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Surakshit Para Surakshit Laikaman.

Let's talk about Child Rights



Surakshit Para Surakshit Lokaman,

Let's talk about Child Rights



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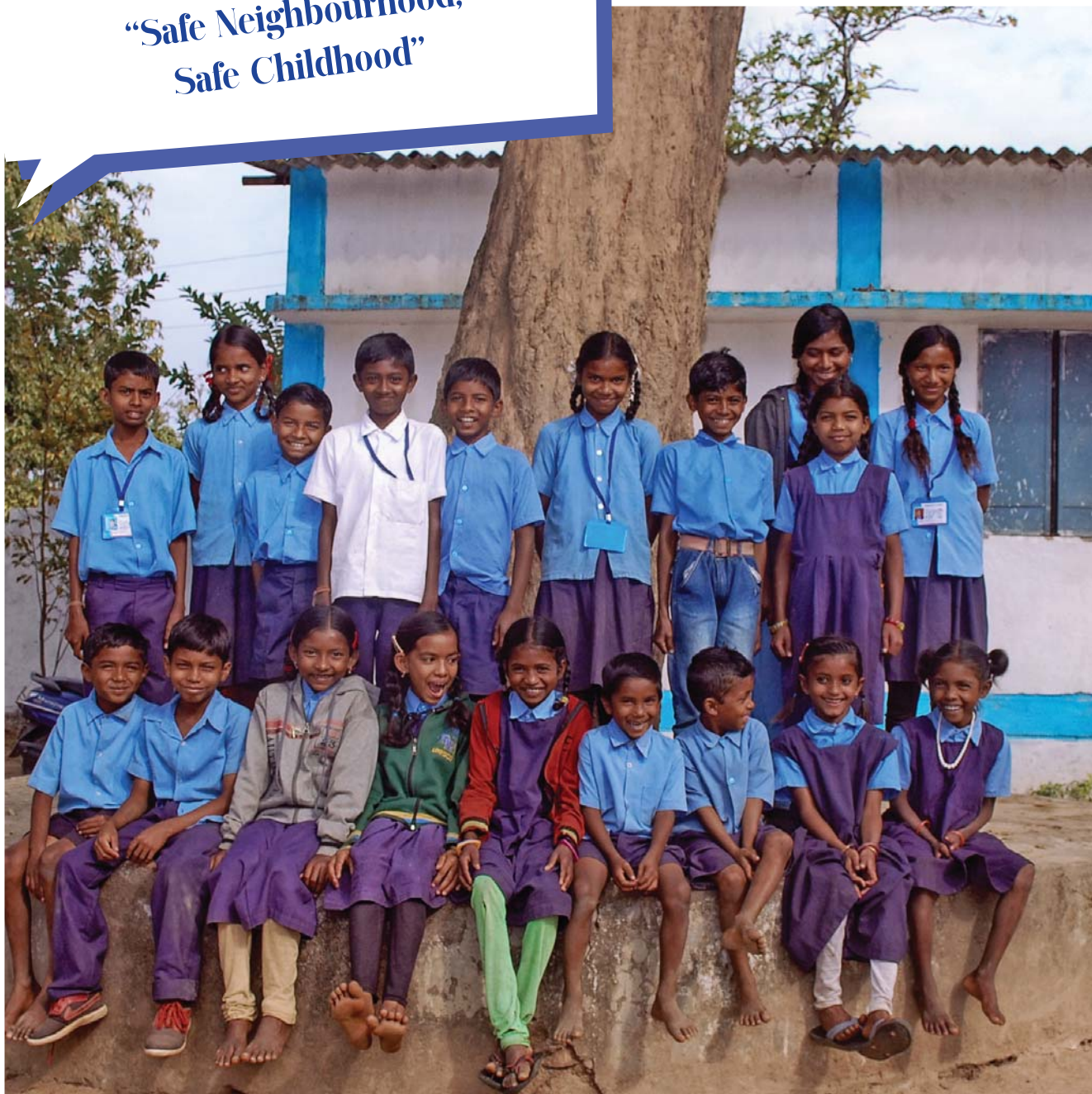
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**“Safe Neighbourhood,
Safe Childhood”**



Abbreviations



ASHA	accredited social health activist
CRC	Child Rights Convention
DCPO	District Child Protection Officer
ICPS	Integrated Child Protection Scheme
IPC	interpersonal communication
JJB	juvenile justice board
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSS	National Service Scheme
PO	programme officer
POCSO	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences
RTE	Right to Education
SMC	school management committee
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VCPC	village child protection committee
WCD	Women and Child Development



Introduction



India signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992, recognizing the 54 Articles on the rights of children. Broadly categorized under the four pillars of the Rights to Survival, Development, Protection and Participation, adoption of the UNCRC should have ensured a safe and productive childhood for all children. Yet, in the last 27 years, limited action has been taken to ensure that all children can exercise their rights.

Bal adhikar or child rights is at best a hazy concept for most - children families, communities and even the functionaries mandated under various laws to protect and uphold these rights are largely unaware of the tenets and their importance for human development. An unknown right cannot be protected as its violation cannot be reported: the violated child is often not aware that her or his right has been violated or of the remedies that she or he can access. Over the years, child abuse

**In Chhattisgarh,
recorded
crimes against
children stood
at 3,777 in 2013;
3,872 in 2014;
and 4,344 in
2015.¹**

¹ <https://naidunia.jagran.com/chhattisgarh/raipur-crimes-against-children-are-on-rise-in-chhattisgarh-791267>

and cases related to violation of child rights have shown an alarming upward trend, fueled by social norms, economic factors, lack of education and awareness on child rights, poor implementation of the law, and low awareness and uptake of various governmental services to redress such situations. As a result, child sexual abuse, neglect, child trafficking, forced dropout of children from schools, etc. remain hidden within the social fabric. Even issues such as child marriage, child labour, and the right to education which have been the focus of various mass awareness campaigns and legislation continue to be violated. Underreporting of such cases gives further leverage to the perpetrators of abuse.



The Need

In 2014, Chhattisgarh ranked fourth in crime against children, contributing to about 5 per cent of all crimes that took place in India in the same year. According to 2014 data, close to 10 per cent of girls aged less than 14 years were found to be employed or working in Dantewada. The district also accounted for about 29 per cent of underage marriages in 2014.² According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Chhattisgarh stood fifth in the list of rape of minor children in 2016. In the same year, the state ranked sixth in the country for cases of kidnapping and abduction of minors, and eleventh in foeticide.³ NCRB data also shows that Chhattisgarh is ranked second only to Delhi with the rate of crimes against children standing at 47.2 in 2016.⁴

Home, the place where a child should be safest, is seen to be the most threatening environment for a child with about 96 per cent cases of child molestation/rape reportedly being committed by close family or people known to the child.³

² Children Trapped in Civil Strife: A report based on a situation analysis of children in the district of Dantewada, Chhattisgarh, January, 2016

³ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/Juvenile-crimes-on-the-rise-in-Chhattisgarh-NCRB/articleshow/53960323.cms>

⁴ <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/ncrb-data-2016-huge-spike-in-rape-of-children-up-by-82-from-2015-up-mp-worst-states-tamil-nadu-new-entrant-496247/>

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NCRB data
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Individuals, institutions and society need to be informed, educated and equipped with the tools to ensure that child rights become a reality. In its global report, Know Violence in Childhood identified three essential actions for this:

- break the silence;
- strengthen violence prevention systems by adopting a multisectoral approach; and
- improve knowledge and evidence on child abuse.

Triggering action

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Field Office for Chhattisgarh collaborated with the National Service Scheme (NSS) to pilot a campaign in 13

**THE SURAKSHIT
PARA
SURAKSHIT
LAIKAMAN
CAMPAIGN WAS
STRUCTURED
IN THREE TIERS:
BAL MELA,
GRAM SAMPARK
ABHIYAN AND
CONSULTATION.**

*Surakshita Para
Surakshita Lokman.*

Let's talk about Child Rights



districts of Chhattisgarh to trigger the essential actions outlined by the Know Violence in Childhood Report. Titled “Surakshit Para, Surakshit Laikaman” meaning “Safe Neighbourhood, Safe Childhood”, the campaign aimed to start the conversation on child rights in 13 districts of the state and shift it from the recesses to the front of people’s consciousness by using NSS’s formidable base of nearly 1 lakh youth volunteers as the messengers and champions of children’s rights.

The campaign was driven by a two-pronged strategy:

- to create awareness of child rights among children, families, communities, institutions and functionaries at the village level in the selected districts; and
- provide a common platform for convergence between all stakeholders from government (namely, Women and Child Development (WCD), Police, School Education, Health and Family Welfare, and Law), UNICEF and NSS who are involved in child protection at the village, district and state levels.



About 2,000 NSS volunteers went to villages to spread awareness about child rights

The Process

The Surakshit Para, Surakshit Laikaman campaign was conceived in October 2018 when planning started. In the preparatory phase, two rounds of trainings were held - A four-day training on theatre techniques for nukkad natak was held in Raipur for 40 volunteers and another training for NSS programme coordinators and 200 programme officers (POs) was held in Raipur to sensitize them on child rights and brief them about the campaign that was being planned. Although POs usually organize the NSS unit under the supervision of the principal of the college or school, for this campaign, they worked under the leadership of the programme coordinator of their district.

The campaign itself was structured in three tiers:

- Bal Mela (sensitization camps for NSS volunteers at the district level and a platform for convergence of district level stakeholders)
- Gram Sampark Abhiyan (day-long village outreach campaigns) and
- Consultations (brainstorming between district child protection stakeholders and NSS volunteers)

The three tiers enabled interactions at the three levels of the social structure of the district (micro, meso and macro). The first tier involved triggering of the NSS volunteers and creating awareness within this cadre. It also brought focus on child rights among the district level authorities and provided a platform for engagement of various stakeholders. The second tier involved field-level activation where NSS volunteers went into the villages, speaking to village-level functionaries, including Panchayat officials, school teachers, angawadi workers and helpers, health workers, ASHAs, etc; families and community members; and children to both gauge the level of awareness of child rights and identify the main issues that children in villages faced. The third tier was a sharing of experiences by the NSS teams with district-level



officials, and mapping of the main problems and possible solutions as an exercise in evolving a way to enhance and ensure protection of children and give them a safe childhood.

The campaign was inaugurated on 18 January 2019 in Raipur at Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University and the last district Consultation was also held at the same location on 15 February 2019. In less than one month, the campaign covered the districts of Ambikapur, Bastar, Bijapur, Durg, Dantewada, Kanker, Kondagaon, Surguja, Mahasamund, Rajnandgaon, Raipur, Narayanpur and Sukma, reaching out to about 5,000 NSS volunteers, 300 villages and approximately 6,00,000 people.⁵



5,000
NSS volunteers



300
Villages



Approximately
6,00,000
people

The camping revealed some key issues.



⁵ Numbers based on an extrapolation of the number of villages covered x average number of households per village x average number of people per household (Number of households taken from Annual Health Survey 2011-12 Chhattisgarh)

This document largely captures details from the four Bal Melas: Durg, Kanker, Kondagaon and Dantewada which were attended by the research team. Divided into two groups, the team also covered six villages (three per group) per day for the Gram Sampark corresponding to these Bal Melas. All Consultations were attended as well.



**Bal Melas were the first
introduction to child rights for
many NSS volunteers**





Bal Mela at Sharkarcharya University, Durg

protection of their rights. Through this activity, close to 5,000 NSS volunteers and POs, from about 100 schools and colleges of the selected districts, were introduced to the subject. Along with district officials, elected representatives also attended the events, not only to recalibrate their own sensitivity to issues of child rights and occurrences of abuse but also to commit their support to promoting and safeguarding child protection through their personal efforts and those of their departments. This was a very important aspect of the Surakshit Para, Surakshit Laikaman campaign which, going forward, would help to coordinate and converge the efforts of stakeholders.

'Champions for children' was the term coined for the NSS youths who were to take the message of child rights to the grassroots. Each champion received a preparatory kit from UNICEF that had a notepad, an I-card and a pen. The kits were to contain a booklet on child rights as well, but due to a logistical issue these were not available except for the last few **Bal Melas**.



Voices before the Bal Mela



Bal Mela at Gondwana Samaj Bhawan, Kanker

Harsha Sahu, a first-year BBA Student from Swami Swarupanand College, who had arrived for the Durg Bal Mela, mentioned that she was looking forward to the Bal Mela but was unaware of the objectives of the event. She informed that the NSS volunteers from her college were intimidated about their necessary attendance at a programme but knew no details about the activity.

On a similar note, 16-year-old Heena Manikpuri from Ghughwa Higher Secondary School and other volunteers from her class did not know what the Bal Mela would be about. However, they were informed that they would be conducting awareness drives in villages for the three days following the meet.



Volunteers presenting a song at Dantewada Bal Mela

There were good intentions but limited exposure to child rights at the start of the Bal Melas

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Sh Baldev Markam, PO from GHSS, Kibaibalenga, said that this was his first exposure to child rights, as he had not attended any training or programme on the issue before the event. His understanding of child rights was therefore limited to a few things only, such as the right to education and protection from abuse. He did not know about the 1098 helpline and was also of the opinion that legislation is well intended and followed, but it does not reach everywhere. His team of NSS volunteers in school comprised 36 female and 64 male students.

- Kondagaon Bal Mela

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Sejwati Kashyab, a Grade 9 student volunteer, said that she did not have much knowledge about child rights. She was also not aware of 1098. She reported that she lived in a girls' hostel where they provided food (breakfast and dinner) only twice a day. On Sundays, they would get egg for lunch. Although she and her friends were not informed about the objectives of the Mela, she expressed her excitement to see how the programme would unfold.

- Jagdalpur Bal Mela

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Another person with an awareness of child rights is Kondagaon Tehsildar, Smt Ritu Hemnani, who was an enthusiastic participant and a keen supporter of the Surakshit Para, Surakshit Laikaman campaign. She said that it is most important that all citizens are made aware about child rights. Since children are vulnerable and cannot identify or understand the wrongs done to them, it is the responsibility of adults to safeguard their rights. She sees young people as an important link in child protection. If every student is made aware of child rights, a future where every citizen realizes the importance of child rights and vows to protect them would not be far away.

- Kondagaon Bal Mela

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Sh Julian Boyle (right) interacting with a volunteer about UNCRC Acts



Bal Mela at Jagdalpur

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Smt Shilpa Sharma, PO from Bastar Girls High School, who is a vocational trainer with a healthcare background, said that representatives from the health department should have also been called to make students aware about child abuse. She added that the volunteers should have a more participatory role in the training.

- Jagdalpur Bal Mela

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Ms Maksuda Hussain, PO from Vidya Jyoti School, shared that child marriages are very much a thing of the present in remote villages of Bastar. She said that there are many cases where students have dropped out after Grade 10 either for marriage or taking up a job. Initiatives like the campaign will help children look for a better future.

- Jagdalpur Bal Mela

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Sh Devlal Mhatra, Janpad Adyakh, at Kondagaon Bal Mela

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Md Akbar Khan, PO from Higher Senior Secondary School, Bakawand, said that attending the Bal Mela in a university or college itself is a big exposure for volunteers coming from rural areas where a large number of students drop out after high school or are afraid of venturing out of their village for higher studies.

- Jagdalpur Bal Mela

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Sh Mahesh Babu, District Judge, Dantewada, emphasized the role of awareness among parents and community in order to ensure the well-being of a child within the family. He said that lack of awareness in the community often makes it difficult for service providers to convey the basic concept of child rights.

Some significant sharings from the Chief Guests at Dantewada

While all the chief guests inspired the volunteers to take up promotion of child rights, some specific remarks are mentioned here:



Dr Abhishek Pallava, SP, Dantewada, said that schools in the Naxal-affected area tend to be targeted as it is popular opinion among the naxalites that education will lead children to join the mainstream. He spoke of the problems related to education in the district. He highlighted the high dropout rate among the children in schools. He further elaborated the importance of education for promoting awareness and access to child rights. He spoke of the important role the NSS volunteers had in spreading awareness in the community. Committing to taking strict action against child rights violators, he promised his full-fledged support to the campaign and its cause.



