


CHANGEMAKERS

Stories of Gender Justice Champions
working in India to End Child Marriage

Gender
Leadership
Programme
(GLP)
2022-23

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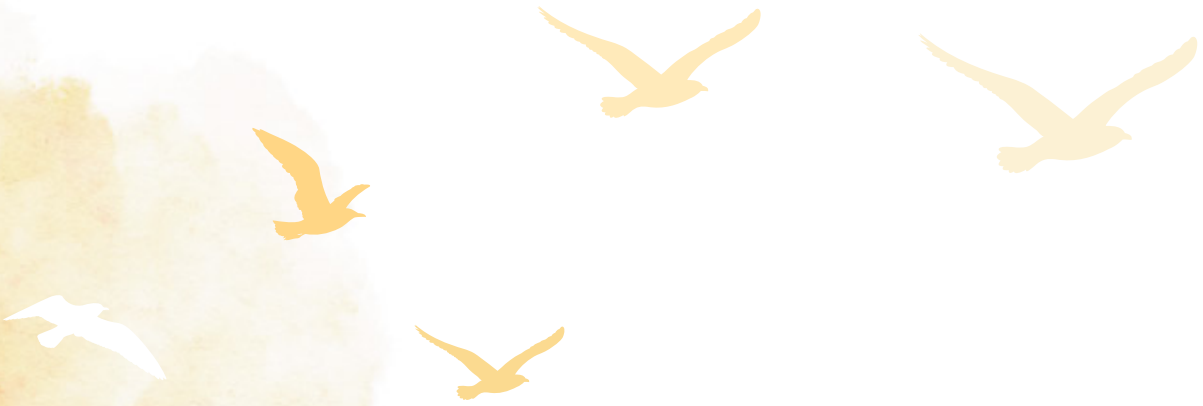
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Writer: Salma Veeraraghav (C4C)
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Gender Leadership Programme (GLP)
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An Introduction: The Gender Leadership Programme (GLP)

Child marriage: The current situation in India

Child marriage* is rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls and women are worth less than boys and men because of their sex. Child marriage disproportionately affects girls – in all their diversity – often limiting their agency, mobility and opportunities for social, economic and political participation. This in turn contributes to poor human development indicators, perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of poverty and poor education and health outcomes for society in general and for girls in particular.

The latest evidence from UNICEF shows a trend towards declining child marriage prevalence at the global level.¹ However, progress has been uneven, with some regions showing positive trends and others stagnating and/or facing increases in child marriage due to demographic shifts and interconnected global crises – or a “polycrisis” – comprised of conflict, climate change, the lasting effects of COVID-19 and rising costs. Progress needs to happen nearly 20 times faster to reach the Sustainable Development Goal Target of ending child marriage by 2030.²

India has been one of the drivers of global progress to end child marriage, as national prevalence declined from 49% in 2001 to 23% in 2021. Despite this progress, prevalence in India is still above the global average of 19%,³ and the country is home to a third of all girls and women who married before the age of 18.⁴

This is why work to end child marriage includes prevention and support for ever-married girls – that is, girls who are, or have been, married or in a union – to access opportunities and services, so they can reach their full potential. Successful child marriage interventions address its root causes, are multi-sectoral and involve multiple stakeholders including adolescents, youth, families, communities, civil society, private sector and governments. To ensure long-term and sustainable change in girls’ lives, child marriage interventions need to be holistic and gender-transformative in their approach.

* In this booklet, we use the term “child marriage” to refer to all forms of child, early and forced marriage and unions where at least one party is under the age of 18. In this, we include all girls and adolescents affected by the practice – whether in formal or informal unions – and acknowledge the culturally-specific understandings of childhood and development, and the complex relationship between age, consent and force.



What we mean by “Gender-Transformative Approaches” and why they are important

Gender-Transformative Approaches (GTA) aim to promote gender equality by fostering the critical examination of gender roles, norms and systemic inequities. GTA recognise and strengthen positive norms that support equality and aim to create an environment in which girls and women can exercise their rights, and make and act on their decisions – that is, have agency.

This means promoting the relative position of girls, women and other groups who have been marginalised, and transforming the underlying social structures, systems and broadly-held social norms that perpetuate and legitimise gender inequalities. This approach is intentional about challenging the status quo, rebalancing power, and redistributing resources towards people who have been historically marginalised, excluded and discriminated against because of their gender.

Minimum-age-of-marriage laws play an important part in ending child marriage and supporting ever-married girls, but evidence from around the world shows that laws alone are not enough – they

need to be part of a comprehensive approach that includes interventions to address poverty, provide adolescent-friendly and gender-equitable health services, violence prevention and support girls' secondary education and school-to-work transitions. Engaging with religious and traditional leaders is another important component of gender-transformative action across India. Without GTA, progress will remain uneven, will not address the roots causes of child marriage, and there will be a higher possibility of interventions not reaching and supporting adolescents from the communities that have been marginalised, and who are most at risk. Such interventions rather tend to place the responsibility for change on girls, rather than transforming the structures that discriminate against them.

The Gender Leadership Programme to End Child Marriage

The Gender Leadership Programme (GLP) to end child marriage was created to enhance the capacities of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations to integrate GTA into their work in a way that

address the root causes, and to develop more impactful programmes to end child marriage and support ever-married girls. It was born of a collaboration between *Girls Not Brides* and Oxfam Great Britain, which has a long experience in implementing leadership programmes in Asia and around the world. The programme was adapted and co-created between the two organisations to align with *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change*, **Partnership strategy** and **Secretariat strategy**. To achieve this, the GLP was designed to support *Girls Not Brides* to convene a cadre of committed and capable individuals to become Gender Justice Champions and to promote GTA in their work to end child marriage and support ever-married girls in India. The 27 GLP participants were selected from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations operating across nine states in India to become Gender Justice Champions who influence their own organisations, coalitions and State Partnerships** to integrate GTA into all they do.

The GLP took participants on a journey over the period of a year, with two face-to-face five-day residential workshops (one each in August 2022 and April 2023), online group sessions, mentorship between the two residential workshops to reflect on and develop learning and practical skills. The GLP also includes individual and collective projects (see below) that provide an opportunity for participants to put learnings from the programme into practice. It attempts to foster a level of personal and professional transformation beyond conventional training.

Some key elements of the GLP⁵

- It starts from the premise that all change begins with the self, so addresses self-awareness and self-change.
- It attempts to build an understanding of structural gender-based inequalities and social exclusion as experienced by self, within organisations, communities and society.
- It addresses a more progressive and expanded concept of leadership, using a constructive and collaborative approach to transform leadership.

The main areas of focus and results of the GLP

1 Increased commitment, knowledge and skills for better integration of GTA into work to end child marriage and support ever-married girls.

The GLP aims to reinforce the GTA commitment, knowledge and skills in work to end child marriage and support ever-married girls. Participants refresh and deepen their conceptual awareness, understanding and analysis of gender. Participants increase their capacities to integrate a gender lens and a GTA approach into their work at all levels (with girls and boys, families, communities and society). As all change begins with the self, key areas of focus include self-awareness, self-change and building the motivation to act as gender justice champions.

