Centre for Social and Behaviour Change | Ashoka University

August 2025

Seeds *of* Compassion

Impact Stories, Challenges & Learnings from Satyarthi Movement for Global Compassion's work across 6 states *in* India

This report is an outcome of a study of Satyarthi Movement for Global Compassion's work, commissioned by the Centre for Social & Behaviour Change at Ashoka University from January to August 2025.

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Executive Summary

Born out of the Bachpan Bachao Andolan and community programmes by the Bal Ashram in Rajasthan, the Bal Mitra Gram (BMG), Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) and the Banjara Education Centre (BEC) programmes of SMGC represent a comprehensive, community-rooted approach to child protection and empowerment. This impact assessment examines the design, delivery, and outcomes of the programme across multiple states, with a focus on Rajasthan, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra. The impact research process for the report employed a behavioural science lens along with participatory research tools for the design of the research methodology and the analysis.

Programme Design

Grounded in the rights-based philosophy of SMGC, the programme models are anchored in strengthening village ecosystems to ensure children's rights to education, protection, and participation. The programme recognises that systemic issues such as child marriage, child labour, and school dropouts are embedded in complex social, economic, and cultural norms. Its design intentionally creates and leverages collective platforms like Bal Panchayat, Mahila Mandal, Yuva Mandal to create community-led behavioural change at multiple levels, from individuals to institutions.

Programme Delivery

Implementation of SMGC's programmes varies across geographies. Regardless, it is marked by strong local engagement through trained Community Social Workers (CSWs), structured awareness campaigns, capacity-building sessions, and participatory governance mechanisms. While village-specific adaptations were made to respond to geography, caste structures and their manifestations in villages and migration patterns, a common ethos of compassion-driven change underpins the programme throughout. The delivery of values and ideas happens through community engagement activities like meetings, door-to-door awareness campaigns executed by social workers who build rapport with people from selected villages.

Programme Delivery

As observed during field research, significant improvements have occurred across BMG and BEC villages, as well as BMM neighbourhoods, in terms of awareness, agency, action, and access.

Children and youth have become central agents of change: children showed increased rights awareness and active civic participation. Girls delayed marriage, returned to school, and voiced aspirations, often challenging deeply entrenched norms.

Women and parents demonstrated enhanced agency and mindset shifts, with 76–95% participating in decisions related to education, health, and protection. Women also began engaging in governance spaces and accessing entitlements independently.

Communities have moved from passive acceptance of harmful practices to mindful problem-solving. The rise in participatory platforms contributed to shifts in norms around caste, gender, and child welfare.

Institutions, including Panchayats, ASHA workers, and schools, have become more responsive through community petitions, regular engagement, and trust-building.

The report employs the 'Stages of Change' framework, acknowledging that villages progress at different paces– from stages like pre-contemplation to maintenance. Post-exit, sites like Lalpura and Piplai in Rajasthan show sustained values, while active sites in the same state, like Maluthana and Heensla, require continued support to stabilise gains.

Challenges & Recommendations

Barriers such as patriarchal norms, weak transport facilities, fragmented caste-based village layouts, and economic precarity persist. Programme limitations included short timelines, staff transitions, and uneven reach in large or physically and socially divided villages.

To deepen impact, future strategies must:

- Extend engagement timelines for institutional transformation.
- Strengthen economic pathways and local livelihoods.
- Leverage alumni-led mentoring models for sustainability.
- Enhance collaboration with state schemes for systemic convergence.

In conclusion, the programmes showcase a replicable model of compassionate community development. Through grassroots leadership, structural advocacy, and behaviour-informed design, it transforms child protection from an obligation into a shared village ethic– sowing the seeds for long-term social equity. The transformation from being a children's foundation to a global movement for compassion is fitting, timed well and reflects adaptability and moves one step closer to ensuring that kids live and grow up in a thoughtful world that responds to their evolving needs.

About The Centre for Social & Behaviour Change, Ashoka University

The Centre for Social and Behaviour Change (CSBC), established by Ashoka University with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is a pioneering institution in India dedicated to advancing behavioural science for social impact. Its mission is to become a globally respected Indian institution that delivers thought leadership and practical behaviour change interventions, particularly for low-income and marginalised communities.

CSBC's work focuses on critical development areas such as nutrition, sanitation, maternal and newborn health, family planning, and financial services. It advances its vision through three interconnected strategies: designing and implementing behaviour change interventions with governments and NGOs, conducting foundational research to better understand human behaviour, and building capacity by training practitioners and policymakers in behavioural science.

CSBC also plays a key role in shaping policy. In 2019, it partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and NITI Aayog to establish India's first Behavioural Insights Unit, and has since supported the creation of similar units in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Through these efforts, CSBC is helping embed behavioural science into public policy and programme design in India.

About the Report

SMGC works to embed compassion as a central force in leadership, social transformation, and collective wellbeing. Its programmes emphasise the power of compassion in shaping how individuals and communities respond to challenges, support one another, and build more inclusive and humane systems.

Through this report, CSBC applies a behavioural science lens to SMGC's initiatives, examining how compassion influences attitudes, decisions, and sustained change. The approach combines SMGC's vision of compassion-led transformation with CSBC's expertise in designing and evaluating behaviour change strategies. Together, the report garners insights that can inform policy, strengthen organisations, and guide future interventions.

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Satyarthi Movement *for* Global Compassion– An Introduction to *the* Organisation

1

Introduction

Satyarthi Movement for Global Compassion was born out of insight and foresight from almost half a century of working towards safeguarding child rights in the country. Mr Kailash Satyarthi founded the Bachpan Bachao Andolan in 1980 to conduct raids and rescue operations to free child workers from unacceptable conditions.

Many years later, the Bal Ashram in Rajasthan was founded in 1998 as a rehabilitation centre for children rescued from child labour. When the Bal Ashram Trust team was working with nearby communities, they realised the need for systemic and structural change, especially against millennia-old traditions and belief systems. This led to the creation of the Bal Mitra Gram Programme.

Building on Mr Satyarthi's work of over 40 years in promoting and protecting child rights, Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation works in partnership with multiple stakeholders at both the grassroots and global levels, with governments, businesses, civil society organisations, communities and children.

Thus, the Satyarthi Movement for Global Compassion has been years in the making, gathering and sowing seeds of compassion since the 1980s.

Mission

In a world plagued by rising extremism, inequality, and climate crises, SMGC's mission is clear: to reignite compassion within every individual and channel it into actions that promote peace, equity, and sustainability. SMGC works at the grassroots level to empower communities, conducts groundbreaking research on compassion, and informs international dialogues that shape policies and drive inclusive development.

Why Compassion?
How does Compassion translate to Action?

SMGC, through its model, brings people in a community together, creating discourse and action surrounding shared challenges. These smaller groups, formed from a space of mutual understanding and empathy, what we call compassion, then mobilise their time, energy, and resources to address issues most relevant to them.

Despite the world's unprecedented wealth, we are failing our most vulnerable. SMGC stands against this backdrop as a force of change, cultivating compassion as a unifying thread capable of bridging divides and inspiring collective action. **SMGC, thus, plays a pivotal role in facilitating the translation of compassion into action through community-led problem solving. Let's understand how.**

SMGC Programmes *and* Processes

BMG: Rajasthan | Karnataka | Jharkhand | Madhya Pradesh

Through Bal Mitra Grams, SMGC upholds child rights by ensuring **child safety and fostering community development** in vulnerable villages. This includes facilitating children's enrollment in government schools where education is free and supplemented by midday meals, routine vaccinations, school supplies, uniforms, and scholarships as announced by governments in respective regions. SMGC, thus, acts as a **facilitator or a catalyst in ensuring that child rights are a practice,** instead of a simple provision on paper, through improved public participation and better diffusion of schemes and supports.

The program aims to empower children, youth, and communities through **rights-based training**, transforming them into **agents of change** who create safe and supportive environments for children.

It addresses children affected by child labour, trafficking, and child marriage by engaging key stakeholders, including village councils, community groups, schools, local authorities, teachers, and childcare workers.

The Bal Mitra Gram Program works by increasing public participation and awareness through the formation of 4 community groups of action:

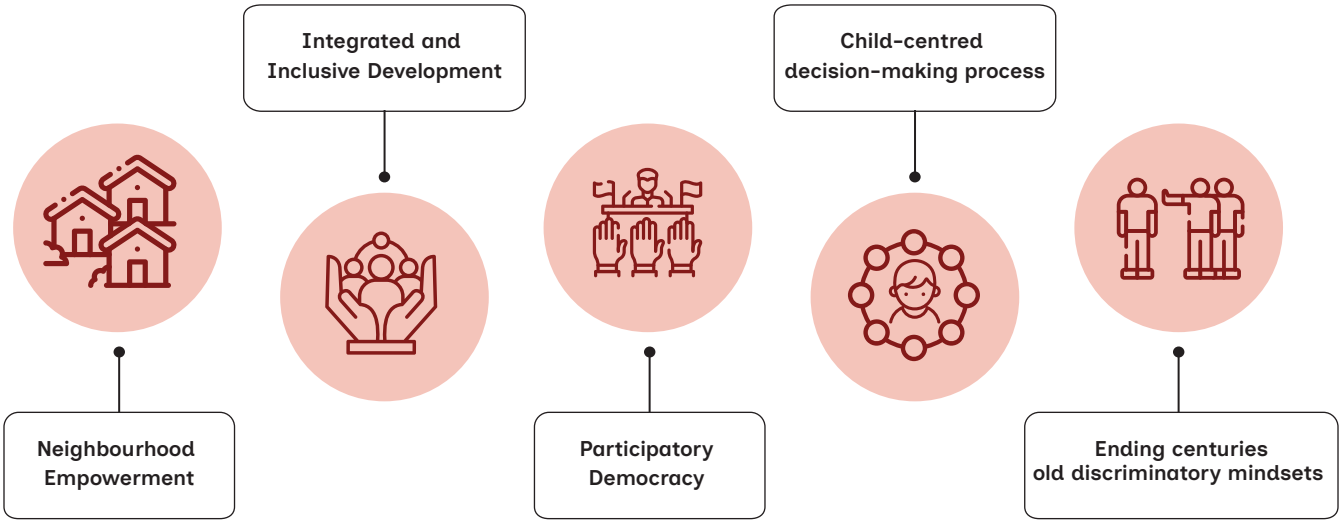
- The Bal Panchayat
- Mahila Mandal
- Yuva Mandal
- BMG Samiti (Advisory)

BMM: Delhi | Pune

Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) or child-friendly community, is a concept based on the flagship programme of KSCF — Bal Mitra Gram, functional in rural India, altered to suit the needs of children living in urban slums. Launched in 2018, it is a sustainable, holistic and preventive intervention for child protection and development in urban slum communities to ensure every child is safe, free and educated. Rooted in the belief that children can be effective agents of change, the vision of BMM focused on **promoting education, strengthening leadership, and ensuring child protection** in marginalised urban communities.

Through participatory structures like **Bal Parishads**, community leadership groups, and hands-on programs such as Gyanshalas and child-led campaigns, BMM seeks to create inclusive spaces that secure their rights and protect them from child labour, child sexual abuse, and raise their awareness on education, water, sanitation, hygiene and livelihood.

The BMM Programme is based on 5 Key Principles:



BEC: Rajasthan

The **Banjara Education Centre (BEC) Programme** was conceptualised to address deep-rooted issues like systemic exclusion, child labour, and negative consequences of migration among nomadic Banjara communities. Recognising the unique socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by these groups, including extreme poverty, lack of land rights, poor access to public services, and educational neglect, the program aims to create **first-generation learners and community leaders** through community-based interventions.

BECs provide basic literacy, activity-based learning, and leadership development while working to eliminate child labour and child marriage.

The BMM Programme is based on 4 Key Principles:

Provide access to education to children from Banjara communities.

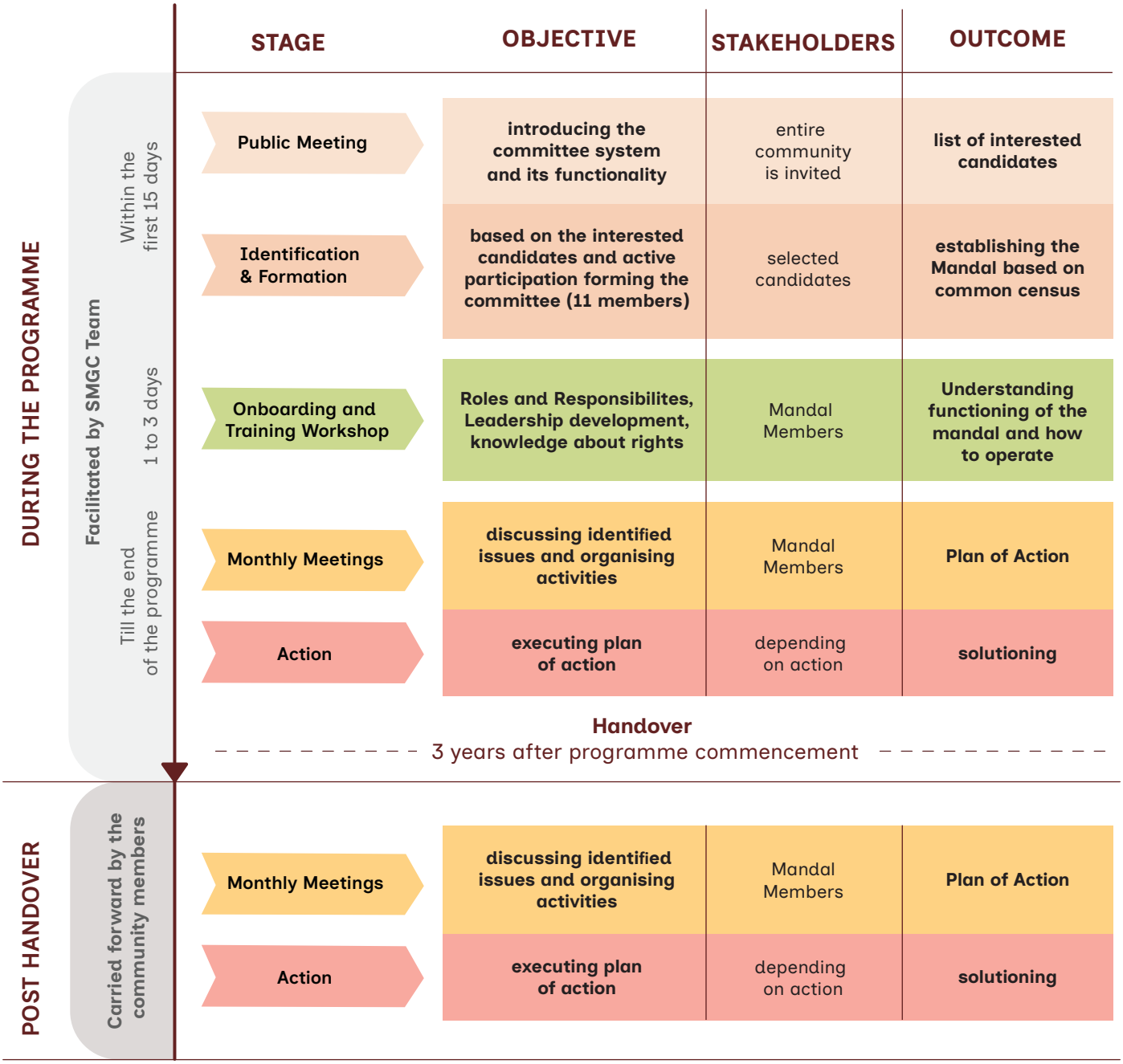
Decrease the incidence of child labour, child marriage and exploitation amongst children in the community.

Improve gender empowerment in Banjara communities.

Reduction in migration of Banjara community members

Programme Implementation Timeline

This is a generalised timeline which captures the overall process of the implementation of programmes at SMGC.



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Methodology *and* process of *the* impact study

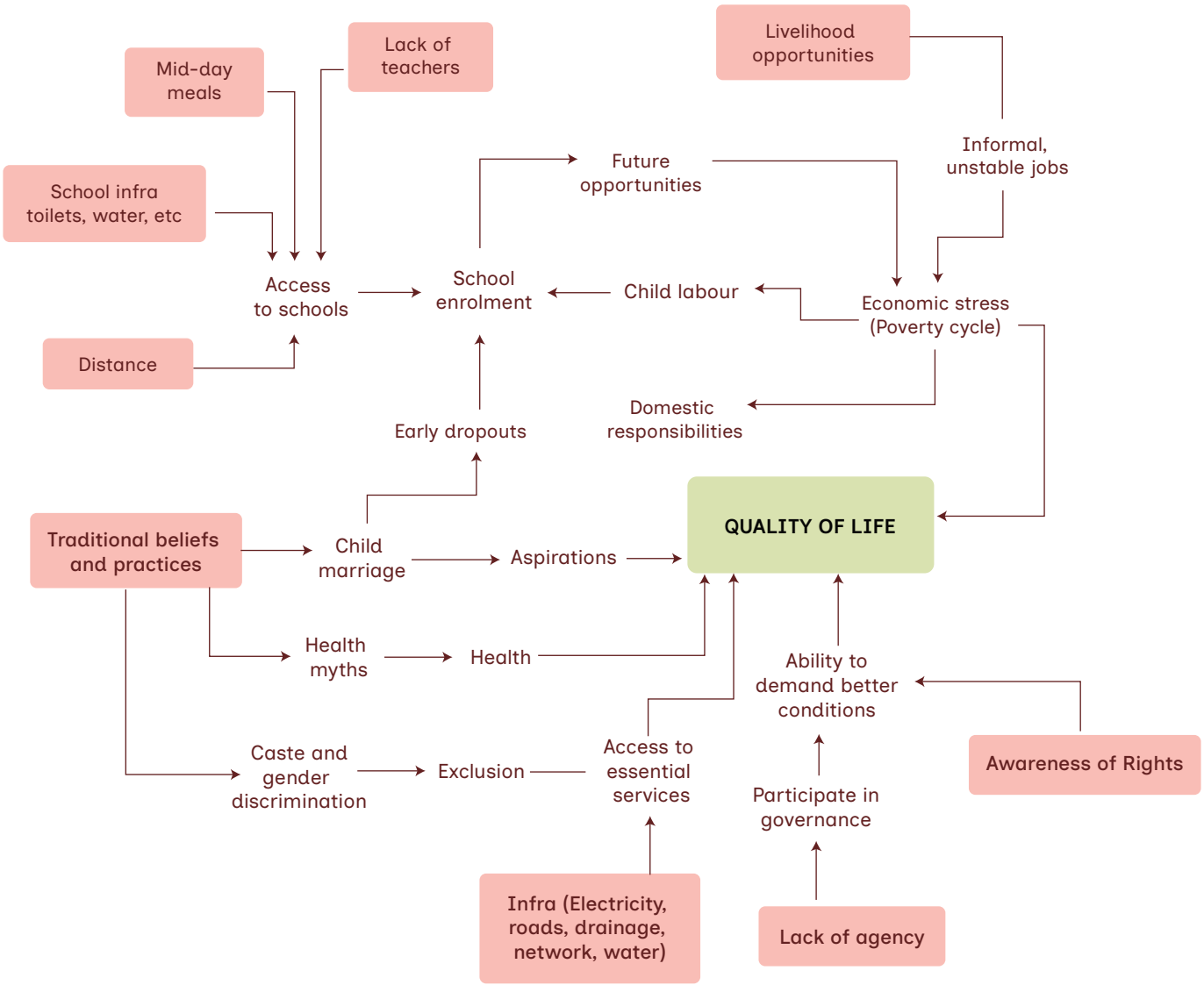
2

2.1 Research Methodology

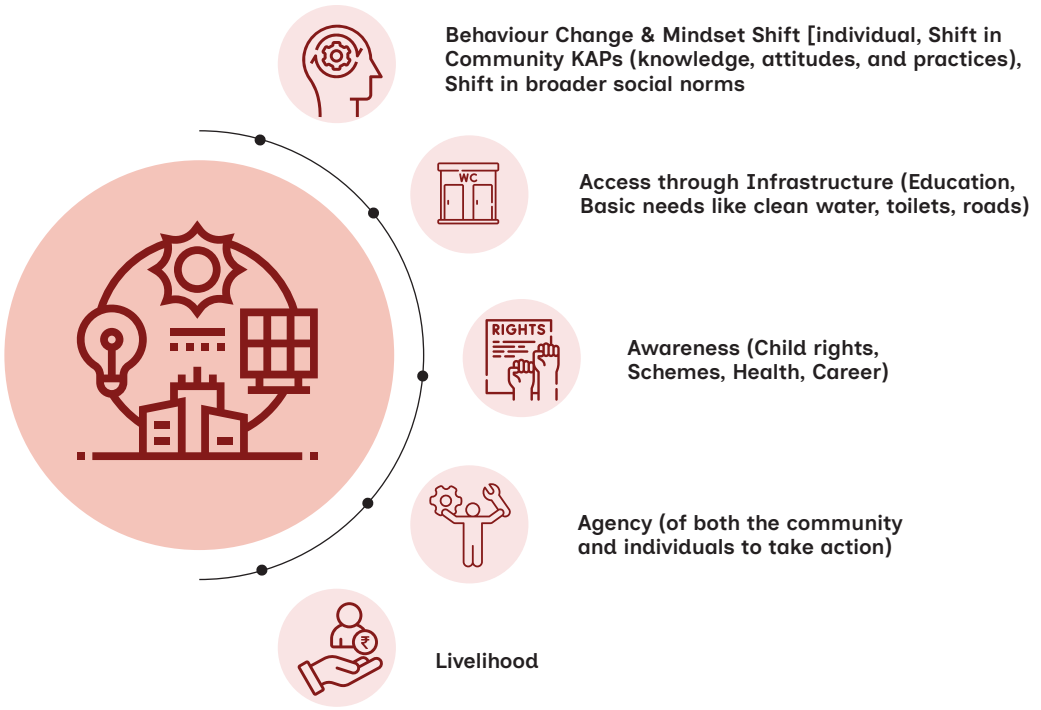
This section outlines the methodological approach for evaluating the impact of SMGC's interventions, identifying programmatic gaps, and recommending strategies to enhance the programme using a mixed-method approach. The study evaluates the effectiveness of 'compassion in action' in fostering community-driven, mindful and inclusive problem solving and child protection rights across multiple intervention sites. To supplement the research, a comparative lens has been employed to understand the situation in non-intervention sites in Rajasthan to assess the differential impact when compared to Bal Mitra Grams.

2.2 Assessment Focus Areas

By understanding the interconnected nature of problems through causal loops, focus areas were identified through which quality of life could be altered through acts of compassion. Compassion in action in this context means transforming empathy into tangible change, fostering a self-sustaining ecosystem where communities uplift themselves and others.



The BMM Programme is based on 5 Key Principles:



Behaviour Change & Mindset Shift [individual, Shift in Community KAPs (knowledge, attitudes, and practices), Shift in broader social norms

Access through Infrastructure (Education, Basic needs like clean water, toilets, roads)

Awareness (Child rights, Schemes, Health, Career)

Agency (of both the community and individuals to take action)

Livelihood

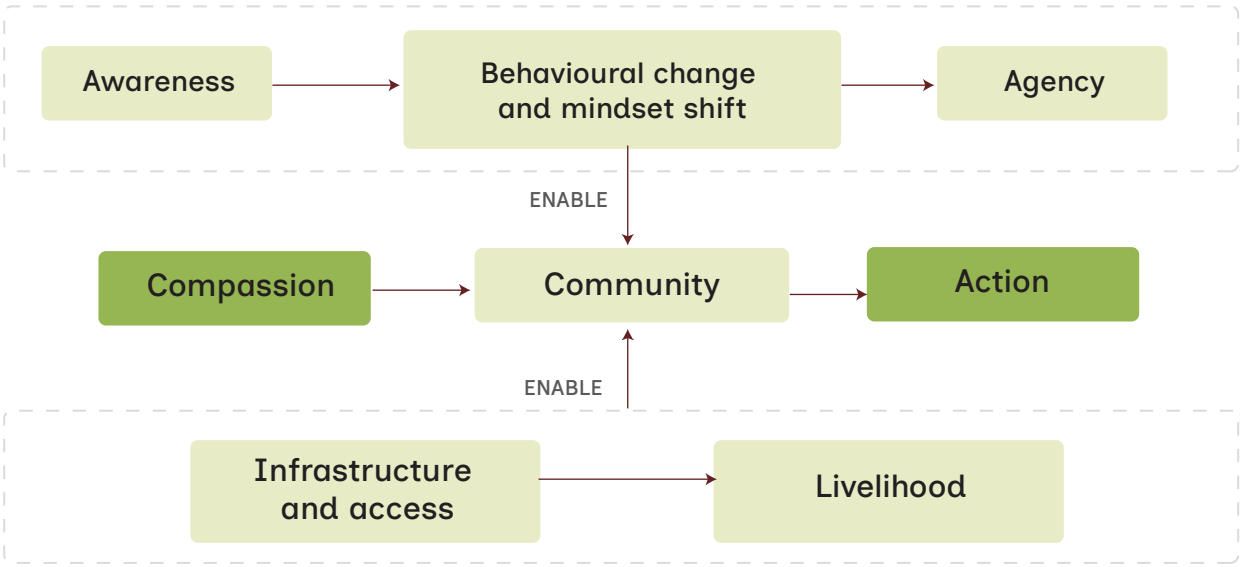
Together, these initiate a butterfly effect, driving long-term improvements in quality of life. A systemic shift empowers communities to not just overcome challenges but to lead their own development, embedding compassion into everyday decision-making and collective progress, positioning the community as both problem-solvers and mobilisers of change.

2.3 Goals of the report

- Observing infrastructure development, accessibility, social interactions (caste, gender discrimination), and holistic community changes through a compassionate lens.
- To assess the impact on a community level across the 5 key focus areas
- To identify gaps and scalable strategies
- To capture success stories
- To draw quantifiable insights as per the mapped indicators

2.4 Assessing Compassion

A key idea was to understand how acts of compassion have translated into action and, consequently, impact.



2.5 Tools & Frameworks Used to Design Methodologies

A mix of behavioural science frameworks, design research tools, and participatory methods was applied to assess community- and individual-level change, identify systemic gaps, and surface scalable solutions. These tools helped trace how behaviours, social norms, and participation evolved over the five-year programme.

Behaviour Change Frameworks

Stages of Change (Transtheoretical Model – TTM): Applied to individual interviews with youth, women, teachers, and caregivers to map behavioural trajectories across five stages—from unawareness (precontemplation) to sustained action (maintenance).

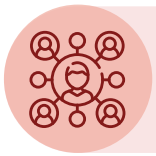
COM-B Model (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation – Behaviour): Structured focus group discussions to assess whether individuals had the skills (capability), enabling environment (opportunity), and internal drivers (motivation) for change.

Positive Deviance Approach: Identified individuals and families who achieved positive outcomes (e.g., delaying marriage, continuing girls' education) despite facing similar constraints, serving as community role models.

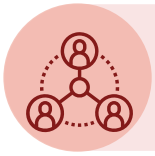
Diffusion of Innovations (DOI): Applied to secondary stakeholders, like teachers and Anganwadi workers, to track how new practices (e.g., school attendance, reporting violations) spread across stages of adoption.

Choice Experiments (Trade-offs & Prioritisation): Inspired by behavioural economics, parents were presented with hypothetical scenarios to understand mindset shifts, decision-making under constraints, and evolving priorities.

Social and Normative Mapping Tools



Social Norm Mapping: Tracked shifts in household roles, community interactions, and peer influence, especially around gender roles, child protection, and collective action.



