

CHILD CENTERED VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT

A description of efforts made by
community and children's collectives
on issues matter for them



2010



Introduction

Extreme poverty, and constrained access to right based entitlements together determine the status and condition of children in Dholpur. Dholpur, is also among the districts having a most adverse sex ratio in the state. The practice of female infanticide, sex selective abortion and strong preference for a male child in most communities has been seen as factors contributing to this imbalance. Child marriage also continues to be serious problem in the district. The situation is particularly adverse for the children who born in poverty. These children face further inequalities in access to crucial resources, leading to exclusion and marginalization. A considerable number of children in the district are in child labour category and those who are in schools, can no way in a better situation. There are huge variation in terms of retention, learning levels and drop -out rates in the state. There are also reported cases of child trafficking and child migration for seasonal work in nearby cities and states. In Dholpur, involvement of children in mining work and processes is significant. It is also important to note that a significant part of mining is “illegal” in the state. Given that most of the mining and quarrying in the District is carried out on informal sites leaving very little space for legal intervention related to the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act.

Prayatn, in 2003 initiated a child centered development process in 90 villages of Dholpur district. In all these villages the incidence of child poverty was high. Particularly the issues such as child labour, child marriage and high dropout rates in primary school grades were rampant. The core approach of the project has been to build community's capacity to demand for their rights and entitlements. There was also a focus of developing a facilitating external environment thereby working closely with institutions of accountability such as school, health department, Panchayati Raj Institutions and Police. Like any other social issue, it was not an easy task to sensitize the community on the rights of the child. Challenging the phenomenon of child work was also a great difficulty. There was always a circular discussion on issues of why children do not go to school.....because of poor quality of schools or apathy of parents. The mechanisms of local control such as School Management and Development Committees (SDMCs) or Village Health and Sanitation

The Initiative

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, supports child participation as a basic right. Children have the right to be heard and considered in decisions affecting them, and the right to access to information, freedom of belief and freedom of association. The CRC further states that child rights have to be handled by adults, depending on the age of the child 'in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child'. In partnership with Save the Children Finland and Bal Raksha Bharat, Prayatn is implementing a project aiming at developing community based systems to ensure Inclusive Quality Education and Child Protection. The project is being implemented in 90 villages of Dholpur district in the state of Rajasthan in India.

Rights-based and needs-based approaches: A rights-based approach is useful in particular at the macro level whereas the needs approach is more helpful at the community level. The advantage of a rights-based compared to a needs-based approach is that one can identify duty-bearers: people or institutions with the responsibility towards the rights-holders. Identification of different stakeholders and understanding their stake in the process facilitates the use of constitutional spaces to bring about change in lives of right holders.

Child participation: Child participation is defined as 'a process of active, meaningful and all-inclusive involvement of children in influencing decisions and issues affecting their lives'. Good practices of child participation begin with real attentive listening to children rather than with applying 'blue print' participatory techniques. Child – adult interaction is the first area to gain for child participation. Child participation is an ongoing process. It does not need to be perfect from the start, but needs a gradual process to get children prepared. Child participation is considered essential for a successful child-centered community development process.

Children's participation

Recognizing children as the main actors in the process of making a reducing their problems, Prayatn started its work by facilitating formation of Bal Manchs (BM). The BM members encourage other children to join. A BM which have a membership of 25 to 50 children who gather to discuss problems that they face at home, in the village, or in school. The children's clubs provide a venue for children to share their feelings and support each other. The BMs have been provided with capacity building inputs and platforms for participation in discussion matter for them. BM holds monthly meetings to share the progress and decide for a roadmap for the future. The monthly meetings also provide an opportunity to its members for expression, entertainment, education and engagement with broader development processes. Initially the BM meetings used to be facilitated by Prayatn's team member. Now there is a good number of BM where this responsibility has been taken over by young leaders. Though there is no conscious effort made by the team, in some of these BM there is now an institutional structure with specifically defined roles of office bearers. The BMs have contributed a lot in terms of creating a child friendly environment in respective villages. There are also a good number of cases where the BM as a group has provided peer support to children to overcome their problems.

Nevertheless, the BMs are a part of an external environment full of adults and their institutions. Since beginning there is clarity that the children should not "replace" the role of an adult. There are mechanisms that ensure that the problem being indentified by children is shared with adults. From this point the adults take care of the issue.

Children-led indicator development

At the beginning of the initiative Prayatn team went through training on method of child centered situation analysis. The brought a stress on ensuring that the situation is understood through eyes of a child. Learning from other experiences the process later termed child led indicator development process. The team along with children developed a list of indicators for the baseline assessment of the situation of children vis-à-vis children's rights, abuse, exploitation, and most importantly school environment. The BM members collected the data and ranked each of the indicators on a scale of 0-10. The indicators are reviewed by children on a periodic basis. For review the members of BM discuss the situation and try to analyze the change against each of the indicator and rank them afresh. At times there are new indicators added in the list. The ranking contributes in developing future course of action of the BM.



