

Nudging Norms through Faith Based Organisations for the Promotion and Protection of Child Rights in **Telangana**

Child marriage, child labour, child trafficking, and violence against children are common place in the Khammam and Mahabubnagar districts of Telangana. To tackle these issues, UNICEF collaborated with the Centre for World Solidarity⁽¹⁾ and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) to implement an initiative to secure child rights in the two districts, in January 2017. UNICEF developed a sustainable and systematic model of collaboration with FBOs — they were identified, mobilised, and given capacity building on Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC), child protection, child rights, and their violation. FBOs influence and shape beliefs, norms, and behaviour as they frequently interact with the community and are highly respected. Based on a successful previous collaboration on polio vaccination facilitated by the FBOs, UNICEF partnered with them in the Mahabubnagar and Khammam district of Telangana to address high child marriage rates and other child protection issues in these areas. Facts for Life (FFL) videos and SBCC materials were used for the capacity development of these FBOs. They actively participated in social and religious events to engage with the community and influence them to effect change in social norms. Moreover, FBOs have begun developing their own child protection policies. Communities are now better aware, and committed to protecting their children from child labour, child marriage, child trafficking, violence, and abuse.

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Situation

Practices like child labour and child marriage deprive children of their childhood, health, and education, putting them at risk of a poor health and immunity, violence, and sexual abuse – all in violation of their basic rights^[2]. According to the Census of India 2011, 4.3 million children aged between 5-14 years were working^[3], and 27 percent women aged between 20-24 years were married as children^[4].

In the Mahabubnagar and Khammam districts of the Indian state of Telangana, the percentage of women who get married and bear children before they turn 18 is relatively higher than the state and national averages^[5]. Child marriage aside, child labour, child trafficking, and violence against children are also prevalent in the two districts. UNICEF’s report on the condition of child workers states that 6.6 percent children in Mahabubnagar and 4.4 percent in Khammam district were involved in child labour in 2011 – the former being higher than the state (4.9%) as well as national (3.9%) average^[6]. As far as human trafficking goes, Telangana ranks 4th in the country^[7].

Social norms around child marriage^[8]:

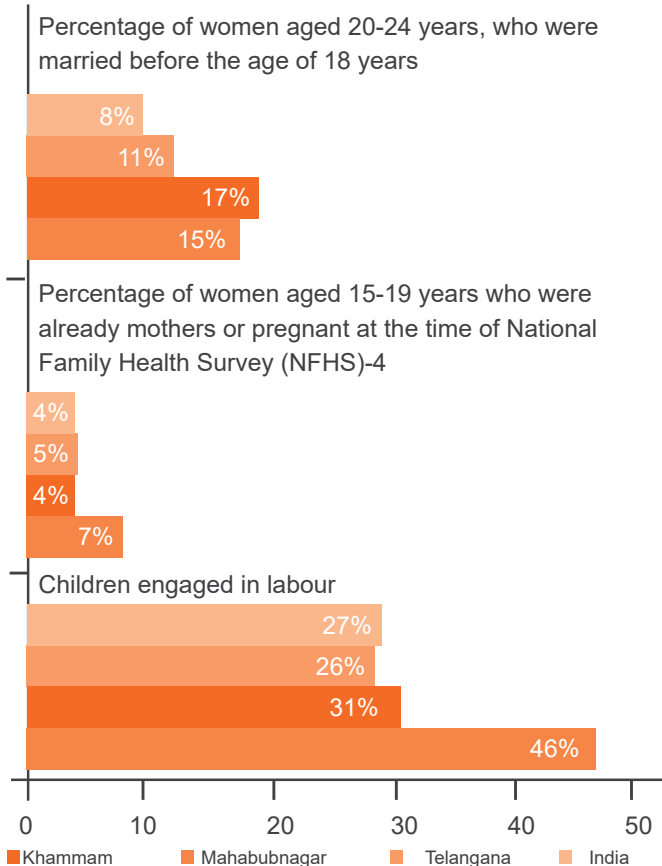
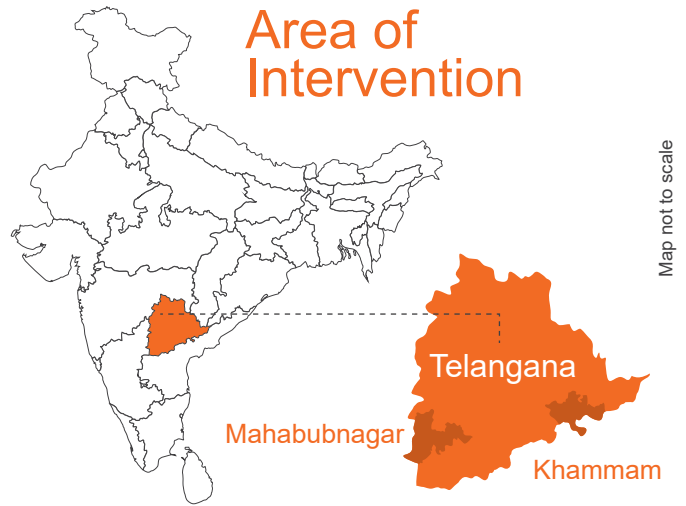