Stakeholder Relationship Mapping (Social Network Analysis-inspired): Mapped evolving community dynamics, leadership structures, and informal support systems.

Evolution Across Generations (Life History-inspired): Documented how attitudes and behaviours, especially around education and gender, shifted across age groups and generations.

Observational & Environmental Tools

AEIOU Framework (Activities, Environments, Interactions, Objects, Users): Used through fly-on-the-wall observation to capture real-time behaviour, access barriers, and spatial use patterns.

Transect Walk: Conducted as a guided walkthrough by a point-of-contact (PoC) to observe infrastructure, access points, and service gaps within the community.

Thematic and Indicator-Based Tools

Comparative Analysis Matrix: Used to evaluate programme impact by comparing indicators across intervention and non-intervention sites.

Thematic Tools for Specific Stakeholders:

Parents: Tools measured involvement in school activities, child rights awareness, and financial decision-making; also explored trade-offs between children's work and education.

Teachers & Anganwadi Workers: Explored changes in child protection awareness, education access, and service delivery.

Community Members: Mapped how messages on health, well-being, and rights spread through formal and informal networks.

2.6 Application *of* Frameworks during Data Analysis

Data Source	Framework(s) Used	How it was applied
FGD's with community	COM-B, Positive Deviance	Analysed awareness, agency, and action using COM-B lenses; identified standout behaviours (PD) to highlight resilience
In-Depth Interviews	Stages of Change	Traced their 5-year behaviour journey from resistance to sustained action
Anganwadi Workers & Teachers Interview	Stages of Change	Measured how they adopted and spread new practices within the community
Observations	AEIOU	To understand lived realities

2.7 Sampling Approach

A **stratified purposive sampling method** was adopted to ensure representation across key groups (youth, women, elders, service providers), with attention to caste, gender, education levels, and age diversity. For non-intervention sites, **matched sampling** was employed using comparable socio-economic and demographic characteristics to allow fair contrasts and pattern analysis.

APPROACH FOR BMG & BMM

Stakeholder	FGD (Participants per group)	Interviews	Surveys	Special Activity
Committees (4)	All members (10-15)	1-2	30 (15 men & 15 Women)	N/A
Parents	N/A	N/A	30 (15 men & 15 Women)	6
Teachers	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
Anganwadi Workers	N/A	1	N/A	N/A

APPROACH FOR BEC

Stakeholder	FGD (Participants per group)	Interviews	Surveys	Special Activity
Committees (4)	2 Groups*	1 - Woman, 1 Youth	30 (15 men & 15 Women)	N/A
Parents	N/A	N/A	30 (15 men & 15 Women)	6

*Group 1
5 Children (10-18 years) → To understand education, child rights awareness, and participation.
5 Women → To assess changes in gender roles, financial independence, and decision-making.

*Group 2
5 Men (local leaders/influential figures) → To gauge shifts in community attitudes and systemic change.
5 Youth (18-28 years) → To capture perspectives on employment, aspirations, and agency.

APPROACH FOR NON-INTERVENTION SITE:

Stakeholder	FGD (Participants per group)	Interviews	Surveys	Special Activity
Committees (4)	2 Groups* (Children & Men)	2 Women (Mixed caste)	30 (15 men & 15 Women)	N/A
Parents	N/A	N/A	30	6
Teachers	N/A	2	N/A	N/A

*Group 1
12 Children (10-18 years) → To understand education, child rights awareness, and participation.

*Group 2
5 Men (local leaders/influential figures) → To gauge shifts in community attitudes and systemic change.

2.8 Data collection methods (quantitative & qualitative)

Methodologies for Quantitative Data Collection

Surveys across different age groups were conducted to understand the impact and reach of the organisation's work. Additionally, secondary research was integrated to support data for the report.

Surveys

Secondary Research

Methodologies for Qualitative Data Collection

Focus Group Discussions

Interviews

Observation

Transect Walk

Fly-on-the-wall

Recognised outsider

SNM (Social Norms Mapping)

Positive Deviance

Life History Method

Diffusion of Innovation

2.9 Research Plan

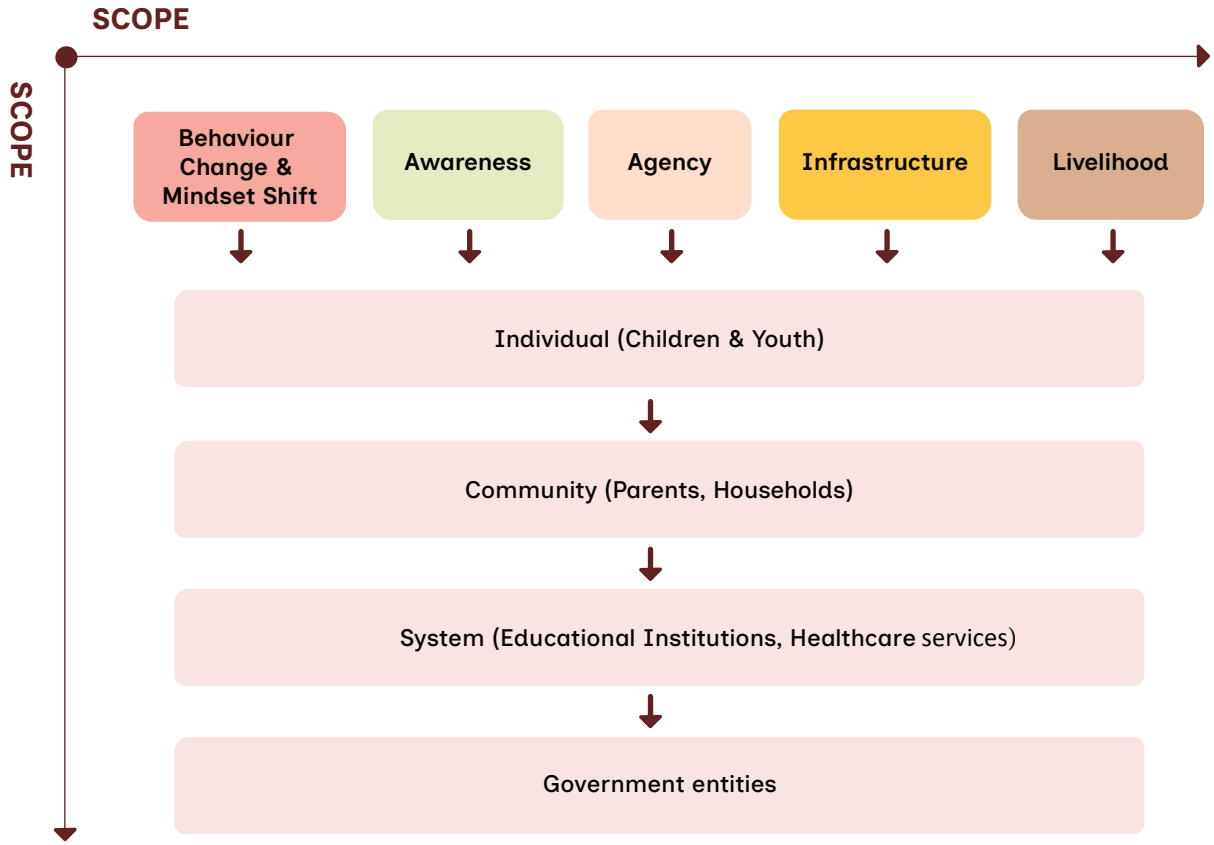
Online (Delhi, MP)

	Bal Panchayat	Mahila Mandal	Yuva Mandal	BMG Samiti	Parents	Community members
Interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Surveys	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Offline (Rajasthan, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Pune)

	Bal Panchayat	Mahila Mandal	Yuva Mandal	BMG Samiti	Parents	Teachers	Anganwadi and/or ASHA Workers
Focus Group Discussions	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Surveys	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

2.10 Indicator Matrix *for* Assessment



2.11 Limitations of *the* study

Quantitative Data

The research team was not directly involved in administering the quantitative survey. Data collection was conducted by a designated volunteer appointed by the SMGC field team based on prior instructions.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative research process was constrained by a tight project timeline and contextual field realities. Factors such as the agricultural crop-cutting season and conflicting labour schedules affected the availability of community members for in-depth interactions.

2.12 Report Structure

The report is divided based on SMGC's different programmes. Under each programme, we focus on each state where the programme has been implemented, with granular village and site-level details to add more specific insights. Additionally, in each state, we understand the impact from the individual level right up to the systemic level. Throughout the report, the names of the individuals interviewed have been changed to maintain anonymity.

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The Bal Mitra Gram Programme

3

A Bal Mitra Gram, translated literally, is a child-friendly village- a name given to villages where SMGC has worked to reduce rates of child marriage and child labour.

What does a Bal Mitra Gram look like?

A Bal Mitra Gram stands out from other villages in terms of collective leadership, increased engagement of locals in governance as a result of empowerment through education & awareness. In these villages, education is seen as an enabler and practised as a right- a key factor that shapes the trajectory of a child's life. Slogans of child rights painted in red on white walls in these child-friendly villages serve as a symbol of solidarity and commitment to the cause. Youth, women and children are regularly made aware of their rights through meetings and engaging activities. The rate of children going to school is high, and so is their attendance.

Before a village is identified to be a part of the BMG programme, a certain set of common challenges is identified across villages.
These challenges faced by communities are deeply tied to the absence of strong social safety nets and the weight of long-standing traditions. They reflect what families and communities have been taught to see as 'valuable' and 'respectable' over generations. These barriers come in the way of practising child rights. While many villages are increasingly connected to the outside world, families, especially those with limited income, often lack the resources, support, or security to navigate and adapt to changing expectations.

These are not signs of resistance, but reflections of resilience in complex circumstances. SMGC channelises this very resilience to translate compassion to action. The communities, who have faced common problems arise out of these challenges through collectives. The abundance of compassion through this shared history of struggles, fuels the stories of change.

Community, i.e., the village ecosystem, is key to a successful transformation.

Community & The Eco-system

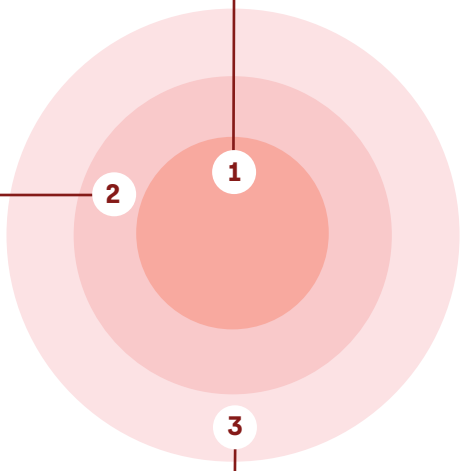
Village ecosystems can make or break the execution of a programme. Villages are dynamic social ecosystems, comprising formal and informal structures that influence daily life and community governance. They are closely knit webs where individual entities, government agents and services, representatives of bureaucracy, private organisations and NGOs interact, with a common goal: welfare of the people.

This ecosystem is crucial to the diffusion of work done by SMGC, its impact and sustainability. Parts of this ecosystem become change agents and enable diffusion through early adoption. The ecosystem can be understood through 3 types of stakeholders.

1. Primary Stakeholders | **2. Secondary Stakeholders** | **3. Tertiary Stakeholders**

1. PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS

Primary stakeholders are key to **ensuring safe environments** for **children.** They have control over 2 key environments of children- their home and school. Thus, **building their capacity, being on the same page as them**, **building trust** with them is of primary importance.



2. SECONDARY STAKEHOLDERS

ASHA workers like **Sarvandevi** from Raghunathpura and **Anganwadi workers** like **Meena Ji** from Maluthana are key to the programme being welcomed in the community and its sustenance too. They **act as trusted local influencers**, **promoting both health and education reforms**. Thus enabling mothers to be healthy and raise healthy children.

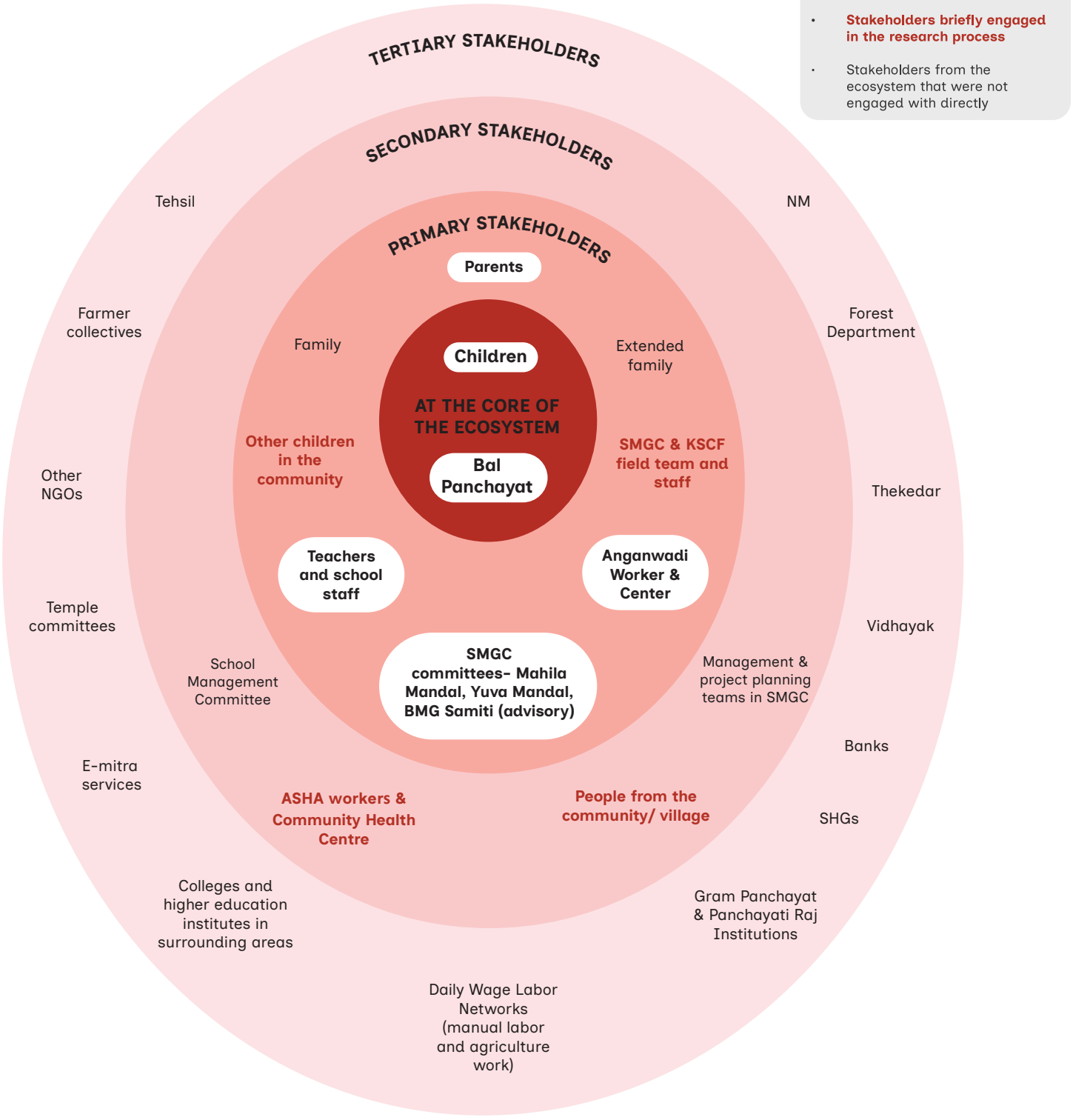
First movers

It is usually members from primary and secondary stakeholders that form for **early adopters of an intervention**. These include close **family members, ASHA workers, people who are members of Yuva Mandal, Mahila Mandal and the advisory Samiti along with Anganwadi Workers**- those who are often aware/educated and have the foresight to understand the intentions and plans of the intervening organisations. They **lead the movement** from within and **go against the currents of cultural resistance, caste discrimination and unquestioned traditional way of thinking to be open to change.**

While early resistance marks the starting point of most villages, the collaborative efforts of trusted local change agents and structured programmes helps increase the rate and pace of adoption, and reduce the friction in the process, signaling steady social transformation. Long term & consistent exchange with these first movers is the secret sauce behind successful programmes.

3. TERTIARY STAKEHOLDERS

These are members/entities of society that can **guide a project** to **ensure healthy relationship & capacity building** for secondary stakeholders in the villages



Other entities that have an impact on children

- Government Schemes and Welfare Programs
- Ambulance Services
- Religious and Socio-Cultural entities
- NREGA
- Local Businesses and Shops
- Local Cooperatives and Credit Societies
- PDS (Public Distribution System) Staff

The ecosystem of a village sheds a light on how the village copes with challenges and what gives rise to challenges in the first place.

Overview of challenges that were prevalent in these areas before Intervention

CHILD ISSUES

- High prevalence of child labor, early marriage, and school dropouts
- Limited awareness of child rights and legal protections
- Lack of access to education, especially for girls
- Fear-based discipline and lack of child-friendly spaces in schools

WOMEN'S ISSUES

- Early marriage, low education levels, and minimal public participation
- Lack of access to vocational training, economic independence, and leadership roles
- Gendered restrictions on mobility, decision-making, and self-expression
- Prevalence of domestic violence with no safe spaces for resolution

SOCIAL ISSUES

- Deep-rooted caste discrimination and exclusion in public and private life
- Widespread substance abuse affecting families and children
- Low trust in institutions and poor engagement with governance structures
- Weak community voice and limited collective action

HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

- Distant and inadequate health facilities, especially for women and children
- Poor awareness of hygiene, nutrition, and maternal health
- Irregular access to vaccinations and emergency care
- Broken toilets, dry borewells, and seasonal water scarcity

INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES

- Poor school infrastructure and sanitation facilities
- Inadequate roads, electricity, and water supply
- Unsafe or non-functional Anganwadi centers
- Lack of transport and connectivity to services and institutions

CHALLENGES IN RAJASTHAN

Traditional practices like ghunghat pratha and mrutyu bhoj

CHALLENGES IN KARNATAKA

Geographical challenges in buffer zones of national parks and protected forests

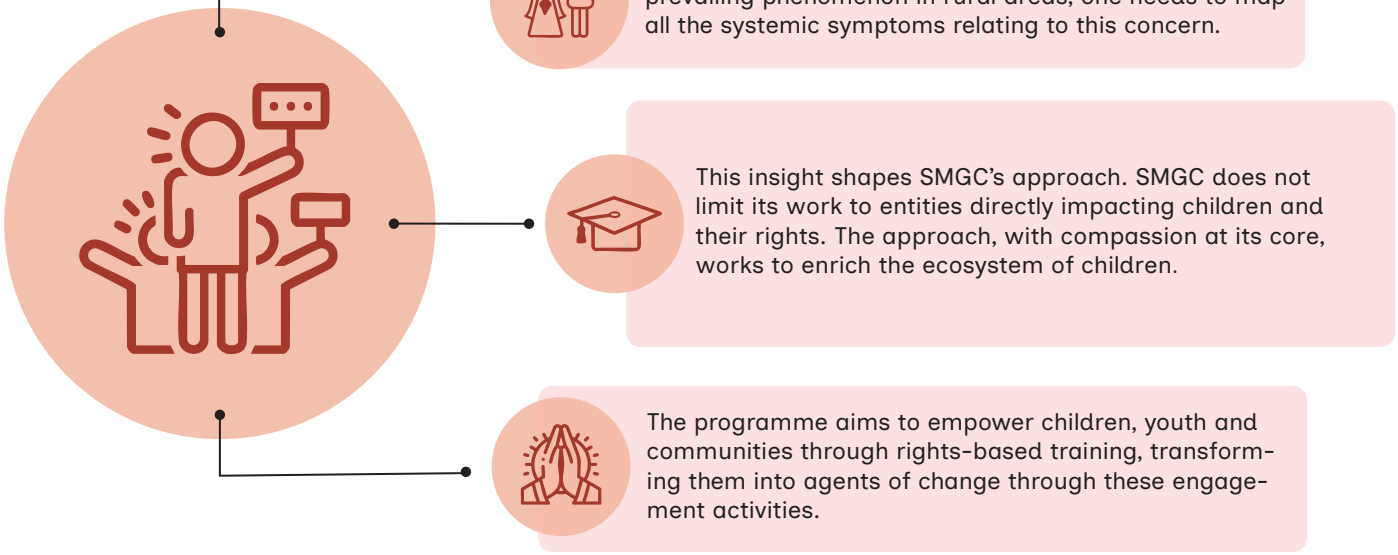
CHALLENGES IN JHARKHAND

Unemployment after shutting down of mica mines

CHALLENGES IN MP

Silicosis concerns from working in stone mines

Issues like child marriage and child rights are not isolated occurrences, but outcomes of years of systemic biases and complexities passed down over generations. The legal age of marriage in India has evolved significantly, from its roots in the British colonial era through post-Independence reforms and further adjustments in the post-liberalisation period. This evolution reflects shifting societal priorities and a growing focus on child rights and gender equity.



Thus, to address child marriage and child labour as a prevailing phenomenon in rural areas, one needs to map all the systemic symptoms relating to this concern.

This insight shapes SMGC's approach. SMGC does not limit its work to entities directly impacting children and their rights. The approach, with compassion at its core, works to enrich the ecosystem of children.

The programme aims to empower children, youth and communities through rights-based training, transforming them into agents of change through these engagement activities.

Across Bal Mitra Grams, these activities of community engagement ignite compassion and get people together, one activity at a time:

Awareness campaign on child rights

Children and youth-led campaigns supported by SMGC field staff to educate communities about their right to education, safety, and participation- demonstrating compassion by ensuring every child is seen, heard, and protected.

Collective Meetings

Inclusive spaces where youth, women, and elders discuss local challenges- compassion comes alive in how communities listen, respond, and act together.

Child Rights Awareness & Substance Abuse Rallies

Rallies educate communities on child protection & substance abuse showcasing youth-led compassion in action by standing up for vulnerable peers, encouraging collective accountability. They are a collective expression of the village's evolving values, bringing people in solidarity, turning shared compassion into public commitment for change.

ACTIVITES OF COMPASSION

Application writing for official requests

Writing to authorities for roads, schools, or alcohol regulation reinforces faith in governance- compassion becomes civic action when communities assert their rights peacefully and collectively.

Leadership Role Training

Through the committees Children, youth, and women received informal training to take on leadership roles- cultivating confidence and empathy-driven responsibility to speak up for others and guide their communities.

Wall painting of slogans

Community members co-create visual reminders of empathy, equality, and justice- imbibing values of compassion by making them visible and collective.

Skills training for youth

Training activities like stitching for women were conducted in some areas for upskilling and providing alternative, dignified means of livelihood

Water & Infrastructure Advocacy

Children and youth wrote letters and held meetings to demand water access, sanitation, and roads- transforming lived hardship into advocacy rooted in care for community wellbeing.

Youth Gatherings

Safe spaces were created for youth to share experiences, learn together, and build networks- leading to mutual support, empathy, and a sense of purpose through collective reflection and action.

ACTIVITES OF COMPASSION

Door to door awareness campaigns

This method of closely engaging with people in Bal Mitra Grams puts compassion at the centre.Through 1-1 interactions and getting to know families closely, the field workers build trust and rapport with villagers.

Health camps

Mobile health services were brought to remote areas, offering check-ups and guidance- demonstrating care for underserved communities and prioritising their right to wellbeing.

School Enrollment Campaigns

Youth and volunteers visited homes to bring children back to school- putting empathy into motion by ensuring every child has a chance to learn, grow, and belong.

Barriers, Challenges & Limitations

This section draws on conversations with beneficiaries, implementation staff, and field visit observations to highlight the challenges faced in project implementation. Implementing the BMG programme across the country has offered deep insight into the complex realities that shape child protection work. While behavioural change was observed at multiple levels, a range of persistent challenges continued to shape the lived experiences of children and families. These challenges emerged both from socio-cultural norms and structural conditions and are a key precursor to the design and implementation of the programme. The descriptions below synthesise observations across field sites into key thematic clusters.

1. Mindset-Level Barriers:

Mindset-level barriers are entrenched social norms, values and expectations that have been ingrained in society over large periods of time.

MINDSET LEVEL BARRIERS

Patriarchal Norms & Resistance from Elders
Mindset change often happens across generations. Thus, buy-in from elders takes time, is difficult to achieve and can have a huge positive impact.

Learned Helplessness and Low Self-Efficacy
Many individuals believed they couldn't act on social issues, expressing resignation and a sense of powerlessness.

Dependence on External Actors
Responsibility for change was often placed on NGOs, with communities feeling they lacked the authority or capacity to act independently.

Deference to Traditional Authority
People tended to listen only to village elders, sidelining newer voices and outside perspectives- even when they offered help or solutions.

Erosion of Motivation Despite Education
Unemployment after schooling led some boys to lose hope, turning to substance use and disengagement- undermining the value of education.

Mistrust due to prior NGO engagement failures was reported, where broken promises from past organisations created delays in relationship-building and participation.

Fear of Social Backlash
Concerns about being targeted or ostracised by the community prevented people from intervening in harmful practices like child marriage.

Fear of Authority and Mistrust in Systems
There was widespread hesitation to approach the police or formal institutions, stemming from fear and lack of trust in protective systems.

Weak Peer Solidarity and Information Hoarding
Those with access to opportunities or information rarely shared with others, leading to fractured community support and missed collective advancement. There was also some reluctance among villagers to report child marriages or other issues due to fear of social backlash.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

2. Structural Challenges:

Structural challenges reflect barriers in terms of infrastructure and existing social structures and institutions.

MINDSET LEVEL BARRIERS

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

Water scarcity and human-animal conflict are seen across villages

Health Risks from Poor Water Quality
Hard borewell water contributed to a high incidence of kidney stones, highlighting the link between basic infrastructure and chronic health issues

Limited Digital Access and Information Gaps
Restricted access to mobile phones in households disrupted learning continuity and slowed information flow, especially for students and women.

Deep-Rooted Inequality within Communities
Community members noted that those with resources or knowledge often withheld support from others, reinforcing structural disparities.

Limited mobile and internet connectivity in some villages limits digital literacy.

Poor working conditions for frontline workers
Field workers like ASHA staff faced threats while addressing sensitive issues, reflecting the risks of local resistance and lack of protection.

Barriers to Rural Livelihoods and Market Access
Despite skills and production, selling goods in the market remained difficult, limiting income-generation potential in rural areas.

Systemic Exclusion from Government Schemes
People reported that they did not avail benefits of schemes, reflecting challenges in bureaucratic transparency and people's belief in public systems.

Poor transport infrastructure- lack of roads, public transport, added expenses to avail education outside the village clubbed with poor economic background.

When parents across BMG villages were asked how they would manage household responsibilities when the primary caretaker has to move to another village seasonally for higher-paying work,

75% of parents **indicated that the elder child would take up the responsibility of maintaining the household and caring for younger siblings.**

In contrast, 25% of parents **preferred to manage with limited resources for a few days and occasionally seek support from neighbours or relatives.**

This response highlights the reliance on elder children as caretakers in the absence of primary earners, reflecting the socioeconomic pressures that prioritise maintaining household stability even if it impacts the child's own educational or personal development.

PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

3. Programmatic Limitations:

Programmatic limitations look at the design and planning boundaries which affect the implementation of the programme.

MINDSET LEVEL BARRIERS

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

The BMG programme is executed over a span of 3 years. A deeply ingrained shift from an individual to an institutional level takes time, and the programme design can make more space to accommodate that time.

