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An account of Community based System and
mechanism to address issues of Child Protection

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Developing Community Based Systems and Mechanism for Child Protection

Background

Addressing Child Protection issues involves challenges of changing behavioural patterns at community and individual levels and demands for a committed effort towards creating a facilitative environment for the child. On the other hand the sphere of child protection intervention expands to ensure quality and reliability of duty bearing public institutions as well. Prayatn has experienced that the positive effects (that takes place), often fade over time as there is no “reinforcement” to the changed behaviour and practices. We believe that the processes of community child abuse prevention needed adequate linkages with investment to develop and sustain local level child protection mechanism(s). Secondly, the measure to ensure child protection needs to be placed within a larger human rights context and the socio-economic environment. Links with other major societal challenges, including poverty eradication, development, ensuring quality education, and employment opportunities, cannot be ignored.

Dholpur is among the poorest districts of the state of Rajasthan. Dholpur is not only one of the remotest but also one of the most difficult places to live in Rajasthan. The indicators such as child marriage, child labour also reveals the poor situation of child protection in the district. In 2003, with support from the Save the children, Finland; Prayatn started its intervention in three blocks of Dholpur. The intervention was developed on principles of child rights programming and was specifically aimed at working on two issues i.e. Inclusive Quality Education and Child Protection. The project adopted specific activities to improve child rights situation in 90 villages of the district. While having the first round of discussion with children in the area we get an idea of the range of issues being faced by children in the area. Besides the visible areas of child abuse such as child labour, child marriage and corporal punishment there was also a high incidence of latent issues leading increased vulnerability for the child such as alcoholism among fathers, gambling and eve teasing. Besides, the geographical conditions of this region also influence abuse.

Our initial discussions with children and the community highlighted the need of a holistic approach to children's rights and child protection. This means that, one needs to take into account the bigger picture and the environment in which children live – one cannot address child protection without looking at the socio-economic environment in which children grow up, one cannot secure respect for their rights without addressing the discrimination that exists in our societies whether based on gender or other criteria. In the areas Prayatn works, at times the child is abused the right to education as he/she is turned into a vendor to raise income to sustain the family or pay fees for the other children. A child is emotionally abused when the parents fail to provide support necessary for a child's physical and emotional development. Verbal abuse often affects children on an older age that is grown enough to understand reality and facts about life. We also found that the fathers especially those who are drinkers often neglect their children.

Dholpur, an ancient city near the only perennial river, Chambal in the state of Rajasthan .Dholpur bifurcated from the district of Bharatpur in 1982 as an independent district comprising of 4 Blocks-Dholpur, Baseri, Baari and Rajakhera. In Dholpur, 18% of the population is under 6 years of age. The main occupations in this area are agriculture and mining. Dholpur is well known for its excellent sand stone, often called 'Dholpur Red'. This red stone from the mines of Dholpur has made its mark not just in local structures and market but also to those historical heritage structures of Delhi, like Red Fort. Animal husbandry and forestry are done on relatively smaller scale. But due to the poor irrigation, agriculture alone does not yield many profits to the peasants. So, right from the beginning there has been a trend of flow of labor from the agriculture to the mining which is there as an alternate source of income.

As a bitter reality, the caste based discrimination (Untouchability) prevails in villages across India and this region too has its share of this social evil. Few communities are considered inferior to the others. The entry of the so called lower castes people in the houses of the upper caste is prohibited and they even face discrimination on petty issues like fetching water from the water source, wells of the upper caste communities. The higher caste men are not even ready to sit and share their thoughts with the lower caste in village gatherings for important issues, discussions and decisions for village development.



Another area of immediate concern in Rajasthan as a whole and particularly in this under developed area of Dholpur is 'Child Marriages'. This social evil exists, the upper caste girls are married off at the age of 15-16 yrs as regular practice every year. The situation is even worse with the lower caste girls; they are married even before they attain the adolescence. The rationale behind the prevalence of this evil is of socio-ethnic background that 'girls should be married before attaining the puberty or else it is seen as a sin by the parents and other factors are like poverty, social pressure and dowry. The girls are perceived as liability by the parents.



The main occupations in this region are agriculture, mining and animal husbandry and forestry. In majority since the land is owned by upper caste communities, they do farming and animal rearing. The landless lower caste people work on their farms. Agriculture is mainly dependent on natural means of irrigation that is rain. In case if there is no or little rain (drought and famine) wells go dry and under such circumstances life becomes even more difficult. In order to earn the livelihood the villager's migrate to big cities like Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Surat, Bangalore, and Delhi, etc. In this process of migration due to economic compulsions the whole family /communities get disturbed i.e. children stop going to school and start working with the families, and this is where their education comes to a suffering end.

