter was resolved.

In the overall context of access to education, the stakeholder groups demonstrated active interest in the education of their children. While the situation was ongoing with regards to issues with the education of children, after engagement with the field staff the stakeholder groups developed greater understanding of the legislative framework around protection of children. This understanding was then used by the groups to develop action to seek improvement in the education provision in the village through collective action. In this process, they received extensive support from the field staff, which helped people realise improvement in the school in their village.

8. Chennikatte Village (Karnataka)

The project implementation in Karnataka began in 7 tribal hamlets, which are currently situated just outside the boundaries of the Bandipur National Park, which was established in 1974 as a tiger reserve. The national park is located in the southern part of Karnataka. At the time of its establishment, the tribal communities living within the reserve area were resettled at the margins of the forest in small hamlets. These communities have faced extensive challenges with regards to access to education for children as well as access to government programmes and schemes.

Most tribal households in the 7 hamlets are living below poverty line with most working as casual seasonal labourers. The household poverty is in stark contrast to the caste villages that are settled around the hamlets and are engaged in agriculture. This has also meant that the tribal groups hold little influence in the local elected councils and their engagement with local institutions and administration was minimal. When BBA began working in the hamlets, alcoholic addiction was raised as a major challenge in Channikatte village that was affecting the entire community, especially women. Since most economically active members of the community worked as casual labourers, the notion of spending most of their daily earning on alcohol caused massive suffering for women and children.

The women's group members and the *Bal Panchayat* member in their meetings highlighted this as a challenge to be addressed. Several meetings were organised with the field staff where conversations were held to identify steps to reduce dependence of the working members on alcohol. The engagement with field staff on child rights as well as rights of women in the village prompted the two groups to tackle this issue.

This is a significant change that one can witness in the hamlet. While it is true that children and women often suffered alcohol addiction of the male members of a

household, there was little that individuals could change in their respective households. However, once the intervention began to develop groups with children and women as stakeholders, it began to change. With each action and meeting, the groups began to feel they could organise action collectively to alter the situation in their households by targeting the problem. This sense of empowerment led the two groups to work together to change a situation they faced in their households and suffered. The child rights perspective was also of great significance as it helped women and children learn about the rights of children and how alcohol addiction and violence at home could violate such rights.

In their meetings, the women's group and the *Bal Panchayat* members decided to put an end to the sale of alcohol within the village. They then began to work with the community leaders who were ready to address this challenge. Soon, with the help of community leaders, the sale of alcohol was prohibited first in the village. Then, the groups also targeted salesmen who would travel to the hamlets to sell alcohol. By directly confronting the salesmen, the groups were able to put an end to sale of alcohol in the village by these individuals.

The last step was then to put an end to men bringing alcohol from nearby Mangala and Hangala villages. Working with the elected council ensured that the women and children managed to restrict this sale of alcohol to men from the hamlet.

Conclusion

The Child Friendly Village intervention and subsequent examples discussed above clearly demonstrate that the framework is built to comprehensively embed child rights in a community through the rights of participation and collective action. The framework is constituted to achieve effective participation of children in local decision-making processes in a community and ensures their leadership in this direction. The framework also seeks to utilise the effect of models like Children's Parliament (*Bal Panchayat*), Youth and Women's groups (*Yuva Mandal* and *Mahila Mandal*) in interacting and paving way for fulfillment of each other's rights ranging from access to quality Mid-Day Meals at schools to environment protection in the villages, thereby empowering the wider community and supporting their engagement with the administration.

Some of the examples discussed above clearly demonstrate that communities understand where services are unavailable to them. However, they lack the know-how of dealing with these matters. In instances where community leaders (elected or unelected) have some engagement with the local administration they are able to improve lives of their communities. But as the data tells us, in most instances even the elected community leadership feels disempowered within the wider political context to take necessary action for their communities.

In such situations, the intervention succeeds in helping communities and children rethink their relationship with services and the administration through a rights-based approach. In addition, as the field staff develops activities in consultation with the communities and children, their participation helps these groups better understand the

nuances of the process that is involved in developing collective action and realising their rights. It is also observed that if the children are a part of Bal Panchayat, it also inspires their parents to understand their rights and work towards its fulfillment, often translating individual problems to community issues by instilling the feeling of solidarity and belongingness.

What is of further interest is to see how the local government functionaries themselves find the rights- based framework a platform to engage better with the communities, especially with children upholding their rights.

These examples from the field also demonstrate the embedded-ness of the intervention in the institutional and administrative framework of India. While the problem of poverty, illiteracy and child labour exist in other parts of the world and perhaps demonstrate a relationship between the three as seen in India, it is the institutional framework that has developed in India in response to redress these matters that is of significance to the intervention.

Of course, the intervention when it began dealt with a different legislative landscape than that is present today. For example, while the intervention began in 2000-2001, it was not until 2006 when a specific legislation against child marriages was passed by the Parliament in India titled the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. The passing of Of course, the intervention when it began dealt with a different legislative landscape than that is present today. For example, while the intervention began in 2000-2001, it was not until 2006 when a specific legislation against child marriages was passed by the Parliament in India titled the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. The passing of legislation gave an additional avenue to the intervention to deal with this matter in rural India in addition to community engagement and persuasion.

Therefore, the intervention evolved along with the evolution of the legislative framework. The intervention on the other hand has also provided data from the field to support BBA's work with policy makers and has helped the organisation raise matters for policy change. Work with NCPDR on improving education infrastructure as well protecting children depends on the data received and analysed from the field.

This means that the potential of the intervention to develop advocacy work is extensive. Therefore, irrespective of the location, the scope for advocacy is inbuilt in the intervention. However, it is the nature of advocacy that may need to adjust to local institutional framework. Similarly, looking at the broader context of institutional framework, it is the similar story. While the intervention in its current framework as developed by Kailash Satyarthi responds to the legislative and institutional framework that is specific to India, especially in the context of ensuring rights of citizens, the expansion of the intervention may mean a reappraisal of the administrative, legislative and institutional boundaries within a pre-feasibility study. It is possible that the challenges of rights violations of a community, especially of children, are addressed within the existing framework. However, if this appears difficult, the intervention may incorporate a component of advocacy at an appropriate level for either ensuring implementation of existing legislation or formulation or appropriate legislation.

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