Figure - 1: Prevalence of child marriage, early pregnancy, and child labour



- Intervention State
- Intervention District

This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

Source: http://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=4183&lang=en

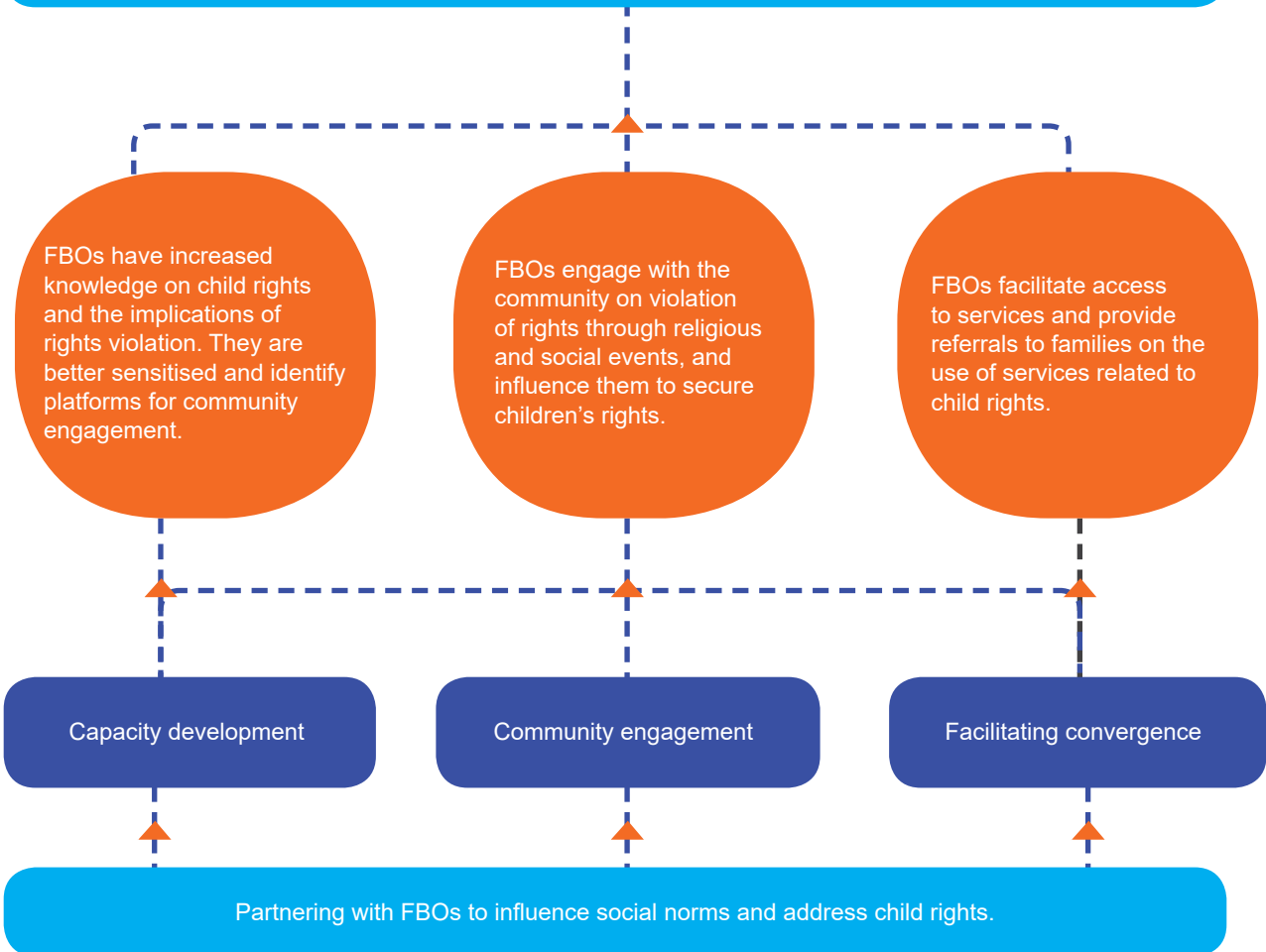
Widespread social approval of child marriage is among the most critical factors that drive high prevalence of child marriage in the community. Other norms and beliefs that cause this are:

- Economic considerations:** Unmarried girls are considered an economic burden to the family. A girl is considered *Paraya Dhan*, or someone who belongs to her future husband's family. Hence, parents are unwilling to invest in their daughters' education and nutrition. To reduce the high cost of wedding ceremonies, children are married during other community celebrations. For instance, when a communal feast is held in honour of the death of an elderly person, the opportunity is seized to carry out marriage celebrations — serving the dual purpose of saving money and ending the mourning with an auspicious and happy event.
- Gender norms:** Girls and women are perceived to have an inferior position in society. Major decisions like marriages are taken by the father or by head of the family, who is usually a man.
- Safety and security:** Communities view child marriage as a means to save the family honour, which they fear losing in case of a premarital sexual relationship. This is grounded in the prevalent gender norm of the virginity of girls. Consequently, marriages are arranged either immediately after or before a girl attains puberty.

Theory of Change



Communities are now sensitised, mobilised, and committed to the protection of child rights. FBOs in the intervention villages actively participate in social and religious events to engage with community and influence them on children's rights. They are also developing their own Child Protection Policy to protect children's rights



Prevalence of child marriage, child labour, child trafficking, and violence against children in the community.

- **Custom of dowry:** The understanding of many families is that the girl's natal home must bear the expenses of bringing her up and arranging for her dowry. Girls are married off early – as the dowry amount increases with the age and education level of the girl.

Faith Based Organisations

Seventy FBOs that were visited by the most number of vulnerable children were identified in Mahabubnagar (64 Muslim, 4 Hindu, and 2 Christian), and twenty in Khammam (6 Muslim, 7 Hindu, and 8 Christian). UNICEF conducted a baseline study on the identified FBOs to understand their background and the status of children who came in contact with them.

The study concluded that:

- FBOs shelter orphans, children with a single parent, and other children from poor economic backgrounds.
- FBOs functioned in isolation and most of them were not registered with the government. They were either self-funded or supported by philanthropists, and did not avail government schemes and entitlements for children.
- Smaller FBOs, while well-intentioned, lacked a comprehensive understanding about child rights and child protection issues.



Adolescent boys at a *Madarsa* (Islamic FBO Mahabubnagar district).

Method

FBOs were identified as change agents, and their capacities were built to comprehend child rights issues and entitlements, and engage with the community to influence and change social norms around them. UNICEF partnered with Centre for World Solidarity (CWS) and FBOs to initiate the 'Securing Child Rights' programme in Telangana in January 2017.

Partnering with Faith Based Organisations

Faith Based Organisations, apart from having deep and trusted relationships with their communities, often have strong linkages with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members, especially children. Due to their

moral influence, FBOs and religious leaders highly impact the social and cultural life of communities^[9]. Moreover, religion and spirituality have a profound effect on the norms and behaviours in a society, thus influencing children's development. FBOs have the potential to positively reinforce protection and promote resilience among children. Behaviours influenced by cultural values affect children's development and can be challenged and redressed by FBO leaders.

The idea of partnering with FBOs for securing the rights of children came about after a special Polio Immunisation Campaign was successfully conducted by

the government and UNICEF in Hyderabad. FBOs were instrumental in increasing the intake of Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV)^[10]. This campaign was backed by a strong communication and social mobilisation component to increase awareness and mobilise the community for vaccination with active support from media, community-based organisations, and medical professionals. The objective of the partnership was to:

1. Mobilise FBOs and leaders to influence social norms and practices that impact child rights.
2. Have FBOs and their leaders participate in local religious and social events and talk about children's issues such as child marriage, school drop-out, and violence.

Capacity Development of FBOs

The capacity of FBOs was developed on various key issues, to work on child rights and change social norms that violate child rights. UNICEF developed an SBCC kit to train FBOs. It contained posters, stickers, and flip books addressing child labour, child marriage, child trafficking, and violence against children. Facts for Life^[11] videos on Social and Behaviour Change Communication related to health of mothers and children were also used.

Key topics included:



A young girl at a shelter run by an FBO in Mahabubnagar.

- Child rights
- Life, survival, and development of children
- Child participation
- Best interests of the child
- Non-discrimination
- Child protection rights
- FBOs and child rights
- Programmes with child rights perspective
- Use of Interpersonal Communication (IPC)



A caretaker at a shelter home run by an FBO in Mahabubnagar.

