

A REPORT

ON

CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP FOR COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORKERS

SUPPORTED BY WE4HER



Event Overview

On 27th March 2024, the India Child Protection Fund (ICPF), in collaboration with 'We4Her Foundation' and 'Just Rights for Children', organized a pivotal Capacity Building Workshop for Community Social Workers (CSWs) in the capital. This workshop served as a cornerstone of the Child Marriage Free India campaign, a coalition of 161 NGOs united in their mission to eradicate child marriage in India by 2030.

The timing of this workshop was strategically chosen to precede the upcoming wedding season and Akshaya Tritiya, periods notorious for increased instances of child marriages, particularly in states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. The workshop aimed to equip CSWs with enhanced knowledge, strategies, and tools to effectively prevent child marriages in their respective regions as well as enhance CSWs' ability to link vulnerable families with relevant government welfare schemes. By bringing together grassroots workers from various states, the event fostered a collaborative environment for sharing experiences, challenges, and best practices in the fight against child marriage.

Background and Context

Child marriage remains a significant challenge in India, with the latest National Family Health Survey (NHFS-5 2019-21) revealing that 23.3 percent of girls in the age group 20-24 were married before the age of 18. This practice not only violates children's rights but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and gender inequality, hampering the overall development of affected individuals and communities.

The Child Marriage Free India campaign, spearheaded by the ICPF and its partner organizations, aims to achieve a tipping point in ending child marriage by 2030, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals. This workshop represents a crucial step towards building the capacity of frontline workers who play a vital role in this mission.

Participants

The workshop brought together CSWs from various states across India. These participants are actively engaged in grassroots-level work to generate awareness, organize pledges, and prevent child marriages in their respective regions.

Event Proceedings:

Icebreaker and Assessment:

The workshop commenced with a structured registration process that served multiple purposes beyond mere attendance tracking. Participants were warmly welcomed and provided with comprehensive kits containing Hindi handbooks covering various issues of child protection and the program schedule. An innovative icebreaker and assessment tool was employed, where each participant had to write two to three points about their understanding of child marriage on a piece of paper provided to them. These were then displayed on a designated board inside the workshop hall. This exercise encouraged participants to reflect on their understanding of child marriage, provided trainers with insight into the participants' baseline knowledge, and created a visual representation of the collective understanding of the issue.

Welcome Address:

Mr. Rajeev Bhardwaj, Trustee of ICPF, delivered a compelling welcome address that set the tone for the day's proceedings. His speech touched upon several key points, providing an overview of the Child Marriage Free India campaign and its achievements to date. He emphasized the critical role of CSWs in the fight against child marriage and stressed the importance of this workshop in the context of the upcoming wedding season. Mr. Bhardwaj concluded with a powerful statement: "Child marriage is a scourge on all our child protection initiatives and has no space in today's world." The welcome address also outlined the day's agenda, setting clear expectations for the participants and emphasizing the interactive nature of the sessions to follow.

Keynote Address by Mr. Bhuwan Ribhu:

The keynote address was delivered by renowned child rights activist and advocate, Mr. Bhuwan Ribhu. His inspiring speech served as a call to action for all participants, rich with insights and emphasizing several key points. Mr. Ribhu highlighted India's significant progress in policy formulation and implementation towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal against child marriage by 2030. He stressed the critical nature of the upcoming month in the fight against child marriages and the importance of coordinated efforts from communities, panchayats, NGOs, and local governments at all levels. Mr. Ribhu also referenced his recent bestseller, 'When Children Have Children: Tipping Point to End Child Marriage,' which proposes a blueprint for ending child marriage by 2030. His address positioned India as a global leader in the fight against child marriage, setting a powerful context for the workshop and motivating participants by underlining the importance of their role in this nationwide campaign.

Session 1: Understanding the Issue of Child Marriage

The first session, "Understanding the Issue of Child Marriage," was led by Dr. Sangita Gaur, Director of Training at ICPF. This comprehensive session was structured to provide a holistic understanding of child marriage. Dr. Gaur began with an interactive discussion, referencing the sentences about child marriage written by participants during registration and facilitating a group discussion on these perspectives. She then provided an overview of child marriage, covering its definition and scope in India, the latest statistics and trends including regional variations, and the short-term and long-term consequences on individuals and society. Dr. Sangita Gaur led the first session, focusing on the nuances of child marriage in India. She utilized the notes pasted by participants during the pre-training activity to facilitate discussion, making the session interactive and participant-driven. The session provided a detailed explanation of The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, its provisions, and the responsibilities of CSWs in enforcing these laws. Dr. Gaur also discussed the social and cultural factors that perpetuate child marriage and the importance of community engagement in addressing these issues. The session concluded with a discussion of real-life case studies and challenges faced by CSWs in preventing child marriages. The CSWs from various states discussed the challenges they face in the villages while stopping child marriage, and were imparted knowledge and space to share experiences, challenges and learn from each other during the workshop.

