



GLOBAL MARCH

Against Child Labour
Contra el Trabajo Infantil
Contre le Travail des Enfants



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NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON ADDRESSING CHILD LABOUR IN COMMUNITIES

Sharing Experiences from *Bal Mitra Gram (BMG)*



Supported by:

Robert Bosch Stiftung

GLOSSARY

Bal Panchayat – Children's Parliament

Bal Mitra Gram – Child Friendly Village

Yuva Mandal – Youth Group

Mahila Mandal – Women's Group

ACRONYMS

BMG – Bal Mitra Gram

CFV – Child Friendly Village

ILO – International Labour Organisation

NCERT – National Council of Educational Research and Training

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

National Consultation on Addressing Child Labour in Communities

Sharing Experiences from Bal Mitra Gram

About *Bal Mitra Gram* (BMG)

The fight against the scourge of child labour needs little justification. Millions of children are entrapped with no freedom of mobility or choice, toiling in worst forms of labour with hardly any opportunity for education and leading a tiresome life with their lives subject to constant change. In a scenario like this, children should not only be rescued but also be placed at the centre of the development paradigm by adopting a participatory approach.

Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) or Child Friendly Village (CFV) model is a strategic intervention by Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) to embed child rights in rural communities of India with the intent to end child labour and trafficking of children and enrol them in schools. The model was initiated under the aegis of Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi in 2001. A collaborative initiative of this model has been by BBA and Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) since 2015 in 27 villages across Rajasthan, Karnataka and Jharkhand in India for creating Bal Mitra Grams (BMGs). The core objective of this initiative is to strengthen local action by community groups including children, youth and the community itself at large to end child labour, inculcate democratic values, promote education and create sustainable environment for children.

Many fascinating and unique success stories have emerged in the first phase of the project with the help of local collective action carried out by community groups ranging from enrolment and retainment of children in schools improving quality education concerning enrolment and retention of children in schools to improved quality of mid-day meal schemes and appointment of teachers in schools, from creating awareness on child rights issues to having acknowledged local environmental challenges.

With the successful completion of the first phase of this initiative a National Consultation was jointly organised by BBA and Global March in New Delhi on the 26th of May 2017.

The National Consultation was organised keeping the following objectives in mind:

1. Sharing experiences, challenges and successes of implementing BMGs and other child friendly models for highlighting challenges, good practices and solutions to strengthen efforts at all levels for a greater change for the children
2. Identifying the current gaps and challenges in implementation of laws such as Right to Education Act, inter-agency coordination and lack of a dialogue between administration and local communities for tackling child labour, ensuring education and sustainable environment in communities based on the experience of BMGs and other child friendly models.

Concerned stakeholders such as children from the BMGs who are also members of Bal Panchayat, Youth and Women from Yuva Mandal and Mahila Mandal, community leaders, representative from Ministry of Labour and Employment, national and international civil society organisations, inter-governmental agencies (ILO, and UNESCO), among others came together on a single platform to share experiences, learning and perspectives from BMGs and other child friendly models. The Consultation also succeeded a experience sharing and scaling up workshop of Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) staff from 6 states of Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh to engage cognitively with them and cross sharing of their experiences and scaling up of best practices in respective states.

Opening Ceremony

The consultation commenced with a welcome address by **Global March Against Child Labour's Global Coordinator Purva Gupta** where she stated "the consultation would be a starting point for sharing of experiences of the programme on BMGs for ending child labour and education".



Purva Gupta, Global March Against Child Labour's Global Coordinator



Mr R.S. Chaurasiya, Chairperson, Bachpan Bachao Andolan

This was followed by opening remarks by **Mr R.S. Chaurasiya, Chairperson Bachpan Bachao Andolan**, who briefed the audience about the objective of Bal Mitra Gram and stated, "After years of struggle, results have finally started showing. The aim of the model has been to pull the children out of work and enrol and retain them in schools". He stated that people in the villages have been made aware of their rights and are not just more informed but also take collective action to address issues at the community level.