Bal Adhikar Manch

A Bal Adhikar Manch (BAM) is a forum of elderly members of the village. BAM as an institution is mandated to work on issues of the rights of the child and to ensure that a child friendly environment is established in the concerned village. BAM is having a membership of 15-20 people. The BAM has been provided with a number of inputs related to human and institutional capacity enhancement. Gradually BAM has emerging as a representative body of the village and have started taking up broader developmental issues such road, electricity and water. With the knowledge and skills gained, the BAM members have now been nominated to several village level committees responsible to ensure better implementation of child development programs. A number of community based systems and mechanisms have also been developed by BAM towards protection and promotion of the rights of the child. The BAM do have an operational linkage with the structures of local self governance i.e. the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This relationship helps the BAM to take forward the issues of children to the departments accountable for providing services to the child.



The BAM functions as a watchdog

There is a close coordination with BAM and BM. They work as an informal network to ensure that the rights of the child are protected in the village. Be it a case of child marriage, corporal punishment, domestic violence, child labor or school dropout children take primary responsibility to report the fact with BAM as soon as they get the information. The BAM then take up the issue further and raise the issue with concerned family of institution of accountability.

Village rules

The BAM has been developing village rules against child protection. Developing these rules has enabled the BAM members and relevant stakeholders to understand children's rights and laws better and protect them from abuse. While village rules help the people in the community to prevent abuse, there must be a strong commitment from the villagers to enforce them. There have been questions related to meet the expenses. At some villages the BAM have been able to institutionalize a common village fund.

1. Ensure that all children and adults know children's rights well.
2. Priorities the best interest of the child in the village agenda.
3. Promote children's right to go to school.
4. Never accept any form of child abuse and violation of children's rights.
5. Take action to support and protect children from any kind of abuse thereby banning use of alcohol and gambling in the village.
6. Listen and consider children's voices.
7. Cooperate with all people, government institutions, and non-governmental organizations to help children to access needed services.

Successful initiatives:

1. Saving Box

In the Baseri Block of Dholpur district, there is this small village called 'Richari'. Approximately 60 families reside in this village. People from different caste and creed live harmoniously in this village as a large family. The children of the village go to the village's middle school to get education.

Since past three years the Children's forum "BAL Manch"/BM (members aged 6-18 yrs.) and Elderly forum "Bal Adhikar Manch"/BAM (members above 18 yrs.) are active in this village like many others in the three blocks of Dholpur district. There are regular meetings of these two forums in which children and elders talk on issues like child rights, development of village and several others. Over the period of time positive results have come up in this direction. In the beginning of the intervention by Prayatn there were certain community activities initiated by the organization like BM and BAM and it is observed that, now after some period of time these CBOs (community based organizations) are efficiently working on their own and taking care of children and the problems they face in the community, school and at home.

In one such incidence we came across a very interesting case of development of Children's Saving Box. The poor, unskilled, illiterate, uneducated and unaware parents who earn mere daily bread after a day's hard labour are unable financially to satisfy the basic needs of their children. The free basic education and sports facility along with other facilities in schools are provided to the village children by government. But other than school if children wanted to indulge in any kind of sport's activities, then they didn't had any option. Children in post school hours would just wander around the village and started picking bad habits like smoking, chewing tobacco and even gambling. To make their leisure hours more productive it was discussed by the children in one of the meetings of BM that they should have some basic sport equipment's with the CBO. This idea was liked and a lot of excitement in the children was observed. In order

to get some Bats and balls, Racquets and shuttle cocks, skipping ropes, flying discs, rings, etc. They thought of having a common fund with the forum which can be used for buying all this. All the children in the BM meeting decided to get 2-5 rupees from their parents in the next meeting. In the next meeting the elder children among the members guided that; first of all they should get a piggy bank kind of a saving box with the forum. Then who so ever gets the money for depositing in the box will have his /her name in the record register and they will be maintaining a record of money coming in the saving box and going out for purchasing. The total sum of initial money collected was two hundred and five rupees. This saving box not only provided them things to play with but it proved to most useful as it is also used for buying required stationary by the children of the village whose parents can't afford buying this.

Now these children motivate other children of the village to contribute and become members of BM. Gradually the parents, teachers and children themselves realized that by participating in such group activities in BM and attending meetings there, now the children have a positive change in attitude, awareness about rights, increased confidence level. The village children who were shy and hesitant in sharing their feelings, thoughts and problems with teachers and parents earlier are now comfortable and confident in bringing the issues affecting them in school and at home to elders. The children came to know about a lot of social malpractices/evils in their society like child marriage, child labour, gambling, alcohol and tobacco consumption and importance of education, awareness of their rights by different mediums in the BM meetings. This resulted in decreased incidences dropouts from the school, child labour, child marriage. BM member worked actively in the village. By the efforts of the children of BM several dropouts are back to school and regular enrolment takes place of children who attain the age of 6 years in the beginning of every educational session. All the people of the village have an understanding on the importance of education in life and at present all the children in the village are getting education.

2. Making School Environment Safe & Friendly and making 20 students regular in School

A village named 'Dhannu ka Pura' in the Bari Block of the Dholpur district is an ideal village in its own respect. About 157 families reside in this village. The villagers are mainly from the Thakur, Brahmins, Gaud, Jatavs, Kori and Khatik communities. There is one Middle school and one Aganwadi center in the village. The general level of awareness is high in this village and the villagers have communal unity here. The issues about caste and creed, myths and beliefs and untouchability which impede the development of the villages in these modern times do not exist here. The main occupations of the people in this village are agriculture, animal husbandry and mining. Both the CBOs BAM & BM work actively in the village. The level of education is average in the village but the situation of Schedule caste and Schedule tribe is much below the average.

