# **BE A NEW THOUGHT:** WEAVE VIOLENCE FREE RELATIONSHIPS

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES

# Canada



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# FOREWORD

*'Bano Nayi Soch'*, is a unique and innovative campaign of Oxfam India. Launched in 2016 to foster positive social norms and gender equality, the name *'Bano Nayi Soch: Buno Hinsa Mukta Rishte'*, means 'Be a new thought: Weave violence free relationships'.

The overarching aim of the campaign has been to mobilise a critical mass of citizens who will promote mutually respectful equal and nurturing relationships which are free of any kind of violence.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is an unfortunate reality, both globally and in India. The National Family Health Survey- 4 (2015-16) reports that one in three women in India face some form of gender based violence. The same survey reported that 52% women as well as 42% of men feel that men are entitled to such violence and women deserve it.

This gender based violence denotes a deep-rooted gender bias in society, where subordination of one gender over the other is legitimized. This bias is visible in norms such as son preference, early and forced marriage, practice of dowry, of dowry deaths, denying a daughter her rightful share in the family property, witch hunting etc. All of these practices, incidentally, exist despite the presence of progressive legislation banning these. Oxfam India has developed the 'Bano Nayi Soch' Campaign to challenge and to change these deep-seated social norms. The campaign has involved intensive capacity building of collectives in the villages and youth in colleges. This capacity building helps them to understand patriarchy and entrenched gender bias in society; to recognize institutionalized subordination of women in the family, society, law and markets; and to develop strategies to delegitimize norms, which uphold this subordination. The campaign has also engaged influential members in society to lead and support the cause. To date, the campaign has reached 50,000 men, women and youth through 1920 collectives in 485 villages and engaged with the youth from 161 colleges in the urban areas, in the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh.



This document is a collection of 'Most Significant Change Stories' of ten young people who were involved in this campaign, and who emerged as Gender Justice Champions. Among others, you will read about Upasna, Samir, Sewati who learnt to promote positive gender norms in their communities. Upasna, a Gender Justice Champion from Jharkhand defied the social norm of getting married and staying at home. She became a wrestler and is coaching an all-boys wrestling team. Samir, from Kandhegaon village of Odisha advocates for equal pay for equal work for the women in his village employed as daily wage workers. Sewati, the Gender Justice Champion from Chattisgarh, challenges the age-old patriarchal traditions in her community. Due to her efforts, the village now has a zero tolerance policy towards domestic violence and has a fine and social boycott as penalty for it.

These are just a representative sample of a few hundred Gender Justice Champions who have come forward in these communities. In turn, they have inspired many more people to challenge regressive social norms that perpetuate violence against women and girls. Challenging such norms, in turn has promoted positive norms that help in building more Gender equal communities. It gives me great pleasure to offer this collection to inspire and to trigger more such efforts in the years to come.

#### Ranu Kayastha Bhogal Director Policy Research and Campaigns Oxfam India

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# Abbreviations

ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist		
AW	Anganwadi Worker		
CEFM	Child Early and Forced Marriage		
CHSJ	Centre for Health and Social Justice		
CS	Creating Spaces		
CSC	Community Score Cards		
EPIC	Engaging People for Change		
FAM	Film Appreciation Module		
FGD	Focus Group Discussion		
GBV	Gender-Based Violence		
HoD	Head of Department		
JCC	Internal Complaint Committee		
KII	Key Informant Interview		
LASS	Lok Aastha Sewa Sansthan		
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer		
MSC	Most Significant Change		
NAWO	National Alliance of Women		
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization		
OIN	Oxfam India		
PCM	Prevention of Child Marriage		
PhD	Doctorate in Philosophy		
PWDV	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence		
SMVS	Sakhiree Mahila Vikas Sansthan		
SRSP	Shri Ramanand Saraswati Pustakalaya		
ТоТ	Training of Trainer		
UP	Uttar Pradesh		
UN	United Nations		
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls		
WRO	Women's Right Organization		
YUVA	Youth United for Voluntary Action		

# Highlights

Oxfam India launched their *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign in 2016 to effect changes in the social norms that underpin violence against women and girls, and Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM).

This campaign which is operational in five states of India, i.e. Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh (UP) is being executed in partnership with 18 Women's Rights Organizations and 20 institutions of higher studies. Under this campaign, Oxfam India partners worked with 23,000 youth, conducted sessions with more than 530 groups of adolescent girls and boys and 650 groups of young women and men. The campaign promoted 215 Gender Justice Champions, 175 from rural and 40 from urban areas.

This document used the 'Most Significant Change (MSC)' methodology to research the stories of ten 'Gender Justice Champions' in five states. The key impacts of the campaign, based on the analysis of stories of ten Champions, is presented below:

- The campaign significantly enhanced Champions' understanding of gender, root causes of gender discrimination, domestic violence and early marriage, and its links with patriarchy, and the role of popular cinema therein. This motivated the Champions to change the prevalent social norms at the individual, family and community levels.
- The Champions underwent a major attitudinal change towards negative social norms and practices, i.e. from being indifferent or helpless to taking a more pro-active stand. There was change in their aspirations as well. Girls and young women were now aspiring towards higher education and career building and breaking the silence of centuries over violence in all forms. Men too were rejecting the codes of genderbased discrimination and toxic masculinity.
- Champions emerged as leaders and agents of social change to end gender discrimination,
  Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and
  Child, Early and Forced Marriages (CEFM). Many of
  the Champions discovered their innate leadership
  abilities and took special initiatives to enforce

positive social norms. The MSC stories suggest a transformation of young men and women from being survivors to becoming strong community voices against violence. It marks their initiation into the world of changemakers who fight against harassment, the gender pay gap, and child marriages by adopting their roles as social media activists.

- Collectives in the rural areas and similarly peer groups in the urban areas served as safe spaces and reference groups for young Champions to freely share their thoughts, ideas and experiences and which in turn motivated the group as a whole. In many cases, mentors, course coordinators, Oxfam India team and partners also worked as reference groups.
- Young Champions acted as influencers for their collectives to disseminate knowledge around gender discrimination, VAWG and CEFM. As grassroot leaders, they got a new identity after getting associated with the campaign, which helped them to lead several initiatives in partnership with members of the collectives.
- Young Champions developed new relationships within families and immediate community to further the positive social norms. They used counselling methods to bring forth changes within their families. Mostly, mothers and siblings supported in enforcing change.
- Strategic engagement with influencers led to debate, discussions and questioning of prevalent social norms, which further created an enabling environment in many of the communities to introduce positive social norms at the institutional level.
- Despite many challenges, the campaign experience suggests that change in social norms is very much possible with active engagement of community and promotion of local Champions.



# PHOTO BY: PRINCE KUMAR, YOUTH CHAMPION FROM BIHAR, OXFAM INDIA

#### Objective of the study

The overall purpose of this study was to understand the effectiveness and impact of individual campaign strategies in effectively changing social norms. Specifically, the key objective of the study was to analyse the impact of *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign strategies concerning adolescent boys and girls and young adults (men and women) and to check if the results were in-line with the campaign's 'Theory of Change'. The study findings will contribute immensely towards the monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts of Oxfam's International's 'Enough!' campaign. Further the study findings are also aimed at helping Oxfam India's efforts of knowledge creation for developing strategies to change social norms to end violence against women and girls.

#### Study Design & Methodology

The study used Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology to capture ten most significant stories of Gender Justice Champions from five campaign states. In each state, the study covered two Gender Justice Champions, i.e. one rural and one urban, except in Jharkhand where both the Champions are from rural areas. The Gender Justice Champions are individuals in all the states except in Jharkhand where the Champions are collectives of adolescents and youths.

The study used qualitative research methodology, which included Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the Champions, collectives, their peers, influencers, partner organizations and mentors. The research team conducted field missions to conduct the above mentioned KIIs and FGDs.

# *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign: A brief



*Bano Nayi Soch*, Oxfam India's campaign launched in 2016, aims to alter the social norms that underpin violence against women and girls, and child early and forced marriage (CEFM). The campaign is operational in five states of India, i.e. Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh (UP).

The campaign aims to mobilize change agents by 2020 to promote mutually respectful, equal and nurturing relationships that are always free of any form of violence. The Hindi name of the campaign, *Bano Nayi Soch: Buno Hinsa Mukt Rishtey* (Be a New Thought: Weave Violence Free Relationships) resonates with its central theme of promoting new thinking around positive social norms for forging violence free relationships.

challenge and change discriminatory social norms that justify VAWG, and is embedded in all the projects of Gender Justice programmes in India. In rural areas, the campaign works with the communities in partnership with the Women's Rights Organizations (WRO) and in urban areas, with the youth by partnering with academic institutions, colleges and universities. The following table presents the state wise list of campaign partners.

End Violence Against Women and Girls" that aims to

The campaign is aligned to Oxfam International's multi-country campaign, <u>"Enough! Together We Can</u>

STATE	WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS (FOR RURAL AREAS)	EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR HIGHER STUDIES (FOR URBAN AREAS)
Bihar	Sakhiree Mahila Vikas Sansthan (SMVS) • Diksha Foundation • RAHAT • Nari Gunjan	Indian Institute of Health Education and Research, Patna • A.N. College • Patna College • St. Xavier's College of Management and Technology, Patna • Patna Women's College • Amity Institute, Patna • Dept. of Gender Studies, Patna University • Department of Sociology, Patna University • Patna Beats, Patna Shots, Patna Diaries: Groups within the institutions.
Chhattisgarh	Lok Aastha Sewa Sansthan (LASS) Nivedita Foundation Trust	Centre for Women's Studies, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur • Bhilai Institute of Technology, Bhilai • Indira Kala And Sangeet University, Raipur • NIT, Raipur • Chaitanya College, Bilaspur
Jharkhand	Lok Swar • Association for Social and Human Awarness (ASHA) • Srijan Mahila Vikas Manch (SMVM) • Society for Participatory Action Research and Knowledge (SPARK) • Chotanagpur Sanskritik Sangh (CSS)	Birsa College, Khunti
Odisha	National Alliance of Women (NAWO) • Indira Social Welfare Organization (ISWO) • Institute for Social Development (ISD) • Women's Organization for Rural Development (WORD)	Utkal University, Bhubaneswar • BJB Autonomous College, Bhubaneswar • Indian Institute of Mass Communication • Media Studies, Dhenkanal.
Uttar Pradesh (UP)	Shri Ramanand Saraswati Pustakalaya (SRSP) • Humsafar • Astitva	Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Urdu Farsi Arbi University, Lucknow • Department of Sociology, Lucknow University.

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#### Bano Nayi Soch Campaign strategies

The campaign follows an intensive strategy for rural areas, to work with local communities and an extensive strategy to work with urban youth in academic institutes, especially students of Media Studies and Mass Communication. Also, every year a new campaign structured around a social norm is introduced. The year-wise three campaign spikes were:

2017: 'F for Freedom'

**2018:** 'Pyaar Mein Vaar Nahi' or 'No Violence in Love'

**2019:** 'Marzi Bina Shaadi Nahi' or 'No Marriage Without Consent' in 2019

A brief of each of the campaign strategies at the community level in rural areas and institutional level in urban areas are described below:

#### COMMUNITY LEVEL STRATEGIES

The community level strategies comprised organizing communities into village level collectives (men, women & youth), building the capacities of collectives through formal curriculums and community score-cards and close engagement with key influencers. Some of the components of these strategies, especially the formal curriculum were adopted and applied in urban areas as well.