Message from Nobel Peace Laureate



Mr Kailash Satyarthi, Nobel Peace Laureate

Succeeding the opening ceremony, he reminded the participants that it is essential to absorb certain values from the children of today for a morally strong world. He stated that the essence of BMGs lies in becoming friends with children and work towards developing a culture of respect for children's rights. He reiterated that India might be the biggest democracy but its politics is driven by caste and communal sentiments. However,

"BMGs are not just about prevention of child labour, child marriage or awareness about government schemes. It's most important aspect is learning to develop a relationship of equality, respect and friendship with children to have a

culture where children's rights are respected. We should always ask what children could give us. What can we learn from them? Children have the power to forgive others which cannot be found easily in adults."

Some insights from experience sharing at the National Consultation

The National Consultation on creating BMGs was all about sharing experiences and learnings by the key stakeholders of BMGs. It focused on some insights on their achievements and challenges in the states (i.e. Jharkhand, Karnataka and Rajasthan) of the collaborative initiative of BBA and Global March supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation (RBF). It also discussed the formation and framework of BMG model and how the model aids solutions in addressing problems faced by children and communities in the villages.

From children of Bal Panchayat (Children's Parliament) to representatives of ILO, the Consultation was an amalgamation of diverse stakeholders and advocates of children's rights. A unique platform as it was, there was direct interaction between children as young as 11, sharing their experiences of initiatives such as ban on plastics in their villages, appointment of teachers, construction of –school boundaries, to name a few with representatives of government, CSOs and inter-governmental agencies. Many such success stories of BMGs were followed by poems, slogans and stories by children creating an electric atmosphere of celebration of their initiatives and the spirit of a vibrant journey towards creating a child friendly world.



Shelly Bhasin, Programme Coordinator, Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, sharing insights from the BMG programme



Children of Bal Panchayat raising slogans

The Consultation was also a starting point for sharing of practices for ending child labour and ensuring quality education for all. The stakeholders from different states such as Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan among others, where the BMG model is being implemented, shared their achievements, challenges and learning from the model. A crucial implication of the exercise was also that it laid ground for a perspective on the scope and challenges of community based child friendly models for addressing the rights of the children as well as the communities.

Some of the important outcomes that could be extracted from the vast and enriching experience sharing exercise are described below:

1. Children, Youth and Community as agents of change

One of the core objectives of BMG programme is to initiate processes involving children, youth as well as community at large to address not only the issues of children such as child labour, child marriage and education but also create awareness and understanding of the rights of the community. The formation of stakeholder groups such as Bal Panchayat, Yuva Mandal and Mahila Mandal facilitates their capacity to identify problems and take collective action to find solutions, simultaneously creating a culture of rights awareness and understanding.

In a country where patriarchal mind set has stalled progress and development for decades, the children and youth from BMGs and *Yuva Mandal* have led some initiatives such as infrastructure improvements -



Neetu, Bal Panchayat (Children's Council) member, Rajasthan

construction of roads, water wells and toilets, organising health camps for the village that benefitted more than 300 people and environment sustainability projects and campaigns such as tree plantation, rain water harvesting, use of paper against plastic bags and anti-firecracker campaign to name a few.

In Rajasthan, the youth and child led initiatives have led to enrolment of 279 children in schools, in particular of the children identified as drop outs and out of school. There is also considerable improvement in the mid day meal schemes in the village schools as well as an overall improvement in the infrastructure such as construction of a boundary wall, play ground, more class rooms, library and provision of electricity and sports equipment in schools.

Neetu Kumari, a 12-year-old BMG member from Rajasthan proudly shared one such achievement from her village. She stated, “earlier my village was very backward but after our village was included in the BMG project, development has been made. The number of teachers in the schools was very less as compared to the children, and then we children of BMGs started regular meetings and discussions to solve this problem.

We also involved elders from our village and wrote a letter to the education chief. She took immediate action by using the law, 'Right to education' and which led to recruitment of 15 teachers”. Children like Neetu have also organised campaigns to create awareness about the issue of child marriage and its harmful effects, a practice that is extremely common and rampant in the state of Rajasthan. More than 6000 people from the community including children, youth, and elderly along with the key influencers of the village have participated in the campaign.

