



Advika, Every Girl Is Unique

**A renewed commitment
towards the wellbeing
and empowerment of
adolescent girls**



Smt. Anu Garg, Principal Secretary DWCD and MS

The state-level 'Advika – Every girl is unique' programme is a renewed commitment towards the empowerment of adolescent girls through education and life skills. Advika will be a common and coordinated platform for linking all schemes targeted at all adolescent girls of Odisha in the 10-19 years age group, across the State, in and out of school. It is the best example of the highest political commitment towards adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage and all kinds of violence.

The State Strategy Action Plan on ending child marriage rolled out in 2019 is a convergent plan of action for line departments, partner organisations including CSOs, and communities. We have formed a State Steering Committee on ending child marriage under the leadership of WCD department with membership from key line departments such as Home, Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water, Education, Skill Development, Health, Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, and representatives from UNICEF, UNFPA, and Action Aid. System strengthening is imperative for the success of these measures. Along with ending child marriage, the state is committed towards empowering adolescents, especially our young girls, to ensure that they are safe, secure, and have access to all facilities and services.

The State of Odisha gladly recognises the commendable efforts of district administrations towards adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage. Currently, as many as 1,700 villages have been declared child marriage-free by district administrations. I extend my thanks to the district administrations and the entire team. We are committed to ensure a bright future for our adolescents and work towards achieving the SDGs.



Shri Aravind Agrawal, IAS, Director DWCD and MS

Since our State and DWCD&MS are committed to and envision making Odisha child marriage-free by 2030, we are focusing on prevention mechanisms. District-level proactive interventions resulted in more child marriage cases being reported to the State. Frontline workers like AWWs, ASHAs and ANMs along with women's SHGs members are now more vigilant in their communities and many child marriages are being prevented. We have also involved religious leaders, local NGOs, CBOs, youth leaders, adolescent volunteers/collectives etc.

One of the key learnings for the department is that community ownership, working with partners as well as ownership by the local government in taking the campaign to end child marriage forward are invaluable. Secondly, system strengthening in terms of effective functioning of existing structures and mechanisms at various levels in the communities has played a crucial role. Thirdly, preventive measures are equally important to end child marriage.

Hearteningly, as many as 387 child marriages were stopped across Odisha in the COVID-19 lockdown period. Stopping child marriage requires proactive intervention, along with constant follow up with the victims. I encourage all districts to work consistently towards adolescent empowerment and weed out the practice of child marriage under the umbrella of Advika so that our youth can realise their aspirations and contribute to the welfare of our State.

A. Background and context

Adolescents are potential agents of change in their own lives and communities. Through meaningful and productive engagement, they can develop skills and capacities that foster resilience and support communities to transform at the same time. Hence, adolescents must be given adequate opportunities to groom themselves, showcase their skills and be motivated to represent themselves in the community as peer leaders.

India is home to the largest adolescent population in the world. Every fifth person today is between 10-19 years. However, many challenges persist for India's young people, particularly for girls, who face gender disparities in education and nutrition, early marriage and discrimination, especially against those who belong to socially marginalised castes and communities. These disparities and inequities in turn, have an adverse impact on the overall wellbeing of young girls and the agency that they have over their bodies and critical life decisions.

B. Adolescent girls in Odisha

Odisha is the 11th largest State in India, with a population of over 42 million and an adolescent population of 8.3 million. Most of them live in rural areas with only 17 per cent living in urban regions. Nearly 21 per cent of the population in the State is tribal. Mounting social and economic pressures caused by poverty, illiteracy, harmful social norms and regressive practices such as dowry, drive families to opt for early marriages for their daughters. Adolescent girls, who lack agency over their lives are forced to drop out of schools and marry early. This often results in early motherhood that further compromises maternal and infant health as well as affects their ability to move freely and make decisions related to their education, marriage, work and general wellbeing. School dropouts among girls are higher than boys and the risk of girls being married before the legal age is also much higher. As per the



21.3% women aged 20-24 years are married before the age of 18 years

National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4, 2015-16), 21.3 per cent women aged 20-24 years are married before the age of 18 years and women and girls are more likely to be undernourished than men.