- Village-level collectives: In each village, community members were organized in four collectives of 15 – 20 members. The four collectives were of adolescent boys and girls between the age of 13 – 17 years and young adults (women and men) from ages 18 to 29. Under this campaign, 0xfam India partners reached out to 23,000 youths and conducted sessions with more than 530 groups of adolescents and 650 groups of young adults.
- 2. Curriculum rollout: The campaign designed and rolled out separate curriculums of 48 modules for men and women.
- <u>'Jago aurJagao, Badlav ki aur'</u> (Wake Up and Awaken to Bring in Change) for adolescent girls and young women.

- "<u>Gendernama</u>" (About the Gender) for adolescent boys and young men.

The curriculums covered four broad topics: concept of gender, violence against women and girls and legislations thereof, human rights and leadership development. Every month one module was delivered to the collectives in village level meetings.

- 3. Community Score-card: The Community Score Cards (CSC), developed by Oxfam India, is a tool with which the community identifies and maps incidences of domestic violence and child, early and forced marriage. The tool has 45 questions/statements, divided into six broad categories, i.e. (i) general awareness, (ii) the incidence of domestic violence and knowledge of law, (iii) reporting of domestic violence, (iv) awareness regarding child marriage, (v) reporting incidences of child marriage, and (vi) community action. The CSC exercise is conducted annually, where the collectives jointly monitor the parameters on the score-cards. Based on the findings, the collectives and key influencers identify the priority areas and develop social action plans.
- 4. Engagement with Influencers: The campaign engages with key influencers at community, village, block and district levels. In each village, a group of around ten key influencers were formed, which included religious and social group-leaders, panchayat (local self - government) leaders, youth leaders, teachers, frontline workers, viz. Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), and Anganwadi Worker (AWW). The village level influencer group meets every guarter to discuss the situation and progress of action plans. At the block and district levels, bi-annual meetings were organized with key government officials, Panchayati Raj representatives, police officials, lawyers, and activists. These meetings focussed on status of implementation of law and schemes related to campaign themes and also on ways to link the community with relevant government services.



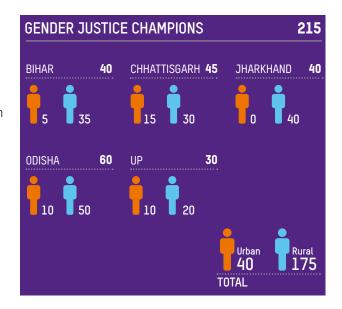
#### INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES

The institutional strategies were directed towards urban youth, especially students of colleges and universities in the state capitals.

- 1. Film Appreciation Module: Oxfam India's 2016 study, 'The Irresistible and Oppressive Gaze: Indian Cinema and Violence Against Women and Girls', [Hyperlink: https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/ all/themes/oxfamindia/images/Impact%20 of%20films%20on%20VAWG Research clean%20 version.pdf] concluded that patriarchy is deeply embedded into mainstream cinema and significantly influences the behaviour and aspiration of the youth. Consequently, Oxfam India developed a module to critically analyse and reflect on the deep-rooted notions of patriarchy and objectification of women in mainstream and popular cinema. The module also focussed on the role of popular media in influencing social norms. The module had four sessions, i.e. (i) Gender-A Social Norm; (ii) Gender Stereotypes in Cinema; (iii) Unboxing Patriarchy; and, (iv) Social Action Project Planning. The module was five and half hours long and was delivered in two 'half-day' sessions. In Odisha, the module was also provided to rural youth.
- 2. 'Gender, Masculinity and Violence Against Women' Curriculum: In response to request for a comprehensive module from Utkal University, Odisha, Oxfam India developed the 12 module course titled, 'Gender Masculinity and Violence Against Women'. This course was based on two of its other courses for rural communities, i.e. 'Jago aur Jagao Badlav Ki Aur' for women and 'Gendernama' for men. This course has so far been delivered only in Utkal University.
- 3. Samanta Saathi Programme (Gender Equality Advocates): Oxfam India trained youth in Chhattisgarh and Bihar to challenge and change existing gender social norms. These 200 young men and boys from colleges and universities, referred to as Samanta Saathi, attended an online course entitled, 'Login: New Man'. This activity was carried out as part of 'Ek Saath', a national campaign carried out in partnership with Centre

for Health and Social Justice, New Delhi. The programme was of three month duration, had six modules and included activities like quizzes, games, stories, videos and selfreflection exercises.

4. Gender Justice Champions: In 2018, as part of the campaign, Oxfam India started recognizing some youth as 'Gender Justice Champions' those who had brought along significant changes in social norms either at the individual or community level. The campaign further trained these Champions through residential workshops to become future leaders and change-makers. These Champions play a critical role in promoting positive gender norms in their personal and public spaces. The campaign also organized inter-state youth conventions for the Champions to facilitate cross learning amongst the rural and urban and community and institutional Champions. Further, Oxfam India frequently organizes several state-level events like film festivals and youth festivals. The Champions closely engaged with the campaign and significantly contributed to organization and management of campaign's mass mobilization activities. The campaign so far has 215 Champions, 175 from rural and 40 from urban areas. The table below presents the state-wise distribution.



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#### MASS MOBILIZATION ACTIVITIES

The mass mobilization activities of the campaign were youth festivals, inter-state and inter-college competitions, street plays, mobile van with infographics, mobile or community radio based interventions, film screenings in schools and colleges, and conferences/seminars on social norms in universities. These events were organized at the block, district, and state levels. The campaign also commemorated 'important days' and provided youth a platform to share their thoughts.

The important mass mobilization activities are provided below:

- 1. Youth Festival: Youth festivals were celebrated bi-annually at block, district and state levels. The members of adolescent collectives and students from urban areas participated in this public event, which conducted multiple creative events and competitions and panel discussions anchored by Champions. The yearly campaign themes inspired the theme of these festivals, which were often combined with other events like One Billion Rising Week or 16 Days of Activism. The state teams decide the festival duration and design, for e.g. Bihar organizes Youth United for Voluntary Action (YUVA), a two-day youth festival on International Women's Day (8 March) and had support of Youth Federation of Bihar. The festival attracted artists, entrepreneurs and youth from state capital and other three districts.
- International Women's Day: The campaign celebrates international women's day every year at the block, district, and at the state levels. During the celebrations, a platform is provided to the members of the youth collectives to share and broadcast their stories of change in social norms.

3. 16 Days of Activism: 16 Days of Activism, as conceptualized by UN Women and celebrated internationally every year, begins with the celebration of International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November and ends with the celebration of Human Rights Day on 10 December. The activists world over come together during this 16 days period to give a clarion call against all forms of violence against women and girls. During this activism period, the campaign engages all the stake-holders of the community in rural areas and youth in the urban areas. Several events including meetings, rallies, speeches, etc., are organized at the community, block, and district levels. The events also provides platform to survivors of violence to interact with block and district civil authorities and demand their entitlements. Members of other civil society organizations are also invited to generate debates and discussions.

#### IMPORTANT DATES

One Billion Rising: Week of 14 February International Women's Day: 8 March International Youth Day: 12 August International Day of the Girl Child: 11 October International Day of Rural Woman: 15 October International Men's Day: 19 November International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women: 25 November 16 Days of Activism: 25 November-10 December Human Rights Day: 10 December

# MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES

This section traces the journey of the Champions under the *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign to shift the social norms to end violence against women and girls, gender discrimination and child and forced early marriage.

The stories enumerated are of ten Champions, two from each state and one rural and one urban except in Jharkhand where both the cases were from rural areas. In Jharkhand, the Champions were collectives of adolescent girls and women while in other states they were individuals.

## MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES

#### Hum Badlenge toh Duniya bhi Badlegi... (If I Change, the World Will Change Too) Mahima's story of breaking the culture of silence around domestic violence.

Shri Ramanand Saraswati Pustakalaya (SRSP), Jokhara block, Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh

#### 2. *Chuppi... Aur Nahin* (Silence....No More) Priyanka Behera's endeavour to break the silence on violence at home and college.

Utkal University, Bhubaneshwar, Odisha

#### 3. *Aatmanirbharta – Atmavishwaas Se* (Self-Reliance with Self-Confidence) Sewati's journey as an entrepreneur.

Lok Aastha Sewa Sansthan, Chura block, Gariyaband district

#### 4. Hum Bhi Hain... (We Are Here Too)

Adolescent girl's and women's collectives changing social norms around women's participation in sports.

Lok Swar, Khunti block, Khunti district, Jharkhand

## 5. *Haq Se...* We (He, She and Ze) are all Equal!

Farhaz Haidar (name changed): Fighting for the social acceptance of LGBTQ community

Humsafar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

#### 6. *"Janiman Hathu Na Bola Unka"* (Here Are the Ladies...Ask Them)

Tribal women's collective challenging norms and creating spaces in the spheres dominated by men.

ASHA, Ranchi, Jharkhand

#### 7. *Hum Purush ... Mahilaon ke Haq Mein* (Men for Women's Rights)

Firoz Ali: A Champion and an advocate of women's rights.

Sakhiree Mahila Vikas Sansthan, Basantpur block, Siwan district, Bihar

#### 8. *Hum Kisi se Kam Nahin* (We Are No Less) Upasana's journey as a wrestler and coach of a boys' wrestling team.

Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh

#### 9. Gender lens Waale Manushya

Prince Kumar: A social media activist spreading the message of gender equality.

Diksha Foundation, Patna and Patna College, Patna, Bihar

#### 10. *Ekta Mein Taakat Hai...* (Strength in Unity)

## Samir's effort to unite community against gender discrimination.

National Alliance of Women, Madanpur Rampur block, Kalahandi district, Odisha

# हम बदलेंगे तो दुनिया भी बदलेगी

## 1. *Hum Badlenge Toh Duniya Bhi Badlegi...* (If I Change, the World Will Change Too)

Mahima's story of breaking the culture of silence around domestic violence



Oxfam India and Shri Ramanand Saraswati Pustakalaya (SRSP) launched *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign in Azamgarh in 2017. SRSP is Oxfam India's partner since 2014 and works to combat biases related to caste and gender in rural India.

SRSP is implementing the campaign in 20 villages and 10 educational institutions. SRSP also runs a women support centre located in the office of Superintendent of Police (SP), Azamgarh. SRSP also worked towards economic rehabilitation and empowerment of women and girls.

MAHIMA is one of the Champions from a Dalit community, who challenged the culture of silence around domestic violence. She has inspired girls and women in supporting each other and championed the rights of girls to pursue a life of their choice.

They told me that society does not respect separated women. If I break my marriage, the family will be shamed and it will be difficult to marry other sisters. Thrice, my parents forcibly took me to my in-laws place in Mumbai. I cried, but they blamed me for everything and advised me to be more tolerant. It is always the girl's fault if anything goes wrong in marriage. My mother said that we have tolerated all our lives, so why can't you?

The campaign meetings helped me understand the wrong that was happening with me. Women and girls too have rights and their wishes are important too. I realise now that nobody can force me into doing anything. There is hope that girls like me can rebuild their life. For so long I have been following the wishes of my parents, but now I want to follow my heart. I want to live life with dignity. I want to raise my daughters and make them independent.

Mahima, a 23-year-old survivor of domestic violence from a Dalit community in Kalyanpur village of Azamgarh district is an epitome of strength and determination as she strongly advocated breaking the culture of silence shrouding domestic violence and fought a personal battle of freedom from her oppressive marriage.

Mahima was married at the young age of 17 soon after completing her 12<sup>th</sup> grade exams. "I was young and naive when I got married. I wanted to study further but could not go against my parents' wishes and they did not want to let go of the marriage proposal from a well-off family. They wanted to fulfil their responsibilities as early as possible." In a span of three years she gave birth to two daughters.

Mahima has separated from her husband and now lives with her parents and siblings and also supports her two young daughters who are now 5 and 3 years old.