Mapping a typical Bal Mela



Interactions at Durg Bal Mela

THE PROCESS

Registration ➔ Assembly
➔ Address by Chief Guests
➔ Introduction to Child Rights and concerned UNCRC Acts ➔ Lunch Break ➔ Ice-breaking Games
➔ Brief on Gram Sampark activities ➔ Brief to POs on villages to be visited for Gram Sampark

On average, about 10 institutions participated in the Bal Mela and each Bal Mela was attended by 450–500 NSS volunteers and 10–15 teachers/POs. These trainings provided the youths and adults with an intensive 5-hour session, lasting from about 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. NSS volunteers and other participants were provided a nutritious breakfast, after which they settled in, curious as to what was to unfold. Held in school or college auditoriums or other available halls, these indoor events usually started with the NSS district coordinator giving a brief about the programme and introducing the chief guest(s). Chief guests came from diverse leadership roles and included a District Magistrate, MLAs, a Superintendent of Police (SP) and a District Judge. The chief guests addressed the volunteers and POs, and many shared their views on the issue in relation to their areas. This was useful as it provided the volunteers a localized insight to the status of child rights prevailing in their specific district. The presence of such known faces and eminent personalities also gave them a sense of gravitas regarding the event and the role they were to play.

Part 1: Creating a basic understanding of child rights

The session was divided into two parts. The first part was used to create a basic awareness of child rights and the various UNCRC Acts, in which the facilitators of the training introduced the topic as they walked amongst the seated youths, building an environment of easy interaction. The seating arrangement was gender-specific and both the boys' and girls' sections got equal opportunities to interact with the speakers. They began by asking students a simple question, "Who is a child?" The students, in return, gave interesting answers. Some said children were like clay, who can be moulded in any form. Some answered that children are the future of the nation. Among jovial answers and palpable applause, the facilitators shared critical information such as the definition of a child as a person of less than 18 years of age, etc. With basic information in place, they went on to introduce the students to the concept of the United Nations (UN). Though most students were unaware of the international body, a few hands did go up when asked whether anyone knew about it.

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The first part of the Bal Mela introduced volunteers to the concept of child rights, including the crucial question of who is a child.

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A participant reading out one of the UNCRC Acts at Kanker Bal Mela

After explaining about the UN and India's role in it, they furthered the topic to human rights and the importance of child rights as a separate concept. This brought the conversation to the UNCRC and the articles that protect the rights of the child. The facilitators had students read out some of the fundamental legislations. The four pillars of child rights – survival, development, protection and participation as seen in the core principles of the Convention: non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child – were discussed. By the end of the session, most participants had learnt these four rights by heart. In a nutshell, UNCRC Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 were discussed and other relevant Articles (1–42) were briefly touched upon. Volunteers

By the end of the **Bal Mela**, students had become familiar with every child's right to survival, development, **protection and participation** and the basic recourse they had to **1098**, the **Childline** in their district.

were selected to read out UNCRC Articles: 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37, through which the facilitators explained the various forms of violence against children.

The facilitators also touched upon discrimination and sexual abuse. Discrimination was a subject with which the youths appeared quite familiar as most of them knew about the various bases on which discrimination is perpetuated in society. They also knew about good touch and bad touch as these topics were covered in social studies textbooks in middle or high school.

The other information that was stressed upon and which students learnt by heart was the toll-free child helpline number 1098. They were told how it can be used to help children in distress, or if they found themselves in need of help. This was a revelation for most students who were not aware of this number before the Bal Mela.



Facilitators Speak



Sh Julian Boyle at Jagdalpur Bal Mela

The role of a facilitator is crucial to the success of a sensitization programme. Sh Julian Boyle and Sh Pankaj Kumar Dalai facilitated all the Bal Melas, sometimes individually and sometimes as a team. Sh Boyle himself was an NSS volunteer in his

youth and saw the NSS cadre as having great potential for bringing about change. Sh Boyle said, "We need to consider our children as our present, and not the future. The better care we give them in the present, the better future we will be able to create".

In his interactive training sessions, he provided the volunteers with a simplified overview of the constitutional provisions for children and rights of children sanctified in our Constitution and UNCRC.

He said that his objective for the campaign, as discussed with UNICEF and NSS, was to trigger conversations and introduce child rights to the community and especially to the NSS volunteers. Through the Bal Melas and the Gram Sampark, he felt, "The volunteers will get a valuable lifetime exposure that neither books, nor the institutions of learning will probably ever be able to provide."



For him, the first step in helping the volunteers start this journey was the orientation of the NSS programme coordinators and associated teachers and lecturers in Raipur, which was held in January 2019. His experience with the teachers and POs was a very positive one as he found them all very enthusiastic about the initiative and eager to work for it.

Sh Boyle's association with UNICEF started in 1985. For the past two years, he has also been a part of an initiative that aims to increase participation of women in the Gram Panchayats of Dantewada, and ensure more inclusion of children's issues in Gram Sabha discussions.

Sh Pankaj Kumar, who works at the Development Network and has been associated with various projects for UNICEF since 2008 as a trainer, felt that the Bal Mela activity did not quite live up to its name: As a Mela, it should have had elements of infotainment with learning imparted to the volunteers through

fun activities such as games and with the use of more engaging materials, but what evolved eventually was more of a formal session. Moreover, there were varying numbers of volunteers – 150–200 volunteers at some sessions and more than 500 at others – which meant that one training strategy would not fit all.



Sh Pankaj Kumar at Kondagaon Bal Mela

Part 2: Preparing for the Gram Sampark

When the volunteers reassembled after the lunch break, they were informed that 20 selected volunteers from each institution would form a team and each team would visit three villages during the Gram Sampark – one village per team per day. Students were given an understanding of the tools they would use during the village engagement, the people and institutions they should visit in the village, and a basic structure for conducting the village-level activation.

At every Bal Mela, the post-lunch session saw a diminished attendance with the majority of the attendees being the 200 students who had been chosen for the Gram Sampark sessions. A smaller group with a clear mandate for their participation meant that this session was more collected and composed. Facilitators explained the details of the Gram Sampark, its purpose, the role of the volunteers, etc. They guided the volunteers with some basic suggestions on how to get information in the village and make their activities more impactful. Meeting village elders and elected PRI leaders, and introducing themselves and the purpose of their visit was the first step. The volunteers were then to meet school teachers, *anganwadi* workers and helpers, *mitanins* (the local name for accredited social health activist {ASHA} workers), retired persons, women's groups, youth groups, etc., and talk to them about child rights.

The second part of the session, post lunch, focused on providing volunteers with an outline on how to conduct a Gram Sampark, whom to meet and the issues to explore. The events concluded with POs receiving a list of the villages to be covered by their teams in the subsequent three days.



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एक दिवसीय बाल मेला

दिनांक - 29.09.19, मंगलवार

स्थान - गण्डव... भवन कांकेर



Volunteers presenting a nukkad natak at Kanker Bal Mela, which they had learnt from their previous training in Raipur

Volunteers were also advised to engage with the villagers and ask any elders or youth of the village to accompany them on a *gram bhraman*, or village tour. This activity would help them to collect basic information such as the number of *anganwadis* and schools in the village, condition of school infrastructure, availability of drinking water, general cleanliness, etc.

Volunteers were to organize a rally throughout the village and inform the villagers about the time and place of the *nukkad natak* they would be performing later in the day. After the *nukkad natak*, volunteers were to engage the audience in discussions about child rights.

Facilitators also encouraged the volunteers to interact with village children and educate them about 'good touch, bad touch' and the importance of raising their voice if an incident of 'bad touch' happens. They taught the volunteers various ice-breaking games that they could play with village children to engage their interest and attention.

Facilitators urged students to be respectful towards the villagers and avoid criticizing or making fun of them.

Students presenting
a song at Jagdalpur
Bal Mela





CASE STUDY

Leaders' voices make an impact: Contextualizing child rights

At the Kondagaon Bal Mela, Sh Neelkanth Tikam, District Collector, was an inspiration to the volunteers, with his strong grasp of child rights. He shared a personal anecdote in which he spoke about his own experience of abuse as a child while studying in primary school and living at a relative's home. When he returned from school, he would not be provided food and so had to raid guava trees for survival. At that time, he was unaware that deprivation of food was a violation of his rights as a child. He added that even throwing a piece of chalk at a child, which is a common practice amongst teachers, is not right as it might harm the child.

The emotionally-charged personal account, coming from a leader, kept the audience spellbound. He said that NSS workers had been provided a great opportunity to spread awareness on child rights and they must make the most of it.



Sh Neelkanth Tikam, District Collector, Kondagaon



Sh Mohanlal Markam, MLA, at Kondagaon Bal Mela

Creating a sense of pride in the audience, he said that the culture of Bastar is such that child protection is always given importance. However, due to insufficient understanding of child rights, people usually question as to who will take care of the younger children if the elder sister goes to study. This attitude violates the rights of the elder sister's right to study. With such examples, he contextualized child rights, giving the NSS volunteers a frame of reference for understanding the issue. He also gave them a target: Speak to the elders, teachers, *anganwadi* workers, parents, and spread awareness about child rights. He inspired them with the words, "You are the future. You have to imagine a better future and guide people towards it." While speaking to the research team, he added that a follow-up in at least six months is crucial for the campaign to have a long-lasting impact. Sh Mohan Lal Markam, MLA, who graced the Kondagaon Bal Mela, appreciated the initiative and promised his full support.

"I will guide my line staff, Gram Sarpanches, anganwadi workers and head masters to give full support for this campaign."

Sh Neelkanth Tikam

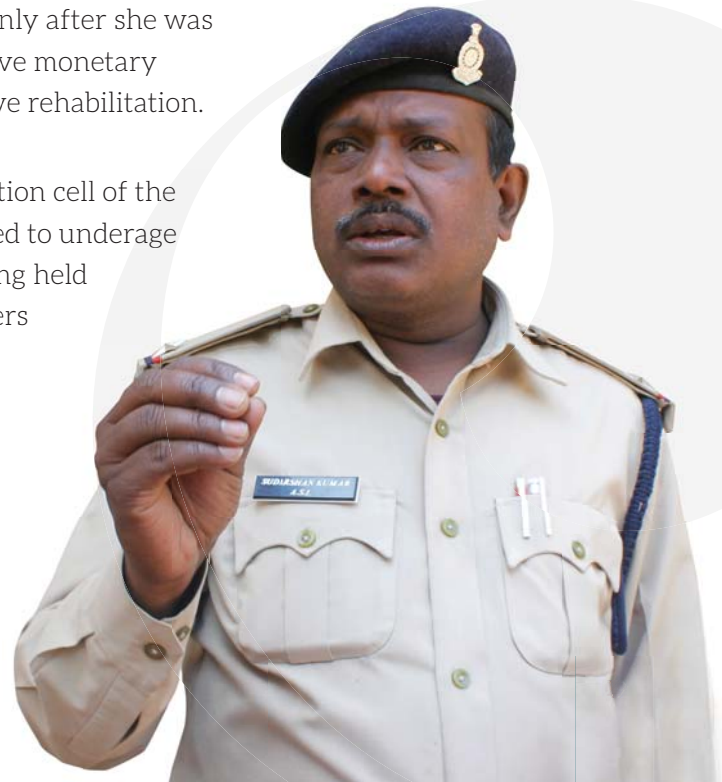
What do the protectors say?

Sudarshan Kumar Majumdar, ASI, Kondagaon, attended the Bal Mela on 2 February 2019. When speaking to the researchers, he said that it is important for legal knowledge to be imparted to students so that they have a fair knowledge of the repercussions of actions that they take in ignorance.

Adding to this statement, Inspector Archana Dhurandhar (Chhattisgarh Police, District Kondagaon), a specialist in Scheduled Castes /Scheduled Tribes cases, said that basic law should be included in educational courses from Grade 9 onwards with actual case studies included in textbooks so that students who are of impressionable ages are made aware of the destructive consequences that actions can sometimes have on their futures. She said this with reference to a case where an underage girl eloped with a young boy and returned home with her baby. Her parents reported the case to the district police, and since the boy was older than 18 years, he was tried under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and imposed a punishment by the magistrate. The hopeless girl, being ostracized by her family and society, was bereft and on hearing the announcement of the punishment for the boy, she climbed to the top of the court building and threatened to jump. It was only after she was counselled by the police and told that she would receive monetary assistance that she climbed down and agreed to receive rehabilitation.

Ms Dhurandhar said that every year, the child protection cell of the district police department, receives 30–40 cases related to underage children, usually aged around 17 years, eloping or being held hostage at workplaces in other cities. Cases of teenagers running away from home are very common in the district. Children drop out from school to find work and earn. Many school-going teenagers elope, only to come back and find themselves cast out by the family and society. She identified low education levels and poverty as the reasons behind this. She also

*Sh Sudarshan Majumdar,
ASI, Kondagaon*



flagged consumption of tobacco and local alcoholic drinks, such as *mahua* sap, as being very common, specially in the south Chhattisgarh region. Family members of both genders are given to excessive drinking which impacts the care given to children.

Sh Majumdar also said that a women's cell is present in every police station in Kondagaon, which also deals with all child rights cases. He said that Childline (1098) has been activated for Kondagaon in 2019. Earlier, calls to the number were being handled from Jagdalpur. An important aspect that he touched upon was the social stigma attached to reporting cases of child abuse. In a step to encourage reporting, he added that if someone brings in a child in distress, the case is taken up by the juvenile justice board (JJB). The person reporting the situation is appreciated by the officials and, once the child has been handed over and relevant information has been provided, is not required for any further process.

Sh RK Jain, NSS district coordinator, Kondagaon, spoke of the gender parity that exists in the tribal belt, where girls are considered more important than boys. The reason he gave for this is the custom in which a boy pays some money to the girl's family when asking for her hand in marriage. However, he also said that the concept of dowry that is widespread elsewhere in India, where the girl's family gives money and gifts to the boy, is gaining popularity in the tribal belts too.

Positive steps towards improving access to child rights:

Every police station in Kondagaon has a women's cell, which also deals with all cases related to child rights.

Childline (1098) has been activated for Kondagaon in 2019.

Any case of child in distress is taken up by the JJB.



Ms Archana Dhurandar, Inspector, Chhattisgarh

Lessons learnt from the Bal Melas

Creation of a common platform: The Bal Melas were a grand success in bringing together students, volunteers, eminent guests and stakeholders under one roof.

Triggering a realization of child rights: Bal Melas played the important role of making the concept of child rights real for NSS youth, bringing it out of the shadows and creating a sense of empowerment of children. By the end of the session, participants were aware of the basic tenets of the CRC and of certain mechanisms that exist for the redressal of violation of these rights – both in terms of the legal frameworks, services such as child-friendly police stations and most importantly, their right to access Childline (1098).

Creating good citizens: Creation of a sensitized cadre of young people on the brink of adulthood, who are conscious and aware of child rights and also equipped with the tools to ensure child protection, is a significant outcome. They would act as both messengers and champions of children in society and themselves create positive influences in the community.

Convergence: The forum provided a significant movement towards better coordination and convergence between stakeholders at various levels to not only increase awareness of child rights but also ensure that access to services was made easier. By bringing together officials from various stakeholder departments who all committed to support the initiative, the path was also paved for better communication. It was a productive platform for volunteer engagement, participation, orientation, education and awareness generation. It was an opportunity for students and volunteers to interact with established people who have made noteworthy contributions in the society. This in turn paved way for information exchange and personality development of the students by broadening their horizons. Brainstorming and debating sessions also stimulated the thought process of these young thinkers.

Possible improvements: Most NSS volunteers and their POs had no prior information about the purpose of the Bal Mela. It is worth considering whether they would have been able to get more information from the interaction if they had some preparation or whether their lack of information

was beneficial in keeping them attentive. In addition, the volunteers had only a few hours to process all they were told about in the training and convert information into action. Although the facilitators tried to engage the students, the training was ultimately in a lecture/class room format, and the number of volunteers was too huge for them to pay attention to everyone. Hence, volunteers' attentiveness to the facilitators, especially of those sitting in the back, was often low and understanding of the issues shared was less than optimal.

At least two facilitators were needed at all sessions. There was also a need for inclusion of audio-visual communication aids such as documentaries, short films and music on the relevant topic which would have better engaged the participants.

As there was no take-away material for subsequent reading, volunteers were not fully apprised of the information being shared by the facilitator. Carry-home material, in the form of a small booklet on the CRC, was supposed to be available but due to certain logistical issues was not printed on time. As a result of this, volunteers and POs did not have access to a quick reference for the articles of the CRC and the basics of child rights. After the Bal Mela in Durg, which was the third in the state, Dr RP Aggrawal, district programme coordinator for Durg and Rajnandgaon, said that the only material received were the programme banners. However, it is worth mentioning that Dr DL Patel, district programme director, took an initiative to get a detailed hand-out created to guide teams in seven districts: Bijapur, Dantewada, Bastar, Kanker, Kondagaon, Narayanpur and Sukma. At the Jagdalpur meet, for Bastar, Dr Patel arranged for the POs an abridged version of the handout which included a time table and a list of topics to enquire about, so as to somewhat channelize the next step towards a structured goal.