C. State efforts to empower adolescent girls

The Government of Odisha has launched massive efforts to address the situation of child marriage in the State. It constituted a high-level Committee, under the chairpersonship of the Principal Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), to review the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 and Odisha Prohibition of Child Marriage Rules, 2009, and formulate and roll out the State Strategy to end child marriage.

'Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls' is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5) formulated by the United Nations in 2015. Action towards achievement of this goal would affect the outcomes of the other SDGs. Of the nine target areas of SDG 5, Target Area 3 spells out elimination of harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

The efforts being made by the Government of Odisha are in alignment with SDG 5, to eliminate child marriage from the State in a systematic and time-bound manner.

DWCD and Mission Shakti (MS), Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSCPCR), UNICEF, UNFPA and Mr. Ghasiram Panda¹ are members of this Committee. The Odisha Prohibition of Child

¹ Programme Manager at ActionAid



Marriage Rules, 2019 were resultantly formulated with specific amendments.

The Committee has wide representation, which includes Departments of Schools and Mass Education, Higher Education, ST and SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare, Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water, Home, Health and Family Welfare, Sports and Youth Services, Skill Development and Technical Education, Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disability and Law. The State also launched a multi-sectoral Strategic Action Plan (2019–24) to ensure coordinated efforts by multiple departments to eliminate child marriage. The High-level Committee tasked district administrations to develop contextualised District Action Plans (DAPs) for smooth implementation of the State Strategic Action Plan.



Notable efforts by the Government of Odisha after laying this crucial groundwork for ending child marriage have been:

Regular training of functionaries

More than 5,000 District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs), Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs), Protection Officers (POs) and District Child Protection Officers

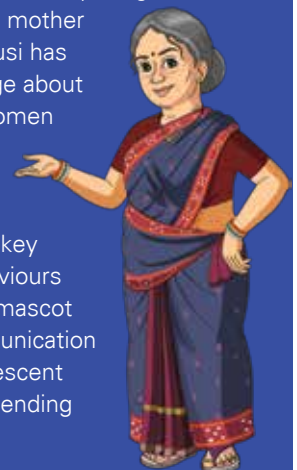
(DCPOs), One Stop Centre, CHILDLINE staff and supervisors have been trained on an ongoing basis. Even during the COVID-19 period, webinars and online training sessions have been conducted at state and district levels to continue the capacity building efforts across all 30 districts.

Issuing guidelines at district, block and panchayat levels

The guidelines mandate the formation and strengthening of District/Block/Panchayat Level Child Protection Committees/Task Forces on Adolescent Empowerment and Ending Child Marriage. They also provide a clear outline of roles and reporting formats for the Committees/Task Forces.

Tiki Mausi Kuhe!

Tiki Mausi, the mascot of DWCD, is a gregarious and empathetic protagonist. She is like a second mother to children. Tiki Mausi has extensive knowledge about issues related to women and children. She loves to talk to people and raise their awareness on key positive social behaviours and practices! The mascot ties together communication efforts around adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage.



Why is the 'Advika, Every Girl Is Unique' programme important?

While the efforts of the Government of Odisha have had a positive impact on the education, health and general wellbeing of adolescent girls, most schemes are targeted at select age groups among adolescent girls. To maximise the impact of all its schemes across adolescent girls of all ages, the State Government launched the 'Advika, Every Girl Is Unique' programme on October 11, 2020 on the occasion of International Girl Child Day. It is the best example of the highest political commitment towards adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage and all kinds of violence against children and women.

This State-wide programme, launched in partnership with UNICEF and UNFPA is envisaged as a renewed

'Advika' means **unique**. The programme aims to educate and empower every girl child who is unique and should be able to make her own decisions regarding her life.

commitment towards the empowerment of adolescent girls through education and life skills. The programme is a common and coordinated platform for linking all schemes targeted at all adolescent girls of Odisha in the 10-19 years age group, from rural and urban areas, in and out of school. It aims at making vibrant and adolescent friendly 'Kishori Diwas' (Saturday sessions) by imparting life skill education to deal with their day-to-day challenges and issues, and creating a space for girls to express themselves and find solutions to their problems. It provides them with the opportunity to become aware and connect with relevant social protection schemes for them and their families.