2 Increased leadership to promote GTA in work to end child marriage and support ever-married girls

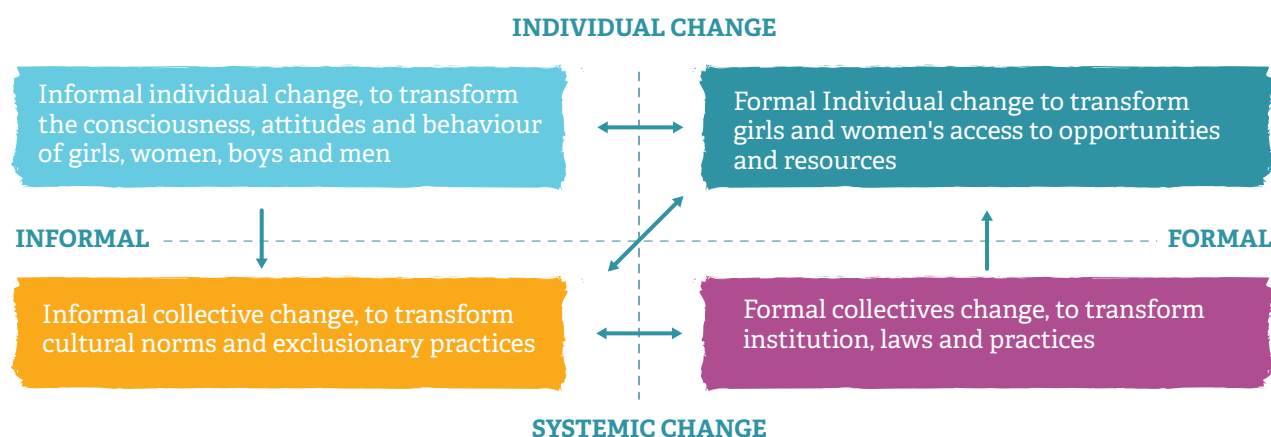
GLP is much more than a training on gender – it focuses on how to integrate GTA into interventions to end child marriage and support ever-married girls. It focuses on developing individuals' skills and confidence to become stronger, more effective and transformative Gender Justice Champions. These Champions are then able to act as “agents of change” for better child marriage interventions, and to influence the work of their own organisations, coalitions and State Partnerships to address the practice.

3 Better understanding of how change happens to end child marriage

The analysis and understanding of change processes is inseparable from gender awareness, analysis and feminist leadership approaches, and is built as a cross-cutting theme through the GLP. Along with the *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change*, the GLP uses the Gender at work framework and its four areas of change (see Figure 1).

** In India, many *Girls Not Brides* member organisations have come together to accelerate progress at the state level. The State Partnership in Rajasthan is a network of member organisations who have aligned their work with the *Girls Not Brides* global strategy and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the secretariat; the state coalitions in Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal are also committed to addressing child marriage but have not signed a formal MoU with the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat.

Figure 1: The four areas of change drawn from the Gender at work framework



Source: Adapted from the Gender at work framework

While all quadrants of the framework addressed in the GLP are important, GNB's work focuses more on transforming informal systems, including social norms, and evidence-based engagement with policies and programmes to create an environment that supports girls and women to realise their full potential.

4 Collaborative and multi-stakeholder action

The analysis and understanding of power – with its different dimensions: power within, power to, power over, power with – is central to the GLP and closely linked and intrinsic to achieving gender equality. The GLP promotes the “power with” aspect through collaboration with wide-ranging stakeholders, including government, civil society, donors, academia and media to end child marriage and support ever-married girls. This is central to ‘Girls Not Brides’ strategic objective on movement-building. Participants have the space to share their experience and lessons learned, inspire others, and build opportunities to work together in their own states, across states and at the national level.

Practical work is also central to the GLP methodology. Participants develop an individual learning project over the year and finish by co-creating a collective project with a GTA to address child marriage. This funded project is a key opportunity to practise the learning and exercise the leadership skills gained during the GLP, and to apply them for concrete interventions to address child marriage. The collective project is designed to generate robust evidence on the

voices and needs of young people to lead a life of choice and dignity. It also creates scope for dialogue between young people and decision-makers at various levels of governance from village to District level.

What this booklet is for

This booklet captures transformative stories of selected Gender Justice Champions. Drawing from the GLP, it provides glimpses of the work done by these champions, documenting their personal transformations and year-long learning projects. It highlights their efforts to bring a more gender-transformative approach to their work, to transform organisational practices, and embed the approach in their state coalitions or Partnerships. The stories in this booklet show multiple changes at the individual, organisational and coalition levels after the one-year programme. We hope these stories show the power of investing in gender leadership programmes, and are excited to follow the future work of this first cohort of Gender Justice Champions in India.

1 UNICEF, 2023, Is an end to child marriage within reach? Latest trends and future prospects.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 UNICEF, 2023, Ending child marriage: A profile of progress in India.
5 Oxfam GB, 2019, Gender Leadership Program guide, unpublished document.

Changing inside-out to lead by example

Javed Abbas,
Milaan Foundation,
Uttar Pradesh



“As I reflect back on my experience at the Gender Leadership Programme (GLP) workshops, I can’t help but feel grateful for the incredible opportunity to learn and grow as a gender justice champion. Even though I have been working on addressing gender equity issues for many years, this programme has transformed me at several subtle levels that are truly valuable to me as a leader,” shares Javed Abbas, from Milaan Foundation¹.

Javed saw the GLP as an opportunity to develop his leadership capacity in addressing gender equity issues to end child marriage. This journey began in

April 2022 when he joined a group of 26 people who came from 9 states of India to attend the year-long programme.

A new lens to view the world

The GLP workshops introduced him to the Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA) for addressing underpinning issues of child marriage. He began to understand that just legal interventions to stop child marriages were not going to end the age-old tradition.

¹ Milaan Foundation is a non-profit, social impact organization, which envisions an inclusive and equal world, where every girl is educated, healthy and safe. Milaan Foundation currently works in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka states of India.

To transform such cultural traditions, a systemic change was required which involved changing attitudes and beliefs on gender norms using Gender Transformative Approaches in programmes and engaging with various stakeholders.

The residential workshops had several practical exercises that helped to enhance Javed's gender awareness. All the participants in the workshop were asked to conduct a gender analysis survey in the Kathmandu market to understand gender relations, power dynamics, and access to resources.

