

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



With best wishes,
Fr. Joy Nedumparambil SDB
Executive Director
BREADS Bangalore

BREADS has consistently been promoting awareness and action about children's rights through its interventions, especially CREAM. Child Rights Clubs (CRC) are the core structure of CREAM, providing platforms for children to learn about rights, and express their views on matters that concern them. In July 2020, 20 CRC representatives from 10 districts in Karnataka expressed their views on the legal marriageable age of girls in a national consultation—*Young Voices*. This edition of *Slice* contextualises the fight against child marriage in the prevailing COVID 19 scenario.

COVID 19 AND CHILD MARRIAGE

How could the Corona virus (that largely affects adults' health), possibly impact children especially with relation to child marriages? Unfortunately, it does: by its debilitating impact on the ecosystem in which children live.

Children who were vulnerable to being married off before the legally permissible ages of 18 (for girls) and 21 (for boys) are now under even greater pressure because of their socioeconomic backgrounds. When schools were functional, there was a concerted effort from concerned adults and children to pay attention to such vulnerable children to keep them in school or in viable alternatives such as vocational training. COVID 19 has locked down schools and institutions of alternative learning, confining children to their homes without the means to access learning in other forms.



CALENDAR

JULY 2020

- COVID 19 relief work in Kerala and Karnataka
- Online consultation with children on Gender Empowerment and Age of Marriage of Girls

AUGUST 2020

- COVID 19 relief work in Kerala and Karnataka
- Independence Day observation across Don Bosco institutions in Kerala and Karnataka

For most vulnerable children, their living conditions do not support access to the internet or smart devices for online learning, even in the few places where online learning is being organised. Parents, already reeling under the impact of the infection or threat of it, the loss of income and livelihoods, the general lockdowns and poor economy, don't see many options for themselves or their children. Reverse migration is further stressing out the already-suffering rural economy. Survival of the family is the focal task and children are automatically conscripted to it—to support the family income by their earnings or leaving it to reduce costs. Child marriage is seen as a means to reduce the number of mouths to feed in the home.

Young people report an increase in early marriages due to the COVID 19 pandemic and reduction in income. People take advantage of social restrictions to conduct marriage ceremonies behind closed doors with very few guests. The traditional patriarchal view that girls are an economic and social burden is dominant in these uncertain situations and families are quick to barter a girl child in marriage for various reasons: economic benefit from the groom's family, passing off a responsibility or the cost of the child's upkeep, fear of embarrassment if a girl possibly engaged in romantic relationships, absence of viable options for education or livelihood.



BREADS and its partners are trying to address the issues of education and livelihood in the COVID 19 scenario through any means possible: education sponsorships, initiating online lessons, helping access to alternative education through smart devices, learning material etc. So far, they have reached 922 children directly with these efforts in Karnataka and Kerala.

COVID 19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE BY BREADS

AS OF 3 AUGUST 2020

SN	ACTIVITY	KERALA	KARNATAKA	MIGRANTS (KERALA)	TOTAL
1	Don Bosco houses engaged in COVID 19 relief	20	20	0	40
2	Face masks produced from all Don Bosco centres	54300	195370	0	249670
3	Beneficiaries of school fee subsidies	74	374	311	759
4	DB institutions equipped with audio-visual room	6	6	0	12
5	Beneficiaries of smart phones/televisions for online learning	63	43	57	163
6	Grocery kits distributed	3246	15484	2430	21160
7	Ready-to-eat food distributed	10238	75509	0	85747
8	Beneficiaries of grocery kits	16368	66543	10242	93153
9	Beneficiaries of cooked food	940	50016	59400	110356
10	Total beneficiaries of cooked food/ food kits	17308	116559	69642	203509

YOUNG VOICES IN CREAM AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE



The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) set up a task force in June 2020 to examine the correlation between the age of marriage and motherhood with key health, medical, well-being and nutritional statuses, as well as the higher education of girls and young women. Based on its submission to Niti Aayog by 31 July 2020, the government proposes to increase the marriageable age of girls from 18 to 21 years. The Task Force is also required to suggest suitable legislation and/or amendments in existing laws to support its recommendations as well as to work out a detailed plan with timelines to implement these recommendations.

In this context, 96 civil society organisations upholding the rights of young people to be heard on all matters that affect their lives, collectively initiated *Young Voices* on 26 June 2020. Within three weeks, the *Young Voices* process involved 2480 children, adolescents, and youth in rural, peri-urban and urban areas, predominantly from the most marginalised communities across 15 states (Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Telangana).

YOUNG VOICES - NATIONAL REPORT
15 STATES, AROUND 2500 YOUNG PEOPLE
 Submission to the Task force examining Age of Marriage and other concerns
 July 2020

Free/affordable higher education	Restrictions will increase, rapes will increase, stricter monitoring.	Include Rights education as part of school education	If age increases, child marriage will increase. Families wait till 18 years with great difficulty- if this increases to 21 years, they will not wait.
No pressure to marry early		No violence on streets & No sexual harassment at school	
We wish girls and boys could meet openly, talk openly, live together if they wish to, get married if they wish to, young people should have these rights, just now we have nothing		If we don't want to become mothers we should be able to discuss this with our partners	Allow us to explore relationships and our sexuality safely and with dignity
More options in higher education in rural areas	Access enabled through safe transport	My control over my body and without being ashamed about it	Run a mass awareness campaign against gender discrimination
Society needs to value girls and ask us about our opinions			

Right now at age 18 only there is a lot of difficulty for young people. When there are relationships of self-choice, boys are being criminalised under POCSO.