Kondagaon Bal Mela

RAIPUR

18 January
2019

Programme Coordinator

Dr Neeta Bajpai



Sh Pramod Dubey
Mayor

Sh Kesari Lal Verma
Professor, Pt. Ravishankar
Shukla University



550 volunteers,
15 institutions

JAGDALPUR

05 January
2019

Programme Coordinator

Dr Neeta Vajpayee



Dr Vijaylakshmi Murti
Additional Director
of Education, CG
Government

Vijay Kumar Sharma
District Child
Protection Officer



XX volunteers,
XX institutions

AMBIKAPUR

19 January
2019

Programme Coordinator
Dr DL Patel



Smt Rohini Prasad
Vice Chancellor,
Surguja University



SK Tripathi
Regional Manager,
Education Department

XX volunteers,
XX institutions

RAJNANDGAON

21 January
2019

Programme Coordinator
Dr DL Patel



Dr Shailendra Saraf
Vice Chancellor



Dr Rajesh Pandey
Registrar, Hemchand
University

XX volunteers,
XX institutions



KONDAGAON

02 February
2019

Programme Coordinator
Dr DL Patel

Neelkanth Tikam
Collector



Mohan Lal Markam
MLA

450 volunteers,
10 institutions

DURG

29 January
2019

Programme Coordinator
Dr RP. Agarwal

Dr Shailendra Saraf
Vice Chancellor



Dr Rajesh Pandey
Registrar, Hemchand
University

500 volunteers,
10 institutions

KANKER

29 January
2019

Programme Coordinator
Dr RP. Agarwal

Shishupal Sodi
MLA



XX volunteers,
XX institutions

BILASPUR

22 January
2019

Programme Coordinator
Dr Manoj Sinha

Shailesh Pandey
MLA



Dr JD Sharma
Vice Chancellor, Atal
Bihari Vajpayee
University

500 volunteers,
10 institutions

MAHASAMUND

22 January
2019

Programme Coordinator
Dr AL Patel

Sh Vinod Chandrakar
MLA



600 volunteers,
12 institutions

DANTEWADA

06 February
2019

Programme Coordinator
Dr RP. Agarwal

Mahesh Babu
District Judge



Abhishek Pallava
Superintendent Police

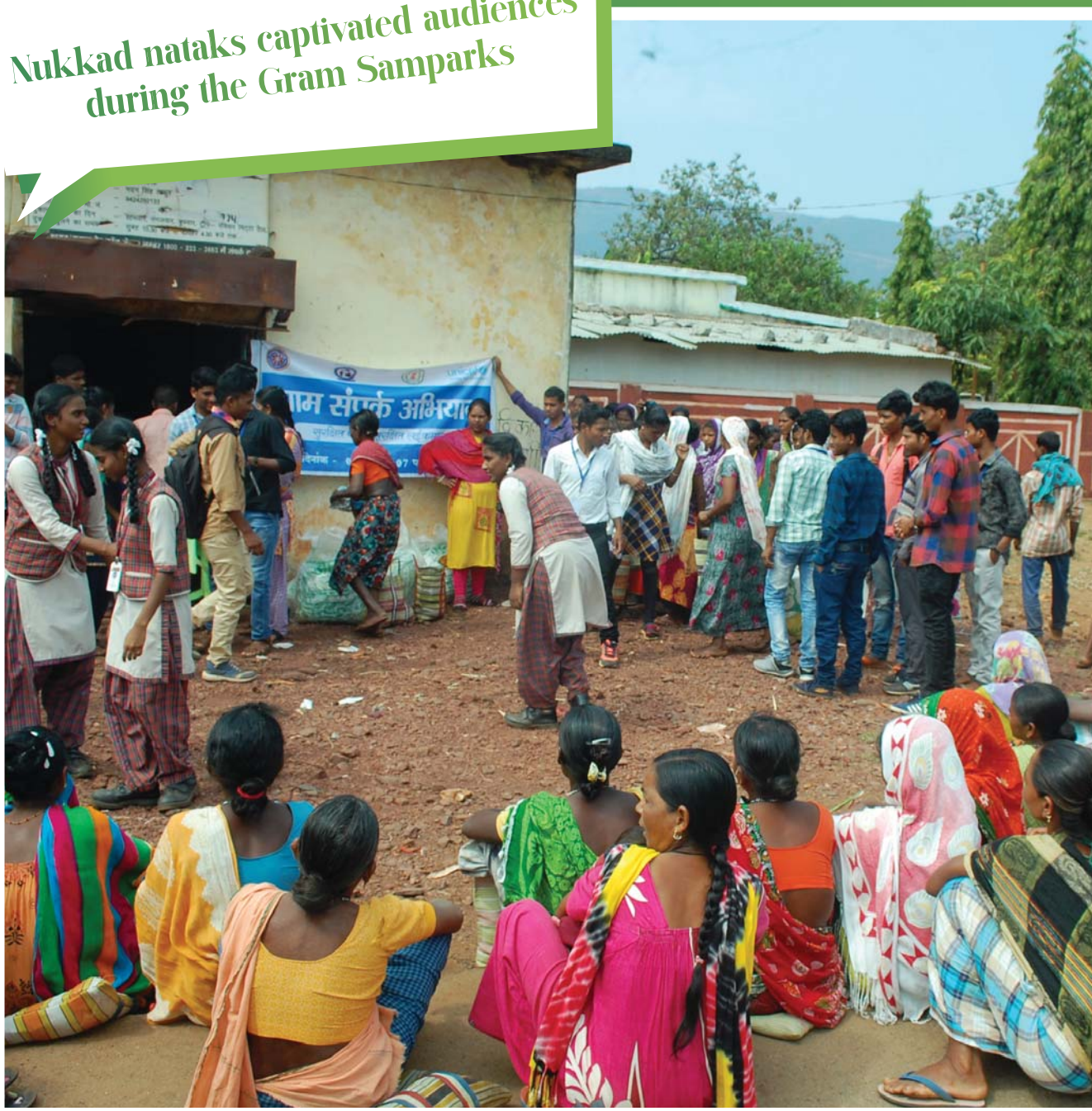
XX volunteers,
XX institutions

**Sh Julian Boyle
training the
students for
Gram Sampark
at Jadgdalpur
Bal Mela**





Nukkad natak captivated audiences during the Gram Sampark





Gram Samparks took place immediately after the Bal Melas. NSS district coordinators allocated villages to the various teams, which were to be within a 20-km radius from their locations as per the guidelines given by UNICEF. Each institution present at the Bal Mela selected a team of 15–20 volunteers each for the Gram Sampark and teams were allocated three villages each. Teams, along with their PO, visited one village per day on three consecutive days. Volunteers had been briefed on how to conduct the Gram Sampark during the second session of the Bal Mela and so were equipped with the basic plan and tools they needed to use in the village. At the end of the Bal Mela, NSS volunteers had various questions in

their kitty: are school-aged children attending school, is there any child labour in the village, are child marriages happening, is there a school management committee (SMC) in the school, how is it functioning, is there a village child protection committee (VCPC), do schools and *anganwadis* have playgrounds, is vaccination being done properly at the AW level, are there any pregnant women and are they being provided the proper care from *mitanin*, and so on.



Mapping a typical Gram Sampark

From each school/college, volunteers left for the destination village in a bus, private conveyance, or on foot, depending upon the proximity of the field area to their institution. Reaching the venue at around 10 a.m., they started their activities for the day.

As per the plan they had been given, NSS volunteers had certain specific tasks to undertake on each day, the first of which was to visit the Gram Panchayat and meet the Sarpanch and Gram Sabha members, inform them about the initiative and its objective, and take their permission for moving further. An elder of the village or a local youth was to be requested to escort them through the village on a village *bhraman*. During the first part of the day, volunteers were to visit various village-level institutions.

THE PROCESS

- Assembly at village
- Meeting with the Sarpanch and Gram Sabha members
- Assessment of water resources in the village
- Visiting anganwadi
- Schools
- Health centre and PDS outlet
- Meeting families and children
- Rally
- Nukkad natak
- Return



Finding information on children's access to basic needs



ACCESS TO WATER

Volunteers had to identify the number of borewells or hand pumps in the village, assess whether these were providing potable water and the surrounding area was clean, inspect how well these were maintained, and estimate the number of people using each water source.



FUNCTIONALITY OF ANGANWADI CENTRES

They had to visit *anganwadis* and meet the *anganwadi* worker and/or the *anganwadi* helper to assess enrollment and attendance of children at the *anganwadi* centre, facilities being provided (immunization, mid day meal, etc.) and any problems they might be facing.



UPTAKE OF RIGHT TO EDUCATION (RTE) GUIDELINES

In a similar vein, when the volunteers visited schools, they had to enquire about details like the number of students enrolled, existence and functionality of the SMC, facilities for students such as playground and boundary wall, problems such as dropouts, child safety, etc.



VILLAGE-LEVEL INSTITUTIONS

Volunteers visited health centres and ration shops and enquired about the facilities being provided there. An important task for them was to find out if the village had a VCPC and whether it was functional.



PO interacting with students at Singhanpur, Keskal



NSS team at Lanjoda, Bastar

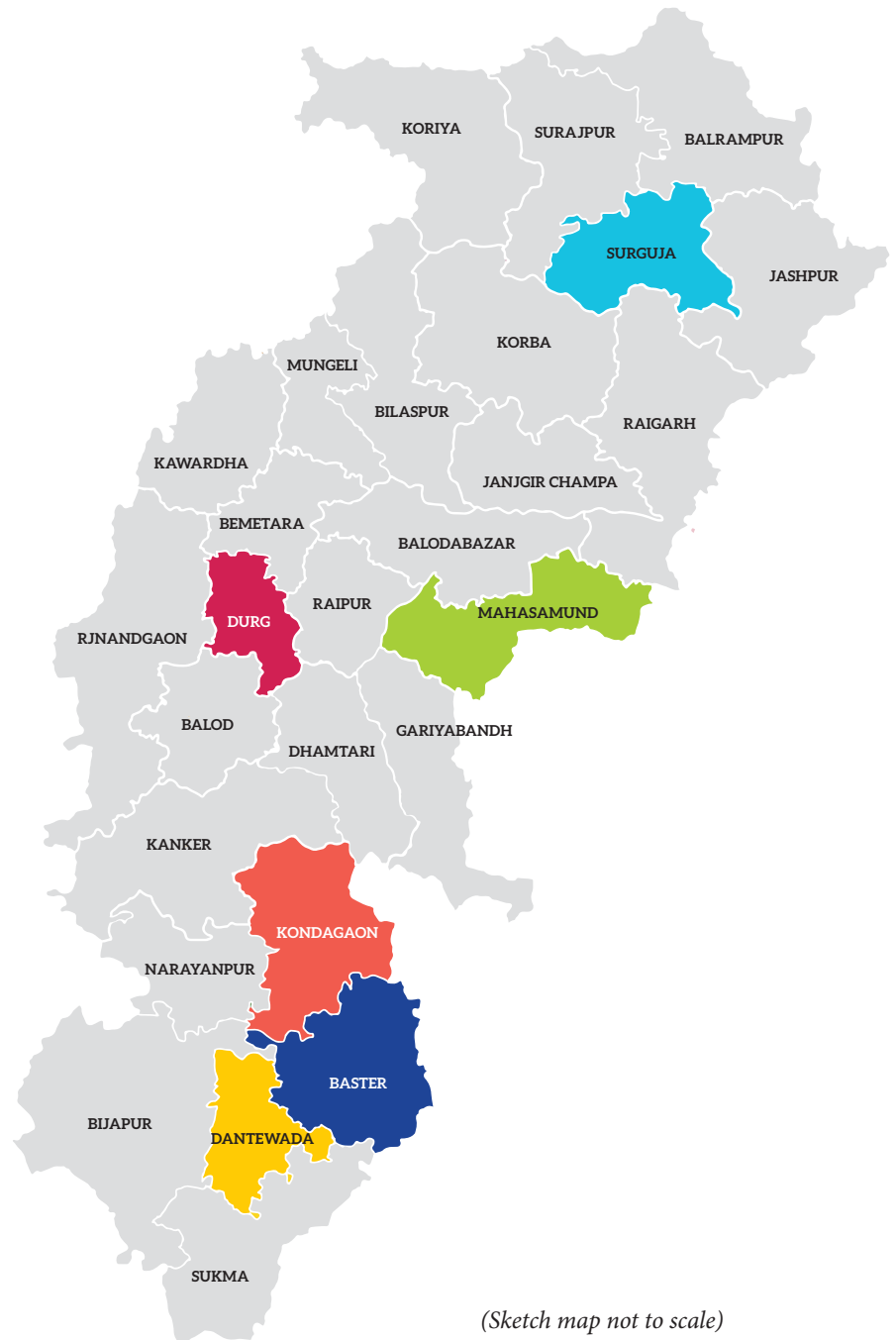
At every touch point with children, teachers and parents, volunteers were required to access information about knowledge on child rights and generate relevant awareness.

The second part of the day was to be devoted to awareness generation. In addition to personal conversations with children, parents and community members, volunteers staged *nukkad nataks*, took out processions and rallies, shouted slogans and engaged in conversations with parents, children and community members explaining the meanings of child rights, good touch-bad touch, providing information about 1098 helpline and encouraging children and adults alike to raise their voice against child abuse.

Although this was the structure given for an ideal Gram Sampark, the order of activities varied from team to team, depending on the availability of the *Sarpanch* and coordination with schools.



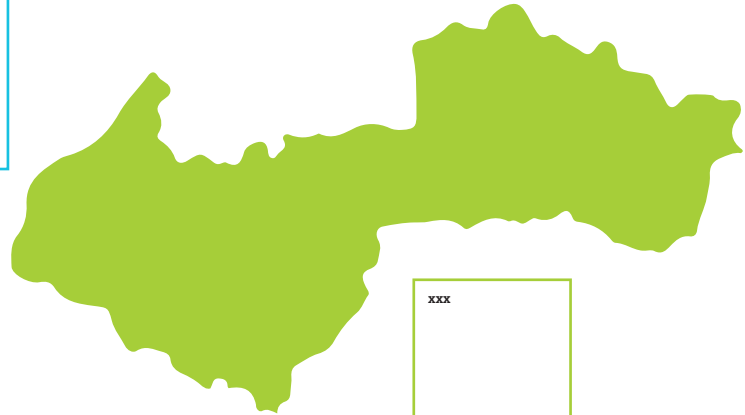
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KHAPRI
KHAMHRIA
UTAI
DUMARDIHA
KARGADIHA
DEMAR
PANDER
AKHARA
ANJORA(DURG)
ANJORA
(RAJNADAGAON)
THANOD
SIKALO BASTI
POTIA
SILOD
KHAPRI
GANIYRI
PURAI
JANJIRI
PAUWARA
KOSANALA BASTI
DHANORA
BORSI BHATA
KARSA
ARASNARA
BODEGAON



(Sketch map not to scale)



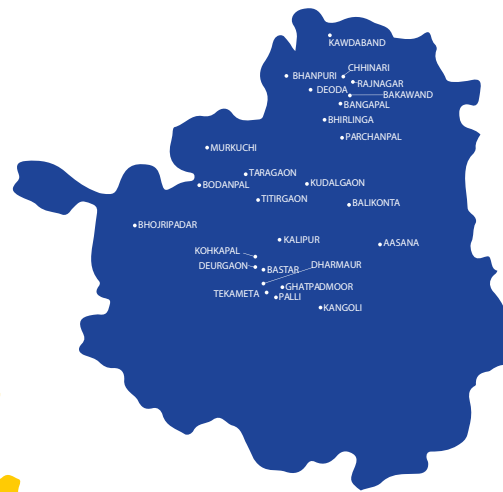
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BASTAR
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PARCHANPAL
MURKUCH
BANGAPAL
BHIRLINGA
TARAGAON
DEODA
AASANA
KUDALGAON
BHANPURI
BODANPAL
KAWDABAND
BHOJIPADAR
CHHINARI
RAJNAGAR
BAKAWAND

xxx





A tentative start, a fulfilling journey

The first challenge that the NSS volunteers and POs faced was the lack of resource materials that could direct them to specific targets or questions for survey. They were mostly operating from the notes they could gather in the Bal Melas. Given the classroom-style structure of the Bal Mela, and insufficient sound set-up, it was doubtful that all the students were able to jot down the points completely and correctly. However, the energetic teams, under the guidance of their POs, did not let any constraint get in the way of conducting an impactful outreach programme. The three-day intensive outreach programme challenged them to give their best output within a short time, keeping them focused and instigating them to think and act on their feet. To record the processes being followed, two research teams visited three villages every day, catching different volunteer teams in action.