Uneven participation across village clusters, especially in geographically fragmented villages

Disruption during CSW transitions, impacted trust-building and programme continuity.

Communities emphasise on a need to focus on livelihoods beyond child rights

Many Bal Panchayat members were too young (due to COVID-era gaps in child availability), which affected depth of participation, even though engagement was attempted.

The programme focuses more on members of community groups of action through community engagement activities.

Understanding Change through Stages: *A* Behavioural Lens *on* Village Progress

To better interpret the progress and impact of the Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) programme, this report uses the Stages of Change framework- a behavior science model that captures how individuals and communities move from awareness to sustained action.

Each intervention site has been classified into one of five stages: Pre-contemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, and Maintenance. This allows for a nuanced reading of change across sites, reflecting both the depth of community engagement and the maturity of institutional and behavioral shifts.

SMGC's interventions reflect movement across the five stages of the 'Stages of Change' model:

1. **Pre-contemplation:** Child labour and marriage are initially common

2. **Contemplation:** Community members begin to question these practices after being exposed to alternative perspectives

3. **Preparation:** Youth groups and women begin participating in meetings, expressing tentative support

4. **Action:** Initiatives like Bal Panchayat elections, teacher appointments, or liquor shop closures are locally led

5. **Maintenance:** In post-intervention villages like Piplai and Lalpura, programme values persist beyond the formal timeline

This lens not only informs the structure of the report- color-coding site examples and data segments- but also guides the formulation of tailored recommendations based on each village's readiness for deeper engagement, scale-up, or transition.

Darolai

Non intervention site

STAGES OF CHANGE

Understanding impact through the stage of change that villages are currently at

PRE-CONTEMPLATION

STAGE INDICATORS

Factors that reflect the stage of change

- A few number of children in school are already married.
- Caste discrimination is noted against the minority 'lower' caste as a norm
- Lack of adequate basic infrastructure in the government school

Other possible features of the stage that can be looked at as indicators/-factors to monitor

- Alcohol use, purdah (ghunghat), caste division were normal.
- Child marriage wasn't questioned.Women have little voice in decisions.
- Kids are expected to do household chores.
- In some places- No roads, no electricity, no network — disconnected from outside world.
- Limited awareness of rights, health access, or government schemes.
- Girls rarely study, are expected to marry early and stay within the home.
- Families accept child labor and lack of rights as a norm

Lothavas

Site where work is ongoing

STAGES OF CHANGE

Understanding impact through the stage of change that villages are currently at

CONTEMPLATION

PREPARATION

ACTION

STAGE INDICATORS

Factors that reflect the stage of changet

- Lothavas has had a good start: there is awareness on child marriage, child labor, rights created through rallies & meetings.
- Early signs of behavior shift: Women now discuss issues openly; Bal Panchayat elections held.
- Community protests (Dharna) show emerging collective agency.

Other possible features of the stage that can be looked at as indicators/-factors to monitor

- Discussions about caste, child marriage, education, and gender roles started in community spaces.
- Bal Ashram and local groups help raise awareness.
- People (youth-women) begin reflecting on old traditions (ghunghat, caste bias, early marriage).

Maluthana & Heensla

Site where work has just ended

STAGES OF CHANGE

Understanding impact through the stage of change that villages are currently at

ACTION

STAGE INDICATORS

Factors that reflect the stage of changet

- Awareness building in Maluthana & Heensla has been strong- Cases of girls stopping child marriage, alcohol abuse reductions are noted. Girls now outnumber boys in school.
- Community is self-initiating infrastructure demands like speed breakers, drains, water
- Youth and women's participation is increasing, but governance corruption may dampen morale.

Other possible features of the stage that can be looked at as indicators/-factors to monitor

- Marriage reforms: names and ages now written on wedding cards to prevent child marriage.
- Women start sitting together and speaking up during gatherings.
- Awareness of schemes like Kisan Samman Nidhi, KCC, Awas Yojana, etc spread through peer conversations.
- Women participate in decisions at home and in social & political spaces.
- Family discussions include money, farming, and education.
- Use of healthcare: hospital visits despite distance.
- Bank accounts and land ownership for women are normalised.

Piplai, Lalpura

Where work has ended 3-5 years ago

STAGES OF CHANGE

Understanding impact through the stage of change that villages are currently at

ACTION

MAINTENANCE

STAGE INDICATORS

Factors that reflect the stage of changet

- Child rights issues (education, child marriage) addressed. Some cultural practices like "ghungat" persist subtly, but drastically changed.
- Community relies less on traditional elder authority (Mukhiya), more on formal legal structures (police, government schemes).

Other possible features of the stage that can be looked at as indicators/-factors to monitor

- Independent decision-making by women.
- Girls' education: Shift from <10% to near 100% school attendance
- Infrastructure: Roads built, electricity improved through community initiative
- Collective Action- People approach the Panchayat and government bodies as a group.

Raghunathpura

Where work has ended 10 ish years ago

STAGES OF CHANGE

Understanding impact through the stage of change that villages are currently at

MAINTENANCE (Self Sustained)

STAGE INDICATORS

Factors that reflect the stage of changet

- Sustained behavior: Child labor reduced, child marriage stopped.
- Deepened collective action: Filing petitions, organizing protests.Collective pride in social equality
- New Identity- Villagers now see themselves as active agents (e.g., petitioners, professionals, educated youth).

Other possible features of the stage that can be looked at as indicators/-factors to monitor

- General awareness is higher
- Active Ongoing Discussions on relevant issues
- Collective problem-solving as a the norm
- Application of similar principles by the community in other problem areas
- Pride in being ‘developed’ and in having changed over the years

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3.1 Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) Programme in Rajasthan

3.1 Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) Programme *in* Rajasthan

Rajasthan, India's largest state by area, is characterised by its diverse geography, ranging from the arid Thar Desert to fertile plains and the Aravalli mountain range. Despite its rich cultural heritage & identity, Rajasthan faces significant socio-economic challenges, particularly in rural areas where traditional norms and economic hardships impact not just adults, but children's lives as well.

The Integrated Child Development Scheme, Laado Protsahan Scheme, Rajshri Yojana and other schemes are a part of the welfare programmes being run for the people of Rajasthan. Despite the existence of these schemes, the ground reality is often different. However, there is often a disconnect between policy and practice. Many eligible individuals are unable to access these benefits due to a lack of awareness, missing documentation, bureaucratic delays, and so on.

According to Census 2011, Rajasthan had the highest incidence of child marriage in India,

with 8.6% of boys (aged 10 to under 21) & 8.3% of girls (aged 10 to under 18)

being married below the legal age[1]. This adds to the vicious loop of existing socio-economic challenges.

Rajasthan is a key state for the Satyarthi Movement for Global Compassion. The identity of the project in this particular state revolves around the Bal Ashram in Viratnagar, a rehabilitation centre for children rescued from Child Labour, Slavery and Trafficking. The Ashram is a hub for villages in Jaipur, Alwar and Kotputli-Behror districts of eastern Rajasthan.

These areas are marked by remoteness, poor transport, limited digital infrastructure, and few viable livelihood or educational opportunities. In such contexts, where child marriage and labour are intergenerational norms, SMGC has been patiently working towards bringing alternate, hopeful and compassionate ways of being to 300+ villages

[1] RAJASTHAN CHILD MARRIAGE AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY. (n.d.). https://younglives.in/home/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Rajasthan-Factsheet.pdf

Understanding *the* Villages: Context and Need Assessment

1. A bird's eye view summary of the Bal Mitra Grams in Rajasthan

Population Range

1200 - 5500
people per village

Primary Occupation

- Agriculture
- Animal Husbandry
- Labour in agricultural or construction set-ups
- Work through NREGA (digging trenches, planting trees, etc.)
- Carpet weaving, making footwear (less common)
- Newer generations are pursuing educational streams and aspire to become teachers

Geographical Challenges

- Lack of water security
- Human-animal conflict as several villages are set in valleys and forests in and around the Sariska Tiger Reserve
- Extreme heat
- Seasonal work due to agriculture.

Caste Structure

Most rural areas display a mixed bunch of people from different castes, with people belonging to Scheduled Castes (like Mena and Balai) and other backward castes (like Gujjar and Yadav), and reflect a clear internalised hierarchy at a community level.

During the field research, elders and youngsters, especially from villages where substantial work has been done, were observed to abstain from using their surnames and the consequential caste discrimination by adding 'Kumar' or 'Kumari' as their second name.

2. Overview of challenges that were prevalent in these areas before Intervention

Before BMG interventions, children were often expected to contribute to family income or household work. Educational access was limited, not just due to financial constraints but also because of deep-rooted beliefs that undervalued formal education.

Parents, unaware of welfare schemes or how to access them, prioritised survival over schooling. The normalisation of child labour and marriage meant there was little questioning of these practices.

Where there was resistance to change, it often stemmed from fear of disrupting what had been accepted for generations. SMGC has worked to flip both these narratives by building capacity, enriching environments and fuelling motivation.

Programme Enablers *in* Rajasthan

A collectivised approach- Enabling children through a strengthened ecosystem

The success of the BMG programme in Rajasthan has been underpinned by historical presence in the state, leadership trust, and community ownership built through sustained engagement. Several design and delivery elements also emerged as critical enablers for program success.

1. Key Enablers:

- **Long-standing trust** due to proximity to the **Bal Ashram,** a known **rehabilitation centre**
- **Peer-led awareness events** (e.g., rallies, street plays, Ashram visits) **promoting social norm change**
- Use of **community-based** social workers (CSWs) who are **residents of the intervention sites**
- Acknowledgement of **local champions** to build social proof
- Formation of **Bal Panchayats** and **Yuva Mandals** with active mentoring support
- Use and strengthening of **participatory governance** spaces like **School Management Committees (SMC)**
- **Integration of schemes** like **Sukanya Yojana, NREGA, and Laado Protsahan** to **ease economic barriers**
- Consistent field visits by **SMGC leaders** and **program staff created symbolic** and **practical trust**

2. Specific Instances *of* Enablers across BMGs

Raghunathpura
(work ended ~10 years ago)

A vibrant Yuva Mandal, actively collaborating with the Gram Panchayat, has been central to Raghunathpura's progress. Notably, no instances of child labour, child marriage, or school dropouts were reported- an encouraging sign of positive community development. The members of the Yuva Mandal (which was formed around 10 years ago) in this context have grown to be strong pillars of the community.

Piplai
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

Community engagement was notably deepened when SMGC leaders personally participated in village activities. The locals from most villages proudly recall events like the dance programme with Mataji- Sumedha Kailash, who leads the organisation with Mr Kailash Satyarthi. This level of involvement has built trust and created a lasting impact.

Lalpura
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

The presence of other NGOs working in the area created a collaborative environment that amplified SMGC's work. Moreover, strong and sustained participation from local youth significantly contributed to the successful implementation.
Where there exist SHGs and Krushi/Pashu Sakhis (who are trained in crop/animal care) in the village, women are relatively more empowered and collectivised, thus allowing SMGC to focus on issues more directly related to child rights.

Heensla
(work has just ended)

Having a CSW (certified social worker) who is a native of the village significantly increased trust and engagement. The impact extended beyond individuals to their families, who also gained confidence and visibility. Proximity to a main road further facilitated smoother commuting and access to external services.

Maluthana
(work is ongoing)

In families where older generations are educated, the value placed on learning has positively influenced younger members. These families serve as examples of the long-term benefits of education.

Lothawas
(Work is ongoing)

Expansion of local education to include classes up to the 10th standard has enabled more children to continue their studies without having to leave the village. This development has also opened doors to better employment opportunities beyond manual labour.

Programme Impact in Rajasthan

To assess the behavioural and systemic impact of the BMG programme in Rajasthan, this section draws upon field data, participatory research methods, and qualitative indicators of change. The programme's influence was observed across multiple layers of society, ranging from individual children and households to community norms, institutional responses, and the broader ecosystem. This layered impact structure aligns with the social ecological model (SEM) of behaviour change, offering insight into how individual, social, and environmental determinants interact.

1. Child level impact

For SMGC, children have been the primary agents as well as beneficiaries of change. The most visible shift was increased school attendance and retention, supported by the timely provision of schemes (e.g., bicycles, uniforms), better infrastructure, and reduced domestic workload. Participation in Bal Panchayats provided structured spaces for self-expression, enabling children to develop leadership and advocacy skills. Stories of children submitting petitions, demanding teacher appointments, and hosting rallies were proudly shared by current and past members of Bal Panchayats. Their exposure to education rights and engagement in institutional advocacy led to visible changes in protection, participation, and self-perception. Throughout villages, a higher impact was observed on people who were a part of committees as compared to those who were not.

In Rajasthan

99.5% of children

demonstrated awareness of their rights, including education, protection, and participation, and showed familiarity with available mechanisms to report abuse and exploitation.

In Rajasthan

98.4% of children

reflected a positive shift in mindset, opposing early marriage, expressing confidence in asserting their rights, acknowledging future aspirations, and embracing inclusive values like inter-caste friendships and valuing education quality.

In Rajasthan

78.9% of children

who were polled actively exercised agency by participating in community programs, taking on leadership roles, and engaging in local advocacy efforts, marking a shift from passive beneficiaries to active changemakers.

In Rajasthan

99.1% of youth

demonstrated strong awareness of their rights and entitlements, including education, employment, and protection, and actively engaged in conversations.

In Rajasthan

100.0% of youth

reflected a positive shift in mindset, embracing gender equality, rejecting harmful behaviours, and challenging discriminatory norms in both private and public spaces.

In Rajasthan

89.18% of youth

exercised agency by taking leadership roles in governance spaces and community-driven campaigns, advocating for rights, inclusion, and developmental change at the local level.

Following changes were observed:

- Protection through Peer-Led Action
- Growth in Confidence & Agency
- Leadership & Inclusion
- Internalisation of Child Rights
- Reduction in Caste Discrimination
- Emerging Aspirations and Ambitions like doctor, police officer, or teacher
- Exposure to Civic Platforms through Maha Bal Panchayat (state & national level)

Success Stories

Nirmal, Lalpura:

“I want to make my village cleaner and greener, and inspire others to do the same.”

As an active Bal Panchayat member and determined youth voice from Lalpura, Nirmal transformed from a silent observer into a community advocate. He led polythene clean-up drives, initiated cloth bag-making with the neighbourhood girls, and ensured school re-enrolment after holidays. With SMGC’s support and encouragement, his leadership journey took him from village streets to delivering a speech in Delhi.

Neelam, Lalpura:

“Earlier, I didn’t think school was a place for girls like me. I used to graze buffaloes and watch other children walk to school with their bags."

Once unable to attend school, Neelam was enrolled directly into 7th grade. She struggled with language barriers and felt out of place with younger classmates. Her village teacher offered extra classes after school, helping her catch up with patience and encouragement. With SMGC's and the teacher’s support, her educational journey took her from the village fields of Lalpura to Armenia, inspiring other girls in the village to pursue education.

Diya, Heensla:

“I said no to child marriage, and yes to my dreams”

At eighteen, Diya refused her family's marriage plans and chose to pursue civil services preparation instead. She moved to the city for studies, working part-time while preparing for competitive exams. Her stand against early marriage initially brought family conflict, but gradually changed community attitudes. Today, she stands as a symbol of strength and someone to look up to for the girls in and around her village.

2. Household-Level Impact

Households demonstrated tangible shifts in prioritising long-term child wellbeing, particularly around education, delayed marriage, and financial planning. These shifts emerged from exposure to role models, peer stories, and aspirational pathways normalised by the programme.

A significant majority

86.1%

of parents surveyed preferred higher education for their children, even in the face of income needs, indicating deferred gratification and future planning.

83.3%

of parents interviewed said they would delay their daughter's marriage if she wished to study further, reflecting a norm shift around adolescent girls' autonomy.

Over **54.1%**

of parents who were polled said, in the case of an unplanned income (₹3000), they would prioritise their child's education, healthcare, or wellbeing.

70.8%

of households surveyed listed education as a top expense, surpassing even household infrastructure in many instances.

Compared to non-BMG villages (50%), BMG sites reported

86% parental support for long-term education, highlighting the programme's impact on mindset.

In Rajasthan,

97.2% of women

interviewed reported awareness of their legal rights and entitlements, including education, protection, financial inclusion, and government welfare schemes.

In Rajasthan,

95.32% of women

surveyed indicated a shift in mindset, with greater confidence in making independent choices, increased family support for their roles outside the home, and a decline in restrictive gender norms affecting mobility and opportunity.

In Rajasthan,

76.6% of women

conversed with demonstrated increased agency, participating in decision-making at home, engaging in community platforms, and stepping into leadership roles or accessing support in situations of domestic abuse.

In Rajasthan,

89.47% of parents

surveyed demonstrated awareness of child rights, particularly around education and protection, and showed strong support for girls' continued schooling.

In Rajasthan,

95.5% of parents

interviewed reflected a shift in mindset, embracing improved health-seeking behaviours, opposing early marriage, and aligning with more aspirational goals for their children's future

In Rajasthan,

99.3% of parents

questioned were actively engaged in community-based actions, such as promoting education, advocating against child marriage and labour, and participating in health and school-related initiatives.

Family Stories:

Women Breaking Silence:

Women in several villages have begun speaking publicly, many for the first time in their lives. This symbolic shift in voice represents a deep behavioural and social transformation. The shift from 'I am not a part of family decisions' to 'I do not need anybody's permission' is evident in how women share stories of change. Mothers gained confidence to speak at Panchayat meetings and assert themselves in school committees, redistributing household power.

Families Prioritising Education Over Ritual Debt:

A noticeable shift has occurred where families are choosing to invest in their children's education rather than engaging in debt-heavy customs like Mrutyu Bhoj, which reflects the collective questioning of long-standing norms.

Shared Household Empowerment:

In Raghunathpura, Rohidas, who grew up as a Yuva Mandal member, is now a respected community elder. He talks proudly about how he supports his wife's participation in the Bal Ashram's skill-building programmes. His story reflects the long-term impact of empowering the youth.

3. Community-Level: Collective Norm Shifts *and* Participatory Action

Across BMG intervention sites, the programme catalysed community-wide shifts in how problems were perceived, discussed, and acted upon. What were once isolated, individual responses evolved into coordinated, collective action, marking a visible transition from passive acceptance to shared ownership of child protection, wellbeing, and village development.

This transformation manifested in three key ways:

1. Norm Shifts Around Protection and Equity

Long-standing norms related to child marriage, caste discrimination, and gender roles began to erode as community members repeatedly engaged in structured dialogue, peer learning, and visible acts of resistance.

- In **Heensla** and **Piplai**, communities moved from silence to collective action, treating early marriage as a shared social issue rather than a private family matter.
- In **Lalpura**, children, parents, and teachers jointly challenged discriminatory practices in seating and play, indicating a shift toward caste inclusion.
- **Mahila Mandal** spaces enabled open dialogue on sensitive issues like Menstruation, domestic violence, and early pregnancy and were supported by **ASHA and Anganwadi workers.**

2. Mindset Change: From Passive Bystanders to Collective Responders

The journey from fear to participation, from isolation to mutual support, and passive acceptance to active change happens over the years. Even after multiple years of engagement, it takes consistent effort to ensure that the momentum achieved due to a programme does not end with the end of the programme itself.

Throughout the programme, the community began recognising its role not just as beneficiaries but as proactive shapers of the village environment. This was visible in the way issues were framed, not as isolated suffering but as collective deficits requiring shared effort.

- In **Lothawas**, there were community-led protests for water and electricity access.
- Collective fundraising and civic problem-solving through petitions
- Public rituals such as collective slogan rallies or joint meetings with officials reinforced rights-based awareness & approach.

Mapping Mindset Shifts at the Community Level

How have the norms shifted in these villages?

Old mindset in villages would look like:

- "Child marriage is normal."
- "Girls should stay home."
- "If a school lacks basic facilities, nothing can be done."
- "Education beyond a point is a waste of time and money"

New mindset in villages looks like

- "All children deserve protection, education, and a life beyond labour."
- "We can demand what is right, even as children."
- "Collective effort can solve village problems."
- Families are open to prioritising education, delaying marriage. Parental encouragement of education improved.
- Increased engagement with health schemes and services, an increase in vaccine uptake & immunisation over the years, as awareness has been on the rise
- Growing social inclusion at the child level, there is an evident difference between how adults and children talk about caste.
- People's proactive participation is common
- Schooling at least up to 12th grade is seen as normal for both genders in most families
- Women attend meetings and discuss health and social issues
- Open distribution of sanitary napkins, vaccine acceptance

3. Rise in Participatory Structures and Local Leadership

The presence of functioning **Bal Panchayats, Mahila Mandals, and Yuva Mandals** gave institutional form to community action, embedding participation into everyday life.

- Cross-village learning and norm sharing through Bal Ashram events
- Youth-led and SMGC-supported informal knowledge transfer and petitioning through
- committees Routine engagement with the panchayat as a sign of participatory efficacy

Taken together, these shifts indicate a community that is moving beyond compliance or symbolic participation towards durable co-governance. The BMG programme's facilitation of peer influence, collective reflection, and local institution-building laid the foundation for these deeper forms of behavioural transition at the community level.

In Rajasthan,

95.48% of community members

questioned reported awareness of child rights, gender equality, and the harmful effects of child marriage, with many actively engaging in local discussions on child protection and compassionate leadership.

In Rajasthan,

86.9% of community members

surveyed showed a marked shift in mindset, embracing collective responsibility, challenging social biases, and moving from passive concern to active problem-solving on issues like discrimination, violence, and child welfare.

In Rajasthan,

60.76% of community members

interviewed exercised agency by participating in local decision-making bodies, reporting violations, and supporting advocacy efforts, leading to visible shifts in community accountability and leadership responsiveness.

Community Stories

Informal Financial Networks:

In the absence of timely financial aid, villagers have built local loan systems based on trust and reciprocity, especially during health and educational emergencies. Stories like this have allowed mothers to help another mother send her kid to school or take care of her child, in case of financial or medical emergencies. In cases where most families have no social security to rely on, such networks embody empathy and prove to be a robust, useful resource to fall back on.

Acts of goodwill:

In multiple instances, such as the construction of a school boundary wall in **Raghunathpura,** people had pooled money to build the compound wall, taking charge of the situation. The Youth from Yuva Mandal of Lalpura have declared voluntary rewards for high-performing children in the local public school.

Mentorship Models:

Young women and Bal Panchayat members are actively mentoring younger children, creating a self-sustaining cycle where one generation of youth informs and builds confidence in another.

Manish, the lawyer from Piplai:

Starting as a Yuva Mandal member in 11th grade, Manish went on to become a lawyer and is now a vital community leader. He advocates for villagers' rights, ensures that bureaucracy does not get in the way of people's wellbeing, and supports his family.

Education Advocacy:

Even where resources were limited, parents encouraged one another to send children to school.

4. Institutional & Ecosystem-Level

At a systemic level, the programme influenced how local institutions and community structures engaged with issues of child protection and development. Behavioural shifts among service providers and local governance actors were supported by structured interactions, petitions, and field-level accompaniment. The ecosystem-wide influence was visible through sustained practices, inter-village learning, and the continued relevance of program values even after formal exit.

- Increased **Panchayat Responsiveness** to **Youth Petitions**
- **Strengthened Collaboration** with **Local Service Providers** like **ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, and SMC members**
- Improved **Scheme Uptake** through **Support from Certified Social Workers (CSWs)**
- **BMG Alumni** Taking on **Leadership Roles** in Governance
- **Shifting Norms** through **Institutional Support for Youth & Inclusion**
- Informal Feedback Loops **Enhancing Trust** and **Child Protection Response**

Systemic Success Stories

In **Piplai, student-led** demand led to the **hiring of additional teachers**, highlighting the power of the **youth voice**.

In **Maluthana, a library** has been **opened** and **computers installed** in the **government school through the BMG Samiti.**

In **Heensla, schools** have **received significant upgrades**; they now have **computers, classrooms, water facilities,** and **more teachers**. Some roads have been **built**, and **open wells** have been covered for safety.

An **Anganwadi worker in Maluthana** has been running the **centre at her own house** due to challenges for **children to access** the **original centre,** displaying a **community spirit** that **enables toddlers and their families, making a systemic impact.**

Village-specific challenges can be applied *as* learnings *in* newer villages

Raghunathpura
(work ended ~10 years ago)

Limited connectivity in the village disrupted **momentum** and **isolated the village from broader benefits**, leading to a **slower impact** during the **programme implementation. This holds true even today.**

Piplai
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

Limited transportation options continue to **act as a barrier** for **students and job seekers**. Even when there is **willingness and intent**, **lack of affordable travel** options curtails access to **opportunity,** thus acting as a barrier for children claiming their rights to further education.

Lalpura
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

Lalpura is **geographically divided into two distant areas**. As a result, **engagement and bringing people** together from the **2 sides was tough logistically**. Water security **remains a pressing concern. Economic stagnation** (limited jobs within the village) **risks slowing down educational aspirations.** There is a **broad internalisation** of values, but **the villages are fragile if economic or infrastructure support weakens.**

Heensla
(work has just ended)

The **village's division** into **two far-apart areas created uneven representation in programme participation.** Group formation and activities are **often skewed toward residents** of **one neighbourhood, unintentionally limiting inclusivity**. Deeper systemic issues like **corruption, illegal mining,** and **environmental damage** are still a **threat**. Livelihood **insecurity exists,** and **farming is labour-heavy and not diversified yet**. Solid action foundation has been laid, but they are still vulnerable and require periodic touchpoints to push into maintenance.

Maluthana
(work is ongoing)

The recently elected **Bal Panchayat lacked experience**, and while that is expected because they are new, **young members** appeared worried and under pressure to respond in expected ways. Additionally, a change in the **appointed CSW disrupted** the continuity of **SMGC's relationship with the village, weakening the depth of community connection.**

Maluthana faces challenges from local power dynamics, including a lack of cooperation from elected representatives. Illegal stone extraction has further complicated social and environmental conditions in the area.

Lothawas
(Work is ongoing)

Project Implementation is **still underway in Lothawas**, with **community ownership** and **local agency gradually being built.** Alcohol abuse remains a serious concern. **Despite the closure of official liquor shops (Thekaas), illegal outlets continue to operate, undermining community health and stability.**

In Rajasthan, where child marriage, caste discrimination, and poverty are deeply entrenched, the BMG programme has enabled a measurable shift in awareness, agency, and action. Through a blend of rights-based education, collective platforms like Bal Panchayats, and the symbolic strength of Bal Ashram, children and families have begun to challenge harmful practices and claim access to entitlements. Though structural barriers persist, the programme's layered impact across individuals, households, and institutions has sown the seeds of long-term transformation rooted in local leadership and shared purpose, and stories of Nirmal, Neelam, and Diya stand as evidence of the same.

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3.2 Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) Programme *in* Karnataka

3.2 Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) Programme *in* Karnataka

Karnataka is the only state in southern India where SMGC has established its presence.

Child marriage remains a critical concern in rural Karnataka. According to the NFHS-4 (2015)[2]

27% of women (aged 20-24) were married before the age of 18

&

12.5% of men (aged 20-24) were married before the age of 21

Seasonal migration, poor public infrastructure in remote areas, and limited social safety nets further exacerbate children's vulnerability. However, state-led initiatives like Bhagyalakshmi and the Child Marriage Prohibition Cell offer promising frameworks for systemic reform.

Understanding *the* Villages: Context and Need Assessment

SMGC's work in Karnataka is concentrated in Chamarajanagar district, located near the borders of Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. Parts of the village fall within the buffer zone of Bandipur National Park and Tiger Reserve. As one moves closer to this buffer zone, the proportion of tribal populations increases, many of whom do not speak Kannada. Due to language limitations, the research focused primarily on non-tribal areas.

