Enabling Action Against Early Marriage
Institution Mapping in six villages of Bihar and Jharkhand

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Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

AHTU	Anti Human Trafficking Unit
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited social health activist
BDO	Block District Officer
BLCPC	Block Level Child Protection Committee
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
CWO	Child Welfare Officer
DLCPC	District Level Child Protection Committee
JJB	Juvenile Justice Board
PDS	Public Distribution System
POCSO	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act
SHG	Self Help Group
SLCPC	State Level Child Protection Committee
SMC	School Management Committee
VLCPC	Village Level Child Protection Committee

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Executive Summary

Early marriage is an issue of concern across the world, especially in South Asia as nearly half the number of girls who married early, as reported by a Unicef report in 2007. In terms of absolute numbers, because of the size of its population, India has the most child marriages and in 47% of all marriages the bride is a child. In India, the latest Census report on the decadal headcount in 2011 reveals that child marriage is rampant, with almost one in every three married woman having been wed while she was still under the age of 18 years.

As part of the early marriage intervention in Gaya, Hazaribagh and Ranchi, Breakthrough, a human righst organisation, realised that many young girls and women are at a critical stage where they are making an informed decision on services and life situations, but the existing formal and informal institutions are not geared to accepting their new empowered status. There is an understanding that realisation of rights and entitlements for young girls and women require interventions from both sides - working with girls as well as sensitising duty-bearer institutions and organisations.

In this context, the study aims to inform Breakthrough's programme strategy by a) Identifying the nature of issues for which young women, girls and boys seek assistance and types of challenges and risks they currently face in doing so and; b) Mapping formal and informal structures where young women and girls can seek help and advice on way forward related to a range of issues.

Methodology

This report is the result of an explorative study carried out in a few locations as part of early marriage intervention in Gaya district of Bihar and in Hazaribagh and Ranchi districts of Jharkhand. The team visited two villages in each of the three districts. The study used participatory methods to engage with relevant stakeholders at the village level – a) Men and boys (73 respondents) b) Women and girls (147 respondents) c) Government service providers such as Anganwadi worker and ASHA (five respondents) d) Governance representatives such as Sarpanch/Mukhiya (three respondents) and representatives of seven NGOs working in the three districts on the issue of early marriage and /or women's empowerment; and/or rights of the girl child.

The study used the LIFE (local informal and formal enablers) tool to identify key narratives (progressive or regressive) around the lives of adolescent girls and women and analysed which among these were the dominant narratives. It also identified formal and informal institutions as supporters or obstructers in the contexts of these narratives.

Findings

Girls willing to open up about issues, but there is a lack of space: The major issues that came up across the locations were the lack of toilets, early marriage, dowry, sexual harassment, drop-outs and menstruation and related taboos, among others. Even an infrastructural shortage such as lack of toilets was linked to threats of violence and shame. There was a lack of formal or informal spaces or institutions where these issues could be discussed. The lack of toilets provided women and girls an unintended 'safe space' to discuss their problems or even their desires and aspirations. This shows the lack of collective public spaces for women and girls.

Institutions and their views determine for girls perceive issues and respond to them: The study found that some issues are not broached or seen as problematic because they have become norms – such as dowry, or have the sanction of some powerful institutions such as the family, or are seen as taboo by society. Similarly, how girls respond to these issues is shaped by how the responses are treated by the institutions – with acceptance, violence or coercion. Soft issues are those that girls are free to talk about such as domestic violence. Hard issues are those where it is very difficult for girls to reach out to any institutions.

Limited awareness and access: The study finds that the girls' awareness of formal institutions that they could approach for support is limited to the village. The girls mainly have their interaction only with ANM, their teachers and Anganwadi sevikas who are there within the village only. While on the

other side, boys' awareness of formal institutions include a few at the block or district level, but these are officials/offices with specific responsibilities related to providing identity documents, proofs of age/caste/residence etc.

The study discusses about the significant institutions out of reach of girls and women because of lack of awareness such as most formal institutions such as women's helpline, child welfare committee, mahila thana, and child protection officers. Also there are certain institutions about which the awareness is there but the institutions are not accessible, such as the police. The Gram sabha, PRI members such as mukhiya, sarpanch and upsarpanch are all accessible but not effective. Only some of the informal institutions like parents and friends are accessible and effective. In addition, access to the formal institutions is mediated by informal institutions, thereby rendering the presence of formal institutions ineffective.

'Burden of honour' influences relationship with institutions: Formal institutions such as health and education service providers, who are not the protectors of the honour of girls and women are seen as supporters. On the other hand, institutions invested with the responsibility of shouldering the 'burden of honour' are seen by girls as obstructers as well as supporters – such as relatives and parents. This burden is reinforced by narratives of 'shame' that aims to control the girl and restrict her mobility and choices. In addition, this burden also triggers hypocrisies within institutions. A seemingly 'progressive' Mukhiya may take regressive decisions when it comes to his/her own daughter.

Thus, it is not enough to clear the path of accessing institutions for girls. What is equally important is to influence the narrative, so that structural changes are brought about that make the environment enabling for girls willing to take a stand for their rights.

Conclusion and recommendations
In the light of the findings, the role of institutions may be explained through the following steps in a band of progression:
- Providing support in times of need for girls and boys
- Creating safe spaces for discussions on issues relevant to girls
- Challenging the existing regressive narrative and creating a progressive narrative
- Enabling structural changes in child protection rather than systemic corrections

Keeping this in mind, the following recommendations may be made.
- To provide support in times of need for girls and boys, through awareness and training/sensitisation at the level of community and stakeholders may be undertaken, while at the same time identifying cases requiring immediate attention, acting on them and following up to ensure that action does not result in more harm for child
- To create safe spaces for discussions on issues relevant to girls by strengthening existing forums, facilitating interactions within and outside the family space, and exploring already existing non-projectised spaces to build support groups and enable conversations.
- To challenge existing regressive narrative and creating a progressive narrative through sensitization on issues of gender and sexuality, exploring peer-to-peer learning groups, networking with relevant institutions and documenting and publicising success stories of girls who stood up for their rights and institutions that supported them
- To enable structural changes in child protection rather than systemic corrections by using participatory tools such as the LIFE tool to positively influence narratives and facilitate multi-stakeholder consultations

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background

In prophecies that send alarm bells ringing, it is estimated that if current trends continue, the number of child brides getting married each year, across the globe, will have grown from 14.2 million in 2010 to 15.1 million in 2030[1]. According to a 2014 UNICEF report, the highest rate of child marriage is in Bangladesh (where two out of every three girls is married before age 18), followed by India, Nepal and Afghanistan[2].

Analysis of data collected from 2005-12 for Indian women in the 20-24 age-group found that 18 per cent of women in this category were married by the age of 15 and 47 per cent of women were married by the time they were 18 years old.[3] Analysis based on the latest Census figures reveals that child marriage is rampant, with almost one in every three married women having been wed while she was still under the age of 18 years[4]. The impact of early marriage[5] on livelihood choices and social and economic development has been well documented. The National Strategy Document on Prevention of Child Marriage of the Government of India's Ministry of Women and Child Development[6] notes that child marriage poses obstacles in the achievement of global development goals such as health and education. Early childbearing, with significantly higher maternal mortality and morbidity rates as well as higher infant mortality rates, end to education, limited support systems, greater risk of HIV infection and heightened risk of violence at home are some of the results of early marriage on the lives of girls[7].

Set against this context, Breakthrough, an organisation that uses media campaigns, community mobilisation and leadership development to change attitudes and usher in a culture of human rights, identified Bihar and Jharkhand as two states where the ability of women and young girls to access education, reproductive health and rights as well as economic well-being was severely constrained by early marriage and consequent childbearing. Within the two states, the three districts – Gaya, Hazaribagh and Ranchi – were chosen as intervention areas.

Data generated from the district-level household survey III conducted in India in 2007-08 shows that both Bihar and Jharkhand have a high percentage of girls marrying below the age of 18 at 45.9% and 35.9%. This can be seen in the figure below:

Figure 1.1: Comparison of percentage of girls marrying below age of 18 in top 5 states (Source: DLHS III)

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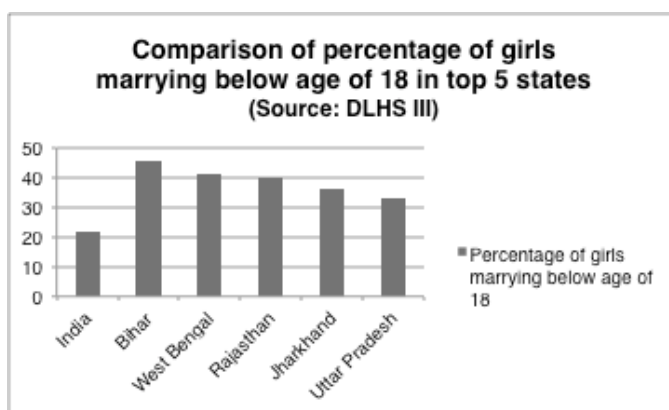
[1] Marrying Too Young - End Child Marriage, United Nations Population Fund, 2012

[2] Child Marriage - Too Young to Wed; Improving Children's Lives - 25 years of Child Rights in South Asia Transforming the

[2] Child Marriage - Too Young to Wed; Improving Children's Lives - 25 years of Child Rights in South Asia Transforming the Future, UNICEF South Asia, 2014

[3] Every child counts - Revealing disparities, advancing children's rights, United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2014

[4] 30% Women Married Under Age 18, Indian Express, May 31, 2016; http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/child-marriage-women-india-census-data-2011-2826398/

[5] According to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), the legal age of marriage is 18 for girls and 21 for boys. This study looks at early marriage beyond the legal definition to include situations where when girls and boys enter marriage before they are legally, physically, or emotionally adults.