Javed shares, *"I recall talking to a woman who owned a small shop in the market. She was divorced and was living with her brother's family to take care of her son. I found out that even though she owned the shop, crucial decisions regarding procurement and how to spend money were taken by her brother. It made me realise that irrespective of cultural differences and national boundaries, women continue to experience a lack of power in taking important decisions in their lives."*

He further added, *"The intense discussions after this exercise helped me to analyse gender relations and power dynamics more critically and understand the impact they have on social norms. I realised to address gender discrimination effectively, we need to have a new lens to view the world, a lens that can catch the subtle subjugation women experience in our daily lives."*

These experiential exercises helped Javed understand that gender transformation means looking closely at how society expects people to behave based on their gender, and changing these expectations is crucial so that everyone has an equal chance to succeed. This involves questioning why some people are treated better than others because of their gender. Gender transformation is not just about individual girls and women trying to do better, but about changing the larger system that

perpetuates gender inequality. These discussions also helped Javed to see how this inequity sustains the regressive practice of child marriage in society.

He shared his insights, *"The GLP training helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the problem of child marriage and the actions required to end it. I learned that child marriage is caused by multiple factors such as gender inequality, social beliefs, poverty, and lack of education, among others. To address these systemic issues, collective action is required, including multistakeholder engagements to enable the overall ecosystem to prevent child marriage."*

Building a learning culture

Javed was inspired to apply GTA in his workspace, to share his learnings about power dynamics, gender mainstreaming and conflict resolution. So, he decided to take this forward as his learning project under the Gender Leadership Programme (GLP) to build a learning culture within his organisation. The Milaan Foundation welcomed his project idea and encouraged him to roll out the project as building the capacities of team members is a priority for the foundation. Javed was also supported by the GLP trainers through online sessions in this journey.

It was not easy to implement this project with his multiple responsibilities as a senior member of the Milaan Foundation. But his determined and hardworking nature paved the way for making his intentions a reality. While finding a suitable time that worked for all his team members was difficult, they worked together to eventually create a space to help Javed deliver the learning sessions. The team fixed two days per month to do these sessions.

Using 'active listening' learning from the GLP training, Javed ensured everyone got a chance to speak and share. This helped the team to build a culture of collective decision-making.

The icing on the cake was that the non-programme team is also planning to join these sessions and everyone is now taking collective ownership to sustain the learning culture in the organisation.

Encouraged by this initial success, Javed decided to use the learning from the GLP in his day-to-day work in managing teams and increasing productivity.

He recalls, ***“There were several occasions when managers with diverse teams shared their struggles with low performance. The problem was that even though the same instruction was given to all team members, the results were inconsistent.”***

The teams had pressure to complete the pending tasks and the Managers needed the whole team to perform well.

Javed introduced them to the GLP module on ‘learning styles.’ He shares, ***“We explored different approaches and discovered that one-size-fits-all doesn’t always work. Flexible, personalised learning strategies make a big difference. Using reflective tools, we identified our own learning styles and leadership orientations, which the managers found helpful. They began to see their diverse teams with a new perspective and focused on leveraging each person’s strengths to get the work done. These discussions fuelled a surge in personalized and adaptive learning.”***

Enhancing the Circle of Influence

The breakthroughs at the workspace encouraged Javed to look for opportunities to enhance his circle of influence as a gender justice champion to end child marriage. Milaan Foundation started Uttar Pradesh Coalition to Empower Girls (UPCEG) in 2018, which has been supported by *Girls Not Brides* since 2019. UPCEG is a state-level collective of organisations working to end child marriage in various districts of Uttar Pradesh. Javed is now working closely with the collective to grow this coalition. In the quarterly capacity-building workshops, they are trying to help the member organisations to understand how they can also include the GTA approach and gender analysis in their work more systematically to end child marriage.

The year-long journey for Javed has been a deeply transformative experience as he has learnt to apply GTA not only in his professional space but also in his personal life. He looked at his family life through this new lens and discovered that there were subtle gender inequities that needed to be addressed even in his simple middle-class home. He observed, ***“While my wife runs her own business and my daughter goes for taekwondo classes, they continue to hesitate in taking independent decisions. I am now actively encouraging them to make decisions on their own. I have realised that if I have to be an effective leader I have to lead by example!”***

Over half of the girls and women in India who married in childhood live in five states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh is home to the largest number.

Source: Ending Child Marriage, A profile of progress in India – UNICEF 2023

Defying gender stereotypes



Vibha Mishra,
Safe Society,
Uttar Pradesh

“The Gender Leadership Programme (GLP) has been a very insightful experience for me. I have always been a feminist and have worked on gender inequality for many years. But this was the first workshop where I began to understand how challenging gender stereotypes under feminist leadership is closely connected to ending the regressive practice of child marriage,” shares the young Vibha Mishra from Safe Society¹.

Feminist Leadership and Ending Child Marriage

The residential workshops organised by *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* and *Oxfam GB* gave Vibha an opportunity to deepen her understanding of feminist leadership. She shares, *“I understood that by providing girls with education, skills, and opportunities for personal growth, feminist leaders enable them to*

¹ Safe Society is a non-profit organisation having Special Consultative Status with the United Nations. Working in three states including Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar the organisation works in the area of gender equality, child rights, public health and livelihoods. Underprivileged girls and adolescent girls are a part of all their interventions to follow their vision of “We can work with them for them”.

develop a sense of agency and make informed decisions about their lives. Empowered girls are less likely to be forced into early marriages and are more equipped to resist societal pressures.

The GLP workshop introduced Vibha to the Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA) to end child marriage. GTA recognise that child marriage is deeply rooted in societal norms, attitudes, and power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality. Breaking gender stereotypes is, therefore, one of the crucial ways to challenge the child marriage tradition. Child marriage often results from the belief that girls are inferior to boys and that their primary role is limited to household chores, marriage and childbearing. By breaking these stereotypes, Gender Transformative Approaches create space for girls to pursue education, develop skills, and have agency over their own lives.

Challenging gender stereotypes

Vibha was inspired to challenge existing gender stereotypes and she decided to take this as her learning project in the year-long Gender Leadership Programme (GLP). She shared her learnings with her colleagues in Safe Society and a project was designed to offer non-traditional livelihood opportunities for women in the slum areas of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The GLP facilitators conducted several online webinars to support Vibha and her team in defining and implementing the project.

Vibha enthusiastically shares, ***“We decided to enroll women to learn to drive light goods vehicles in slum areas of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. We wanted to challenge the set pattern of livelihood in these conservative families where even the women did not warm up easily to the idea of learning how to drive light-goods vehicles to get driving licenses. The challenge was immense but we were all determined to redefine gender roles to change mindsets.”***

Vibha and her spirited team began creating awareness about their programme and invited women to challenge their capacity to learn something that seemed impossible to them. A driving school was identified that would teach these women early in the morning and help them get their driving licenses.

Several husbands openly expressed their displeasure by saying, ***“This work is not meant for women, their place is in the kitchen in front of the stove making food for the family.”*** Women had their concerns, ***“Early morning if we go to drive, who will serve food to the children?”*** The community also expressed their disdain, ***“It’s not the place for women to learn how to drive, only ‘fast women’ would think of doing such things!”***

Convincing both men and women took several rounds of in-depth discussions around the necessity to challenge gender stereotypes. The team used the GLP learnings on active listening, resistance and change to challenge the pre-existing gender norms within the community. These discussions delved into issues such as how lack of education, early marriage and lack of economic independence leaves most women powerless over their own lives, which is also harmful to the whole family. Women were invited to imagine the possibilities of earning better income and how they could be role models for their daughters or girls in the community. Vibha and her team reached out to 1000 families and managed to get 15 women registered for the driving programme, with 10 women eventually completing their driving lessons and getting their licenses. Completing this project against all odds was no small achievement.