She recounted, "Pati Parmeshwar hota hai (husband is like God), keeping him happy was my duty. My husband used to force himself on me and I would quietly oblige. He taunted me for not bringing enough dowry and restricted me from meeting others. He'd lock me in the house before leaving for work. He even deserted me when my daughters were born. He threatened me to defame the family by calling the panchayat in the village. I tolerated all of this for 4 years, but things did not improve."

When Mahima shared stories of her husband's behaviour with her parents, they were more worried about the backlash from the community. "They told me that society does not respect separated women. If I break my marriage, the family will be shamed and it will be difficult to marry other sisters. Thrice, my parents forcibly took me to my in-laws place in Mumbai. I cried, but they blamed me for everything and advised me to be more tolerant. It is always the girl's fault if anything goes wrong in marriage. My mother said that we have tolerated all our lives, so why can't you?"

Finally, while in Mumbai, one night Mahima fled to her maternal uncle's place. She approached the police to file compliant against her husband and in-laws; however, the police did not accept her complaint. The police asked her to file a Domestic Incident Report (DIR) in her hometown. Mahima returned to her parents, however, did not file the DIR thinking it to be a hassle for the family. She decided never to return to her in-laws place under any circumstance as she felt she had to protect her sense of self-worth and respect at all cost. At this point, Mahima was in dilemma, as she wanted to leave her husband, support her daughters and also not be a burden on her parents.

Mahima's sisters were part of the campaign's adolescent collective and encouraged her to join. Initially she used to be very quiet and withdrawn, but with time, slowly opened up and became very active. She started attending the sessions with the adolescent group regularly and found them to resonate with her internal thoughts and feelings. Sessions on gender equality and stereotypes, VAWG and laws and support services associated with them interested her the most. Mainly because she was able to associate the discussions with incidents in her life and her ambition to lead a life devoid of restrictions and violence. These sessions gave her hope and helped her to realize that it's possible to change her life for the better. As she wanted to be self-reliant, Mahima approached the SRSP team to seek advice and support. The team counselled her to engage in group activities as well as spend time in the library and assist the organization's work. These activities helped her to keep her mind away from thinking about the problems in her life. Inspired by new hope and purpose, Mahima started actively engaging in the campaign activities. She mobilized adolescent girls, built a rapport with them and soon became their close confidante and their group leader.

In 2019, Mahima was selected as a Champion and participated in residential training conducted in Lucknow. Here, she was able to connect with other Champions, who shared their personal journeys and experiences. The workshop instilled in her a sense of self-confidence. Mahima found a new purpose in her life and became very active in the campaign. She even started facilitating training sessions with adolescent girls in community, schools and colleges.

Mahima reflects, "The campaign meetings helped me understand the wrong that was happening with me. Women and girls too have rights and their wishes are important too. I realise now that nobody can force me into doing anything. There is hope that girls like me can rebuild their life. For so long I have been following the wishes of my parents, but now I want to follow my heart. I want to live life with dignity. I want to raise my daughters and make them independent."

Meanwhile, Mahima registered a DIR and underwent one round of counselling at the legal centre at SRSP. Her husband and in-laws are now looking for some kind of reconciliation. However, Mahima is determined to separate, even if that means going to the court.

There is a change in Mahima's mother as well as she now understands Mahima's situation and supports her. Mahima convinced her to join the women's collective too, which in turn helped in changing her perspective. Her mother said, 'I was not aware that I have been abusing my own daughter in the pretext of societal pressure. Once she is successful, people will stop talking about her. I want her to be independent so that she is able to take care of herself and her daughters.' Her mother is now a friend and a confidant, which has lifted her self-esteem significantly.

Mahima is now a role model for her sisters and other women in her community. Her sisters want to pursue professional careers and be economically independent. Mahima plans to continue her work and enrol in graduation with SRSP's help.

She concluded by saying, "I really like my work, I go out to different places and inspire girls like me. Some people in the village talk bad about me, but I am not bothered. *Samaaj toh ghalat sochta hai* (The way society thinks is wrong). The day I will be successful, the society too will change their tune. That is why it is essential for me to change my life. I have to be independent for myself and my daughters' sake." I really like my work, I go out to different places and inspire girls like me. Some people in the village talk bad about me, but I am not bothered. Samaaj toh ghalat sochta hai (*The way society thinks is wrong*). The day I will be successful, the society too will change their tune. That is why it is essential for me to change my life. I have to be independent for myself and my daughters' sake.

# चुप्पी और नहीं

## 2. Chuppi Aur Nahin...(Silence No More)

Priyanka's endeavour to break the silence on violence at home and college



Oxfam India in partnership with Utkal University, Bhubaneswar ran a 12-module course titled 'Gender, Masculinity and Violence Against Women' and a film appreciation module for the youth in Odisha.

School of Women's Studies' of the university hosted the course and the module under the campaign. Launched in 2018, the first cohort of 40 students successfully completed the course. The course aims to sensitize the youth on the issues of gender-based discrimination and violence by identifying social norms that perpetuate violence against women and girls. The course also created awareness on the legal provisions to fight the issues of violence, discrimination, and harassment.

Impressed by the output and content of the course, the Director of the School of Women's Studies intends to formalize it as a 'certificate course'.

**PRIVANKA** one of the course participants was selected as a Gender Justice Champion by the campaign in July 2019. She is one of the 40 Champions in Odisha and one of the ten from her University. Priyanka displayed significant courage and

Domestic violence in my family was always quite normal. My father used to routinely hit my mother on his return from monthly journeys on trivial issues in a drunken state. He used to throw away food, which often led to the entire family sleeping on empty stomach. Throughout my life, my brother and I had witnessed this domestic violence, which deeply disturbed and distressed us. maturity in dealing with domestic violence issues at home and sexual harassment in her college.Priyanka is a student of Master's in Sociology at Utkal University and belongs to a typical lower middle-class Indian family, which is nuclear and works hard to make ends meet. Her father is a lorry driver, her mother is a field worker in the agriculture department, and her elder brother is a salesman. She mentioned, "Domestic violence in my family was always quite normal. My father used to routinely hit my mother on his return from monthly journeys on trivial issues in a drunken state. He used to throw away food, which often led to the entire family sleeping on empty stomach. Throughout my life, my brother and I had witnessed this domestic violence, which deeply disturbed and distressed us. But we never raised our voice against this issue, as we started believing it to be normal. To keep myself away from this trauma, I joined the Oxfam India's course."

After joining the course, she realized that domestic violence is not limited to her home but a much more widespread social evil. The course used brain-storming and role- play sessions that helped Priyanka to connect her education to real life situations. The course also motivated her to figure out strategies to address negative social norms around them. After understanding the root causes of the violence in her home, she first shared her learning with her brother. Along with her brother she counselled her parents, especially her father. Priyanka explained to her mother to not take the violence as normal part of her married life and encouraged her to stand for her rights.

"Convincing my mother to change her mindset was extremely difficult, as she had already accepted the abuse as her fate. I had to explain to her that accepting violence was also one form of crime. I questioned the social norm that women should not raise voice against men because they are head of the households" said Priyanka.

Priyanka and her brother explained to their parents how years of domestic violence had affected them mentally, physically and emotionally and how their social status in the neighbourhood was quite low due to their father's wild and unruly behaviour. The discussions during the course helped Priyanka articulate her thoughts confidently. After repeated discussions the violence has entirely stopped in her home. More so, her father has quit imbibing alcohol, is more accepting and considerate of others.

Priyanka reflected, "It is very unfortunate that women in our society are not aware that they are the survivors of domestic abuse. They do not even realize when this abuse crosses the boundary of being a heinous crime to an acceptable norm."

This positive experience lifted her spirits and filled her with courage. In another case, Priyanka took the lead in fighting a case of sexual harassment in her university. When a PhD scholar sexually abused one of her friends, she convinced her friend to file a formal complaint to the Head of Department (HoD). Since the PhD scholar was the HoD's favourite, she got angry, doubted the veracity of the incident and asked the girls to withdraw their complaint. Despite HoD's warning to not risk their reputation, Priyanka took the lead in filing formal complaint in the university's Internal Complaint Committee (ICC). Convincing my mother to change her mindset was extremely difficult, as she had already accepted the abuse as her fate. I had to explain to her that accepting violence was also one form of crime. I questioned the social norm that women should not raise voice against men because they are head of the households. Every woman is aware of whether she is treated wrongly or not. And, in case she is treated wrongly, she should not be afraid to speak out. Priyanka believes that, "Every woman is aware of whether she is treated wrongly or not. And, in case she is treated wrongly, she should not be afraid to speak out."

The ICC guidelines state that the vice-chancellor of university along with fellow ICC members has the statutory authority to resolve such cases. However, the HoD pleaded and convinced the university to resolve the matter through a panel of teachers comprising the Director (Centre of Women's Studies), the HoD, and few other faculty members. Priyanka and her friend presented their case to this panel. After listening to both sides, the panel asked the perpetrator to apologize and removed him from all administrative works.

As a result of her role in the incident, she suffered unnecessary discrimination from the angry HoD. Far from being discouraged; Priyanka focussed all her energy on studies and remains determined as ever to raise her voice against gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment.



# आत्मनिर्भरता आत्मविश्वास से

## 3. Aatmanirbharta - Atmavishwaas Se (Self-Reliance with Self -Confidence)

Sewati's journey as an entrepreneur



Oxfam India with Lok Aastha Sewa Sansthan (LASS) launched the *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign in twenty villages of Chura block of Gariyaband district in Chhattisgarh. LASS provides support to survivors of domestic violence.

SEWATI a survivor from Kothigaon village, was supported by the campaign.

Sewati, one of the Champions, made significant achievements including forming a women's collective, leading the collective to participate in Panchayat meetings and won business plan competitions. With the support of campaign, she is now recognized as a successful leader and an entrepreneur in her village, who challenged the norms of domestic violence, confinement of women to the household chores, women's mobility, and participation of women in the entrepreneurial activities.

Sewati shared her life-changing experience and her transformation from being a survivor of domestic violence to an entrepreneur when she mentioned, "I was tired of taking all the beatings and was thinking of suicide. During the same time, in June 2017, I attended the campaign event and heard about women's legal rights in matters of domestic abuse, etc."

I was tired of taking all the beatings and was thinking of suicide. During the same time, in June 2017, I attended the campaign event and heard about women's legal rights in matters of domestic abuse, etc. We decided to attend Panchayat meeting as we also wanted to participate in decision making. We express our thoughts and ideas freely during these meetings. The information provided in the event comforted her, but she also had questions related to her rights. She hesitantly shared the domestic violence in her home and the campaign facilitators immediately arranged a joint-counselling session with her husband at Sakhi Centre (a support centre run by LASS for survivors of domestic violence).

The counselling revealed that her husband, who was mostly unemployed, used to get influenced by his friends during regular drinking sessions and beat Sewati after that. She shared, "His friends would fill his mind with foul ideas about my character. These lies made him terribly angry, and he used to take out all his anger by beating me." After the counselling, her husband realized his misdeeds and pledged to stop drinking and violence. LASS, for their part, realized that for a sustainable behaviour change, they would need to assist Sewati's husband in finding a regular job. While initially sceptical of LASS's intentions, Sewati's husband started trusting them when they registered him for a job and ration card.

Encouraged by this change, Sewati formed a women's collective in her village, which also collects a small amount every month as group's savings fund. This fund helps the members in case of any emergency. The women members of her collective also started attending Panchayat meetings, a significant milestone as women never attended these meetings before. Sewati shared, "We decided to attend Panchayat meeting as we also wanted to participate in decision making. We express our thoughts and ideas freely during these meetings." Despite facing resistance from the community leaders, Sewati also formed an entertainment group and sang hymns and songs, which the community did not allow women before.