It was observed that there is huge number of irregular children in the school and gradually these irregular children are becoming dropouts. The reason behind this was indiscipline in the school and ignorance of the teachers. There used to be discussion in BM/BAM often about the importance of going to school regularly, but they were not able to do anything constructive about the irregular students. The irregular children were getting away from the mainstream education and eventually were getting lost in the vicious cycle of child marriage, child labour and illiteracy.

To make the irregular students regular the BM member formed a system. In this new system a group of 4 children was made as a team to work on this issue and in the similar manner many such teams were formed. These teams were then given their target to look for the irregular children in their locality and in the village and try to contact his parents and teachers and make efforts to make him/her regular at school. Other than this special emphasis were made by the BM member's teams to make the irregular child understand the importance of education in life and a safe and friendly environment in the school where they are not threatened, scolded or given any form of physical punishments. The team tried not only to make the child understand these things but also briefed this to the parents and the teachers and also

made them realize that these few issues affect the child's psyche tremendously. This way these teams motivated all the irregular children of the village and made sure that they go to school by taking them to the school along the team. This system was successfully implemented in the village and gradually twenty irregular students became regular at school.



3. Road to School

There is this village called 'Shikarra, which is 32 kms from the district headquarter, Dholpur in the Bari Block. This village comes in the Chilachond Panchayat. Shikarra is situated in 2 kms away from the Panchayat headquarter in the foothills of the Aravali range. There are 105 houses in the village which belong to the people of Rajput, Brahmin, Kholi and Jatav communities. Like most of the people in this region, these villagers too are indulged in either in farming or in mining.

Since last two years presence of Prayatn has been in this village and due to some interest and intervention of the organization, there are two CBOs BAM and BM which are working actively in the village towards the development of the village and Child Rights. BM is the forum of children who unitedly realize, identify, discuss and bring their problems to the BAM who then acts to solve the issue affecting them.

There is one high school in here but it is situated at some distance from the village. There is only one mud road to the school and the school going children face problems on their way to school. The muddy, bumpy and uneven road creates difficulty in reaching school. The BM members after discussing this issue in their meeting brought this issue to the knowledge of the BAM members. The BAM members looked into this matter and later within their meetings decided to take it up to the authorities. The BAM representatives went to the B.D.O (Block Development Officer) and A.D.M (Additional District Magistrate) with a letter representing the issue, to build a concrete road to the school under the NREGA*.

*(The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.)

With effect to this letter, the A.D.M (Bari) immediately sanctioned a budget of Rupees. 10 lakhs for the construction of the road and later a concrete road was made to the road. This way the road to the school was made.



4. Increase in number of teachers in the school by the efforts of BM & BAM

Rahrahi is a small village situated on a hill top in the Baseri Block of Dholpur district. In this village the habitation is divided into two parts one part which is on the top of the hillock and the other part is across the Sarmathura road. The majority of the houses on the hillock are of Jatav community and the houses across the road mainly belong to the Meena community. In all there are 70 households in this village. Another village called Rajpura is situated nearby. The main occupation of the people here is mining and few families do farming which is rain water based but due to little or no rains and no irrigation facilities the peasants do not get enough returns out of it. There is electricity in the village but due to faults in the transformer often there is no electricity. There is one Aganwadi Center here. In this village the middle school was upgraded as a high school and many children from nearby village come to get education here.

In this high school problem of less number of teachers was often observed. The number of teacher should have been increased after the up gradation but instead the existing teachers were also transferred to other schools and finally the school was left with only one female teacher and 3 male teachers. There were these two CBOs in the village who would talk about Children & their rights and Inclusive Quality Education in the village. Persistently this issue of inappropriate number of teachers in the school was coming up in their meetings. Thus BM & BAM decided to deal with this issue jointly. They represented their problem jointly in a letter to the B.E.E.O (Block Education Extension Officer), this letter was taken to the B.E.E.O by a representative group of BAM members.

To the effect of this letter the B.E.E.O immediately ordered for appointment of a teacher in the school. At present there are now 5 teachers in the school and the CBOs are making efforts to get required number of teachers in the school. The CBOs regularly examine the Mid-Day Meal in the schools, volunteered in the enrolment of children in school at the beginning of the session and participated in the constitution of School Management Committee (SMC).

5. LIBRARY REVIVIED

In the Baseri Block on the Sarmathura road there is this village called 'Dompura'. In this village nearly 100 families of Jatav , Gujjar and Kushwah community are residing. Dompura is situated on near the main road leading from Sarmathura to karuli. There is large water hole near the village which carries water supplied from the Parvati Dam for the Dang region (The ravenous area of Chambal and its tributaries infested by dacoits is known as Dang Area of Rajasthan.) This water hole is used by the people of this village for farming and for the drinking purpose of cattle. The mountain range near the village which facilitates the mining to the people of this area so the majority of people do this and very little farming is done.