Vibha shares with pride, ***“Today the women are thrilled with their breakthrough and are happy that they dared to defy gender stereotypes. They can see that they have become role models, as often when women get together, they curiously enquire about their unique experience of learning to drive. What is heartening is that young girls have begun***

to enquire about this driving course run by Safe Society. Navigating this journey would not have been possible without the GLP facilitator's consistent guidance."

Collective action to scale-up efforts

Empowered by these experiences, Vibha now fully understands the need for collective action across states to end deep-rooted traditions like child marriage in the country. As an inspired Gender Justice Champion, she shares her enthusiasm to scale up efforts, *"Being part of the GLP participants group of 26 people from 9 states I have begun to see the possibility of collective action to end child marriage. I see this knowledgeable group as an invaluable resource to exchange expertise to solve the local challenges each one is facing in their state. Before the GLP, my husband often pointed out that I was a loner and needed to learn to connect with others to create the possibility of real change in society. Today with this energetic group, I feel like I belong to a group that has the expertise to help bring about tangible change to end child marriage."*

Challenging stereotypes within

The GLP learnings have been deeply empowering for Vibha at a personal level too. The reflective exercises in the training workshops helped her to see how she unconsciously judged her own behaviour through the prism of conventional gender stereotypes. She shares, *"I often questioned myself, wondering whether I am being too aggressive. Am I too outspoken? Should I speak softly? Am I overreacting to gender issues? Am I overly sensitive? However, when I attended the GLP workshops and met other participants, I noticed that they were facing similar comments, but they had developed their own strategies to deal with these concerns. The residential workshops gave me several opportunities to share my self-doubts to become aware of how our patriarchal society was unconsciously making it difficult for me to accept myself."* The exercises during the course of the programme have helped Vibha to become more self-aware and accepting of her bold vocal nature. *"Post GLP I am a more self-assured person and confident that collectively our group will take large-scale actions to end child marriage,"* shares the vibrant Vibha.



Nearly one in four young women in India (23 per cent) were married or in union before their 18th birthday.

Source: Ending Child Marriage, A profile of progress in India – UNICEF 2023

Photo credit: Bhangaha Mahottari

Amplifying Voices



Aslam Khan,
FXB India Suraksha,
Delhi

"In the scorching summer heat, when the Gender Leadership Programme (GLP) workshop arrived like a much-awaited rain, its significance became clear. Just as the rain cools the land, this workshop cooled my mind, providing the nourishment I needed. Like the crops thirsting for sustenance, I found myself fed with knowledge and growth," shares the poetic Aslam Khan from FXB India Suraksha (FXBIS)¹.

Working to end child marriage is a journey that requires persistence, and willingness to stand up, speak out and take action. Aslam shares the significance of GLP in this journey, ***"In my two decades of working in the social sector,***

collaborating with diverse individuals and communities, I have witnessed the power of collective action and knowledge sharing. However, there comes a time when we realise the need for reorientation, restructuring, and growth on multiple levels. Despite the constraints of our daily routines, the GLP workshops marked the beginning of a transformative journey, enabling fresh insights and personal growth which has rejuvenated my work to end child marriage."

Aslam started this reflective journey in a five-day residential workshop as part of the Gender Leadership Programme (GLP). As the year-long programme concluded in Kathmandu,

¹ FXB India Suraksha (FXBIS) is an Indian non-governmental, non-profit organisation providing development assistance to marginalised children, women, and communities in rural and urban India. Today, FXBIS works across 330 villages and 5 slums across 12 states and 1 union territory and has reached out to over 500,000 people through its community-based programmes and interventions.

Aslam shares his insights, *“The GLP workshops were distinct in their approach to addressing the challenging issue of child marriage. The workshop introduced us to Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA) to prevent the regressive practice of early marriage in society. I realised that to address the persistent gender inequality in society and to eliminate the root causes of child marriage, we require comprehensive systemic transformation. Through the GLP experiential and reflective exercises, it dawned upon me that this profound societal shift cannot occur without individual self-transformation, which must extend to our interpersonal dynamics within families, organisations, and communities. Simultaneously, it must also encompass changes at the governmental level.”*

Intersectionality and child marriage

The interactive exercises helped Aslam to delve into the important concept of intersectionality and its influence on the practice of child marriage.

Intersectionality helps to understand that the issue is not solely rooted in gender inequality but is influenced by other factors such as poverty, cultural norms, race, ethnicity, and geographic location.

Intersectional analysis recognises that the experiences and vulnerabilities of girls and young women vary based on the specific intersections of their identities. Aslam shares his insights, *“I began to understand that for instance, in certain communities, girls from marginalised racial or ethnic backgrounds may face additional barriers to education, economic opportunities, and healthcare, which increase their vulnerability to child marriage. Similarly, girls with disabilities may face unique challenges due to ableism, which can heighten their risk of child marriage.”* By taking an intersectional approach, efforts to eliminate child marriage can be more inclusive, responsive, and effective in addressing the specific needs and realities of diverse communities and individuals. It helps to identify and dismantle the intersecting systems of power and discrimination

that perpetuate child marriage and work towards comprehensive solutions that promote gender equality.

Training of Trainers to integrate GLP learnings

Empowered with enhanced self-awareness and knowledge Aslam began to think of sustainable ways to take action to amplify the voices to end child marriage. He came up with a learning project to develop a Training of Trainers (TOT) for his office colleagues, community workers, peer educators and social workers working in different programmes of FXB India Suraksha.

Aslam shares his vision, *“As I look after North India for the organization, it gives me the space and privilege to work with different teams who work with children, youth, women and other marginalised communities. So, the idea was, by conducting TOTs, I wanted to train a group of trainers who can then, as Gender Justice Champions, cascade the GLP knowledge and skills to a larger number of participants or project stakeholders to significantly scale up the efforts to end child marriage.”*

The idea was welcomed by the FXBIS team and a well-defined project was designed with the help of the GLP trainers. 24 participants from two states Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan were identified for the project as a first step towards eventually scaling this training to all states of FXBIS operations. Some of the specific objectives included providing conceptual clarity on gender concepts, power, intersectionality and child marriage through offline and online workshops. Building effective leadership skills and most importantly facilitating a gender-positive society within their professional as well as personal space was also a key purpose. Aslam approached the training with a clear focus to develop leaders with a distinct voice. He shares, *“I believe leaders are effective when they have their own style of leading. Often, people approach*

training without realising individual and community strengths. I wanted to make sure to develop leaders by using their inherent strengths to expand their horizons to understand things. Leaders emerging from such values would not be clones of the trainer. They would be stronger voices as they would have internalised their learnings to make it their own. Such leaders have the power to unfold the leadership in the community to carry on this long struggle forward to end child marriage sustainably.