Over the last 15 years, SMGC has worked in 43 villages in Karnataka.

[2] NFHS Health Survey- 4 (2015), State Fact Sheet Karnataka

1. A bird's eye view summary of the Bal Mitra Grams in Karnataka

Population Range

1200 - 5700[3]
people per village

Geographical Challenges

- Human-animal conflict
- Water scarcity in semi-arid regions
- Seasonal employment dependency
- Long distances to colleges or hospitals

Primary Occupation

- Agriculture (onion, chilli, turmeric, garlic) and flower cultivation
- Selling Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)
- Animal husbandry
- NREGA and daily wage labour
- Some men migrate to Bengaluru and Mysuru for construction work
- Youth exploring education, retail jobs, and ITI courses

Caste Structure

Mixed communities with large populations from Scheduled Castes, OBCs, and Scheduled Tribes (particularly in northern and interior districts)

[3] https://www.census2011.co.in/data/village/619574-hangala-karnataka.html
https://www.census2011.co.in/data/village/619587-kaligowdanahalli-karnataka.html

Programme Enablers *in* Karnataka

In Karnataka, SMGC built strong community connections by ensuring that social workers belonged to the same villages in which they worked. This approach enabled deeper trust and more meaningful engagement, following the state's identification as a priority area through Bachpan Bachao Andolan in 2010.

1. Key Enablers

Community Collectives Driving Dialogue & Action
Formation of Bal Panchayat, Yuva Mandal, Mahila Mandal, and BMG Samitis fostered collective problem-solving, advocacy, and inclusive decision-making across age and gender groups.

Awareness Campaigns on Child Rights & Social Norms
Door-to-door outreach, rallies, and sessions by SMGC and KSCF raised awareness on child marriage, education, health, and gender equity, shifting norms village-wide.

Youth Leadership & Positive Peer Influence
Youth-led initiatives addressed issues like substance abuse and early marriage, while aspirational peers pursuing higher education became role models for others.

Women's Empowerment through Mahila Mandal
Mahila Mandals became safe spaces for women to share concerns, take leadership, and participate actively in community discussions and decision-making.

Institutional Support & Guidance
SMGC field workers, ASHA workers, teachers, and Certified Social Workers (CSWs) provided trusted support, helping communities navigate governance, schemes, and social issues.

Skill Development & Resource Access
Training programs and tools like phones for education and access to cycles for mobility enabled youth and women to overcome logistical barriers and pursue opportunities.

Increased Engagement with Government & Schemes
Communities used petitions and applications to demand roads, shut down alcohol shops, and access schemes like NREGA, Gruha Lakshmi, ICDS, etc., reinforcing faith in institutions.

Collective Safety & Norm Shifts
Public safety mechanisms, open forums, and real success stories (e.g., stopping child marriages) built trust and reduced fear of backlash when challenging harmful practices.

Enablers of Successful Implementation

Kaligowdanahalli
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

The foundation enabled access to cycles for girls above the 8th grade. Due to the limitations in the public bus service in the buffer region, this enabled many girls to continue their education.

Hangala
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

Pavithra, the field worker, was from the same village and had grown up there. Her longstanding relationship with teachers and the community created an environment of trust, which enabled smoother communication and collaboration. This made it easier for her to spread awareness about child rights and bring tribal students back to school.

Programme Impact in Karnataka

To assess the behavioural and systemic impact of the BMG programme in Karnataka, this section draws on insights from fieldwork, qualitative narratives, and participatory methods involving community members and youth. The impact is examined across interconnected layers- individual mindsets, household dynamics, community practices, and institutional responsiveness. Anchored in the social ecological model (SEM) of behaviour change, the analysis illustrates how shifts in norms, agency, and access unfold through the interaction of personal, social, and structural factors.

1. Child-Level Impact

- Increased Awareness of Rights & Social Issues through Bal Panchayat & Yuva Mandal
- Emerging career aspirations and future orientation in fields like law, civil service, engineering, and CA
- Critical reflection on social norms

In Karnataka

53.7% of children

surveyed **demonstrated awareness of their rights**, including education, protection, and participation, and showed familiarity with available mechanisms to report abuse and exploitation

In Karnataka

58.22% of children

interviewed reflected a **positive shift** in mindset, o**pposing early marriage, expressing confidence in asserting their rights, acknowledging future aspirations**, and embracing **inclusive values** like inter-caste friendships and valuing education quality.

In Karnataka

54.7% of children

surveyed actively **exercised agency** by participating in community programs, **taking on leadership roles, and engaging in local advocacy efforts**, marking a **shift from passive beneficiaries to active changemakers**.

In Karnataka

67.5% of youth

conversed with **demonstrated strong awareness of their rights and entitlements**, including education, employment, and protection, and actively engaged in conversations around gender, civic responsibilities, and government schemes.

In Karnataka

66.2% of youth

interviewed reflected a **positive shift** in mindset, **embracing gender equality, rejecting harmful behaviours**, and challenging discriminatory norms in both **private** and **public** spaces.

In Karnataka

70.13% of youth

questioned **exercised agency by taking leadership roles** in governance spaces and community-driven campaigns, **advocating for rights, inclusion, and developmental change** at the local level.

Success Stories

Renu, Hangala:

"I want to study law and fight for justice."

Renu's child marriage was stopped by the Bal Panchayat in Hangala when they intervened at the right moment, allowing her to continue her education and pursue her dreams of studying law. From a girl who almost became a child bride to an aspiring lawyer, her story shows how community intervention can change lives and create new possibilities for young aspirers.

Ashu, Hangala:

"We couldn't let our friend's future be taken away from her."

As a member of Hangala Yuva Mandal, Ashu successfully stopped his friend's sister's child marriage by convincing the family to reconsider their decision. Working together with other youth members, he showed how peer influence and community dialogue can prevent harmful practices and the power of young people standing up for each other's rights within their own communities.

Madan, Hangala:

"I thought my education was over, but Bal Panchayat showed me another way."

Once a school dropout working in a butcher shop, Madan was convinced by Bal Panchayat members to return to school and complete his 10th grade. His journey from the butcher shop back to the classroom shows how community support can help young people reclaim their educational opportunities. Today, he serves as an example for other dropouts that it's never too late to restart their studies.

Rakhi, Hangala:

"I could continue studying after Yuva Mandal stopped my early marriage! "

When 16-year-old Rakhi's child marriage was being planned, Yuva Mandal Hangala intervened to stop the arrangement and ensure she continued her education. The action saved her from early marriage and kept her dreams of completing school alive. Her case shows how youth organisations can effectively challenge harmful traditions and protect young girls' futures.

2. Household-Level Impact

Shifting household attitudes through exposure to role models

Increased family support for girls' participation in public spaces

Internalisation of autonomy and self-reliance among women

In Karnataka

68.4% of women

surveyed reported awareness of their legal rights and entitlements, including education, protection, financial inclusion, and government welfare schemes, and actively took part in conversations around gender equality and community wellbeing.

In Karnataka

48.9% of women

surveyed indicated a shift in mindset, with greater confidence in making independent choices, increased family support for their roles outside the home, and a decline in restrictive gender norms affecting mobility and opportunity.

In Karnataka

72.15% of women

interviewed demonstrated increased agency, participating in decision-making at home, engaging in community platforms, and stepping into leadership roles or accessing support in situations of domestic abuse.

In Karnataka

70.95% of parents

surveyed demonstrated awareness of child rights, particularly around education and protection, and showed strong support for girls' continued schooling.

In Karnataka

72.9% of parents

reflected a shift in mindset, embracing improved health-seeking behaviours, opposing early marriage, and aligning with more aspirational goals for their children's future.

In Karnataka

81.0% of parents

surveyed were actively engaged in community-based actions, such as promoting education, advocating against child marriage and labour, and participating in health and school-related initiatives.

Family Stories

Women's Empowerment through Mahila Mandal

"Five years ago, I couldn't even imagine going to the store alone. Now I walk there confidently to buy snacks."

An older woman from the Mahila Mandal in Kaligowdanahalli was once constrained by traditional norms that limited her mobility and independence. Through her involvement in the women's group, she gained the confidence to visit local stores independently, marking a small yet significant shift towards personal freedom.

Priyanka's story

"I helped stop multiple child marriages in my village and ensured my daughters could pursue education."

Priyanka from Kaligowdanahalli, an active Mahila Mandal member, helped stop several child marriages in her village. Her advocacy also ensured her daughters pursued education, and she now supports them while earning some money by tailoring blouses, reflecting growing confidence and agency. She has gained confidence from her involvement in Mahila Mandal, contributing to not just personal growth but also various community discussions.

3. Community-Level: Collective Norm Shifts and Participatory Action

Peer support networks enabled collective motivation

Yuva Mandal members writing letters to panchayats and intervening to stop child marriages demonstrate grassroots action challenging entrenched practices. Youth-led awareness campaigns, even without systemic follow-up, reflect the growing civic engagement.

Girls and boys challenged traditions, signalling emerging norm shifts

Social opportunity is shaped by peer influence and group solidarity, but is still hindered by social policing and stigma (e.g., fear of gossip, hesitation in reporting child marriages).

Home visits prevented school dropouts

In Karnataka

72.4% of community members

interviewed reported awareness of child rights, gender equality, and the harmful effects of child marriage, with many actively engaging in local discussions on child protection and compassionate leadership.

In Karnataka

51.9% of community members

surveyed showed a marked shift in mindset, embracing collective responsibility, challenging social biases, and moving from passive concern to active problem-solving on issues like discrimination, violence, and child welfare.

In Karnataka

40% of community members

surveyed exercised agency by participating in local decision-making bodies, reporting violations, and supporting advocacy efforts, leading to visible shifts in community accountability and leadership responsiveness.

Community Stories of Change

Varun's Educational Journey

"Being taken to Delhi was a recognition of my progress in education, and it motivated me to inspire others."

Varun, a youth from Kaligowdanahalli, was taken to Delhi as recognition of his active involvement and progress in education. His achievements and journey inspired other parents in the village to encourage their children to study harder. His story demonstrates how recognising young people's efforts can create a ripple effect, motivating entire communities to value education and support their children's academic pursuits.

Saraswati's Fight Against Child Marriage

"I filed FIRs to stop four child marriages, despite facing verbal abuse from the community."

Saraswati from the Bal Panchayat in Kaligowdanahalli successfully stopped four child marriages in the village. Despite facing verbal abuse and backlash from the community, she filed FIRs and involved the authorities, demonstrating resilience and commitment to protecting child rights.

Maguvinahalli Bicycle Initiative

Bal Panchayat members gave a cycle to a boy from a remote village to ensure his regular school attendance in Hangala

4. Institutional and Ecosystem-Level

Yuva Mandal's interface with institutions (e.g., letters to improve staffing) reflects early efforts at institutional engagement.

Two letters written to the Gram Panchayat resulted in action (cleaning, road repairs).

SDMC and the Gram Panchayat were engaged in addressing concerns.

Alcohol-related issues in the street were resolved through community pressure.

Requests submitted under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and beneficiaries like Shantha receiving ₹1.2 lakh for house construction, show improved access to institutional welfare systems.

Systemic Success Stories

Youth Mobilisation against Substance Abuse

A group of boys from the Bal Panchayat in Kaligowdanahalli reported substance abuse incidents happening in the school premises. They gathered courage and, with the support of their peers, reported it to the authorities, resulting in a cleaner and safer school environment.

School Kitchen Hygiene

Bal Panchayat's advocacy led to improved hygiene at school by installing underground sewage pipes to replace open wastewater disposal in Hangala

Village-specific challenges can be applied as learnings in newer villages

Kaligowdanahalli
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

Initial Difficulty Forming the Committee Due to COVID-19
The Bal Panchayat had to be organised during the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it challenging to gather enough children and form a full committee. This disrupted the ideal implementation structure and required adaptation, especially in mobilising younger participants informally.

Hangala
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

Prejudice Against Tribal Children
Teachers expressed fixed, unexamined biases that tribal students "are not interested in education" and that their parents lack awareness. These assumptions were not challenged or contextualised, making it difficult to implement inclusive strategies without additional effort to shift teacher mindsets.

The Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) programme in Karnataka illustrates how deep-rooted social norms, infrastructural limitations, and economic vulnerabilities can begin to shift when communities are equipped with the tools, platforms, and support to reimagine their future. While unique in its geographical and cultural context- situated near forest buffer zones and marked by linguistic and tribal diversity- the sites in Chamrajnagar demonstrate that locally rooted leadership and consistent community engagement can lead to significant gains in child rights, women's empowerment, and civic participation.

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3.3 Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) Programme in Jharkhand

Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) Programme *in* Jharkhand

Jharkhand, carved out of Bihar in 2000, is a mineral-rich yet developmentally challenged state in eastern India. Nearly 76% of its population lives in rural areas, and a large proportion of its residents belong to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. These communities often face multi-dimensional poverty, limited access to public services, and deep-rooted social inequities that directly impact children's rights and well-being.

Child marriage remains a critical concern in Jharkhand. According to NFHS-5 (2019-21)[4]

32.2% of women aged 20–24 were married before the age of 18

significantly higher than the national average. According to 2011 data, there were almost 1 lakh working children in Jharkhand (aged 5–14)[5], many of whom were engaged in hazardous labour, including mica mining and agricultural work. School dropout rates are high, particularly among tribal girls, due to economic distress, lack of infrastructure, seasonal migration, and entrenched gender norms.

Although the state has introduced welfare initiatives like the Maiyya Samman Yojana, Savitribai Phule Kishori Samriddhi Yojana, weak last-mile delivery and lack of community awareness hinder the impact. Addressing child rights in Jharkhand requires a holistic approach combining behaviour change, institutional accountability, and grassroots leadership, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

Understanding the Villages: Context and Need Assessment

Villages like Giridih and Ghaghra in Jharkhand are spread across larger areas with people of different castes living in different areas, often known as tolas. Many people, especially men and youth, have migrated from the villages in search of employment. Older children, especially those seeking ambitious careers, have to stay away from home to avail of services like coaching. The history of mica mining and the subsequent closure of mines without any support for livelihood has made the situation vulnerable for locals.

[4] National Family Health Survey Jharkhand (2019-2021) https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR374/FR374_Jharkhand.pdf

[5] Ministry of Labour & Environment https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/Census-2001&2011.pdf

1. A bird's eye view summary of the Bal Mitra Grams in Jharkhand

Population Range

3000-8500
people per village

Primary Occupation

- Agriculture and forest-based livelihoods
- Daily wage labour
- Mica mining (in heavily reduced amounts in a few regions)
- NREGA work (when available)

Geographical Challenges

- Hilly terrain and scattered settlements
- Water scarcity in the summer months
- Inaccessibility during monsoon
- Limited access to nearby towns due to poor transport

Caste Structure

High concentration of Scheduled Tribes along with Scheduled Castes and OBCs in mixed clusters

2. A collectivised approach- Enabling children through a strengthened ecosystem

The Jharkhand State government had approved the State Action Plan on Elimination of Child Labour in 2012. SMGC's work and mission fit right into the state's atmosphere of development and growth, focused on the prevention of child labour. This, coupled with other factors, enabled the project here.

Key Enablers :

Collective Strength & Support
Women and youth expressed greater confidence when part of a group **(e.g., Mahila Mandal, Bal Panchayat).** **"We are stronger when 5–8 of us get together."**

Awareness Sessions & Consistent Engagement
SMGC/KSCF field workers discussed issues like **child marriage, child labour, education, and rights.** Regular meetings and exposure helped shift mindsets over time.

Youth and Children as Change Agents
Children became vocal about their **rights and resisted child labour/marriage.** Girls started advocating for their own education.

Access to Basic Infrastructure & Schemes
Bank accounts (through Aadhar) enabled **financial agency.** Education facilities up to the 12th grade in nearby Tisri encouraged **girls to study longer.**

Community-Based Institutions
The presence of **samitis and local leadership (Bal Panchayat, Yuva Mandal, etc.)** gave platforms for **expression and problem-solving**.

Visible Role Models
Local youth (e.g., Priyanka, Sunidhi) pursuing higher education or careers served as **inspirations.**

Specific Instances *of* enablers across BMGs

Ranadih
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

In Ranadih, it was observed that people who were deeply a part of the political and social work spheres were a part of the BMG Advisory Committee. This enabled change as people who were supporting women, youth and children were connected to bureaucratic spheres and could give substantial advice and support.

Ghaghra
(work has just ended)

In Ghaghra, it was observed that in large joint families, members across generations were a part of the **community group of action,** encouraging an **ethos of participation in work for social good.**

Programme Impact

This section analyses the behavioural and systemic outcomes of the BMG programme in Jharkhand through field narratives, qualitative observations, and stakeholder voices. The programme's impact is mapped across multiple levels- from individual children and women to family structures, caste and gender dynamics, and governance mechanisms.

Drawing on the social ecological model (SEM), the assessment reveals how deeply embedded practices are being reshaped through exposure, dialogue, and institutional support, creating gradual but meaningful shifts in awareness, agency, and action.

1. Child-Level Impact

- Children became aware of their rights- education, protection, and participation- **through Bal Panchayat sessions and trainings.**
- Dropouts reduced as children began **advocating for their peers' education**, even visiting homes to convince families.
- **Girls became vocal about delaying marriage and pursuing education**, with examples of individuals continuing education up to 12th grade or preparing for the army.
- Activities like **drawing, computer sessions, and reading** helped increase classroom engagement and interest in learning.
- Children learned how to identify and act on **cases of child labour and child marriage,** often leading the initial conversations with families.
- **Confidence increased-** children who were once hesitant now speak up in meetings and classrooms.
- Children wrote letters advocating for improvements **(e.g., hygiene, streetlights, school infrastructure),** reflecting their growing agency.
- One success case involved a 12-year-old girl, Khushbu, whose early marriage was stopped and who is now back in school.

Success Stories

Kiran:

"My marriage was stopped when I was 12 years old. Today, I'm back in school and continuing my education."

At just 12 years old, Kiran's marriage was halted through the intervention of community members who recognised the importance of protecting child rights. Today, she's back in school and continuing her education with renewed hope for her future. Her journey symbolises the power of local advocacy in protecting children and demonstrates how community intervention can transform a young girl's life.

Reena & Anita:

Reena, once an active voice in early awareness sessions, is now pursuing her B.A. and preparing for government exams. Her journey reflects the long-term impact of youth engagement and educational opportunity. Reena & Anita, both unmarried, have chosen to pursue higher education beyond secondary school. Their decision challenges local norms and encourages younger girls to stay in school.

Priya, Giridih:

"I completed my 12th exams and now plan to prepare for the NEET exam."

Priya, a student from Giridih, has completed her 12th exams and now plans to prepare for the NEET exam to pursue medical studies. Her educational aspirations represent a powerful example of rising ambitions among girls in rural Jharkhand. Her journey from village student to aspiring doctor shows how access to education can transform dreams into achievable goals for rural youth.

- A girl from the BMG village passed the Indian Army entrance exam, a rare and celebrated achievement in her panchayat. Her success has inspired many others to aim higher.
- A child in the village of Ghaghra had not been admitted to school and didn't have an Aadhaar card. Bal Panchayat members noticed this, informed the parents, and ensured the child got enrolled

2. Household-Level Impact

Parents grew curious and supportive after seeing their children take initiative, often asking what was discussed in meetings.

Women began participating in decision-making: managing finances, attending meetings, and even advocating for children's rights.

Families helped **girls open bank accounts,** apply for scholarships, and continue their education beyond the 8th grade.

Shifts in household mindset were visible: men gave money for children's needs, and women independently visited banks or healthcare centres.

Discussions on **health, hygiene, and nutrition,** previously absent, became more common within families.

In cases of **illness or emergencies, families used collective funds** to support healthcare or farming inputs.

Impact Stories-

Pari Kumari

The first elected Mukhiya of the Bal Panchayat (Ghaghra) in 2018, completed her B.A., is now married and has a child. A lot of her family members are in the BMG committees now.

3. Community-Level: Collective Norm Shifts *and* Participatory Action

Community members joined hands to stop child marriages and bring dropouts back to school.

Bal Panchayat members, supported by SMGC, initiated door-to-door campaigns, filed complaints, and escalated unresolved cases.

Mandals (Mahila, Yuva, Bal Panchayat) began collectively advocating for roads, water supply, streetlights, clean washrooms, and school libraries.

Women who were once shy and hesitant now sit in meetings and voice their concerns confidently.

Hygiene awareness increased through group discussions, leading to better nutrition and sanitation practices.

Child labour reduced as youth refused to work and instead pushed for school enrollment.

Savings groups began funding local needs- medical emergencies, farming tools, or school supplies- demonstrating grassroots resilience.

Community Stories *of* Change

Over a period of six months to a year, Bal Panchayat members worked persistently to stop 3–4 child marriages in their village, showing how sustained community effort can shift deeply rooted norms.

Kusum, Ghaghra:

"My friend used to work in mica mines and rarely attend school, but a teacher helped her come to school more regularly by speaking to her guardian about the importance of education."

Asha Kumari, Ghagra:

"I called the police to stop my classmate's child marriage. The police arrived and took both parents and the pandit to jail."

Asha Kumari from Bal Panchayat in Ghaghra directly intervened to stop her classmate's child marriage by calling the police without hesitation. When another 9th standard girl from a different neighbourhood approached her about her own arranged marriage, Usha informed the teacher, who successfully convinced the family to stop the marriage.

- Women from the Mahila Mandal Ghaghra reported that now many girls are studying till 10th, 12th, and even pursuing degrees, which was rare earlier. The mindset shift happened after seeing other girls succeed, and with the help of SHGs and Mahila Mandal discussions.
- Girls in Ghaghra now go to Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya and a newly started degree college near Kidikya Mod, walking in groups or using cycles provided by the government- a significant change from when they didn't attend school beyond the 5th grade.

4. Institutional & Ecosystem-Level

Children and youth wrote letters to the Panchayat Development Officer (PDO), resulting in streetlights, temple cleaning, roads, and water tankers.

A hospital was built in Tisri; Anganwadi centres and schools improved access to sanitation and learning materials.

Cycles were distributed to girls, enabling safe access to distant schools.

SMGC provided mobile phones during COVID for digital learning via Byju's and YouTube, along with teacher-led group sessions.

Scholarship assistance and digital infrastructure (e.g., online college access in Tisri) expanded education access.

Child protection processes became more systematised with community-led monitoring, police escalation if needed, and links to formal institutions.

Stories of Change-

The villagers in Ghaghra collectively convinced a landowner who was blocking road construction to agree, and when that failed, they found an alternate route and successfully built the road after a 10-year wait.

Challenges

Ranadih
(work ended 3-5 years ago)

In Ranadih, because of the village being divided into different tolas (areas with a concentration of people from a specific caste), not a lot of work has been done with regard to caste discrimination. Bringing people from regions far from each other is a logistical constraint, and a lack of shared spaces makes it difficult to have critical conversations on caste

Ghaghra
(work has just ended)

In Ghaghra, the participation of people was observed to be concentrated in a few families, especially as a result of the tola structure in villages. Challenges pertaining to the passing down of values and knowledge also persist because of the migration of previous members of Yuva Mandal and Bal Panchayat to other places for higher education/work.

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3.4 Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) Programme *in* MP

Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) Programme in MP

Madhya Pradesh, located in central India, is one of the country's most demographically diverse and geographically expansive states. With over 72% of its population residing in rural areas,[6] the state presents unique challenges in delivering equitable education, health, and child protection services. It is home to a significant tribal population, and socio-economic disparities, particularly in forested and remote districts, contribute to persistent child rights

As per NFHS-5 (2019-21)

23.1% of women aged 20–24 in Madhya Pradesh were married before the age of 18

higher than the national average, underscoring the continued prevalence of child marriage[7]. The 2011 Census recorded over 2.8 lakh working children[8] (aged 5–14), many engaged in agriculture, construction, and household industries. Educational dropout rates, particularly among tribal girls, remain high due to factors like early marriage, gender bias, and lack of infrastructure.

Despite these challenges, the state has implemented various initiatives such as the Ladli Laxmi Yojana to support girl children and the CM Rise School initiative to enhance school quality. However, translating schemes into real impact requires stronger community engagement, consistent follow-ups, and greater accountability. Building child-friendly systems in Madhya Pradesh thus demands a convergence of grassroots mobilisation, institutional reform, and

Understanding *the* Villages: Context and Need Assessment

The villages in Madhya Pradesh where the BMG programme has been implemented are historically shaped by the presence of stone mines, which have been a major form of employment over the years. Many villages are remote, and migrating outside is the way to go for growth and development. While people are moving away from working in quarries because of the commonly understood health ailments it causes, livelihood remains a key concern.

In such a context, over the last 10 years, SMGC has worked in 40 villages in Madhya Pradesh.

[6] https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/madhya+pradesh.html

[7] NHFS-5 2019-2 (Compendium of Fact Sheets) https://data.opencity.in/dataset/530ee93a-d24c-43df-b90b-272a067d5a4e/resource/ee4f53f3-d694-40bf-8c9c-8139e93c6318/download/madhya_pradesh-nhfs.pdf

[8] GOI Ministry of Labour & Employment- Census Data on Child Labour https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/Census-2001%262011.pdf

1. A bird's eye view summary of the Bal Mitra Grams in Madhya Pradesh

Population Range

1500 - 2000
people per village

Geographical Challenges

- Water scarcity during summer
- Forest proximity in tribal regions (leading to isolation)
- Poor road connectivity
- Seasonal work dependency

Primary Occupation

- Seasonal Agriculture (wheat, soybean, pulses)
- Working in stone quarries/mines
- Forest-based livelihoods
- Animal husbandry
- Wage labour under NREGA and private contractors
- Some youth engaged in seasonal work or migrated for construction work

Caste Structure

Predominantly Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes with pockets of Scheduled Castes and General category families in larger villages

2. A collectivised approach- Enabling children through a strengthened ecosystem

In November 2021, the Department of Women and Child Development signed an MoU in Bhopal to adopt the BMG model across 100 villages in 10 districts. Government support is thus a key enabler in institutionalising the approach.

Key Enablers :

Community Mobilisation
The presence of active community groups like **Yuva Mandal, Mahila Mandal, and Bal Panchayat** encourages collective problem-solving and awareness-raising efforts.

Support from Organisations:
External organisations like **SMGC and KSCF** conduct awareness drives, educational interventions, and advocacy for child rights and women's empowerment.

Educational Advocacy
Community-driven efforts to **upgrade school infrastructure and awareness about the importance of education** have significantly improved school attendance and reduced child labour.

Women's Empowerment Initiatives
Programs aimed at engaging women in socio-economic activities, like **sewing and small-scale businesses,** have encouraged women to step out of traditional roles and take active community roles.

Youth Engagement
Youth involvement in **awareness campaigns, meetings, and social initiatives fosters leadership and critical thinking** among young members of the community.

Skill Development Opportunities
Training programs for **sewing, stitching, and informal jobs motivate youth and women** to acquire skills and gain financial independence

Access to Information
Educational sessions, rallies, and discussions led by **community leaders and NGO workers** increase awareness of rights, laws, and available opportunities.

Awareness Campaigns
Continuous efforts by organisations like **BMG, KSCF, and SMGC** raised awareness on issues like child marriage, health practices, and the importance of education.

Community Support
Strong community support from groups like the **Mahila Mandal, BMG Samiti, and Yuva Mandal** fostered a collaborative environment for change.

Government Schemes
Introduction of government schemes like the **Ladli Behen Yojana, Awas Yojana for housing, and health-related initiatives** provided tangible benefits that motivated behaviour change.