Earlier the village school was a primary school and it was up graded 2 years back as a middle school by the efforts of the villages CBOs BM & BAM. This up gradation instilled the interest and confidence in the villagers; they realized that they are able to make a difference in the system by their own efforts. As a result they started taking interest in the village development activities. At present there are 6 teachers in the school and the construction of the boundary wall of the school is on with the support of the villagers.

There is one library in this school. This library had some books which were not being used by any of the students. In one of the meetings of the BM the issues came up and that particular time the Prayatn's team was present in the meeting. The team along with the children of the BM brought this issue to the knowledge of the BAM. They all collectively agreed that more interesting books for children will be brought to the library. Prayatn with the support of Save the Children donated 350 books to the library with a big box to keep them all safe in the library.

Even after this, there were not many children who were taking interest in books. Now Prayatn's team along with the teachers in the school gave brief lectures on merits of book reading. This gradually increased the usability of the

books from the library. The children were now reading these books and were often observed discussing about them.

This sudden interest in library and book reading compelled the head master of the school to appoint one of the teachers as the in-charge of the library. A new record register was made to maintain the system regularly books were issued to children. In addition to this an extra reading period was given to children to read books from the library and children were allowed to take books to their home. This all resulted in creating overall better learning attitude of children in the school and there was increased interest was observed in studies by the students.



This revival of the library brought back not only the interest of children but of teachers as well. At present all the children and teachers are being benefited by the knowledge of books.

6. Malpractices by Nurse in Vaccination- Checked

Village Toadpura is situated 12 kms towards west from Bari. There are nearly 500 houses in this village of various communities like Rajputs, Brahmins, Jatavs, etc. There is one primary school and one Aganwadi center in the village. The level of education is low in this village; it is observed that generally students drop studies after 8th grade. The main occupation of this village is agriculture and the women folk of the village are relatively well aware. A nurse named 'Mira', use to come to this village for vaccination of young children and expecting mothers.

Mira had a careless attitude towards the villagers. She would take them for granted and was administering the syringe incorrectly while giving injections to children and women. It was observed that she would reuse the syringe and would inject the syringe without removing the clothes. This malpractice was creating several problems to the women and children, often after the vaccination the injection site in their arm would swell, small wounds use to form leading to rupture at the site after some time, and the site use to drain pus. Painful nodules were too occurring soon after injection.

When this issue came to the meeting of BAM, there was a lot of agitation of this malpractice by the Nurse .They all discussed and came to the conclusion of sorting this out with the Nurse. The next time the nurse came, they all went to her and asked to stop this malpractice or else they will complain against her to the District Collector and to Chief Medical Officer. She admitted her fault and assured them all to be careful in future.

Since then she became very careful while doing the vaccinations. The villagers and BAM members realized the impact of their united strength.

7. A CHANGE FOR BETTER : case of Shailendra &Anokhi

I) Shailendra

Shailendra is a 12 years old boy and is the youngest in his eight siblings. They are four brothers and four sisters. He lives in a small village called 'Baroli ka Pura' in Bari Block of Dholpur district. His family lives much below the poverty line. His father Bharosa Ram runs the family with great difficulty working very hard to earn the daily bread for his family. The difficult life has taken its toll on Bharosa Ram considerably but, despite facing the everyday struggle in life, he still has a vision in life for the well-being of his children. This sense of responsibility toward the family gives him the ability to guide his children. They all are doing well in studies and attend school regularly.

Shailendra in year 2008 became the member of BM. It was observed that in the meetings of BM, initially he was too shy to talk openly with other members but at the same time he was very mischievous too. It was not just his problem, majority of children in BM were of the similar nature. These children use to come in good numbers in the meetings but were not comfortable talking their problem in the meetings. When the Prayatn's Team realized that firstly they need to have confidence of these young boys and girls. Then several activities were carried out in order to bring the true child hidden inside these timid faces. Personal contact was done with the children and the families; a rapport was built with them and their parents, many different types of creative activities like essay writing, drawing and coloring competitions, debates, quizzes and puzzles solving, songs and lots of sports activities were then carried out with the children of BM. Gradually, these activities resulted in a manner which no one expected and over a period of time, there was considerable change in the behavior of children. Now they were all not only present but were very attentive in the meetings of BM and they were no longer shy to talk to the Prayatn's Team members and share their opinion on the issues in the discussions. These children started bringing their small problems in the meeting from the school and the house hold. Later these children started to talk on the issues of village and its development.

Shailendra was not much different from the other children in the BM. He would too attend the meetings regularly and started participating in the discussions and debate in the meetings and would not hesitate in asking questions. He not only indulged himself in the several activities of BM but, also at the same time motivated other children at school and neighborhood to join the BM and to attend the school regularly.

In the meetings of BM as per the Project the stress was laid by the Prayatn Team members on Intensive Quality Education, Safe school environment, significance of education and child protection. The team's attempt by organising lectures and debates on these issues were successful in developing an understanding of these concepts in the children of BM. Shailendra would often participate in discussions and volunteer in the activities done in the BM. Eventually, he became confident and this positive change reflected in his academic progress also.