People who work in mines suffer from various major health issues like TB, Asthma and other respiratory diseases. Most of these mines are illegal hence they do not follow the prescribed norms and rules for the benefits and safety of workers. The functional age of mines worker is 40-45 years only, and then this economic pressure comes on other family members especially children. They start sending their children to work in mines and this is how the vicious cycle of child labor in the village is formed. It was observed that the root cause of child labor was poverty in most of the cases.

When it comes to their health, they get content by having a drink in the night rather than going to get a medical aid. As it is generally, observed that, these people in this region who are mainly involved in the mining for relatively longer period of time, do get the respiratory tract diseases. They tend to ignore their deteriorating health as they think by wasting a day's time to go see the doctors in the hospital nearby, they will lose a day's wage and it is more important for them to feed their family than to take care of themselves. They might not say this but admit that they too obsessed by daily drinking and gambling that they do not want to disturb their routine by going out of the village or by spending money on medicines. They believe in destiny and do not do any efforts to live better lives.

All the financial compulsions compel these poor people to take such steps which not any other parent would like to do in normal circumstances, like marrying off their young daughters. The economic factors which serve as the reason for the child marriages are several. While marrying the elder daughter who is an adult, a minor daughter is also married along so that later when she is sent to the in-laws house, at that time parents would spend less and would do a smaller function. This saves their money and at one time expenses both the daughters are married.



Infrastructural Aspect

These villages lack in terms of infrastructure facilities like poor road connectivity (the main roads of the villages are generally kucha* and uneven). In the name of govt. facilities only few school (with inadequate facilities) are present. These schools are often not found functioning properly with large no. of students dropping out every year. With inadequate number of teachers in the schools and they too found lacking in their performance and not following school timings, are ignorant of well-being of children, do not give sufficient attention to the mid day meal provided to children under the ICDS

Either the quality of education the schools impart is not proper or if the child has completed the highest grade in the school, then there comes the question of changing the school and the next available option is either going to a school in the nearby village or not going to school at all. At this very moment many children become drop outs. It is observed that there is a large number of students who drop out after fifth grade and the this is due to one of these reasons. The latter cause of dropping out is more often seen in case of girls, who are generally left free to go to school and get education in their respective villages but the mindset changes when the situation arises where the girls are required to go a village nearby to get education .Other infrastructural issues which affect the development of the children in these villages are non availability of the recourses like play grounds .Either there are no play grounds and if they exist then they are not available for children to play. As observed in a few cases the play ground of the government schools were occupied by the villager's for their own purposes at some places the allotted land by the govt. for play ground was used as the village dump yard. And this is how the already disadvantaged children living a precarious life in these villages are further robbed of their rights.

Not all villages have anganwadi centre under ICDS . The Anganwadi system mainly provide outreach services to poor families in need of immunization, healthy food, clean water, clean toilets and a learning environment for infants, toddlers and per-schoolers.

Where the school are till primary level or till middle level their children after passing the primary and middle schools, for the sake of higher studies have to go to other villages that too by the kucha road with burrows for water flow in this region. The parents would not allow the girls child to go to the other villages for higher education due to apprehensions about their security. And as a consequence they drop out school and are out of the development process. These girls are then engaged in domestic work. The household chores for these girls include fetching water every day as the sources of water are diminishing, getting fodder for the cattle, fuel (wood) from the forest , grazing cattle ,looking after younger siblings ,cooking, cleaning ,washing clothes and utensils,etc. All of this takes them away from getting educated.



Child protection and social control: The theoretical perspective

The Theory of Social Control elaborates on the onus that is shared by society and devised control mechanisms to ensure a safe social arena, one that is devoid of any type of delinquency. Theory of Social Control is not without specified ways to organize the various control mechanisms that are already 'in place' in society. The focus is mainly on the 'family' as the primary source of behaviour control. The assumption behind developing child friendly community based systems and mechanisms spotlights the internalization of values and timely guidance and monitoring of behaviour as the factors responsible for an 'ideal' society for the child. The process set up ways by which the likelihood of child un-friendly behaviour can be reduced.

Initially, it was difficult for Prayatn team to make people understand that abuse occurs everywhere, as long as the child's rights are violated. Our preliminary work in the field placed primary emphasis on identifying parents engaged in abusive or neglectful behaviours. Once identified, these parents were provided with knowledge and counselling to overcome their personal limitations. Recognizing that environmental forces can overwhelm even well-intended parents, more emphasis was given to develop community strategies. The strategies focus on altering the social norms that govern personal behaviour, and personal and collective responsibility for child protection. For every such strategy the goal was to build a normative cultural context and a motivated community to promote a child friendly environment in the village.

