

Knowledge Connect: E-Digest

Key Issue

The elimination of child marriage is imperative for India to achieve its MDGs as child marriage results in school dropout, early conception and high risks of maternal mortality, low birth-weight babies and often initiates the vicious cycle of under-nutrition and anaemia. West Bengal reported the fifth highest prevalence of child marriage amongst all states with 54.7% currently married women (aged 20–24) being married before 18 and 57.9% for rural young women (DLHS-3; 2007-08).

Action

Kanyashree Prakalpa (KP), a universal social protection scheme, is an important step taken by the Government of West Bengal (GoWB) to prevent child marriage and promote girls' education. In order to reverse the trend of child marriage, KP was created in 2013 as a conditional cash transfer (CCT) scheme for girls to provide them with two conditional financial benefits: 1) an annual scholarship of INR 500 for 13–18 year old girls enrolled in Grades VIII-XII or equivalent and are unmarried at that time and 2) a one-time grant of INR 25,000 to girls who are 18 based on certain conditionalities.

Comprehensive technical support for the formulation of the scheme guidelines, implementation mechanism, management information system (MIS), grievance redressal and communication strategy has been provided by UNICEF – West Bengal. The scheme is implemented by the Department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare in convergence with 13 other departments and the National Informatics Centre (NIC).

Results

Field level data validation reveals that KP has had a positive impact on boosting girl children's aspirations and reinforcing their parents' desire to have them educated. Within the first year of implementation, the scheme has covered 1,943,403 beneficiaries; of these, the coverage of SCs (23.2 percent), STs (5.7 percent) and minorities (24.3 percent) for the annual scholarship is approximately proportional to their population, according to the scheme's MIS. KP Clubs have been formed across the state and discussions around and disapproval of early marriages are reported to have increased. KP's robust governance structure and convergence with other departments and NIC are key to its implementation.

Lessons Learned

- A complete Theory of Change should be finalized during the planning phase to guide the implementation of the intervention.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems needs to be planned on onset of the intervention rolls out. For example, the scheme MIS should be formulated in alignment with the scheme structure and implementation mechanism so that reporting can be streamlined.
- Trainings and orientations need to be institutionalised on a regular basis for relevant functionaries at state, district and sub-district levels.
- GoWB has instituted quarterly district monitoring exercises through field monitoring and data validation and used these findings to improve scheme implementation and ensure equitable access to scheme in remote areas, urban slums and areas with other marginalized groups.
- Girls clubs have been formed in various districts where life skills and future employment activities are discussed, which is particularly useful for girls who receive the one-time-grant of INR 25,000 grant as they can better understand how to use the money to further their education or training.
- Effective leadership at different levels has ensured improved accountability at various levels. The State Steering and Monitoring Committee for KP is chaired by the Finance Minister who reviews the intervention on a monthly basis. District Magistrates are directly responsible for overseeing scheme implementation at district level apart from its day-to-day management by the District Social Welfare Officers.

Next Steps

To further strengthen the intended impact of the scheme, GoWB, with technical support from UNICEF, is working on the effective orientation of teachers, parents and communities and working with related departments to provide effective livelihood and skill-building options for 18-year-old recipients of the INR 25,000 one-time grant. A comprehensive assessment of the scheme is also planned for 2015 with UNICEF's support. UNICEF continued to advocate for the preparation of a systematic training plan for KP at the beginning of each year in collaboration with relevant departments.