Women's Empowerment
Empowerment of women through **skill-building programs, access to financial independence (bank accounts), and participation in decision-making roles.**

Positive Role Models:
Role models from the community who embraced **education and career development, encouraging others, particularly girls,** to follow similar paths.

Safe Spaces for Discussion:
Regular community meetings provided a platform for **open discussions on issues like health, child marriage, and education.**

Educational Support
Support for children to continue **education, including school admissions for dropouts, and efforts to reduce child labour** through education.

Healthcare Awareness
Increased awareness and knowledge of hospital deliveries, vaccinations, and prenatal care led to healthier community practices.

Engagement of Youth
Youth involvement in **sports, education, and advocacy programs** helped increase motivation for personal development and community transformation.

Community Health Initiatives
Vaccination drives and health camps, supported by frontline workers, improved healthcare practices

Programme Impact

To evaluate the behavioural and systemic change brought about by the BMG programme in Madhya Pradesh, this section synthesises findings from immersive field engagement, focus group discussions, and community feedback. Impact was evident at the level of individuals, households, community norms, and institutional linkages. Aligned with the social ecological model (SEM) of behaviour change, the analysis captures how sustained efforts at education, mobilisation, and advocacy are influencing both personal trajectories and collective structures in the region.

1. Child-Level Impact

- Increased awareness of child rights, education, gender equality, and child protection.
- Significant reduction in child marriage; improved understanding of legal implications. Rise
- in school enrollment, attendance, and continued education up to 12th and beyond. Boost in
- confidence through rallies, Bal Panchayat and public speaking. Girls delay marriage, pursue
- higher education, and express career aspirations.
- Youth actively pursue vocational guidance and view education as a pathway to growth.

In MP

92.65% of children

surveyed demonstrated awareness of their rights, including education, protection, and participation, and showed familiarity with available mechanisms to report abuse and exploitation.

In MP

95.28% of children

who were polled reflected a positive shift in mindset, opposing early marriage, expressing confidence in asserting their rights, acknowledging future aspirations, and embracing inclusive values like inter-caste friendships and valuing education quality.

In MP

75.0% of children

surveyed actively exercised agency by participating in community programs, taking on leadership roles, and engaging in local advocacy efforts, marking a shift from passive beneficiaries to active changemakers.

In MP

93.3% of youth

demonstrated strong awareness of their rights and entitlements, including education, employment, and protection, and actively engaged in conversations around gender, civic responsibilities, and government schemes.

In MP

71.13% of youth

reflected a positive shift in mindset, embracing gender equality, rejecting harmful behaviours, and challenging discriminatory norms in both private and public spaces.

In MP

50.03% of youth

exercised agency by taking leadership roles in governance spaces and community-driven campaigns, advocating for rights, inclusion, and developmental change at the local level

Rakesh's Education Journey

"I left my village to study in Delhi, and it changed the way I see my community"

Rakesh, a young man from Sahaba, pursued higher education in journalism despite growing up in a village with limited resources. He was encouraged by his community leaders and went to Delhi, where his mindset was transformed, inspiring him to work for the education of others in his village.

2. Household-Level Impact

Families increasingly **supported girls' education and delayed marriage**, aligning with child protection and education rights.

Improved healthcare choices, such as hospital deliveries and vaccinations, supported children's right to health.

Parents prioritised schooling over child labour, recognising children's right to development.

Domestic violence has reduced with declining substance abuse, creating safer home environments for children.

Household attitudes shifted as families became more open to community support in stopping child marriage.

Parents engaged more in children's learning, showing increased involvement in their development and protection.

Women began making financial decisions, handling banking, and accessing schemes, contributing to child welfare through economic stability.

Greater mobility and collective support among women fostered an enabling environment for children's well-being.

In MP

93.3% of women

surveyed reported awareness of their legal rights and entitlements, including education, protection, financial inclusion, and government welfare schemes, and actively took part in conversations around gender equality and community wellbeing.

In MP

77.0% of women

indicated a shift in mindset, with greater confidence in making independent choices, increased family support for their roles outside the home, and a decline in restrictive gender norms affecting mobility and opportunity.

In MP

86.3% of women

surveyed demonstrated increased agency, participating in decision-making at home, engaging in community platforms, and stepping into leadership roles or accessing support in situations of domestic abuse.

3. Community-Level: Collective Norm Shifts *and* Participatory Action

Community-based platforms like Mahila Mandals, Bal Panchayat, and Bal Samiti enabled collective reflection, child protection dialogue, and shared decision-making.

Collective efforts led to halting child marriages and rejecting harmful traditional practices, reinforcing children's rights to protection and development.

Infrastructure improvements (schools, RCC roads, Anganwadi repairs) enhanced children's access to education and early childhood services.

Women's participation in livelihood activities and public life helped shift norms around gender equality and child welfare.

Awareness drives reduced superstition and caste-based exclusion, promoting inclusion and equality for all children.

Village unity grew through joint action on issues like domestic violence and alcohol abuse, fostering a safer environment for children.

In MP

93.98% of community members

surveyed reported awareness of child rights, gender equality, and the harmful effects of child marriage, with many actively engaging in local discussions on child protection and compassionate leadership.

In MP

91.48% of community members

interviewed showed a marked shift in mindset, embracing collective responsibility, challenging social biases, and moving from passive concern to active problem-solving on issues like discrimination, violence, and child welfare.

In MP

78.66% of community members

surveyed exercised agency by participating in local decision-making bodies, reporting violations, and supporting advocacy efforts, leading to visible shifts in community accountability and leadership responsiveness.

Community Stories *of* Change

Rani, Sahaba:

"I lost my father..and now I work in the fields and study hard to help my family"

In Sahaba, a girl from the Adivasi community scored 87% in her 12th board exams. Despite losing her father, she is focused on helping her family by working in the field. Her determination inspired other girls in the village to prioritise education.

Deenabai:

"After my husband died, I became a leader in Mahila Mandal and made sure all children, especially girls, go to school."

After her husband's death, Deenabai emerged as a local leader through the Mahila Mandal. She actively ensured that children, especially girls, were enrolled in school and accessed welfare schemes, becoming a role model for women's empowerment in the community.

4. Institutional *&* Ecosystem-Level

Field workers from SMGC/KSCF catalysed behaviour change through sustained awareness campaigns and community engagement around child rights.

Panchayats became more responsive, facilitating school upgrades, road construction, and water supply, enhancing access to services for children and families. A hospital was built in Tisri; Anganwadi centres and schools improved access to sanitation and learning materials.

Improved collaboration with ASHA and Anganwadi workers ensured better maternal and child health outcomes, including food, vaccinations, and checkups.

Trust in institutional healthcare grew, reducing reliance on superstitious practices and improving child health and safety.

Primary Health centres and private hospitals became more accessible, institutionalising regular healthcare access for women and children.

Infrastructure improvements in schools (compounds, washrooms, fans) created safer, more inclusive learning environments.

Career counselling strengthened adolescent aspirations and preparedness for life beyond school.

Facilitating Ecosystem Level Change

Improved School Conditions
The school in Sahaba, once lacking basic facilities, was transformed through collective community action. With a new compound wall, women's washrooms, and infrastructure upgrades, the school has become a safer, more inclusive space for learning.

Challenges *in* Implementation

In Sahaba & Bhilai, unemployment and a lack of livelihood opportunities remain a critical issue that challenges the security of families, thus affecting children's access to education. While free primary and secondary schooling (in some cases) is available in public schools, higher studies often come at a cost which families cannot afford. Thus, economic barriers get in the way of accessing higher education and often, job security for youth.

The BMG programme in Madhya Pradesh has demonstrated the power of collective voice and local mobilisation in addressing issues such as school dropout, domestic violence, and substance abuse. Communities- especially youth and women- have begun challenging traditional norms, reporting child rights violations, and engaging more actively with panchayats and welfare schemes. In regions marked by poor infrastructure and social fragmentation, the programme's participatory approach has built social capital and revived trust in institutions. Continued mentorship, skill development, and access to entitlements will be key to sustaining and scaling this progress.

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3.5 What's next for Bal Mitra Gram

Recommendations

Based on the field observations and patterns of change noted across Rajasthan's BMG villages, it is clear that **sustaining behavioural outcomes requires targeted action across programmatic, stakeholder, and systemic domains.** While the program has catalysed mindset shifts and created enabling structures, ongoing support is essential to deepen and **institutionalise these changes**, particularly in areas still facing socio-economic or infrastructural instability.

With the rise of internet connectivity across far corners of the country, awareness about child rights is slowly increasing in comparison to a decade or two ago. People are busier securing a living for themselves, and the 'community' attitude is sometimes seen to be dwindling among people. Yet, the landscape of social work is changing, as individuals face growing economic pressures and global uncertainties such as climate change.
At such a juncture, it is important for SMGC to reevaluate its role and adapt to the changing times.

The following recommendations are grounded in the lived realities captured during the assessment and are designed to reinforce long-term, community-owned progress.

Education-centred Recommendations

Use **arts-based, culturally rooted learning formats** to engage children in complex rights-based discourse and to support emotional well-being.[9]

Establish **shared study spaces** in villages to support consistent learning beyond school hours and to foster peer learning.

Introduction of **early career counselling** to ensure that children make the right choices at the right time, focusing on widening children's world views and providing support in charting out career pathways.

Encourage the building of **proper sanitation facilities** in schools to ensure retention, especially of adolescent girls.

[9] Rooney, R. (2004). Arts-based teaching and learning. *Retrieved September, 27, 2015.*

Ecosystem-based Recommendations

Collaborate with financial literacy and rural livelihood organisations to strengthen household income stability, thereby reducing child vulnerability

Increase engagement with locals who are not members of committees/ community groups of action

Upskill government school teachers in child-sensitive, rights-based approaches, ensuring alignment between school spaces and programme objectives.

When parents across BMG villages were asked how they would manage financial stability during a crisis caused by a natural calamity, where the primary earner is unable to work, 72% of parents opted for immediate financial relief with the possibility of children having to work over the choice to rely on schemes/relatives. This reflects the sensitivity of the situation, reflecting the lack of social security and stable income for these families. 100% of parents from non-BMG villages (where SMGC has not intervened) opted for immediate relief. This highlights the importance of **ensuring social security and stable income to safeguard child rights.** Build partnerships with institutions offering social entrepreneurship training to open local livelihood pathways for youth.[10]

Strategy Recommendations

Create an inter-village mentorship model wherein youth from graduated BMG villages support newer ones, fostering role-modelling and continuity.

Encourage Panchayats and Mandals to prioritise inclusive leadership, ensuring representation from socially excluded groups and geographies within the villages.

Implement formal handover mechanisms within Bal Panchayats and Yuva Mandals to mitigate leadership discontinuity caused by youth migration.

Regular monitoring to track key protection indicators and enable participatory monitoring.

[10] Lis, A., & Pacut, A. (2024). How Universities and NGOs Collaborate. In *Universities and Non-Governmental Organisations* (pp. 9-23). Routledge.

Stakeholder Engagement Recommendations

Encourage household-level dialogue on financial preparedness and child protection to build a more resilient ecosystem.

Increase engagement of non-member community members indirectly through the panchayat/mandal members to ensure that awareness trickles down.

Ensure **diversity of members** in community groups of action.

Stage wise recommendations *for* activities *and* focus areas

Based on the identification of the stage at which a selected village is, SMGC can implement focused activities instead of a standard programme. This can create a customisable model which can be more focused and flexible. Categorising activities based on the stages of change identified in the report can create space for SMGC to be more intentional with the activities that are conducted in villages based on the needs identified.
This is how different stages can focus on different indicators and goals-

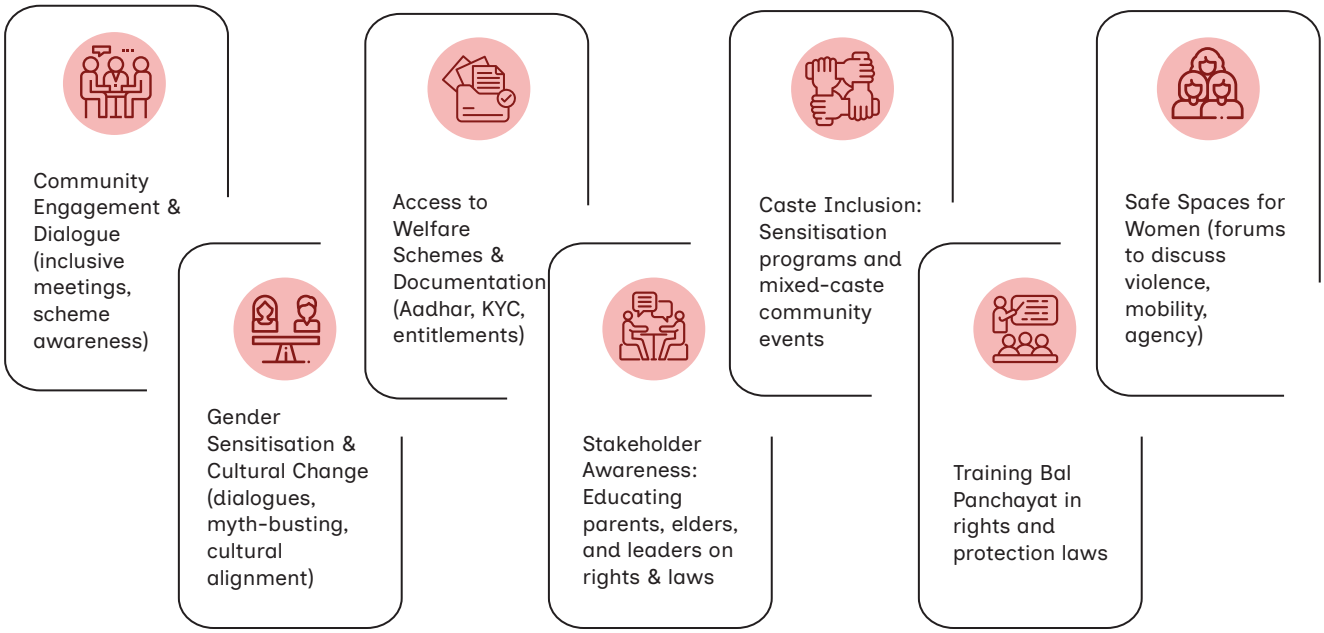
A. Pre-Contemplation (Focus of Trust Building)

These are villages where harmful practices like child marriage and labour are normalised. Recommendations here focus on infrastructure, safety, and foundational access to rights and services.

- Focus on supporting basic Infrastructure & Public Amenities sooner for trust building (roads, drainage, drinking water, lighting)
- Water, Health & Basic Infrastructure (borewells, rainwater harvesting, health centres)
- Early Childhood Care & Anganwadi for Ecosystem Strengthening
- School Infrastructure & Access (washrooms, safety, transportation)
- Health, Hygiene & Wellbeing (mobile camps, addiction awareness)
- Digital Inclusion & Access to Information (basic literacy, scheme access)
- Awareness Campaigns against child labour and marriage

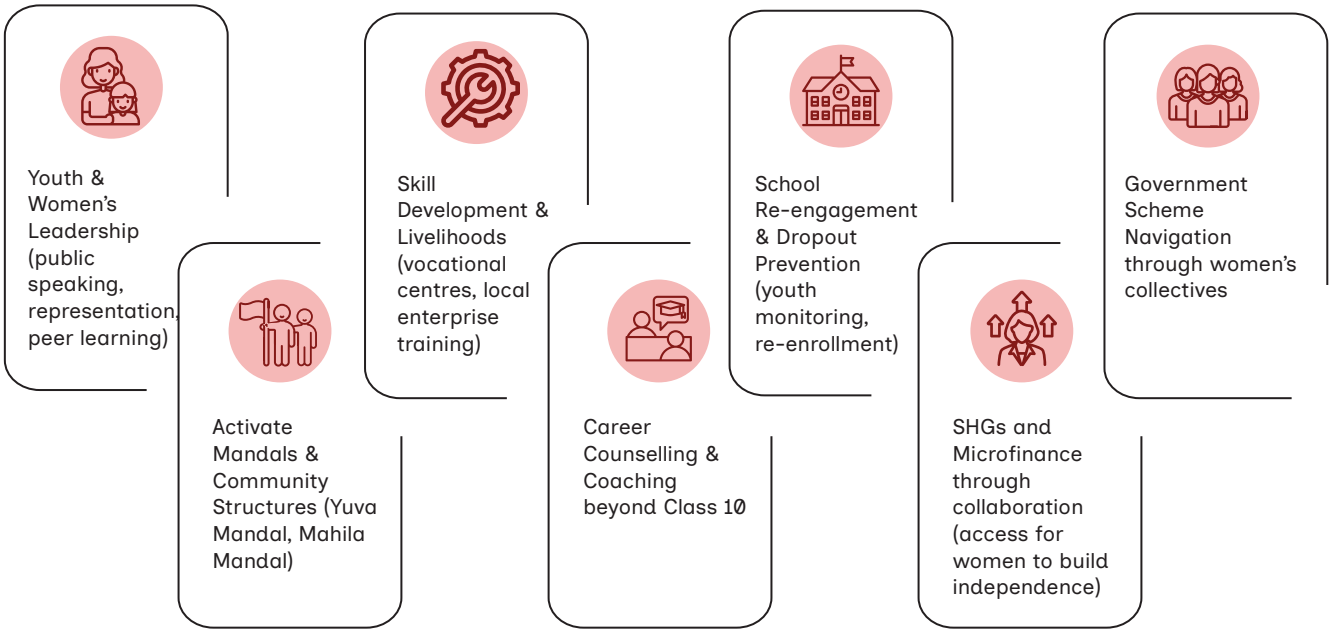
B. Contemplation (Gradually challenging long-held beliefs)

People in villages in this stage have already started questioning practices and have become more receptive to dialogue. Recommendations here aim to build awareness, promote dialogue, and create entry points for participation.



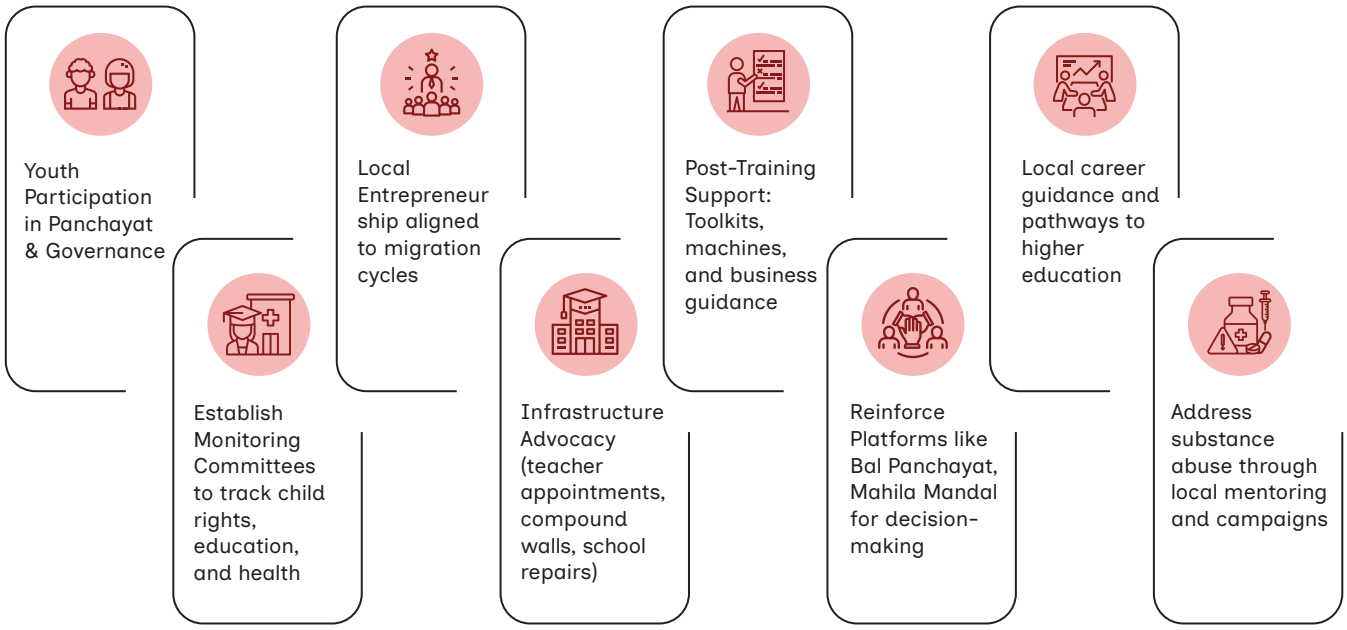
C. Preparation (Initiating active engagement from beneficiaries)

Villages in this stage reflect tentative support and early action, often through group participation and inquiry. The focus is on strengthening community structures and capability-building.



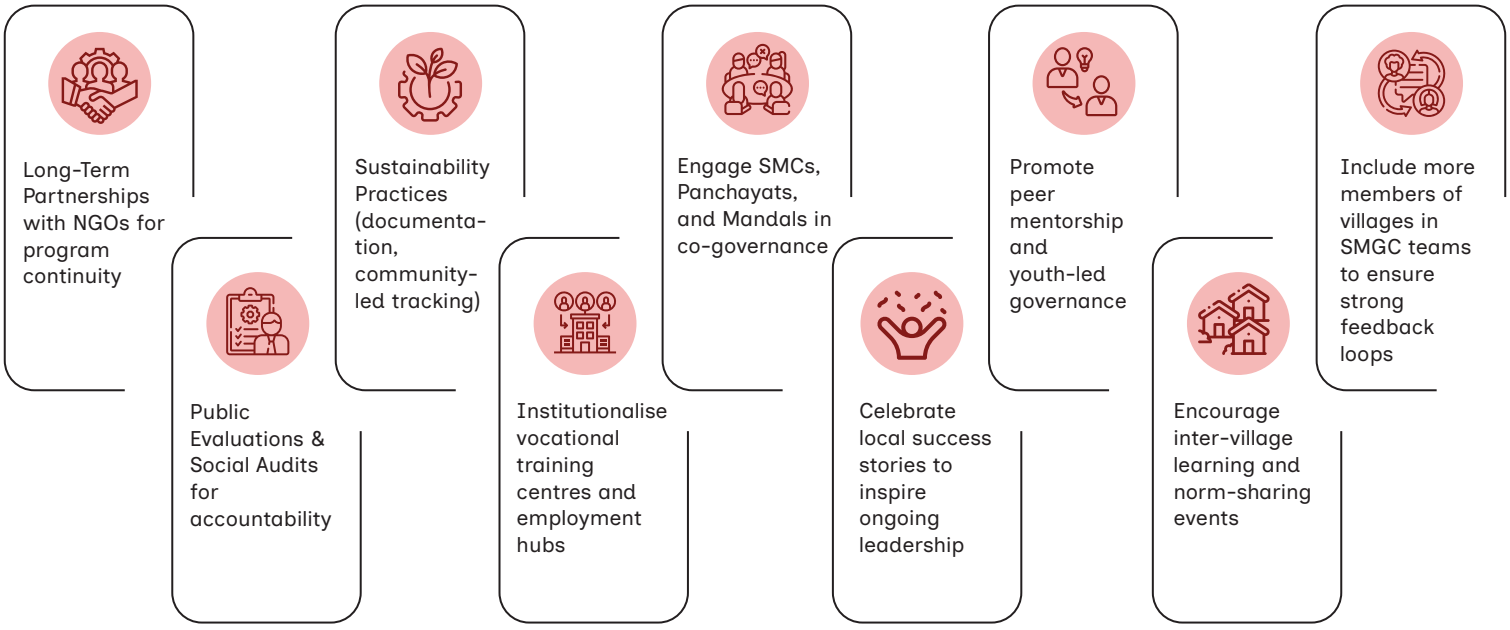
D. Action (Focus on capacity building and community strengthening)

Villages at this stage demonstrate ownership and are actively implementing solutions. Recommendations support local governance engagement and expansion of participatory platforms.



E. Maintenance (Laying emphasis on sustainability)

These communities have embedded child rights and equity in local culture. Focus is on long-term sustainability, partnerships, and accountability mechanisms.



The Future of *the* Bal Mitra Gram Approach

The Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) programme stands as a testament to how child rights can be operationalised at the village level through participatory governance, behavioural change, and collective action. By anchoring its work in locally rooted collectives like Bal Panchayats, Yuva Mandals, and Mahila Mandals, and by embedding the principles of capability, opportunity, and motivation (COM-B) into its approach, BMG has transformed passive beneficiaries into active stakeholders.

As BMG moves forward, the challenge is not just to replicate but to deepen its impact by fostering inter-village mentorship, building resilient accountability systems, and ensuring state and institutional buy-in. The path to a child-friendly village is not prescriptive but participatory. What BMG has shown is that when communities believe that children deserve dignity, protection, and opportunity, change is not only possible, it becomes inevitable.

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The Bal Mitra Mandal Programme

4

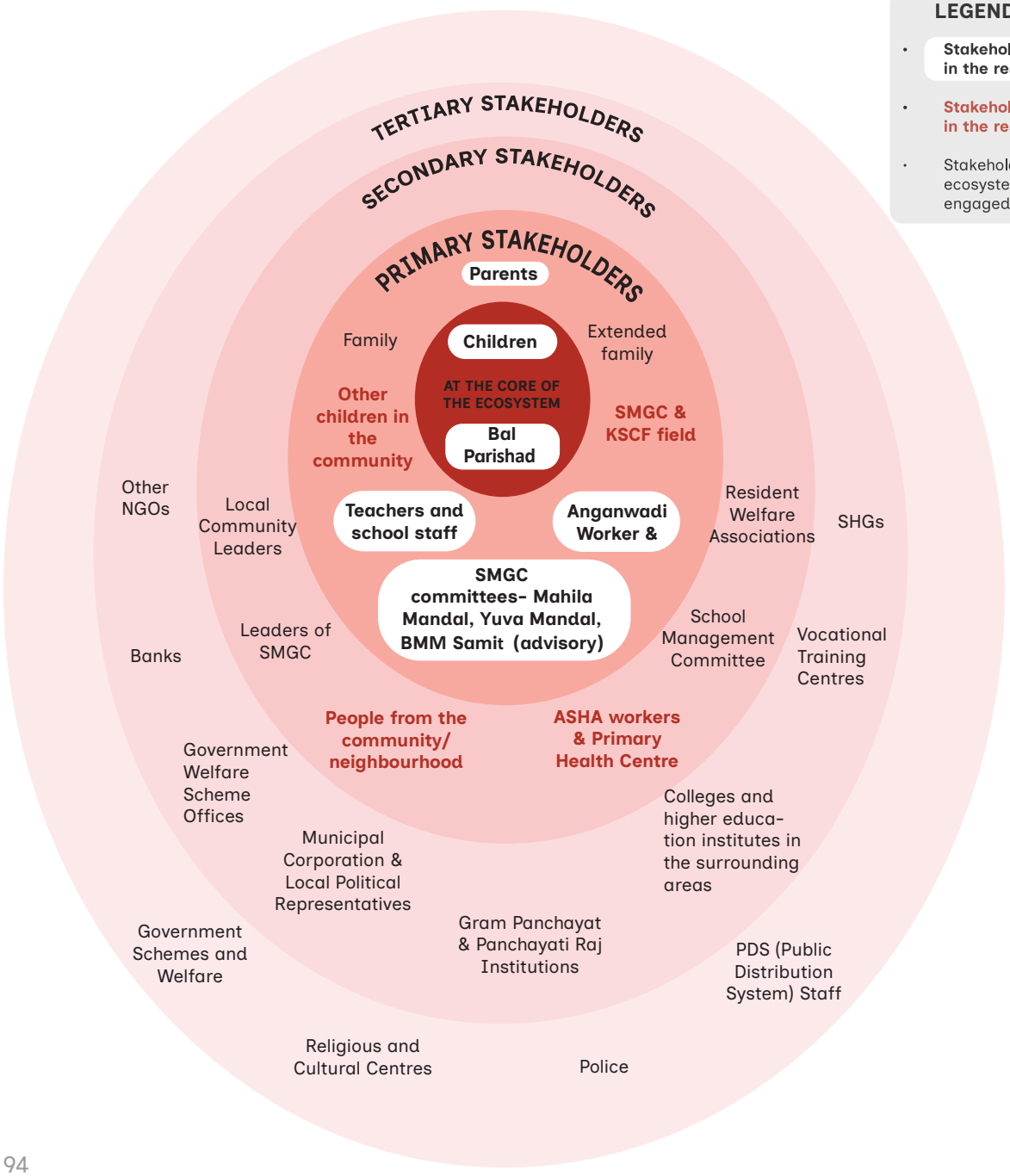
What does *a* Bal Mitra Mandal look like?