Session 2: Understanding the legal aspects of Child Marriage

Ms. Rachna Tyagi, Managing Partner at Ethicus Legal Consulting Solutions, conducted the second session on "Understanding the Legal Aspects of Child Marriage." This in-depth legal session was designed to empower CSWs

with the legal knowledge necessary to effectively combat child marriage. Ms. Tyagi began with a comprehensive analysis of the legal framework, including a detailed examination of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, its intersection with other relevant laws, and recent legal precedents and landmark judgments. She then guided participants through legal procedures, providing a step-by-step guide on obtaining injunction orders to prevent child marriages, the process of filing complaints and FIRs in cases of child marriage, and the legal rights and protections for CSWs and other individuals reporting child marriages. The session also covered the roles of various authorities, including the powers and responsibilities of Child Marriage Prohibition Officers, the role of the police, judiciary, and child protection committees, and the legal obligations of religious leaders, marriage officiants, and families. The session concluded with a discussion on the importance of proper documentation in child marriage cases, the types of evidence required for legal action, and protocols for maintaining confidentiality and protecting the identity of minors.

Session 3: Linking Families and Children with Government Social Welfare Schemes

The final session of the day, "Linking Families and Children with Government Social Welfare Schemes," featured a panel of experts and included interactive elements to ensure participants gained practical skills in accessing and utilizing government schemes. The panel consisted of Dr. Sangita Gaur, Director of Training at ICPF, Mr. Omprakash Pal - Director of the Initiative on Child Labour Free Mica, and Mr. Manish Sharma, Director of Victim Assistance. The session began with discussion on relevant government schemes such as Mission Vatsalya, Foster Care Sponsorship, and Child Care Institution Scheme, covering their eligibility criteria, benefits, and application processes. Participants then engaged in a practical group activity where they were assigned case studies of vulnerable families or children and tasked with identifying suitable government schemes and outlining plans to link these families or children with the schemes. This was followed by a panel discussion where the experts addressed common challenges in accessing government schemes, strategies for overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, and best practices in scheme implementation from different regions. The panelists also provided guidelines on the role of CSWs in scheme implementation, covering topics such as identifying eligible families and children, techniques for explaining scheme benefits to communities, protocols for assisting in the application process, and the importance of follow-up and monitoring after scheme enrollment. The session concluded with the presentation of success stories, showcasing case studies where the successful implementation of government schemes prevented child marriages, and discussing the long-term impact of these interventions on children and families.

Key Outcomes and Action Points

The workshop resulted in several concrete strategies and action points for the CSWs:

1. Legal Interventions:
 - Procedure for obtaining injunction orders from courts to prevent imminent child marriages
 - Protocol for collaboration with local law enforcement and legal authorities
2. Community Mapping:
 - Techniques for conducting demographic studies of villages to identify vulnerable children
 - Creation of a risk assessment tool for identifying families prone to child marriage

3. Awareness Campaigns:

- Design and placement of informative posters with anti-child marriage messages at strategic locations, including religious places
- Development of a standardized message to be written on Panchayat notice boards in every village, detailing punishments for child marriage

4. Inter-agency Collaboration:

- Establishment of a communication protocol between NGOs, local governments, and community leaders

5. Legal Education:

- Development of a simplified legal guide for community members
- Planning of regular legal awareness sessions in villages

6. Scheme Linkage:

- Creation of a comprehensive database of government welfare schemes
- Development of a step-by-step guide for linking families with appropriate schemes

7. Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Establishment of a follow-up protocol for families at risk of child marriage

Participant Feedback and Testimonials

Participants expressed that the workshop provided valuable insights and strategies to overcome challenges they face in their grassroots work. They particularly appreciated the opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other.

One of the participant stated, "Today's workshop has given us insight into the way forward, and our takeaways will surely be of immense help in our fight against child marriage."

Conclusion

The Capacity Building Workshop for Community Social Workers marks a significant milestone in the Child Marriage Free India campaign. By equipping frontline workers with enhanced knowledge, legal understanding, and practical strategies, the workshop has strengthened the grassroots movement against child marriage.

As India progresses towards its goal of eliminating child marriage by 2030, the role of well-trained and motivated Community Social Workers cannot be overstated. Their ability to intervene effectively, especially during high-risk periods like the upcoming wedding season and Akshaya Tritiya, will be crucial in protecting vulnerable children and upholding their rights.

The success of this workshop reinforces the power of collaborative efforts between NGOs, government bodies, legal experts, and communities in addressing complex social issues. As the Child Marriage Free India campaign gains momentum, such initiatives will play a pivotal role in creating a safer, more equitable future for India's children.