



### **SFIRD – Bapatla District in South Andhra Pradesh – Interventions on CMFI:**

**Society For Integrated Rural Development (SFIRD)** as a Voluntary Organization has been working with Coastal & drought affected Villages and urban slums in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The primary objective of SFIRD is improving un-reached Villages for a 'Better Future' through the basic components such as Empowerment, Environment, Enlightenment and Enjoyment. In the process, SFIRD has been implementing Education, Health, Skill Development trainings and Income Generation initiatives in its target Villages. With regard to Child centered activities, SFIRD has been involved in Child Rights Promotion activities during the past 05 years. With the support and partnership of KSCF, presently SFIRD is involved in a project namely "Ensuring Access to Justice" for Children in 50 Gram Panchayats of Bapatla District in Andhra Pradesh. The issues related on prevention of Child Trafficking and Child Labour, sensitizing and working towards Child Sexual Abuse and POCSO and stop early forced Child Marriages. The organization has been participating in Child Marriage Free India (CMFI) Campaigns in Bapatla **and the neighboring Districts of Andhra Pradesh.**

### **The Campaign Activities of SFIRD:**

#### **Awareness for elimination of child labour, child marriage, child sexual abuse and child trafficking**

**June and November Action Month** – Participated with District Task Force (DTF) committee in identifying Child Labour cases in Bapatla District conducted the action month with the objective of Child labour Free Andhra Pradesh and Rescued 16 children from shops and institutions and 02 FIRs got registered and children were present before CWC and all the identified cases were sent for educational rehabilitation. The campaign was conducted in collaboration with local labour department, Police, and child line departments.

**16 October 2023 - Child Marriage Free India Campaign Event** – The campaign event was conducted in more than 50 village in collaboration with all line departments (ICDS, Velugu, Grama Sachivalayams and local Community Bases Organizations. School Teachers, local religious leaders, Women from Self Help Groups were involved in the process.

Campaign highlights:

1. Rallies were conducted with Candle lights and the teams of SFIRD went around all the Villages in order to sensitize on “Stop Child Marriages”. There is a good impact and many Women (Mothers) and their Adolescent Girls thanked SFIRD and KSCF for motivating all the stakeholders in lines of “Stop Early Forced Marriages”. IEC materials in the form of a pamphlet in Telugu local language and stickers / posters were made and used at all the awareness generation campaigns. The book “When Children have Children” was released by the Bapatla District Collector Mr. P. Ranjith Basha and the local Revenue Divisional Officer. These books were also distributed to notable dignitaries (Commissioner – Information govt. of Andhra Pradesh and to the moderator of JMJ Service Society).
2. SFIRD met the District Officers namely DRO, PD-DRDA, PD-W&CD, SP, DPO and explained about the A2J project and its relevance in our interior Coastal Villages. All the four District Officers gave reference letters / Memos to their subordinating officers for extending cooperation and support to the functionaries of SFIRD during their visits to Gram Panchayats / target Villages.
3. Conducted Kalajath / cultural action in cluster Villages on eradication of Child labour,, Child marriage, Child sexual abuse and Child trafficking.
4. SFIRD met the local people’s elected representatives and explained about the Child centered activities which are implemented in the local Villages and sought their cooperation and participation. A pledge / undertaking was given by Bapatla LS Member of Parliament Mr. Nandigam Suresh and MP Rajya Sabha Mr. Mopidevi Venkata Ramana. In the same manner the local MLAs Mr. Kona Raghupathi (Bapatla Assembly), Mr. Anagani Satya Prasad (Repalle Assembly) and the A.P State Social Welfare Minister Mr. Meruga Nagarjuna. Photos were captured and were made available for the team visited SFIRD in the month of February, 2024.
5. Out of 50 Grama Panchayat Presidents (Mukhyas) 45 gave their pledges stating that they will not allow any Child Marriages in their Village locations. These Gram Panchayat Presidents are being mobilized to give Child Marriage Free Panchayats certifications.
6. Our Community Social Workers capacitated the families, communities and individuals. Pledges were taken from over 45000 individuals and the remaining target will be reached soon.
7. Families in target Villages were mobilized to give their consent not to get their Children married before attaining the prescribed age (Girls before 18 years of age and Boys before 21 years of age).
8. As per the project agreement School level and Mandal / block level awareness generation sessions were conducted and sensitized the participants on right age for marriage(s). In the same manner, Children at target Schools and in Villages were sensitized about Child sexual abuse, good touch and bad touch in particular and about the four Child Rights.
9. Wall writings with slogans on Child Marriage Free India in particular and about Child Labor in general was completed in few Villages and is continuing in the remaining Panchayats.

