

## Reducing Child Marriage



*Photo: Children participating in a GVNML led Cultural Programme on child rights.*

Despite its illegality, it is estimated that in Rajasthan 50% of girls are married by the age of 18, but within Tonk district this figure can be much higher, partly due to the level of discrimination between male and female infants. It pushes children into early adulthood and gives them responsibilities they can't yet fulfil.

GVNML works with both the right holders and the duty bearers to stop this discriminatory practice believing in particular that by educating children in the perils of child marriage, the coming generation will be changed too.

Much of our work is focused on alliance building with local community organisations. Training is organised for Village Development Committee (VDC) members on the impact of child marriage and we support VDCs to stop the practice. GVNML holds discussions and orientations with Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) and Block Level Officials around child marriage and other child rights issues. Gram Panchayats attend quarterly interface meetings organised by Community Based Organisations, motivating them to take action at village level to stop upcoming child marriages. GVNML has set up Bal Vivah (child marriage) Vigilance Committees in 67 villages, which includes all Panchayat members and Panchayat level government officials in Mulpura and Toda blocks.

To reach the right holders, we find comic workshops are an effective way of engaging children and teachers. Cluster Resource Mobilisers teach the children how to make comic strips with stories based on child right issues including child marriage, which are then displayed in common areas and presented to community members. Cultural programmes performed by children attract hundreds of community members. Children attend a one day workshop to develop the programme theme and through the show communities understand more about their duties in protecting children.

It hard to see measurable impact from the stop child marriage programme. There are still very limited numbers of child marriages being reported to teachers and the government, and usually just one or two are stopped each year. Changing traditions which have been alive for hundreds of years is a slow process, and it is not just new laws that will change behaviour. It takes significant social efforts to make the smallest steps. We are committed to long term work to stop child marriage, evolving our strategy so that we can give children their childhoods back.