Action

Identification of FBOs

UNICEF and CWS carried out the mapping of FBOs operating in the two districts. Twenty FBOs^[12] were identified in each district to implement the intervention. This identification was based on the following criteria:

1. They were from districts where the implementation partner was functional.
2. They were willing to work for children's development as change agents.



A baseline survey was carried out to ascertain the FBOs' understanding on child rights. Many of them engaged in social services for children but did not essentially understand their rights.

Consultation workshops

UNICEF and CWS held workshops in January 2017 at the district level to mobilise and blend FBOs with the programme. The workshops sought to understand the nature of FBOs, their work, and their understanding of child rights issues in the community. Through the workshops, FBOs understood the importance of various factors that drive the current behaviour of the communities. They also volunteered to receive training on child rights to influence the children and communities around them.

Capacity development of Faith Based Organisations

UNICEF trained active members of select FBOs, and Master Trainers, who trained at least three other members of the FBO on child rights. Capacity development helped improve knowledge among FBOs regarding government schemes and entitlements for children. Capacity development helped improve knowledge among FBOs on the importance of securing child rights and their role in influencing communities for social change.

Convergence meeting with district-level officials

UNICEF facilitated meetings between the FBOs and officials from Child Welfare Committee (CWC)^[13], Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)^[14], and Childline^[15]. The objective was to increase the FBOs' awareness on government schemes and entitlements for children. District officials and Childline representatives shared their experiences in dealing with issues of child marriage, child labour, child trafficking, violence against children, and child sexual abuse. Convergence meetings helped FBOs work in collaboration with government systems for greater impact.

Participation of FBOs in community events

UNICEF, with FBOs, identified religious events and festivals in the two districts. FBOs participated in these social and religious events to engage with communities on issues of child rights, influence norms and practices, and link the communities with the government schemes.

They also identified public spaces such as *anganwadi* centres^[16] and local government buildings to discuss specific child protection issues with the community. These discussions were based on their observations of child rights in religious events, and covered laws and remedial measures on child protection.



Girls at a *Madarsa* in Mahabubnagar. This is the room they sleep in.



Boys studying at an FBO-run shelter in Mahabubangar after school hours.

Results

UNICEF's partnership with FBOs has led to the following results:

Behaviour change in FBOs

FBOs are better sensitised to deal with children and ensure that child rights are not violated. They have realised the importance of a child protection policy for their organisations and are willing to access entitlements for children through various government schemes.

FBOs as change agents

FBOs participate in the community gatherings and influence families to secure the rights of children. FBOs also conduct IPC sessions with families where child rights were reported to be violated.

FBOs influencing communities

FBOs have motivated communities to:

- Send their children to school instead of work
- Take the commitment to not marry them off before the legal age
- Collectively ensure that children are protected from child rights issues

Caselet 1

Community meetings, Seethamma Thanda, Bandameedi Palli

FBO leaders regularly participated in community meetings at Seethamma Thanda, Bandameedi Palli. FBOs explained child rights to the community with the help of FFL videos during IPC sessions. Community meetings concluded with an oath-taking by the members, stating that they will ensure no child marriage takes place, no child goes to work, and no child is abused. This triggered a sense of responsibility among the community members. A series of follow-up sessions were conducted by FBO coordinators with the community on various issues pertaining to child rights, thereby resulting in change in behaviour. As FBO leaders belonged to the same community, they could effectively influence behaviour change. As a result, 1) three family members re-enrolled boys in the government school, 2) six families made a commitment in community meetings that they will get their girls married only after 18 years of age, and 3) eight families ensured that their daughters who had dropped out of school acquire vocational training.

Community meetings, *Madarsa Madeer Mahammadeeya*

The FBO held community gatherings in small groups (50-60 participants), as well as large ones (more than 500 participants). Religious leaders from the FBO who were trained on child issues, child rights, and social norms, addressed the community members during these gatherings — to positively use their moral and spiritual influence in all communities to reduce the vulnerability of children.

In Rajapur village of Balanagar Mandal, two such community gatherings were conducted by Madarsa Madeer Mahammadeeya to mobilise the community and address social norms around the identified issues. The FBO leader from the Madarsa addressed community members on issues related to children, their rights, consequences of child marriage and child labour, and importance of education. Parents, Frontline Workers (FLWs), self-help group members, and other village-level stakeholders participated in these gatherings. IPC sessions using FFL videos steered discussions around issues related to children. These gatherings addressed by FBO leaders have motivated the community to proactively respond to the violation of child rights.