[6] http://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/women-and-child-development/strategy-child-marriage

[7] Solutions to end Child Marriage; International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW); 2011

More recent reports suggest that Jharkhand takes the lead as far as child marriage figures go. Data shows that the incidence of early marriage is high. Bihar had the highest percentage of girls marrying below the age of 18 at 45.9%, while Jharkhand follows at 35.9%[8].

Figure 1.2 Percentage of Girls (under 18 years) who were married for four years or less at time of survey (Source: Census 2011): Comparison of relevant states and districts
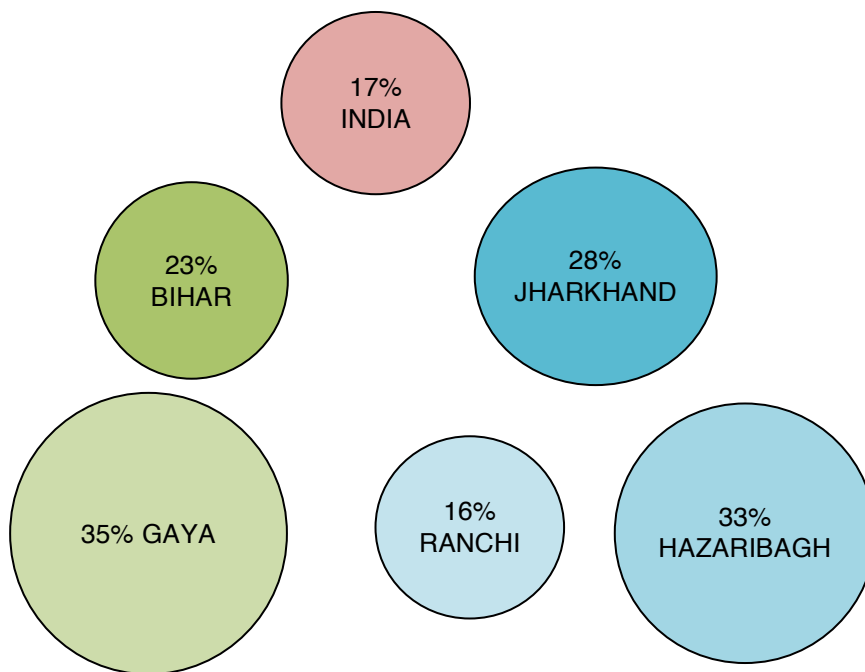
The above figure shows that while Bihar's statistics show relatively better performance in early marriage, than Jharkhand, it still is much higher than the national average. Similarly, Hazaribagh and Gaya districts have more than double the national average and Ranchi with respect to percentage. If we look beyond the number of women who had been married for four years or less at the time of the survey, then Census 2011 points out that an alarming 30.2 per cent of all married women had married before they had turned 18[9].
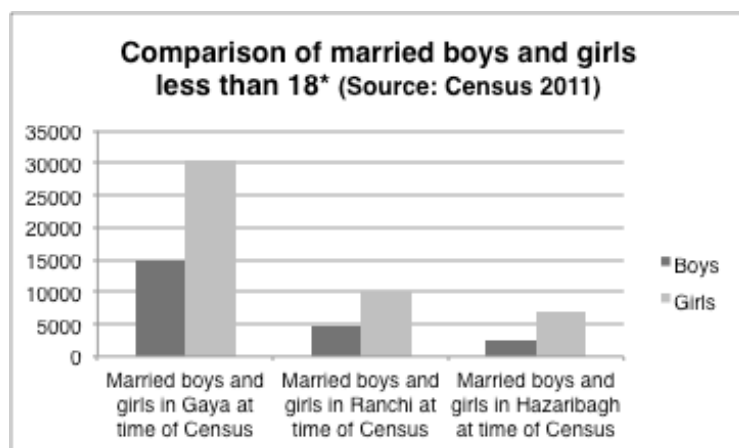
Figure 1.3 Number of married girls and boys below 18 years in Hazaribagh, Gaya and Ranchi (Source: Census 2011): Comparison across the districts

The adjacent graph offers a comparison between the numbers of boys and girls who were married before they turn 18 in the intervention districts.

Across the districts, the number of girls married by the age of 18 is either double or more than the number of boys married by the age of 18.

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[8] District-Level Household Survey III (2007-08) data shows that Bihar had the maximum percentage of girls marrying below the age of 18 at 45.9%, followed by West Bengal and Rajasthan at 41.3% and 39.9%. Jharkhand was fourth at 35.9%.
[9] Ibid

1.2 About the study

A formative research[10] carried out for Breakthrough[11] by Praxis[12] in 2011-12 explored reasons for early marriage and its impact in the planned intervention areas. The study tested some hypotheses related to early marriage in the field and found that the practice could not be causally linked to any single factor such as poverty, lack of awareness, lack of education, social conditioning, tradition or peer pressure. Instead, early marriage was linked to a combination of reasons. It existed despite awareness about legal implications, because of the social acceptance of the practice. What was common across scenarios was the patriarchal desire to control the sexuality of girls and women and the limit the space to discuss gender rights. The study concluded on the need to involve men and boys in bringing about change in the existing scenario around early marriage and to shift the focus of interventions to awareness about gender and sexual rights of women and girls.

Breakthrough, which has been working on the issue over the last few years, is aware that legal enforcement alone cannot achieve change. It was keen to frame a strategy formed in accordance with the Preventive/ Precaution and Rescue and Rehabilitation perspective that looks at collaboration between structural factors and norms to achieve impact.

In this context, Breakthrough sought technical assistance to conduct an institutional mapping in the intervention area focusing on formal and informal institutions that play the role of supporters or obstructers in upholding the rights of girls and women. Praxis, which specialises in participatory approaches that aim to enable excluded people to have an active and influential say in equitable and sustainable development, was commissioned to map the institutions in the three districts of Bihar and Jharkhand to inform the subsequent programme strategy for Breakthrough.

1.3 Study Objectives

As part of the early marriage intervention in Gaya, Hazaribagh and Ranchi, Breakthrough realised that many of the young girls and women are at a critical stage where they are making an informed decision on services and life situations, but the existing formal and informal institutions are not geared to accepting their new empowered status. There is an understanding that realisation of rights and entitlements for young girls and women require interventions from both sides: (a) working with girls to help them understand their rights and enable their claiming of the same; and (b) sensitising duty-bearer institutions and organisations to respect the rights of women.

The objectives[13] of the study are listed below:

- Identifying the nature of issues for which young women, girls and boys seek assistance and types of challenges and risks they currently face in doing so
- Mapping of formal and informal structures where young women and girls can seek help and advice on way forward related to a range of issues.

1.4 Research Process

To fulfil the above objectives, Praxis evolved a step-by-step plan that is presented in the diagram that follows:

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[10] Marriage can Wait, Our Rights Can't; Breakthrough; 2012; http://www.breakthrough.tv/o/wp-content/files_mf/1380298474Breakthrough_EarlyMarriage_FormativeResearch_web.pdf
[11] Breakthrough (https://www.inbreakthrough.tv) is a human rights organisation working to make violence and discrimination against women and girls unacceptable
[12] Praxis – Institute for Participatory Practices (www.praxisindia.org) is a not-for-profit working to democratize development processes and focusing on issues of equity and good governance
[13] Terms of reference for project shared by Breakthrough

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Figure1.4: Research process followed in the institution mapping study

Rapid assessment of Mapping available from BT	Meeting with partner NGOs and relevant stakeholders at the district level	Collate data generated from the three locations and analyse
Scanning of secondary literature for institutional mapping	Detail views of influencers and potential informal structures available	Share a draft report with Breakthrough
Tool design and analysis framework preparation	Assimilating views of young women, boys and girls at the villlage level	Finalise report

1.5   Research Methodology

It was an exploratory study that used participatory methods to engage with relevant stakeholders who influence the intervention objectives on early marriage. Significant stakeholders identified were:

a) Men and boys
b) Women and girls
c) Government service providers such as Anganwadi worker and ASHA
d) Governance representatives such as Sarpanch/Mukhiya
e) Representatives of NGOs working on the issue of early marriage; and /or women's empowerment; and / or rights of the girl child