We should be able to talk to our family, be able to share our likes and choices on marriage. We can only do this when there is an open environment in our family.

The capacity to form/act on decisions is built over time with different experiments, not overnight. We need to start this practice from childhood, otherwise the person who is unable to take decisions at age 18 cannot do so at 21 either.

Options of studying alongside working

Parents will worry more for their daughters with law and society running differently; there is no check and balance of laws and its implementation at ground level

I want to take all decisions about my marriage and my life

Bringing a child into the world is the responsibility of both parents and hence both should be ready for it. Need to work with families and with boys to make them understand this

Safe spaces for girls to talk and learn together

Access to education and real work options

Ask us what we need and want

Whenever a boy and girl form a relationship of their own choice, society does not accept it and hence they are forced to elope

Access to SRH services with dignity and confidentiality

As part of this process, 20 representatives from the Child Rights Education and Action Movement (CREAM) of BREADS took part in an online consultation moderated by The Concerned for Working Children (CWC). They were among a total of 41 children representing 14 districts, supported by organisations such as BREADS, Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA), and Child Rights Trust (CRT).

The CREAM Child Rights Clubs representatives were articulate and forthright in their views about child marriage as most of them were involved in individual and collective activism in 10 districts of Karnataka. They pointed out how poverty, lack of options, agency, educational opportunities and employment opportunities affect them most. They spoke of girls being seen as a burden and a liability and its impact on their lives. They referred to the criminalisation of consensual sexual relationships of young people, the impact of COVID 19 on their lives – and what needs to be done to support them at these times. The negative experience from Karnataka, where the legal voiding of child marriage led to more harm than good, was also shared. All the children were vocal about the challenges they face in their own lives to exert their agency and realise their aspirations.

The young people across India were categorical that increasing the legal age of marriage of girls from 18 to 21 years would be ineffective at best. It will either harm or have no impact by itself unless the root causes of women's disempowerment are addressed. Four representatives from different zones also spoke to the Task Force in a webinar.

Their collective demands submitted by the National Working Group - *Young Voices*, to Smt. Smriti Irani, Union Minister, MWCD, were:

1. Create incentives (quality education, secure jobs, information and access to sanitary napkins, contraceptives, and safe abortions) that enable us to realise our aspirations (including delay in our age of marriage).
2. Conduct mass awareness drives with our parents and community leaders to encourage them to discuss our issues and respect our decisions.
3. Increase the Right to Education from Grade 8 to Grade 12 up to 18 years, and give free, compulsory, and quality education, especially for girls.
4. Expand our opportunities for higher education (with free education or scholarships), vocational education close to our houses, which are also responsive to our diversity and marginalised contexts.
5. Ensure our access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education in schools and in communities. Acknowledge and empower our sexual and reproductive health and rights.
6. Ensure non-judgemental community-based and institutional protection mechanisms, which do not criminalise us. Ensure the prevention of gender-based violence.
7. Provide social and financial support for our parents so that those of us who are vulnerable to child marriage may get more years of school and automatically marry when we are older.
8. Create empowering spaces for us, with us.
9. Increase our mobility, especially for girls, with safe and free public transportation.
10. Inform us about all our rights & entitlements, and laws that are related to us and how they impact us.
11. Our entitlements should be available to all of us without conditionality and judgment whomever or whenever we choose to marry, whether or not we choose to marry.
12. Respect our personhood and agency and mandatorily consult us in decisions that affect us.

The coming months will reveal the impact of these young voices on this important legislation regarding the legal age of marriage for a girl.

NEWS

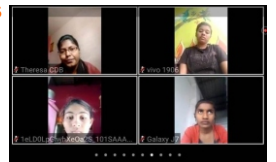
FCDP and TMS Kollam: Reducing the digital gap for students in need

The Fishermen Community Development Programme (FCDP) and Theeradesa Mahila Sanghatana (TMS) entered another phase of COVID-19 relief activities with the support of BREADS Bangalore. It is a joint venture aiming to reduce the digital divide and to lend a helping hand to deserving students who cannot afford electronic gadgets and technologies to access the online classes conducted by schools. FCDP identified deserving students with the support of benefactors and well-wishers... [more](#)



Consultation on Gender Empowerment and the Age of Marriage for Girls

The Government of India Gazette of 4 June 2020 announced a task force to examine matters pertaining to the age of motherhood, imperatives of lowering maternal mortality rates, improvement of nutrition, correlations between age of marriage and motherhood with health, medical wellbeing and nutritional status of mother and neonate/infant/child during pregnancy, birth and thereafter. A study of key parameters such as Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), Total Fertility Rate ... [more](#)



A joint venture to aid tribal families in Nagarahole, Karnataka

In its efforts to reach as many groups of people affected by the COVID 19 pandemic, BREADS partnered with Good Quest Foundation, Project Vision, Corona Care Bengaluru, and AIFO India to support tribal colonies in Nagarahole and Bandipura forests in Karnataka with grocery kits, cookies and other eatables. As yet untouched by the Corona virus itself, safe within the forests, these families were nevertheless affected by the fallout of the pandemic: lack of incomes because of the... [more](#)



KISMAT touches the life of a Guest Worker in Kerala

Krishna Khakhlari (42) a native of Assam, has been a guest worker in the unorganized sector in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala since 2015. He is a daily wage worker and the only breadwinner of the family. He has a grandmother, wife and three girl children back at home. He proved very industrious in his work and sent home all the money that he earned. The welfare of his family was uppermost in his mind. He was staying in a rented room in Thiruvallam along with eight other guest workers from .. [more](#)



JULY 2020