Shailendra was sensitive for the village development and he wanted to see his people living better lives. By now, he had some notions about social development and change, he was able to see and understand the overall social environment of his village. Shailendra by this time developed the ability to understand what all factors impede the development of the village. He took some initiative in the BM meeting to address such social issues which were a reason for many problems in their humble lives, like gambling, consumption and sale of alcohol in the village. Other did not take long to understand and join him to bring awareness in the village about these issues. By the mutual discussion in one of the meetings of BM, they all arrived on a conclusion to organize a rally, in which all the BM members will march in the village with banners in hands and saying slogans to make people aware of these social evils. Shailendra evolved as the leader of this young brigade and was able to handle the whole effort with the support of other children very well.

He took the responsibility to maintain the record register of the BM meetings and once again proved himself. He volunteered in the process of SMC constitution and participated in the group activities from time to time in BM. He played a crucial role in the action plan development of both the CBOs- BM & BAM. At present, he is an active

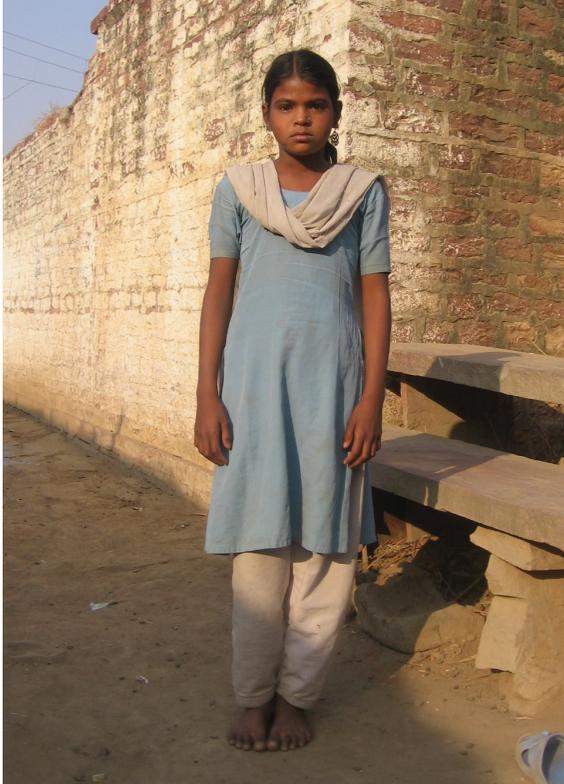
member of BM. Shailendra has surely change for better in life as today he is a confident boy doing well in studies and co-curricular activities in school, there has been a pleasant and positive transition in Shailendra's personality. As compared to this previous self, he finds himself more balanced and knowledgeable. He is more disciplined and no longer indulges in fights with other at school or home. His teachers and parents are happy to see this change in him. People in village see him as child of great potential and capability. This change in Shailendra has created a positive impact in the mind set of villager's about the interventions of Prayatn and effectiveness of CBOs in the village development.

II) Anokhi

In the village 'Hussainpura' of Bari Block in Dholpur district, there lives a 11 year old girl called Anokhi. As her name suggests she is certainly unique than other girls in the village. She is studying in 6th grade and attends the village school regularly. They are 2 sisters and 1 brother, father is one of the mine laborers in the village and mother try and support the family income by a flock of sheep. Both the parents are illiterate but work hard and send their children to school to see those living better lives later in life. They too have lot of expectations from their children like any other parents.

In village 'Hussainpura' there are nearly 125 houses and the dominant community in the village is Kushwah. The main occupations of this village are farming, mining and animal husbandry. The majority of parents are illiterate in the village as a consequence much attention is not given to the education of the children here.

Anokhi joined BM in 2006 at the very beginning of BM in the village. But she was a bit half-hearted and hanging back from participating in the discussions and sitting along with boys in the BM meetings. She was interested more in domestic work than studies. By regularly attending the BM meetings, staying in regular contact with Prayatn's Team



members and with their efforts gradually she changed from a coy girl, (who use to be reluctant in talking or participating in the group activities in BM) to a confident and effective members of BM.

Over a period of time she has developed as an active member of BM who comes up the issues affecting their lives in houses and at school. She is regular in these meetings, actively takes part in discussions and speaks her mind boldly in presence of other boys and girls in BM meetings.

Anokhi played a key role in solving the issues affecting the children at the school. She along with the other members made efforts to get the required number of teachers in the school, getting the hand pump repaired in the school campus and in representing their problems to Sarpanch (Village headman) and the principal of her school. She always motivates other girls to join the BM. She participates in the sports and group activities with great enthusiasm and in reconstitution of BM she played an important role. She wonderfully participated in the collection of Bal Kosh-Children forum's saving box. Today her attitude towards life has changed.

8. PLAY GROUND

In one of the Dholpur district's Gram Panchayat, Basai there is this small village called 'Bhilgawa'. It is situated at a distance of 9 kms from Dholpur. There are 120 houses in this village and the population is approximately 1200. The main community in this village is 'Khuswah', their main occupations are agriculture and mining. There is one middle school, one agarwadi centre in this village. The availability of electricity and water is satisfactory and there are relatively better roads in these villages.

