



Engaging Men and Boys in UMANG

What is the Initiative About

UMANG is an ICRW conceptualized, and IKEA Foundation supported comprehensive, multi-layered girls empowerment program to increase their retention in school and reduce prevalence of child marriages in Godda and Jamtara districts of Jharkhand. UMANG is being implemented by ICRW in partnership with SATHEE, Badlao Foundation, PCI, and in close association with the government of Jharkhand. The program uses a socio-ecological framework and gender transformative approaches for multilayered intervention at individual (adolescent girls), family (parents, siblings), community (men & boys, women, and other community members) and system (schools, local governing structures like PRI, child protection mechanism, etc.) levels.

UMANG program proposes to achieve sustained decline in child marriages and enhance the value of the girl child. Other than directly engaging with adolescent boys and girls through in-school and out-of-school activities like group education sessions, school campaigns, and engaging girls in sports, 'bringing together groups of men and boys to reflect on masculinity and gender inequality' is considered one of the key interventions as men and boys are key stakeholders in the family ecosystem and in patriarchal societies like India it is crucial to engage with them and in efforts to change the status quo and promote gender equality.





How Did We Do It

Objective

The engaging men and boys initiative in UMANG aims to promote self-reflection as well as changes in attitudes and behaviors related to gender norms, increase the value of girl child, promote positive masculinity among men and boys, and create a supporting and enabling environment for the adolescent girls in the community. The initiative aims to do so by enhancing communication between fathers and daughters/sons on issues of gender discrimination, negative impact of child marriage, masculinity, fatherhood and by enabling them to challenge negative beliefs, attitudes, and social norms associated with child marriage and by sensitizing on “value of girl child” at family and community levels.

Innovative Approaches

Two strategies were planned and applied to engage men and boys at the various level.

The first strategy included organizing yearly workshops at the district level, six monthly workshops at the block level and quarterly workshops at the panchayat level. These workshops aimed to build perspective and sensitize stakeholders on gender and masculinity issues and involve stakeholders in issues of empowerment of adolescent girls. PRI members, religious leaders, youths, and key community stakeholders participated in panchayat-level workshops. Similarly, various departments and PRI members participated in the block-level workshops. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) led the discussion at the district level, Block Development Officer (BDO) led the discussion at the block level, and Mukhiya at the panchayat level. About 50 people participated in each workshop. Specific action plans were prepared during these workshops, including activities for adolescent girls like poster competitions, exhibitions, debates, and flag hoisting & speeches by adolescents on Independence Day, Jharkhand Diwas, International Women’s Day, National Girl Child Day, etc. In addition, activities were planned to felicitate those parents who supported their daughter’s higher education.

The second strategy included mapping and listing of youths (with consent) in 212 villages for conducting 60-90-minute-long discussions every month. Initial discussions started with youths (19-25 years), but after observing interest areas, time availability, and dynamics at the community level, separate groups were formed for relatively elderly men. A curriculum was crafted on gender and masculinity to discuss with men and boys. The draft curriculum included 20 sessions. It was pre-tested with men and boys in the community. After the pre-test, all the 20 sessions were revised and reorganized into 12 sessions. This curriculum was used during the group meetings to facilitate the sessions.

This was accompanied by pledge signing activity with youth to create social pressure among them to continue supporting gender equality.

Collaborative Efforts:

Considering the potential and shared objectives, 90 youths from Nehru Yuva Kenda (NYK) were sensitized around gender and engaged to assist in discussions with men and boys. Similarly, 32 Field Facilitators were trained on curriculum and facilitating discussion with men and boys.

Challenges and Solutions:

While the OBC and ST men and boys participated actively in discussions, the participation of men from other population segments was limited. Some topics like inter-caste marriage, love marriage, friendship with boys, and profession for girls led to huge debates. Similarly, discussions on patriarchy, masculinity, and sexuality sometimes led to conflicts. However, presence of NYK youth and Field Facilitators helped in moderating the debates. The attendance in meetings and discussions was found to be higher among those 26 – 50+ years. However, the youth actively assisted the adolescents in activities like playing tournaments. While finding resources for sports activities was a challenge, some PRIs were able to share resources for sports and events for adolescents. Similarly, district and block level officials also supported the program.

Voices from the Field

- "जेंडर शब्द सुने थे, परन्तु इसका मतलब अब समझ में आया"
- "यह चर्चा बुजुर्गों के साथ निरंतर करने की जरूरत है"
- "हम अपने रोल को अभी तक इतनी गहराई से नहीं सोचते थे"
- "हम लोग लड़कियों को खेल में मदद कर उन्हें फुटबाल के जिला स्तरीय टूर्नामेंट में पहुंचाए हैं"
- "हम अपने पंचायत में किशोरी सशक्तिकरण की जिम्मेदारी तो ले ही सकते हैं"
- "छोटी-छोटी हिंसा का असर कितना अधिक हो सकता है, यह अब समझ में आया"
- "पहले चर्चा में भाग लेना समय की बरबादी समझता था, परंतु अब चर्चा का इंतजार रहता है"
- "हमारी पंचायत की ग्राम सभा बैठक में उमंग की किशोरियाँ को भी बुलाया जाता है"
- "पर ऐसे भी उदाहरण हैं कि कुछ लड़कियां पढ़ लिखकर अपनी मनमानी करती हैं"
- "अभी हमारे यहाँ लड़कियां इतनी समझदार नहीं हैं कि शादी का निर्णय खुद लें"
- "हमारी पंचायत ने 15 किशोरियों की फुटबाल टीम को जर्सी एवं शूज के लिए मदद की और टीम ने जिला स्तर की प्रतियोगिता जीती"
- "हमें कुछ छूट मिली है तो हमारे ऊपर पैसा कमाने एवं घर चलाने की जिम्मेदारी भी ज्यादा है"





What Do Numbers Say

- Altogether **716** groups were formed with 18409 men and boys across **212** villages.
- Separate groups have been formed for different age brackets i.e. **15-18** years, **19-25** years and **26-50+** years.
- Around 4700 men and boys have taken part in more than five sessions.

Conclusion

Engaging men and boys helped in building perspective and sensitizing them on gender and masculinity issues. These engagements helped in creating an enabling environment for adolescent girls that could have long-term effects in shaping the future of these girls. It is helping in garnering more parental support for girls to pursue higher studies, aspire for employment opportunities, and support them do what they would want to do in their life.

We extend our appreciation to the dedicated UMANG team members whose collective effort brought this product to fruition: Nasreen Jamal, Sakti Ghosh, Nitin Datta, Parasnath Verma, Binit Jha, Triloki Nath, Ravi Verma, Amajit Mukherjee, Pranita Achyut, Sandeepa Fanda, Anurag Paul and Rajendra Singh. Thank you for your invaluable contributions.

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