During one of the interactive sessions, community members came forward to discuss the case of 16-year-old Rafeeq who resides in the same community. He lost his mother at the age of seven, and his father remarried. He was never interested to go to school, nor was he aware of the importance of education. His parents are daily wage labourers who struggle to make ends meet. Rafeeq started working at the age of nine, doing the petty business of selling old papers/ clothes, iron pieces, and plastic trash. Community members made plans to ensure that the child is in a safe environment where his rights are secured. Community members (an anganwadi teacher, village elders, and an FBO leader) visited Rafeeq's home and encouraged his parents to send him to school. A series of IPC sessions were taken up by the community, along with the FBO leader, to influence the behaviour of the family. As a result of the collaborative effort by the community and FBO, Rafeeq's parents agreed to send the child to a Madarsa.

Transformative Change

FBOs who were earlier not aware of children's rights have come forward to develop child rights policies for their own organisations. UNICEF facilitated meetings with FBOs in July 2017 regarding child protection policies. They discussed:

- The need for a child protection policy among FBOs
- Existing protection protocols, if any
- Advantages of having a child protection policy
- Specific preferences, if any, in terms of protection protocols
- FBOs are aware of their role in influencing communities to secure child rights



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Child protection policies ensure that everyone associated with the FBOs: 1) is committed to influence the social norms that violate child rights, and 2) protects children from c) getting married before the legal age, b) labour, and c) violence and abuse.

Through this intervention, UNICEF has strengthened its partnership with FBOs, who are among the primary caretakers of vulnerable children, and influence the community to bring about change in social norms. The learnings from Mahabubnagar and Khammam can be used as a key strategy to work across Telangana, and other parts of India where similar situations exist.



In Summary

UNICEF, in collaboration with the Centre for World Solidarity, and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs), implemented an initiative to secure child rights in two district of Telangana. It aimed to address high child marriage rates and other child protection issues like violence and sexual abuse, through the capacity building of FBOs. Here is a blueprint of how the intervention was rolled out in the Khammam and Mahabubnagar districts of Telangana.

Action



UNICEF and CWS identified twenty FBOs in each district to implement the intervention. A baseline study was carried out to ascertain their understanding of child rights.



Workshops were held at the district level to sensitise FBOs on the various factors driving community behaviour. They underwent capacity training to improve knowledge on child rights issues.



Apart from *anganwadi* centres and local government buildings, religious events and festivals were identified where FBOs could engage with communities about child rights, influence norms and practices, and sensitise about government schemes.



UNICEF facilitated meetings between FBOs and officials from Child Welfare Committee (CWC), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and Childline to increase the FBOs' awareness on government schemes and entitlements for children.



FBOs are better capacitated and have realised the importance of a child protection policy. They access entitlements for children through various government schemes.



FBOs participate in the community gatherings and influence families to secure rights of children. They also conduct IPC sessions with families where child rights were reported to be violated.

Results



FBOs have engaged with communities to influence social norms.

Transformative Change



Earlier, FBOs were not completely aware of children's rights. They have now come forward to develop child rights policies for their own organisations. These policies ensure that those associated with the FBOs protect children from early marriage, labour, violence, and abuse, and are committed to influencing social norms that violate these rights.



UNICEF has strengthened its partnership with FBOs, who are among the primary caretakers of vulnerable children and influence the community to effect change in social norms. The learnings from Mahabubnagar and Khammam can be used as a key strategy to work across Telangana, and other parts of India where similar situations exist.

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- [7] <http://ncrb.nic.in/StatPublications/CII/CII2015/chapters/Chapter%20A-15.11.16.pdf>
- [8] United Nations Children's Fund, Reducing Child Marriage in India: A model to scale up results, UNICEF C4D, New Delhi, 2015
- [9] https://www.unicef.org/media/media_4537.html
- [10] Around 3,00,000 eligible children were administered fractional doses of IPV injections over a period of seven days, from 20-26 June 2016.
- [11] Facts for Life videos, published by UNICEF, contains essential information that families and communities need to know to raise healthy children.
- [12] This is a pilot project by UNICEF, based on budget a total of 40 FBOs were finalised.
- [13] Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) have been designated by law as the final district-level authorities for the care, protection, treatment, development, and rehabilitation of children in need of care and protection.
- [14] Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is an Indian government welfare programme which provides food, preschool education, and primary healthcare to children under 6 years of age and their mothers.
- [15] Childline India Foundation is a non-government organisation (NGO) in India that operates a telephone helpline called Childline, for children in distress. It was India's first 24-hour, toll-free, phone outreach service for children.
- [16] *Anganwadi* centres were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services program to combat child hunger and malnutrition.

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