Sewati proudly shared, "Due to our group's efforts, the village now has a no-tolerance policy against any act of domestic abuse. In case of any act of domestic abuse or violence, the perpetrator will be punished by the community and the punishment includes fine and social boycott."

# अत्मिनिर्भरता अत्मिविश्वास से

Further, Sewati led her collective to take up income generation activities of marketing of a traditional variety of rice (*Kodo*) and assembling decorative lights. This variety of rice is highly rich in dietary fibre and protein along with being gluten-free and having a low glycemic index. Sewati presented her business plans of selling *Kodo* rice, at a number of national and state level platforms. She and her group won the state level competition in Raipur and a national level one in Lucknow. She also recalled making her first sale of *Kodo* rice in Pune, where she sold a 25 kg rice bag for INR 3500. These achievements have made Sewati confident and empowered to handle any challenge in her life. Her husband's attitude has also changed. Now he not only respects Sewati, but also helps her in daily household chores.

In another case, Sewati inspired her collective to partner up with Aditya, a Gender Justice Champion from Raipur who is an engineer and a budding entrepreneur, to assemble decorative lights. Aditya trained members of the collective in the assembling process, which is now providing employment to forty women in the village. This partnership has been mutually beneficial as the village women are now earning more and Aditya too has also saved on his manufacturing cost.

Sewati is now recognized as a leader and an entrepreneur in her village. She took charge and altered her situation and is now an inspiration to many other survivors in the village who silently suffered violence for a long time. Due to our group's efforts, the village now has a no-tolerance policy against any act of domestic abuse. In case of any act of domestic abuse or violence, the perpetrator will be punished by the community and the punishment includes fine and social boycott

# अत्मिर्निर्भरता अत्मविश्वास से

# हम भी हैं

### 4. Hum Bhi Hain (We Are Here Too)

Adolescent girls' and womens' collectives changing social norms around women's participation in sports

Oxfam India in partnership with Lok Swar, a rightsbased organization in Jharkhand, launched the *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign in Khunti district. The campaign promoted adolescent girls' and womens' collective in the village.

Since 2000, Lok Swar is working for the marginalized sections of the society for the betterment of their lives in Jharkhand. The adolescent girls' collectives took up playing football and inspired women collective members also to play football, an outdoor sport. Due to efforts of these two groups and a religious leader, the village has undergone transformation. Girls and women now wear dresses of their choice and have even travelled outside their villages to play football. They also participate in the weekly *Gram Sabha* meetings and raise the issues of their concern. With their efforts, there is no out-of-school girl in the village, child marriage has stopped and there is significant reduction in the instances of domestic violence.

The campaign formed a collective of adolescent girls in Silda, a tribal village in Khunti block of Khunti district, Jharkhand, in 2017.

We were confined to this village. We had never gone out, so did not know much about the outside world. Girls were always treated inferior to boys in our families; we did not know what our wishes and desires were. We were not heard in our homes or community. The adolescent girls' collective started with identifying the prevalent negative social norms related to their dressing/attire, mobility and education. Looking at the collective of adolescent boys play football, girls also demanded to play it. Girls in the village did not play football before, as it was an outdoor sport. However, sensing their eagerness and with the support of a progressive religious leader, the campaign hired a local football player to coach the girls. Football gave the girls a new sense of freedom and empowerment. They were filled with confidence and dreams for a better future.

As part of the campaign, the girls' collective travelled outside their village and state, which further increased their exposure. Although their families opposed initially, seeing their daughters' confidence, they realized that the girls were capable enough to travel independently, without any male supervision.

"We were confined to this village. We had never gone out, so did not know much about the outside world. Girls were always treated inferior to boys in our families; we did not know what our wishes and desires were. We were not heard in our homes or community. But now we are aware that boys and girls have equal rights, we have seen outside world and have learnt to express our desires with our parents."

The girls' collective further identified that many girls were not allowed to complete their education. Dropping out of school led to early marriage and subsequently domestic violence and sexual and reproductive health problems. The girls' collective took an initiative in a strategic manner to ensure that no girl is a school dropout in their village. They enumerated all the out-of-school girls, counselled them and their parents, and followed up till all the girls were back in schools. The adolescent girls regularly visit schools to monitor the status as well. The collective also stops any early marriage in their village.

"In the past, parents married their daughters at a very early age, often without their consent, and girls had to leave studies. Now our group does not allow marriage of girls below the age of 18 years. Once we come to know of any case, we go to girl's house and stop the marriage by giving reference of law. We also intervene if the girls consent to marriage is not taken", said Falguni, a collective member.

These acts of girls' collective inspired the women's collective in the village as they also decided to play football. The women's collective formed a team and started practicing. The men including their husbands tried to stop the women by uprooting the goal- posts and strewing sharp pieces of glass in the football field, however, the women were undeterred in their resolve and continued on with their practice sessions.

Priyanka, one of the women collective members recalled, "some men in the family supported us but others passed comments like "samdhi banana ke samay khel rahi hai" (At the age of becoming a mother-inlaw, she is playing football). When women wore salwar suits instead of saris then, men commented that, *'uski Biwi bahut smart ban rahi* hai' (His wife is acting extra smart).But none of this could stop us. We continued our game, we wore salwar suits, shorts and t-shirts and played football." In the past, parents married their daughters at a very early age, often without her consent, and girls had to leave studies. Now our group does not allow marriage of girls below the age of 18 years. Once we come to know of any case, we go girl's house and stop the marriage by giving reference of law. We also intervene if the girls consent to marriage is not taken. I was not aware about PWDV Act and PCM Act. I realized that violence against women needs much more of our attention. I too have sisters and daughters and I realize now that every day we unintentionally perpetuate violence by not discussing it. After a year of practice, the women played a friendly match in the village and later played against Ranchi Riders, the Jharkhand state women's football team. Initially what started as an activity to engage adolescent boys, football soon triggered a campaign to break away from social norms.

Bandhan Pahan, the 65-year-old religious head of the community, played an instrumental role in this transformation. As the most respected person in the village, he presided over the weekly *Gram Sabha* and was also the chief decision maker for village development. He has been associated with Lok Swar since 2008 and was closely engaged with the campaign. He encouraged open discussions around gender discrimination, VAWG and CEFM in the weekly *Gram Sabha* meetings. Since Bandhan Pahan backed the voices of women and girls, the resistance from non-conforming villagers was not significant.

Pahan noted, "I was not aware about PWDV Act and PCM Act. I realized that violence against women needs much more of our attention. I too have sisters and daughters and I realize now that every day we unintentionally perpetuate violence by not discussing it."

Now in the village, the incidence of domestic violence has reduced significantly, all the girls are in schools and no case of child marriage has been reported in the last three years. Women and girls are an important part of *Gram Sabha* meetings. There is also freedom of mobility and to dress according to one's wishes.

As one of the girls said, 'Previously we could never wear jeans and t-shirt and move around in the village. Now nobody restrict us from wearing clothes of our choice and travel outside the village'

The girls are now getting educated and becoming resolute, confident and self-dependent. They independently interact with government officials and visit courts of law. The quality of life has improved in the village and each woman is now part of some collective. Most importantly there is solidarity between women and men in the village. The men have also realized that gender based discrimination, domestic violence, early marriage, restrictions on movement, etc., are real issues and need to be resolved for the development of the society as a whole.

# हम भी ह

# हक से वी

# 5. *Haq Se* We (He, She and Ze) are all Equal!

Farhaz: Fighting for the social acceptance of LGBTQ community



Oxfam India partnered with Humsafar to build a supportive network to raise community responsiveness and preparedness to address deep-rooted societal norms perpetuating gender inequalities and VAWG.

Since 2003 Humsafar has been ensuring holistic support with a wide range of services to violence survivors to safeguard their human rights.

FARHAZ is a one of the 30 Champions in Uttar Pradesh and has formed a network of around 100 LGBTQ people in Lucknow and encouraged many to come out openly about their sexuality. Farhaz mentors this network and also works on the issues of genderbased discrimination and violence against women and girls.

Farhaz Haidar (name changed), a 24-year-old Champion from UP, belongs to a middle-class Muslim family from UP. Farhaz identifies himself as a human rights activist and works on the issues of violence against women and girls and members of the local LGBTQ community, primarily gays, bisexual and transgender people. He advocates equality of rights for all genders and sexual minorities.

He believes, "Violence perpetuates when there is inequality in any relationship. Hence, to have violence-free relationship, one must embrace equality."

Violence perpetuates when there is inequality in any relationship. Hence, to have violence-free relationship, one must embrace equality. Being a Champion motivates you to be responsible and take initiative. We are role models for many others Since childhood, the gender-based discrimination in his family and ostracization of LGBTQ community members disturbed him. He was especially troubled by the low social status of trans people in the community, where they were ridiculed, excluded and had no freedom to choose their partners.

"I started exploring the lives of, and the discriminations experienced by the LGBTQ community because I personally identified myself as a part them" said Farhaz.

According to him, LGBTQ people are often ostracized by their families and later by the community. Transgender people especially are excluded from the education system and are not able to take up regular jobs. Even their religion considers them as outcasts. All of these lead to LGBTQ community living in extreme mental and psychological trauma.

"A family is (traditionally) defined by Man, Woman and Child... LGBTQ community on the other hand has no space in the definition of a family" noted Farhaz.

When he started, Farhaz met members from the community individually as well as in groups several times. Initially, winning their trust and confidence was a big challenge, as the community members rarely disclose their status. Farhaz worked hard and went on to form a network of Queer people (which included gays, bisexual and transgender people), which has over 100 members from Lucknow and nearby areas. He also started a Whatsapp group for the community to be in regular contact and so that they could share their problems.

Farhaz now mentors this network and supports their issues and challenges. He narrated once receiving a distress call at 2 am from a friend whose parents were throwing him out of the house. It was because his parents had discovered him dressed as a woman. Farhaz immediately responded and counselled the parents and asked them to accept their son's choice and treat him with respect. Finally, his friend was allowed to stay in his parents' house.

According to Farhaz, there has been an active attempt to reclaim identities amongst this community so they may live a more dignified life 'People called them names like Hijra, Queer among others without knowing what they meant. They have embraced these terms, given them dignity and made it their identity' Farhaz remarked. Significantly, he was able to encourage and motivate twenty of his friends from the network to come out openly about their gender and sexuality identities and participate in the local Pride walk. The Pride walk was held in February 2020 in Lucknow for the rights of LGBTQ community.

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"Being a Champion motivates you to be responsible and take initiative. We are role models for many others" says Farhaz.

Back home in his village, when his sister was getting married in 2018, he asked his parents to invite Sapna Aunty, a transwoman. His parents refused as it was against the social norm to invite a transwoman.

However, Farhaz was able to convince his parents after several rounds of arguments and discussions about treating the LGBTQ community equally and with respect. Farhaz's sister personally visited Sapna Aunty's house to invite her. This changed the social norm in the village and now Sapna Aunty gets invitations from everyone in the village.

Farhaz says with hope in his eyes, "Today the villagers are inviting her and accepting her gifts/ blessings, a day also will come when the community will openly participate in her celebrations."

In his journey, Farhaz has faced severe opposition from family, friends and community. His friends would ridicule him about the fact that he worked with this group and many even stopped interacting with him. His father refused to support him during his higher studies. Notwithstanding the opposition from his father and community, Farhaz completed his Masters in Social Work and works with Humsafar tirelessly to advocate for the rights of the LGBTQ community. Today the villagers are inviting her and accepting her gifts/ blessings, a day also will come when the community will openly participate in her celebrations.