Snippets from the Field

During field visits, research, and conversations with stakeholders, it was observed that the interventions under the Bal Mitra Mandal Programme were largely centred around child-related concerns. A strong emphasis was placed on empowering children, nurturing their leadership skills, and encouraging experiential learning through hands-on activities. Active participation by the local community emerged as a key factor, significantly enhancing the program's effectiveness and nurturing a collaborative environment for meaningful, sustained change.

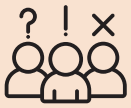
Community & The Eco-system

Understanding the community ecosystem is essential to the success of the Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) programme, as it operates within complex urban environments shaped by social norms, power dynamics, and lived realities. The attitudes of families, local leaders, peer groups, and service providers have a profound influence on how children engage with their rights, education, and leadership. A strong grasp of this ecosystem allows the programme to create interventions that are contextually rooted, inclusive, and sustainable.



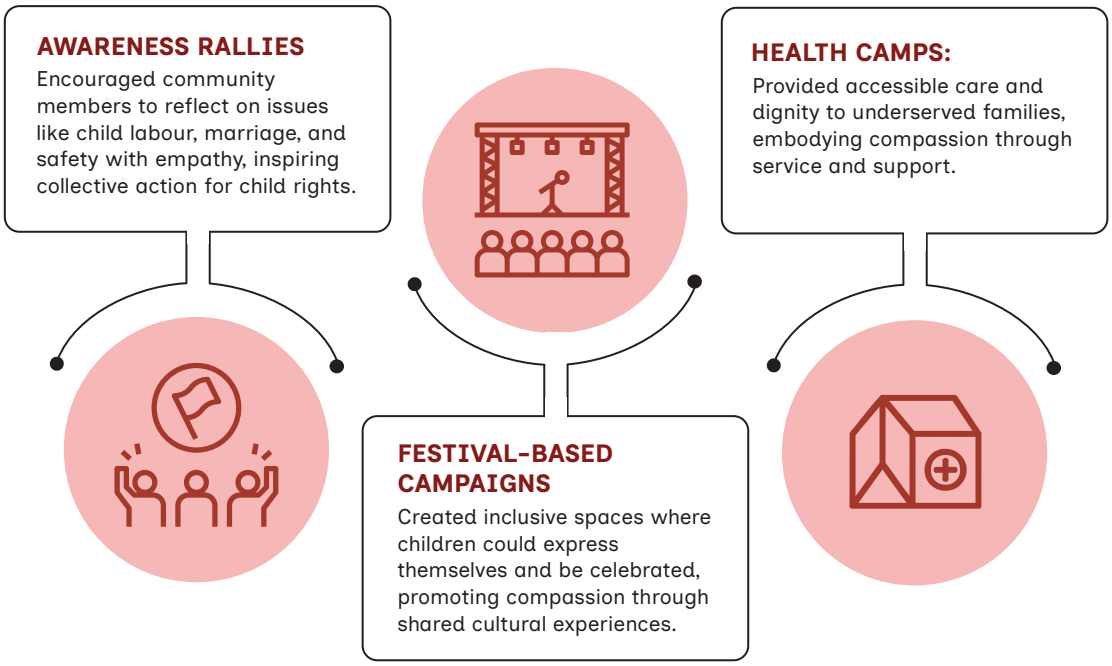
Overview *of* challenges that were identified before *the* Intervention

In urban neighbourhoods lacking basic amenities, issues such as child rights violations, poor education, substance abuse, and gender discrimination are deeply interconnected. Addressing only one aspect in isolation risks ignoring their systemic nature, which limits the potential for long-term, inclusive change.

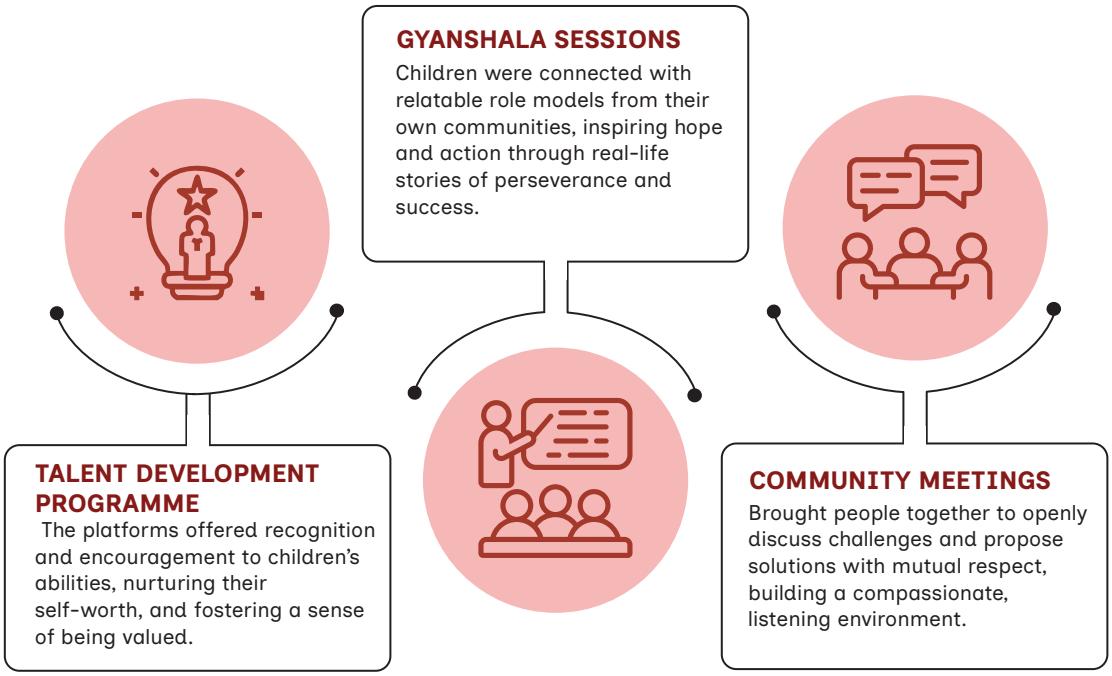
Child Rights Issues	High School Absenteeism & Dropouts Guidance	Low Enrollment and Engagement among Girls	Poor Educational Infrastructure	Lack of Vocational Training and Career Guidance
Women's Issues	Gender Inequality & Restricting Norms e.g. ghunghat pratha	Economic dependence of women	Child Marriage	
 **Social Issues**	Weak Community Leadership & Participation & Limited Collective Problem-Solving	Lack of Social Support Structures	Caste-Based Discrimination and Social Isolation	
Infrastructure Issues	Safety and Mobility Concerns	Poor road conditions, unsafe public spaces, and a lack of street lighting		
Health-related issues	Limited Access to Healthcare	Substance Abuse Among Youth		
Challenges in Delhi	Due to the settlement being located in a slum area, poor infrastructure, particularly damaged roads, and inadequate drainage make conditions especially challenging during the rainy season.			
Challenges in Pune	School Absenteeism	Alcohol addiction, Generational addiction problem		

Compassionate Activities *of* Community Engagement

The Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) initiative aims to build child-friendly, inclusive neighbourhoods by addressing structural issues while nurturing a culture of care and empathy. At the heart of this effort is the belief that sustainable change begins when individuals, especially children, are seen, heard, and supported with compassion. The program uses a range of compassionate tools, including storytelling, community celebration, inclusive learning spaces, and peer-led initiatives to shift attitudes and behaviours. These activities encourage people to think and act with empathy, enabling them to support one another and take ownership of collective well-being. The impact we seek is a visible change in how communities respond to child rights issues—with deeper understanding, emotional connection, and active participation.



ACTIVITES OF COMPASSION



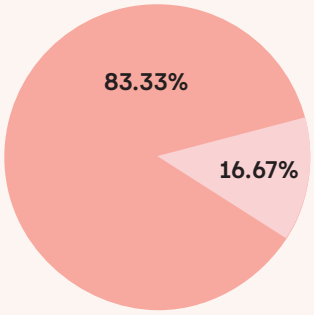
Barriers, Challenges & Limitations

Despite the progress made through Bal Mitra Mandal, key challenges remain across the mindset, structural, and programmatic levels. Deep-rooted gender norms, limited economic opportunities, and gaps in follow-up or leadership transitions continue to hinder lasting change. This section outlines the most persistent barriers observed during field engagement.

1. Mindset-level barriers

MINDSET LEVEL BARRIERS

- Hesitation among girls, driven by fear of judgment or 'saying the wrong thing,' often leads to a longer ice-breaking process. This reflects deep-seated social conditioning around age and authority.
- Gender norms are ingrained over generations and lifetimes. Traditional gender roles can be significant barriers to achieving equality.
- Sometimes, contributions of younger females are often dismissed, suggesting a generational gap in perceptions of voice and agency.



83.33% of the surveyed parents from Delhi were comfortable with the elder child assuming household responsibilities, including caregiving for younger siblings,

while
16.67% preferred to rely on neighbours or relatives for support.

This points to the normalisation of role reversal among children in the absence of adult caregivers, often without full recognition of its impact on the elder child's education and personal development. It highlights the need for greater awareness and support systems that prevent children from having to compromise their learning and well-being to fill caregiving gaps.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

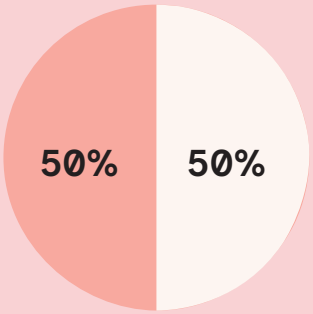
PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

2. Structural challenges

MINDSET LEVEL BARRIERS

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

- Absence of Youth Role Models and Aspirational Anchors
- Multi-Generational Substance Abuse and Its Effects, like Gendered Economic Burden
- Economic hardship leads to education being deprioritised, especially for girls.
- Limited Employment Opportunities for Educated Youth
- Infrastructure Deficits Hindering Progress



50% of the surveyed parents from Pune said they would allow the elder child to take on household responsibilities in the absence of the main caretaker,

while the other **50%** preferred to manage through limited resources or external support.

This reflects the vulnerability and lack of support systems, which are often the triggers of vicious cycles of challenges.

PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

3. Programmatic limitations

MINDSET LEVEL BARRIERS

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

Limited Uptake of De-addiction Support Services

Lack of sustained follow-up and leadership transitions reduces momentum for community-led initiatives

Dependency on external facilitators (SMGC team) limits the internalisation of behavioural and mindset changes within the community.

These challenges highlight how deeply entrenched issues—ranging from gender norms and economic insecurity to weak local leadership—are interwoven and mutually reinforcing in underserved urban communities. Tackling child rights in such contexts requires a holistic approach that acknowledges and addresses the full ecosystem of barriers. Delhi & Pune are 2 major places where the BMM programme has been implemented.

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4.1 Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) Programme *in* Sanjay Camp, Chanakyapuri, Delhi

Understanding the Neighbourhoods: Context and Need Assessment

Approximately 6,343 slums, with around 10.20 lakh households, were estimated to exist in urban Delhi in 2012.[11]

These densely populated settlements are complex ecosystems marked by inadequate infrastructure, limited access to education and healthcare, and a lack of safe spaces for children. In such environments, children's voices are often overlooked, and their rights compromised. The Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) programme in Delhi seeks to transform these urban slums into inclusive, child-friendly communities, where children are not only protected but also empowered to lead change, supported by compassionate adults and responsive systems.

1. A bird's eye view summary of the Bal Mitra Mandals in Delhi

Population Range

Around

7000

Primary Occupation

Daily wages:
factory, labour, domestic help

Caste Structure

Most slums are home to people from diverse religious backgrounds. People from lower economic strata live in urban slums.

Challenges

- Due to the settlement being located in a slum area, poor infrastructure, particularly damaged roads, and inadequate drainage make conditions challenging especially during the rainy season.
- Communities face a range of interconnected challenges, including high school absenteeism, low engagement of girls, inadequate educational and healthcare infrastructure, and weak community leadership. Deep-rooted gender norms, caste-based discrimination, safety concerns, and lack of vocational opportunities further limit agency, mobility, and collective problem-solving, particularly for women and youth.

Programme Enablers in Delhi

From a behavioural lens, enablers are crucial because they create the conditions that make positive actions possible, easier, and more likely to be repeated. Whether it's access to information, supportive social norms, role models, or safe infrastructure, these enablers reduce friction, build motivation, and bridge the gap between awareness and action, allowing individuals and communities to sustain meaningful change.

[11] GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL CAPITAL TERRITORY OF DELHI. (n.d.). https://des.delhi.gov.in/sites/default/files/urban_slums_in_delhi.pdf

1. Key Enablers

Community Engagement and Mobilisation:

- Youth groups like Yuva Mandal and Bal Parishad actively engage the community through rallies, street plays, and awareness campaigns (e.g., against substance abuse and child marriage).
- Women's groups (Mahila Mandal) conduct door-to-door awareness and facilitate community meetings to discuss health, education, and social issues.

Role Models and Peer Influence:

- Youth members who have successfully enrolled in vocational training (like hotel management) inspire others to pursue similar paths.
- ASHA workers and Mahila Mandal members serve as local role models, showing that women can step out of traditional roles and contribute meaningfully.

Supportive Networks:

- The formation of groups like Bal Samiti and Mahila Mandal helps create support systems where community members collectively address issues like domestic violence and child labour.

Collective Problem-Solving:

- Communities are increasingly adopting a collective approach to problem-solving, discussing issues openly, and deciding on action plans together (e.g., resolving electricity issues through collective appeals).

Support from NGOs and Local Leaders:

- Active involvement of NGO representatives and local leaders (like Neha Didi) who guide, motivate, and resolve community issues encourages continuous engagement.
- Political support from local MLAs, especially in providing spaces for meetings and community discussions, fosters a conducive environment for change.
- It was observed that people are receptive to tuition teachers and the advice they offer, since they are closely involved in their children's education.

Access to Information and Training:

- Community members are becoming more aware of their rights and opportunities through meetings, training sessions, and career counselling. This increased knowledge fosters proactive decision-making.
- School and vocational training initiatives (e.g., tailoring classes, computer skills) empower youth and women to seek better opportunities.

Programme Impact in Delhi

The Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) programme has created a meaningful impact across multiple levels—shifting individual mindsets, strengthening community participation, and improving access to services and opportunities. By centring children's voices and supporting participatory action, the programme has been conducive to both personal and systemic change.

1. Child-Level Impact

Children previously out of school are now enrolled and attending regularly, with improved attendance among girls

Enhanced career clarity and confidence among youth, with exposure to diverse career paths

Equal access to education for girls and boys, with strong parental support

Confident youth engagement in public speaking, street plays, and community mobilisation

Access to computers, libraries, and creative activities supports holistic development.

Youth-led identification and resolution of community issues like child labour and unsafe infrastructure

Active child participation in awareness drives on child marriage and the importance of education

Youth-led substance abuse prevention through campaigns and community-based monitoring

Increased awareness among youth about child rights, including education and protection from labour

In Sanjay Camp,

100% of youth

demonstrated strong awareness of their rights and entitlements, including education, employment, and protection, and actively engaged in conversations around gender, civic responsibilities, and government schemes.

In Sanjay Camp,

66.67% of youth

reflected a positive shift in mindset, embracing gender equality, rejecting harmful behaviours, and challenging discriminatory norms in both private and public spaces.

In Sanjay Camp,

100% of youth

exercised agency by taking leadership roles in governance spaces and community-driven campaigns, advocating for rights, inclusion, and developmental change at the local level.

Success Stories

Megha– Youth Leadership and Career Aspirations

'I want to redefine what being a woman entails in my community'

As a Yuva Mandal member, Megha has grown into a confident youth leader, actively engaging in community dialogues and peer mobilisation. With increased exposure and support, she now aspires to pursue a professional career, challenging expectations placed on young women and inspiring others to dream beyond traditional roles.

Keerti – Theatre as a Tool for Social Change

'I believe in storytelling as a means to change'

As a Bal Parishad member, Keerti discovered her passion for theatre. Through street plays on child rights, education, and gender equality, she uses performance to spark dialogue and shift mindsets. Keerti's storytelling has become a powerful force for awareness and collective action in her community.

When faced with a scenario where their daughter has received a scholarship for a PhD but is also under social pressure to marry,

100% of parents

chose to delay her marriage and support her continued education, even though she was already qualified to work.

This reflects

a progressive shift in parental attitudes towards girls' education, with families increasingly valuing personal aspirations and academic growth over traditional timelines for marriage. It also highlights a growing confidence in the long-term benefits of higher education for daughters, despite prevailing societal expectations.

2. Household-Level Impact

- Women who were previously confined to domestic spaces now access jobs and public services independently.
- Women openly discuss menstrual health, a shift from earlier discomfort and secrecy.
- Most women now have bank accounts and are aware of saving practices and financial schemes.
- Women participate in decision-making within households and community forums.
- Increased awareness of government schemes among women, especially related to health and welfare.
- Parents now support their daughters' education and consult youth leaders for guidance.
- Families approach the Bal Parishad for help with admissions and resolving domestic challenges.

Family Stories:

Lata– From Housewife to Community Leader

"I was once confined to domestic work, but now I lead discussions on women's rights and advocate for girls' education."

Once confined to domestic responsibilities, Lata's involvement in the Mahila Mandal transformed her confidence and visibility. She now leads discussions on women's rights, advocates for girls' education, and mobilises her neighbourhood on local issues, evolving into a respected community leader.

In Sanjay Camp,

79.98% of women

reported awareness of their legal rights and entitlements, including education, protection, financial inclusion, and government welfare schemes, and actively took part in conversations around gender equality and community wellbeing.

In Sanjay Camp,

96% of women

indicated a shift in mindset, with greater confidence in making independent choices, increased family support for their roles outside the home, and a decline in restrictive gender norms affecting mobility and opportunity.

In Sanjay Camp,

99.5% of women

demonstrated increased agency, participating in decision-making at home, engaging in community platforms, and stepping into leadership roles or accessing support in situations of domestic abuse.

When asked how they would guide their child after completing high school at age 18,

100% of parents

expressed a clear preference for their child to pursue higher education, despite the additional time and financial investment required.

When presented with the scenario of ageing parents unable to continue working and a child who had completed basic schooling,

100% of the surveyed respondents

chose to have their child continue with traditional higher education, rather than opt for immediate earning through vocational training.

A reality check on current family priorities revealed that

100% of parents

of parents cited children's education as the primary expense,

while 66.67% said

most of their time is spent with their children, indicating a strong and conscious focus on their development.

This indicates

a strong aspirational mindset among parents, reflecting their belief in education as a pathway to long-term financial stability and upward mobility. It also suggests a willingness to delay immediate income for the promise of a better future, signalling a shift away from short-term survival thinking.

3. Community-Level: Collective Norm Shifts and Participatory Action

The collective community mindset has shifted toward rejecting early marriage and child labour.

Discussions on gender equality are now frequent, with women and youth more visible in public roles.

Community forums like Bal Samiti and Yuva Mandal hold regular problem-solving meetings.

Discrimination (bhedbhav) has reduced, with improved inter-caste and inter-group interactions.

Youth are recognised as capable changemakers by the community, shifting the perception of their role.

Cleanliness, safety, and hygiene efforts have become community-wide norms.

Community-led rallies and health camps on education, sanitation, and substance abuse are now common.

Cultural practices like sending girls to school and consulting youth for advice have gained acceptance.

In Sanjay Camp,

97.4% of community

reported awareness of child rights, gender equality, and the harmful effects of child marriage, with many actively engaging in local discussions on child protection and compassionate leadership.

In Sanjay Camp,

86.75% of community

showed a marked shift in mindset, embracing collective responsibility, challenging social biases, and moving from passive concern to active problem-solving on issues like discrimination, violence, and child welfare.

In Sanjay Camp,

98% of community

exercised agency by participating in local decision-making bodies, reporting violations, and supporting advocacy efforts, leading to visible shifts in community accountability and leadership responsiveness.

When asked about sudden additional resources, all respondents said they would spend extra money on savings, health, or their children, while 100% said they would use three extra hours in a day to work more and increase their earnings, **reflecting a clear prioritisation of security, well-being, and income generation.**

4. Institutional & Ecosystem-Level

Improved school infrastructure, libraries, and toilets through sustained community pressure.

Regular police presence, cameras, and streetlights have increased safety, especially near schools and railway crossings.

Health camps are held regularly, and ASHA workers actively monitor child and maternal health.

Vocational training for girls and women has expanded, including tailoring, paper bag making, and banking.

Support systems like second-hand book sharing and remedial classes have improved continuity in learning.

Community members now rely on youth leaders and committees for the timely resolution of issues.

Improved water pipelines, drainage, and sanitation infrastructure have contributed to healthier environments.

Success Stories

Sanju Devi:

“As an ASHA worker and Mahila Mandal member, I organise health camps and ensure vaccination access for everyone.”

A member of the Mahila Mandal and a dedicated ASHA worker, Sanju bridges the gap between healthcare services and the community. From organising health camps to ensuring vaccination access, her efforts have strengthened trust in public health and empowered women to take charge of their well-being.

Conclusion

The Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) programme in Delhi has shown that creating child-friendly communities in complex urban slums requires a deep understanding of local realities and sustained, participatory action. By working across individual, household, community, and institutional levels, the programme has sparked tangible change—from increased school enrolment and youth leadership to women's empowerment and collective accountability. Its strength lies in recognising that education, child protection, and wellbeing are not isolated concerns but are deeply linked to broader systemic and social factors such as gender norms, infrastructure gaps, and service accessibility. The Delhi experience reinforces that when communities are supported to lead their change, with children at the centre, urban transformation is not only possible, but scalable, inclusive, and rooted in local resilience.

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4.2 Impact of *the* Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) Programme *in* Bhim Nagar, Pune

Understanding *the* Neighbourhoods: Context and Need Assessment

In 2001, 19.4% of Pune's population lived in slums. As per the State of Slums in India - A Statistical Compendium of 2013, 20.7% of households in the city were classified as slum households. According to Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) reports, there are 353 declared and 211 undeclared slums in the city. A major percentage of these slums suffer from a degraded physical environment due to a lack of basic civic amenities such as proper housing, sanitation, drainage, waste disposal, and safe drinking water.

1. A bird's eye view summary of *the* Bal Mitra Mandals *in* Pune

Population Range

Around

5500-6000

Primary Occupation

- Women - domestic work
- Construction site workers, drivers

Caste & Class Structure

The population predominantly includes SC, ST, and Buddhist communities, with some muslim households.

Challenges

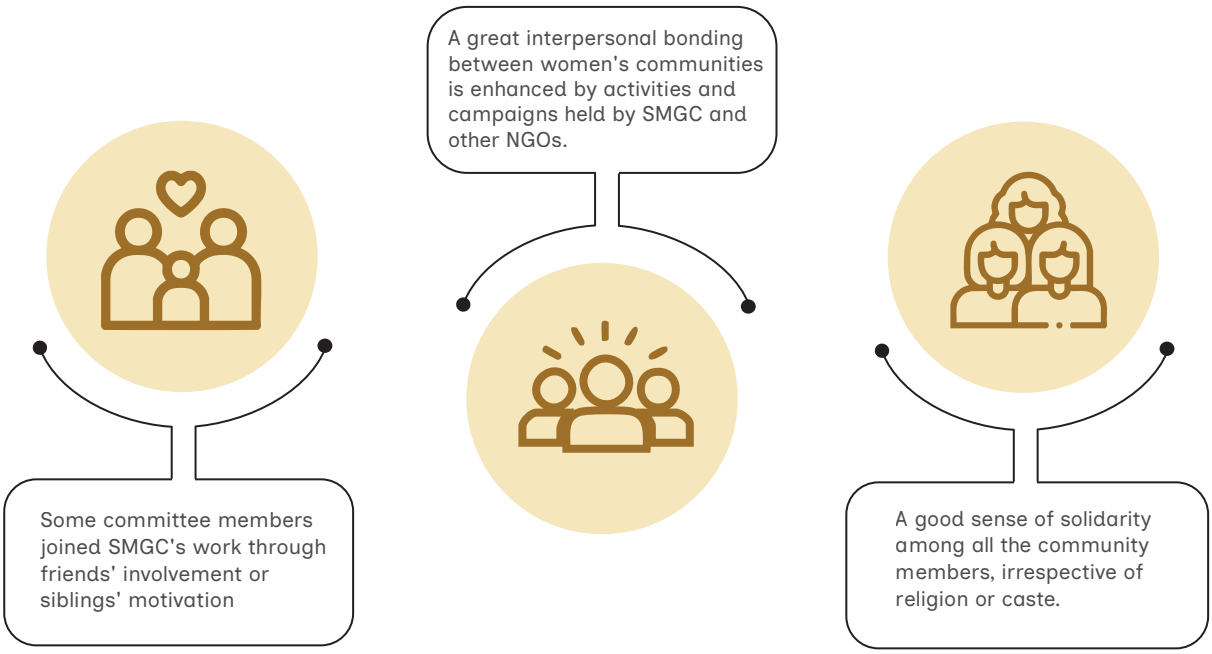
Although the community is located in Pune city and has good access to facilities and infrastructure, parking remains a significant challenge due to the cramped layout and unplanned construction. Many houses have unauthorised extensions that encroach on roads, narrowing them considerably. As a result, residents often park their vehicles in front of homes and along these narrow lanes, especially at night. This creates serious obstructions, making it difficult for emergency vehicles like ambulances to access certain areas.