Figure 1.5 Diagram showing number of stakeholders met during the process

Women and Girls	Men and Boys	Representatives of NGOs	Service providers	PRI members
147	73	7	5	3
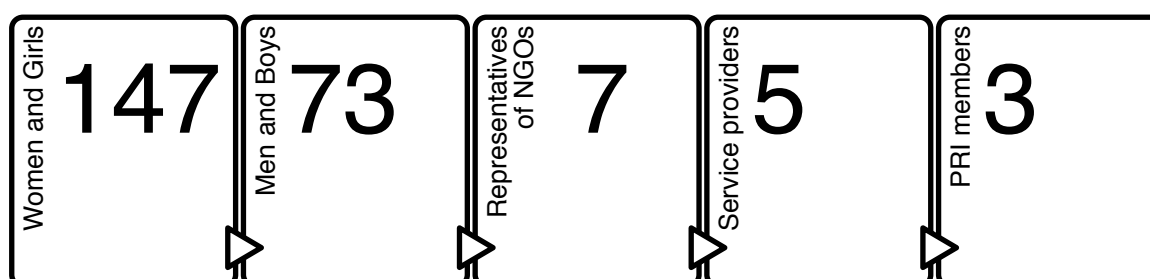
The purpose was to understand contextual factors that enable or dissuade girls and women from approaching different formal and informal institutions. Often, the factors are very subjective, requiring in-depth and systematic probing. Therefore, the methodology aimed to apply the principles of participatory tools: -

(a) The aim was to get analysis from the respondents, rather than information
(b) Respondents first provided descriptive information about the situation and they systematically arranged the information in such a way that collective analysis was possible

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(c) The process was made participatory in such a way that after some time, the probe questions were asked by respondents. In that way, the research framework did not become a limiting factor for accessing any information related to the theme

In addition to some of the more common participatory tools, such as card sorting and prioritisation of issues, and chapathi diagram/institution mapping[14], an innovative Local Informal and Formal Enablers (LIFE) tool was evolved to understand institutions in the context of early marriage.

LIFE Tool - The LIFE tool identified some of the key issues from the life of adolescent girls in rural Ranchi, Hazaribagh and Gaya and looked at them critically. These issues included school drop-outs, menstruation-related taboos, dowry, early marriage and sexual harassment. The tool analysed the narratives woven around these issues by the community and categorised them as progressive or regressive. Through discussion, the women and girls then identified institutions that acted as upholders or objectors of the narratives. The tool drew from the assumption that despite the presence of adequate legislations, government schemes and support systems for girls, the above issues persisted because of the absence of a dominant progressive narrative that could fuel the change.

1.6 Change Continuum Evolved for Analysis

To inform intervention strategy, the programme mapped the different stages at which the stakeholders are. The figure below provides the analysis that was needed to inform the interaction strategy.

Figure 1.5 Change continuum in young girls and women, formal and informal institutions and their relation to their lived realities

Stages of empowerment of women and girls and of sensitisation of formal and informal institutions to address issues and problems that prevent realisation of rights and entitlements of women and girls				
Young Girls and Women	Stage I. Accept/ are conditioned on patriarchy	Issues, Problems, rights, claims, entitlements, norms and mores	Stage I. Available but non-functional	Formal institutions
			Stage II. Functional but non-accessible to women and girls	
	Stage II. Assert their rights. Stand up. But not able to negotiate with formal and informal institutions		Stage III. Accessible to women and girls	
			Stage I. Closed to women; moral driven; manned by men or patriarchal women	Informal institutions
	Stage III. Are able to engage with institutions and convert assertions into entitlements		Stage II. Beginning to open up for women. Listening but support not regular	
			Stage III. Institutions have demonstrated progressive aspects. Accept women and girls as citizens with rights and entitlements	

The above framework indicates an empowerment continuum for both girls and women, as well as formal and informal institutions. An empowered society will see changes at the levels of girls, formal institutions and informal institutions. Informal institutions are often more significant than formal ones, because they are the bridge for children to access formal institutions.

The empowered society will bring about a change in the way issues are perceived and addressed, rights and entitlements are claimed and mores and norms challenged to make way for an equitable future.

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[14] Details in annexure

1.7   Locations: villages visited

The team visited two villages selected in each of the three districts of two states. The villages were selected keeping in mind that at least two of them would have a large population of Dalits, two would be predominantly Adivasi, one would have a substantial Muslim population and the other could have a mixed community group.

State	Jharkhand		Bihar
District	Hazaribagh	Ranchi	Gaya
Village	Harhad (Muslim), Sarauni Kalan (Mixed)	Gagi, Rampur (both Adivasi/tribal)	Angarra, Mahuawan (both Dalit)
NGOs met	Srijan Foundation, Mahila Mukti Sanstha	Chhotanagpur Sanskritik Sangh	Nav Nirman Kendra, Nav Nirman Mahila Jan Kalyan Samiti, Amar Jyoti Foundation and Gramin Vikas Sansthan

1.8   Challenges

It is challenging to make all social categories part of a thin sample study. The study began with the intent of meeting homogenous categories, but the challenges in the field made the team interact with mixed populations during the group discussions. The study ensured that all categories of population got represented among the respondents. Nevertheless, a focussed discussion separately with groups would have helped the team get nuanced information about that category.

Similarly, building trust with local groups is a challenge. In some cases, the groups were not committed to the intervention. However, that has not affected the study much, because the process was made participatory so that the respondents become familiar to the interventions in a gradual way and could contribute in the group process.

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2.   Challenging problems of women: A context in which institutions matter

To identify the institutions, the research team felt that the entry point lay in the different problems that respondents faced. Therefore, the team first tried to find the issues that were faced by the women and girls across villages. In the next step the team mapped the institutions to see what role they played in solving or perpetuating the issues, if there was any uptake, especially among women and girls for any of these institutions and if the institutions themselves were contributing any change in the narratives existing around some issues that were seen as significant among women and girls in Bihar and Jharkhand.

This section presents (a) different problems stated by the respondents; (b) nature of these issues and their link to institutions; and (c) forms of dominant narratives on those issues shaped by dominant institutions.

2.1   Girls and women ready to voice issues but lack forums

In order to map the institutions that are accessible to the community for the problems they face, the team interacted with girls and women, men and boys to map the range of issues girls experienced. Many of these were being faced for generations now. Table 2.1 lists out these issues.

Table 2.1 Collated list of issues faced by girls across the locations visited[15]

S No	Categories of issues	Specific issues
1	Barriers to access of opportunities	School dropout, especially after Class 10 Limited mobility of girls Inability to take up jobs because of lack of safety Economic condition or poverty leading to drop outs*
2	Social norms	Early marriage Tradition of dowry Absence of guidance on menstrual hygiene/problems because of taboo surrounding issue resulting in ill health and complications
3	Violence	Alcoholism among men leading to domestic violence Forced marriages Open defecation posing threat to safety Fear of sexual harassment Sexual harassment
4	Lack /poor quality of infrastructure	Absence of toilets* Poor quality of schooling* Poor living conditions (road, streets, water, drainage)*
Note: *Issues that are not specific to women and girls		

Of the issues listed above, the first three draw from patriarchal notions of control over women and impact the everyday lives of girls – such as access to education or health services. Infrastructure issues such as the lack of toilets or poor water supply also indirectly affect the girls and young women more. While the men also have to walk long distances to defecate, they are spared the taunts and harassment that women defecating in the open experience. The narrative of 'feeling shy' or 'ashamed' was voiced only in the context of women, though the lack of toilets affected everyone. Similarly, not having adequate water supply led to the additional burden of fetching water on young women and girls.

One of the only issues where girls were better off than boys was in the sphere of education – the common perception was that boys had to quit studying to earn for the family. However, the reasons for drop-out among girls was not limited to poverty but also extended to issues of restricted mobility and lack of value of education for girls.

Some of the prominent issues, which were listed among the top five issues in the locations visited, are listed in Table 2.2 below.

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[15] Field interactions in Harhad, Sarauni Kalan, Rampur, Gagi, Angra and Mahuawan

Table 2.2. Collation of top five issues listed in the six locations visited

S No	Themes	Harhad	Sarauni Kalan	Rampur	Gagi	Angra	Mahuawan
1	Lack of toilets	T	T	T	T	T	T
2	Early Marriage	T	T	T	T	Y	T
3	Dowry	T	T		T	T	Y
4	Sexual Harassment		T	T	Y	T	T
5	Drop outs and poor quality of education	T	Y	T	Y	T	Y
6	Menstruation and related taboos		T		T		T
7	Weakness in women	T	T				
8	Lack of water supply			T	T		
9	Poverty			T		T	
10	Unemployment		Y	T			
11	No drainage system	Y		T			
12	Domestic violence due to alcohol abuse		T				Y
13	Rumours against girls					T	
Note: In the table T stands for Top 5 issues mentioned by the community and Y stands for mentioned as issues. Red indicates the issue was listed by men and boys in that particular location							

It is interesting to note that early marriage, dowry, lack of toilets and sexual harassment find place among the Top 5 problems in most villages. The fact that women rate them as significant problems shows that there is a willingness to acknowledge these issues and points towards awareness and acceptance that even dowry, though it has social sanction, is seen as a problem. The lack of toilet is closely related to safety issues. In Rampur, women said "We are afraid of being attacked by snakes or men when we go to the fields to defecate."

Issues such as "rumours against girls" and "menstruation" – which are now finding place in collective discussion spaces – suggest that women are willing to voice their opinions, but probably do not find enabling institutions. In other words, if they had enabling institutions, these issues would have been addressed at the community level itself. That the men have raised sensitive issues such as harassment and early marriage as being significant problems for women shows that there is awareness among them about the problems faced by the women in their communities. It triggers hope that strengthening institutions will enable men and boys to take this concern to the next level of action.

The following tables provide an analysis of issues stated by these girls.

