

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS: EXPERIENCE IN SEVEN STATES THROUGH NGO INTERVENTION

Successful efforts for empowerment of adolescent girls from six states of India

Since 2011, non-governmental organisations across seven states of India (in more than 50 blocks) have been working on strengthening the Scheme of the Ministry of Women and Child called SABLA. The work being done by the organisations has contributed to the empowerment of adolescent girls and is a resource for any schemes that seek to build a stronger future for the girl child.

About the Scheme:

The pilot phase of a comprehensive scheme for **Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)** called **SABLA** is being implemented in 200 districts across the nation on a pilot basis. The scheme is supposed to focus on out-of-school girls between the age group of 11-18 years. School going girls can also join in the activities. The objectives of the scheme, to be implemented through the ICDS infrastructure, are:

- Enable self-development and empowerment of adolescent girls;
- Improve their nutrition and health status;
- Spread awareness among them about health, hygiene, nutrition, Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH), and family and child care;
- Upgrade their home-based skills, life skills and vocational skills;
- Mainstream out-of-school girls into formal/non formal-education; and
- Inform and guide them about existing public services, such as PHC, CHC, Post Office, Bank, Police Station, etc.

About the Cohort:

A cohort of **five non-government organizations** with considerable experience in working on adolescents' gender and reproductive health issues working across **seven states of India** have been providing a value addition to the SABLA scheme for the last four years and have a wealth of experience on implementation, training, group facilitation and material production. They have all supported the government scheme to incorporate a gender and rights component, and they are described below:

Name of organization	State	Coverage area of SABLA strengthening work	Key Activity
1. Centre for Catalyzing Change (C3)	Delhi	6 Blocks, 615 AWCs	Enhancing government capacities for SABLA implementation
	Jharkhand	11 Blocks, 1670 AWCs of Gumla district	
2. Child in Need Institute (CINI)	West Bengal	18 blocks spread over 6 districts, 720 AWC	Building NGO capacity to
3. JAGORI Rural	Himachal Pradesh	2 blocks in Kangra district	

4. SAHAJ and partners	Gujarat	4 districts, 3 blocks covering 59 AWC, plus 20 bastis and 9 schools in Vadodara city	support SABLA functionaries in implementation
5. SAHAYOG and partners	Uttar Pradesh	9 blocks spread over 4 districts covering 100 AWCs	
	Uttarakhand	3 blocks in Nainital District covering 40 AWCs	

Some of the **key achievements** of the organisations in the Cohort are described below:

- a. All the organisations have worked with the issues of **gender and rights to promote empowerment of the adolescent girls**. This is evident from campaigns to promote **school enrolment** (179 girls in West Bengal, 30 in Jharkhand and 222 in Uttar Pradesh were re-enrolled in school), halt **early or forced marriages** (57 cases of early marriage prevented in West Bengal) and increase **girls' mobility** (a campaign called "Mere Sapne Meri Udaan" was conducted by the adolescent girls who tried to internalise gender equality and call for equal rights; video film documenting this is available from Uttar Pradesh)
- b. In addition, the organisations have strong background in promoting **reproductive health information** among young people, and have been using this to strengthen the SABLA impact by educating girls about menstrual hygiene and removal of taboos.
- c. All the organisations have developed a wealth of innovative and interactive printed **materials in terms of training tools, community meeting tools and handbooks, awareness and campaign materials, participatory tools for programme monitoring at the community level**, and so on (a complete list is available with samples in soft copy). These have been developed in simple language, usually in local languages and are often pictorial for the non-school-going girls to understand. These have been **adopted by the state governments** in three states, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.
- d. All the organisations have developed methodologies, skills and tools for supportive **supervision of the programme implementation** and back-up **community participation** components. There have been training programmes/manuals developed for the functionaries at block, district and state in Jharkhand and New Delhi
- e. Three of the organisations have developed strong **collaborative approaches with the local ICDS department officials and frontline workers** (Anganwadi workers and supervisors) that enable them to provide constructive **feedback for better implementation** of the SABLA Scheme. In Uttar Pradesh, the Kishori Diwas has been held regularly each quarter, with participation of AWWs, teachers and PRI members, and occasionally the ANM (45%). In Uttarakhand the Kishori Diwas has been facilitated regularly by the AWW after advocacy with the ICDS department.
- f. Girls of the adolescent groups have been empowered with information about the SABLA scheme and encouraged to **monitor the SABLA implementation** themselves in four states, using a special "entitlements calendar" (Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand) or an IVRS system (Delhi and Jharkhand). Girls in UP have been able to get their AWCs to open regularly, and they have ensured that AWCs are hosting the girls' meetings each week. In Uttarakhand the girls have tracked the supplementary nutrition which has been missing for last three years.

Knowledge about entitlements has increased: “I insist on grains being made available at the ration shop even when they scold me and say that I have no right as an outsider (being Gurkha). I also eat my share of the food from the Aanganwadi. Only if I remain healthy can I do something for the community”. Kishori, Khanyara Centre. Himachal Pradesh

It is significant that parents, especially mothers of Kishoris are supportive, as they see a value in this programme. “In our time, there was no such scope to discuss these issues openly. I think this training will save my daughter from the mistake (early marriage) I made. I would like her to be self-sufficient before marriage” says Rehana Begam, mother of a Kishori in Garden Reach, West Bengal.

AWWs have begun to own up the SABLA process and they now feel part of the change. “I feel so proud, taking part in the drama group. It is like my wish come true. I so much wanted to act in a play, and now SABLA has given me the opportunity,” says Bandana Das, AWW in Entally (West Bengal), who played the role of a health worker in a play organised by the Early Marriage Protection group.

Anita, a 15 year old adolescent girl in Patnipara Gram Panchayat of Coochbehar-II block, Coochbehar district attended various training programmes on gender, early marriage and early pregnancy. Her father is a rickshaw-puller and mother, a domestic worker. Since Anita had five sisters and she was the oldest one, her father decided to get her married at the age of 15 to a daily wage labourer. But Anita did a silent protest against her parent’s decision. She informed other girls of the Kishori Samooh in a nearby Anganwadi centre. The girls discussed this issue with the Anganwadi worker and the concerned supervisor of the centre, and they went to Anita’s house together to sensitise her parents about the ill effects of early marriage and early pregnancy. Initially the parents did not want to disclose the fact of the marriage, but gradually they came to understand the significance of the statutory warning of the Kishori group. They decided to postpone the marriage till Anita completed 18 years, and agreed that would not force her to get married. Anita’s awareness about the ill effects of early marriage and early pregnancy and the involvement of other Kishoris to strike at the conscience of parents worked well to prevent her early marriage.

They will be given services like Supplementary Nutrition, IFA Supplementation, Health check-ups and referral services, Nutrition and Health Education. Every three months a ‘Kishori Diwas’ is to be organized in the village where the health and nutrition check-up is to be done for every girl through convergence with the health department frontline workers (ANM and ASHA). Groups of 15-25 adolescent girls (Kishori Samooh) are to be formed at each Anganwadi Centre from among out-of-school girls (school-going girls can also join on weekends and vacations). A trained leadership team of one ‘Sakhi and two ‘Sahelis’ nominated from amongst the group members are then supposed to conduct meetings of the Kishori Samooh thrice a week. Additional sessions may be conducted by local NGOs, facilitated by the Anganwadi Worker. ‘Kishori Card’ for each adolescent girl is to be maintained at Anganwadi Centre.

Monitoring Calendar called “Chalo Aao Dekhe Kaisi Mil Rahi Hai Kishori Swasthya Sewaen” (Evaluating Health Services for Adolescent Girls).

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