Children face systemic protection threats that arise at family, community, and societal levels and that may be grounded in a socio-historic and political context of institutionalized inequities and social injustice. The risks that child faces are rooted in chronic poverty and the structures of social exclusion that cause and inter-relate with poverty, weak social structures, and poor governance. Furthermore, there are immediate issues of family violence, gender-based violence, and risks of child labor, child marriage, sexual exploitation, and disability related issues.

The community is a crucial source of potential support since it includes friends, neighbours, elders, teachers, religious leaders and others who provide valuable care and protection. Also, communities are key points of intersection between the government and civil society. To provide adequate protection for children, however, communities need wider supports organized by the government, which bears the primary responsibility for children's protection and well-being. Government actors and institutions are obligated to provide for security, maintain law and order, and develop child friendly services, regulations, and policies that promote children's protection and well-being.



Among the most widely used community mechanisms for child protection are child-focused community groups—often called “Child Protection Committees,” “Child Welfare Committees,” and “Child Protection Networks,” among other terms. Although the groups vary considerably in regard to their formation, composition, roles and responsibilities, and mode of functioning, this review will refer to them collectively as child-focused community groups. Prayatn, since its inception has been focussing on developing Bal Adhikar Manch and Bal Manch in its intervention areas. The BAM and BM works in close coordination and share a complimentary relationship. In the path of child participation, there is always a point where we think the role of adults start. Children should not replace the role of adults in the name of participation.



Moving ahead

In the beginning, when Prayatn initiated the baseline survey to get the factual understanding of these villages and the status of children in these villages the team members were treated like any other stranger trying to sneak a peek into their lives. The team had to face many initial hurdles at the time of entry in the villages. The villagers would doubt their intentions and looked them with suspicion. However, the team kept on going to these villages and tried talking to the villagers'. Rather with time this trend of hostility changed and these villagers themselves started letting team members interact with them, sit and sip cups of tea with them.

Gradually, the people started opening in the conversations with the team members and the team was successful in accessing the actual situations of the villagers. Often the team was challenged on different issues in the village, but the team members with great sense of patience tried to show them their real problems. The team when once started having dialogue with them; the villagers started recognizing them and became friendly with the team. Now they started sharing their thoughts and listening to the team members. For some time these interactions were on personal basis or a group basis, but our need was to address the social issues on the level of community and bringing awakening on the village level. So the team after this first phase of success got involved in the process of mobilising a larger audience to listen. With number interactions with the villagers, team members got an opportunity to observe their lives closely. The villagers largely in this belt of state are like the majority in country, peasants and due to irregular rainfall are compelled to go for the alternate income prospects. Due to high density of mines in this area, they have this option readily available to choose and this is what a large chunk of them go for. Mining is associated with several health problems like TB, Asthma and other respiratory diseases. Mostly all of these mines are illegal hence they do not follow the prescribed norms and rules for the benefits and safety of workers. The functional age of mines worker is 40-45 years only, and then this economic pressure comes on other family members especially children. They start sending their children to work in mines and this is how the vicious cycle of child labour begins.

These villages do have the trend of consumption of locally made liquor which is available in the villages itself. There are several kinds of this local brew made in these villages like from the sap of palm tree , by fermentation of jaggery, grape, oranges, babul tree bark and roots, liquor made from the food grains like millet, from the flowers of mahua tree, etc. The men in these villages grew up with this culture of having this liquor in the evening on their way back to the home. They tend to stop on these liquor outlets and spend what all petty amount they have earned during the day. After having the routine intake of alcohol, these inconsiderate men tend to loose the left over money in gambling as well. They do not hesitate even in borrowing money for gambling. As a consequence of which their families do not get a minimal income to survive from the most capable member amongst them. This force women and children to step out and earn for there survival. This gives birth to the problem of child labourers and child marriage as well. The families which are economically poor face difficulty in rearing children as well. Often the boys and girls are taken out of schools as the poor family can no longer afford their studies when they do not have a single grain in house to eat. So they then start sending boys to earn where ever possible mainly to mines and marry their daughter off at very young age. After the marriage of girls parents feel free from the responsibility of security of the girl as now she is owned up by the other family.



This is how these children get further away from any possibility of getting education in future as well. The boys are soaked by the work, earning and feeding the family and girls are absorbed by the household work in the new family. These children work hard to pay off for the responsibilities given to them by the society at this young age and in turn loose themselves for life. Their development is completely disrupted from all the aspects. Now tend to carry this burnt on them till they live and would provide the same atmosphere to their children. This is how this never ending vicious cycle of misery goes. This joint effort, here which we are trying to make is to the change the way of life in this most neglected part in Rajasthan.