DWCD and MS conducted a week-long social media campaign on adolescent empowerment following the launch. Forty-two social media posts were shared on the Department's social media handles on the Advika launch, Tiki Mausi videos on issues of adolescent girls, quotes and videos by adolescent girls, and celebrity quotes. The posts also included content on online safety, helpline numbers, the Anganwadi Worker (AWW) pocket book and safe practices around COVID-19.



With a commitment to protect and nurture girls, community members and adolescent girls in Pipli in Puri district celebrate #DayOfTheGirl #Advika, Every Girl is Unique

Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2020

A two-day online training of trainers (ToT) was completed in December 2020. They then trained field level functionaries including Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), Supervisors and AWWs on the Advika resource package to be used during the weekly Kishori Diwas (on Saturdays).



Highest political commitment towards adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage

“I wholeheartedly support and appreciate the Advika programme. I am confident that the initiative will reach out to and benefit several families. In today’s concerning social scenario, I hope and believe that it will bring about a significant change. It will enable girls to fulfill their dreams and not neglect them. It will provide girls with a new perspective to life and their future. We can include all adolescent girls from rural and urban areas under one umbrella. The pocket book, calendar and videos have been launched keeping in mind that discussions on important topics as per the calendar will be held in the Saturday meetings. The programme aims at empowering girls to understand and practise life skills in their own lives thereby preparing them to face all odds, giving them courage, empowering them to voice their opinions and live on their own terms.”

Smt. Tukuni Sahu
Hon’ble Minister
W&CD and MS, Odisha

“Women and girls have always been at the centre of our State policies. By launching Advika, we hope to make a positive impact on adolescent health, nutrition and skills as well as protect adolescents from all kinds of violence. When they become mothers in the future, we will be able to see a difference in them because we would at least have prevented child marriage and ensured good nutrition for them in our efforts to tackle the challenges that come with young motherhood and early pregnancies.”

Smt. Anu Garg, IAS
Principal Secretary
DWCD and MS, Odisha

“Mission Shakti will be a very big part of the Advika programme. Our Self-help Groups (SHGs) have a very big role to play as mentors, monitors and counsellors in the community for girls and boys. Since most rural and urban women are part of the SHG network, every week they can find out who has dropped out of school and why and take steps to bring these girls back. Child marriage can also be monitored by the SHGs. SHGs can also monitor adolescent girls in tribal schools, hostels and institutions on a weekly or fortnightly basis. They can talk to the girls and support them to speak about issues that they are afraid of bringing up or reporting.”

Smt. Sujata Karthikeyan, IAS
Commissioner-cum-Director
Directorate of MS, Odisha

Advika - Each girl is unique
 Renewed Commitment for Adolescent Engagement
 in the State of Odisha on International Girl Child Day

Click & join the webinar | <https://unicef.zoom.us/j/95101334302>

UNFPA UNICEF for every child

“In line with the Mother and Child Protection (MCP) card, DWCD and MS is introducing the Kishori Card which will have information on weight, height, body mass index (BMI), haemoglobin level, consumption of Take Home Ration (THR), Iron Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation, referral and other services. It will also indicate important milestones in an adolescent girl’s life. Similarly, the Kishori Kalendar which is being released today will be used as a guide and will have reference topics for weekly discussion in the assembly of adolescent girls at the AWC level. Skill development is also being focused on by linking government schemes for 17-19 year old adolescent girls to empower them financially.”

Shri Aravind Agrawal, IAS

Director, ICDS and Social Welfare, DWCD and MS, Odisha

“Mission Shakti is empowering and transforming the lives of over seven million women in the State. Advika comes as a fitting complement to Mission Shakti by addressing the very specific needs of adolescent girls who are often neglected traditionally and not thought of as a priority. I am really convinced that dedicated programmes such as Advika, can play an instrumental role in empowering adolescent girls with life skills and enhancing agencies so that they are informed and consciously involved in decisions regarding their bodies, their lives, and their world. The meaningful engagement of girls at all levels fulfils their right to participation and can catalyse their leadership.”

Smt. Argentina Matavel Piccin

Representative, UNFPA, India and Country Director
 UNFPA, Bhutan

“Advika is really a noble way of bringing all the departments together to make the best impact for young people. Today we are here to renew our commitment to adolescents in Odisha, especially the young girls. We are committed to translating it into actions and all the sectors we work in will come together for that. UNFPA and UNICEF are really looking to partner with the State Government even stronger and we look forward to continuing to support the State Government’s amazing work. I would also like to congratulate the Government on the COVID-19 response, in ensuring that essential services, especially psychosocial care, reaches children and adolescents in these very difficult times.”