Incremental learning

From the Bal Mela to the Gram Sampark, the volunteers gained in knowledge and confidence. Learning on the job, they approached the first day of the Gram Sampark with some hesitation, both in terms of how they would connect with the village folk and their own knowledge of the subject on which they were to interact. As morning led to evening, the increase in confidence of the volunteers was clearly visible. The various activities they participated in, which involved interaction with government officials, community members and school students, strengthened their understanding of violence against children. Special credit goes to active POs who made this campaign an immensely enriching experience for volunteers. It is worth noting that by the end of Day 3, the volunteers were comfortable talking about child protection and mobilizing support for the issue.



Coming face-to-face with issues affecting children

The Gram Sampark put NSS volunteers in close proximity to the issues that children face at the village level. Visits to Gram Panchayats, *anganwadis*, schools and PHCs, and interactions with service providers and beneficiaries brought to light the barriers children face in exercising their rights at the micro-level.

Volunteers identified issues such as dropping out of school, alcoholism, drug abuse, lack of teachers, and lack of basic amenities like toilets in schools.



Access to regular education is an issue at the village level. It emerged as a leading problem faced by children. Unlike many issues of child rights or child abuse, this issue is visible and can be spoken about freely. In interacting with villagers, the volunteers were told of many reasons why children had dropped out – some of which were due to circumstances and demands from adults while others were for reasons created by the children themselves.

Reasons for dropping out ranged from child labour to child abuse, and mostly in the case of girl students – taking care of younger siblings. There is also a tendency in the community for males to start earning as early as possible. As a result of this, children in their later teens are often lured by agents who offer them work in neighbouring states.





CASE STUDY

Dropping out of school: Family circumstances deprive children of education



Nikhil Yadav, a volunteer from Rajiv Lochan College, Rajim Nagar, Gadiaband, shared a case about a family in Patharra village, Gadiaband in which there were three children: two girls – one in Grade 11 and another girl in Grade 4 – and a boy aged 10-12 years, None of the children attended school. The eldest girl accompanied the mother to work as a domestic help, and as a result, often missed school. The younger sister had suffered a mild paralytic attack recently due to which she no longer went to school. The father did not work as he too was paralyzed. The boy, Bhojraj, did not go to school, though he said he wished to study.

Nikhil spoke to the principal of the primary school regarding Bhojraj's admission and the principal said that there was no reason why Bhojraj could not attend school. As neither Bhojraj nor his family commented on why he

was not admitted to school, the only conjecture that could be made was that he was responsible for looking after the father and younger sister while his mother and eldest sister went to work.

Volunteers in Sukurpara found three high school dropouts who stopped attending school because they had failed in their exams a few times. They also mentioned a case where a Grade 5 boy committed suicide, apparently because he was being forced to go to school.





CASE STUDY

Alcoholism: Barrier to children's development



The *mahua* tree, which is prolific in the state, provides an easy source for homemade alcohol. Mukesh Turkar, a 35-year resident of Jondrapadar, Kondagaon, explained that people here have *mahua* trees in their homes, which is used to make an intoxicating drink. As a result, men in the households are generally drunk, which adversely impacts the children. They are not taken care of properly, and following their elders, they start drinking at an early age. He flagged the issue of young children (even pre-teens) dropping out of school and taking to alcoholism and other forms of substance abuse such as glue sniffing. He said that awareness and values of education need to be instilled in the community, and then only would

Surakshit Para, Surakshit Laikaman found that one of the challenges to safe communities and safe childhood stems from alcoholism. Intoxicated adults are not responsible and hence cannot be good parents; they create unsafe environments; they are poor role models with negative influences on children. Alcoholism is a factor in perpetuating the poverty trap.



there be hope for a better village. He was glad that the programme was happening in their village and hoped it would be sustained so as to impact the lifestyle and choices of the people there.

Hemlata Sahu, a volunteer from Government DB Girls College, Raipur, shared a sad picture of Mujgahar village in Mahasamund. She said that her team, which was an all-girls team, were forced to wrap up their activities in the village by 2 p.m. because of the incessant catcalling they encountered during their field visit. The presence of drunk people everywhere also posed a risk to their safety. In their short stint, they had found that gambling was also a big problem in the village, with a gambling spot located right in front of the *anganwadi*.

In Kumharpara, Kondagaon, Sarpanch Sh Hemachandra Kurram himself came to open the Gram Panchayat office when informed about the campaign, despite it being a Sunday.

Sh Kurram said that literacy in the village was low and the main occupation of the villagers was craftsmanship and agriculture. Generally, people urged their children to take up the family occupation and learn the skills accordingly. In an effort to change the scenario, he once stopped the village ration supplies for a full month, threatening the residents that there would be no ration provided if they did not ensure their children's attendance in school. However, since most of the people were generally intoxicated with *mahua* juice, the effort did not yield anything. He also said that in the village *anganwadi*, 16 children were listed as undernourished, citing *mahua* addiction among the majority of the parents as the reason why they did not pay attention to their children's health.

He was unaware of the provisions for the 1098 helpline or VCPC. When asked by the NSS volunteers, he said that he had no information about these. At the end of the discussion, the Sarpanch promised to promote 1098 and hold meetings with the inter-village departments to discuss child rights.

However, it should be noted that the NSS volunteers' discussion with the Sarpanch bordered on aggressiveness, so much so that he had started feeling threatened. This also points to the need for better training of the volunteers.



Silence on child rights abuse is dangerous

Families and communities are complicit in many issues of child rights abuse – from creating environments where alcohol and substance abuse are normalized, through lack of access to education, child labor and underage marriages to even more heinous crimes like sexual abuse and trafficking. While issues pertaining to wrongdoings of children that lead to child rights violations are freely spoken about, areas where adults and society can be held responsible are largely shrouded in silence. This points to the extreme need to empower children themselves and enable them to access protection mechanisms while at the same time sensitizing adults on the need to respect and about behaviours that ensure children's rights are protected.

Early marriage, child labour, trafficking and access to services: Child rights is unknown territory for most

Most volunteers interacting with the community reported that there was little awareness about child rights – be it among children or parents. Even office bearers like Sarpanches, Gram Sabha members, teachers, and *anganwadi* workers had little knowledge about child rights beyond common topics like child marriage, child labour and equality for the girl child. Awareness about 1098 helpline was very limited too.

For example, in Chichadi, Kondagaon there were two teams of NSS volunteers from Government Naveen College, Farasgaon – one with Sh Pankaj Raj and the other with Sh Mahavir Jaiswal. In a conversation with the teams, the research team assessed that some of the volunteers had only partially grasped the information shared at the Bal Mela. For example, volunteer Sunila Markam, aged 21 years, was not aware of 1098 helpline. Even the understanding of child rights was not well developed for all members of the team, as most of them stayed quiet when asked about their

Low crowd attendance affects success

*Twelve NSS volunteers from Gondadhar Mahavidyalaya, PG College, with their programme coordinator Sh RJ Rajput, had arrived in Jondrapadar at around 10 a.m. They had planned for a rally, meeting with *anganwadi* workers and home visits. However, the *anganwadi* was closed since it was a Sunday and most people had gone to the weekly Kondgaon market for supplies. Holding a 12-member rally would not have been as impactful, so they conducted only home visits. They could have held the rally at the weekly market, which would have received more response from the crowd. However, Sh Rajput said that the market was too far and they did not have proper conveyance.*





Sh Mahavir Jaiswal interacting with his team in Chichadi

understanding of child rights or their planning for the day. However, there were three volunteers – Dev Singh Netam, Rajendra Kumar Mandavi and Amar Sai Netam – in the team of about 20 members who had attended the Kondagaon Bal Mela, who had grasped the concepts quite well and were responding enthusiastically to questions like what should be done if one came across a case of violation of child rights, and what good touch – bad touch meant.

The Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat in Chichadi, Kondagaon, 34-year-old Sh Rajesh Kumar Markam, the father of four young sons, admitted that he had no knowledge about child rights and the 1098 helpline number. He knew that there was a VCPC for the village comprising 12–13 members but was unsure of

their role. He appreciated the interaction with NSS volunteers, remarking that it would be helpful for the development of the village children.

Later, in a conversation with 12-year-old Bhumika Vatti and 11-year-old Namita Nitam, both 6th graders in Chichadi, Kondagaon, it was found that they would work at a brick kiln with their parents on their days off from school. They did not like working there, but were obligated to do so because of their parents' insistence.

There were also cases of trafficking, where children were lured by traffickers/agents under the guise of promising work in cities. They would be forced to work and not allowed to return to their homes easily. Sometimes the police had to intervene in such cases to ensure the children's safe return.

Low uptake of services impacts children's right to health and development

While doing the household visits in Chichadi, the NSS team found that service delivery at the *anganwadi* was low. Many parents said that their children did not receive deworming and iron tablets; none of the parents interviewed had enrolled their daughters in the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana as they did not receive any such information from the *anganwadi* workers. Sickling tests, to screen for Haemoglobin S in blood (sickle cell disease), were also not carried out regularly. The team advised parents not to carry their children with them when they went to work, as children needed rest and proper nutrition.

The research team was also informed about a case where an underage girl had eloped with an underage boy. When the couple returned to the village, the girl was 2-3 months pregnant, and the boy's parents got them married. Unfortunately, the girl could not carry the child to full term and died before the delivery.

Madhav Markam, 28 years old, whose two children go to the *anganwadi*, said that no one in their village knew either about Childline or child rights. He said that young children of the age group 14-22 years would go to Tamil Nadu to work at borewell sites. He spoke of Jitendra Vishwakarma, a boy of about 16 years of age, who had passed away in a fatal accident while working at one such site in Tamil Nadu. The dead body was brought home with the police's help but there was no support from the Gram Panchayat.

Although parents acknowledged the issue of child marriage, they highlighted instances of only those marriages that took place as a result of elopement. They did not speak of cases where underage children were forced by elders to marry against their wishes.



Volunteers interacting with community members in Chichadi

Not everyone believes in child rights

It was observed that most teachers and principals believe that some form of punishment is necessary for instilling discipline in students. Sh Deepak Singh, principal of the Utai Middle School, said that teachers were scared of backlash from parents in case the child complained of being scolded or beaten. He felt that children misused their power in this respect and often blackmailed guardians and teachers, threatening to commit suicide if they were scolded or chided in any way. He also said that any act of sexual abuse from a teacher would lead to his/her utter disgrace in the society, given the nature and dignity of a teacher's job. However, such acts were mostly committed by people in the lower-rung jobs, such as peons or watchmen.

Sh Jaisawal mentioned that since teachers could not administer corporal punishment to students since the implementation of Right to Education (RTE) Act, children often bunked school and attendance had become very low. He said that a system of collecting a token penalty amount when students misbehaved had been instituted, although it was not being implemented regularly.



Roshni Vatti (left) with her mother



CASE STUDY

Corporal punishment: A way of life for students



Primary and middle school students, almost everywhere, said that light beatings were considered very normal. Mostly, boys were more susceptible to hard beatings than girls. Two 8th graders, Bhagwat Dihari and Suraj Kashyap, from Korawand Primary School, said that their headmaster was a fearsome man who beat them even if they were merely 10 minutes late for school. They said that the girls were not beaten as badly as boys.

14-year-old Roshni Vatti, a Grade 9 student of Majhiadgaon High School, was also seen working with her family members in their brick kiln. She said that sometimes they get beaten up in school by teachers if they cannot correctly answer their questions or when children fight among themselves. She did, however, know about good touch and bad touch which was taught by a female teacher in her school. Roshni expressed her desire to join the police force someday in the future and protect girls from being harassed.



CASE STUDY

Multiple vulnerabilities: A glimpse of the problems girls face in Devra

Taruna (name changed on request), an NSS volunteer from Chandulal Chandrakar Arts and Science University, Patan, recalled a horror she had to face every day while studying in Patan Girl's School. A wine shop was located in front of her school which regularly attracted groups engaging in anti-social behaviour. The girl students had to suffer lewd comments and attempts at eve teasing on a regular



The NSS team in Devra: A team of 15 volunteers from Devra High School, under the guidance of PO Sh Dinesh Chandra, visited the middle school in Devra. The team had no girls as the PO said that they had to be excused because of their practical exams. The all-boys team held a rally but no interaction with the students.

Having an all-boys team was seen as a bit of a barrier to open interactions with girl students.



Volunteers from Apollo University, Durg

basis. The teachers and students tried to move the higher authorities to provide a solution by sending them signed letters but it took several years before the wine shop could be shut down for good.

She also said that it was common for girls who had been abused or raped to be forced into marriage with the perpetrator, in an attempt to normalize such an incident and salvage the honour of the girl. Such acts were inhumane as they left the girl with no hope for a better life.

She also shared the story of a family with their three daughters in her neighbourhood. The eldest

daughter married a boy of a different caste. According to Taruna, the second daughter was made to bear the brunt of the parents' anger. She was repeatedly tortured, especially by the mother, in the fear that she might follow in her sister's footsteps and also have an inter-caste marriage. Taruna also added that the second daughter was married off just the day after she turned 18.

Speaking of her own situation, Taruna says that though her mother would support her if she ever wanted to marry a person of her own choice, her father plans to arrange her and her elder sister's marriage at the same time so that they save expenses on both weddings.

Unfortunately, feeling unsafe when travelling to or from school is not an experience limited only to Taruna. NSS volunteers from Rasmada, Durg, and girl students from middle school in Devra had similar stories to tell. The volunteers, girls in the age group of 16-17 years, said that they often faced eve teasing while on their way to school and back. The one kilometre walk from their homes to the school often was an unsafe zone where young boys on bikes and in cars passed lewd comments; the fast-moving vehicles made it easier for them to escape in case of any retaliation from the girls. Workers on their way to the factories, which are in the vicinity, also target school-going girls with their lewd comments. Younger girls aged 13-14 years from Devra also said that eve teasing by older boys who always loitered around a shop 'Vikas Hotel' for near the school was a common occurrence on their way home back from school. According to the students, child rights were not a focus in the school. It had no POCSO box; the two male and one female teachers also never asked the girls if they were facing any problems.



POCSO box installed on the classroom wall at Government Primary School, Nayapara, Singhanpur, Kondagaon

Support to counter harassment is limited



Although eve teasing was a common experience for girls, they did not receive adequate support to confront or negate it. For example, 14-year-old 8th grader Bhumika from Devra said that she often encountered catcalling while crossing Vikas Hotel. Other girls supported the statement and informed that they faced the same situation. Bhumika told her aunt about this, but the matter was dropped and no action was taken. Confrontation in such cases was rare. Ignoring such abuse was seen to be the most common practice.

One of the volunteers from Rasmada High School, Durg, spoke about a girl she knew who was sexually abused by a man living in the neighbourhood. The girl, the only child of a widowed mother, was alone at home when the man, who was known to her, forced his way inside the house and abused her. The mother complained to the police but no severe action was taken. After some time, the mother left the village with her daughter and now resides in Durg, working odd jobs to make ends meet.

Sonia, another volunteer from Rasmada, added that there were no female members at her home and she had to do all the household chores, which affected her studies. The volunteers also said that some parents did not allow girls to go for NSS camps in other villages.



CASE STUDY

Discrimination: Awareness can be the difference between a happy childhood and an unhappy one

Kamal Narayan Banjare was an enthusiastic and self-motivated youngster who was leading the activities of the NSS team as a team leader in Utai. He was also an active participant in the Bal Mela. His mother was a *mitanin* and had been supporting him and his two sisters as a single mother for the last 20 years, as his father passed away when he was just two years old. An introvert by nature, Kamal spent most of his childhood watching the other kids from a distance as they played. They bullied him because of his quiet demeanour and called him derogatory equivalents of 'gay' and 'weak'. They also made fun of his SC status. Due to this constant verbal abuse, he often entertained suicidal thoughts. His teachers were not aware of his situation as he did not confide in them. He had no knowledge of any counselling activities where he could seek help.

"Jaati dharm
ma jhan baato,
Nar naari dui jaati la,
Oonch neech ka bhed bhaga do
Sab haran insaan ga"

Don't divide humans into caste and religion
Male and female are the only two castes
Do away with the separators of high and low
Because everyone is a human

Kamal Narayan Banjare

Kamal's maternal uncle helped him escape this vicious cycle of misery and low self-esteem when he introduced him to his Panthi folk dance group. Panthi is one of the important dance forms of Chhattisgarh.

The company of the dance troupe inspired him and he started focusing on being an agent of change in the society. When he was in Grade 10, he started doing *nukkad nataks* with a group of his friends, highlighting the ills of the caste system in his and neighbouring villages. This changed the outlook of others towards him, and soon enough, even those who used to bully him became his friends.