Programme Enablers *in* Pune

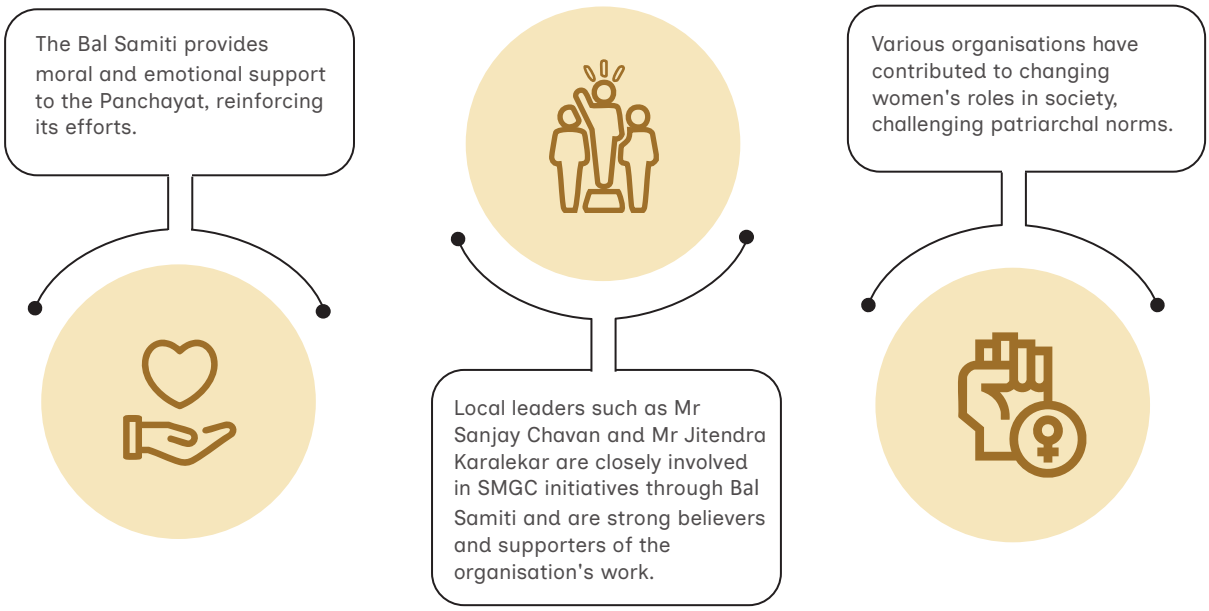
Understanding enablers within a community or neighbourhood is crucial because they create the conditions that make positive behaviour change possible and sustainable. These enablers—such as supportive leaders, trusted institutions, and accessible services—help overcome barriers and build collective momentum towards long-term transformation.

1. Key Enablers

Community unity and solidarity



Support from NGOs and community leaders



Access to urban infrastructure and facilities

Parents have a range of schooling options based on their preferences for medium (English or Marathi), location, fees, and additional support.

Students have access to a broad pool of colleges and career options after completing 10th or 12th grade.

Proximity to healthcare facilities makes it easy to seek specialised medical treatments or medicines. Reduces dependency on community-level camps organised by SMGC or any other NGOs. Although there is high participation in these health camps.

A well-connected public transport network, especially in this area, enables residents to travel across the city. A central bus depot located right outside the basti allows community members to move around the city for work, education, and other needs.

Programme Impact *in* Pune

The Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) programme has created meaningful impact across multiple levels—shifting individual mindsets, strengthening community participation, and improving access to services and opportunities. By centring children's voices and fostering collective action, the programme has enabled change that is both personal and systemic.

83.3% of the surveyed parents in Bhim Nagar preferred to rely on external schemes, relatives, and new income sources rather than involving children in part-time work during a financial crisis caused by a natural calamity.

This indicates a strong inclination among families to protect children's right to education and prioritise long-term stability over short-term coping strategies that might compromise their learning.

Change has thus occurred across different levels of society- in people's minds, in families, schools and interactions with the system as well.

1. Child-Level Impact

Children are now **aware of their rights** and confidently engage with adults, including **participation in Bal Parishad meetings** and **decision-making**.

Girls now raise concerns like **sanitation** in schools during meetings, indicating growing **gender equity and confidence.**

Children educate their parents on issues like **child rights and education,** creating intergenerational awareness.

Youth take initiative in organising **community campaigns, leading rallies,** and **conducting outreach** to **promote school enrolment**.

Members conducted **summer campaigns at traffic signals**, facilitating **68 school admissions** and **providing meals to underprivileged children.**

Bal Parishad resolved **drainage** and **electricity issues** through **local authority engagement.**

Children reject child marriage and influence peers to stay in school through informal **counselling.**

Youth now consider **diverse careers** and understand the value of **financial independence** through livelihood awareness.

Girls and **boys** are actively involved in **sports, arts**, and **festival organisation,** enhancing collective expression and **leadership.**

In Bhim Nagar,

91% of the children

demonstrated awareness of their rights, including education, protection, and participation, and showed familiarity with available mechanisms to report abuse and exploitation.

In Bhim Nagar,

95.38% of the children

reflected a positive shift in mindset, opposing early marriage, expressing confidence in asserting their rights, acknowledging future aspirations, and embracing inclusive values like inter-caste friendships and valuing education quality.

In Bhim Nagar,

85.25% of the children

actively exercised agency by participating in community programs, taking on leadership roles, and engaging in local advocacy efforts, marking a shift from passive beneficiaries to active changemakers.

In Bhim Nagar,

91% of the youth

demonstrated strong awareness of their rights and entitlements, including education, employment, and protection, and actively engaged in conversations around gender, civic responsibilities, and government schemes.

In Bhim Nagar,

78.4% of the youth

reflected a positive shift in mindset, embracing gender equality, rejecting harmful behaviours, and challenging discriminatory norms in both private and public spaces.

In Bhim Nagar,

69.4% of the youth

exercised agency by taking leadership roles in governance spaces and community-driven campaigns, advocating for rights, inclusion, and developmental change at the local level.

Success Stories

Re-enrollment Through Awareness

A young boy had dropped out of school due to financial stress and spent his days roaming around. When he came to the centre, the Bal Parishad intervened, explained the benefits of government schooling to his parents, and successfully convinced them to re-enrol him in Class 10.

Ravi:

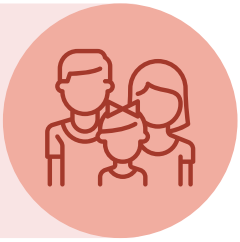
“I was just a silent observer in class, but now I’m a Bal Parishad leader and want to become a lawyer”

Once a quiet observer, Ravi is now an active Bal Parishad leader, aspiring lawyer, and respected community voice. Through sustained participation in SMGC and community initiatives, he has grown into a confident changemaker, resolving issues and motivating peers across the basti.

2. Household-Level Impact

- Women now independently access healthcare, financial services, and public spaces, shifting household norms of dependency.
- Menstrual health and taboo topics are openly discussed in women's groups and sessions held at SMGC.
- Women actively assist in children's education, serve as counsellors, and participate in local governance.
- Banking literacy has improved; most women now have bank accounts and understand schemes like Ladki Bahin and PM Swanithi.
- Many women attend vocational training in tailoring, cooking, and plumbing, creating new income opportunities.
- Women collectively organised events like Savitribai Phule Jayanti, reflecting growing civic engagement.
- Women increasingly seek financial independence and participate in household decision-making and budgeting.

Across all surveyed parents in Bhim Nagar, household income is primarily spent on education, groceries, healthcare, and loan repayments, reflecting a tight financial balancing act to sustain essential needs. Parents' time is mostly consumed by paid work and household chores, with limited space left for personal development or leisure, though some parents consciously prioritise time with their children.



In Bhim Nagar,

96.56% of the women

reported awareness of their legal rights and entitlements, including education, protection, financial inclusion, and government welfare schemes, and actively took part in conversations around gender equality and community wellbeing.

In Bhim Nagar,

64.96% of the women

indicated a shift in mindset, with greater confidence in making independent choices, increased family support for their roles outside the home, and a decline in restrictive gender norms affecting mobility and opportunity.

In Bhim Nagar,

84.62% of the women

demonstrated increased agency, participating in decision-making at home, engaging in community platforms, and stepping into leadership roles or accessing support in situations of domestic abuse.

In Bhim Nagar,

88.25% of the parents

demonstrated awareness of child rights, particularly around education and protection, and showed strong support for girls' continued schooling.

In Bhim Nagar,

93.16% of the parents

reflected a shift in mindset, embracing improved health-seeking behaviours, opposing early marriage, and aligning with more aspirational goals for their children's future.

In Bhim Nagar,

78.43% of the parents

were actively engaged in community-based actions, such as promoting education, advocating against child marriage and labour, and participating in health and school-related initiatives.

Family Stories:

Swati:

"After my husband's suicide, I moved out of my in-laws' home and became the sole earner for my family."

After her husband's suicide, Swati moved out of her in-laws' home and became the sole earner for her family. Through Mahila Mandal and SMGC's capacity-building programs, she gained the confidence to support her children's education and navigate financial and emotional independence.

100%

of the parents

preferred that their child pursues higher education after high school, even if it required additional time and money, reflecting a collective aspiration for long-term economic mobility over immediate income.

In a scenario where parents were ageing and unable to work,

66.6%

of the parents

still chose traditional schooling over vocational training for their child, indicating a sustained belief in the value of formal education despite economic pressures.

92%

of the parents

were willing to delay their daughter's marriage to support her aspiration of pursuing a PhD, indicating a strong shift toward valuing educational and career goals for girls despite traditional social pressures.

This points towards how perception towards education has shifted.

3. Community-Level: Collective Norm Shifts *and* Participatory Action

Cleaner streets, improved drainage, and increased police presence around schools reflect community-wide shifts in safety and hygiene.

Community norms have shifted against child marriage and gender discrimination, driven by ongoing rallies and awareness campaigns.

Superstitions and restrictive traditions are declining due to increased exposure to education and child rights discussions.

Joint efforts like teaching underserved children and organising events show growing unity and shared purpose.

Bal Parishad and youth groups are seen as legitimate actors by the community and local institutions.

Community forums meet regularly to assess children's issues and take action, such as door-to-door age verification.

Youth now influence household discussions and resolve issues like school dropout and absenteeism among peers.

Awareness campaigns use relatable messages like 'Roti, Khel, Padhai, Pyaar' to promote holistic child rights.

In Bhim Nagar,

82.74% of community members

reported awareness of child rights, gender equality, and the harmful effects of child marriage, with many actively engaging in local discussions on child protection and compassionate leadership.

In Bhim Nagar,

97.5% of community members

showed a marked shift in mindset, embracing collective responsibility, challenging social biases, and moving from passive concern to active problem-solving on issues like discrimination, violence, and child welfare.

In Bhim Nagar,

61.82% of community members

exercised agency by participating in local decision-making bodies, reporting violations, and supporting advocacy efforts, leading to visible shifts in community accountability and leadership responsiveness.

Community Stories :

During summer vacations, Bal Parishad members visited 10 traffic signals to engage with out-of-school children. Despite public misunderstanding and suspicion, they clarified the situation and helped facilitate 68 school admissions, playing a key role in advocating for inclusive education and systemic support for vulnerable children.

The Bal Parishad identified a recurring safety issue caused by exposed electricity wires. They submitted a formal application to the MSEB, leading to the wire removal. This made the area safer and allowed residents to construct upper floors on their homes.

4. Institutional & Ecosystem-Level

INSTITUTIONAL & ECOSYSTEM-LEVEL

- Local governance systems respond to child-led petitions, such as fixing hanging wires and sanitation issues.
- Women now access health services and vaccination programs at PHCs and participate in health camps.
- Regular school and household visits help assess child well-being, monitor attendance, and identify support needs.
- Child-friendly infrastructure like libraries and sports facilities has improved through community pressure.
- Bal Parishad is seen as a trusted platform; families who once resisted now proactively seek help from them.

Conclusion

When asked how they would utilise an unplanned, sudden income, most surveyed parents expressed a desire to spend it on children's education-related needs, such as tuition fees and school materials, with a few mentioning long-pending personal or loan-related expenses, indicating deferred aspirations due to income limitations.
If given extra hours a day, many would choose to work more or learn new skills like tailoring or art, pointing to a strong aspiration for self-improvement and earning capacity, while others expressed a longing for more quality time or experiences with children.

Long-term aspirations shared by surveyed parents in Pune include owning a home, improving quality of life, and pursuing personal learning or travel experiences, but these remain distant due to financial constraints.
To prioritise their children's wellbeing, parents cited the need for financial aid, career guidance, access to scholarships, extracurricular exposure, and better-quality coaching, showing that while education remains central, there is a desire for a more holistic developmental ecosystem.

While this points towards challenges still prevalent in the Bhim Nagar neighbourhood, insights from the field of this BMM project also highlight how urban communities with access to infrastructure can still face deeply rooted social and behavioural challenges that hinder child rights and wellbeing. Through sustained engagement, the programme has enabled children, women, and youth to shift from passive recipients to active participants in shaping their communities. From challenging gender norms to building civic consciousness and influencing local governance, BMM has fostered change at multiple levels—individual, household, community, and systemic. The Pune node of the project reinforces the value of locally anchored leadership, community trust, and consistent support in creating inclusive, responsive environments where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

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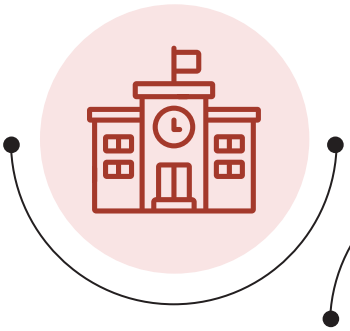
4.3 What's next for Bal Mitra Mandal

Recommendations

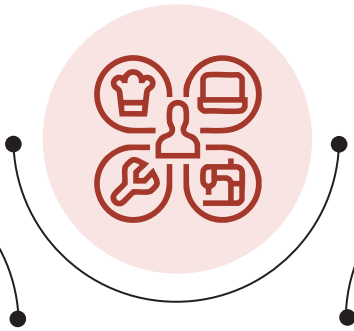
Creating truly child-friendly and inclusive urban communities requires more than addressing individual issues in isolation. The following recommendations are informed by on-ground insights and are organised across four key domains: education, community ecosystem, strategy, and stakeholder engagement. Together, they provide a holistic, sustainable, and context-sensitive response to the complex, interconnected challenges faced by children and their families.

Education-centred Recommendations

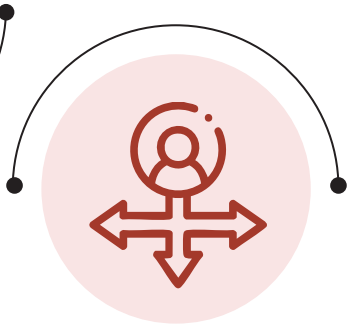


Improve school infrastructure, including secure toilets, drinking water, and lighting, to ensure safe and inclusive learning environments.

Encourage continued education of girls through incentive schemes to reduce dropouts after Grade 8 and delay child marriage.



Integrate sports, arts, and vocational training into education to enable children to pursue non-traditional or interest-based career paths.



Expand career guidance initiatives to help children and youth explore diverse and aspirational career opportunities.

Support personalised learning by recognising and nurturing children's talents and interests.

Organise structured career counselling sessions that guide children toward scholarships, vocational training, & employment pathways.

Address educational gaps by supporting youth who dropped out to re-engage with learning or skill-building.

Introduce gender-sensitive sanitation and infrastructure upgrades to make schools safer and more welcoming for girls.

Ecosystem-based Recommendations

As per insights from Delhi, when asked how they would manage during a financial crisis caused by a natural calamity:

66.67% of parents chose to rely on internal coping mechanisms, including having all family members, even children, take up part-time work to ensure household stability.

The remaining 33.33% preferred to seek external support through government schemes, relatives, or alternative income sources.

This reflects a strong sense of self-reliance among families, shaped by limited trust in external support systems. However, the use of child labour as a coping strategy highlights the vulnerability of such households and the urgent need for robust, accessible social protection mechanisms to prevent children from being pushed into work during crises.

When asked about long-term aspirations they were struggling to achieve,

66.67%

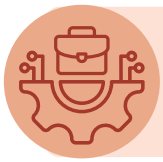
of parents mentioned securing a better future for their children, while others spoke of owning a house or land. To prioritise their child's education and well-being, all respondents emphasised the need for better teaching or coaching, along with improved opportunities after education, highlighting the importance of both quality education and clear career pathways.

Strengthen health awareness campaigns focused on child hygiene, nutrition, and maternal care through schools and community networks.

Promote de-addiction and rehabilitation programs, incorporating life skills, counselling, and family support, to protect children from intergenerational addiction.

Create safe community spaces where children and youth can discuss mental health challenges and access basic counselling services.

Enhance access to healthcare services for children and mothers through regular medical camps and outreach services.



Provide diversified skill-building options for youth and women to reduce the school-to-work transition gap and enhance economic agency.

Develop safe public infrastructure, including roads and lighting, to ensure secure transit to school and public spaces for children.

Empower children to advocate for infrastructure improvements, such as resolving drainage and electricity issues, by engaging local authorities.

Foster gender sensitisation programs that promote equitable roles in education, decision-making, and community life.

Use peer-led sports and cultural activities to develop life skills and promote positive behaviour change among youth.

Build leadership skills among children and youth, focusing on communication, advocacy, and problem-solving.

Document and share child-led success stories to inspire replication and celebrate community achievements.

Ecosystem-based Recommendations

- Encourage joint committee meetings (Bal Panchayat, Yuva Mandal, Mahila Mandal) to co-design child-focused solutions.
- Establish formal engagement with local authorities to ensure timely action on child protection, education, and infrastructure needs.
- Increase legal awareness among children and families regarding child marriage laws, RTE provisions, and child protection rights.
- Facilitate community training in basic monitoring and evaluation of child rights programs using simple tools.
- Strengthen collaboration between community groups and schools to ensure holistic child development and safety.
- Leverage informal youth spaces (e.g., sports tournaments, festivals) to introduce life skills and child protection messages.

Strengthen partnerships with ASHA workers, teachers, and NGOs to deliver integrated child development services.

Engage local police and governance officials to address infrastructure, substance abuse, and safety concerns impacting children.

Mobilise local leaders and political representatives to advocate for systemic improvements in education, health, and child protection.

Expand outreach on government entitlements, including scholarships, nutrition programs, and child protection schemes.

Align Mahila Mandal and SHG activities to support mothers of school-going children through livelihood and emotional support.

These recommendations highlight the need for multi-layered action that bridges gaps in infrastructure, behaviour, leadership, and service delivery. By aligning efforts across community groups, institutions, and local governance, the Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) programme can catalyse systemic change, ensuring that every child is safe, heard, and supported in realising their full potential.

The Future of *the* Bal Mitra Mandal Approach

The Bal Mitra Mandal (BMM) programme demonstrates that building child-friendly urban communities requires more than service delivery—it demands a shift in mindsets, stronger community structures, and sustained local ownership. By centring children's voices, engaging families, and fostering inclusive leadership, the programme has made visible progress in promoting education, preventing child marriage, and creating safer environments.

However, persistent structural barriers such as poverty, gender norms, addiction, and infrastructure deficits continue to challenge long-term change. The learnings from Delhi and Pune underscore the importance of deeply understanding each community's unique ecosystem and tailoring strategies that integrate both compassion and accountability. Looking ahead, the BMM model offers a replicable and adaptive framework for transforming urban neighbourhoods into spaces where every child can thrive.

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The Banjara Education Centre Programme

5

What does a village *with* a Banjara Education Centre look like?

Snippets from the Field

Banjara Education Centres provide basic education and work towards eradicating systemic discrimination, child labour, and forced migration within these marginalised groups. These centres have turned the tide against child labour and forced migration, creating first-generation learners and women leaders. BEC aims to address these socio-cultural challenges through community-based interventions, promoting education and fostering social reform. By fostering holistic education and supporting mainstream school enrollment, BECs drive social reform and ensure long-term empowerment of marginalised families.

100% of parent survey respondents

preferred that their child continue traditional schooling with a focus on higher education and future career opportunities.

This indicates the commonly held viewpoint that stability and success can be achieved through formal education.

Community & *the* Eco-system

In the context of the Banjara Education Centre (BEC) project, the role of the ecosystem and community is especially critical. As many of these nomadic communities have only recently settled, they face complex challenges such as a lack of documentation, insecure land rights, and deep-rooted caste discrimination. These structural barriers make it difficult for children, often first-generation learners, to access formal education. In such a context, the support of the broader community becomes essential. It is the collective trust, participation, and encouragement from families, local leaders, and neighbours that create a nurturing environment where children can begin learning, stay engaged, and eventually transition into government schools.

Overview *of* challenges that were prevalent *in* these areas before *the* Intervention

Child rights issues are often consequences of deeper challenges and barriers in a society. It thus becomes important to understand a wide range of challenges before intervening in any context.

Child Rights Issues

- Absence of nearby schools; children walked 4–6 km to attend school.
- No formal school structure
- Low attendance and retention in schools
- Children loitered or worked in roadside hotels/dhabas.
- High school dropout rates due to fees for higher education and a lack of motivation.
- No provision of educational materials or extracurricular exposure.
- Child marriage was common; cultural and economic pressures pushed early marriage.

Women's Issues

- Women were excluded from public discussions and decision-making.
- Strict gender norms—ghunghat practices and seating restrictions near elders.
- Women lacked financial agency and did not work outside the home.
- Domestic violence was prevalent, often linked to alcohol abuse.
- No structured platforms for women's engagement.
- Limited or no access to local livelihood opportunities.

Social Issues

- Families lacked caste certificates, ration cards, and bank accounts.
- Errors in official records (e.g., voter ID, pension details).
- People could not avail benefits of schemes due to the lack of education and awareness
- Seasonal migration by men disrupted family and community stability.
- Lack of diversification in sources of income
- Inter-village tensions and caste-based clashes
- Lack of civic engagement, collective problem-solving, and youth involvement.

Infrastructure Issues

- No proper roads, and inaccessibility during monsoons.
- Poor sanitation and hygiene, lack of clean water and clothing.
- No electricity or lighting in homes, schools, or streets.
- Lack of water sources—handpumps, borewells, or piped water were missing.
- Anganwadis and schools were far or non-existent.
- Health services were scarce—only occasional ANM visits, no clinics.

Social Issues

Specific challenges in Neemdi surround the absence of ownership of land and the consequential lack of amenities, entitlements and social stigma and caste discrimination.

Activities in *the* Education Centres-Nature *of* Education in the Centres

Basic Literacy and Numeracy: Teaching early literacy skills in **Hindi, English, and Mathematics** using hands-on, activity-based methods.

Non-Formal Education: Structured learning to bring children up to **age-appropriate learning levels** so they can be mainstreamed into formal government schools.

Activity-Based Learning: Emphasis on **interactive and engaging pedagogy** to help children grasp fundamental concepts joyfully and inclusively.

Remedial and Transition Support: Continuous follow-up to ensure that children **enrolled in formal schools** stay retained and perform well academically.

Child Rights Awareness: Regular sessions on child rights, encouraging children to recognise and speak out against exploitation.

Career and Vocational Exposure: Older children receive **career counselling** and exposure to professional courses as they progress in their education.

This holistic and context-sensitive educational model not only builds academic skills but also supports children's social and emotional development, making the idea of going to 'school' accessible and sustainable for the marginalised Banjara communities.

Barriers, Challenges & Limitations

Despite the progress made through the Banjara Education Centre (BEC) programme, significant challenges persist across the mindset, structural, and programmatic levels. Entrenched gender norms, economic instability, and inconsistencies in follow-up and community leadership continue to limit the depth and sustainability of change. This section highlights the most pressing barriers identified during field engagement.

1. Mindset-Level Barriers

Deep-rooted patriarchal norms that limited women's mobility, voice, and decision-making power.

Fear of social judgment or backlash when resisting traditional practices (e.g., child marriage, girls speaking up).

Cultural reliance on traditional healers sometimes delays effective medical intervention.

Two-thirds of the surveyed respondents (66.67%)

were willing to take the risk of marrying off their daughter first, with the hope that she would continue her studies after marriage.

This reflects

the deep-rooted tension between cultural norms and educational aspirations for girls, and the fragility of those aspirations once marriage occurs.

When asked about what families would spend on, were they to receive sudden unplanned income,

50% of the respondents

mentioned jewellery, while

another 50% highlighted

their child's education.

Some also spoke of savings.

This implies

that families navigate a blend of cultural priorities and emerging aspirations, while jewellery reflects traditional values and a form of financial security, investing in children's education signals a forward-looking mindset focused on mobility and opportunity.

All surveyed parents mentioned that their major time is spent being involved in work, either domestic or income-generating, as a key part of daily life.

This indicates

a dual burden, especially for women, and highlights the absence of rest or leisure time in low-income households.

2. Structural Challenges

- Seasonal migration of men and youth leads to discontinuity in engagement and schooling.
- Lack of identity documents (caste certificate, ration card, etc.) creates barriers to accessing schemes.
- Geographical isolation—long distances to school, no roads, or the presence of wild animals near schools.
- Economic pressures are pushing children into work or early marriage to reduce the household burden.
- Unresponsive or absent government services (Panchayat, MLA, documentation systems) undermine trust in formal institutions.
- Limited access to information and digital tools—shared button phones, unreliable network, and low digital literacy.
- Health issues and medical expenses drained family resources and disrupted routines.

All surveyed parents (100%)

cited household expenses such as food, health, and school as major financial priorities.

This suggests

that basic needs remain a central concern and influence how families allocate limited resources.

100% of parents

surveyed shared that to ensure financial stability, every family member, including children, would have to contribute through part-time work in cases of family health emergencies, so that the household can function without worry

50% of surveyed parents

said that in cases of emergencies, they would manage with limited resources temporarily, sometimes seeking help from neighbours or relatives. The other 50% said that the elder child in the house would take up additional responsibility.

This points

to a reliance on informal community safety nets (which sometimes include children) in the absence of formal support systems. It also highlights the fragility of formal social support systems, leading to child labour in economic distress, which comes at the cost of education.

All parents (100%)

identified land or housing as a dream they would want to turn into a reality, pointing to longstanding challenges within the Banjara community.

This underscores

the community's marginalisation and lack of secure tenure, which affects access to basic services and entitlements.

3. Programmatic Limitations

Absence of targeted programs to mitigate the impact of seasonal migration on education.

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5.1 *The* Banjara Education Centre (BEC) Programme *in* Neemdi, Rajasthan

Impact of *the* Banjara Education Centre (BEC) Programme *in* Neemdi, Rajasthan

The Banjara community still face complexities around identity documents, land ownership, caste certificates, and pension access. The older generation recalls days of child marriage, nomadic life, and domestic violence, while younger members are slowly finding their footing through education and collective organising. Gatherings, whether for festivals or local meetings, bring the community together, but these are occasional and often triggered by specific problems rather than regular civic engagement.

This is a place shaped by resilience, heritage, and evolving aspirations, where old customs coexist with emerging change, and where every home has a story of struggle, survival, and small beginnings.

Understanding *the* Villages: Context and Need Assessment

A bird's eye view summary of the BECs in Rajasthan

Population Range

Around

350

Primary Occupation

- Pastoralism
- Men migrate for work- this includes animal trade, labour in construction or farming.

Challenges

- Extreme weather
- Land disputes
- Lack of regular water supply

Caste Structure

Scheduled castes and tribes with some population from other backward castes.

Programme Enablers *in* Neemdi

Regular engagement by Ashram staff and volunteers through home visits, school interactions, and awareness sessions built trust and reinforced key messages.

Support from respected community leaders and elders, such as **Bhim ji**, helped promote education and delay early marriages.

Positive influence of older children and peers who modelled desirable behaviours and actively intervened to stop harmful practices like child marriage.

Exposure to cultural and extracurricular activities (e.g. drama, sports, music) boosted children's confidence and participation in community life.

The provision of free incentives like school supplies, uniforms, food, and transport by the Ashram reduced economic barriers to schooling.

Community meetings and rallies around social issues encouraged collective ownership, dialogue, and visibility of key concerns.

Improved infrastructure, including roads, street lighting, handpumps, and functional schools, enhanced access and reduced logistical barriers.

Established trust in the Ashram and its staff made families more open to change and willing to engage with program efforts.

Family members in government or the army served as aspirational figures and reinforced the importance of education and civic identity.

Supportive women in the household, especially grandmothers, played a role in discouraging harmful behaviours like alcohol abuse and promoting healthier norms.