The GLP had deepened Aslam's understanding of important concepts like power and gender analysis, and the TOT incorporated those learnings. *"As a leader, it's your responsibility to balance power fairly. Often when you hold a powerful position of a leader, you can be surrounded by gossip circles and this has a negative impact on the team. An effective leader uses his power in a way that conflicts are openly talked about and resolved keeping in mind all perspectives and vulnerabilities of the team," shares Aslam.*

Gender analysis was another tool that was used in an enriching way in the GLP training. Aslam shares, *"It was very insightful to use gender analysis among family and friends. People feel that things in their personal and office life are different but really actions and thoughts and language should be consistent as a leader. For instance, many men use sexist language in their personal spaces thinking that it does not affect their work. But inherent inconsistencies that emerge from such hypocritical behaviour cannot lead to power that can be influential."* The TOT project curriculum included all these invaluable insights that Aslam had gained in the Gender Leadership programme. At the end of the TOT workshop, participants shared with Aslam, *"We have a better perspective now which helps us to reflect on gender dynamics at work and our behaviours, and actions regarding the same."* Team members, social workers, and peer educators working at FXBIS are practising these learnings in their respective communities and program spaces, wherein they interact and engage with over 600 children (including 300+ boys) daily

because of their work. Aslam is now working on scaling this project in all the states of North India.

Listening to expand awareness

As Aslam rolled out the training programme, he was mindful of practising what he was preaching. Self-reflective exercises were a critical part of the GLP training programme. He shares, *"Learning to accept mistakes was a crucial lesson I had learnt through the GLP. This happened when I became aware in the active listening module that I tend to interrupt people when they speak. Accepting this weakness was not easy. I saw how my mind resisted accepting the fact because of the fear of feeling weak. I soon realised that accepting weakness does not make you weak. Acceptance was actually liberating because it helped me to be free of resistance so that I could focus on taking proactive actions for becoming a better listener."*

This invaluable learning came to effective use as a trainer when he conducted the TOT in his organisation. Aslam recalls, *"During the sessions, one of the participants discovered that he was doing unconscious subtle discrimination against his wife for years. He was overwhelmed as he shared how horrible he felt about his behaviour."*

When the workshop participant confided in Aslam, he first listened without any judgement as he knew from personal experience how hard it is to accept oneself. His active listening helped the participant to recognise that he had shown the courage to accept his mistakes. Aslam knew from personal experience that making someone wrong is not helpful to anyone. *"I was well aware that when people make others wrong it does not result in change it results in defending. As a leader, I knew my job was not to make them feel guilty but to inspire them to take proactive steps to overcome their challenges,"* shares Aslam. These self-realizations were a breakthrough in these workshops as individual transformation is fundamental to bringing systemic change in the society.



Fostering Equal Learning Opportunities

Kundan Kumar,
Jan Lok Kalyan Parishad,
Jharkhand

“If society wants to progress, it is necessary to educate girls!” 25-year-old Kundan enthusiastically shares this slogan from the campaign to build girl-friendly toilets in the schools of Jharkhand. The purpose of building toilets was to reduce the number of girls dropping out of schools in the most underdeveloped areas of Jharkhand as that has linkages with child marriage. This was Kundan’s learning project in the year-long Gender Leadership Programme (GLP) organised by ***Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage and Oxfam GB.***

As a grassroots worker at Jan Lok Kalyan Parishad (JKLP)¹, Kundan found the GLP training invaluable for learning Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA) to address gender equity issues in the field. He shares, ***“The GTA have been instrumental in my understanding of feminist leadership. It has empowered me to critically examine systems of power, resistance, and change. This learning has helped me realise the significance of conflict resolution in addressing gender disparities and has provided me with the tools to champion for gender justice effectively.”***

¹ JKLP is a grassroots organisation established in 1994 that focuses on women and child development.

Kundan further shares his experience, ***“Attending the GLP workshops was a totally unique experience for me as prior to this, I did not have the opportunity to receive gender training. The GLP training has played a crucial role in deepening my understanding of the problem of child marriage and the actions needed to prevent it. It has equipped me with a comprehensive approach to tackling this issue strategically.”***

Championing girl-child education

Empowered with this knowledge gained in the GLP, Kundan recognised the importance of educating girls to address the root causes of the issue of child marriage. He decided to work towards eliminating barriers and disparities that hinder their access to education. His ideas were welcomed by his colleagues at JLKP as they could see how education is a powerful tool in preventing child marriage. Education empowers girls, improves socioeconomic status, breaks intergenerational cycles of discrimination, and fosters social change, all of which contribute towards creating an enabling environment for girls to exercise their agency and preventing child marriage.

Jharkhand has a large Adivasi (Scheduled Tribes) population, with recent government data revealing that the state’s dropout rates for girls is higher than national figures due to a multiplicity of factors. Addressing this complex issue with limited resources required some strategic thinking to develop an effective project. Kundan received regular online guidance from the GLP trainers to develop a project that would be truly valuable to the young girls studying in schools, especially at the upper primary and secondary levels. Along with his colleagues and the local youth club members, Kundan decided to convince the School Management Committees (SMC) to invest in, ‘Building Girl-Friendly Toilets.’

The absence of this simple amenity is a significant reason for girls to drop out of school. The lack of

clean and functional toilets makes it challenging for girls to feel safe and manage their menstrual hygiene effectively. In addition, lack of access to sanitary products can lead to embarrassment, shame, and discomfort, causing girls to miss school, especially during their menstrual cycles.

This in turn leads to girls discontinuing their education. Kundan shares, ***“Without access to education, girls are more likely to face limited options and may be pressured into early marriages. Child marriage perpetuates a cycle of poverty, reinforces gender inequalities, and negatively impacts girls’ health, well-being, and overall development. By addressing the issue of inadequate toilets in schools and promoting girls’ education, we can help prevent girls from dropping out and reduce their vulnerability to child marriage, empowering them to build better futures.”*** 15 schools were selected in the most underdeveloped tribal villages of Littipara block in Pakur district of Jharkhand for this project.

Collaborative actions paved the way

Implementing this project in the most underprivileged Adivasi (Scheduled Tribes) communities of Jharkhand was not a simple task. It required collaborative efforts with the communities, village and district administration, as well as School Management Committees to help them to realise the importance of building proper sanitation infrastructure, raise awareness about menstrual hygiene, and eliminate cultural barriers that hinder girls’ education.

Navigating through these myriads of issues, Kundan found clarity through the GLP training learnings.