Meanwhile the similar efforts with elderly also turned fruitful and by the end of a couple of weeks, the villagers understood that these men and women from Prayatn are there to help them for their good. By now the team was in a position to talk about the reason of their interest in these villages and the team members on individual basis started talking about the inclusive quality education(IQE) and child protection(CP) .But surprisingly ,after so much of effort already done the team was taken a back to see the people of these villages either not interested or having no understanding of this subject of discussion. Like the true torch bearers of development, their motivation was not shaken by this and then they realized that it is the need



of the hour to address this problem to the masses. So to have them all at one place and one time to listen to all novel concepts and ideas was not a easy task for the team. Due to the presence of social-ccultural structures of caste systems in these societies having them all together was very difficult. But, by talking to them in small groups and making them realize their problems and showing the way to reach to their solutions and most importantly making them understand the power of union of the villager's, which is capable of questioning the system, made them all think alike on these issues of development.

The team members would often say, who are facing problems in villages? ,Who are getting affected by them? Where and When we can talk about our problems? How are the officials affected by villager's pursuing a problem? And similar stuff to convince them that change is possible with efforts. After several repetitive efforts like these, the age old mindsets of villager's who would believe in destiny and there problems as the curse ill deeds of previous births of there, changed.

Organizing the community

Now still with some apprehensions about the course of this new beginning the community was at least open to talk on the village level without the concerns of caste and gender issues, and consequently a general village meet was organized with the consultation of time and place with the villagers as per their convenience. The adults of the village gathered in good numbers, there were women too, who broke the shackles of traditions of not sitting with the men folk of the village, the so called traditions which kept them under the darkness of obscurity for generations together today appeared so meaningless to them.

The success of this meeting was a big challenge for the team. As the villagers were there to listen what the Prayatn's team has to say, but it was near impossible to have them all agree on a certain conclusion of the discussion. But still having the faith in the right approach, the team members conducted the session by introducing themselves and the others present in the meeting. After the rounds of introductions, which was there just to break the ice amongst the people present, a session of singing religious songs was done to have them all feel connected with a sense of fraternity. This came out to be a fruitful exercise to have them shed their false ego issues and to have them ready to talk on common grounds.



Some serious discussion started post the religious songs about the village ,infrastructure in the village, government schemes, issues related men, women and children in the village. Several different paradigms came out of this discussion .The team was witnessing a current of problems flowing from all around in the meeting like problem of drinking water, medical facilities in the village, problems of electricity in the village, road, agriculture related issues, land, water problems with the school staff, irregularity in the schools, etc.

Now it was difficult to make them understand that this all does not lie in our domain but as the good will and the confidence of villager's was more than anything, we did not step backwards . The discussions lead to conclusion of some sort of system to check all this kind of requirements , with consent and suggestions of the villager's, the idea about a Community Based Organisation (CBO) which would look in the matters of this nature and follow them to seek the solutions by the democratic approach appeared. What would be the structure of a CBO like and how would it function? And all their queries were addressed to their satisfaction and the apprehensions were made clear there and then. This concept of CBO was readily accepted and the with only a few interested villager's left with us, rest all dispersed with promise to come in same numbers in the next meeting on a happy note this collective first ever meeting of the village concluded.

A couple of these young and enthusiastic men left after the meeting were showing a great interest in these new ideas for their villages which were evolved just out of this one collective meeting. They believed in this approach and showed keen interest to get associated with the working plan of such innovations in their village. They were identified by the team and a number of interactions with them individually and collectively were very meaningful, in the sense, that we were able to see the village and their problems from their perspectives now through them. They were in a better situation to judge the whole dynamics of their villages. With the support of this young group the next collective meeting was organized on the previously decided date, place and time. In this second meeting we were hopeful to see some more positive responses in the village about the CBO and fortunately, the things went in the right direction and jointly with the discussions and approval of villagers, a CBO with the name of Bal Adhikar Manch (BAM) was formed.



Similarly evolving a platform out after the discussions with children in these villages was not a difficult task. The basic aim to have such a forum is to have the participation of children in the village development related matters and protection of their rights. The constitution of forum for children named Bal Manch (BM) took place with great enthusiasm and excitement. BM is a platform where children will give expression to their problems freely, discuss their problems with each other and with the BAM and they take decisions of their own. They learn to identify a problem, understand and take decision. Getting them (children) organised was an interesting task for the team sometimes with the medium of the songs, games and different creative activities, gave us a chance to come closer to these tender blossoms in the hamlets of India.