Thus, what is clear from these experiences is that a process of engagement, and partnership of Children's Parliament with the youth and women groups and other influential villagers starts with rights awareness and understanding. The process is culminated through collective problem solving at the village level, children and other community stakeholders are empowered to address issues of rights of children and community at large. Such process of engagement also helps the community to directly engage with the local authorities and administration for realisation of rights and entitlements under various provisions and schemes of the government such as the Right to Education Act 2009, Mid-day Meal Scheme, etc.



Panudda Boonpala, ILO - On appreciating the role of community in addressing child labour

It is also critical to work towards the sustainability of the intervention along with the engagement of the children and communities. According to Ms. Panudda Boonpala, Director DWT South Asia & Country Office India, International Labour Organization (ILO), the focus should be enhanced to include the development of community based monitoring (CBM). Doing so can make the intervention self-sustainable since the stakeholders take charge of the monitoring themselves and can regularly inform the community about key actions, problems and solutions about their issues and in particular children's rights. On the other hand, Mr. Onkar Sharma, Regional Labour Commissioner from of the Ministry of Labour and Employment,

New Delhi, India, focussed on strengthening enforcement along with Community Based Monitoring. He stated, The community should be made responsible to take action against any form of violation of rights and also build a relationship with the court of the law at the local/regional level.

Panudda Boonpala, ILO, On appreciating the role of community in addressing child labour

"For addressing the potential challenges in many countries the community role is very important. The action has to go down at the community level and key actors have to be from the community itself with a sense of ownership".

2. Civic engagement

"The BMGs are trying to teach the children the real meaning of democracy with a bottom to top approach and have given birth to child leaders and led to positive changes in the households of rural communities, particularly challenging the power dynamics and patriarchal mind-set."

Kailash Satyarthi, Nobel Peace Laureate, founder- BBA and honorary President- Global March Against Child Labour

The collective action of children, youth, community and other stakeholders to acknowledge and address issues in the village, in particular issues related to children also acts as a bridge between the civic authorities and the community. Awareness of and access to welfare schemes is one of the most crucial outcomes of the BMG intervention in many states. According to Shelly Bhasin, Programme Coordinator of BMGs, most of the BMG intervention states have shown improvement in accessing the welfare schemes such as Labour Card, Below Poverty Line Cards, and access to pension schemes to name a few. This has been made possible with the help of a rights based approach instead of a welfare approach as it fosters cross-linkages with different government departments such as education, medical, social welfare, and encourages their participation for overall delivery of services and access to rights.



Dhananjay Tingal, Executive Director of BBA

Children as young as 11 present at the Consultation have filed Right to Information RTI to seek transparency in the provision of teaching staff for the schools in their respective villages and have succeeded in ensuring a decent student-teacher ratio in schools. The Executive Director of BBA, Dhananjay Tingal added an interesting perspective by stating, *"the civic engagement is an important aspect of the enforcement of rights and is a key marker of democratic empowerment of children and their communities where local norms and hierarchies often guide practices. This scenario however is being challenged and changed by the BMG programme, which keeps the children and community at the center of development paradigm to bridge the gap between them and the civic bodies."*

3. Collective Participation for Sustainable Community Development



“Collective participation can be seen as one of the best practices for sustainable development of children and communities wherein government agencies, NGOs and communities can work together. I have met women' groups in one of the villages of Maharashtra who used social media to raise an alarm and successfully withdrew child labourers from employment and enrolled them in schools. “

Dr. Helen R. Sekar, a Senior Fellow from the V.V. Giri Labour Institute, India

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Civil society interventions have predominantly dealt with welfare-based approach in empowering the communities and its children. The BMG intervention on the other hand focuses on promoting a culture of respect for children's rights at the same time embedding their rights with that of the community and other aspects such as environment sustainability. The experience of Baleshar, member of *Yuva Mandal* (Youth group) from *Chandwara* village, Jharkhand makes for a relevant example that said,

Achievements like these are made possible with the help of democratic participation and collaborative approach for collective problem solving by all community members, from children to adults involved in the community activities. To make the intervention sustainable, participation of children and women from categories of stakeholders that are either underrepresented or marginalised in the villages is taken into consideration. Marginalised tribal communities in the Karnataka state of India have done exceptionally well under the BMG intervention. The communities are consistently involved in overcoming the cultural and language barriers to development. In the Chamarajnagar district of Karnataka, 53 children including the ones from the tribal communities have been enrolled and are attending school regularly. Besides, the intervention by children, youth and community led to ban on illegal sale of alcohol and decrease in alcohol addiction, especially in the tribal villages.