# जानीमन हाथु ना बोला उनका

## 6. *Janiman Hathu Na Bola Unka* (Here Are the Ladies...Ask Them)

Tribal women's collective challenging norms and creating spaces in the male dominant spheres.



In Jharkhand, Oxfam India partnered with Association for Social and Human Awareness (ASHA) under the *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign. ASHA is using the women collectives in the tribal villages to change social norms around gender discrimination, VAWG and CEFM.

SAKHI SAHELI, one of the women collectives, is waking significant contribution to local village development by occupying men's spaces as contractor of local development work, regular participants of *Gram Sabha*, monitoring the domestic violence cases and taking up economic activities. Men have now started respecting their abilities and have even transformed themselves to take up household chores and rice sapling plantation.

When we applied for construction of the road, the men objected to it saying that it's a man's job to construct roads and women will not be able to do it and that women should concentrate on their own sphere of work.

Sakhi Saheli is a women's collective of tribal women formed in 2012 in Garkhatanga village of Namkum block of Ranchi district, Jharkhand. When this group was formed, women took up the issue of alcoholism, as it was one of the key reasons for domestic violence. The campaign to stop alcoholism in the village failed in absence of support from men and community leaders. However, this experience gave the women a new voice and will to participate in the development and social affairs of their village. The collective started participating in *Gram Sabha* and Panchayat meetings. The group requested the Panchayat leaders to allocate them construction work. After numerous appeals, in 2016, the Panchayat gave the group a tender to build a 400 feet road under national employment guarantee scheme.

"When we applied for construction of the road, the men objected to it saying that it's a man's job to construct roads and women will not be able to do it and that women should concentrate on their own sphere of work", mentioned Sarita, a Sakhi Saheli member. The collective successfully executed the contract and they received another contract in 2019 to construct a platform of 20 square feet to celebrate festivals.

To encourage participation of women in *Gram Sabha*, the collective launched a signature campaign to monitor attendance of eligible villagers in the *Gram Sabha*. The signature campaign significantly increased women's participation in the *Gram Sabha* meetings. While earlier women were ridiculed and made to feel unwelcome by men, now their issues are heard and taken note of.

"We members meet one day before the *Gram Sabha* and plan what needs to be said and who will speak, also prepare how to handle if any objection is raised. We have now learnt how to talk with men in the meetings"... said Fugan Oraon, another member of Sakhi Saheli.

Apart from attending the village level meetings, the collectives are making sure that the village level committees on health and education function effectively and efficiently. Some women have even ventured into entrepreneurial roles, like managing a small grocery shop, and selling vegetables under government schemes. This has resulted in increased financial independence of women.

Further, the women's collective has also formed a committee, named 'Jagruk Samriti', to monitor cases of sexual abuse and domestic violence in their village. The members of this committee resolve domestic violence cases by counselling. However, if the matter is serious and beyond their control, the cases are reported to ASHA who further take it to women's support cell.

"When officials come to our village, then the panchayat members ask them to talk to the women as they know more than men. No work is initiated without consulting us. Previously, we used to go to panchayat members for our work related matters, now they do not start any work without our contribution"... said Sarita. When we applied for construction of the road, the men objected to it saying that it's a man's job to construct roads and women will not be able to do it and that women should concentrate on their own sphere of work. Previously our knowledge was limited to the four walls of the house. Now, you ask anything about the village, we will tell you everything The collective organized an event '*Ulta Puran*' to discuss the importance of sharing work at the household level by both men and women. The event helped in creating awareness on the amount and type of work performed by women and men in the households. After this event, men's participation in household chores increased and women are taking up work outside their homes. Men also started rice sapling plantation, which has been a woman's job since time immemorial.

Members of the collective continue to take up challenging roles, traditionally carried out by men. One such example was of a landowner who illegally encroached and claimed ownership over some part of the village land. The group immediately reported the issue and took the matter to court. The members followed up the case in court and finally won the case and claimed ownership of the encroached land.

"When we used to go to the court, the middlemen would follow and threaten us. We had never been to court before. We were scared. But we did not stop and finally were successful" noted Sushila of Sakhi Saheli. The encroacher was asked to forego his illegal claim and leave the village.

In Garkhatanga village, women are now an integral part of the village level meetings where development-related decisions are routinely taken. Men accept women's contribution and admire their confidence and ability to handle issues related to gender-based discrimination.

As one of the men said in a matter of fact manner, 'Janiman hathu na bola unka' (Here are the ladies, ask them). The Sakhi Saheli group proudly mentions the selection of three of their members in the state police force as constables.

"Previously our knowledge was limited to the four walls of the house. Now, you ask anything about the village, we will tell you everything"... confident and proud claim of Sakhi Saheli members.

# जनिमित हाथ जा बेला उन्हो



## 7. *Hum Purush Mahilaon Ke Haq Mein* (Men for Women's Rights)

Firoz: A Champion and an advocate of women's rights



Oxfam India in partnership with Sakhiree Mahila Vikas Sansthan launched the *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign in Siwan district.

Since its formation in 1992, Sakhiree Mahila Vikas Sansthan is working with survivors of CEFM and DV to access support from government system.

FIROZ Ali, is one of 40 Champions from Bihar who sings to popularize the messages to promote importance of gender equality and eliminate violence against women and girls. He and his adolescent group members are taking other initiatives to promote girl's education and reversing the role of men in household work.

Firoz Ali is was a 17-year-old, studying in 12<sup>th</sup> standard from Hariyamma village of Basantpur block in Siwan district, Bihar and belongs to a farming family with seven members. A member of the adolescent boys collective, Firoz sang songs to disseminate messages to promote gender equality and eliminate negative social norms on gender discrimination.

Firoz noted, "There is a high demand to have a son in a family. Giving birth to a son increases mother's respect in the society. People are aborting the female foetus. This is a very wrong practice."

There is a high demand to have a son in a family. Giving birth to a son increases mother's respect in the society. People are aborting the female foetus. This is a very wrong practice.

I am a changed person now. Earlier when I would see any woman being hit by her husband, I used to blame the woman and assumed that it was her fault. But now I am totally against it. According to me, it is not right, just to beat your wife or any other woman per se. Firoz is disturbed by many discriminatory practices against girls. He mentions that girls cannot do well in studies due to numerous restrictions and workload related to household chores. Girls are not allowed to join schools outside their villages and as such are forced to drop out.

They are married early to avoid doling out large sums of dowry amount. Parents also fear that girls will get involved in love-relationships. These arranged early marriages are often without the consent of the girls. These practices further perpetuate gender discrimination and VAWG.

According to Firoz, domestic violence is prevalent in every household of the village. "Women are physically and verbally abused and not given money for expenses. They do not have the freedom to talk to everybody" shared another adolescent of the collective.

According to Firoz and his collective, any intervention in domestic violence case is a challenge. "Families do not like to discuss domestic violence in open. It is regarded as a personal matter. Women are encouraging domestic violence by tolerating and not speaking about it. There is also no help from administration. If we go to stop the abuse, then they attack us and warn us to keep off their family matter."

At a personal level, Firoz's understanding of domestic violence has changed. He mentions, "I am a changed person now. Earlier when I would see any woman being hit by her husband, I used to blame the woman and assumed that it was her fault. But now I am totally against it. According to me, it is not right, just to beat your wife or any other woman per se."

He also supports family in household chores so that his sister can get sufficient time to study.

Being of young age, Firoz realized it would be difficult to talk to the adults on the sensitive issues of domestic violence, girls' freedom and female foeticide. He started thinking of ways of creating space for himself and his young team to break the culture of silence on violence. Being an amateur singer, he searched for songs and poems on gender equality on online platforms like, YouTube. It has now become routine for Firoz to sing songs on gender equality during the collective's meetings and other events like rallies, youth festivals. He has been successful to some extent to draw the attention of the people on these topics through his singing.

Other members of the collective have also taken initiatives in this direction. Sanjay, another member and Champion said, "I was able to convince my mother to allow my sister to attend college outside the village."

Amit Kumar, another member, enjoys cooking and doing household work. Despite resistance from his mother, he regularly cooks meals for the family. These young boys are not concerned about being ridiculed by their peers or community members.

Young men are accepting new norms and challenging the old ones, specially the ones restricting girl's mobility and opportunities for education. Youths like Firoz, Sanjay and Amit are bringing a radical change by being male advocates of women's rights in a conservative and strictly patriarchal social setting.

# हम किसी से कम नहीं

## 8. Hum Kisi Se Kam Nahin (We Are No Less)

Upasana's journey as a wrestler and coach of a boys' wrestling team



Oxfam India Chhattisgarh team partnered with Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University in Raipur to launch *Samanta Saathi* programme and the Film Appreciation Module as a part of *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign.

Under the campaign, 40 Champions were selected, and Upasana was one of them. She is a wrestler and an advocate of gender equality. Despite opposition from the community she took up wrestling and at a young age participated in the international championship. Further, she became a coach for men's wrestling team and a national level referee. Upasna participation in the campaign built her confidence to take up coaching, which is largely men's domain.

**UPASANA** is a 24 years old female wrestler from Chhattisgarh who aspires to become a sports officer after completing her education. Defying the conventional path of getting married after studies, she chose to practice wrestling and pursue masters in physical education.

Wrestling is typically a men's sports in India, according to Upasana, "I was never treated equally by men players and was discouraged at every step by the community members who kept reminding that sports, especially wrestling, are not for women."

I was never treated equally by men players and was discouraged at every step by the community members who kept reminding that sports, especially wrestling, are not for women. I do not kneel to society's defined gender-based roles. I want to pursue my passion for wrestling without any restriction and expectation. I want to create my own path and would encourage other girl of my age to do the same. Upasana has five sisters, four elder to her and one younger. She thanks her school principal who introduced wrestling in a girls' school. She is also grateful to her school coach who encouraged her to start wrestling at the tender age of nine. Her coach, Guru Shailendra Pathak, created the first-ever all-girls wrestling team in her school.

Upasana said 'Society expects girls and women to be confined within the house and carry out household chores. Whereas, boys do not face mobility restrictions. Unlike girls, they can take decisions without asking their parents.' However, she considers herself fortunate as her family and schoolteachers supported her to take up wrestling.

A native of Jharkhand, Upasana's journey of becoming a wrestler was not easy as she was the first girl in her community to take up this sport. She recalled, "Soon, people started taunting me. Boys teased me and passed improper remarks on my physique, my sports dress and my choice of becoming a wrestler." However, these remarks could not discourage Upasana. In 2017, she participated in international traditional wrestling competition in Kyrgyzstan. The national press covered the event extensively and this high-level recognition eventually changed perception of her community. She mentioned, "I was surprised to see the change in the perception of people. People, who in the past discouraged me, were now asking me to guide their daughters and motivate them to take up wrestling. I was happy and felt proud of my decision."

Even after participating in international event, Upasna was not very confident of continuing with wrestling due to overwhelming male dominance.

In 2018, Upasana joined the campaign, which helped her in gaining knowledge and confidence. She remarked, "we should not blindly trust what our society preaches and expect from us. I was inspired by this thought, and this lesson stayed with me forever. I decided to ignore what society preaches and to follow what I feel is right. I now strongly advocate gender equality."

Upasana has now ventured into coaching the boys wrestling team in the college, which is path breaking and against the prevalent norms. Initially when she started coaching, she was hesitant, but the campaign gave her strength and confidence to continue. Her coaching skills impressed her professors who assigned more coaching sessions. This further boosted her confidence and helped her attain the position of a national level wrestling referee. She has now participated in various wrestling competitions at both national and international levels. She now tells everyone, "Nothing is Impossible as Impossible itself says I M Possible."

Upasana mentions that her department head is her inspiration, who is also the campaign coordinator at the university.