He shares, ***“While implementing the project, the GLP learnings on issues such as change process, power and change, gender analysis and gender behavioural change were extremely helpful in various stages of implementing the project from beginning to end.”***

Kundan also used these learnings to prepare the field team to implement the project. He shares, ***“I used my knowledge from the various Gender sessions to orient the youth to help me to work effectively and smoothly at ground level to reach the objective of the program.”***

They found these learnings to be especially useful in mobilising the community. Kundan recalls, ***“We had several village-level meetings to help the parents, teachers, village Panchayat Leaders, and key influencers in the community to make them realise the importance of girls’ education. We had to address apprehensions such as, if the girls go to school who will take care of household work.”***

Kundan and his team engaged with the community by showing videos of women achievers to make them realise how an educated woman can accelerate the entire family and communities’ path to prosperity and well-being. The team also mobilised the young boys in this campaign to encourage girls’ education. As they began to understand the economic and social benefits of educating girls, the young boys also joined the campaign to champion for girl-friendly toilets in schools. This encouraging support from the community helped the School Management Committee to welcome Kundan and his team to survey their premises for developing the sanitation facility.

Kundan and his team worked with School Management Committees (SMC) and the District Education Department to mobilise resources for

building girl-friendly toilets. This helped to create girl-friendly toilets in five schools. These clean toilets with water have doors to create privacy for the girls which were previously missing. The SMC has also arranged sanitary napkins and disposal bins for adolescent girls attending school.

Spreading the wings of change

This breakthrough was welcomed by parents and girls in the area. Kundan observed, ***“Over a period of time I can see some fathers have begun to talk about their daughter’s higher education plans. Girls are also motivated to go to school so they are attending school more regularly now. It is so encouraging to see fathers focused on educating their daughters instead of marrying them at the earliest.”***

As Kundan dreams to spread the wings of change he shares enthusiastically, ***“The GLP has empowered me to be a catalyst for change and has given me the confidence to work towards creating a more equitable and just society. I wish the GLP training was available to more grassroots workers in my state and IEC² materials were available to create widespread awareness about girls’ education.”***

A girl’s risk of child marriage depends on certain background characteristics. Girls who live in rural areas or come from poorer households are at greater risk, and a higher proportion of child brides are found among those with little or no education.

Source: Ending Child Marriage, A profile of progress in India – UNICEF 2023

One Issue One Voice

Akhtari Begam,
IZAD,
Bihar

“I have had several opportunities to receive gender-related training. However, this Gender Leadership Programme (GLP) was different. It provided the opportunity to establish the perspective of feminism in leadership. I understand now that working on leadership with a feminist viewpoint is crucial for change. This training goes beyond just increasing knowledge; it aims to bring about equality, justice, development, and long-lasting change in society to end regressive traditions like child marriage,” shares Akhtari Begum from IZAD¹ who has been working on gender issues all her life in Bihar.

Feminist leadership

Akhtari deepened her understanding of Feminist leadership in the GLP workshops, where she realised that Feminist leaders prioritise collaboration and inclusivity by actively involving diverse voices and perspectives in decision-making processes. They value collective action and seek to create inclusive spaces where everyone's input is valued and heard regardless of their religion, caste or gender identity. It challenges traditional power structures, norms, and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities and works towards creating a more just and equitable world.

¹ Izad, a women-led grassroots organisation in Bihar, focuses on addressing various issues such as gender, sexuality, violence, education, and child marriage.

She shares, ***“What was particularly insightful for me was Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA) to feminist leadership. I began to understand that feminist leadership goes beyond addressing immediate issues and seeks to bring about transformative change in society. And this journey of transformation begins with oneself. A self-aware leader has the potential to lead by influence and not just by authority.”***

Envisioning holistic change

Akhtari decided to share her GLP learnings with her teammates to build the feminist perspective within her team and focus on promoting community-level leadership while fostering gender-inclusive leadership. She took this as her project in the year-long GLP. With regular mentoring from GLP trainers through online webinars, she felt confident to create a vision to end child marriage.

She shares enthusiastically, ***“We can end child marriage. For this, we need to work at the community level, preparing young girls as gender justice champions under the guidance of a feminist leader. In this long journey, the youth is our hope to make sustained efforts to bring about long-lasting change in the traditional mindset of society. We need to create awareness among all key stakeholders so that we can inspire them to take collective action to prevent child marriage.”***

This collaborative approach is crucial in addressing the complex and deeply entrenched issue of child marriage. Akhtari and her team, therefore, worked systematically to do the groundwork for creating the possibility of change at the community level. They began with a gender perspectives mapping exercise that aimed to identify and address inequalities, biases, and stereotypes that existed within the community. Akhtari designed monthly trainings with her team members to address the issues identified in the mapping exercise. The team

decided to engage with various stakeholders to mobilise one voice on the issue of child marriage.

Creating community of Gender Champions

The slogan ‘One Issue- One Voice’ inspired their campaign to create widespread awareness of the issue. At the heart of their initiative was the collaboration with 1000 adolescent girls to develop them as gender justice champions in the community who are creating awareness to prevent child marriages. This youth leadership programme today has 25 adolescent girls as leaders who have successfully raised awareness about child marriage among approximately 2000 students in 10 schools in their surrounding areas. This remarkable breakthrough was only possible because these girls are leaders who can walk the talk. These 25 adolescent leaders have managed to prevent their own early marriages proposed by their families.

This transformative journey of courage was possible because Akhtari and her team worked diligently to build their perspective through thematic discussions. They were educated on issues like health, nutrition, education, economic independence and legal rights. The girls began to understand the value of having a purpose in their lives and how the lack of dreams results in them feeling more pressurised to succumb to the option of child marriage. They were gradually encouraged to share their learnings and goals with their families which helped them to understand that child marriage is not good for anyone.

Akhtari shares proudly, ***“Some girls who had to face stronger resistance from their family even found the courage to tell their parents that they will go to the police station if they were forced to get married. Taking this bold stand eventually, made the parents understand their wishes to follow their dreams.”***

Collaborative action for systemic change

Community mobilisation was done through regular open dialogues. Young boys and girls were encouraged to ask their family members the age when they got married. Several girls came back to share their mother's experiences, ***"I was married at 14 years of age and by the time I turned 20 I had three children with no dreams for myself."*** ***These heart-to-heart conversations encouraged several parents to take a stand. They declared openly in these meetings, "Our dreams were crushed too early but we will not let our daughters pass through the same life."***

Mobilising the administration was another key activity to work towards systemic change. Akhtari and her team formed a leadership group consisting of 25 Elected Women Representatives (EWR) and Female Frontline Workers (FLW), who are actively engaged in dialogue and raising awareness about the legal issues in child marriage at the community and district levels.

Akhtari and her team are working to create one voice on ending child marriage so they have created a strong communication system for effective monitoring of all initiatives. Daily WhatsApp messages are exchanged with everyone in the field

and monthly review meetings are conducted to track the overall progress. Every five months they also revisit the gender perspective mapping exercise for identifying any course corrections that may be required.