Baleshar, member of Yuva Mandal (Youth group), Jharkhand

“The first initiative of BMG project was to form youth groups, Mahila Mandal, Bal panchayat and Advisory Committee. With the help of their alliance with BBA and due to the efforts made by the BBA activist, parents started caring for their children's education and started sending them to school.”

Collective action and participation has also made a remarkable difference in the condition of women in these communities where gender discrimination and patriarchal mind-set guides most of the decisions. As members of Yuva Mandal (Youth groups) and Mahila Mandal (Women's groups), many women in the community have not only taken initiatives to look into the issues that concern them but also that of the children and the community, in particular natural resource management and environment. The self-sufficiency has started to reflect in the change in how women in BMG villages are treated and their decisions are holding importance.

Kalawati Devi – Women's group, Gopal Puri, Rajasthan

“Earlier the women in my village used to have a very different position, now things have changed. We take collective action on various issues related to the environment, child labour and child marriage.”



Kalawati Devi – Women's group, Gopal Puri, Rajasthan

4. BMG model as a best practice for prevention of practices exploiting children and ensuring education



Dr. Huma Masood, National Program Officer Gender & Education, UNESCO

“We can learn a lot from the BMG model for solutions related to policy for education of children such as incorporating the rights and vulnerabilities of children, infrastructural access for all, and improvement in education quality as well as flexible timings and learning environment.”

***Dr. Huma Masood, National Program Officer
Gender & Education, UNESCO***

In the last 17 years, the BMG intervention has reached children and their communities in more than 500 villages. An intervention that began to primarily address the issues of children such as child labour, child marriage and education for all has come a long way with the children from BMGs along with the community making strategies on their own to address their issues.

According to the Executive Director of BBA, Dhananjay Tingal, “every village has a different reality and challenge. We are the facilitators for capacity building, monitoring and enforcement of interventions in different villages and have strengthened the capacity of thousands of children in BMGs who themselves have prevented child marriage, child labour, trafficking and sometimes even got traffickers arrested”. The BMG model therefore is not only about working for the children, but also working with them based on a child centric approach, treating them as equal stakeholders in decisions that concern them and their communities.



Dr. Anup K Rajput, Head of the Department, Elementary Education ,NCERT

In one of the sessions of the Consultation titled “Implementation of Right to Education Act in Communities for addressing Child Labour”, the role of child friendly models like BMG in improving education access under Right to Education Act (RTE) was asserted. The model has considerable good practices and learning that can be used to give education to the most vulnerable child.

The representative of NCERT, Dr. Anup K Rajput, and Head of the Department, Elementary Education NCERT asserted that goal targets and timeframes of RTE should be taken seriously in order to aid the capacity of such child friendly models to ensure quality and age appropriate learning for all. He also appreciated the intervention of BMG model in identifying working and out of school children and stated that “mere tracking of the

children who are out of school and enrolling them is not enough, there is a crucial need for age appropriate placement with a focus on quality of education and alternatives such as home based education”.

Vikram - Child Member of Bal Panchayat Group, Saleta village

“When there was no BMG in the village, many child marriages used to take place and child labour was rampant. But after the formation of BMG project it has completely ended with the efforts of Bal panchayat group as they started many rallies to ban child marriage and child labour which led to a positive result.”



Vikram - Child Member of Bal Panchayat Group, Saleta village



Kavita, Member of Mahila Mandal, Jharkhand

Kavita, Member of Mahila Mandal, Jharkhand

“When I came for the first time to this village in Jharkhand, the level of education was really low. With the help of BBA's intervention, I was able to enrol my own daughter in a school and now over a period of time, each and every child is enrolled in school. My daughter has completed her 10th and 12th standard and has now taken up an English course and thus advancing in life.”