Gradually, we were able to convince them that talking for your own rights is absolutely fine. In the beginning these children were not opening up and after many sessions of the group activities, we and they themselves in a better position to understand where they stand today and what all they are able to do by just getting aware a bit in life. They realized that too have a place in the society of their own and they are fully capable to contribute and participate in community. Both the forums BAM & BM are in close contact with each other. Both the CBOs work together with co-operation to deal with issues affecting their lives forming systems and mechanisms. Their this effort for themselves helps in the village development and Child rights protection.



Developing community based mechanism for prohibition of alcohol:

A system was formed by the CBOs of these villages to prohibit the consumption and selling of Alcohol in the villages. The name of these villages are Dompura, Tarva, Rahari of the Baseri block and Khorpura, Milkan of Dholpur which were the few pioneers' in this discovery of one of its kind. The new social norm which these village communities evolved and sustained till date is an example for the communities who suffer from this social evil of alcohol. While having the regular meetings of BAM the issue of increased consumption of alcohol in the village came out of mutual discussions of BAM members and villagers. More than this was the problem which appeared after people would consume it. There were increase in the incidents of eve teasing, wife-beating, increased tendency of losing money in gambling and thus falling financial status of the families, disturbed children in the school, high rates of drop outs, increased number of child labourers, more of child marriages in the villages.



After identifying this problem which was affecting the simple lives of the villagers, the BAM members and villagers were convinced to do something about it. They all had a discussion at length about the causes and effects of this problem of alcohol and its impact on the well being of the children, their development, education and protection. This problem was affecting them tremendously and was in a way the cause of several other problems. So, few members of BAM after discussing it in their meeting went to one of the following meetings of BM and tried to bring this issues up there as well, in order to get the inputs from children before they would think of some way to deal with it.

This proved to be a fruitful exercise; they came out with the broader view of what the children feel and think of this problem of alcohol and how it affects them in different ways (Emotional, physical, psychological, social and it being one of the fundamental reasons of dropping out from school of affected children). Some cases of assault with them appeared while talking to children other than the previous outcomes of the discussion amongst the adults. The people now wanted some solution to this problem desperately.

Thus with the discussion held before hand, in the next meeting of BAM all the villagers gathered to address the issue in large numbers. This issue was a talk of the villages now. People were able to clearly identify the cause and its effects on them. With several rounds of discussions amongst themselves, they finally arrived on a conclusion of a system of penalty. This penalty will be imposed on both who sell and who consume alcohol in the village. The villagers agreed on an amount of Rupees 2100 for who sells alcohol and Rupees 1100 for who consumes/buys alcohol in the village. They kept prize money of Rupees 100 for information giving about any kind of give and take activity of alcohol in the village. The person who would be guilty of doing so will not only penalized but also will be boycotted from the caste/society.

Some of the BAM members (active men and women) came forward to take the responsibility for this new task. They formed a committee to look after the implementation of this new norm. They would do the monitoring and all related activities like meetings, imposing penalty and making the collection of the money. While discussing the roles of the committee, they came across the issue of collection of the money and again with the mutual consensus it came out that they will make a village development fund out of this collection. This fund will be then used for the developmental activities for the village.

Once the decision was done the villagers were excited about this new thing, they were for the first time able to jointly arrive on a conclusion successfully and wanted this thing to work. Soon the BAM members and villagers were faced by the opposition of the villagers who were either themselves alcoholics or they were the alcohol dealers in these villages. When BAM and villagers stood together then these opponents were forced to step back and stop advocacy on this slow poison (alcohol). This step brought the change in the villages. There was a considerable decrease in buying and selling of alcohol in the villages. This decreased the consumption



of it in the villages and as result of which the problems of eve teasing ,wife-beating ,gambling, happy and confident children in the school, decreased rates of drop outs, decreased number of child labourers and less of child marriages in the village. Now there was a better financial status of the families.



Developing community based mechanism for prohibition of Gambling

An effort made by the villagers and the elderly people's forum of villages to tackle this problem. This small effort of these people resulted into formation of a system to check the practice of this social evil of Gambling in villages and it proved to be a milestone in the development of these villages by having a great positive impact on the lives of the people in these villages. The system is still functional and is made sustainable by adopting certain measures by these humble people in small obscure villages in Dholpur district of state of Rajasthan. The names of villages are Rahrahi, Tarva in the Baseri Block (This is where adults in huge numbers were found playing this illegal game of cards. The other village Gadrpura in Bari Block where such a system developed was the one in which children were found to be habitual of Gambling and it was indeed a reason of great concern as this was the new generation who was entering into the vicious cycle of misfortune, illiteracy, poverty and sickness.

'Gambling' in the villages was a routine activity for the adults. Every evening they would sit down to play cards and bet money on them. The place they would choose to play generally would be either under a tree or a common place or even outside a shop in the village. The majority of these men who would indulge in this would be landless labourers working in the sandstone mines near the villages. They would play normally on their way back to home after working in the mines all day long. It was a regular scene which the team members would witness very often on their visits to these villages.