2.2 Perceptions and responses

Issues are perceived by the community in a way that is moulded through years of engagement. For example, some issues may have become so embedded in the psyche of the community, that they have become part of the norms and are not even perceived as problems any more. For example, Tilak (dowry) demands have become so common that even Muslims have started this practice. In the Muslim locality of Harhad, a respondent joked, "A boy preparing for medical and engineering makes a demand of Rs.1.5 lakhs and a scooter. Once they become doctors, they may even ask for aeroplanes!"

Similarly, girls may have reservations about some practices, such as marriage-related decisions, but because of strong pressure from social institutions, such as family and marriage itself, they get pushed into silent acceptance. To a large extent, decision-making in several significant areas of life are non-existent for girls and women. Some issues are not even seen in the public domain – these included menstruation-related taboos or friendship with the opposite sex, lack of safety or harassment. As a result, there is the need for much probing and continued engagement to create a safe space where these can be discussed. It is also interesting to note how patriarchy overcomes even progressive policies. According to an NGO, many of the women Sarpanches and Mukhiya wield nominal power, while their husbands become the real decision makers.

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Similarly, the way girls respond to these issues is intrinsically linked to how open different institutions are to these issues. For example, in some cases, such as education, girls may be comfortable raising their concerns if they feel their parents will not reject them outright. How institutions react to some of these protests by girls also shapes the impact on others. For example, if a couple elopes, the way the society responds to the particular instance – whether they are ousted from the village or accepted into the family's fold also sets a precedent for girls. More girls may be willing to negotiate these power relations if there are positive examples of the same. These issues are presented in the table below.

Table 2.3 Perceptions of issues and responses of girls

	Categories	Certain issues have become norms, not issues anymore	Issues uncomfortable, but strong pressure from institutions like family and marriage	Issues not seen as part of public domain
How the girls/	Examples	Dowry (It is seen as natural so much so that respondents joke about the practice – Girls in Angarra said "Giving dowry is mandatory, even if you have to steal to be able to pay it") Domestic violence (It is a common practice and is acceptable – Men in Sarauni Kalan said: "You should have spent last night in our village. Fights would have kept you awake. It is the story of every night"; A woman in Rampur said: "It happens between all husbands and wives. There's no harm in it")	Decisions regarding marriage (If girls want to postpone marriage, they approach their parents, but if they insist, the girls give in – Harhad)	Menstruation-related taboos ("We do not talk about it", said girls in Gagi) Lack of safety Friendship with the other sex Practice of male member taking over duties of woman mukhiya or sarpanch
How girls responded to these issues	Categories	Girls had raised voices, but were silenced	There is resistance, but got stifled	Girls not able to talk about these because of fear of institutions
	Examples	Girl wanted to pursue higher studies in a subject of her choice but had to give up her dream as she was not allowed to go to Hazaribagh and study the course (Harhad) Alcoholism and domestic violence (Harhad, Sarauni Kalan)	Fight against alcohol (Sarauni Kalan women led a campaign against alcoholism, but eventually it is back) A couple eloped in Gagi, but the Mukhiya advised that the marriage should be nullified under the influence of bride's father.	Sexual harassment ("We don't complain as we are then blamed and we are not allowed to go out", said girls in Angarra) Elopement (A man in Mahuawan said "For every successful case of elopement, there are many failed cases. In these, the girl charges boys with eve teasing) Forced marriages ("Nobody asks whether a girl wants to marry or not" said women in Mahuawan

2.3 Shrinking spaces for women

Across locations, the first problem to be listed was the absence of toilets. In Gagi, women said only four or five houses had individual toilets. The others depended upon open fields. In other locations like Harhad, the presence of a river nearby meant that women would go there to defecate. In most of the villages visited, there was limited supply of water, pushing the communities to carry water in *dabbas* (plastic containers) or bottles from their houses.

 "When we go to the fields taking a bottle, boys tease us," the girls in Gagi said. In Mahuawan, women said, "we feel shy to take bath at a public tap". To avoid unwelcome stares from strangers and passers-by, girls and women would bathe / defecate either early in the morning or after sundown. This posed the threat of snakebites or insect bites.

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Despite these dangers associated with the absence of toilets, communities have found ways to cope with it. Humour was one mechanism. For example, in Sarauni Kalan, the men said: "Absence of toilet helps us fulfil the need for morning walk so even those with toilets in their house defecate in the open!" For women, the absence of toilets ended up creating a **safe, women-only space** for sharing their thoughts with others. While open defecation is the centre of attack from several quarters, the time taken to go to an open field or river provided them with the time and the opportunity to discuss issues that were otherwise left un-discussed. As a result, they would discuss friendships with the opposite sex, harassment, domestic violence and other such topics.

It is interesting to see the open defecation as juxtaposed with the SHGs for women – while the latter is projectised, the former is more informal and offers women the security of non-documented conversations. In fact, it is the informality of the space itself that makes it sacrosanct. This situation points to the presence of shrinking public spaces for women to come together in as well as the lack of collective action that women can own. In a sense, even if open defecation is done away with, women would probably find different public spaces. There is the need to look for and explore alternate spaces that women can tap into to emerge ahead collectively.

2.4 Soft and hard issues – Negotiable or taboo?

The reason issues were broached was to understand who are the institutions that can dialogue on the topic and how they respond to the concerns of girls and women. Based on this, issues were divided into hard and soft issues. Hard issues were those around which conversations are not encouraged (such as menstruation or deciding whom to marry). Soft issues are not taboo and can be negotiated through dialogue (such as permission for further studies) or even legal action (domestic violence) – talking about them was relatively more acceptable in society.

The table below outlines the same.

Table 2.4: Hard and soft issues – as analysed by inputs from community and NGOs

	Issues	Barrier institutions	Supporter institutions
Soft issues - that girls have space to discuss			
1	Girls wanting to decide on the age of marriage		Parents ask girls in a few locations if they want to get married
2	Sexual harassment in the form of teasing on the streets	Parents may blame girl and restrict mobility	Parents can be approached to complain Can approach friends to share issue
3	Girl children from Class 8 onwards wanting to study further	Other people in village/ neighbours/ relatives who feel girl should not study a lot	Parents are worried about safety, elopement, pressure to get them married; but recognise it as important for girls Teachers are supportive Friends may be supportive
4	Allowing girls to go out of village for work	Parents are afraid of commute, elopement, distance, safety issues	Parents are beginning to be open to girls working Community in some locations feel girls must work
5	Domestic violence	In-laws Community may trivialise matter Police may demand bribe	Own parents PRI leaders like Mukhiya, Sarpanch Police may support
6	Family Disputes	Police may seek bribe Court may draw case over years and be expensive	Family elders Mukhiya Police Court
Hard issues that girls have no space to talk about			
1	Children being provided quality	Though ASHA, Anganwadi	Friends

	Issues	Barrier institutions	Supporter institutions
	facilities to address issues of menstrual hygiene	worker can guide on this, they are not proactive in locations	In some locations ASHA proactive
2	Sexual harassment in the form of abuse/blackmail/rape		Parents With support from parents, may approach Mukhiya, or police if need be
3	Girls wanting to decide on who they marry	Parent sees it as their right Community see it as parents' right	In rare cases of elopement, parents may accept Mukhiya Police for protection
4	Girls having a choice on payment of dowry at time of marriage	Parents pay dowry so it is seen as their domain Community upholds norm Police rarely intervene	
Note: Red indicates informal institution			

Stepping into formal spaces can be seen in cases of softer issues such as domestic violence and family disputes over property. The hard issues are all linked to taboos in society or honour of the family. In such cases, there is very little scope for the formal institutions to intervene. In such cases, the police or the Mukhiya is seen as an arbitrator when a girl has to go against the informal institutions that she is most closely linked to – such as family or marriage. In the locations visited, there were at least some cases of each everywhere. This only stresses the importance of strengthening the institutions to play a supportive role.

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3. Changing institutions: Key interventions

An 'institution' is defined as formal or informal but "established organisation"[16], which has an interface in terms of roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis people. Sociologically, it is known that 'Institutions' are the formal and informal rules and norms that organise social, political and economic relations. In other words, this study understands institutions in terms of any formal or informal but organised group of people, which sets formal and informal rules for the people.

3.1 Mapping institutions available for protecting the rights of children

3.1.1 Where formal institutions are on awareness radar
An extensive interaction with the NGO respondents and community members in the three districts gave an overview of the mechanisms in place for young girls who would like to take action against issues of early marriage. The table below consolidates the list of formal institutions that are in place in conjunction with various schemes and laws of the central and state governments.