5. Addressing the local environmental challenges



Manjushree Banerjee from Scholar, TERI,

According to Manjushree Banerjee from TERI, *“Every child has the right to live in a clean and healthy environment but that right is often violated due to various socio-economic reasons, clean water, energy crisis. Holistic awareness about the environment and natural resources is crucial for every child to grow healthy.”* The Child Friendly Village model's essence lies in linking most of the life's aspects to the rights of children and the way other actions in the community impact them. One such relationship that has been established is that with the environment. In a BMG model there is an understanding that there is a link between the welfare of children, communities and protection of environment and management of natural resources.

The experience sharing at the National Consultation made it very clear that listening to the voices of children is not only important for them to be equal stakeholders but is also beneficial. Children know a lot about the environment as they spend a lot of time outdoors and can give innovative insights in actions related to rural sustainable development. Participatory and integrated collective action of children and their communities for natural resource management has benefitted the BMG villages at great length from planting saplings to reserving water, from banning of plastic bags to crackers, from water free festivals such as Holi to generation of environment friendly livelihood, the approach has enabled children to acquire other forms of learning and provided the right kind of socialization where they can grow with each other.



Mr Ravi Prakash Verma, Member of Parliament

According to Member of Parliament, India, Mr Ravi Prakash Verma, *“Children in BMGs work on the contemporary social issues such as environment sustainability and natural resource management which is not even taught in convent schools. Through activism they gain expertise on issues such as environment friendly livelihood, prevention of deforestation and rain water harvesting.”*

Some key activities and achievements on addressing local environment challenges shared in the Consultations by the stakeholders are:

1. Imparting critical knowledge and skills to start address pressing environment concerns
2. Assessment of environmental issues
3. Training to impart knowledge and skills to save environment to Yuva Mandal members of BMGs
4. Alternative Livelihood Generation in states like Karnataka
5. Smoke free stoves awareness in villages for healthier homes and better health of women



Laxman- Youth representative of BMG (Member of Youth group)

“My village had many trees but then people started cutting them for several reasons. But after the formation of BMG in our village, everyone especially we as the youth group started discussions on such issues, which led to positive results, and people started stopping unnecessarily cutting of trees and also started plantation of trees. We also initiated the awareness programme for ban on using plastic bags and made people understand the negative effects of polythene in which we succeeded. We started digging pits so we could bury all plastic bags in it and asked the villagers to do the same”

Laxman- Youth representative of BMG (Member of Youth group)

“With the help of models like BMG, children actually influence the decisions at the community level, in particular environment related problems such as lack of water resources, deforestation (when economy depends on it) and declining agricultural productivity.”

Manjushree Banerjee, Fellow Centre for Impact Evaluation and Energy Access, TERI

6. Role of activists

During the Consultation, the activists of the BMG villages present were introduced as the Chief churners, spear headers and forerunners of the programme. A visit to any of the BMG village would reveal the bond of trust and reliability that exists between the children, village community and the activists. An activist is responsible for creating embeddedness within the community and maintains daily interactions with the community members as the vehicle of awareness and capacity building. The key emphasis for an activist lies in

1. Creating grassroots civil society structures such as children's assembly, women's groups and youth groups
2. Building their capacities for rights implementation through rights awareness
3. Mentoring the communities for the civic engagement and new interventions in the village
4. Engaging with communities for collective action to withdraw children from work and enrol them in schools
5. Making parents aware of the rights of their children

Arif, Community Social Worker, Koderma, Jharkhand

“We make sure that every child goes to school and there is no child marriage. We try to be friends with children so they can open up about their problems.”