These people already living the marginal lives and lost in the dark of their misfortune become more susceptible to the social evils and financial crisis by indulging themselves into the malpractices like 'Gambling'. Due to this trend of playing cards and betting money on them in the villages, they get a chance to even lose whatever they earn for a day's work and they do not even hesitate in taking loans to gamble, when they do not have enough money with themselves. The psyche behind this repetitive behaviour of these habitual gamblers is that this would get them some easy money, if by chance they get lucky sometime. This hypothetical victory in mind influences their behaviour and often they end up losing all what they have in this nasty game of luck.



This defeat in game of cards is fatal for the family of the loser. These hand to mouth poor people become even more helpless in such situations and their lives come on the threshold of getting perished. These gamblers are inhumane with the family and especially with the children and women. When they are back home in the late evening they are often drunk too and tend to abuse wife and children. This situation gets worse if they have come after losing the game then they are most difficult to deal with and they tend to ignore their duties too as the fathers or the husbands. They would take the frustration out on the wife and kids in physical form by beating them, their language is abusive under the effect of the alcohol and they become short tempered and throw tantrums on petty things and get provoked by little issues.

The family already living in crisis kind of situation is then faced by a bigger financial crisis. The amount of loan these gamblers take to gamble is doubled as they then have to take more loans for the survival of the family. Even in such desperate situations the habitual gamblers do not hesitate in further indulgence into the foul play which is destined to finish them and their families. The most of the burnt of this evil is bearded by the wife and children of the gamblers and the toll of such a social problem is takes on the lives of the poor children, and as result in hampered development of these poor children in all the aspects.

The children suffers not just from the view of development but also there are long lasting effects of the exposure of this social evil at such young age and the repercussions caused by this. These young boys and girls are forced to quit their studies and they start to work full time in order to support their families. That's how when it was observed closely it was found out that huge number of these children of the landless mine laborers are; those who constitute the either maximum number of the drop outs in the school or those who are amongst the highest absentees. They are sent to work in this tender age to support their families to meet the day to day expenses of their families and earning in this young age not just takes them out of school but also develops not so preferred habits. Like it is observed that these children after giving the big share of their earning in the household then start demanding a share of their income. Their share of money with them in their pocket leads to a lot of bad habits like the start drinking alcohol and learn to smoke tobacco and even start gambling to increase their pocket money to fulfill several other similar needs which they would otherwise conceal from the family members.

One such case appeared in a village called Rahrahi in Baseri Block of Dholpur district. Here it was observed that the children from the very early day of their childhood have seen this culture of money betting, cards playing and playing marbles. This they would play without the knowledge of their parents. The children were caught stealing money from their own houses to play this game of betting. All of these were the issues affecting the lives of the people of these villages. While having the meetings of the CBOs-(BAM & BM) these were often discussed and were the topics of concern by these responsible people in the village. In the meetings of the BM the issues of children affected were coming up frequently. When the inquiry about the drop outs were made, it was found that that the drop out mainly belong to such families where the fathers are alcoholics and habitual gamblers. Then, again while making an attempt to understand this, it became evident that there is a continuous drift in the drop outs to get diverted into the child labor due to financial pressure in the families .When the common meeting of BAM & BM was held then all of such recent observations were discussed.



Then later this became the agenda of discussion of the next BAM meeting. This is how the awareness on the issue of gambling in the villages was raised and in few days' only and it became a topic of common discussion. Now the community was aware of the fact that the gambling was doing no good to them and rather it was a big reason of misfortune coming to them. This is how as the layers unfolded one after the other on this social evil, people became of more firm opinion that this is something which has to be addressed by some sort of system and that there is a urgent need to regulate this ill practice in the villages which is ruining not only their present but the future of their coming generations as well.



After a few rounds of discussions in the meeting of the BAM, the members of the BAM and the villagers jointly agreed on the conclusion to have a system which bans the practice of gambling in their villages. It was now well understood and accepted by the villagers that this practice of gambling is having the negative impact on the children as they too have developed the habit of gambling by betting, whatever small amount of money they had either as pocket money given by the parents or the share of their earnings which they were earning while working like child laborers. To resolve this issue, first of all the children who were doing this betting were identified by the BAM with the help of BM. Then in a common meeting it was decided that no child in the village will ever play this foul game of money betting in any form. And if after this open declaration of the norm to quit this habit in children, still anyone is found doing so then BAM members will take the issue to the parents of the child(as they were doing this without the knowledge of the parents). Prayatn helped the villagers in getting some sports gear for the children like Bat & Ball, Badminton Racquets & shuttle-cock, rings and Skipping ropes, etc. So they would spend their time more productively and in a healthy way. After this effort, a change was observed that now the children would play in groups in evening in the school play ground, the irregularity in school was decreased and the re-enrollment took place in schools of the drop outs. The elderly people and the children were very happy with this change in the children who were drifting away from all of these small joys of childhood.