Table 3.1 List of formal institutions with scope and mandate to prevent early marriage[17]

Institutions	Perceptions by NGOs and communities
Village	
Village-level child protection committee	B[18]
Adolescent groups / Kishori baithaks	B[19]
School Management Committee	A (Limited to functioning of schools)
NYK Youth Club	A (Limited to sports activities)
Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)	C (in some cases are proactive)
Auxiliary nurse and midwife	A (Limited to healthcare)
Anganwadi Sevika and Sahayika	C (in some cases are proactive)
Panchayat members	C (in some cases)
School teachers	C (in some cases)
Police	E
Block	
Block-level child protection committee	C
Block officer	A
Child Welfare Committee	D
Juvenile Justice Board	D
1098 Child Helpline	D (Awareness depends upon outreach by NGO)
Lady supervisor (of Anganwadis) at block level	A (Limited to supervision of ICDS)
Women-friendly / Child-friendly police stations	E
District	
District-level child protection committee	C
Child Marriage Protection Officer (CMPO)	D
District Magistrate	
District Collector	A
First class judicial magistrate / metropolitan magistrate	D
Mahila Court	C

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[16]http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/institution

[17] List of NGOs working on issues of children/women's rights are listed in Annexure 1

[18] Chhotananagpur Sanskritik Sangh in Ranchi supported setting up and activating VLCPCs in Bero and Itki blocks of Ranchi district

[19] Mahila Mukti Sanstha Hazaribagh woks on strengthening Kishori Samooh as part of its work

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Institutions	Perceptions by NGOs and communities
Yuva Maitri Club	D[20]
District Child Protection Officer	C
District Welfare Officer	C
Juvenile Justice Boards	C
CDPO - Child Development Project Officer	C (In some cases active)
AIDS Counsellor	E
Anti-Human Trafficking Unit	Non-functional in Gaya, functional to an extent in Jharkhand
Family Counselling centre	D
Women's helpline	D
Short-stay homes, observation homes	D
State and national bodies	
Ministry /department of women and child welfare, education, health, Commissions for Protection of Child Rights, schemes like POCSO, ICPS	
Note A – Active on issues other than early marriage B – Functional, depending upon NGO support in the issue C – Functional on issues of early marriage D – Functional, but limited awareness E – Not functional Cells in grey shade represent institutions that were mentioned by girls, boys and the NGOs Cells in grey shade represent institutions that were mentioned by boys and the NGOs	

Some of the inferences that can be drawn from the above table are as follows

- Girls' awareness of formal institutions that they could approach for support are limited to the village. It emerged during discussion that in several cases, the service providers or functionaries had either taken action regarding early marriage (Sarpanches) or volunteered guidance on issues of menstrual health or early pregnancies (ASHA and Anganwadi sevikas)
- Boys' awareness of formal institutions include a few at the block or district level, but these are officials/offices with specific responsibilities related to providing identity documents, proofs of age/caste/residence etc
- The only district-level institution girls are aware of is the Mahila Court – pointing to the fact that there have been cases in these locations where the women in their communities have had to seek legal recourse for some problem or the other. During discussion it emerged that this was often with relation to domestic violence or property dispute.
- Lack of outreach on the part of several mandated institutions such as Child Marriage Prohibition Officer or the District Child Protection Unit leading to limited awareness. During discussion with the NGO respondents at Chhotanagpur Sanskritik Sangh, it emerged that often, there was the lack of follow-up in cases where a child marriage had been stopped. Similar examples came up from the Gaya discussion, where NGOs pointed out that cases where some drastic action had been taken often ended up jeopardising the girl's life further because of the rumours and negative publicity generated around it.

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[20] Was mentioned only by Srijan Foundation

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3.2 How girls and boys perceive 'supportive' and obstructive' institutions
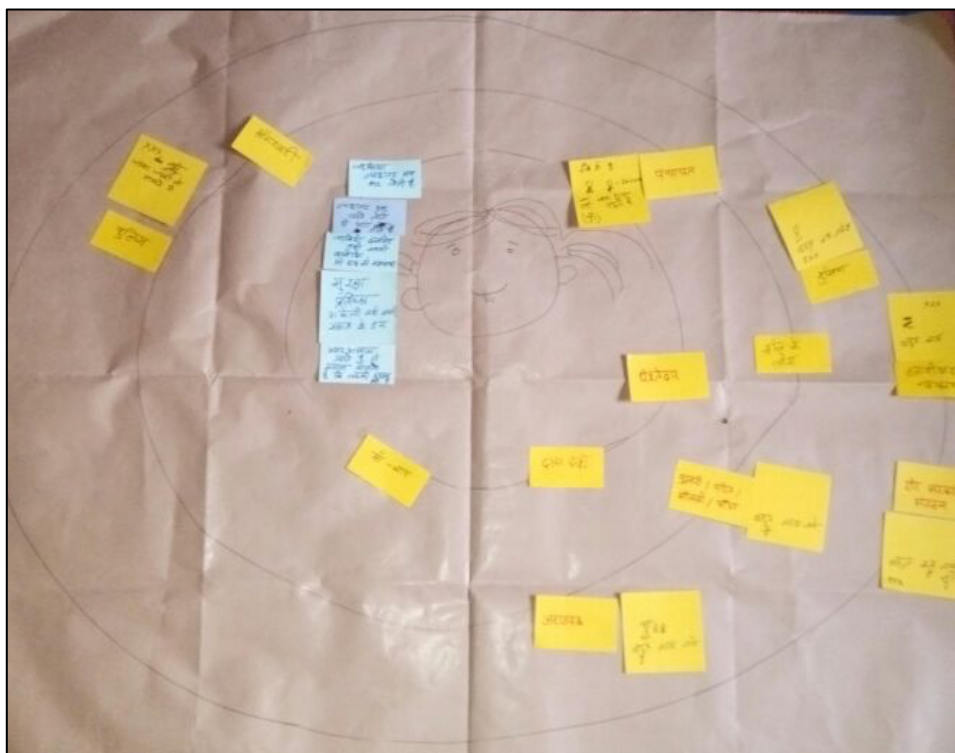
Table 3.1 Diverse range of institutions listed by community respondents: varying significance

	Number of Villages that reported the following institutions as					
	Important	Significant and functional	Perceived as supporting Institutions	Perceived as Obstructing Institutions	Reachable and Affordable	Women part of the Institution
State						
Sarpanch	H1,R1,R2,G1	R1,G1	R1,R2	R2	-	H1,H2,R1
Mukhiya/ Upmukhiya	All	H1,R1,R2	R1,G1	G1	R1	H1,H2,R1,
Ward Member	H1,G1	G1	-	-	-	H1,G1
Panchayat	H1,H2,R1,G1, G2	H1,R1	R1	H1,G1	R1	H1, H2,R1, G1,G2
Police	All	-	-	H2,R1,G1	H1	H1, H2,R1
Education/Health Space						
Teachers	All	H1,R1,G1	H2, R1, H1, G1, G2, R2	-	H2,G2	H1,H2,G1,G 2
SMC members	H2	-	H2	-	H2	-
ASHA	All	H1,H2,R2, G1	R1, R2,G1	-	H1,H2,G1, G2	All
ANM	All	H1,R1,R2, G1	R1,R2, H2	-	H2,R1,G2	H1,R2,G1,G 2
Anganwadi worker	All	H1,R1	H2,R1,R2,G 1	-	H2,R1,G2	R1,R2,H1,G 2
Hospital/ Doctors	H2,R1,G1,G2	H2,G1	0	-	R1	-
Cook at school	H1,H2,R1,G1, G2	R1,R2	0	-	H2,G1,G2	H1
Moral Guardians (community space)						
Religious Leaders	H1,G2	-	-	-	-	-

	Number of Villages that reported the following institutions as					
	Important	Significant and functional	Perceived as supporting Institutions	Perceived as Obstructing Institutions	Reachable and Affordable	Women part of the Institution
Community Elders	H1,H2,R1,G1, G2	R2,G1	H2,R1,G2	H1,R1	R1	H1,H2,R1, G1
Aghua matchmaker	H2,G1	-	-	H2	-	G1
NGO	H2	-	H2	-	-	-
Meena Manch	H1,H2,G1,G2	H1	H2,G1	-	G1,G2	All
Family Spaces						
Parents	All	All	H1,H2,R2,G 1,	H1,H2,R1, R2,G1	H2,R1,G1,G2 ,	All
Mother	H1,R1,G1,G2	All	R1, G1	H1,G1	All	All
Siblings	H1,H2,G1,G2	H1,H2,G1	H2,G1	-	H2,G2	H1,H2,G2
Husband	All	H1,H2,R1, R2	H2,G1	G1	H2,G1,G2	-
Relatives	H1,H2,R2,G1, G2	H1	H2,R2	H1,H2,R2,G 1,G2	-	H1,H2,G1
Informal/Unorganised						
Friends/ Peer groups	All	H1,H2,R1,R2, G1	H2,R1,R2,G 1, ,G2	-	H2,R1	H1,H2,R1, R2, G1
TV/Radio	R1	-	-	R1	-	-
Note H1 – Harhad, H2 – Sarauni Kalan R1 – Gagi, R2 – Rampur G1 – Angarra, G2 – Mahuawan Shaded rows – Institutions seen as supporters but not as obstructers						

Some of the inferences that can be made are as follows:
- Institutions that are clearly seen as supporters and not as obstructers are largely the health and education service providers at the community level. These institutions, to a great extent, have been able to contribute to a positive narrative around the two issues they specifically deal with – healthcare and education.
- In addition, the peer groups of siblings and friends also fall in the same category. While they are seen as supporters, in most cases, the support is limited to emotional support or counselling.
- Institutions largely seen as both supporters and obstructers are largely the family – parents or relatives
  - Such institutions carry the burden of protecting the girl child on their shoulders. While some are direct 'protectors; such as mothers and fathers, the others are indirectly invested with the function of perpetuating norms that protect the girl – such as relatives.
  - As they are the most intimate circle of confidence of girls and women, these informal institutions also play a role as supporters. While in some issues where negotiation is possible (Table 2.4), they are supporters, whereas in those where negotiations can lead to a change in status quo as far as the girl's position in the patriarchal order is concerned, they are obstructers.
  - Such institutions hold a very influential position in the lives of the young girls and women. Such institutions wield influence not as much through physical control, but sociological control – by creating and advocating narratives that keeps girls under control. For example, as seen in Table
- Institutions such as PRI and the police, which are mandated to be active agents of enforcing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, are actually perceived as obstructers by girls. In addition, the community in only (one?) location saw them as affordable and approachable.