Through his personal experiences as a child, Kamal had become sensitive to the negative impact that abuse, even if it is just a form of bullying by peers, can have on the development of a child. Going a step further, he insisted that appreciation is crucial for a child. Just as bullying created negative cycles within him, appreciation created positive cycles of confidence which encouraged him to participate



Silence and ignorance of child rights: Children are usually silent victims, lacking the confidence to approach adults with their stories and being ignorant of the fact that their distress is recognized and protected against by the law. Making children aware of what comprises a transgression of their rights and empowering them with the knowledge and confidence to approach services and authorities for protection are essential first steps in realizing child rights.

in more activities, get more accolades, and become confident to participate more in various activities. He had read about child rights in his school textbooks, but had never had access to anything beyond the textbook mentions.

Lauding the efforts of UNICEF and NSS, he was enthusiastic to take this campaign to the villages where he hoped to touch the lives of other children like himself. He added that had there been an outreach programme like this in his childhood, he might have sought help and achieved much more than he has today.





CASE STUDY

Disability: Specially-abled students are at a loss



Sh Rajneesh Mishra, PO, lamented the lack of facilities for specially-abled children who, under the RTE Act, are promoted till Grade 8 irrespective of their performance but have low learning levels and lack the skills needed to be admitted to higher studies. As a result, most of these children become confined to their homes. He said that training is occasionally provided to teachers on dealing with children with special needs, but it is not sufficient. Children with special needs are neglected and face humiliating situations in school. For example, in the primary school of Korawand, there was a specially-abled girl in Grade 8, Anita Patel, who had to sit on the floor while the rest of the class sat on chairs with desks. She had a rickety wheelchair to facilitate movement, but

*Anita Patel, a special student at
Primary School, Korawand Bastar*

no special desk to allow her to sit comfortably in class. Volunteers from Shankaracharya University insisted that training for teachers and Gram Panchayat officials regarding child rights was necessary to enable them to acknowledge and identify child rights violations around them, citing an example of an intellectually challenged child they had encountered in the middle school who was being taunted by his classmates in the presence of the teacher, but the teacher ignored the issue.



Volunteers interacting with a family at Chichadi, Bastar

Nukkad nataks are a hit

In each village, NSS volunteers performed *nukkad nataks* primarily on the subjects of child marriage, equal education opportunity for girls and boys, and child labour. The scripts for these *nataks* were prepared by volunteers themselves. For some districts, the handout provided by NSS coordinator Sh DL Patel, which gave pointers on female foeticide, child marriage, child sexual abuse and child labour, was a helpful guide.

The *nukkad nataks* were usually performed by groups of 6–10 volunteers. In some villages, the *nataks* were presented in schools, and at village cultural platforms in others. Since it was the annual festival season for many schools in the state, some volunteer teams, such as those in Janjgiri (Durg) and Bargaon (Bastar), took permission from the school principals and performed the play on the stage during the annual day festivities. This gave them a wider audience where children and parents gathered together.

Throughout the campaign, it was observed that *nukkad nataks* were an instant hit: captivating the young and the old alike. This was clearly seen in Ghughwa, Durg, where the NSS volunteers from Ghughwa Higher Secondary School concluded the



Vikas Kumar and others from Shaildevi University, Anda at the annual fest of Janjgiri primary school

Gram Sampark with a *nukkad natak* held at the village *chowk*. They had carried out a rally earlier and announced about it. The *nukkad natak* was on the theme of gender discrimination and was a hit with the 100 primary school children as well as adults who gathered in nooks and corners to enjoy the show. Before the *nukkad natak*, the NSS volunteers used poems and speeches to share messages such as 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' and 'Baal Mazdoori Band Karo'. Village women who were watching from a distance said that such programmes were important for the development of children and that they would welcome more of such events. However, they were uncomfortable speaking about sexual abuse of children and denied that any such thing happened around them. They had little knowledge about child rights, but they understood that children must be educated and fed nutritious food. They had no idea about 1098 helpline.



Nukkad natak at Khapri, Durg



Nukkad natak in progress at Ghughwa, Durg

In Satlare, Kanker, volunteers performed the *nukkad natak* in the school playground which was adjacent to a village road. The audience of about 150 school students was joined by about 50 community members, making it one of the biggest audience numbers for any *nukkad natak* conducted during the campaign. After the play, which was themed on female foeticide, volunteers discussed child rights with some of the community members present there. They collectively said that there was no practice of female foeticide in their part of the world.

In Padapur, Dantewada, volunteers performed a *nukkad natak* at the primary school which was loved equally by the teachers and students, so much so that some of the school students presented a dance, keeping in tune with the high spirits of the moment. The volunteers also demonstrated correct handwashing techniques. The volunteers also presented the *natak* in front of a public distribution system (PDS) point, which was witnessed by community members.



A volunteer explaining the correct handwashing technique to a school boy

Building capacities for outreach activities is essential

There was a distinct difference in the *nataks* presented by volunteers from the cities and villages. For example, volunteers from Shankaracharya University, Junwani, and Apollo University, Durg, presented *nataks* complete with loud clappings, rotating in circles and shouting of slogans in between the *natak* - which are characteristic techniques to draw the crowd's attention. The plays from volunteers in villages, although entertaining, lacked these techniques and were simpler in presentation. The themes of the plays, however, remained more or less the same.

Not all villages gave such an enthusiastic response to the *nukkad nataks*. In Khapri, Durg, for instance, the response was desultory and barely a handful of drifters stopped for a few minutes to watch the performance.

Rallies were also carried out in almost every village by volunteers who were often accompanied by school students. Some of the rallies were very successful in drawing out people from their homes.



Nukkad natak at Padapur Primary School, Dantewada



Nukkad natak at Satlare

For example, the rally carried out in Anjora, Rajnandgaon by volunteers from Apollo University and children from Primary and Middle School of the village, which started from the school premises and ended at the village cultural platform 20 minutes later, was witnessed by at least one member of every household on the way; at least 60–70 people took notice of the rally. It was observed that the more participants a rally had, the more attention it garnered. In villages like Khapri, Durg, where only 15–20 members of the NSS team from Rasmada High School comprised the rally, it could not generate enough excitement for more than a handful of people to take notice.

Rallies: A Snapshot



Sukurpara, Bastar



Anjora, Rajnandgaon



Khapri, Durg



Jaitpuri, Bastar



CASE STUDY

POs play an important role

Across villages, it was seen that there was a lot of unevenness in the capacities of the teams. Whereas some were desultory in their interactions, and either unconfident or off track in the messages they were to deliver, a few teams were vibrant and on point with their messaging. A lot depended on the leadership of the PO and his guidance to the volunteers. For example, in village Singanpur, Keskhal, Sh Rajneesh Mishra, who had previously been a resource person with UNICEF, was well informed of child rights as was clearly seen in the *nukkad natak* his team presented for the primary and middle schoolers of Singanpur. Steering clear from a focus on either gender, it directly addressed issues of good touch, bad touch with pairs of volunteers of the same sex demonstrating examples of good touch – such as a pat on the head, uncomfortable touch – such as a prolonged rubbing of the back and bad touch – such as contact with chest and private parts, and what to do when an uncomfortable or bad touch is encountered.



A presentation on 'good touch, bad touch' at Singanpur

To an audience of about 200 students, he and his team explained child rights through examples and every day occurrences with which the audience was familiar. By asking children to recall the very common occurrence of how a pregnant woman is usually the last one in a family to get proper meal and rest, he drew attention to the violation of the rights of an unborn baby.

He also informed students about 1098 and when to use it. Understanding the mischievous nature of children, he took the teaching a step further by making them understand the gravity of misusing the helpline. He cited the example of an ambulance not reaching a real accident spot on time if pranksters misguide it.

Remarkably, each child was attentive and seemed to pick up the information in the emotionally-charged environment. Even the back-benchers listened intently.

His team put up a chart in the school showing all the steps that can be taken up to get oneself heard in case of a child rights grievance – starting from 1098, to a written complaint to the panchayat, then to the block education officer, to National Child Protection Committee and Chhattisgarh Child Protection Committee, and finally to the court.

He also took a video byte of the Sarpanch Sh Rajesh Netam, where he appreciated the initiative and said that nutrition and immunization are taken care of by the *anganwadi* workers in his village. Sh Netam said that he regularly monitors various government programmes and encourages village women to make the best use of government facilities wherever possible.



Sh Rajneesh Mishra

SMCs active in some places, VCPC missing at most

Two important aspects on which volunteer teams were to get information from the villages were the existence and effectiveness of the SMC, mandated under the Right to Education Act, and the VCPC, which is one of the structures recommended in the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), both of which were launched in 2009.

Although SMCs have been established in some schools, their functionality remains questionable. Hence, Sh Kamal Nath Sahu, Secretary of the SMC of the Primary and Middle School in Anjora, Rajnandgaon, did not know what child rights meant. His first real introduction to the subject came when the NSS volunteers told him about 1098 and how it should be used. Interestingly, although the concept of child rights seem unknown, the school fulfills the requirement for establishing an SMC, which mandates of having 16 members, with the Sarpanch as a compulsory member and parents and teachers making up the rest of the committee, and maintaining an equal ratio of male and female members. According to Sh Sahu, the SMC was active as an advisory group which is organized every year and held monthly meetings where members discussed issues related to improving children's education, school infrastructure and so on, although the effectiveness of the SMC could not be corroborated from any other source. Sh Tilak Ram Mandavi, PO from High School, Badi Bandri, informed that the Primary, Middle and High school in Joba have SMCs although he did not comment on the role or functions they performed.



Sh DD Pandey, principal of Ghodagaon Middle School, Bastar, said that a functional SMC was present in both middle and high schools. He informed that there were 16 members in the middle school SMC and 22 members at the high school level. Md Akbar Khan, PO from High School, Karidgaon, Bakawand, Jagdalpur, said that his school had an active SMC with 22 members. Sh Dinesh Chandra, Assistant Professor, Government College, Bhanpuri, Raipur, said that the SMC in Bhanpuri High School looked after things like cultural activities, primary treatment and immunization for children. Sh Mahavir Jaiswal, from High School Borgaon, said that his school had an SMC with five male and two female members. Sh Gokulram Ganjoria, teacher at Korawand Primary School, Bastar, reported that there was no SMC in the school.

Lack of exposure to child rights at the village level and the fact that VCPCs were not known, let alone established, were recurrent findings in almost every village visited. As Smt Tulsi Netam, Sarpanch, Jaitpuri, Kondagaon, said, child rights were not a part of the training agenda of Gram Sabha members. She added that two years ago, a team from Kondagaon district headquarters did visit to organize a CPC, however there was no follow-up after the initial discussion and the VCPC was never established.

Dr RP Agrawal, who had been associated with NSS since 1987 and had been serving as a PO since 1998, was conversant with issues at the grass roots. He said that most villages and schools were not aware of the requirement for a VCPC, though the requirement to at least establish an SMC in every school was better known and some schools followed the guideline for establishing SMCs. In his view, it was only when an unfortunate incident occurred that people were pushed into action. Taking the example of MGM School, Bhilai, he said that 2-3 years ago, there was a case of child sexual abuse after which an SMC was set up there and in most schools of Bhilai.



A teacher at Primary School, Kurud, Durg showing the SMC chart of the school



CASE STUDY

The Gram Sampark impact: Creation of VCPC

Kulhadgaon became one of the first villages to create a VCPC on the spot after NSS volunteers from Naveen Mahavidyalaya, Farasgaon and Upper Middle School, Borgaon visited the Gram Panchayat as part of the campaign. In Joba too, Sh Sudaru Kashyap, sealed the formation of a VCPC with his signature after a discussion with the NSS volunteers, the panches and other members of the community. It is worth noting here that all the consultation and decision-making was done by men and there was no female representation in the process at Joba. Sh Kashyap said that the volunteers' visit made him aware about child rights and 1098.

A few bumps along the way

Although by and large the NSS teams received ample support from teachers, office bearers and the community, there were instances when they were viewed with suspicion. In one notable case, Middle School teachers in Khapri, Durg, would not allow volunteers from Shankaracharya University, Junwani, Durg, to interact with the children, even after classes



Joba Sarpanch, Sh Sudaru Kashyap, with VCPC formation letter

were dismissed. Despite repeated requests by the PO, Smt Shilpa Kulkarni, the teachers did not budge. Interestingly, Khapri is the adopted village of Shankaracharya College where they hold annual camps. Mayank Dwivedi, a volunteer from Shankaracharya, said that the teachers were unwilling as the team did not have any official letter or permission for conducting the activities.

Other problems also emerged due to the inexperience and lack of training of the volunteers in conducting such a programme which led to their occasionally going beyond their brief in the information and advice they shared or communicating in ways that were not healthy. Smt Kanti Gupta, *anganwadi* worker at Pravir Ward-2, Jagdalpur, for example, felt threatened by the way the volunteers questioned her.

The unbridled enthusiasm and inexperience of the volunteers also led them to try and resolve problems by proffering unsolicited advice to the village people on subjects such as giving up alcoholism (for example, advice such as “if you decide to do it, you can”).



Smt Kanti Gupta (extreme left), at Anganwadi, Pravir Ward-2

Salvaging Sundays with Sarpanch support

In Kondagaon, the first day of the Gram Sampark was a Sunday, and thus schools, *anganwadis* and Gram Panchayats were closed. Some office bearers, however, showed exemplary support for the programme, such as the Up-Sarpanch of Mesora village, Kondagaon, Sh Ram Kumar Baghel. He immediately got the Gram Panchayat office opened when he received news that a programme was being held in the village. Although cooperative, he did not have much information regarding child rights. He said that 1098 was the women helpline number and he was unaware about VCPC. He also said that the nutritional status was good in the village and the *mitanins* were doing a great job. However, dropout rate in the high school was high, 40:60 (girls:boys). There were more male children dropping out as they had a tendency to go to neighbouring states to find work through agents.



Sh Ram Kumar Baghel



CASE STUDY

An apparently supportive sarpanch but the focus on children is missing

Another Sarpanch worth mentioning for the support provided is Smt Tulsi Nitam of Jaitpuri, Bastar. As it was Sunday and the middle school in the village had an off when the team visited, the 18 NSS volunteers led the children of the middle school hostel in a rally across the village. Showing her full support, the Sarpanch joined and walked the entire rally with them. The slogans that were prepared for the rally also showed that the volunteers had understood the messages to be during the awareness drive. Here are some of the slogans:

Hume jeene ka adhikar hai, hume padhne ka adhikar hai

Baal sanrakshan samiti ka gathan karo

1098 toll-free number

Ek parivar me ek hi baccha

Sathiyon bhed bhaav band karo

Baal mazduri, band karo

Though supportive, Smt Nitam did not have much understanding of child rights, other than that they are rights for the development of children. She did not know about 1098 and also said that the Gram Panchayat had never received any complaints of sexual abuse against children. When asked what steps she would take to resolve a case should it occur, she mentioned that since she was now aware of the helpline (post the activation drive in the village) she would call 1098. Beyond this, she did not know the steps to be taken in such a scenario or how to promote child rights in her role as Sarpanch. However, she said that rallies on various issues are quite common in the village and that the Gram Panchayat too regularly carries out rallies on promoting rights of girls, education for all, and importance of voting.

Children from the pre-matric boys' hostel opened up to the NSS volunteers and said that in their hostel, they were not provided breakfast and the food was never cooked according to the menu chart. Even supplies such as soap were provided by the parents, and not by the hostel. They said that the peon of the hostel verbally abused them often. However, no action was taken even after they complained to the warden.



Gram Panchayat members of
Jaitpuri village



CASE STUDY

Active volunteers are assets to be identified and groomed

Vikas Kumar, a first-year student of B.Sc Biology, is an NSS volunteer from Shaildevi University, Anda, who had come to Janjgiri with his team. Of the volunteers whom the researchers met during the campaign, Vikas stood out as one of the more active and committed volunteers. He and his team did a survey of dropout children by finding information during their conversations with teachers and students. They also visited the house of a child who had stopped coming to school a month after he started Grade 8. Although they could not meet the child, they spoke to his mother. She suspected that the child had faced some form of abuse, which was why he refused to go to school and had been at home for the past one year. The child did not reveal his problem or the source of his worry, despite being asked several times. Vikas said that there had not been any action on this from the school and the parents, who were daily wage labourers, too had not pursued the matter further.