Growing within to lead effectively

As Akhtari increases her influence as a leader she is also working on growing within. She shares, ***"In the GLP workshops we used self-analysis tools that have made me aware of my subtle inadequacies. I discovered that I lack confidence when I speak in English in large gatherings. The in-depth discussions after this exercise made me realise that I have to accept myself unconditionally first to do anything."*** She further explains, ***"The reflective exercises made me realise logically, how I was letting a mere language define me when all my work showed that I was quite competent and capable. I now have tools to deal with my inadequacies. I have decided to overcome this inhibition by learning to pat my back on every step I take towards my personal transformation. This inner journey has become really precious to me and I look forward to more such reflective workshops that will help me grow as an effective leader inside-out."***

The prevalence of child marriage varies across states and union territories in India.

At least 40 per cent of young women were married before turning 18 in West Bengal, Bihar and Tripura, compared to 1 per cent in Lakshadweep.

Source: Ending Child Marriage, A profile of progress in India – UNICEF 2023

Breaking the mould to redefine gender

Shakuntala Pamecha,
Rajsamand Jan Vikas Sansthan,
Rajasthan

65-year-old Shankuntala has been working tirelessly on women's empowerment through Rajsamand Jan Vikas Sansthan (RJVS)¹ in Rajasthan. Residing in a state where child marriage, gender-based violence and female foeticide are highly prevalent, she has dedicated her life to addressing gender discrimination issues. She is well aware that there is a constant need to find effective ways to address these deep-rooted inequities in society.

The Gender Leadership Programme (GLP) were, therefore, an opportunity for her to deepen her journey in addressing gender discrimination and

gave her a comprehensive framework to understand the complex issues involved in child marriage.

She shares, *"I found the Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA) to addressing child marriage issue particularly insightful. It made me realise that to eliminate prevailing gender inequality in society, we need systemic change. This holistic change in society is not possible without self-transformation which should further extend to change within our interpersonal relationships in the family, our organisation, community and simultaneously at the government levels too."*

¹ RJVS is a grassroots-level NGO committed to transforming the lives of women and adolescent girls through continuous and timely interventions which work towards the mitigation of child marriage and violence against women.

Shifting perspectives on gender roles

Shakuntala found the multi-modal GLP workshop exercises to be very engaging. In the Goa workshop, a video was shown about Katherine Switzer, the first woman to run a marathon held in Boston in 1967. This event was exclusively for men until then, so when a woman decided to participate, the organiser reacted negatively. As she began running, the race director tried to throw her out. Fortunately, her male friend stood by her side, and then nobody else expressed negativity. To everyone's surprise, Katherine completed the gruelling race successfully. This ground-breaking moment paved the way for the inclusion of women in marathon races.

This video and the intense discussions that followed shifted her perspective profoundly. She shares, ***"I was deeply moved by this story as I saw that while there was a man who was trying to hold the woman athlete back there was another man who was instrumental in enabling her to achieve the goal. It got me thinking about how I had been running my organisation with only women employees. I decided to change that immediately as I could see that men and boys had a crucial role to play in changing girls' lives and their participation is a necessity to end something as deep-rooted as child marriage."***

Shakuntala shared her GLP experiences with her colleagues at RJVS and they collectively decided to include male staff members in their organisation. This change brought about a significant shift in her organisation's approach to their work.

Enhancing leadership skills of girls and boys

Shakuntala initiated a project to develop the leadership skills of girls to raise awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage and emphasized the importance of education. A group of 40 girls and boys was formed to create awareness in the Khamnore and Railmagra blocks of the

Rajsamand district. While working on this project, Shakuntala discovered that Child Protection Committees (CPC)² formed in the district were not functioning effectively. It was a challenge to obtain orders from the collector³ to activate the Child Protection Committees. To address this, she organised meetings with the group of boys and girls and provided them with information about the committees. She shares, ***"We repeatedly sent them to the collector's office to develop their leadership skills and boost their confidence in talking about their rights. These regular dialogues with the officials helped to obtain orders from the district collector to activate and empower these committees at the district and village levels."*** After seeing the orders from the collector these committees are now holding regular meetings. In these meetings, Shakuntala informed committee members about their roles in preventing child marriage, child labour, and child abuse. This awareness is helping the CPC in taking proactive steps to prevent child marriage

Challenging gender stereotypes

"Stepping out of their comfort zone, the girls have realised that they can achieve a lot if they step out of their homes," shares Shakuntala. These girls who were earlier not allowed to leave their homes or attend school have now begun to show interest in pursuing their education. The regular interactions with boys and girls together are changing the way they are looking at their education. She shares enthusiastically, ***"Previously, the girls pursued arts and astrology, but now they have started opting for science and commerce. Some boys used to feel ashamed of studying arts, considering it a subject for girls. However, they have come to understand that all subjects are useful for education."***

Shakuntala saw this breakthrough as an opportunity to expand her efforts to change the mindset of families and communities. She organised a workshop where girls were asked to invite their fathers to have a conversation about

² CPC is a community-based group including duty bearers, who are primarily responsible for creating and promoting a child-friendly and safe community environment wherein all children's well-being, safety and right are protected.

³ Collector is an administrative officer in the district governance system in India who issues "orders" or formal permission for anything to be executed or implemented.

their education. Initially, most of the girls refused, stating that they did not interact much with their fathers and many of them did not even know which class they were studying in. Shakuntala used her GLP training on active listening to patiently understand all their apprehensions. Eventually, she was able to help the girls to understand that it would be an invaluable opportunity for them to share their dreams with their father who had the power to make them come true. Shakuntala supported the girls to have that difficult conversation.

Contrary to everyone's expectations 14 fathers of the girls participated, which brought joy to both the RJVS staff and the girls. ***"All the fathers responded remarkably well, expressing their commitment to educating their daughters if they wanted to pursue higher studies. This instilled happiness among the girls, and today, all of them are actively pursuing education. This successful endeavour encourages us to continue conducting similar workshops in the future,"*** she shares with immense satisfaction.

Driving a new future

As Shakuntala continues to drive towards a new future of building empowered community participation in ending child marriage, she is also learning how to drive a car for her own personal transformation. She shares, ***"Post GLP workshops when I came back home, I saw my life through the GTA lens and realised subtle gender inequities in my personal life as well. I noticed that everyone in the family knew how to drive except me. I was leading an organisation but I was dependent on someone else for going to work."*** Shakuntala has learnt to drive despite remarks such as, ***"At your age, you should be hiring a driver to take you to work."*** An elated Shakuntala shares, ***"I was able to overcome societal expectations and gain the necessary skills to drive a car by enrolling my family and people into my vision for myself. The GLP workshops equipped me with strategies and perspectives to challenge traditional norms and pursue personal growth and empowerment in all aspects of my life."***



The practice of child marriage is less common today than in previous generations. Evidence shows accelerating progress over the last 15 years.

Empowering Girls for Higher Education and Careers

Imam Ansari,
Lok Jagriti Kendra,
Jharkhand

“The Gender Leadership Programme (GLP) workshops have been an invaluable resource, equipping me with the necessary tools and insights to drive positive change. I am grateful for the personal and professional growth it has facilitated, and I am dedicated to creating a better future by empowering individuals in my community to end child marriage,” shares Imam Ansari from Lok Jagriti Kendra¹ (LJK).

