

## **CASE STUDY ON ARRESTING EARLY CHILDHOOD MARRIAGE- CRITICAL ROLE PLAYED BY SERVICE PROVIDERS IN MARRIAGE CEREMONIES**

One of our important strategies is to identify the service providers in arranging a marriage ceremony and educate them on the evils of early childhood marriage. Based on this approach we conducted series of workshops and cluster meetings in Harichandanpur Block of Keonjhar district during 2020-2021. The main participants in these workshops were service providers like intermediaries, tent house suppliers, catering units, Music system suppliers with audio. Lighting and decoration professionals etc. We conducted 3 such workshops where more than 60 service providers attended. The theme of the discussion was underage marriage, its implications on the newlyweds and their families.

The main facilitators and speakers in these workshops were other renowned social workers of the area, representatives from district such as DSWO, CDPO cum CMPO, BDO, AWW, ASHA, JJB, DCPO, Media. Members from Brahmin Samaja and advocates who are committed to the cause of early childhood marriage, and PRI members also joined. Apart from the negative impact on the socio-economic condition of the affected families the Government regulations and the provisions in the law were also discussed in detail. This led to a lot of rethinking from these service providers. Many of them shared that they have not perceived that early marriage can destroy the lives of the married couple along with their families. The legal provisions against the service providers who have facilitated such unlawful act were also discussed in detail. This worked as a deterrent for them and all most all of them promised to stay away from supporting and providing their professional service to such unlawful and wrong action. There was also a sincere request from all concerned to work as a watch dog for such events and let the authorities and the NGOs working in the area be informed about any such event happening.

During the month of February 2021, it came to our notice via information from Mr Mrutunjya Behera who supplies tent house materials in marriage ceremonies that one childhood marriage is planned on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at Sagadapata village of Harichandanpur Block. Immediately we notified to CDPO cum CMPO, Harichandanpur block and visited the family where this was planned. We found the information to be true and counseled the parents of the girl and their neighbors. We found out that the parents are economically in a bad situation and want to marry off their girl in a bid to lessen their burden. After our intervention, they understood that the situation will become even worse for their daughter in comparison to the present state. We also talked to the girl and made her aware of the unfortunate scenario likely to happen if she marries early.



Discussion with mothers group, GP level Taskforce committee & VCPC members to stop the Child marriage at Jhumpura Block

Ultimately, the marriage was cancelled. We organized a meeting in the village on the issue of early marriage and appealed all to refrain from it.

Similarly, our intervention at Jhumpura Block has also yielded results. The Block is predominantly tribal with prevalence of Munda Community. They have a tradition where the boy snatches the girl by force and brings him to his house. The family gives feast to the relatives later. We have educated and stopped 7 such marriages in the Block with support from CDPO and other officials. In all such cases, the girls were snatched from as far as Joda which is 25 kms away. The girls were rescued by joint collaboration with child line, JJB and police. After rescuing, the girls were sent back to their parental homes under custody of authority. Following this, we organized series of meeting with the community and impressed upon them the evils of child marriage and the sufferings from the newlyweds. The community though reluctant initially, accepted the idea and promised to refrain from such activities. Particularly the younger generation of boys and girls were educated on the issue. The processes are still continuing and take time to make a lasting impact. We have planned to focus on these areas more with priority in our next interventions.