

ZIMMEDAR PITA – Responsible Father

Fathers Care - a Campaign for Promoting Men's Involvement in Securing Rights of Children in India



My Father is the Best - Showcasing positive role models



Capacity building



Meetings and discussions



Participation of women and children in discussion

Fathers Care is a campaign that is currently spread over 4 states of India- Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, covering more than 1500 villages in 50 districts with the support of OAK Foundation. More than 280 organizations and 1000 volunteers are associated with this campaign. The Campaign is being conducted by members of Forum to Engage Men (FEM), a nationwide network on men for gender equality headquartered at Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ), in New Delhi.

The campaign revisits child rights as a promise of fathers for the nurture, safety and development of their own children through men's involvement as fathers:

- From pregnancy through child birth;
- Share the 'care' work – domestic care roles and child care roles;
- Raise children without violence; and
- Recognise discrimination against daughters, child sex abuse and son preference;
- Give daughters equal opportunities for growth and development;
- Support and respect their wife and recognise and respond to domestic violence including sexual violence;
- Promote caring fathers – respect and give recognition to each other;

At a practical level the intervention focuses on reinforcing the varied roles of a man as father: teacher, role model, a guide, a mentor, a nurturer, care giver, a friend, a supporter, a provider and protector.

The idea of this intervention has evolved from CHSJ and its partners' experience over the last decade on how men have found that they have gained immensely in the depth of their relationships with their spouse and children when they get involved in efforts and campaigns on violence against women and gender equality.

The objective of this initiative is in a way the campaign seeks to re-conceptualise the role of the father in the context of children's caring, development and well being, creating an onus and responsibility on fathers. It is also to change the way the role of the father and protection of child rights is visualized by community, activists like women's groups and children's groups along with working for community level changes where men start taking active roles in their families and communities for securing women and children's rights bringing equity.

Influences and impacts: **The campaign has been underway for about three years now and influenced the thoughts and discourses at the national, state and community levels.**

NATIONAL LEVEL:

- This intervention has generated a lot of interest because it is the first time child rights issue is also being seen within family; which is very pertinent as children are vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence;
- Work on child rights have most been on issues in the public sphere like street children, child labour, corporal punishment, right to education and strengthening of juvenile justice system; this intervention has created an awareness and made space in debate and discussion about role of fathers around norms and practices which are normative but harmful ;





Discussions with boys in a school



Community campaign



Social massaging for protecting child rights

**Are you listening?
We men and fathers should come together
and talk about the rights of our children**

Forum to Engage (FEM): Fem is a network of individual organisations, launched on an all India basis in 2007 with the primary objective of working with boys and men to usher in a just and peaceful society free from violence.

- The initiative has allowed a coordination between child rights and women's right organisations as the issue of violence and vulnerability to sexual abuse against women and children is being addressed together, bringing out the additional and gendered vulnerabilities of the girl child (beyond the issue of declining sex ratio).

STATE LEVEL

- Each of the four states made innovative plans to take forward the campaign. Maharashtra groups have established, Bapanchi Shala' (school for fathers). The primary emphasis of these 'Bapanchi Shalas' is to highlight the need for men to learn and be more responsible not only as a provider but as a nurturer and protector of children.

- In each state CBOs working on child rights, dalit rights and women's rights have together on this common issue realizing that there was a need to mainstream the work around the rights of child within their larger programme intervention. This has led to many more groups joining this campaign, increasing its spread.

- The campaign has involved and generated media attention leading to increased reporting of the campaign and more stories from the ground around child rights and abuse; as a result state level coverage is given by the local media on the success stories of the fathers contributing for child caring.

- All those stakeholders who have been associated with the campaign have started reflecting on their own behaviour and their role and responsibility within family towards their child. These have been captured through stories, case studies in which fathers have talked about their behaviour and the discrimination that they themselves perpetrate between their sons and their daughters. This has helped them to change their own mindset and devote equally to bother their son as well as their daughter's welfare.

- The campaign which also covered schools in these 50 districts saw children writing down their expectations from their father and the support they required from their father. This was very emotional and saw many fathers reacting positively and emotionally;

- In Madhya Pradesh the partners have partnered with other networks and alliances working on maternal health, to start a joint campaign on quality of care of maternal and child health.

COMMUNITY LEVEL: it has become a rallying point for the community and community level institutions like the school teachers, Gram Panchayat (village council) to come together and collectively discuss the importance of the rights of the child, and the vulnerability they face, and the role of fathers to protect their rights.

"A campaign like this is necessary in our patriarchal society, where lack of education makes it all the worse. In our society, girls are generally silenced when they ask questions. After I attended the meeting held during the campaign, I realised I needed to answer my daughter with as much patience as I give my son,"

'Rambhau Hinge' a resident of Bhor.

"Fathers influence their sons greatly. Sons tend to imitate their fathers and adopt their view points. Our aim is to gender sensitise fathers and train them to become more caring. This would ensure that sons understand that a caring personality is also a quality a real man possesses," said Anand Pawar, Samyak (NGO), Maharashtra

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