

# बाल विवाह मुक्त भारत CHILD MARRIAGE FREE INDIA

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## CONCEPT NOTE

*"I was only 15, studying in class 10, when I was married off. Within a year, I was grappling with the responsibility of motherhood, started facing health issues due to early pregnancy, and was also subjected to domestic violence. It has taken me decades to gather the courage to resume my education and today I am financially independent. I pledge that I won't let my girls, or any child around me face the atrocities of child marriage."*

- Ruchi (name changed), 35, Haryana, Counsellor with NGO

### What is Child Marriage Free India Campaign?

Child Marriage Free India is a nationwide campaign led by civil society organisations and women activists in more than 300 of the worst impacted districts in the country with the aim to eliminate child marriage by 2030, thereby saving 30 million underage girls from getting married. The campaign is being run with the focus on effective implementation of the existing government policies and laws in the country that ensure child protection.

### Why Child Marriage Free India Campaign?

Child marriage is an age-old social evil, which is prevalent in our society since time immemorial. It robs children of their childhood, hurtling them into adulthood overnight. Child marriage is one of the worst forms of exploitation against children. It surpasses the barriers of caste, culture and religion and has strong linkages with sexual abuse and trafficking.

In India, 23.3% of women (between the 20-24 age group) were married before they turned 18 (2019-2021, NFHS-5). 12 million children were married before attaining the legal age, of which 5.2 million were girls (Census 2011). As per the Crime in India 2021 report of the National Crime Records Bureau, 3 children were forced into marriage

### What is wrong with Child Marriage?

The social evil brings with it many adversities and challenges especially,

- Adverse Impact on Health
- Adverse Impact on Education
- Adverse Impact on Protection of Children
- Social and Economic Impact

Child marriage severely impacts physical and mental health, education, future, and the overall well-being of a child. It triggers the vicious cycle of inter-generational poverty, thus affecting the economic development of the country.

### Some of the specific consequences include:



**Disruption in girl's education** and thereby reduction in opportunities of her personal and professional development



**Early pregnancies** leading to increased rate of maternal and infant mortality



**Undernutrition** among both the infant and the mother



**Domestic violence and abuse**



**Limited decision making powers**



**Psychological and mental health issues**



In a landmark judgement to protect minor married girls, the Supreme Court of India declared that sexual intercourse with a minor girl would be considered as rape.

To address this, the most definitive and audacious commitment to end child marriage was made with launch of the Child Marriage Free India campaign.

## THE JOURNEY SO FAR- CHILD MARRIAGE FREE INDIA CAMPAIGN

### Phase 1 - Launch on 16th October 2022

The campaign began in 2022 that led to igniting women across the country and channelling them into the largest movement against child marriage. **76,000 women leaders** came on streets demanding Child Marriage Free India.



### Since then...

The campaign has led to a robust coalition of **160 NGO partners** in **288 districts** to work in villages to prevent and stop child marriages, engage with communities, religious leaders, school teachers/principals, Panchayati Raj officials, law enforcement agencies and child protection functionaries to work collectively to eradicate child marriage from their districts.

Across India more than **1 crore people** have taken the pledge to end child marriage, over **1,700 child marriages** have been foiled and over **171 FIRs** have been registered in the last one year through the efforts of the coalition.

In Assam, the government launched a state-wide action against child marriage, leading to registration of around **4,000 cases** and arrest of **3,000 perpetrators**.

(Source: The Print 18 Feb, 2023)

### Phase 2 - Campaign on 16th October 2023

The coalition is organising the second phase of the campaign with focus on:

- **Mobilising, sensitising and empowering women leaders** along with child protection stakeholders for realisation of a child marriage free nation
- **Timely action** by police, Child Marriage Prohibition officers and Magistrates in the **prevention of child marriage** by issuance of injunction orders



To create child marriage free India

## Aim of the Campaign

The campaign aims to eliminate child marriage by having a targeted intervention in 288 districts where the rate of child marriage is over 23.3% (India's national average - National Family Health Survey - 2019-21). In addition, there will be interventions in neighbouring districts in partnership with Government agencies and civil society organisations. The aim of the campaign is two-fold with a single goal of creating a Child Marriage Free India through behaviour change. Child marriage has so far been seen as a social evil however, it is a criminal offence and unless it is treated as a crime, children especially girls cannot be safe.

### The Child Marriage Free India Campaign aims to



Prevent child marriage  
by education & awareness



Ensure enforcement of  
law against child marriage



Behavioural  
change in society

## Objectives of the Campaign

- Reduce child marriages from 23.3% (NFHS-5) to 10% by 2025 and make India child marriage free by 2030
- Make 50,000 villages in 300 districts across India child marriage free by 2025
- Educate, encourage and ensure 5 Crore pledges from citizens across India to end child marriage
- Strengthen community and village-level institutions to end child marriage
- Empower women as leaders and equip them to raise their voices against child marriage in their villages
- Appeal to faith leaders, local communities, temples, mosques and churches to support in eradicating child marriage by refusing to solemnise child marriage in their regions
- Build capacity of law enforcement and child protection agencies for immediate response on complaints related to child marriage

## How to combat child marriage?

Addressing the issue of child marriage requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach of different government departments, institutions, statutory bodies, and civil society organisations. Child Marriage Free India campaign is a targeted intervention aimed at accelerating progress towards the tipping point to end child marriages. The campaign is pillared on the 'PICKET' strategy as it requires a multi-pronged approach.

### PICKET strategy to combat Child Marriage across India

- Policy Intervention for Prevention and Protection;
- Investments in Capacity and Institutions to prevent child marriages;
- Convergence of services for health, education & social protection, and Community participation;
- Knowledge-driven decision making;
- Education for all children under 18 years as a right, and skills and livelihoods training;
- Technology for change

## Demands of the Campaign

- Ensure access to free education for all children till class XII
- Dedicated budgetary allocation for schemes and infrastructure for education and vocational training till Class XII
- Enable real-time attendance data analysis and intervention when irregularities occur
- Effective implementation and enforcement of laws against child marriage for all sections of society

## Target Audience

- Central, State and District Level Government Departments
- Women leaders in villages
- Women Welfare and Self-help Groups
- Anganwadi supervisors and workers
- Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers
- Survivors of child abuse and exploitation
- Teachers/Academicians
- NGOs/CSOs
- Panchayati Raj Members
- Gram Sabhas
- Ward members
- Bal Sansad/children group/youth group
- School Management Committees
- Para-legal volunteers
- Community members
- Child protection committees
- Block Development Officer
- District Child Protection Units

## Child Marriage Free India Campaign Event Day 16 October 2023

### Call to Action:

**5 crore people and women leaders to light candles/*diyas*, take out torches/*mashal julus* and pledge to end child marriage through online and offline modes**