Like the other villages in this region, 'Bhilgawa' was also associated with the Prayatn organization for past 3 years. The two CBOs, BM and BAM are working actively in this village as well. There were regular meetings of BM in the Village. In one such meeting, when the children were asked about the problems they face in school, it came on repeatedly that there is no playground for children even in the school. So the BM children concluded that meeting on the note that they will take their problem to the elderly people of the village to have a solution of it. In the next BAM meeting, as the BM members had planned, a representative group of BM children came up with their problem and tried to make elders understand their problem of not having any play-ground. The BM members Manish and Lekhraj met Principal the same day and made him realize that children had no place to play.

The BAM members heard their problem and assured them of fast response to the whole issue. The BAM members called the principal the same day and requested him to call a meeting of the SMC. The principal called the SMC meeting the same day, when all the members were there in the SMC meeting once again the whole matter was discussed with the all the people present in the meeting. The meeting was concluded with writing a letter to the principal, requesting him to provide the land for play-ground as soon as possible.

All the villagers gave the responsibility of getting this task done as soon as possible to the principal and at the same time villagers were ready to provide any kind of support and co-operation in this regard to the principal. Then in the SMC meeting the discussion was done to finalize the place for the play-ground. In this meeting it was suggested by the villagers that there is a big piece of land in the north of the village. This land belongs to the government and so far no activity is done ever here. So this place is near the village, is quite big and is underutilized.

The only issue in this land was this that local ex- member of legislative assembly had got this land transferred in his name by the then government. The villagers stood united on this issue and they all called in person the district collector, officers in the Tehsil (Block office) and the Sarpanch of their Panchayat. They all made them aware of the issue affecting the lives of children in the village and how much they are in the need of having a place to play in the village. Absence of a play-ground is affecting the children negatively, after the school hours the village children do not have anything productive to do. They generally waste their time wandering in the village and tend to pick bad habits of playing cards and then start betting money on the cards. To have bet on the cards, these children ask for money from the parents and when the parents are unable to meet their demand, then they start stealing money from their own houses. Once they have money in hand they play cards and buy alcohol and even tobacco to chew and smoke. So by throwing some light on what effects this absence of play-ground children are having, the villagers were able to convince the officers to provide the desired land, which suits the children of the village for the purpose.

In response to the efforts made by the villagers the desired piece of the land was allotted for the play-ground. At present, the play-ground is open for all the children in the village, with the help of the CBOs- BM & BAM the village children collected money from almost all the houses and bought a couple of sports equipment like –Bat and Ball, Football, Skipping rope, Flying discs, Rings, Badminton net, racquets and shuttle cocks, etc. The BM members were made responsible for taking care of all the sports equipment and to provide them to the village children in the evenings and on the holidays. This arrangement has been working well for some time and this is how the village children got their play-ground.

This is one of the many similar cases where either the children did not had the play-ground or even when the play-ground was there, it was not being used as there was some or the other problem like the playing area was filled with garbage/ water. In this journey of providing the children of their basic rights we came across many such occasions where the ignorance of elders stopped the children for long from enjoying the pleasures of childhood.



9. Vijay Quitted Tobacco-chewing

'Ninokhar' is a small village situated 16 kms from Dholpur. This village comes in Panchgaon Panchayat and is at a distance of 2kms from the panchayat. The dominant community in the village is 'Kushwah'. There are two schools in this village one government and one private school. The private school is situated in the middle of the village. The main occupation of the people in this village is farming, mining, animal- husbandry and some are daily wage laborers.

There is this trend of alcohol and tobacco chewing in this village. Almost all the men and a majority of women in the village either smoke or chew tobacco. The children in the village grow up seeing this as a part of their culture.

The two CBOs in the village are working for Child Rights and Village Development for past few years and have done a lot of good work in this short period of time. The regular meetings of the two CBOs BM & BAM are done in this village. In one such meeting while the children were talking on the problems they face in society and their cause and effects, this issue of tobacco came in discussion. Almost everyone in the in the meeting was aware of the excessive usage of tobacco in the village by the men, women and children. For sure this was a point of concern, children chewing tobacco in the village were not only damaging themselves but at the same time they were followed by other children in doing so.

There were a few shops in the village which would sell tobacco in form of Gutkas*(Chewing Tobacco) in small sachets in affordable price to villagers. Alike several men and women in the village, Children picked this bad habit of chewing tobacco. These children would often end up spending their pocket money like this without the knowledge of the parents. In the meeting of BM children were given a lecture of Ill effects of Narcotics by the Prayatn's Team members.

They all were made to understand the ill effects of the tobacco like stained teeth, bad breath, sores on the gums and in the mouth that are stubborn to heal and other dental problems. Some of the effects on dental health are escalated by the sugar that is added to the tobacco during processing to improve the taste. The habit can also affect a person's ability to taste and smell. After prolonged use there is a risk of developing oral cancer which may become apparent through a sore that does not heal, a white patch, prolonged sore throat, difficulty chewing, or a feeling there is a lump in the throat. A person should stop chewing tobacco to reduce the side effects and health risks associated with it. Chewing or smokeless tobacco contains nicotine a very addictive substance. The nicotine gets into the bloodstream through absorption in the mouth and is slower acting than getting nicotine from smoking a cigarette. The most serious health risk associated with the smokeless habit is cancer.