As seen in Chapter 2, there are many issues that have started being discussed more openly. Active discussions around the same could facilitated the changes in narratives around the rights and choices available to girls. The table offers an insight into existing institutions that could be made sensitive to

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their roles and responsibilities towards young girls. As they are more approachable, ASHAs, AWWs and teachers could be further sensitised to open up spaces for discussions with girls.

Similarly, governance institutions can also be strengthened to proactively play a supportive role for girls. As Mukhiyas have a mandate to preventing early marriages in their communities, it may be useful to sensitise them to their additional responsibilities as a community leader. With more and more women getting elected to the Panchayats, it would be useful to tap into their successes to influence the narratives around girls.

3.3 Narratives shaped by institutions

Often, the issues do not get problematised because of the way the institutions shape the narratives around them. A lot of influencers have worked in these locations and there have been transformation at individual levels, but for those to be mainstreamed, there is the need to change the rules and challenge the norms.

The study team tried to understand different narratives on a few key issues related to girls and women and explored the progressive and conservative narrative around them from the perception of girls. Often, the dominant narrative emerged as the one which was held and publicised by the institutions.

Table 3.3 Narratives around issues and how institutions shape them

| Conservative	Progressive	Dominant narrative
Dowry		
• It is a matter of pride to be able to give dowry • We give it so that our daughter is not troubled by her in-laws • It is a tradition. How can we suddenly stop it?	• We won't ask dowry for our sons • In many love marriages, there is no dowry	Panchayat acts in a conservative manner by helping donate money to pay dowry for poor families. Patriarchy sees the daughter a gift that needs to protected by the groom. Hence, dowry is the price of protection Relatives and members of community put a high premium on dowry
Education		
• No matter how much she studies, she has to be in the kitchen • What if she does wrong things like elope or befriends boys?	• Girls should be allowed to study as much as they want • For more educated girls, dowry is less	Pro-education for girls campaigns by NGOs help change mind set Parents are supportive subject to conditions such as distance of school/college SMC members' involvement contributes to change narrative Teachers proactively approach parents to counsel them
Early Marriage		
• What if something goes wrong? Eloping, getting caught in a compromising position, sexual harassment • If marriage is delayed she will not get married at all • Father's duty to get daughter married	• Daughters should be financially independent before getting married • Daughter should find a job that will support the family before she gets married	Community social conditioning overrules any individual parent wanting to delay daughter's marriage Relatives question why a girl of age is not married Many social norms around getting daughters married early
Menstruation-related taboos		
• Don't touch pickle, plants, worship or take bath • Don't pluck fruits or water plants (I watered my plants once and they died)	• Why have taboos when it is God's gift? • We work in others' fields, but not in our own	Families insist on woman doing work at home, so even relaxing taboos is actually furthering patriarchal norms Some girls question practice
Sexual Harassment		

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Conservative	Progressive	Dominant narrative
• Girls are supposed to stay at home. If they go out, harassment can happen • Whether we have a dabba in our hands or a book, they pass comments • Girls attract harassment • If incident becomes public knowledge, will be difficult to marry the girl off	• Sometimes, I get so angry, I want to beat them up with slippers • If we keep quiet, it will only increase	While girls are more vocal or resist harassment, community or parents reinforce regressive narratives of victim blaming and shaming *However, some Panchayat members have ruled in favour of harassed girls*
Note Shaded cells indicate dominant view is one that questions status quo, even if it is conditional		

Narratives around issues are shaped by rules laid down over centuries and modified over time. Narratives do not change on their own. There is the need for certain institutions to challenge or sustain the narratives.

For example, narratives around education are changing with more girls wanting to study and institutions such as teachers and SMCs taking an active interest in education. Public campaigns on the importance of educating girls also impact mind-sets, especially in connection with softer issues where parents are willing to compromise. This goes hand in hand with more parents sending girls to school.

Similarly, despite the fear of being blamed, girls are at least vocally expressing the reality of harassment in their lives. There is, however, the absence of spaces where girls can make these voices heard. In other contexts, the kishori groups have shown the way forward in changing narratives, simply by bringing some taboo themes to the discussion table. For example, Mahila Mukti Sanstha listed at least two case stories where the girls were able to resist marriage after they brought it up before the Kishori Samoohs.

The diagram below shows how girls of a Kishori Samooh in Sijuah village of Hazaribagh district, strengthened by the NGO's intervention, took action in an early marriage case.
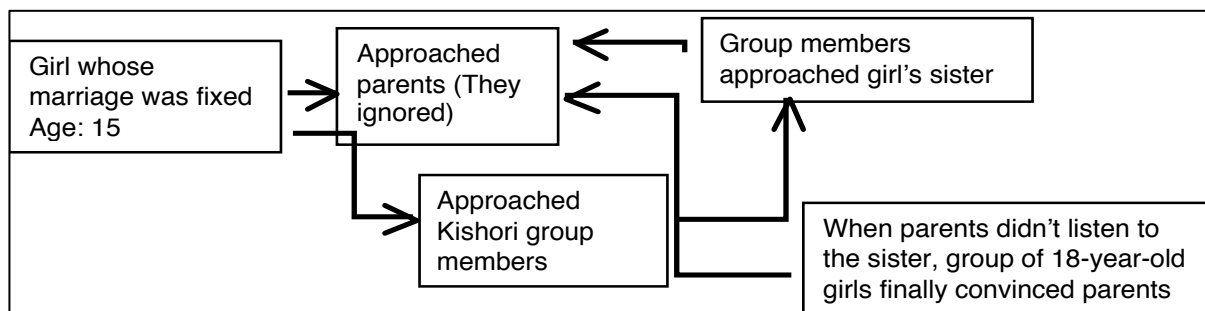
However, several regressive narratives rooted in patriarchy also exist. For example, in families where there are not enough women to do the household work, if a menstruating woman is excluded from the household chores, the taboo will be questioned. As a result, respondents in Mahuawan asked, 'Who will cook? Can we expect the men to cook?' The challenge to the status quo here rests on reinforcing gender stereotypes and norms.

The relation between individuals and institutions are constantly in flux, influencing each other to bring about changes. It is here that the scope to influence them in the direction of gender equality and empowerment of girls lies. The changes in narratives are effected through active sensitisation by stakeholders as well as through increased access of services.

3.4 Patriarchy and 'burden of honour' imposed by institutions

It is important here to dwell on the concept of patriarchy as reflected in the table. Some of these institutions, especially in the closest sphere, associate a "Burden of honour" with girls. Institutions are considered to be the protectors of this "Burden of honour" by creating narratives around why girls should carry this burden and how it can be affected negatively.

(i) The higher an institution's preoccupation with the "Burden of "honour", the more obstructive does it become: as shown in the table, some institutions such as parents, husbands and relatives have a very high burden of honour to maintain. As a result, regardless of how open or experimental they may be in the relatively softer issue of education, they enforce a stronger and more restrictive narrative in issues such as marriage or dowry. As a result, though these institutions – such as families and relatives – are supportive as well as obstructive

(ii) The less the burden of honour, the more supportive an institution is: institutions that are in the health and/or education sector are very supportive of girls and women because they don't have a burden of honour attached to them. As a result, institutions such as ANM, teachers and AWWs are more accessible for the girls and women and also contribute to more progressive narratives as seen in Chapter 2

(iii) Siblings are often supportive for girls and women in the family, unless they are in the position of head of the family, in which case, they may choose to support the 'burden of honour' rather than the instinctive support for the sister. Similarly, friends are also often supportive in their limited capacity. These peer groups create a space for discussing taboo issues such as harassment, marriage or even friendships with the opposite sex

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4. Conclusion

The findings section locates the institutions in two broad categories – formal and informal. Despite the presence of institutions from both categories, there was not much uptake of the same. The community, especially young girls, hesitate in reaching out to formal institutions on their own. The reasons for this range from the taboo associated with several issues, such as decision-making in marriage, to the lack of awareness about the institutions, to the fear of using the institutions. Additionally, the informal institutions form the channel of access to the formal institutions.

This chapter analyses the findings to come up with recommendations for the programme.

4.1 Issues as barriers in accessing institutions

As the first barrier in accessing the institutions lies with the issues themselves, we analyse the issues that the respondents raised across the locations. This section looks at the most prominent issues that emerged during the discussions as recorded in Chapter 2.