10. Counseling sessions for parents of teenage girls were conducted in traditional marine fisher folk Villages, Yanadi tribes and Buda Jangalu communities as Child Marriages are rampant.
11. Music for change programs were conducted in important cluster Villages in Bapatla District. Female youth, Women and grassroots level functionaries actively involved and made it quite impactful.
12. UNCRC closing function in November, 2023 – International Children's day was observed in Girls Residential School run by AP State Social Welfare Board. Mr. Kesali Apparao – Chairman and Ms. B. Padmavathi – Member from AP State Council for Protection of Child Rights (APSCPCR) and DRO, DEO, CDPOs & PD – W&CD and local Civil Society Organization representatives (CSOs) attended and made it quite useful for Girl Children of the center.

### **CMFI Background:**

Child marriage is not just an age-old social evil, but also a heinous crime that robs children of their childhood. Child marriage is a “crime against children” that violates basic human rights, minor girls are forced to marry and live a life of mental trauma, physical and biological stress, domestic violence including limited access to education and increased vulnerability to domestic violence. The consequences of child marriage are severe and extensive. Some of the specific consequences include: early pregnancies leading to complications and higher rate of maternal mortality and death of infants, malnutrition among both the infant and the mother, increased vulnerability to reproductive health, disruption in girl's education and thereby reduction in opportunities of her personal and professional development, domestic violence and abuse, limited decision making powers in the household, and mental health issues.

India's Census 2011 revealed 12 million children were married before attaining the legal age, of which 5.2 million were girls. Globally, child marriage is identified as a crime and a menace that needs to be eliminated. It finds space in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, under target 5.3 of Goal 5 that states elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation by 2025.

The latest National Family Health Survey (2019-21) shows that although there is a drop in the overall rate of child marriages, from 26.8% in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4) to 23.3% in NFHS-5, it is still high despite laws, programmes and schemes in place to address the issue.

### **Child Marriage Free India Campaign**

Understanding the seriousness of the issue, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P. Civil 382 of 2013 pronounced that the sexual intercourse committed by the husband upon his wife being under the age of 18 years with or without her consent can be constituted as rape. To address this, the most definitive and audacious commitment to end child marriage was made with the launch of [Child Marriage Free India campaign](#).

[Child Marriage Free India \(CMFI\)](#) is a nationwide campaign led by women leaders and a coalition of more than 160 NGOs spanning more than 300 districts working to eliminate child marriage in India. CMFI is working to attain the tipping point of child marriage, after which the society does not accept this evil practice and that will happen when the prevalence of child marriage is brought down to 5.5% by 2030, from the current national prevalence rate of 23.3%. This is being done by initially targeting 257 high-prevalence districts and gradually focusing on all the districts of the country.

Child marriage results in child rape, resulting in child pregnancy, and in a large number of cases, may lead to child deaths. For decades, we have been losing generations of our children to child marriage. The [Child Marriage Free India campaign](#) has received extended support from various Departments and Institutions of over 28 States. So far, across India more than 5 crore people have taken the pledge to end child marriage over the last one year through the efforts of the [Child Marriage Free India Campaign](#).

**Know more about the [Child Marriage Free India \(CMFI\) Campaign](#):** <https://www.childmarriagefreeindia.org/>



## THE GOAL

### Reduction of Child Marriage to 5.5% by 2030

as proposed in WHEN CHILDREN HAVE CHILDREN - TIPPING POINT TO END CHILD MARRIAGE (Ribhu, 2023)

## DEMANDS OF THE CAMPAIGN



Ensure **access to free and quality education** for all children till class 12 (or 18 years of age, whichever is later)



Dedicated **budgetary allocation** for schemes and infrastructure for education and vocational training till class 12



Enable **real-time attendance data analysis** and intervention when irregularities occur



Effective **implementation and enforcement of laws** against child marriage for all sections of society

## The Way Forward: PICKET Strategy to End Child Marriage

Addressing the issue of child marriage, requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach of different government departments, institutions, statutory bodies, and civil society organisations.

For India as a nation to end child marriage by 2030, the PICKET Strategy as proposed in *WHEN CHILDREN HAVE CHILDREN - TIPPING POINT TO END CHILD MARRIAGE* (Ribhu, 2023)



**Policy** for prevention, protection, prosecution: It is important to ensure parity in the enforcement of laws, and special laws must prevail over customary or personal laws.

The effective implementation and enforcement of existing laws and policies that prohibit child marriage along with swift and decisive justice delivery mechanism are most important steps in checking the prevalence of this crime against children. When prevention of crime is incorporated as a policy, it ensures that the state machinery as well as citizens feel responsible and accountable to prevent child marriage.



**Investment** in infrastructure, incentivisation and institutions: Investing in child protection institutions, education, healthcare, justice delivery, and rehabilitation framework builds layers which work to prevent and protect children from abuse and exploitation apart from providing legal and mental health support for girls in child marriages.

Infrastructure to support girls at imminent risks of marriages, like institutional alternative care and residential educational facilities are urgently needed to stop their marriages, abuse and exploitation, and provide them with resilient alternatives.