Upasana is full of dreams, "I do not kneel to society's defined genderbased roles. I want to pursue my passion for wrestling without any restriction and expectation. I want to create my own path and would encourage other girl of my age to do the same."



### 9. Gender Lens Waale Manushya

Prince: A social media activist spreading the message of gender equality



Oxfam India in association with Diksha Foundation ran the campaign and *Samanta Saathi* programme in Bihar. The programme attempted to promote 100 young men and boys from 4 educational institutions in Patna as gender equality advocates.

Since 2010, Diksha's movement has been towards creating "transformative learning spaces for children."

**PRINCE** is one of the Gender Justice Champions from Bihar. He formed an informal group of batchmates (girls and boys) in his college to challenge the social norms leading to gender based discrimination. Prince and the group members have taken several initiatives to challenge these social norms. Seeing the success of the group, the college has decided to institutionalize the gender workshops.

The situation of girls after marriage becomes worse. Society expects her to quietly follow the wishes of husband and inlaws. Her own will and wish is secondary. She lives a life locked in a cage. All this is imposed in the name of bridal duties by the society. This can be so suffocating and mentally disturbing for a girl. My journey of transformation began with participation in the course, 'Login: to new man'. The course changed my perspective on gender and violence on women and girls. I can now see and understand issues by standing in their shoes. Prince, a 17 year old boy from Sitamarhi, Bihar belongs to a middle-class upper caste family, and is currently based in Patna, Bihar. Along with his formal education, Prince pursued his passion for social issues and acquired skills on various creative art forms like theatre, songs, dance and filmmaking.

He started by saying that, "My journey of transformation began with participation in the course, 'Login: to new man'. The course changed my perspective on gender and violence on women and girls. I can now see and understand issues by standing in their shoes." Because of his deep interest in the issue, Prince completed the online course in a few weeks itself. He then volunteered for the campaign.

Referring to an 18 year old bride in his neighbourhood, he shared his thoughts, "the situation of girls after marriage becomes worse. Society expects her to quietly follow the wishes of husband and in-laws. Her own will and wish is secondary. She lives a life locked in a cage. All this is imposed in the name of bridal duties by the society. This can be so suffocating and mentally disturbing for a girl." His life in comparison like that of most boys was stress-free with no such responsibilities. He noted that one of his friend's sister had to marry a boy chosen by her parents after completing her graduation, only because her boyfriend was in his early days of building his career and her parents did not want to lose time.

He said, "Parents are under societal pressure to get their daughters married at an early age and as a result girls do not get sufficient time to build their career or marry someone of their choice."

Prince formed an informal group of like-minded classmates in the Mass Communication Course of Patna College and named it as *'Gender Lens Wale Manushya'*. Each member in the group felt a common connection to question the prevalent gender stereotypes and to transform the society. One of the members, Harshita is negotiating with her hostel warden for relaxed entry timings just like the boys do. She questioned the whole logic of restricting girls' movements due to boys loitering around, lewd comments and unwanted sexual remarks. "Girls freedom is curtailed so as to maintain the freedom for boys" noted Harshita.

Diksha, another member of the group is challenging the gender stereotypes in her home. "I always used to get agitated seeing separate set of rules for me and my brother regarding household work and freedom of movement. My brother never contributes to household chores and stays with his friends till late hours. But I have to work in the kitchen, cannot go to the market on my own or stay late with my friends. Now, I am raising these concerns with more confidence and stronger voice" says Diksha.

जेन्दर लेस वाल मनुष्य Hema, another member, is challenging the practice of dowry and elaborate wedding rituals. Her parents had to pay a huge dowry amount for her elder sister's marriage. She was highly disturbed and had raised concerns, however, her parents talked of social norms, which they cannot change or escape. She said "Our life is governed by the societal norms that dictates what is right and wrong. Society intervenes even in matters like marriage, which should be decided only by the boy and girl, since they have to live together. There is a price tag attached to each groom and family consent is more important than the consent of the girl. We need to raise our voice..." She with Prince's help produced a video on this evil practice titled, <u>*Marzi Bina Shaadi Nahin'*</u>. This video was uploaded on 0xfam India social media pages and was much appreciated. This video also had an immediate impact on Hema's brother-in-law (sister's husband) who discussed her concerns.

As a social media activist, Prince has developed a number of creative endeavours like hip-hop numbers, poems and songs covering issues of skewed sex ratio, and importance of a girl's consent in marriage and her life decisions. His creative products have been posted on social media platforms including 0xfam's website.

Disturbed by the recurring incidents of rape in the country and in Patna in particular, he composed a very touching poem <u>'Maa! Teri Yeh</u> <u>Gudia Kyun Dar- Dar Ke Soti Hai?</u> (Mother ! Why Does Your Little Girl Sleep in Fear).

He also produced gender toons (a series of cartoon strips) on the issues of skewed sex ratio, child marriage, and gender stereotypes. Prince was awarded first prize for this comic series in YUVA, youth festival oragnised in Patna under the campaign.

The energy, confidence and trust of these young women and men are witnessed during youth festivals, when each one takes responsibility for the other. Prince is already a role model for many and is inspiring students through his initiatives. At his home, he is now motivating his mother to resume her studies, a dream that she could not fulfil due to her early marriage.

I always used to get agitated seeing separate set of rules for me and my brother regarding household work and freedom of movement. My brother never contributes to household chores and stays with his friends till late hours. But I have to work in the kitchen, cannot go to the market on my own or stay late with my friends. Now, I am raising these concerns with more confidence and stronger voice.



# एकता में ताकत है

### 10. Ekta Mein Taakat Hai (Strength in Unity)

Samir's effort to unite community against gender discrimination



Oxfam India is implementing Bano Nayi Soch Campaign in twenty villages of Kalahandi district of Odisha with the support of National Alliance of Women (NAWO). The campaign strategically creates awareness amongst the community about the negative social norms.

Formed in 1996, NAWO Odisha is an alliance of all women's organizations who work at the grass root level and works in 4 critical areas concerning women viz: poverty and livelihood, political empowerment, violence against women and girls and health.

In Odisha, there are 50 gender justice Champions and Samir is one of them who was selected due to his recognizable efforts in shifting the norms of gender wage gap, child marriage, and men's participation in the household chores. Samir had joined the adolescent collective in 2017 at the age of 17 and is now part of the men's collective.

SAMIR, in his early twenties, can be seen in the corner giving cooking instructions to a group of adult men almost twice his age, and everyone listens to him patiently. Even at such a young age, the community respects Samir for his mature ideas and beliefs. He is a college-going student of Paika caste (other backward class) from Kandhegaon village in Rampur, Kalahandi district, Odisha.

I was shocked to hear the women laborers' response that men work harder than women and therefore, deserved to get paid more. Samir belongs to a family of a minor landlords. His family used to employ men and women as daily wagers and paid differential wage rates, i.e. men were paid @ ₹200/day and women @ ₹180/day. This common practice troubled Samir and so he asked the women workers to demand equal wages, however, their response surprised him. "I was shocked to hear the women laborers' response that men work harder than women and therefore, deserved to get paid more" said Samir.

Confused by this interaction, but determined to resolve the issue, he approached his grandfather, a highly respected man in the village. He argued, 'Both men and women work similar hours and do the same amount of work; so there shouldn't be any wage disparity between the two'However, his grandfather brushed his concerns aside and told him to concentrate on his studies instead. Far from being deterred, he took up this issue in his collective and slowly convinced the community about the wage parity. Samir mentions, "While initially, many opposed, finally they understood that it is essential to recognize the work of men and women workers equally by paying them equal wage."

Motivated and inspired by the results, Samir and his collective are planning to submit a formal complaint on the wrongful wage payment in the local government works. He mentions, "My fellow collective members and I know that the official wage rate is ₹286/day; however, workers in our village are paid only @ ₹200/day. Moreover, payment is made in cash instead of direct bank transfers and through a middleman. Therefore, we have decided to take collective action against this unjust and unethical behaviour. The community (both men and women) is motivated to take up the issue with united front."

Samir is passionate about questioning other social norms like men's role in household chores and child marriage. He says, "I have been helping my family in carrying out household chores after my mother's death when I was only 15. The community makes fun of men who perform tasks reserved for women like cooking, cleaning, etc., but I am not ashamed and continue helping my family." In 2019 when he turned 19, his father decided to get him married, which he refused saying, "I am not of eligible age to get married, and my marriage will be considered illegal." His father had hoped that after his marriage, his wife would take care of the household chores. Samir's refusal is quite significant, as it is a norm to follow one's father's decisions in cases of marriage. He also stopped a child marriage in his village of a 17 year old girl. Samir raised this issue with the block level officials and collected documentary evidence of the girl's age and persuaded the girl's parents to postpone her marriage by a year.

When the girl's father asked him not to interfere in someone else's matter, his response was, "If something illegal is happening in my village, I will be damned if I don't try to stop it. The girl and the entire village are much better off if she gets married next year. There is no hurry to marry your daughter and if she marries now, she will be fall ~ into the trap of domestic violence as it happens in most of the child marriages."

Samir's is a story of personal sacrifices and upholding gender equal values. He has mentored the community about collective strength to address the prevalent social norms.

While initially, many opposed, finally they understood that it is essential to recognize the work of men and women workers equally by paying them equal wage.

# EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT

This chapter assesses the effectiveness and impact of the *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign strategies. The effectiveness of the campaign is understood with regard to immediate and intermediate outcomes and specifically to answer the questions 'what worked and what did not'. The impact of the campaign was analysed using the ecological approach of UN Women's framework which looks at factors at the individual, relationship and community levels.<sup>2</sup>

#### ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

### 🕵 Effectiveness

#### **Community Level Strategies**

- Collectives at the Community Level
- Formal Curriculum
- Community Score-cards
- Engagement with Influencers

#### Institution Level Strategies

- Film Appreciation Module
- Samanta Saathi Course
- Gender Masculinity and Violence Against Women Course

#### Mass Mobilization Strategies

Gender Justice Champions Strategy



<sup>•</sup> Individual Level • Relationships Level • Community Level

2 UN Women. (2015) 'Understanding Violence Against Women' (pp. 22 – 4), A Framework to Underpin Action to Prevent Violence Against Women (e-reader version), Retrieved from https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/ publications/2015/prevention\_framework\_unwomen\_nov2015.pdf?la=en&vs=5223



#### **Effectiveness of Community Level Campaign Strategies**

As highlighted in chapter 1, the community level strategies in rural and semi-urban areas included organizing adolescent boys and girls and young men and women into groups, holding sessions with these groups with the use of specially designed curriculum and assessing the progress with the

#### Collectives at the Community Level

#### Formation of collectives required special efforts, rapport and context relevant strategies and were effective in organizing communities

Organizing young men, women and adolescents into groups as conceived by the campaign required context specific strategies, good rapport with the communities and a lot of persuasion. Oxfam India's previous work with women groups in the campaign areas initially helped in organizing women. Survivors of domestic violence were especially included in the collectives.

Oxfam India and its partners took special measures to form groups of men and adolescents, which was significantly time consuming. As a common strategy, the partners approached family members of the women group members to join the adolescents and men groups. This household approach led to more stable groups in the village as the family members were sensitized at the same time and resistance from within the family was reduced. In other cases, partners innovated as per existing context, for example in Jharkhand where patriarchal mindset is not so strong, partners engaged with the adolescents and women through football, which helped in earning their trust quickly. While in Bihar, which is a more conservative society, partners used creative arts to build rapport with the adolescents.

use of community score-cards. The campaign also engaged with village level influencers by holding quarterly meetings.