Table 4.1: Most prominent issues from the six locations

Issues	Locations where issue was listed among top 5	Locations where issue was listed, but not in top 5
Lack of toilets	H1, H2, R1, R2, G1, G2	
Early marriage	H1, H2, R1, R2, G2	G1
Dowry	H1, H2, R1, G1	G2
Sexual harassment	H2, R2, G1, G2	R1
Drop outs and lack of employment opportunities for girls	H1, R2, G1	H2, R1, G2
Notes		
H1 – Harhad, H2 – Sarauni Kalan		
R1 – Gagi, R2 – Rampur		
G1 – Angarra, G2 – Mahuawan		
Red indicates that the group of men and boys in that particular location listed the issue.		

The issues cannot be seen in isolation. The diagram below lists out some of the narratives associated with the above-listed issues:
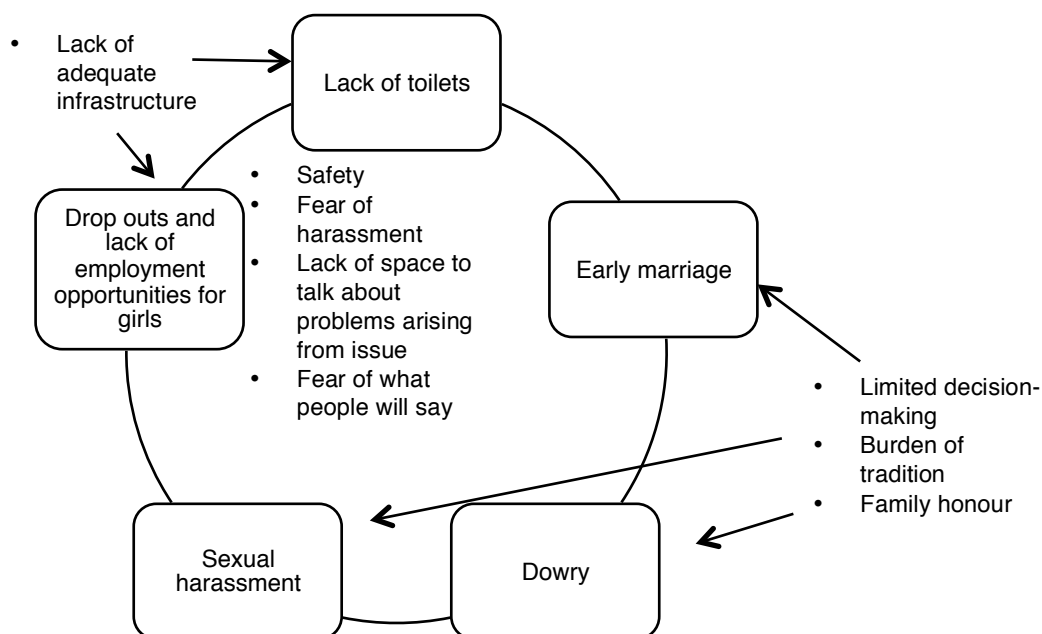
The narratives around each issue linked to larger problems like fear of harassment, fear of what people will say and not having space for discussions around them both within the family and in other institutions such as friendships or in school.

As seen in Chapter 2, there is limited awareness of rights of girls and women and a lack of discussions around gender and sexuality to the extent that many of the issues listed are not even perceived as problems. For example, in Sarauni Kalan, the men and boys raised the issue of eve teasing, while the women said that it was non-existent. There is the fear of repercussion or action if these are brought up, leading to denial. When such problems are not discussed even in informal spaces, there is limited possibility of it coming before formal institutions set up to act on them.

4.2 Significant institutions out of reach of girls/women

The respondents did not foresee a crisis where they would have to approach any of the institutions, because problems such as forced marriage or withdrawal from school/college was seen as a possibility in the lives of many girls. Under such circumstances, the natural option was to accept and not resist.

The institutions listed by the respondents as the ones approached by girls and women are placed in a matrix below depending upon whether they can be approached directly and if they were effective.

Table 4.2: Approach and perception of institutions as girls see it

	Never approach	Approach through parents	Approach directly
No awareness about institutions	1098, Juvenile Justice Board, NGOs, Child Welfare Committee, Women's helpline (10921), Mahila Mandal, Meena Manch (both approached only for loans), Kishori Samoohs, Mahila Thana, NGOs		
Awareness exists, but institutions not accessible		Police	
Accessible, but not effective		Gram Sabha, ANM, PRI members like Mukhiya, Sarpanch, Upsarpanch	Parents, Relatives, Teachers (women teachers), Anganwadi worker, other women in village
Effective			Friends, Mothers (both are effective in limited cases and capacities)
Note: Informal institutions in red			

As most of the respondents had never approached any of these institutions, their comments on its effectiveness was related to perceived effectiveness. At times, there were also incidents that pointed towards the effectiveness of the institutions, for example, how the Gram Sabha handled a particular case of elopement or how the Mukhiya responded to sexual harassment complaints.

4.2.1 Mandated institutions function only where external support is present
Some institutions such as Kishori Samoohs or Kishor Baithaks, as well as the recently mandated Village-Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPCs), were not heard of in the locations visited. The Chhotanagpur Sanskritik Sangh mentioned their intervention in Bedo and Itki blocks of Ranchi to facilitate the constitution of the VLCPCs. Similarly, the Mahila Mukti Sansthan in Hazaribagh mentioned their work in the strengthening of Kishori Samoohs in Padma and Ichhak blocks of the district. The presence of external organisations contributed to some of these committees being functional. However, the NGO itself was not listed, except in two locations. In both, they were placed in the outer most circles in order of significance to the respondents. In cases were NGOs were listed, they were not seen as relevant to women and girls.

There was a lack of awareness about most of the government-mandated mechanisms for the protection of children, especially girls, and young women. From Childline to child-friendly police stations, these were unheard of.

4.2.2 Unapproachable institutions leave no choice

Formal institutions, such as police or PRI representatives or local NGOs, are usually not approached because of how they are perceived and the distance at which they are located. Some, like the police and the court, are seen as corrupt and ineffective where action can drag over years. Similarly, there is limited awareness about them and absence of any outreach efforts on their part. Additionally, they were headed by men in most cases, except where it was mandated to be a woman's job – such as an ASHA or an Anganwadi worker. A woman as the head of a village or a panchayat was seen as more approachable, especially in cases of domestic violence or family dispute.

There was a lack of confidence in approaching institutions, because often the person in authority was either related or from the same village, and the element of confidentiality was not there. There was more confidence in approaching an official at the district- or block-level as the chances of being identified was much less. Breakthrough's representative also mentioned girls approaching Childline through them to report cases anonymously.

Informal institutions on the other hand, came with a lot of taboos and strings attached. So, approaching a parent depended upon previous experience of approaching them or the way the personal equations were mapped. The informal institutions did not have the barrier of physical distance, but came with barriers of tradition and fear of repercussion or judgement.

Trapped between the two, the girl/young woman often preferred to accept a situation as fate, rather than approach any institution against it. Especially in the case of early marriage, respondents mentioned how even if a girl didn't want to get married, she could at most approach her parents and express dissent. If they disagreed, she could approach some relatives or a teacher or health worker, but even there, not much of result was expected. Girls felt that seeking help was equated with rebelling against one's own family and putting them in trouble if a formal institution was approached, or putting them to shame if an informal one outside the family was approached.

4.2.3 Informal institutions mediate access to formal institutions

Across locations, respondents shared that they would approach formal institutions such as the Mukhiya or the Gram Sabha, but only with the consent and support of their parents. The respondents were unable to identify issues for which they approached such institutions on their own. Additionally, the approach to these formal institutions is in many ways, mediated by the informal institutions and their interpersonal relations with them. For example, as mentioned in Gagi, if a girl wanted to complain about an incident of harassment that she faced, she would inform her family, who would then decide whether to take it to the village forum or not.

If the informal institutions play a regressive role with regard to girls and women taking a stand on some of the issues, then it is only natural that the access to the formal institutions becomes nearly impossible.

4.2.4 Hypocrisy in belief systems informing institutions

Similarly, while formal institutions are seen as external players, very often they are headed or manned by informal institutions and they may not act in the same way in different capacities. For example, a Mukhiya may also be a parent. They may respond in different ways to a problem brought to them in their capacity as parent than they would in their official capacity. While they may be more liberal in their outlook in the case of an early marriage incident brought to their notice, they may, under family or social pressure, agree to get their own daughter married at a young age.

Similarly, the way the girl perceives an institution may also be in two ways. While a girl may approach the ASHA to discuss a sexual encounter or demand condoms[21], she may never think of the option if

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[21] In an incident mentioned by Mahila Mukti Sansthan, the ASHA in a particular village had the confidence of the adolescent girls and she advocated the importance of safe sex among them.

the ASHA was her own mother. Similarly, the ASHA may never entertain such a discussion with her own children.

This hypocrisy of approach arises from the conflict between responsibilities imposed by the public role of the person and the age-old personal beliefs of the person. It signifies a phase of flux that is essential for mind-set change in any society. However, there needs to forums that can positively channelise these deep debates or influence them from the lens of gender and child rights.

There is the absence of direct contact between the girl and formal institutions for the reasons listed above.

4.3 Scope of roles of institutions

Figure 4.1 Band of progression that may be aspired for any institution

Based upon the above discussions and findings, it is safe to categorise the role of institutions in the above band of progression.