Incentives in the form of conditional cash transfers have shown impact in communities to keep girls in schools delaying marriage decisions. Universalization of these to at-risk families has the potential to stop child marriages and trafficking and abuse of girls for both labour and sexual exploitation.



**Convergence** of departments, governments and stakeholders in the community: All schemes and interventions geared towards the protection, prevention, education, health and awareness of children and adults affected by child marriage need to operate in sync with each other. Child participation and empowerment is at the core of such convergence aimed at child centric community development.



**Knowledge** which equips all the stakeholders to combat child marriage: Enhancing knowledge empowers children, especially boys, to say no to child marriage. When a young man refuses to marry a minor girl, he breaks the cycle of generations of conditioning. It also gives agency to girls to raise their voice and complain when they are forced for marriage against their will or in violation of law. When children, parents, community members and stakeholders participate in decision making equipped with correct and latest knowledge, it can lead to collective action to prevent child marriage.



**Ecosystem** where child marriage does not thrive: Central to the PICKET strategy is an ecosystem where child marriage is non-existent. In a society where child marriage is pervasive, multi-pronged intervention at all levels is required. To change the societal perception, behaviour and acceptance towards child marriage, the response at scale requires an ecosystem level retaliation.



**Technology** for monitoring and deterrence to combat child marriage: Enabling real-time attendance data analysis will help reduce child trafficking, child marriage and drop-out rate in schools. Different states are already using technology for awareness campaigns, supporting and monitoring programme interventions, augmenting education and skills outreach. The use of machine learning and artificial intelligence needs explorations in support of child protection and creating a safe and harm-free ecosystem for children.

## Tipping Point to end child marriage

*WHEN CHILDREN HAVE CHILDREN - TIPPING POINT TO END CHILD MARRIAGE* Book authored by Mr Bhuwan Ribhu is an action plan to eliminate child marriage in

## Case Study – Preventing Child Marriage

### STOPPED – Child Marriage at Nagaram Mandal, Bapatla District

#### Intervention of SFIRD under A2J with the support of KSCF

**Community background:** The habitation known as “*Jangala*” Sangham is located in Nagaram Gram Panchayat, Negaram revenue Sub division in Bapatla District of Andhra Pradesh. House sites for these families were assigned by the revenue department under Houses for ‘Homeless’ scheme. The habitation has around 120 households with approx. 1080 population. This *Jangalu* Community people are landless and the Women are street vendors (selling plastic items, fancy ornaments, vessels and garlands made of plastic origin). They regularly go to the nearby Villages and towns to sell these items. Men from the community are usually engage in begging, parrot astrology telling.

**Involvement:** Having come to know that a Child marriage will take place around 15<sup>th</sup> of July, 2023, the Community social worker (CSW) of SFIRD Mr. K. Nageswara rao kept on enquiring in the neighborhood. It was confirmed that the elders of both the parties came to an understanding and fixed date and time for the marriage. CSW reported the matter to Project Coordinator and both had series of discussions regarding the same. CSW had an interface with the Pastor who was supposed to perform the marriage. But the Pastor informed that he has no information on the same.

**STOP the Marriage:** The bride namely; Kinnera Ruthu, aged 14 years, dropped out at class 8<sup>th</sup> from the local High School. Her Father’s name is Yesaiah and Mother’s name is Bharathi. The groom Turapati Anand, aged 18 years, dropped out at Class 5 from the Mandal Parishat High School. He has been attending, whenever there is need for the work, ‘Catering’ work (as a team member) and gets paid on par with the other Caterers. His Mother’s name is Ms. Nagaratnam, aged 34 years. Father abandoned them (Mother and the Son) and has been leaving with another Woman elsewhere. Both the parties are converted to Christianity and their Caste leaders met and finalized about the marriage. Our CSW met Parents of bride and the Mother and close relatives of Anand and had Counseling sessions with them. Initially Elders were reluctant as the groom is not having father and the Mother only taking care of the groom. However, both the parties were warned about the consequences which they may face if the marriage is performed. The ill effects of getting both Ruth and Anand getting married at tender age were explained in detail. They agreed and the marriage was stopped.

#### Impressions / findings:

- Both the parties fall under Below Poverty Line (BPL) status and both bride and Groom are close relatives living in the same habitations and have good social background.
- The boy’s mother had her marriage at a tender age and she was abandoned by her husband at an early age. She wished to get her son married and another person in the form of daughter-in-law joins their family.
- Early Forced Child Marriages is an accepted phenomenon, but SFIRD has been campaigning on Stop Marriages at a tender age for the past 04 years. The matter was not revealed to anyone and kept very confidential. Our CSW on his routine, found that this was planned to take place, hence intervened and stopped.
- SFIRD’s CSW wished to help the Girl (Ruthu, the bride) to continue her studies by joining in the local School in class 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup>, but the family left the habitation and are living in another Village. CSW plans to meet them and convinced to join the Girl at a local School to continue her education.