The habit of snuff or chewing tobacco can be considered as a very unclean habit. The substance is held in the mouth and then spit out. Some people may choose to engage in this habit because they believe it is not as harmful as smoking cigarettes. However, this is not necessarily true. The substance is still absorbed into the bloodstream and the side effects of chewing tobacco can be detrimental to health and can even lead to developing a serious illness such as cancer.

Other serious health problems associated with the smokeless habit include an increased heart rate and blood pressure. People who are engaged in this habit should stop chewing tobacco before they have a heart attack or suffer from a stroke. Heart attack and stroke can happen because the arteries constrict; there is an increased risk of blood clots; both of these effects are caused by the nicotine. Oral or mouth cancer are not the only types of cancer associated with a smokeless habit; some of the cancer-causing chemicals can get into other vital organs such as the stomach, esophagus, bowels, and bladder. High doses of nicotine can cause respiratory and digestive distress.

After this lecture to the children of BM, they were asked to give their feedback on the usage of narcotics in their lives. A lot of things came up like smoking and chewing of tobacco by their parents and other family members. Later a few

children hesitantly came up with the information that their classmates, siblings and few of the children present in the meeting do chew tobacco and their parents are unknown about the fact they do so and some of them are either facing or started facing some or the other sort of health problems. The name of this child called Vijay came up in the meeting who use to chew tobacco. So the meeting was made concluded that day. At the end of the meeting all the children now realized that it is not good for them to chew tobacco and they all took a vow of not chewing or smoking tobacco.

Vijay was later contacted by the Prayatn's team members and a few BM members. Vijay initially denied the fact completely that he chews tobacco. Later when his friends and parents were contacted then it was very clear from the inputs they gave that is a habitual tobacco chewer. Of late as per his mother he been complaining of oral sores and some digestive problems. When he was contacted once again with this information about him from his house and friends, finally he admitted that he has been chewing tobacco for past few months. He was made to understand the ill effects caused by tobacco. He then realized what harm he is causing to himself and promised to quit this habit of tobacco chewing.

Vijay was then became a member of BM. He became active in the meetings of BM and gradually quitted chewing tobacco.

10. Hand-Pump in the Village

'Hullashipura' is a small village situated in west at a distance of 4 kms from the block Bari in Dholpur district. There are about 88 families residing in the village. The population of the village is nearly 500. The main occupation of this village are farming and mining. There is a trend in the village to get into farming or mining early in life. It is observed that young boys dropout the school and are absorbed in either of the occupations as soon as they are capable of working. Animal Husbandry is also done by some families. There are not many facilities in the village for drinking water there are 3 hand-pumps and a well. The villager's use these hand-pumps for getting drinking water. For some time out of three, two of the hand-pumps were not working properly and the villagers are left with just one of the hand-pump to get the drinking water. This one hand-pump which is working is at a distance of 100 meters from the village. Since it is the only hand-pump working, all the people come to this pump only to fill their pots and this work falls under the domain of the women. So often there is a big crowd around the hand-pump and it takes on an average 2-3 hours for one woman to get a pot of drinking water from this pump, both because of distance and crowd.

Other than the huge amount of time it takes to get the drinking water, there are often quarrels amongst the women folk of the village to get water first. These small quarrels at times do take the form of big fights in the village. Everyone in the village is affected by this problem of drinking water in the village. The worst affected are the children. The school going children are often either late in schools or even if they are on time, they are dirty as their uniforms, hands and nail are not clean and this affects their health negatively. There are numerous cases of skin disease and infections of different types in these children. Often children have complains of nausea and vomiting. They miss their studies by either not attending school or coming late to the school and gradually trail behind in studies as compared to other students in class and this is how eventually they lose their interest in studies and become dropouts on any weak occasion like illness of parent, marriage in the family, etc.

This is a clear violation of their basic rights. They do not even have access to clean and safe drinking water. This matter came in the discussions of the two CBOs BM and BAM. The BAM members took this matter to the knowledge of the Prayatn's Team members in the area and asked for their advice and support on this problem.

To this the Prayatn's team called for a general meeting in the village and with the consent of villagers towards the end of the discussion, they decided to write an application to the water works department of the area to repair the other two hand-pumps as soon as possible. Twenty men and women signed this application and personally took it to the office of water works department, on the behalf of the rest of the villagers.

Along with the giving of application, they also warned the staff in the water works office to get the hand-pumps working in a week's time or else they will take the matter to the higher officers of their department and even to the district collector.

After three days the plumbers from the department came and repaired the two hand-pumps and this is how the villagers once again had the easy access to drinking water. With this success of their combined effort, the faith in unity in the village increased. The villagers now firmly believed in the power of CBOs and appreciated the appropriate support and guidance of Prayatn's team members.

This is just one of the several similar stories in many of the villages in this area, in which the villagers solved their water problem which was terribly affecting their day to day living, all by themselves working collectively through CBOs.