Some of the key findings with regard to effectiveness of these campaign strategies are as follows:

#### CHALLENGES

- The age criteria, i.e. 13-17 for adolescent groups and 18-29 years for young women and men collectives, was relaxed to have enough members in the collectives and to include interested women and men from other age groups.
- Forming groups of adolescents and men was especially challenging. This is because these groups initially did not relate themselves with the campaign issues. It was commonly perceived that gender related interventions are relevant to women only. The household approach helped in dealing with this challenge.
- Migration for work outside villages impacted the group membership especially of men and young boys. Oxfam India and its partners had identified this as one of the risks before starting the campaign, and had planned to keep group size big in the beginning to accommodate the dropouts. However, the drop out rate was significant. In some cases the youths also returned to the villages after few months or years. Some of the collectives kept in touch with the members on social media when they were outside the village.

#### Formal Curriculum for Knowledge Transfer

#### A well developed curriculum and delivery in modules was effective in keeping the discussions around gender discrimination and domestic violence in a systematic manner

The campaign used the two modules, i.e. 'Gendernama' and 'Jago aur Jagao Badlav ki aur', to conduct sessions with adolescents, men and women, which provided a framework to the field teams to organize the awareness sessions in a consistent and systematic manner across villages. This formalized approach was quite useful in keeping the discussions around the key issues, which often runs the risk of losing focus. While the partners and their teams used different approaches considering the low literacy levels and also their needs, the central message remained the same. Evidence from the ground suggests that the formal curriculum was effective in transferring new knowledge about gender, domestic violence and child early and forced marriage. The curriculum also helped some of the participants in developing a deeper understanding about these sensitive and rarely talked about issues.

#### CHALLENGES

- Both the courses had 48 modules to be delivered over a period of four years. Due to change in membership especially of men's groups, it was a challenge to keep the learning level of all the members at the same level.
  Partners trained Champions to deliver the modules to new members, however, difference in learning levels remained.
- Many of the collectives were fatigued with discussions after some time. Communities also prioritize problems around lack of livelihood opportunities or causes of domestic violence like alcoholism over the issues related to root causes. This affected the morale of the groups, which required constant motivation and delicate facilitation by the field teams.
- Older members especially women found it difficult to grasp the information and knowledge around legal provisions and support services.
  Further, the literacy levels of the groups also affected the learning levels.

#### **Community Score-Cards**

#### Community score-card is an effective participatory tool to educate, identify, and monitor prevalence of the cases and support services related to domestic violence and child marriage

Oxfam India applied community score-card, an easy to use tool, with the collectives annually and so far twice in the project. The results of the score-cards were analysed and presented to collectives as well as influencers in the village. As the scoring method around each of the criteria is based on the consensus method, the scoring exercise led to discussions within the collectives. This process not only led to acknowledgement of issues, which are otherwise considered sensitive and the community is in denial, but it also led to identification of cases. The criteria around legal provisions and government's support services educated the communities of their rights and the government's mandate.

Since the community score-card is organized annually and the findings (along with the comparisons with the previous one) are shared with the community, the tool empowered the community to monitor the status. This also prompted actions in certain cases wherein the collectives stopped the child marriage. The presentation of the findings also worked as an advocacy tool at the local level when it was presented to influencers group. The score-card also prompted certain element of competitiveness and inspired many of the collectives to take definitive actions. Finally, the score-card helped in moving the community from a state of denial to acceptance of prevalent negative social norms and further to take specific actions.

#### CHALLENGES

- The strength of the community score-cards is that it is participatory and the scoring is done on consensus basis. However, this also poses certain challenges. The initial round of community scorecards may not represent the actual situation with regard to different criteria as it is based on the existing knowledge and perception levels of the collective, which may not be correct. For e.g. in Jharkhand, in response to the statement 'Women are equal to men in our society', the average score decreased from 3.30 to 2.03.
- There can be certain level of competition and aspiration amongst the community members to showcase their village in positive light, which can skew the scorings.
- Accordingly, the score-card does not fully represent the actual baseline situation and changes in the villages with regard to gender discrimination, domestic violence and early marriage.

#### **Engagement with Influencers**

### Engagement with influencers led to wider acceptance of existence of negative social norms

Oxfam India and its partners systematically engaged with influencers at the community, village, block and district levels through quarterly meetings and other regular interactions. The campaign developed IEC materials for influencers which included community level traditional leaders, elders, religious heads, members of PRI, frontline health workers, officials of relevant departments including police who were approached for sensitization on the campaign issues. Later these group members were also encouraged to take specific actions against the prevalent negative social norms.

At the first level, the campaign strategy was effective in influencers accepting and acknowledging the prevalence and existence of negative social norms, which in itself is a significant accomplishment as there is widespread denial. Second, the engagement led to the community leaders and influencers to deliver messages to eliminate such negative practices. Third, since the influencers were also engaged in planning and monitoring of strategies along with the collectives, the collectives of adolescents, men and women felt recognized. Finally, it also led to better understanding of the issues by the influencer group. Overall, the engagement with the influencers provided critical support to the Champions and collectives in taking actions against the negative social norms. And in some cases, it also led to influencers leading the change. Since the campaign also engaged with block and district level influencers, it helped the collectives in accessing government support services.

#### CHALLENGES

- The level of engagement and interest varied across individuals and geographies and accordingly, the effectiveness was also not uniform.
- Many of the influencers were old men who were highly resistant to change and did not accept concepts around gender equality easily. While they may be politically correct and make the right noises at various public forums, the gender stereotypes and patriarchal systems are deeply entrenched and linked with power equations, and which they do not want to disturb.
- Engagement with influencers is highly resource intensive and bringing them under one platform for quarterly meetings required significant facilitation efforts.

#### Effectiveness of Institution Level Campaign Strategies

As part of the *Bano Nayi Soch* Campaign, Oxfam India engaged with the youth in the urban areas in the five states by partnering with educational institutions. The key strategies in the urban areas included Film Appreciation Module in all the five states, 'Samanta Saathi' (Gender Equality Partners) programme for young men in Chhattisgarh and Bihar, a specially designed course for college students in Odisha, youth festivals at the state level and inter-state youth festival. Some of these modules like the film appreciation module were also shown to rural youth.

#### Film Appreciation Module

#### Film appreciation module was effective in making the youth understand the deeply embedded patriarchy in Indian films and Indian society

The film appreciation module helped the youth in understanding gender as a concept, the associated negative social norms and the deeply embedded patriarchy in the society as perpetuated by popular cinema. For most of the youths, the course was an eve-opener, which led to greater understanding of gender and the patriarchy in society and including their homes. Youth further understood the deeply ingrained gender negative social norms, which they could not identify earlier and treated them as 'normal'. The module was effective in building new knowledge in the minds of the youth and also encouraging them to take action including critical review of the popular cinema. The special module on social action project planning triggered a number of initiatives by the participants in their homes, immediate neighbourhoods and on social media platforms. The young Champions are now running these initiatives independently. For example 'Gender Talkies' in Instagram, 'Rising Stars' as WhatsApp group are working as social media plaftorms for creative expressions on gender equality such as feminist songs, stories to mobilize their peers.

#### CHALLENGES

 The module's duration is short and is not sufficient to adequately engage with the youths in urban areas. As evident from strategies in most of the states, 0xfam India initiated other courses by adapting their longer modules to deeply engage with the youth for a longer duration.

#### Samanta Saathi Course

#### Samanta Saathi (Gender Equality Champions) course along with Gendernama helped the urban young men who completed the course to build deeper understanding of the gender issues

In Bihar and Chhattisgarh, urban youth (men) under the *Samanta Saathi* programme attended 'Login: New Man', an online programme, along with *Gendernama*, an offline course adapted and compressed into 12 modules from the original one. While the online course helped in building understanding of the gender issues, *Gendernama* helped the students to share their perspectives. Young men shared that the course helped in understanding how unconsciously they were also part of the patriarchal society and in many ways, furthering the same system. The social action project further helped them to identify the gender biases within the family and in society and motivated them to take specific actions.

#### CHALLENGES

- Since the course attendants were college students, scheduling the course along with offline interactions was a challenge due to their pre-existing commitments and academic calendar.
- The online course faced technical glitches relating to username and passwords, ability to access the course from mobile phones, mentors not able to track students' progress and other issues, which affected the effectiveness of the module.
- The online course is not interactive and as such many of the students did not find it user-friendly.
- A significant percentage of students who enrolled into the course did not complete it, for e.g. in Bihar 45 per cent of the 100 students did not complete all the modules.
- The online course alone is not sufficient to motivate the youth to take actions against negative social norms. The offline sharing is quite important to facilitate that process.

#### Gender, Masculinity and Violence Against Women Course in Odisha

#### In Odisha, the 'Gender Masculinity and Violence Against Women' course in Utkal University significantly helped the young students to understand the gender inequity especially domestic violence and sexual harassment

In Odisha, the Oxfam modules 'Gendernama' for men and 'Jago Aur Jagao Badlav Ki Aur' for women were adapted to develop the course, 'Gender Masculinity and Violence Against Women'. The evidence suggests that the course participants developed a deeper understanding of the gender issues especially domestic violence and sexual harassment. This in-depth understanding led them to understand the underlying causes of the negative social norms in their families, neighbourhoods, and public spaces as well as in the institutions. Because of this better understanding, some of the course participants took special initiatives to object to domestic violence in their families, public spaces and in the university. Some of the participants also took special initiative to spread this understanding in the previous educational institutions that they had attended.

#### CHALLENGES

- The only challenge that this strategy faced is that it could be conducted only in one university in Odisha due to resource constraints.

#### Effectiveness of Campaign's Mass Mobilization Strategies

#### Campaign's mass mobilization strategies were effective in generating momentum and in engaging with wider sections of the society

Oxfam India and its partners conducted various mass mobilization events like 16-Days of Activism, youth festivals, inter-state and inter-college competitions, interactive street plays, mass dissemination activities using mobile van, community radio, mobiles, film screening in schools and colleges and conferences/seminars on social norms in universities. These events were conducted at the block, district, and state level and created significant momentum around sensitive issues of gender discrimination, domestic violence, sexual harassment and patriarchal system in the society. The events encouraged discussions and engagement of the youth and other citizens around the sensitive issues, which are otherwise hardly spoken about. Further these events also gave an opportunity to the youths to showcase their leadership and organizational abilities, as they were closely involved in the organization of the events. The events, which witnessed good participation from different sections of the society, gave a lot of impetus to the partners' regular work and also encouraged them to continue working on issues which are otherwise very difficult to work upon. Overall, these mass mobilizations, which were resource intensive, were effective in creating a favourable environment for the campaign.

#### **Effectiveness of Champions Strategy**

#### The Gender Justice Champion strategy recognized the special efforts of the Champions and built their capacities to further the objectives of the campaign

The campaign selected around 215 Champions from urban and rural areas in five states, which meant a lot to the youths who showed significant interest in the campaign and took special initiatives. The campaign further conducted three-day handholding ToT workshops for 100 Champions, which built their capacities as master trainers. The Champions were also engaged as volunteers in many of the campaign activities, which led to showcasing of their talents and leadership skills. This also helped them in sharpening their planning and organizing skills. The Champions by participating in these events got exposed to the outer world and got an opportunity to share their thoughts with other likeminded Champions. For many of the youths, it was for the first time that they had moved out of their hometowns or villages to the state capital. For many others, it encouraged them to use social media and creative arts to speak against gender discrimination and the patriarchal system.

This strategy instilled a good degree of selfconfidence in the young Champions and also motivated them to set examples for gender equality, elimination of domestic violence, sexual harassment and child, early and forced marriage.

#### CHALLENGE

- In absence of an overall consolidated strategy, the number of Champions and their distribution across rural and urban areas also varied across five intervention states.