Dr. Yasmin Ali Haque

UNICEF Representative to India

Voices of adolescent girls

Leading the way!



Sixteen-year-old Chanchala Pujari hails from a tribal community in Khudiguda village, Borigumma block, Koraput district, Odisha. Her parents had planned to solemnise her marriage as per their tradition at the age of 13 when she was studying in class 7. Chanchala continuously opposed this move. However they went ahead and took her to the would-be groom's house. She was confined in a room while all arrangements were being made. Seeing no way to escape, Chanchala managed to call the 1098 CHILDLINE number and asked them to rescue her and stop her marriage. CHILDLINE came to her rescue and she was produced before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC).

The CWC rehabilitated her and asked her to enroll in the Semiliguda Ashrama School to continue her studies.

Chanchala is now in class 10 and lives in a hostel. She realised that other girls in her community faced similar challenges. As a young leader and change maker, she has been actively engaged in creating awareness on the issue of child marriage and mobilising adolescents. She motivates parents and community members to focus on continuing education of their children instead of getting them married at an early age.

She is an active member of the Aparajita campaign for adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage in Koraput district and is a member of the Balya Bibah Pratirodh Manch (BBPM), an adolescent platform to end child marriage promoted by the district administration with UNICEF support in partnership with ActionAid. She also challenges harmful social norms by supporting the district administration in the prohibition drive against the age-old *udulia* (elopement) practice. During COVID-19, Chanchala has been creating awareness among community members about safety measures to be taken.

Contributing to her community!



Nineteen-year-old Subhalaxmi Sethy, is pursuing her bachelor's degree and aspires to be a lawyer. She is from Borapada village of Dhenkanal district in Odisha. In 2016, while studying in class 10 at the age of 16, her parents were forcing her to marry because of pressure from relatives and their dire economic condition. Subhalaxmi knew that her parents were unable to meet her educational expenses. She also understood the general custom in her community to marry off girls soon after puberty. She was told that she would not find a good match if she continued with her studies. But Subhalaxmi knew that getting married so early was not good for her. She could not let her parents succumb to the

pressure created by neighbours and relatives and so she gathered the courage to resist. Subhalaxmi stood firm against her entire family and was finally able to convince her parents to continue her studies. She made them understand about the ill-effects of child marriage. Finally, her marriage was stopped. She says "My priority is to study. I want to achieve something in life before marriage."

She was inspired by the district administration's initiatives towards ending child marriage. As part of the BBPM, she has been trained and works to ensure that other adolescent girls can continue their studies and only marry after the legal age. She encourages them to become self-reliant. During COVID-19, she maintained vigilance on the situation of child marriage and also made people aware of the importance of sanitation, physical distancing and wearing masks. She says "I feel privileged to be a part of this work and serve my village and I feel happy to see community members giving a positive response. I have also been supporting learning of preschool kids through the Ghare Ghare Arunima programme. I feel so proud and happy when I see smiles on children's faces when I interact with them."



D. Key activities

Sensitisation and training of functionaries is imperative to set the programme in motion

- State level sensitisation and roll out plan: A virtual training for district functionaries on sensitisation and the roll out plan for Advika was organised. All 30 districts then identified master trainers to conduct training in cascade mode for field functionaries such as supervisors and AWWs.
- State Trainings of Master Trainers (ToMTs): The first 2-day State training was conducted virtually on 15 and 16 December, 2020 on adolescent empowerment tools, facilitation skills and the uses of Advika resources. Master trainers from all districts will be given quarterly training on various sessions/themes of the Kishori Kalendar.
- Project and sector level training: Master trainers will conduct monthly training for supervisors at project level. The supervisors will then train AWWs in monthly sector meetings.

Community level implementation

After being trained in a cascade mode, the AWWs will hold weekly Saturday sessions with adolescent girls on 'Kishori Diwas' as per a specified Kishori Kalendar.