While surveying the middle school, the team found that Grade 8 students would bully those from Grade 6. Citing a particular incident, Vikas said that he saw 8th graders threaten their juniors and demand that they vacate a certain spot that the 8th graders wished to occupy. The school had clean toilets and proper mid-day meal facilities. Vikas also said that all teachers they had met painted a good picture of their school and the management. During the NSS visit, there was an annual function going on in the primary school. A power cut disrupted the programme and people started moving away. The NSS team took this opportunity to interact with the audience, presenting a speech about child rights.

Throughout the campaign, several volunteers stood out in terms of their understanding of the subject and the passion with which they were conducting the activities. Such passion could be groomed and further used in subsequent phases of the campaign.





Vikas Kumar

ग्राम पंचायत दैमार

L.G.D-CODE-124888

सभागार

unicef
for every child

ग्राम संपर्क अभियान

सुरक्षित पारा, समृद्ध लईका

30, 31 जन 01 फरव

पंचायत स्त

- 1 महात्मा गांधी
- 2 आम आवाज
- 3 लोक
- 4
- 5

जानकारी



पंचायत स्त

बाल विवाह कि रोकथाम
एक रात्र मिलकर
करे के काम

बच्चे बूटो का खरी नहना
जोड़ने मे दुमों न रहना

पढ़ने लिखने की अवसर
बाल विवाह जमे है



CASE STUDY

Girls missing field work in some cases

Although the majority of NSS teams were a healthy mix of male and female students, there were a few cases where girls were deliberately excused from the activity citing reasons of safety or exams.

In Devra, Jagadapur, volunteers from Bhanpuri Mahavidyalaya who visited the village were all boys. The PO, Sh Dinesh Chandra, said that girls were not included as they had their practical exams.

Similarly, the volunteer team in Farasguda also did not have any girls on the field, despite their names being registered as part of the team. The PO, Sh Gajendra Panigrahi, said that he should have included the girls too, and would take care of the same in the future.

There were no girls in the NSS team that visited Janjiri from Shaildevi University, Anda. The PO, Sh Santosh Kumar Devangan, said that he avoided including girls when making teams for visiting other villages. When asked the reason, he informed that taking care of girls was risky. He also mentioned that the management discouraged enrolling girls in the NSS programme, but did not elaborate when probed further.

Girls from the Demar, Durg, team also felt that they did not get to participate as equally as boys. Hence, previously when camps were held in other villages, girl students were either asked to stay at their relatives in that village for the night or were excluded from the activity. Even the female NSS POs rarely agreed to set-up camps outside their own village. However, they said that things were improving as Smt Pushpa Minj, their PO, was very supportive and did not hesitate to plan camps outside villages, even when overnight stays were required.

Reflections on the campaign

Speaking to the researchers about the Surakshit Para, Surakshit Laikaman campaign, Dr RP Agrawal, programme coordinator, Durg, said that the Bal Mela and Gram Sampark initiatives had given a huge boost to NSS volunteers – both in terms of their learning and their confidence. This was a new activity for the volunteers who were used to going into villages to perform *shramdaan* – such as cleaning or construction activities, but they were now for the first time engaged in trying to communicate ideas to the communities and that too on a very sensitive subject. Whether they carried out surveys or went door-to-door to spread awareness, they came into close contact with problems related to children – be it dropouts, bullying, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, child labour, etc. Being young people themselves, these were issues close to their hearts and important for them also to imbibe so that they could in reality be champions of children, going forward. To this extent, the campaign had a double duty – sensitizing the volunteers as they sensitize the community.

Several POs and volunteers had no previous knowledge of child rights and went straight into the Gram Sampark phase of the campaign.

Dr RP Agrawal said that the present campaign was an IEC campaign which was only meant for spreading awareness about child rights and that it was working out successfully. He congratulated UNICEF for tying up with NSS, highlighting that this collaboration between UNICEF, which has the resources, and NSS, which has the volunteers, would be very fruitful.

During the campaign, it emerged that many of the POs and volunteers had no previous exposure to child rights and went straight into the Gram Sampark phase of the campaign. Speaking of such challenges, Dr Agrawal said that since the campaign coincided with the exam season, volunteers as well as POs faced difficulties in finding time for NSS activities. This was one of the



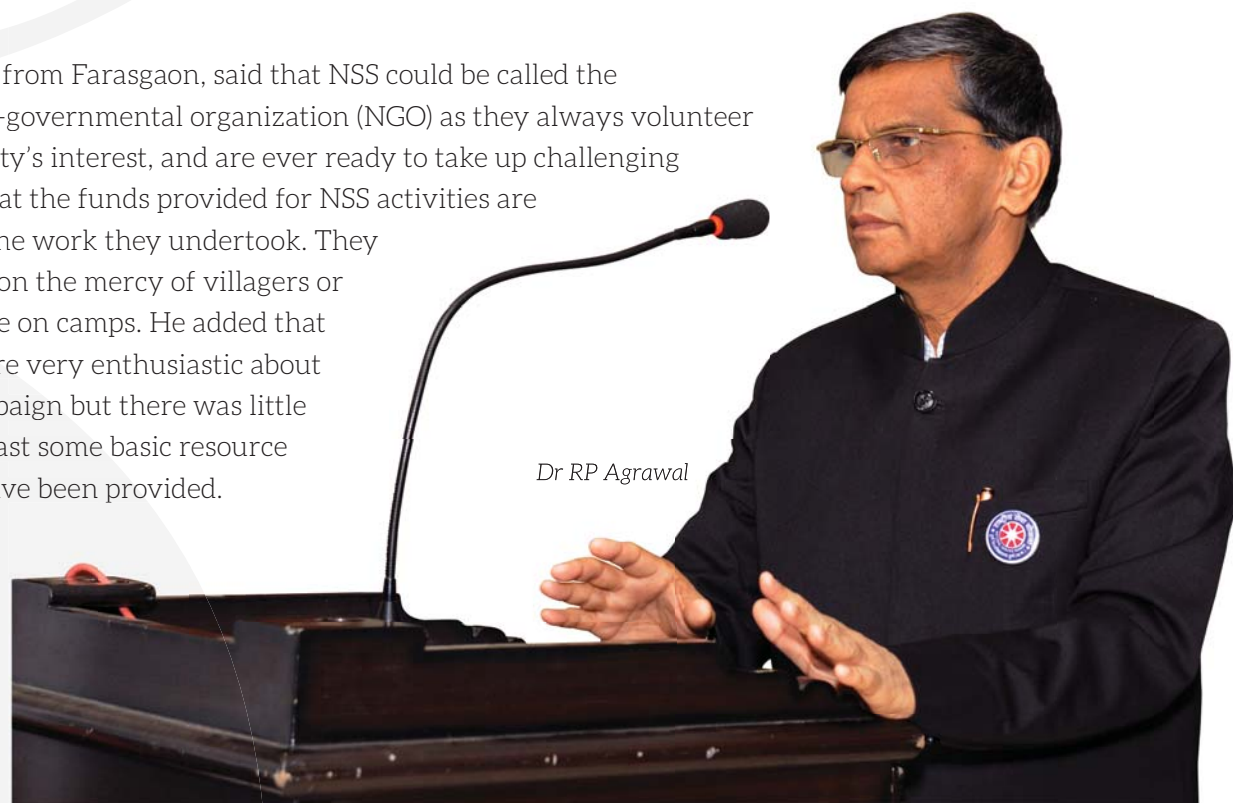
*Volunteers interacting
with village children in
Pauwara, Durg*

main reasons why POs and volunteers who were earlier trained in Raipur and Bhilai were not the ones going into the field. In a few instances, even POs who had attended the Bal Mela sent substitutes for Gram Sampark citing reasons that they could not spare time from their main responsibilities. This broke the chain of learning, which was crucial for the success of the campaign. In addition, both POs and volunteers required more training to gain clarity on their roles and actions as well as about child rights. He also said that recognition in the form of certificates for the volunteers would spur their efforts further.

Dr Aggrawal added that the NSS POs worked in a part-time capacity for NSS. As teachers, they already had a full workload and voluntarily devoted weekends to NSS activities as the weekdays were spent on their regular duties. There was no financial incentive for them, but only a sense of contributing something to the society that propelled their actions.

However, he added that the volunteers needed to be trained more so that they could understand the concept of child rights better, and more pointed targets needed to be decided. He said that a more concrete action plan would be visible after the Consultations.

Sh Pankaj Rao, PO from Farasgaon, said that NSS could be called the government's non-governmental organization (NGO) as they always volunteer to do tasks in society's interest, and are ever ready to take up challenging work. He added that the funds provided for NSS activities are not sufficient for the work they undertook. They often have to rely on the mercy of villagers or the Sarpanch while on camps. He added that the volunteers were very enthusiastic about the Surakshit campaign but there was little preparation – at least some basic resource material should have been provided.



Dr RP Agrawal

Learnings from the field

The main issues are similar across districts: Conversations with people from various districts highlighted the similarity in cases of child rights violation across the state. Alcoholism, child marriage, child labour, harassment, dropouts, discrimination, drug abuse, lack of basic amenities, were some of the recurrent themes. This points to the fact that the issue of child rights violation is rampant and calls for a greater need to address them.

There are many silences on child rights: While parents, teachers and elders were open about discussing most issues related to child rights, they were tight-lipped about other “sensitive” issues such as Naxalism, sexual abuse and adult pressure for underage marriages as they would consider these topics as taboo, shameful, controversial or likely to incite violence. As children are not aware of their rights, they cannot highlight the violations that occur. As a result the issues remain - pernicious but shrouded in silence.



Wall painting by volunteers from Government Higher Secondary School, Purai, Durg

The NSS is an appropriate cadre to undertake such mass sensitization campaigns: The NSS infrastructure of approximately 1 lakh volunteers across the state presents a disciplined and prepared cadre of volunteers for spreading awareness and behaviour change. Given its internal structure, dedicated POs and youth force drawn from the communities who are being addressed, it is an easy to train group that can be deployed most effectively.

Child rights issues need a lot of focus, but at least the process has started: Child rights are a neglected development issue and are difficult to address as the concept challenges accepted behavioural norms and patterns in society. The rights are generally unknown or little known, even among the protectors of the rights. The campaign sensitized the NSS and made the volunteers aware of the four basic principles on which all child rights are based. It also introduced the idea of child rights to the communities that were reached, most of whom had no or limited prior knowledge of the issue. It



widened the understanding of child rights beyond the realms of education, child labour and age of marriage.

More time is required for community to open up about discussions on child sexual abuse: Getting anyone to discuss a highly sensitive issue like child sexual abuse is a matter of building trust over time. Hence, it was no surprise that community members chose to either not talk about these issues or paint a pretty picture of their village almost every time the research team tried to interact on these lines. Most NSS teams and POs chose to refrain from taking up child sexual abuse in their interactions as well. Surely, more time in the field, and specific training, will help the volunteers navigate around the uncomfortable subject and make a fruitful impact.

Follow-up is essential for the campaign to have any real impact: As Kondagaon Collector, Sh Tikam, said, there will be no real impact if follow-up is not done, at least after every six months. Sh Mishra said that he was planning a follow-up, at a personal level, in the panchayats that promised better nutrition facilities at their *anganwadis*. A plan for a consolidated follow-up is required that can assess whether the IPC campaign resulted in any improvement.

Using IPC instead of mass media takes the issue right to the heart of the community: Outreach sessions that allowed for mid media tools such as rallies and *nukkad nataks* as well as IPC made for more targeted and direct conversations on the issue. It gained some commitments from leaders, allowed children to speak of their problems, and raised the consciousness of the village in a more direct manner.

Training is the key: Sometimes NSS volunteers, due to lack of specific knowledge, were found to give advice contradictory to the state laws and regulations. For example, in Sukurpara, the NSS team found a school with one teacher for 28 students, for which the team members advised the teacher to request the Gram Panchayat for more teachers. However, the RTE Act says that one teacher for 40 students is sufficient. Similarly, in Jondrapadar, the volunteers met Md. Asif, who had five children. His son studied in a private school and the four daughters attended a government school. The NSS volunteers advised him to transfer his girls to private schools too. This was based on the common notion that private schools are better than government schools.

Also, it was observed that almost all the *nukkad nataks* presented during the campaign revolved around promoting the girl child – with the resounding message of equal education and opportunities for both. Although right to equality is a crucial child right, the present campaign focused on rights for all children and alleviating the suffering of children regardless of their gender. This means that a better understanding of child rights needs to be developed at the training level so that the concept of child rights as encompassing issues of children of both genders can be developed.

Logistics and planning need to be enhanced: There were issues related to distances that had to be travelled, time taken to get there, etc., that were an impediment to the effectiveness of the campaign at a few places. For example, Moushumi Biswas, PO from Bakawand College, who reached with her team to the venue at around 1 p.m., said that they got late due to non-availability of conveyance. As a result, they had little time for proper interaction with all the touch points suggested.

Transportation was to be arranged by the POs themselves. At most places, the volunteers were dropped off at the main road and they had to traverse through distant *paras* (villages) on foot, which meant loss of time. Also, sometimes there was a single bus for more than one NSS team, which meant that by the time the last team was dropped at its venue, precious time was already lost.





Smt Yogita Nashine, PO from Apollo University, interacting with community members during the rally

**Various departments joined hands
at Consultations**



Consultations



Tier 3 of the campaign comprised Consultation meetings. Initially intended as district-level events, the Consultations for districts were clubbed together due to shortage of time such that 2–3 districts met together for what were eventually zonal or regional Consultations. These meetings had additional significance for the Surakhshit Para, Surakhshit Laikaman campaign as this was the first active partnership between UNICEF, Chhattisgarh government and NSS and there were many learnings that emerged during the process. Dignitaries from various departments were also present during these Consultations, which was significant in discussing cross-cutting issues on a neutral platform. The meetings facilitated active discussion, brainstorming, information exchange and incorporation of useful ideas.

THE PROCESS

Address by dignitaries

- ➔ 2 x 1 minute films on child rights followed by discussion
- ➔ Sharing of experiences
- ➔ Lunch
- ➔ Brainstorming
- ➔ Sharing of suggestions

Consultations were held across the state to share experiences of the campaign, identify the learnings, strategize the next steps and bring together all the stakeholders involved in protection of child rights. The process also allowed multilevel interactions that allowed every participant or stakeholder to feel involved and connected, re-emphasizing the message that child rights are everyone's business. The meetings also helped in fostering a spirit of team-building, ownership and accountability among the participants.