Challenges And Achievements In BMG States

RAJASTHAN

CHALLENGES	ACHIEVEMENTS
Scarcity of water Caste based and gender based discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water conservation – 14620 people participated in awareness rally on conservation of water in March 2016.• 32 hand pumps, repaired• 5 new hand pumps installed.• 4 tanks for drinking water constructed• Awareness drive against caste based discrimination, untouchability and other social evils

KARNATAKA

CHALLENGES	ACHIEVEMENTS
Conflict with state Livelihood generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased civic engagement – dialogue between community and government officials• Alternative Livelihood Generation - Sandalwood plantation• Women group Training on lantana hand-craftwork and micro-savings• Bank Linkages to Groups for Financial Assistance.• Formation of Chandhanavana development Groups in all 7 villages for Sandal wood plantation in Bandipura Tiger Reserve

JHARKHAND

CHALLENGES	ACHIEVEMENTS
Communities – women & children Marginalised and vulnerable Child labour in Mica mining	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 181 minors withdrawn from child labour• 178 dropouts/irregular and 200 dropout children identified and enrolled in schools• 1,107 boys and 1,069 girls became voices of children• No child in mica mining

Recommendations:

ILO

1. Community based monitoring for community participation and inculcating a sense of ownership in the communities in finding solutions for the challenges, finding the problems and at the same time monitor progress of the action
2. Ethical monitoring of children and youth's work in the informal workplaces

NCERT Representative

1. Age appropriate placement and learning in schools
2. Addressing Gaps in schooling of children who are victims of child labour, trafficking, particularly girls



A snapshot of sessions from the Consultation



SESSION 1 : Child and Community Participation for addressing Child Labour



SESSION 2: Implementation of Right to Education Act in Communities for addressing Child Labour



SESSION 3 : Local action towards environment protection for building sustainable child friendly communities



SESSION 4 : Nobel Peace Laureate interacting with children of BMGs during the opening ceremony

Agenda

NATIONAL CONSULTATION

Experience Sharing on Bal Mitra Gram* (BMGs)

Venue: Tamarind Hall, India Habitat Centre

Date: Friday, May 26, 2017

Time	Session	Details	Resource Person
9.30-9.45	Registration		
9.45-10.00	Welcome and Inauguration	Welcome participants and sharing aims and objectives of the Consultation	<i>BBA and Global March Against Child Labour</i>
10.00-10.30	Keynote Address		<i>Tbc</i>
10.30-11.00	Experience sharing on <i>BalMitra Grams</i> (BMGs)	Introduction to the model of BMGs for addressing child labour in communities, followed by presentation on highlights and achievements of current programme	<i>BBA and Global March Against Child Labour</i>
11.00-11.30		Experience sharing by children, youth, community members from 3 states	<i>BBA staff</i>
11.30-11.45	Break		
11.45-12.45	Child and Community Participation for addressing Child Labour Moderator – Ms Jyoti Mathur, Director- Research, Child Protection, KSCF	Panel Discussion covering children and community engagement in child friendly models like BMGs to prevent child labour, sharing challenges, solutions, and other good practices that can be adopted/used	<i>Representative from NGO, INGO, UNICEF, />K corporate, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Panchayati Raj Institutions, Child Representative</i>
12.45- 13.00	Q & A Session	Space for ideas, comments and questions	
13.00-14.00	Lunch		
14.00-15.15	Implementation of Right to Education Act in Communities for addressing Child Labour Moderator – Ms Subhadra Menon – Director (Health) Research, KSCF	Panel Discussion sharing how child friendly models like BMG model supports in improving education access under RTE Act, sharing challenges, solutions, and other good practices that can be adopted/used	<i>Representative from BMGs, NUEPA, NCPCR, UNESCO, DCPCR, MOHRD, NGO/CSO</i>
15.15-15.30	Q & A Session	Space for ideas, comments and questions	
15.30-15.45	Break		
15.45-16.15	Local action towards environment protection for building sustainable child friendly communities	Discussion sharing efforts made under BMGs model on local action to address environment issues, sharing challenges, solutions, and other good practices/models that can be adopted/used	<i>Representative from MoRD, MoEnvironment, TERI, Youth Stakeholders from BMGs, District Forest Officer</i>
16.15-17.00	Way forward and Vote of Thanks		
17.00	End of Day		

*Child Friendly Village



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