Now for the adults in the village a system was formed and under this newly formed mechanism to check this social evil, which was responsible for destroying the lives of several people in this area. The norm commonly formed and approved by the community was like this, that if anyone in the village is found playing cards whether with or without money will be charged fine money of 1100 Rs. and 100 Rs. prize money was declared for the informer who would give the information of this evil being practiced anywhere in the villages. Once this system was formed then there appeared a requirement of certain people who would take the responsibility to execute this system in the villages. On this note then there took a constitution of a committee within the meeting of BAM. Most of the members of the BAM itself were ready to volunteer in this new system to be the part of the committee but finally a few men and women came forward to form this committee of 15 members. Both the members of BAM and village people were part of this committee and they were committed to their cause to tackle the problems of their village together on every step of this new beginning.



So, the community members and the BAM members jointly formed the committee and were ready to take their responsibility to make this change possible in these villages. This committee of 15 members was now there to execute and monitor this system and at the same time make collections of fine under this system framed by the community. It was also decided in the meeting that the collections made out of this would go to the Village Developmental Fund. This fund is used for several purposes of development for the villages like fixing the problems of water by repairing the hand pumps and for solving the issues of electricity, organizing a cultural function in the village and inviting the officers and on this occasion making aware them of their problems and giving their requests in written letters to address the issues, these officers who would be otherwise unapproachable to these villages were present here on this platform rather they were more sensitive towards the problems of villagers.

The impact of the system formed started appearing within some days like-the regular gamblers who would reach home earlier very late and in a drunken state were now on time and were spending quality time with family members. Now they were able to take hold of their lives in a better manner. There were less family quarrels in the villages. The women of the area were now happy with this new development in their lives where they were feeling physically and mentally secure than before. This is how by forming a single system to check one social evil there several issues were resolved and the lives became better of the villagers. These systems developed about the gambling are sustained till date successfully.



Developing community based system to prohibit Child Marriage

The story of this part of India in Rajasthan is no different from what it was like a hundred years ago. Every year in Rajasthan and in some other parts of India on the auspicious day of 'Akshaya Trutiya' and otherwise in the marriage seasons a lot young boys and girls are made to tie knots. There has been a custom of getting married on some particular days in Rajasthan as it is believed, by doing so the couple will have a happy and successful marital life.

Marriage in this tender age pushes these young children into a vicious cycle which leads to early pregnancy and as result of this we have high maternal and infant mortality rate and inter-generation cycle of malnutrition. The harmful implications of child marriage do not limit themselves to these rather they are so much more then these few discussed here. Young children with the acceptance of society are left on their own to perform such duties and roles for which they are not physically, mentally and emotionally prepared. They are expected to fulfil all such duties after getting married which are beyond their mental and physical capabilities.



Here we have a brief account of the efforts made by the CBOs in their villages to stop child marriages in Dholpur district of Rajasthan. These underprivileged people are sensible enough to identify this social evil and have successfully attempted to eradicate this from the society. The name of these villages are as follows:- Richari(Baser Blocki),Nakshondha,Koyala,Umareh,Kankari(Bari Block),Nisote ka pura,Line ka pura(Dholpur Block).

There came the information in the regular meetings of BAM about a child marriage which would take place soon. Smt.Saumiti w/o late kalla kushwaha was marrying her elder daughter of 18 years of age in a week's time and along with the elder daughter she is also marrying her younger daughter who is just 11 years of age. After this news there was a detailed discussion on this issue and the group concluded that this has to be stopped, so they all decided to go and talk to the family members of the girl. The next day all the members went to her house and met the family members who were busy in the preparations of the marriage. There the CBO members guided the family members about the harmful consequences and illegal aspects of a child marriage.

Members of the CBO along with the other responsible villagers gave a patient hearing to the personal problems of the family of the minor girl, who was being married and promised to take up their problems in the village and will jointly address the issues to resolve them as soon as possible. At the same time the group warned the family members that if despite all this talk, still they marry their minor daughter married then the villagers will boycott the family and will get the amount of 20,000 Rs. cancelled which was provided to the family as the beneficiaries of the govt. scheme from the women and child development department with the help and guidance of the organisation. The family if let the minor marry will have to face the consequences as it is an illegal act and a complaint in police will be filed against the mother and other family members.