11. Villagers collectively came forward to stop child battering in the village and to provide safer and better environment to children

Village Basai ka pura is situated at a distance of 4 kms from Nakshoda gram panchayat and is at a distance of 10 kms from Block Bari towards west. The majority of the population of this village is from Jatav Community and there are around 48 houses of Jatavs in the village. The main occupation of the people in this village is mainly mining. Some people have migrated to Gujrat and work in the diamond cutting and polishing units.

There is one primary school, two hand-pumps for drinking water, one community centre and there is a Kuccha road (mud road) to the village from the main road outside the village. The two CBOs BM and BAM have been working for Child Rights and village development past few months. These organisations do have their meetings in the village regularly. In both the CBO's meetings the issue of child battering both at the school and home were coming often.

This was brought to the knowledge of the Prayatn's Team Members by the BAM members. Later it was observed that there is a frequent trend in the village to hit the children on petty mistakes by parents, teachers, elder siblings and just anyone one could do this to children just because of their age. There was a complete absence of a sense of empathy to this situation of children. The villagers had no concept of child rights and were insensitive towards the fact that this kind of physical abuse can affect the development of the children to a great deal. So, the BAM and Prayatn's Team decided to have a meeting with all the villagers, in which they will educate the villagers about the child rights and the negative effects of the child battering.

This general meeting soon happened and there were almost all the villagers in this meeting. BAM members and Prayatn's Team members together talked about the negative effects of the physical abuse done to children. The villagers were told how frequent and harsh beating can cause young children to bottle up their feelings of fear, anger,

and hostility and in later life these children are unusually prone to suicidal thoughts, suicide, and depression. Those children who are physically punished are more likely to grow up approving of it and using it to settle interpersonal conflicts. Even children who have experienced “normal” beating are almost three times as likely to seriously assault a sibling, compared to children who were not physically disciplined. This contributes to feelings of helplessness, and resentment that may lead to withdrawal or aggression toward caregivers. There are several Studies, which demonstrate that eliminating physical punishment does not increase misbehavior in home or school. Systematic use of positive alternatives, however, has been shown to decrease misbehavior significantly. The villagers were also told to explore other healthier alternatives to discipline children.

The discussion was left open for exchange of ideas amongst the villagers. They came up with their queries and apprehensions from time to time and all doubts were cleared by the Team members and the BAM members. They all realized the mistake they were doing and towards the end of the meeting they all mutually discussed and decided to completely stop this trend of hitting their children in the village. They all jointly declared a prohibition on this kind of an act by anyone in the village whether at the school or at the home. The school teachers were also contacted by the parents and BAM members and all the teachers and the SMC members were made aware of this new development and were requested to abide this community decision.

At present, there is a considerable decrease in hitting children and villagers are more sensitive towards the children in the village. The villagers do appreciate this initiative of the BAM and support of Prayatn to give a safer village environment to their children.

12. Irregularities in the Mid- Day Meal in the schools

Village 'Surajpura' is situated at a distance of 10 kms from the Bari block. There are about 80 houses in the village. The Gaud, Jatav, Khuswah and Nai communities mainly reside in this village. There is one primary school and one Aganwadi center in this village. The main occupation of the people in this village is farming and some do work outside the village in marble cutting units.

The CBOs were approached by the children and parents about the irregularities in the Mid-Day Meal given in the government school. The number of such similar issues either about not giving Mid-Day Meal at all or having given low quality of food grains or uncooked food given to children or nearly burnt chappatis given to children or presence of insects and lizards in the Curry in the meal or giving them adulterated pulses or serving the meal in dirty utensils and biggest of all getting the meal cooked by children only. Such complains are not uncommon to this place regarding Mid-day Meals. Well in the present case the issue alike many other places where food was cooked in the school and when it was served to the children, it would be in dirty and pre-used utensils. Some of the children found insects in the curry served to them in the mid-day meal in the school. This matter was taken to the cook, who use to prepare the meal for children by the BM children but they were taken casually by the school teachers. The school staff and administration were impervious to this humble request of the children. The children were even scolded for coming up for this issue to the school staff.

The BM members and all the other school children decided in the BM meeting to talk about this matter to their parents and BAM members.

When the parents came to know about this matter then there was a strong feeling of displeasure in them and they all brought this matter to the School Management Committees, BAM and to the other villagers. So it was decided that

they will all meet the school staff, and a common meeting was called in the village, where the this issue of irregularities in the quality of food given in the mid-day meal was raised. The school headmaster bluntly disagreed to this and then the children once again came up with the problems they have with the food served in mid-day meals in the school openly in this common meeting. The children told that how they get sick after eating the mid-day meal which is cooked in unhygienic manner. The parents told the people present in the meeting that children often get stomach aches, indigestion and infections after eating the food in the school. After listening to the children and parents and the health problems these children face, the headmaster had to apologize for not accepting the fact of irregularities in the mid-day meal and he promised that he, himself will take care of Mid-Day Meals from now onwards.

The villagers and the BAM members warned the school staff and the cook to be very careful with this in future or else they will take this matter to the district education officer and the district collector.

The SMC on the suggestion of the villagers accepted to check the quality of food in the Mid-day Meal on a day to day basis.

After this there has been a change in the quality of Mid-day Meals for the children and the vigilance team of active members of SMC often visit the school to check the food which is being given to the children in Mid-day meals.