The GLP introduced Imam to Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA) to address

gender inequity. Preventing child marriage requires going beyond just strengthening the legal frameworks. Efforts should focus on advancing gender equality by empowering girls and women, improving access to education, addressing poverty, engaging communities, and advocating for social and cultural change. Collaboration between governments, civil society organisations and communities is also crucial for creating sustainable solutions to end child marriage.

1 Lok Jagriti Kendra (LJK) is a grassroots non-profit organisation working to empower women and children from marginalised underprivileged communities in Jharkhand since 2010.

Creating systemic change

“The GTA learnings proved to be a turning point for me as it shifted my entire perspective to a holistic approach to addressing child marriage in the marginalised communities of Jharkhand. Inspired by what I had learnt about systemic change, I decided to address the underlying causes of child marriage in my year-long learning project in the GLP. Education was identified as the tool for change in the remote village of Torar Panchayat in Senha C.D. Block of Lohardaga district in Jharkhand,” shares Imam.

There are a total of 682 houses in Torar Village Panchayat and the maximum population belongs to Dalit/Adivasis² and OBC² communities. After the lockdown, several migrant workers from these marginalised communities lost their livelihoods. They were unable to resume work due to the pandemic uncertainties even after the restrictions were lifted. With limited sources of income in the village, most households pushed girls to take on more responsibilities for domestic care work leading to a notable rise in the number of school dropouts. The number of girls dropping out was significantly higher, as were incidences of child marriage. So, Imam and his team in LJK decided to work on enhancing access to secondary education for both girls and boys aged 12-19 years from these disadvantaged communities. The aim was to reduce the incidences of dropout of children from 40% to 10% and facilitate their transition into secondary and higher education, while also enhancing employability through government-affiliated skill development programmes. Additionally, the team also aimed to create awareness about gender leadership among NGO staff, community members, school/college students, and parents.

“Education is inherently linked to gender equality. By ensuring equal access to education for both girls and boys, societies can dismantle discriminatory practices and create a more equitable environment. When girls are educated, they can actively participate in decision-making

processes, challenge gender stereotypes, and advocate for their rights, ultimately fostering a more equal society,” Imam shares his insights.

Equity in action

Emphasising the significance of education was a key aspect of LJK’s efforts among the community, parents, and children. Initially, the team collected secondary data from School Management Committees (SMC) to identify the students who had stopped coming to school. A list of 17 dropout children was prepared and then the enthusiastic LJK team developed a plan to connect with their families through Anganwadi Workers (AWW), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM) and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA)³ who were in communication with them. With their help, they conducted a survey to gather all the background details about these families.

Creating an enabling environment within the community was a crucial step. Imam recalls, ***“We focused on building rapport and mobilising the community. Scheduled interviews were conducted with each dropout child, typically through home visits. We also had a one-on-one engagement with the parents of dropout children to mobilise their support.”***

These discussions highlighted several economic concerns. Parents shared with the LJK team, ***“How long do we support children’s education before they can support our miserable economic condition?”***

Imam and his team decided to address these concerns at several levels. He shares, ***“We created awareness about the Government Skill Development Programme, ‘Kaushal Vikas Pariyojana’ under the Jharkhand Skill Development Mission Society. We told them that students could go through this route and get jobs earlier if they finished their school education. We also engaged in discussions about career options and emphasised their importance to the students.***

² Dalits/Adivasis² and OBC (Other Backward Classes) are social categories in India to identify groups of historically disadvantaged and marginalised communities due to social and economic factors, with the aim of providing them with affirmative action and welfare measures.

³ Anganwadi Workers (AWW), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM), and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) are grassroots community health workers involved in delivering essential healthcare and nutrition services, maternal and child health support, and promoting public health awareness in underserved areas.

Regular contact was maintained with schools and colleges involved. Our approach involved providing a supportive environment and avoiding excessive pressure on students.”

Connecting with the Government

Building a collective understanding of the reasons behind the dropout in the community and connecting with the government was an important task. So, meetings were scheduled at LJK organisation premises, involving all dropout children, parents, teachers, Panchayati Raj Institution members, community leaders, District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Block Education Officers, Block officials, Block Resource Centre and Cluster Resource Centre representatives. These meetings helped everyone to understand the necessity for working collaboratively to help build the future of these marginalised children in society. Imam and his team's efforts towards regular communication created an environment for re-admission. The team helped prepare referrals to ensure the linkage of 13 dropout children to the nearest government school/college to facilitate their continued education. The team continues to work towards convincing the remaining families to enrol their children. Regular monitoring of the progress and providing feedback are integral parts of the LJK's approach.

“Through our dedicated efforts, we have achieved a range of significant outcomes. Our efforts have helped in reducing the incidences of early and forced marriages among girls, while simultaneously raising awareness among parents and the community about the vital importance of education. Our vision extends beyond these immediate goals to the development of a society free from gender biases, where equal opportunities are available to all children,” shares an inspired Imam.

The LJK team has successfully increased the awareness levels of the community about the need

to improve literacy levels among girls and empower them to pursue higher education, technical skills, and career development. Encouraging parents to support their aspirations and ensuring that girls receive the same opportunities as boys has been a priority. Lastly, their efforts have resulted in the establishment of effective referral systems and linkages for job opportunities for both boys and girls, as well as information centres that facilitate access to crucial information and resources.

Imam shares enthusiastically, *“These achievements reflect our commitment to creating positive change and building a better future for children, especially for girls, so that the conversation moves beyond marriage and is supportive in their pursuit of education for a brighter future.”*

Growing Circles of Effectiveness

As a member of the Jharkhand State Coalition to end child marriage, LJK is actively expanding its influence in the region. Imam shares, *“We utilise our GLP learning by sharing knowledge, skills, tools, techniques, and experiences during core group and state-level meetings. The coalition actions include raising awareness, advocating with government departments, emphasising girls' education, and promoting skill development.”*

Imam understands the importance of decentralisation in scaling up efforts. He shares, *“To ensure ongoing progress, I regularly orient my team on relevant issues and provide feedback on any challenges encountered in the field. My aim is to develop more leaders within my team and organisation, ultimately empowering them to take on responsibilities and transfer power.”* Imam believes that *“True leadership involves empowering others and developing their leadership capacities.”* By orienting his team, providing feedback, and nurturing more leaders, Imam and his team have become champions in the fight against child marriage.

***One in three of the world's
child brides live in India.***

***Child brides include girls under 18
who are already married, as well as
women of all ages who first married in
childhood.***

***The majority of young women who married in
childhood gave birth as adolescents.***

***Child brides face challenges in
continuing their education.***

***Fewer than 2 in 10 married girls
remain in school.***






Source: Ending Child Marriage,
A profile of progress in India – UNICEF 2023

Girls Not Brides:

The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage is a civil society partnership of over 1600 organisations in more than 100 countries working together to end child marriage. Over the last decade, **Girls Not Brides** have built global and national ecosystems for change, fostering global and national collective action for policy change and implementation.



The Global Partnership
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