Programme Impact *in* Neemdi

The BEC programme is uniquely positioned to work with semi-settled, migratory populations where formal systems are often absent or inaccessible. Its impact is multi-level, reaching individual children through foundational learning, shifting family attitudes towards education and child rights, and slowly building a culture of aspiration and inclusion within historically excluded communities. Looking at the multi-level impact is thus important to understand the holistic picture.

1. Child-Level Impact

- **Regular school attendance and increased engagement** in sports and cultural activities like kho kho.
- **Improved confidence and self-expression** through active participation in classroom and community discussions.
- Increased pursuit of higher education with the Ashram's support.
- **Peer inspiration and awareness-building** by children returning from the Ashram.
- **Stronger school-community connection** with children celebrating festivals and encouraging peers to attend.
- **Child-led advocacy** through participation in rallies against child labour and child marriage.
- **Deepened trust in the Ashram**, leading to continued education and delayed marriage decisions.
- **Increased access to higher education** with children commuting to nearby towns like Narayanpura for schooling.

In Neemdi,

93.37% of children

demonstrated awareness of their rights, including education, protection, and participation, and showed familiarity with available mechanisms to report abuse and exploitation.

In Neemdi,

96.8% of children

reflected a positive shift in mindset, opposing early marriage, expressing confidence in asserting their rights, acknowledging future aspirations, and embracing inclusive values like inter-caste friendships and valuing education quality

In Neemdi,

76.5% of children

actively exercised agency by participating in community programs, taking on leadership roles, and engaging in local advocacy efforts, marking a shift from passive beneficiaries to active changemakers.

In Neemdi,

100% of youth

demonstrated strong awareness of their rights and entitlements, including education, employment, and protection, and actively engaged in conversations around gender, civic responsibilities, and government schemes.

In Neemdi,

99.1% of youth

reflected a positive shift in mindset, embracing gender equality, rejecting harmful behaviours, and challenging discriminatory norms in both private and public spaces.

In Neemdi,

91.7% of youth

exercised agency by taking leadership roles in governance spaces and community-driven campaigns, advocating for rights, inclusion, and developmental change at the local level.

Success Stories

Resisting Early Marriage

‘I say no to getting married early. Education is my right.’

A young girl, **Trupti**, bravely stood against early marriage, asserting her right to education. Her family supported her decision, signalling a powerful shift in agency and challenging deep-rooted norms that often silence girls’ voices in such matters.

Army Selection as Community Pride

‘I will chart new pathways & inspire younger kids from my hometown’

One child, **Vishal**, successfully cleared the Army’s physical test—an achievement celebrated widely in the village. His success became a symbol of aspiration and pride, encouraging other youth to dream beyond traditional limitations.

Youth Choosing Higher Education

Where once distance and cost kept children from studying, more youth are now pursuing higher education, aided by the Ashram’s support. The shift marks a significant change in educational aspiration and opportunity.

Anish’s Journey of Confidence

‘I am confident, and I can stand up for myself’

Anish, an 18-year-old student, once hesitant and shy in school, gradually gained confidence through participation in cultural events and kho-kho. Her transformation reflects how encouragement and opportunity can shape a young person’s path.

2. Household-Level Impact

- Families who previously supported child labour now discourage it, realising the long-term importance of education.
- Women now actively discuss their children's futures and oppose early marriage practices.
- Girls have begun asserting their right to education and resisting marriage, with families increasingly offering support.
- Family members, especially elder children and educated relatives, have played a key role in stopping child marriages.
- Some families opened bank accounts after Ashram awareness drives; while still new, these accounts are a step toward formal financial inclusion.
- Smartphones or button phones are now present in most households, often shared, aiding communication and school updates.

In Neemdi,

96.7% of women

reported awareness of their legal rights and entitlements, including education, protection, financial inclusion, and government welfare schemes, and actively took part in conversations around gender equality and community wellbeing.

In Neemdi,

93.46% of women

indicated a shift in mindset, with greater confidence in making independent choices, increased family support for their roles outside the home, and a decline in restrictive gender norms affecting mobility and opportunity.

In Neemdi,

79.98% of women

demonstrated increased agency, participating in decision-making at home, engaging in community platforms, and stepping into leadership roles or accessing support in situations of domestic abuse.

In Neemdi,

95.43% of parents

demonstrated awareness of child rights, particularly around education and protection, and showed strong support for girls' continued schooling.

In Neemdi,

89.97% of parents

reflected a shift in mindset, embracing improved health-seeking behaviours, opposing early marriage, and aligning with more aspirational goals for their children's future.

In Neemdi,

73.27% of parents

actively engaged in community-based actions, such as promoting education, advocating against child marriage and labour, and participating in health and school-related initiatives.

100% of the parents surveyed

in Neemdi supported the idea of encouraging their child to pursue higher education, even if it required additional time and financial resources.

This reflects

a strong aspirational value placed on education, despite current financial hardships.

3. Community-Level: Collective Norm Shifts *and* Participatory

- Child marriage, once common at ages 14–15, now typically occurs at 20–22 years.
- Marriage awareness efforts—including home visits, community meetings, and volunteer engagement —have led to widespread change in attitudes.
- Communities now gather to discuss education access and children's welfare in school meetings, held every few months.
- Rallies, campaigns, and slogans initiated by children and Ashram volunteers have contributed to stronger norms around schooling and delayed marriage.
- Villagers once sceptical of education now donate land, resist school demolitions, and contribute funds for amenities like fans.
- Discussions about caste and gender discrimination have decreased within the village society, reflecting a shift in shared norms.
- Neighbours now intervene in cases of domestic violence, reflecting growing community responsiveness and solidarity.

In Neemdi,

91.6% of community

reported awareness of child rights, gender equality, and the harmful effects of child marriage, with many actively engaging in local discussions on child protection and compassionate leadership.

In Neemdi,

88.67% of community

showed a marked shift in mindset, embracing collective responsibility, challenging social biases, and moving from passive concern to active problem-solving on issues like discrimination, violence, and child welfare.

In Neemdi,

73.23% of community

exercised agency by participating in local decision-making bodies, reporting violations, and supporting advocacy efforts, leading to visible shifts in community accountability and leadership responsiveness.

Community Stories

Freedom Fellowship for Education

Four to five children from the village became Freedom Fellows, receiving full support from the Ashram to continue their education. What once felt like a distant dream became real, inspiring others to pursue learning against all odds.

Community-Funded School Improvement

Families in the village came together to raise funds and install ceiling fans at the BEC school. The initiative reflected growing community ownership in creating comfortable, dignified learning spaces for children.

4. Institutional & Ecosystem-Level

- The Ashram and village institutions have worked together to address critical issues—repairing handpumps, laying roads, installing lights, and improving sanitation.
- Education infrastructure has significantly improved: fans, handpumps, tables, solar lights, and a play area are now available at schools.
- Government officers like Patwaris and Gram Sevaks have been involved in documenting land issues and school buildings.
- Health services have improved: ANMs visit monthly for vaccinations and maternal care, and a nearby private clinic is accessible.
- Midday meals provided by the Ashram—including dal-rice, chips, Maggi, and fruits have helped retain children in school.
- Transportation support, like buses, has been arranged for students pursuing education in towns.
- Livelihood shifts are visible: traditional pastoralism has declined, and more people now sell milk than wool.
- Initiatives like Aadhaar enrollment and awareness around death-related schemes and job delays are helping streamline access to entitlements.
- Women are participating more in government employment schemes like NREGA, expanding income and confidence.

Recommendations

The recommendations outlined below are based on field-level insights from semi-settled, historically marginalised communities where structural gaps and social exclusion intersect.

Surveyed Parents from Neemdi
defined a better future in terms of money, success, education, and marriage.

This illustrates
how aspirations are framed through a mix of financial security, formal education, and socially accepted milestones like marriage.

Thus, to ensure lasting change, the approach must go beyond education alone, addressing interconnected issues such as access to services, livelihood security, gender norms, and leadership development.

1. Education-centred

Improve access to nearby schooling options and education streams, particularly for science and higher secondary education.

2. Ecosystem-based Recommendations

- Improve access to water (handpumps, wells), roads, and nearby Anganwadi centres.
- Set up support for resolving land, housing, and documentation issues (e.g., caste certificates, ration cards).
- Facilitate easier access to government services like pensions, healthcare, and education schemes through regular camps and local assistance.
- Address corruption and inefficiencies at points of service (e.g., e-Mitra centres).
- Introduce vocational training programs for women and adolescent girls, such as tailoring, jewellery making, and craft skills.
- Create local income-generating opportunities to reduce dependency on seasonal migration.

3. Strategy Recommendations

- Initiate structured leadership programs for adolescents, particularly to counter negative peer influences.
- Use storytelling, theatre, and youth-led campaigns to challenge harmful practices like child marriage and gender discrimination.
- Identify and celebrate positive deviants and community role models to inspire change from within.

4. Stakeholder Engagement Recommendations

- Ensure regular and inclusive community meetings involving women, youth, and elders.
- Strengthen the role and regular functioning of Mahila Mandals, youth groups, and community forums.

Together, these recommendations underscore the need for an integrated, community-led approach that responds to both immediate needs and long-term aspirations. By strengthening local infrastructure, fostering inclusive participation, and enabling youth and women to lead change, the Banjara Education Centre (BEC) programme can continue to shift entrenched patterns and pave the way for sustained transformation in vulnerable settlements like Neemdi.

The Future of *the* Banjara Education Centre Approach

The BEC programme demonstrates how targeted, community-based education initiatives can unlock access, agency, and aspiration among the most marginalised, first-generation learners. Its strength lies in addressing foundational gaps–such as literacy, documentation, and social acceptance, that often go unaddressed in mainstream interventions. When integrated with broader programmes like Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) or other rural development efforts, BEC can serve as a catalytic layer, strengthening uptake of services, deepening community trust, and accelerating outcomes in education, child protection, and livelihoods. As a flexible, plug-in model, BEC holds immense potential to enhance the efficiency and reach of existing programmes, particularly in hard-to-reach, migratory, or underserved communities.

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Reflections and Recommendations

6

Shifting Mindsets *and* Choices: Comparative Study

To better understand how sustained engagement through the Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) programme influences household decision-making, we posed a series of hypothetical yet realistic scenarios to families in Darolai (a non-intervention site) and Raghunathpura (an intervention site). These scenarios explored critical moments of choice around children's education, work, caregiving responsibilities, marriage, and long-term aspirations, each reflecting the everyday trade-offs families navigate.

The responses offer a window into the values, pressures, and norms shaping these choices, and importantly, how these differ between communities that have been part of rights-based interventions and those that have not. Across themes—whether prioritising child labour over education during crises, or choosing higher education over early marriage—patterns begin to emerge that highlight the transformative potential of awareness-building and ecosystem strengthening.

	DAROLAI (Non Intervention Site)	RAGHUNATHPURA (An Intervention Site)
Financial Crisis and the Role of Children	 When asked how they would cope with financial hardship during a natural calamity, **100%** **of families** in Darolai (non-intervention site) chose to involve children in part-time work, citing the absence of reliable support systems.	 In contrast, in Raghunathpura (intervention site), while **66.67%** still opted for child labour as a coping mechanism, **33.32%** preferred to seek alternative income sources or rely on schemes and support networks. This reflects a growing shift away from normalising child labour, likely influenced by sustained rights-based engagement through the BMG programme.
Immediate Earnings vs. Higher Education: Navigating Aspirations	 When asked how they would guide their child after completing high school, **50%** **of parents** in Darolai preferred that their child begin earning immediately. For many, completing the 12th grade was seen as sufficient, with financial contribution to the household taking priority over further education.	 In contrast, **83.32%** **of parents** in Raghunathpura encouraged their children to pursue higher education, even if it required more time and resources. This reflects a growing belief in long-term investment in education, likely shaped by exposure to future-oriented narratives and role models within the BMG programme.

Vocational Training vs. Traditional Schooling: Balancing Need and Aspiration

Faced with the prospect of ageing parents and limited earning capacity at home,

50%

of families

in Darolai opted for vocational training as a quicker, more accessible path to income. The other 50% chose traditional schooling, driven by a desire to break the cycle and secure better futures for their children—often expressed with frustration at their own constraints.

In contrast,

100%

of respondents in Raghunathpura preferred continued formal education, reflecting a strong collective belief in long-term academic pathways, shaped by sustained awareness efforts and exposure to aspirational narratives within the BMG programme.

Household Responsibilities vs. Education Focus: Role of the Elder Child

In a scenario where the primary caregiver must migrate for seasonal work,

100%

of respondents

in Darolai said the elder child would assume household and caregiving responsibilities—reflecting a prevailing norm where children step in as default caretakers during parental absence.

In Raghunathpura, while

66.67%

echoed this approach, a notable

33.32%

preferred to manage with fewer resources or seek community support, signalling an emerging shift in norms that prioritise children's education over domestic duties. This shift suggests the early influence of child-centred perspectives promoted through BMG interventions.

Marriage vs. Career Aspirations: Navigating Education for Girls

When asked to choose between a daughter's aspiration for higher studies and the societal pressure to marry,

66.67%

of respondents

in Darolai prioritised marriage. The response was shaped by prevailing norms—child marriage had been common in the village, making early marriage a familiar and accepted path.

In contrast,

100%

of respondents

in Raghunathpura supported delaying marriage to allow their daughters to pursue further education. This unanimous response reflects a deep shift in mindset and priorities, underlining the impact of sustained rights-based engagement and community dialogue fostered through the BMG programme.

A Shift from Survival *to* Aspiration

Across all scenarios, Darolai's responses reflected an immediate, survival-first mindset, often rooted in lived realities of economic vulnerability, limited social support, and deeply held cultural norms. Decisions around child labour, early marriage, and vocational shortcuts were not framed as choices but as necessities—pragmatic responses to chronic insecurity.

In contrast, Raghunathpura's responses revealed a visible shift in thinking. Families were more willing to delay gratification, invest in education, and protect childhood, even when this meant going against prevailing social expectations. The emergence of alternative pathways, trust in institutional support, and belief in long-term benefits of education signal a movement from survival to aspiration.

While structural challenges remain, these contrasts make clear that change is not only possible—it is already underway where communities have been equipped with knowledge, support systems, and the space to reflect. The decisions families make are not just about their children's futures, but also about the futures they now dare to imagine.

Parallels *with* the Sustainable Development Goals

This segment explores how SMGC programmes contribute to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to education, gender equality, child protection, and reduced inequalities. It highlights the programme's alignment with global development priorities through local, rights-based action.

Directly impacted

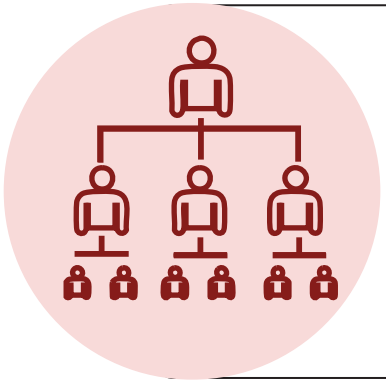
Indirectly impacted

Should address going forward (indirectly)

Learnings *from* the Lens of Behaviour Science

Behavioural science offers a structured lens to understand how individuals and communities gradually shift their attitudes, choices, and actions. SMGC's approach implicitly integrates several behavioural principles, ranging from peer influence, social reinforcement, to restructuring of opportunity environments. The following sub-sections provide an academic synthe sis of how key theories of behaviour change help explain the observed impact in BMG villages across Rajasthan.

Theoretical Principles at Play

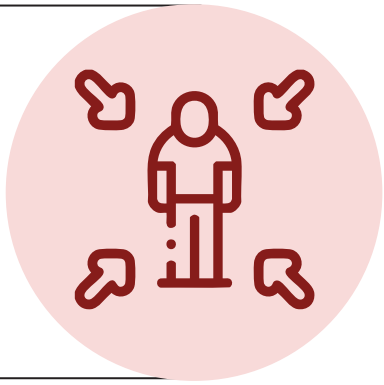


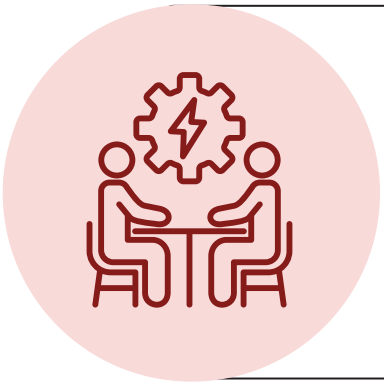
SOCIAL PROOF AND SOCIAL LEARNINGS

Older members sharing success stories have clearly helped others visualise change and feel it was possible for them too. This has been particularly beneficial across villages, with people sharing their own experiences with other villages. Seeing collective action succeed (water pipeline, electricity, and stopping Mrutyu Bhojan) reinforces the belief that change is possible. Children have become active change agents, bringing dropouts back to school. People know that they can write to officials regarding their needs. All these have normalised activism and participation for collective problem-solving.

PEER INFLUENCE AS A POWERFUL DRIVER

Change happens faster when children influence each other rather than relying on adult intervention. Children's peer groups (via Bal Panchayat) are normalising behaviours like higher school attendance and active participation, ensuring that children not just come to school but also make the most out of it. Similarly, mothers who have attended meetings shared instances of how they influenced other mothers in coming to meetings/ doing what is better for their children.



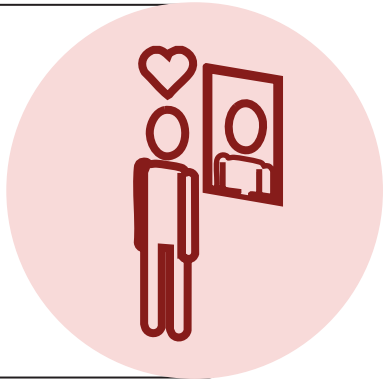


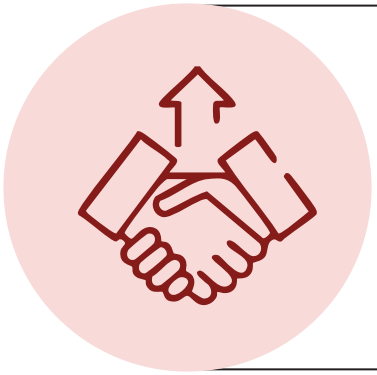
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Before intervention by SMGC, especially in older villages, child marriage and child labour were historically accepted norms. New information about the ill effects of child labour and early marriage naturally created internal conflict, where some shifted away from old habits earlier than others. Initial discomfort with new beliefs regarding caste & gender roles, and how deeply ingrained some of our old beliefs are, both still reflected through stories and lifestyles of people. Mindset change is a long process. Regardless, what community meetings have done is expose people to the rights and newer perspectives that spark thought and reflection.

SELF EFFICACY

The sight of children discussing their dreams and speaking up is a very recent reality for these villages. While it is very normal for fatalism and a habitual distrust to exist in environments where progress is slow, SMGC has instilled the understanding that asking for one's own rights is the bare minimum one can do. Still, discouragement from systemic corruption or poor institutional response remains a risk. Motivating communities must go hand-in-hand with building institutional accountability to ensure that efforts by citizens are not ignored or disheartened.





INCREMENTAL TRUST-BUILDING

For resistance to be replaced by cooperation, the field team of SMGC had to consistently engage with the communities. For trust to grow, smaller incentives like giveaways and snacks for children during initial meetings have gone a long way. The communities affirmed that the field team's efforts to help people beyond issues directly related to child rights helped them develop strong bonds. These bonds played an incremental role in challenging people's long-held beliefs. In one, people are more aware, more connected, and change has already reached the preparation stage instead of being in the pre-contemplation/contemplation stage.

ENVIRONMENT RESTRUCTURING FOR SOCIAL SECURITY

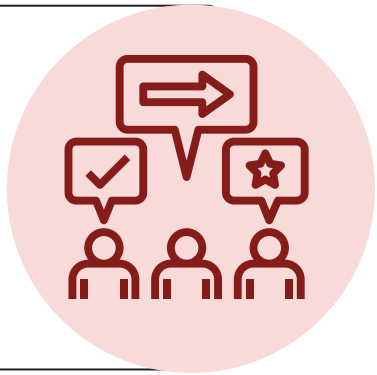
Physical and social environment changes like improved infrastructure in schools, discussions on water conservation, and limiting liquor shops have made healthy choices and personal growth easier and more sustainable. Ensuring access to and awareness of government schemes for financial inclusion has increased social security, supporting new mindsets and behaviours.

COMMUNITY REINFORCEMENT

Collective problem-solving, financial support networks, and structured peer accountability helped reinforce new social norms. It creates a culture of supporting each other in times of need, and this builds a stronger support net for children, too. Community as a whole goes beyond self-preservation and encourages compassion and responsibility.

SHIFTING NORMS

What was once taboo (girls studying, women speaking, questioning caste) is now normal. Social norm shifts take time – While children are changing mindsets, adult buy-in remains gradual and requires a longer time.



EMPOWERMENT

Across many villages, individuals have moved from silence and isolation to confident participation and negotiation in family and public life. Children now advocate for creative learning environments (like drawing classes and better washrooms)—a sign that needs are shifting from basic survival to self-actualisation.

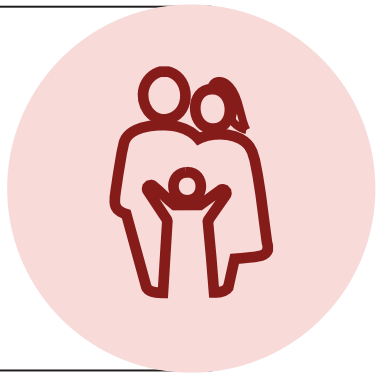
TANGIBLE INCENTIVES/INTSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR LASTING CHANGE:

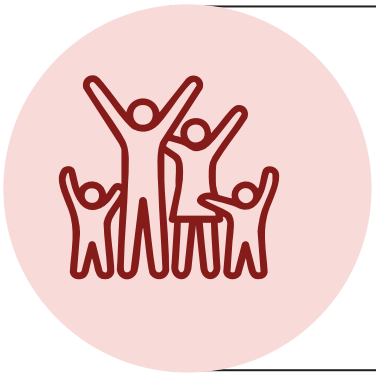
Cycles, awards, and infrastructure improvements reinforce behavioural persistence. Scholarships, transportation, and better infrastructure remove everyday barriers to education and activism.

WHAT CREATES RELATIVE ADVANTAGE?

Some families can accept norms faster than others. It is crucial to understand what creates this gap and empower more people with exactly that which gives some people an advantage over others.

Educated adults often encourage higher-quality education for children
People with a stable economic background can support their children's education better.Exposure to role models, especially those who have succeeded through education or activism, broadens children's aspirations.



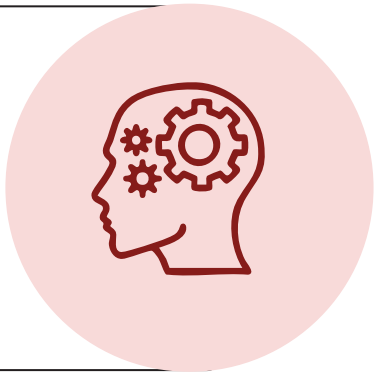


FAMILY BUY-IN ENABLES PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINED CHANGE

Especially in cases of aware women and elders who move homes after marriage, it is observed that they play the role of an enabler for others.

BUILDING CAPABILITY THROUGH KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

Before the intervention, communities had limited awareness of rights and low literacy. The BMG program addressed this by equipping children and adults with legal awareness, practical skills (e.g., petition writing, vocational training), and educational resources. Exposure to rights-based language and computer literacy fostered confidence and the ability to take action.



CREATING ENABLING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION

From unsafe and resource-poor environments, the program enabled access to schools, schemes, and health services. Platforms like Bal Panchayat and Mahila Mandal empowered youth and women to engage with governance, while peer groups and social campaigns fostered solidarity. These opportunities transformed passive recipients into active participants in village development.

Sustaining Motivation *through* Aspiration & Collective Identity

Pre-intervention fatalism gave way to aspiration as families began prioritising education and agency over survival. Role models, small wins (like closing a liquor shop or securing a teacher), and shared struggles helped build trust, pride, and a sense of ownership. Over time, this nurtured and sustained local leadership and collective momentum for change.

What Next?

The Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) initiative, together with the Bal Ashram and Bal Mitra Mandal efforts, represents a long-standing and deeply embedded attempt to reimagine child protection, not as a service delivered from the outside, but as a shared community responsibility. From the remote villages of Rajasthan to the forest-fringed settlements of Karnataka and Jharkhand, the programme has worked to dismantle systemic barriers through community-led platforms and compassion-centred engagement.

BMG

BMM

BEC

At its core, the BMG, BMM and BEC models are behavioural and ecosystem interventions. They recognise that early marriage, child labour, school dropouts, and exclusion from schemes are not isolated issues, but symptoms of structural inequity and inherited norms. In response, the programmes do not merely raise awareness—they work to shift power while building capacities among children, youth and women, while simultaneously creating enabling environments in which rights can be claimed and upheld.

This report has demonstrated that such shifts are possible, measurable not only in percentages but in stories of assertion, leadership, and resilience.

Children who once feared speaking in public now contest elections to Bal Panchayats

Girls once at risk of early marriage are now aspiring to become teachers, doctors, and civil servants.

Families are choosing education over traditional rituals, and women are stepping into public life, armed with information, voice, and community support.

This report underscores the importance of context- caste dynamics in Jharkhand, migration in Madhya Pradesh, or language barriers in Karnataka significantly shape how behavioural shifts manifest and sustain.

To make sure that the impact of the programmes is sustained and amplified, deep-rooted patriarchy, economic hardships, political inertia, and limited infrastructure need to be consistently challenged.

Challenges such as poor connectivity, entrenched social hierarchies, and limited livelihood options repeatedly surface across the field insights.

To make sure that the impact of the programmes is sustained and amplified, deep-rooted patriarchy, economic hardships, political inertia, and limited infrastructure need to be consistently challenged.

Going forward, adaptive, longer-term, and multi-sectoral approaches will guide SMGC to embody and imbibe compassion on the way to enabling communities on their journey to a better quality of life, by working actively towards safeguarding child rights.

Programme design limitations, such as the finite engagement window or the inability to address economic vulnerabilities alongside social ones, also impacted depth and reach in certain areas, pointing towards the need for a broader approach to ensure child rights

Despite these limitations, SMGC programmes demonstrate what becomes possible when communities are not seen as passive beneficiaries but as protagonists of change. Whether it is a young girl writing her first letter to a government official, a Mahila Mandal member debating sanitation in a public meeting, or a Yuva Mandal member stopping a child marriage, the programme has consistently turned intentions into collective action. The emergence of peer-led norms, informal support networks, and mentorship models are early indicators of systemic transformation.

Looking ahead, sustaining and scaling these gains will require deeper integration with state mechanisms and convergence with other rights and livelihood-based programmes.

The potential of alumni networks, digital platforms for community leadership, and stronger livelihood linkages can offer a pathway to reinforce the behavioural shifts already underway.

Moreover, extending programme timelines, institutionalising youth platforms, and embedding social workers in governance processes can help maintain momentum beyond the formal exit.

Additionally, extended sustained engagement with points of contact in villages would only prove fruitful in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organisation's efforts.

Ultimately, the BMG, BMM and BEC models affirm that child rights and community wellbeing are not technical outcomes to be achieved, but social processes to be nurtured. Change requires time, trust, and tenacity. The stories emerging from these villages are a powerful reminder that when the right structures meet the right values, transformation is not only possible, it is inevitable.

This report is the output of a joint study conducted as a collaboration between the Centre for Social & Behaviour Change at Ashoka University and Satyarthi Movement of Global Compassion from January to August 2025.

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