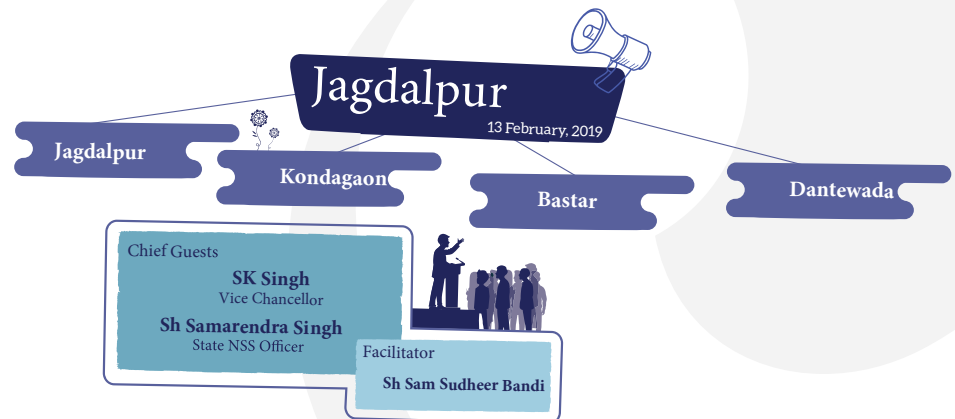
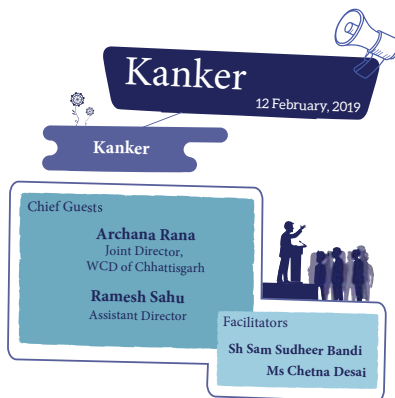
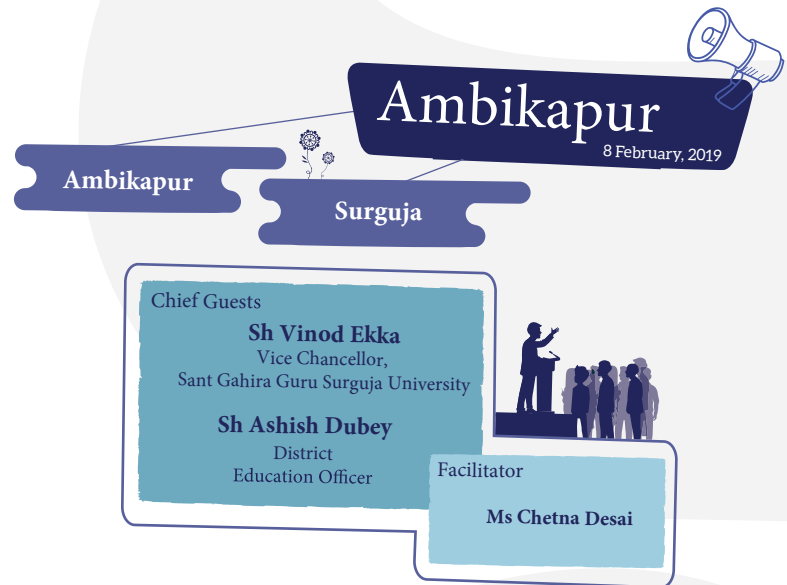
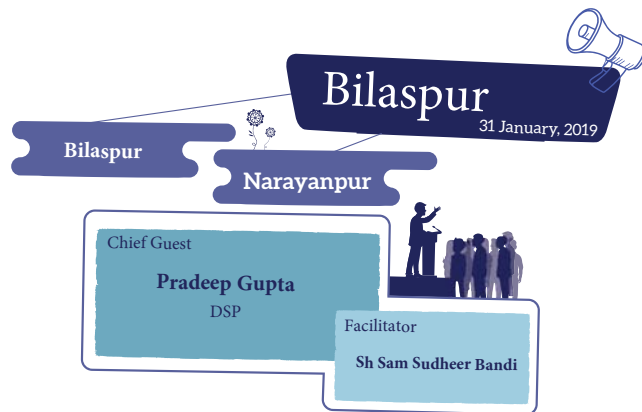
The Consultations provided an opportunity for:

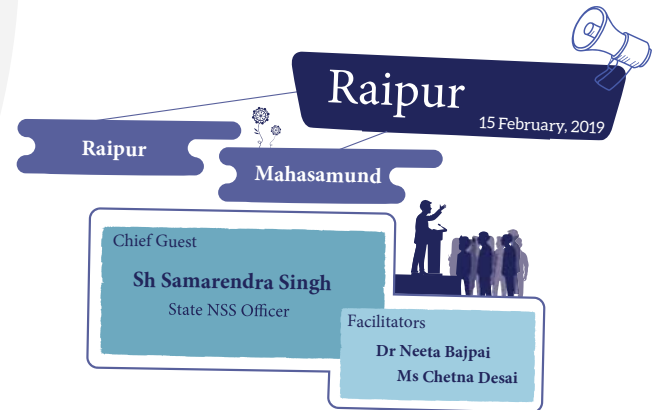
1. Stakeholders and officials from various departments to express their role, commitment and expectations from other stakeholders to effectively promote child rights.
2. Volunteers involved in community outreach activities to share their field experiences and provide and receive practical feedback.
3. Learning and knowledge sharing among all stakeholders.
4. Brainstorming and understanding the ground realities around which an action plan is to be built with a holistic multi-stakeholder approach after thorough discussion, analysis and consensus. The Consultation meetings under this campaign were organized in six different districts of Chhattisgarh – Bilaspur, Ambikapur, Kanker, Bastar, Durg and Raipur and were attended by volunteers and POs from all 13 campaign districts. In addition to UNICEF and NSS staff, volunteers and POs who attended the Consultations, there were representatives from the District Police, Justice Department, Education Department, Women and Child Development Department, Child Welfare Committee, District Child Protection Unit, Integrated Child Protection Scheme, and NGOs.



Jagdalpur Consultation

Consultations at a glance





Mapping a typical Consultation:

The sequence of events for the Consultation meetings was similar in all the districts. Ms Chetna Desai or Sh Sam Sudheer Bandi, of UNICEF, facilitated most of the Consultations, barring the one at Durg which was conducted by Dr Neeta Bajpai, programme coordinator and NSS nodal officer for the programme, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University.

The first part of the Consultation meetings started with the dignitaries on the dais addressing the gathering and sharing their own experiences and viewpoints on child rights. The second part of the programme was the screening of two 60-second videos on the theme of Safe Neighbourhood organized by UNICEF to remind the audience and stakeholders about the purpose of the campaign. The message, about how each of us sees child abuse in some form but deliberately turns a blind eye to it, led to a discussion of the volunteers' experiences in the field, situations they had encountered and their responses, and feedback from senior dignitaries from various departments. The third part of the Consultation, the post-lunch session, was dedicated to group work. Teams were formed and given a few of the most pressing child abuse issues that had emerged during the meeting. Each team




जिला सलाहकारी समीक्षा बैठक
सुरक्षित पारा, सुरक्षित लईकामन
दिनांक - 13 फरवरी 2019, बुधवार
स्थान - हॉटल आकांक्षा, जगदलपुर
बस्तर विश्वविद्यालय, जगदलपुर (छ.ग.)



Voices

Among the many eminent district officials who spoke, a few voices are presented here.

Dr Samarendra Singh, NSS State Head, Chhattisgarh, said that Surakshit Para, Surakshit Laikaman had touched almost 95,000 NSS volunteers who were engaged with the campaign directly or indirectly. He saw great potential for similar collaborations with UNICEF in the future to bring about a social change and make a positive impact on the lives of the people. Focusing on being active members of change in the society, he said, "We have to implement the learning in our lives first, and make sure that we acknowledge and take action on the violence against children in and around our homes."



*Dr. Neeta Bajpai (left) and
Dr. Samarendra Singh (right)*

Inspector General of Bilaspur, Sh SH Gupta said, "For the past 15 years, we have been unaware about the concept of child rights in India but in recent times, with education, people are becoming more aware and conscious. Various crimes against women and children remain unreported due to various constructed societal taboos and preconceived notions. Even today, most of the cases are underreported due to lack of awareness and empowerment. In Indian society, parents have the liberty to raise their hands on their children or beat them for the smallest of mistakes. Although this kind of corporal punishment is certainly not legally allowed, it remains morally justified according to the parents. The NSS has a wide visibility in the community which can help UNICEF to promote child rights awareness." He also assured that the police department would lend their support wherever required.

Ms Desai pointed out that when children indicate that something wrong is happening with them, adults often turn a deaf ear or do not believe the children, which results in their trauma being suppressed. She added that the campaign's objective was to sensitize volunteers and POs towards violence against children, and hence the term 'Champions for Children'. Referring to the videos, she said that in the campaign, the volunteers worked to open the blindfold that community members knowingly or unknowingly put on themselves while coming across child rights violation around them. Child abuse does not only cause trauma for the child, but even economic loss to the country in the long run. Adding that the campaign is just a beginning, she said that we needed to change the psyche of the society where children are thought of as mere puppets, and parenting skills need to be developed.

Sh Bandi, one of the facilitators for the meetings, said, "We can all join hands and formulate the action plan to make this successful." He also brought out an important point that the environment should be made "police-friendly". He said that whenever there is a case of child right violation, the victim's family or guardians and even the concerned departments like CWC, District Child Protection Officer (DCPO) refrained from approaching the police due to



Ms Chetna Desai at Raipur Consultation



Sh Sam Bandi at the Consultation in Jagdalpur

social stigma and fear of victimization. There is a culture of silence in the community. People hesitate from openly discussing issues like menstruation, reproductive parts and sexual abuse due to fear of being ridiculed or social isolation.

Smt Archana Rana, Joint Director of the Women and Child Welfare Department of Chhattisgarh, shared an interesting view on the status of child rights in India. She said, "Child rights have never been a political agenda due to the fact that children do not contribute to the vote bank." She added that despite the presence of proper machinery to address such problems, hardly any complaints were received from the community due to lack of awareness. The community was not acquainted with the procedure for approaching the concerned department. She said, "Child rights issues are limited to the mere functioning of *anganwadis* due to which matters are not escalated to the relevant departments." She said that it should be made mandatory to regularly discuss issues concerning child rights in the Gram Panchayat meetings.

Sh Tajuddeen, DCPO, Ambikapur, highlighted the gap in the legal system. He commented, "Important stakeholders like parents are excluded from the legal provisions concerning child rights. Parents should be made accountable for children not accessing educational facilities like schools under the RTE Act. If there is a child marriage happening in the village, attendees and, particularly the Sarpanch, within whose knowledge the marriage takes place, should be held accountable too. The legal system should also empower local bodies such as the village panchayat to intervene in issues violating child rights. The community should also realize their responsibility and actively utilize the existing services provided by the state." He also said that the community did not value the locally existing service; for example, nutrition supplements for mothers and children were available in *anganwadis*, but since they were priced very low, people did not consider these to be valuable.

NSS students and teachers in Bilaspur shared their views, "Unrestricted availability of drugs and harmful substances in the market promote their easy access among the children which may even lead to substance abuse." Further, they added that such shops should not be within a radius of 10 km of the schools as prescribed by the RTE Act. Ms Chetna Desai, UNICEF, who moderated the meetings, shared her observation that one Child Welfare Committee is not sufficient to handle all the child right issues in a district.

When the NSS volunteers shared their observation regarding the functioning of VCPC at the Kanker Consultation, DCPO of Kondagaon, Sh Narendra Soni said that VCPCs were smoothly functioning in 124 villages of the district. He also said that the department often received complaints related to child protection issues but most of the time people who raised such issues did not prefer to disclose their identity due to fear of social isolation. Sh Soni even went on to say that the village Sarpanch would also not agree to the existence of such committee to avoid any form of responsibility and accountability. He also stressed on the fact that the nature of the committee was purely voluntary due to which the members did not display active interest and involvement.

Dr Vijay Shankar Sharma, DCPO of Jagdalpur district said, “A family is the only place where the holistic development of a child can be fostered in the truest sense. Efforts must be directed towards strengthening and empowering the families for a healthy childhood. Focus must be laid on reaching to the root cause of the existing problem and coming up with appropriate solutions rather than mulling over the current problem.” He further added that at present, there was no single department to deal with different domains of children’s issues.” He also emphasized on the role of the DCPO to identify the problem and mitigate the same with close coordination from the concerned departments.

District Education Officer of Bastar, Sh Som, pointed out that a high rate of dropout led to an increase in the number of child marriages in the district. He supported the argument with empirical evidence. He said, “There is a decline in the number of students going to school with 1,526 children in primary school, 638 in middle school and 99 in secondary and higher secondary, which is a matter of great concern.”

Dr JP Kanojia, MJ College said, “Preventing child abuse cases can only be done by promoting awareness among teachers, parents and the community as a whole, as it is a moral issue more than anything else.” He added that people were afraid of complaining to the police because often the perpetrators reciprocated with violence against the complainants. The police department needs to assure victims and their families of safety, and only then will people come forward to report. He also added that patrolling of sensitive areas, such as those where anti-social elements regularly gather, should be increased to discourage criminal activities.

Sh Pervez, an Education Consultant with UNICEF Chhattisgarh, who was present at the Raipur Consultation, said that the supply side, i.e., government services such as schools, *anganwadis* etc., are present but it is equally necessary that the demand side, i.e., community and parents, are aware of the services they can avail and are vigilant about the quality of services delivered. He said that UNICEF was working on the demand side through various projects. He informed about an app developed by UNICEF, 'Hamar Laika, Hamar School', which measures various components of a functional school: attendance of teachers and students, drinking water, working toilets, and so on. He said that this app could be used to monitor the functioning of SMCs.



Sh Pervez, UNICEF Education Consultant



Pankaj Kumar Yadav, an NSS volunteer from KR Technical College, Surguja, who had also been selected for the National Youth Parliament and was present at the Ambikapur Consultation, said that alcoholism and gambling were huge problems in villages. He said that younger children often picked up these habits from elder children or adults in or around their house. He added that while rallies did garner some attention from the community members, such programmes needed more time and a long-term association between NSS and government agencies or NGOs like UNICEF to be really fruitful. He also said that celebrating power should be used to gain the maximum coverage.

Key issues that were discussed

A few recurrent themes emerged in each of the Consultations. A majority of groups argued that child abuse or child sexual abuse primarily occurred due to lack of awareness in the community that such actions can hamper the overall development of the child causing long-term impact. The desire to display power and anger in front of weaker beings, poor family relations which may lead to emotional vulnerability of children, hesitation among parents and elders to discuss such issues with the children, parental expectation and frustration, past unpleasant experiences of the perpetrators, sick mindset and behavioural issues of individuals are the main factors behind such crimes. The groups came up with solutions like spreading awareness in the community regarding child protection issues, different forms of abuse, government and legal services, creating a police-friendly atmosphere, strengthening the VCPCs in various places and installing counseling centers at the village level, among others.

Community-level issues

Excessive alcoholism and drug abuse: In some areas of Chhattisgarh, this is a big issue that results in neglect of children. At the Raipur Consultation, many voices concurred that drug addiction and

Group in discussion
at Ambikapur
Consultation



substance abuse were prominent in Rajinagar, Sondongri, and Kabirnagar *bastis* of Raipur, so much so that children as young as 7 years of age were found indulging in various products having acetone such as nail polish remover, paint thinner, adhesive, to get high. Locally, such products are referred to as '*soluchan*'. Cough syrups and *antas goli* were a popular medium of drug abuse. Unregulated availability and sale of drugs and other harmful substances posed the risk of children harbouring substance abuse leading to juvenile delinquency. Similar stories were heard at other Consultations too. The causes of substance abuse were also discussed which included easy access of the substances by children, peer pressure, lack of parental supervision, presence of similar habits within a family, and children's lack of interest in education.

The groups at almost all Consultations collectively concluded that strict laws should be enforced at the community level to discourage the presence of shops dealing in such substances close to schools, spread awareness in the community regarding the ill-effects of substance abuse on physical and mental health of children, impart moral values along with formal education at schools, strengthen the VCPC and increase vigilance by the police on such illegal activities.

Dropping out of school: Children, particularly in the higher grades, drop out due to economic necessities or the glamour of finding work in the big cities. Elder siblings, particularly girls, are often left in charge of younger siblings if the mother is also working, or is not there.

Child marriage in the community: Groups across districts expressed that lack of awareness and knowledge, patriarchal mindset of the society, dropping out from school, customary laws and cultural factors contributed to the menace of child marriage, which could be only resolved through enlightening the local people regarding the consequences of child marriage especially on health, and the importance of education. Ms Desai said that though the number of child marriages have reduced over the years, a staggering 31 per cent of children are still being married.

Migration and trafficking: Families migrate to other cities for labour work, and children bear the brunt of it. While parents work, the elder siblings are left to take care of the younger ones. Migrants often live without any proper facilities, compromising the health and education of children. Many

children are also lured away/kidnapped by traffickers who sell them dreams of jobs and better lives in the cities. Sh D Shyam, a reporter from Bhilai, who attended the Durg Consultation, said that Chhattisgarh is the biggest human trafficking area in Asia; the fact that eight national highways traverse through Chhattisgarh does not help. He said that even after girls are rescued, they are not accepted in the society. The government has allocated budget for a rehabilitation under which they can learn a vocation and earn a livelihood. He urged the audience to be more attentive to their surroundings and inform authorities whenever they come across violation of child rights.

Child labour: The issue of misuse of children was most enunciated by Smt Kalpana Bhagat, PO from Government High School, Deori, Pallari, who reported that in Rohansi village of Raipur district, teenage girls ran away in groups because they were made to work too much by their families. She also added that there were many cases where girls in Grades 9 and 12 only attended school to escape household work.

Poverty, expectation that children should share the family burden, lack of education among the parents, education being considered to be an investment without return, and desire to earn more income were seen as some of the reasons why child labour



*Sh D Shyam, present as
a media representative*

persists. Among the solutions offered were that the community should be economically empowered within the villages by creating livelihood opportunities using local resources, strengthening government's efforts to facilitate and implement skill development programmes and self-help groups, and spreading awareness among children and parents regarding the importance of education to reduce the school dropout rate.

Malnutrition among children was also brought to notice. It was discussed that it mainly occurred due to poverty, lack of awareness on the importance of nutrition and gaps in local services as told by the group members. Malnutrition could be eradicated through upliftment of the economic condition of the community through various means, ensuring awareness on health among important stakeholders concerning children like the parents, teachers, *anganwadi* helpers and workers, ensuring the quality of midday meals at schools and timely provision of nutrient supplements by the *anganwadi*, and encouraging the community to utilize the services. Participants pointed out that child migration and trafficking prevailed due to lack of awareness in the community, poverty and pressure on the children to support their families. These could only be resolved by enforcing strict laws to ensure prosecution of the traffickers,



Brainstorming action plans at Jagdalpur Consultation

protection of the victims, prevention of trafficking, spreading of awareness on child protection issues like trafficking, warnings to the community against fraudulent agents and traffickers, and vigilance by the police and local bodies like the VCPC. Post presentation, an action plan was developed based on the solutions given by the participants.