- Every Saturday, adolescent girls in the village gather at Anganwadi Centres (AWCs).
- Two girls assigned as Sakhi and Saheli (peer leaders) to assist AWW in disseminating key messages and information to families and communities.
- AWW holds discussions to engage adolescent girls as per the Kishori Kalendar.
 - Weekly theme-based sessions using AWW pocket book, Kishori Barta, FAQs
 - Viewing sessions of short films and animated series
- AWW engages with adolescent boys in separate sessions and identifies peer volunteers who can set positive examples to challenge gender stereotypes and harmful social norms.

Monitoring and reporting mechanism

- CDPOs to monitor and report to DSWO
- DSWO to report to State Department using the structured reporting format/template
- State ToMTs will help in forming district-level resource groups to support district administrations in training, monitoring and reporting.

A **Management Information System (MIS)** is being developed to monitor Advika training and activities. It will include the following features:

- Detailed database of master trainers/resource groups and training details
- Details of mapping and tracking of adolescent girls along with monthly calendar sessions conducted in AWCs is captured in it
- Best practices, innovations, activities/sessions, case studies and photographs will also be captured.

Resource package

Kishori Barta is a booklet with key messages on various adolescent health, nutrition, personal hygiene and protection topics etc. to engage effectively with adolescents during weekly Saturday sessions.



Kishori Kalendar is an annual calendar that describes specific month-wise topics based on which AWWs hold weekly sessions with adolescents. Each month-specific theme is discussed followed by an audio-visual spot/comic/tool etc. The themes include: nutrition and anaemia; know your rights and related legislation; gender-based violence; adolescent reproductive and sexual health; relationship and marriage; financial literacy, education and skill development

AWW Pocket Book is an illustrative book which guides AWWs on communicating with adolescents on child protection issues such as child marriage, child trafficking, child sexual abuse, and child labour. It also includes information on gender equality, nutrition, health, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and online safety. It helps AWWs to hold separate gender sensitisation sessions with adolescent boys.



Ama Manara Kichi Prasna

is a booklet that addresses FAQs related to important themes and subjects concerning adolescent girls.



Multimedia package of 40 videos and animated films (new and adapted)

is a series of animated films, short videos, videos with the DWCD mascot 'Tiki Mausī', audio-visual spots, comics on various topics/themes mentioned in the adolescent calendar. These are used along with other communication materials during the weekly Saturday sessions.



E. Key stakeholders

Women's self-help groups (WSHGs)

Odisha has 70 million SHG members in seven lakh groups. They will play a crucial role in implementing Advika by supporting AWWs in tracking adolescent girls, ensuring that they attend school regularly and do not drop out, empowering girls so that they do not fall prey to child marriage, child labour, trafficking or other forms of violence, and engaging with adolescent boys to break gender stereotypes and challenge harmful social norms.

Gram Panchayat Child Protection Committee (GPCPC)

The Committee will discuss adolescent issues on a quarterly basis, support in preventing and addressing violations of child rights, popularise helpline numbers like CHILDLINE 1098, women's helpline, one-stop crisis centre, identify and link vulnerable children and their families with social protection schemes.

Peer leaders

AWWs will select one Sakhi and one Saheli to be peer leaders in the adolescent groups. They will motivate the children and

adolescents in the village to raise their voice, spread awareness on child protection issues, and report cases of child marriage, abuse, labour, trafficking etc. They will be selected on a rotation basis for six months, so that every girl gets a chance to build leadership skills. They will participate in quarterly GPCPC meetings and form sector level groups to assist AWWs, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and WSHGs in spreading awareness, community sensitisation and counselling. At the district level, they will also be members of the BBPM.

F. An exciting vision

The Advika programme is an umbrella to harness all the valuable efforts that have been conducted by the Government of Odisha to end child marriage and set adolescents on the path to empowerment. It supports the State Government's vision of convergence and sustained efforts to improve the lives of adolescent girls, empower them by providing leadership at the State level and working closely with communities at the ground level in a concerted way!



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**Department of Women & Child Development
and Mission Shakti**
Government of Odisha
Odisha State Secretariat
Sachivalaya Marg, Unit 2, Keshari Nagar
Bhubaneswar, Odisha 751001



UNICEF State Office for Odisha
Plot No. 44
Surya Nagar, Unit 7
Bhubaneswar 751003, Odisha, India
Tel: +91 0674 2397977, 0674 2397980