While the most basic expectation of institutions would be of them to provide support in situations of need, as mandated by various laws, including the Child Marriage Prohibition Act, 2006, the highest aspiration could be that the institutions enable structural changes that recognise gender equity and the rights of children. For a rights-based organisation like Breakthrough, while the first goal should be achieving the Step 1 in the band of progress, the overall goal of sensitising the institutions and triggering change-makers should not be ignored.

5. Recommendations

At the outset, it is important to reiterate that the locations visited were not seen as a representative sample. The intent was to map institutions in the specific locations to understand the trends and practices therein with regard to the access to and uptake of institutions among girls and women in Harhad and Sarauni Kalan in Hazaribagh, in Gagi and Rampur in Ranchi, and in Mahuawan and Angarra in Gaya.

Breakthrough has been actively engaging on the issue of empowerment of women and girls in Bihar and Jharkhand, especially in the context of early marriage, is already working on creating awareness on many of the issues listed above. However, progress in effecting social transformation is difficult without the support of stakeholders at multiple levels.

Based on the findings as discussed in the previous chapters, the change in the institutions may be depicted in the figure below.

5.1 Way forward for Breakthrough

Figure 5.1 Four scenarios around a girl's approach for support
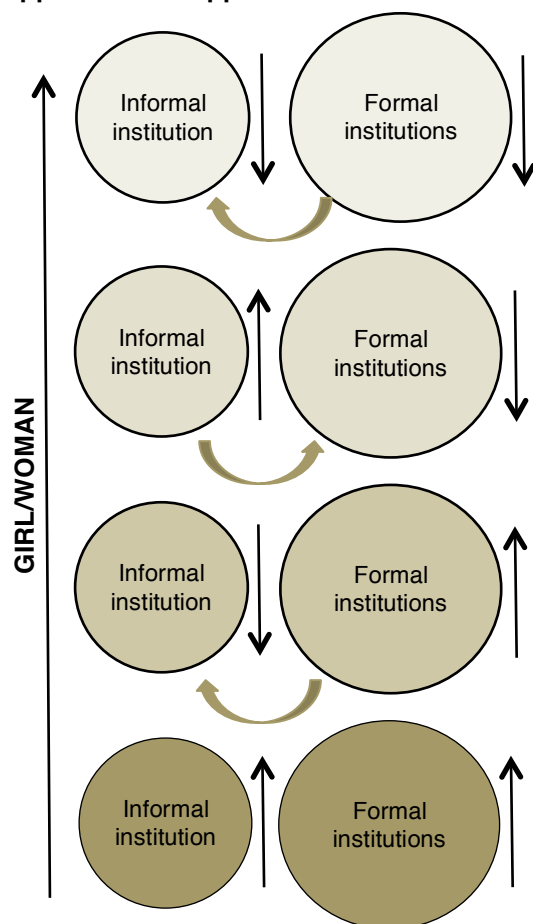
All the scenarios in the adjacent figure 4.1 assume an activation of the girl/woman to seek support from institutions. The black arrows indicate mindset (upward for progressive and downwards for regressive) and the shaded arrows reflect direction of influence).

In the first instance, the girl is aware enough to seek support during a crisis, but neither formal nor informal institutions are able to provide positive support for one or more of the reasons discussed above. For example, in a case of elopement in Gagi village, the Mukhiya pointed out that he advised the parents to separate the couple as the parents of the girls wanted the same.

In the second, while the girl seeks support and the informal institution such as parent or others are supportive, the ineffectiveness of the formal institution poses a barrier. For example, in Harhad, one of the respondents mentioned that her parents were supportive of her desire to do engineering. But because of the absence of colleges in the vicinity offering the course she wanted to pursue, she was forced to opt for Commerce.

In the third, while the informal institution is not supportive, the formal institutions initiate action and influences change. In several cases listed by the NGOs, girls rebelled against their parents' decision to get her married and approached an institution such as Childline for help. In such cases, the formal institution was forced to act, even though the informal institutions such as her parents and society were non-supportive.

In the last scenario, the activation of appropriate mechanisms results in action in favour of the girl. This would be an ideal scenario in many ways, especially if it is accompanied by a change in mind set.
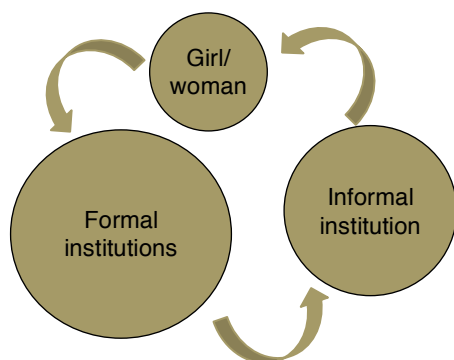
Figure 5.2 Cycle of multi-level activation of stakeholders

For Breakthrough's interventions to be successful, there is the need for multilevel activation of the stakeholders, where each influences the other and acts in the interest of girls and women.

To achieve this, it is important for Breakthrough to explore innovative solutions that can bring about changes not only in the way institutions act in an emergency, but also how they can proactively work towards a more equitable society that is safe for young girls and provides them the opportunity to live a life of dignity and choices.

Keeping this in mind, the gaps in accessing institutions are listed below.

Figure 5.3 Gaps and challenges in accessing institutions to support girls and women in the broad context of early marriage

As amply clear from earlier studies, early marriage is not a stand-alone problem with a one-stop solution. It demands that several changes in mindset at the level of institutions as well as the community be addressed to root out the practice altogether.

PRAXIS

Providing support in times of need for girls and boys

- Building awareness through video vans, street plays about available institutions
- Creating and displaying banners/ posters of support mechanisms for instant recall
- Training health and education service providers on the issues of gender and sexuality and how to sensitively broach these with girls
- Training/sensitising institutions such as police, PRI members, teachers, etc to be approachable to children in need and what steps them should take
- At a programmatic level, there is the need for identify cases requiring immediate attention, act and follow-up to ensure that action does not result in more harm for child

Creating safe spaces for discussions on issues relevant to girls

- Create forums where community can engage with stakeholders on the rights of women and girls and issues of gender and sexuality. This can be done through sensitisation workshops
- Create forums where there can be dialogue among girls and between girls and their families.
- Structures like the Kishori Samooh can be activated and strengthened to support women and girls to stand up for their rights and be aware about their rights and options open to them
- Exploring already existing informal non-projectised spaces to broach conversations among women and build peer support groups

Challenging the existing regressive narrative and creating a progressive narrative

- Sensitise PRI members and village-level committees on issues of gender and sexuality
- Explore formation of peer-to-peer learning groups where PRI members, especially women, can dip into for support or advice
- Network with institutions at the block and district levels who are working on child protection such as DCPU and CDPO so that they proactively support block- and village-level institutions
- There is the need for cases to be well documented and publicised along with the institutions that supported her. Often it is seen that progressive parents were the main reason for the girls' success.
- There is also the need to talk about girls who were able to resist pressure from the community to stand up for their rights and dreams.

Enabling structural changes in child protection rather than systemic corrections

- Evolve participatory LIFE tool to facilitate discussions around narratives among communities so that change takes place through discussions in community meetings
- Facilitating multi-stakeholder consultations to enable peer-to-peer learning, dialogue on the issue and also showcase change makers

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Platform / pool of legal resources and mechanisms
There are many organisations working in the area of women's empowerment and children protection. There is however, the need to create a bank of existing laws and legal mechanisms that can holistically look at the issue of early marriage and will be available for anybody.

These recommendations are based upon the interactions in the six locations in Bihar and Jharkhand and may not necessarily be applicable universally. Under the circumstances, it is necessary to carry out a mapping of institutions in the intervention areas to make the mechanism more robust and the programme successful.

PRAXIS

Annexure 1 – Mapping NGOs

Table A. Snapshot of NGOs and the sectors they are working on

NGOs	Areas of work	Area of operation (among three intervention districts)
Chhotanagpur Sanskritik Sangh	Community development, health, self-governance, agriculture, human resource development, advocacy and works with women, children, poor, tribal, persons with disabilities	Ranchi
CINI	Child Health, Child Rights, RTE, education	
LEADS		
Unicef		
KGVK	Healthcare, Natural Resource Management, Women's Empowerment, Capacity Building, Market Linkage, Education, Renewable Energy	
Srijan Foundation	Livelihoods, women empowerment, Vocational training, disability, food security, health	Hazaribagh
SUPPORT	Livelihoods	
Samadhan		
Mahila Mukti Sansthan	Women empowerment	
Serve Seva		
Nav Nirman Kendra	Total sanitation, SHG formation, women's empowerment, child rights	Gaya
Tathagat Foundation (*also works on environment)		
Sugam Jagriti	Skill development, education, SHG formation, sustainability	
Kalyan Parishad	Early marriage, horticulture, women's empowerment, child labour	
Women's Development Corporation	Women's empowerment (implementing organisation for women development programmes of Bihar government)	
Nav Nirman Mahila Jan Kalyan Sangathan	Self-help group formation, skill building and vocational training, mental health and afforestation	
Gramin Vikas Sansthan	Mental health, youth awareness, women's and farmers' collectives	
Amar Jyoti Foundation	Agriculture, Art & Culture, Children, Civic Issues, Education & Literacy, Health & Family Welfare, Information & Communication Technology, Micro Finance (SHGs), Panchayati Raj, Rural Development & Poverty Alleviation, Women's Development & Empowerment, Youth Affairs	

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