There is a culture of silence in the community regarding the naxal issue. Though it is a truth that Maoists in Chhattisgarh often recruit children between 16-18 years of age¹, particularly from the tribal belt, this issue was never brought up by any child or adult throughout the campaign. At the Jagdalpur consultation, when Sh Sam Bandi tried to open the topic for discussion, there were hardly any responses. The silence around the issue makes it even more difficult to be addressed.

Key Outcomes

Lack of awareness about child rights: This was one of the key reasons for perpetuation of child abuse. Adults and children are not aware of issues that constitute child rights or of the recourse available if these are violated. Social taboos, culture of silence and lack of openness to discuss issues of child abuse in the community act as a barrier to the effective implementation of child protection policies at the ground level. Lack of awareness about child protection services in the community such as the 1098 helpline was also brought to the notice of all stakeholders by the NSS volunteers. The NSS volunteers also appraised the authority of the lack of knowledge at the ground level regarding the functioning of VCPC in various districts.

Hesitation to approach the authorities: Another issue discussed was the hesitation faced by community members in approaching the police due to fear of social stigma and isolation. Dr Bajpai added that casteism is another factor due to which cases in which perpetrators are of upper caste and the victim of a lower caste are often buried. The police is also not viewed with confidence by the common person, which leads to barriers in accessing protection or intervention.

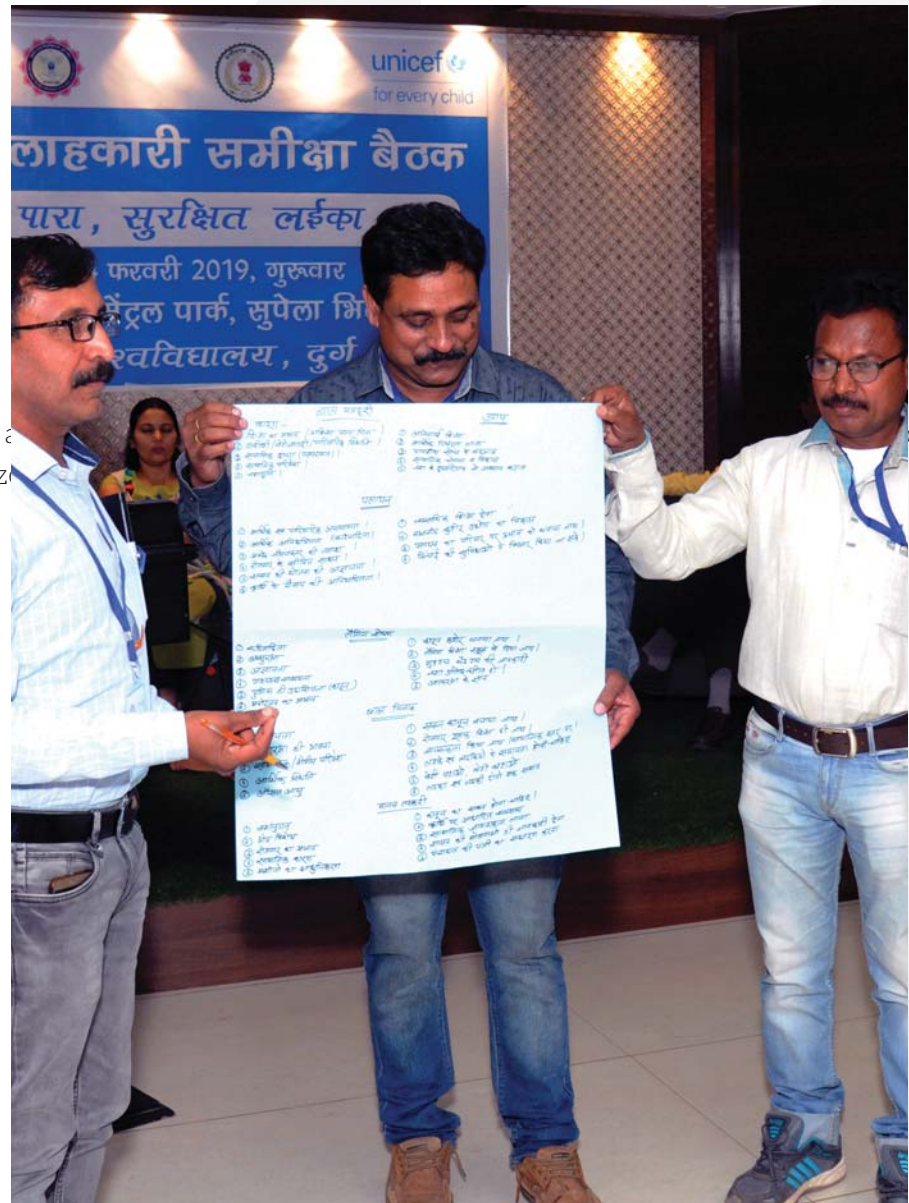
¹ United Nations Security Council, Children trapped in Armed Conflict Areas, May 16, 2018, p. 30.

Lack of coordination between responsible departments: One more major theme that emerged was the existence of a gap between the policy-level stakeholders and the people at the grass roots. Lack of inter-departmental coordination was also a major impediment in the implementation process which was also raised by a few stakeholders.

Ms Yogita Thapar, inspector in charge of Chhattisgarh Police, said that even though hospitals did not support the police in sensitive cases like child abuse; they would cite jurisdiction reasons to avoid taking any responsibility or provide cooperation.

Another issue that came up was that teachers in government institutions are burdened with too many administrative responsibilities, which hamper their quality of teaching.

Improper implementation of ICPS: The ICPS mandates setting up of VCPCs at the village level. However, there seems a gap between the existence of VCPCs on official record and the actual functioning of the



Various teams presented action plans towards the end of the Consultation

body at the grass-roots level. Lack of proper incentive and motivation given to the community members also plays a major role in hampering the active implementation of such committees. The existing VCPCs can be strengthened by developing a sense of acceptance and ownership for the programme among the service providers, committee members and community people. There can be a model where the community is empowered to monitor the functioning of the VCPC. Further motivation can be provided to the committee members through incentives which can promote their active involvement.

1098 should be promoted: The community should be made aware about the government services such as the toll free number 1098 which they can access as a preventive measure or during emergency stations. Effective communication model can be utilized for promotion of the aforementioned service.

*At the end of every
Consultation,
participants
presented their action
plan to the audience*



Make child rights everyone's concern: Engagement of the local police and the community can be encouraged through campaigns, meetings, interactions, workshops, camps and other activities to promote a police-friendly community. Most of the laws related to child rights issues are child-centric in nature. They fail to encompass important stakeholders like parents and local village authority. For instance, parents should be equally held accountable for dropout or absenteeism of their ward from school. Similarly, in case of child marriage, the village head or Sarpanch should be equally held responsible apart from the parents. Outreach programmes and campaigns can be organized by the village-level committee in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations to raise awareness and update the existing knowledge in the community. Enforcement of stringent laws prohibiting the illegal sale and use of harmful substances and drugs should be in place.

Conclusion: The Consultation meetings proved to be extremely important as it distilled the learnings from Bal Melas and Gram Samparks into actionable ideas. It was successful in bringing different macro- and micro-level stakeholders face to face on a single platform, breaking down hierarchical structures and bringing all stakeholders closer to each other. Participants talked about the culture of silence existing in the community due to which people shy away from discussing matters related to sexual abuse or bodily changes. It also emerged that most of the cases related to child rights remained under-reported due to lack of awareness, fear of police and social stigma.

It was also seen that more training was required to give volunteers an in-depth understanding of the actual issues at hand. At the Raipur Consultation, for example, some volunteers raised the point that they found an *anganwadi* running in a rented place. Although renting a place for an *anganwadi* is not a problem as long as it is following the norms, the volunteers had wrongly interpreted it as being a problem.

The Consultation meetings provided an opportunity to the stakeholders to identify the gaps observed and propose suitable solutions for the same. Formulation of action plans was the most important part of the Consultation meetings which was carried out after thorough group discussions between all stakeholders.

IN THE NEWS

Various press reporters and media personnels from media houses like Pioneer, Nayi Dunia, Patrika News, Mavret Shikhar, Hari Bhoomi News, Dainik Bhaskar and Bhartiye Digital News were present for covering the various events. The media showed a lot of interest in the campaign and gave positive media covers in their respective newspapers. Some newspapers highlighted the fact that the campaign was a noble initiative to promote awareness and child rights in the community, while some drew the attention of the public towards inculcating moral values in children along with formal education in order to make them productive citizens.

UNICEF is organising a campaign on ending violence

UNICEF is organising a campaign on ending violence against children, involving various stakeholders and community members. The article mentions that UNICEF is organizing a campaign to end violence against children, involving various stakeholders and community members.

UNICEF-NSS to hold campaigns on ending violence against children

UNICEF-NSS will hold campaigns to end violence against children, focusing on awareness and community involvement. The article states that UNICEF-NSS will hold campaigns to end violence against children, focusing on awareness and community involvement.

'समाज में स्वस्थ बचपन का निर्माण करेंगे स्वयंसेवक'

How will we create a healthy childhood in society? The article discusses how volunteers will contribute to creating a healthy childhood in society through various initiatives and awareness programs.

हिंसा से बच्चों की सुरक्षा के लिए कार्य करेंगे स्वयंसेवक

Volunteers will work to ensure the safety of children from violence, through community-based programs and awareness campaigns. The article reports that volunteers will work to ensure the safety of children from violence, through community-based programs and awareness campaigns.

एक दिवसीय कार्यशाला (बाल मेला) का आयोजन

A one-day workshop (Baal Mela) was organized to educate children and the community about child rights and safety. The article describes a one-day workshop (Baal Mela) organized to educate children and the community about child rights and safety.

बच्चों अपने तरीके...

Children express themselves in their own ways. The article explores different ways in which children express themselves and their needs, emphasizing the importance of listening to their voices.

The Surakshit Para, Surakshit Laikaman campaign has taken the first step towards raising the consciousness of NSS volunteers and people in the pilot villages on issues related to child rights.

Using young people as messengers on issues related to child rights, which have emotional and psychological underpinnings for childhood, proved to have many merits. Both as part of the community and as little more than children themselves, the volunteers were not entirely new to the problems faced by children in the communities: corporal punishment, verbal and sexual abuse, child labour, child marriage and neglect, to name a few. However, when volunteers were trained on child rights and the 54 Acts that safeguard children's interest, a new vista of knowledge opened up before them. They became aware of what every child deserves and how those rights can be violated; they gained knowledge about the systems that can be approached for help; they learnt about the responsibilities



END NOTE

that government machineries like Gram Panchayats, schools and *anganwadis* have towards children and how they can be held accountable for not fulfilling their duties. To say the least, interacting with the community was an eye-opening opportunity for volunteers as well as POs, who came to know not only about the heinous crimes committed against children but also the various subtle ways in which children's rights are violated on a day-to-day basis, such as neglect of pregnant women, verbal bullying in schools, and so on. The vast volunteer base of the NSS, spread and functional across the state, meant that nearly one lakh sensitized and empowered young people drawn from the community were ready to reach back to their communities as change makers – a new role for the volunteers and one which they could effectively use.

In most instances, the campaign evoked a positive response and in some cases even resulted in the instantaneous formation of a VCPC – on 4 February, 2019, NSS volunteers reported that a VCPC was set up in Kulhadgaon in the presence of Sarpanch Secretary and community members. Similar action was taken in Joba.



Volunteers and school students at Bastar



Passionate volunteers and POs shone throughout the campaign. Young NSS volunteers brought back varied tales of violence against children to the Consultation meetings. The Consultation meetings saw young people and officials interact with focused attention to find solutions to child abuse that are broad-based and rooted in an understanding of the ethos of the communities for which they were being developed.

That said, there were definitely some learnings to be incorporated into subsequent phases of the campaign. Brief visits to villages did not give enough time for the volunteers to gain the confidence of the children or to truly examine the state of the child rights in different villages. Also, as the Gram Samparks began the very next day after the Bal Mela, the students had just a few hours to process the information they received and figure out activities or prepare materials for the village-level activation. Training of the POs was also an issue as many in field had not participated in the inception training held prior to the Bal Mela.

Timing was another issue that would need to be considered in the future. Dr DL Patel, district programme coordinator, Kanker, Kondagaon, Jagdalpur and Dantewada, said that since practical exams are held in February, the teacher body was highly pressed for time, which led to a lack of continuity of teachers and students attending the events (trainings, Bal Melas and village activation). For the campaign to be effective, it is imperative that the substitute teachers are briefed by the trained teacher. However, it did not seem to be the case in every village. Additionally, villages visited on Sundays, when all institutions are closed for the weekly off, were challenged in finding impromptu activities through which to gain information.



Dr DL Patel giving a pep talk to the volunteers in Bastar

There were some patterns that were visible across the districts. For rallies, volunteers picked up slogans like 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao', 'Ladka ladki ek samaan', 'Hum sab ne thana hai, baal mazdoori hatana hai' and others in a similar vein. These are slogans from campaigns that have been going on for quite some time. People already have an understanding of gender discrimination and child labour being wrong. The campaign needed to give voice to lesser known forms of child rights violations such as bullying, corporal punishment and sexual abuse of children.

There is widespread denial of eve teasing and sexual harassment of children, with village elders claiming that such things do not happen in their villages. In almost every instance, they said that it could be happening in other villages or cities, but denied such problem existed in their vicinity.

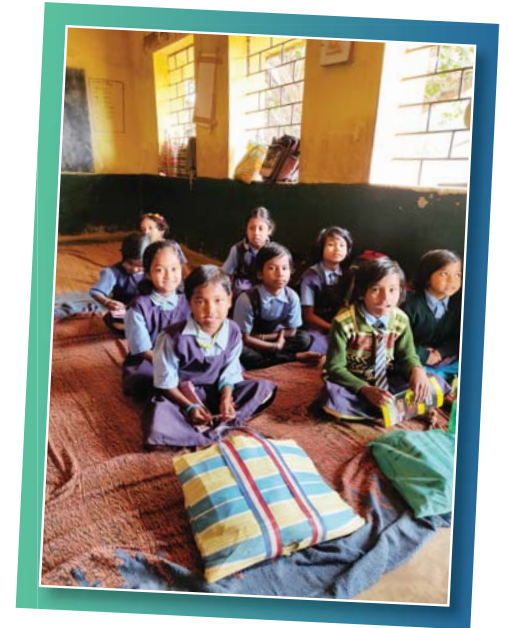
Given the state data on this, it is clear that much work is needed to bring these issues out of the closet and implement realistic actions to end them.

Being an outreach campaign based on mid media and IPC makes the training and capacity building of POs and volunteers in the field critical to the success of the programme. If they are not sensitized on the complexities of the issues, or have only partial or even inaccurate knowledge, they cannot effectively guide those they interact with or may themselves get bogged down with non-issues. At present, there is a degree of variation between teams in terms of their knowledge and ability to communicate messages. Whereas some teams were very competent and energetic, others lagged in terms of knowledge, enthusiasm and communication skills. Training will be needed to bridge this gap if a lasting impact is to be made.

Follow-up actions are needed both at the grass-roots level and at the level of the district authorities. At the grass-roots level, the process of making changes has begun but in a very limited number of villages. It needs to be expanded to cover all villages in the state. In addition, it is necessary to remember that some attempts to activate VCPCs in villages have been made in the past but have not been sustained. The campaign also holds out the promise of better coordination and cooperation among district-level authorities responsible for protecting child rights. At both at the Bal Melas and Consultations, commitments of cooperation were given by various departments to improve the access

and functioning of child rights. To cement these gains will require efforts in the coming months as well.

Surakshit Para, Surakshit Laikaman was the first time for NSS and UNICEF to join hands and create a programme that would give NSS volunteers a chance to observe the functioning of government systems catering to children, and bring child rights awareness to the very home – the smallest and most important unit that ensures the safety of a child. In the journey, they themselves became sensitized to child rights and the laws that protect them. The intensive exercise of the campaign taught them important lessons in promoting the betterment of children and safeguarding their interests – lessons that will be by their side whenever they come across injustice against children.



Hopefully, the campaign will set off a chain reaction that will lead to an awareness of child rights permanently embedded in the psyche of the society and a better future for children in the country.