The results which we see as no child marriage taking place in the area is not mere one day's efforts made by the community in this most backward part of Rajasthan. There were several sessions of Prayatn with CBOs and later CBOs with people and as an outcome of all these discussions an understanding of the issue was made in the community. Several rallies in the villages (the names of these villages of Bari block are Naksouda, Koyala, Umrahe and Kankarie) were organised to create the mass awareness on the issue. In all 450 people participated in these rallies. The BAM members, BM children and villagers in large numbers participated in these rallies with a great zeal and enthusiasm .They all vowed to stop this evil tradition of child marriages in their villages and solemnized to raise their voice against this harmful practice and not to be a part of such an act in any form.



Another incidence of stopping a child marriage took place in village called Nisoure ka Pura, which is just 10 km from the district head quarter of Dholpur. There was the presence of the Prayatn's team in the village for some time now. Regularly the team members use to visit the village and make people aware on the issues of their rights, child rights, development and protection of children .the constitution of BAM and BM was already done. There were 15 children in Bal Manch here.The meetings of BM were regularly done and issues were brought to the BAM. In one of the meetings of BM the issue of Child Marriage was discussed with the children. They were made aware of the negative and harmful implications of marriage at young age. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 was discussed at length with them. This time of the year was the marriage season as per the Hindu calendar .One of the boys present in the meeting named Rakesh told that his uncle is getting his younger son Siyaram , married who is a minor along with the older son who is an adult. Normally, having both the marriages at the same expense is a common thing in these villages. As these poor people can bear the grand wedding expenses only once in their life time, which is also done with money on loan from the village money lenders.

The members of BM decided to stop this marriage which was going to take place in some days' time. The members of Bal Manch met the parents of the minor boy and made them aware that what they are going to do is not just an evil but illegal too and it would ruin the life of your children. At this, the family members scolded the children and asked them to leave. But as the children were committed to their cause, they threatened them of taking the matter to the police and administration and they would not let it happen. Still the family members ridiculed them saying, who will listen and believe you kids?

The very next a meeting of BM was organized in which the people of prayatn were called to guide the children in drafting a complaint against the family who was getting the minors marry. This letter of complaint was then prepared with the details of the head of the family, names of family members, name of the minor boy and his age. Ten children from the BM were given the responsibility of this letter. These ten children got is signed by other children in the village and gave it to the district collector and to the Dy.S.P. Sh. Rajendra singh Ken .

As a result of this effort of the children this child marriage was successfully stopped with the help of police .After this children were apprehensive about their security as the victim's family members were getting hostile with the children who stopped this marriage. So, the children demanded the police to intervene in this matter and police warned the family members not to do any such act in which they could be booked and will have to be behind the bars. Police also gave encouragement and congratulated the children for this job well done by them. In this whole gamut of activities the children build the confidence to take up issues on their own and developed leadership qualities and learned to be express themselves and this stopped the evil of child marriages in this area and still due to the awareness build on the issue and due to fear and knowledge of law child marriages no longer takes place in this area.

The third case which took place in this region was of child marriage of 2 children- a girl and a boy. The girl named Maya was 15 years old and left studied after grade 5 and the boy named Rajveer was 12 years old was not attending school. The issue of their child marriage came up in the regular meetings of BM. All the efforts were made by the BM member to make these children and their families aware of the ill effects of marriage at this age and the legal aspect was also discussed with them. But all this effort was useless as the people were not ready to listen to the children or taking them seriously.



Then children went to seek the advice of their school teacher, who comforted all of them with all possible support and did share the fact that villagers generally organise such weddings in summer nights so that no one would know, since at this time neither the Prayatn's team nor the school teachers are not there. Then these children went to get support of Ms Gaeta, who is one of the team members of Prayatn in the area. Now they all organized a meeting in the village in which 27 people participated(15 women and 12 men).All the possible paradigms of child marriage was discussed in this meeting and people were made aware of the fact that Child Marriage was social evil and it is time that they all collectively give it up for ever. The parents of the minor girl(Maya) and the boy(Rajveer) were also present. At the end, the meeting was concluding at this note that 'No one will let this evil happen in the village and will make others aware of this. The parents of Maya and Rajveer were now convinced that they will not do this injustice with their children. Thus amongst several phases of tension, chaos and anxiety, the children with the support of the elders were able to stop Child Marriages.

Prayatn's team did face a lot of hurdles in their visits and while working in the villages, post this success of stopping child marriages. The villagers did not do child marriage with fear of law but at the same time did support the team's effort for the cause overtly but were actually agitated with this development. But despite the hostility the committed team of Prayatn's is marching forward with the mission to succeed in their target of development of these obscure villages.