#### Impact of the Campaign

In order to understand the impact of the campaign, the Social-Ecological Model is being used, which analyses the factors and conditions at the four levels, i.e. individual, relationships, community and societal.<sup>3</sup> Further the study has used 'Most Significant Change' methodology wherein the Champions are the subjects as well as agents of the social change. Accordingly, the impact of the campaign is being assessed from the perspective of the Champions based on the MSC stories.

#### Impact at the Individual Level

#### The campaign significantly impacted Champions' understanding of gender, root causes of gender discrimination, domestic violence and early marriage, and its links with patriarchal system, and the role of popular cinema

The campaign has made a significant impact on the knowledge levels of the Champions. For many, the new knowledge and understanding around the gender issues was an eye- opener. The Champions developed an in-depth understanding of the gender as a concept and the discrimination associated with it in the patriarchal society. The Champions can now understand roles traditionally assigned to men and women and its linkage with the power structure. The Champions also gained new knowledge around role of popular cinema in perpetuating patriarchal system. Further, the campaign helped the Champions to understand the root causes of domestic violence and early marriage. The campaign also helped in understanding the legal provisions, entitlements and government support mechanisms. Overall, this knowledge led the Champions in developing strong belief to change the prevalent negative gender social norms.

#### The Champions have undergone a significant attitudinal change towards challenging negative social norms and practices, i.e. from being indifferent or helpless to taking a more proactive stand

Most of the Champions considered gender discrimination, domestic violence and early marriage as wrong, however, were either indifferent or helpless to deal with them. The new knowledge led to significant attitudinal change in all the Champions. In cases where the Champions are survivors, they do not consider themselves as helpless anymore but are motivated to strongly reject any form of violence

3 https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/publichealthissue/ social-ecologicalmodel.html under any circumstances. The attitudes of young women have changed towards education and career have changed as they now want to complete higher studies and be financial independent. These young women look at gender discrimination and violence as crime and find them completely unacceptable under any circumstances. From being indifferent earlier, the young men now reject gender-based discrimination and toxic masculinity. Importantly, the Champions understand their role in changing the situation and are hopeful, confident and committed towards making significant contributions.

## Champions have emerged as leaders and agents of social change to end gender discrimination, VAWG and CEFM

During the campaign some of the Champions have undergone significant behavioural changes as they discovered leadership abilities and also took special initiatives to enforce positive social norms within their families, community and society.

The MSC stories suggest transformation of women from being survivors of domestic violence to award winning micro-entrepreneurs, from a normal college student to a crusader against sexual harassment in college and against domestic violence in their homes. The stories also suggest behaviour change of young men as creative artists using social media to disseminate messages against negative social norms. Another common and significant behaviour change amongst young men is their participation in daily household chores, which is considered women's work in patriarchal system. Young men have also taken initiatives to support their sisters for higher education and also prevented child marriages. Another Champion took up the cause of caste-based discrimination and led the social norm change.

The evidence from the MSCs suggests that Champions have emerged as home-grown role models for social change in highly challenging environments.

#### Impact at the Relationships Level

#### Collectives in the rural areas and peer group in the urban areas served as safe spaces for young Champions

Collectives of adolescents, men and women served as safe spaces for the young Champions where they could freely share their thoughts, ideas and experiences about the highly sensitive topics and negative as well as positive social norms. These collectives helped them cement their thoughts and made them believe about the progressive changes required in their families, community as well as at the societal level. These collectives also worked as reference group for young Champions who were earlier limited to just their family members or friends.

# Young Champions acted as influencers for their collectives to disseminate knowledge around gender discrimination, VAWG and CEFM

In most of the cases, the young Champions are also the group leaders of their collectives in rural areas where they influenced the knowledge and thinking of the group towards the negative social norms and enforced beliefs to take action to change them. Armed with the knowledge and skills gained during the campaign, these Champions along with their group members started questioning the negative social norms, their rationales and implications in their lives. As grass-root leaders, the Champions got a new identity after getting associated with the campaign which helped them to lead several initiatives in partnership with the members of the collectives to stop gender discrimination, domestic violence, child marriage as well as promote girl child education. In urban areas, the batch- mates of the course functioned similarly in giving strength to the Champions.

# Young Champions developed new relationships within families and immediate community to further the positive social norms

Most of the young Champions developed a new relationship with their family members wherein they counselled, negotiated and led the family members to either stop the negative practices or to take action to promote positive gender norms. Within the families, mothers and siblings mostly served as reference group for the Champions who provided support in enforcing change. The Champions mostly used counselling methods to bring changes within their families.

#### Mentors, course coordinators, OIN team and partners worked as reference group who provided support to the Champions in leading the change

In many of the cases, the course coordinators in the universities, the assigned mentors and Oxfam India team worked as reference group for the young Champions who supported them to question the negative social norms and motivated them to bring in changes. The close interaction of a very different kind during many of the campaign activities helped them in forging a new and special relationship where the common objective was to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and gender based violence.

#### Impact at the community level

# Strategic engagement with influencers lead to debate, discussions and questioning of negative social norms

The Champions, collectives and the partners strategically engaged with influencers to first educate them on the prevalent negative social norms and their root causes, which led to discussions at the community level. The regular engagement with influencers also helped in making known their disapprovals of the negative social norms at the community level and it also made them commit to the positive social norms. This created an enabling environment in many of the communities to introduce positive social norms even at the institutional level.

### Change in social norms at the community level is possible

The campaign has led to a good number of cases where the communities in rural areas have taken definitive steps to change negative social norms. In most of the cases, the Champions have led this change with support of their reference groups. In some of the cases, the collectives have jointly taken action and in few others community level stakeholders have led the initiative. The following changes in social norms illustrate the impact of the programme:

- In Bihar, a woman *Sarpanch* (elected leader of local governance institution), is leading the fight to end domestic violence in her village. Apart from mentoring and counselling, she is also using government and legal support mechanisms for this purpose.
- In Chhattisgarh, a young woman is now coaching a men's wrestling team, which is traditionally men's sport.
- In a Chhattisgarh village, a survivor of domestic violence is now a local role-model and led the village to adopt a no-tolerance policy towards domestic violence. According to the resolution, the perpetrator of domestic abuse/violence would invite punitive action by the community, which will include monetary fine and ostracization from the community. In another case in Chhattisgarh, the village adopted resolutions to end witch-hunting, child marriage and to encourage participation of Dalits in *Gram Sabha*.
- In Jharkhand, there is 100 per cent enrolment of girls in the schools with no incidence of child

marriage for last three years. Members of women collective are regular participants of the *Gram Sabha* and issues related to women's freedom is discussed. These women are also active participants in the village development activities.

- In Odisha, a girl student raised the issue of sexual harassment in the university and was able to stop it. In a village in the same state, a young man successfully led the campaign to end the gender based wage gap.
- In Odisha, the Gaud tribe unanimously passed a resolution to increase the marriageable age for girls and boys, i.e. 20 for girls and 25 for boys.
- In U.P.'s conservative society, a young Champion took up the cause of other LGBTQ community and ensured that they are respectfully invited in the community level social functions including wedding and created safe space for LGBTQ community.
- In another village of U.P., a mother of domestic violence survivor encouraged her daughter to remarry after her failed marriage. The daughter, despite being survivor of domestic violence, met the prospective groom, interacted with him and married him on her own terms.
- In Chhattisgarh, 50 women leaders contested Gram Panchayat elections and 35 have been elected. Of these 6 have been elected as the Sarpanch. Five gram sabhas have brought in a resolution to organize kabaddi matches for women; and another five gram sabhas have resolved to earmark a space in all panchayat bhawans for women's resource centre.
- In Odisha, 27 girls were supported to continue with their education and 7 girls were prevented from marrying too early. Youth are talking about menstrual taboos being discriminatory for women and girls and also about inclusion of transpersons in the community. One of the Champions took up the issue of gender parity in payment of agriculture workers.
- In Jharkhand, sport was successfully used as tool to challenge social norm of 'women are supposed to stay at home', by forming football teams for Adivasi girls and women.

The above examples highlight the impact of the programme at the community level where the change is evident and lasting.



Some of the key lessons that the campaign generated especially with regard to campaign's theory of change are being presented below. The lessons relate to the campaign's strategies and the desired outcomes.

- The campaign's overall strategy at the community level based on the technical understanding of social norms and its components, i.e. social expectations, reference group and social actions, is valid. Based on this understanding, strategy targeted both descriptive as well as injunctive social norms, which included collectivization of communities, creating a new reference group in the community by building their capacities, recognizing the Champions and sensitizing the key influencers. Further the campaign's dual strategy of eliminating negative social norms and promoting positive social norms helped in achieving greater impact at the community level.
- 2. The campaign design targeted young population, i.e. between 13 years to 29 years, however, the evidence suggests that adults older than 29 years especially women can play a significant role at the community level. However, it is also true that it is difficult to change the beliefs of adults under normal circumstances and require special efforts and persuasion. The further categorization of village level community between adolescents and youths, i.e. 13-17 years and 18-29 years require flexibility and need not be rigid. The categorization can be relaxed based on the context to ensure cohesion.

- 3. The formal curriculum provides a uniform framework to engage with community, however, methodologies need to be adapted as per the local context. Factors like illiteracy, local dialects, symbolisms significantly influence the learning process.
- 4. Recognizing youth as Gender Justice Champions based on their initiatives gives a new identity and meaning to the Champions who with new energy plays a critical role in accelerating change in social norms within the communities.
- 5. It is important to identify and work with sensitive local stakeholders for them to serve the role of influencers at the community. While it is important to engage with the entire group of influencers, the key influencers in each community irrespective of their age can play the role of change-makers.
- Campaign's current level of engagement and the methodology with the influencers is not sufficient for them to play a critical role in changing social norms. Due to diverse interests of the group of influencers, their engagement levels vary and so does their contributions.
- 7. While there is always a pressure from the communities to take the initiative towards local problems and more tangible benefits, it is important to maintain the focus around the issues of gender discrimination, VAWG and early marriage, where the benefits are perceived as non-tangible. Establishing linkage of the groups with livelihood lifts the morale significantly, however, delicate management is required to remain committed to original purpose of the collectives, i.e. changing social norms.
- 8. Organizing adolescents and youths, especially boys and men take special efforts and persuasion as initially they do not relate themselves with the issues of VAWG and gender discrimination. Context specific efforts are required to build rapport and once engaged, they play a significant role. A household approach, where all the members of the same household are part of the different groups helps in building rapport and trust in a shorter span of time and is more effective.

- Community score-card is an excellent tool to educate and sensitize the community in a very specific manner, however, does not always represent the real status of indicators as it is based on the group's opinion and perception.
- 10. Use of popular cinema through film appreciation module is an effective way to engage with the urban youth, however, considering their fast pace, a deeper and continuous engagement strategy is required.
- 11. Online courses need to be more interactive and mindful of the infrastructural realities of the small towns and require offline interactions to retain the interest of the youths.
- 12. Mass mobilization activities complement the long-term strategies in creating momentum to engage with common masses. These activities also provide a platform to youths to showcase their talents and leadership skills.
- 13. Gender Justice Champions require additional capacities building activities to get exposed to newer methods, which helps them in leading initiatives to bring in social change.
- 14. Gender Justice Champions require a new reference group, in form of collectives, mentors or development workers.
- 15. A greater rapport and trust through prolonged engagement with communities and youths is required to discuss highly sensitive topics like sexual violence in intimate relationships.
- 16. Change in social norms is possible, for which a complex set of factors is often responsible. The factors include creating safe spaces for communities to discuss negative social norms, new knowledge to understand the root causes, home grown role models to lead the initiatives, a supportive environment provided by local influencers and a new positive social norm sanctioned by the community.

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