

Goal 5 : Gender Equality

Aim : Reducing Child Marriage in West Bengal (India)

Freedom Charity

Module Title : Social and Green Innovation

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Student Full Name : Ilham Belkacemi

Module Leader and Seminar Leader : Maria Granados

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Background about Child Marriage In India and West Bengal

Child marriage indicates any formal and informal marriage of a child, female or male, under 18 years of age. However, it disproportionately affects girls and is prohibited by international law (UNICEF, 2021). According to a 2019 UNICEF report, India is the second-most populous country in the world regarding child marriages. Around 1.5 million girls under 18 years old are married each year. The report also revealed that the prevalence of child marriage among Scheduled Tribe girls is the highest.

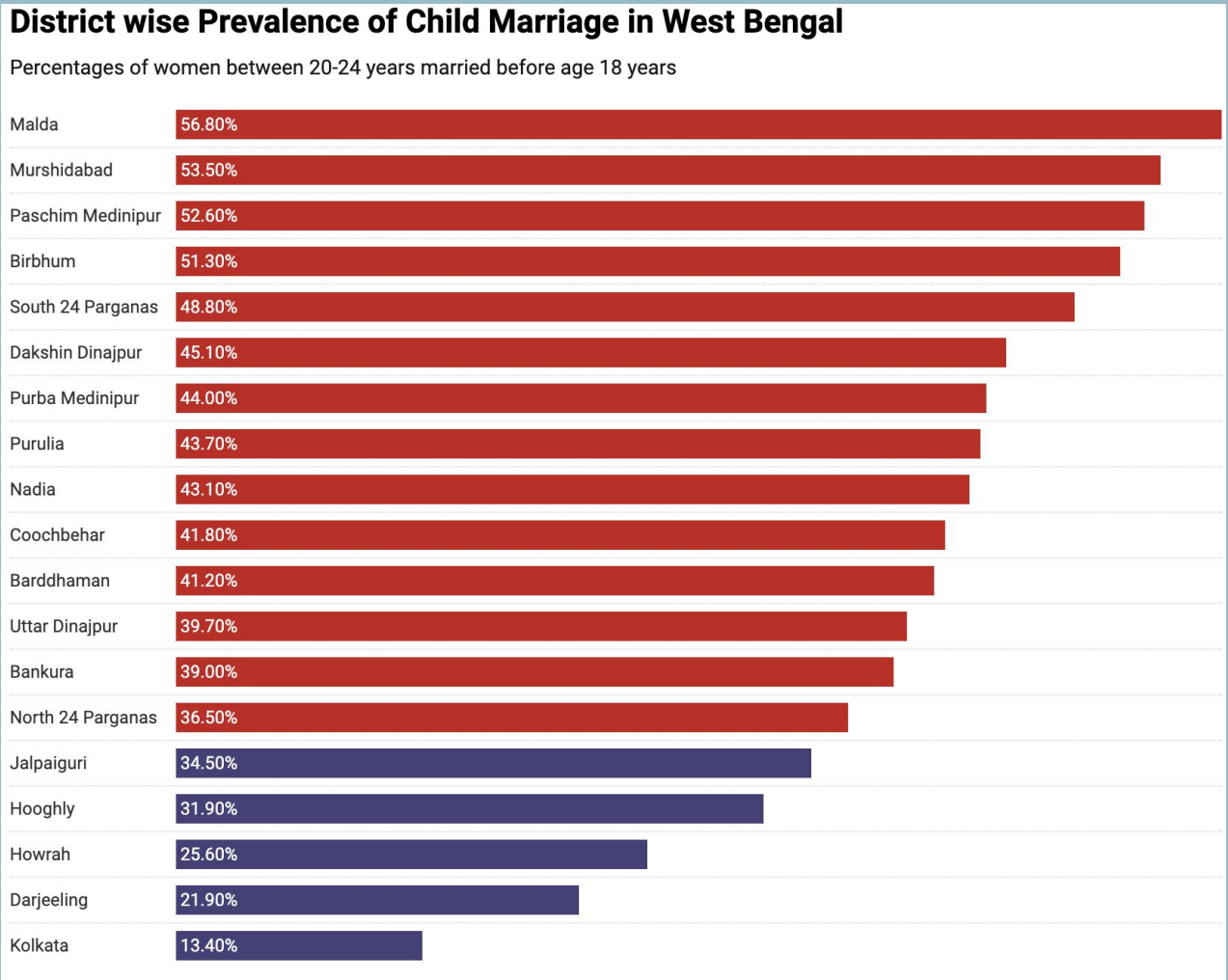


Figure 1 – District wise Prevalence of Child Marriage in West Bengal – Percentage of girls married before the legal age (Bhaduri, 2019)

The main factors that contribute to the increasing number of child marriages in India are the lack of education and parents' poverty as the belief that marrying is a way to secure the girl's future both socially and economically (Agrawal, 2018). West Bengal is one of the largest states in India and has the highest rate of child marriage, as reported in figure 1 and figure 2 (Bhaduri, 2019). The study by ICRW (2018) claimed that child marriage has various negative consequences on girls' health (Mentally and Physically), lack of education and no financial independence.

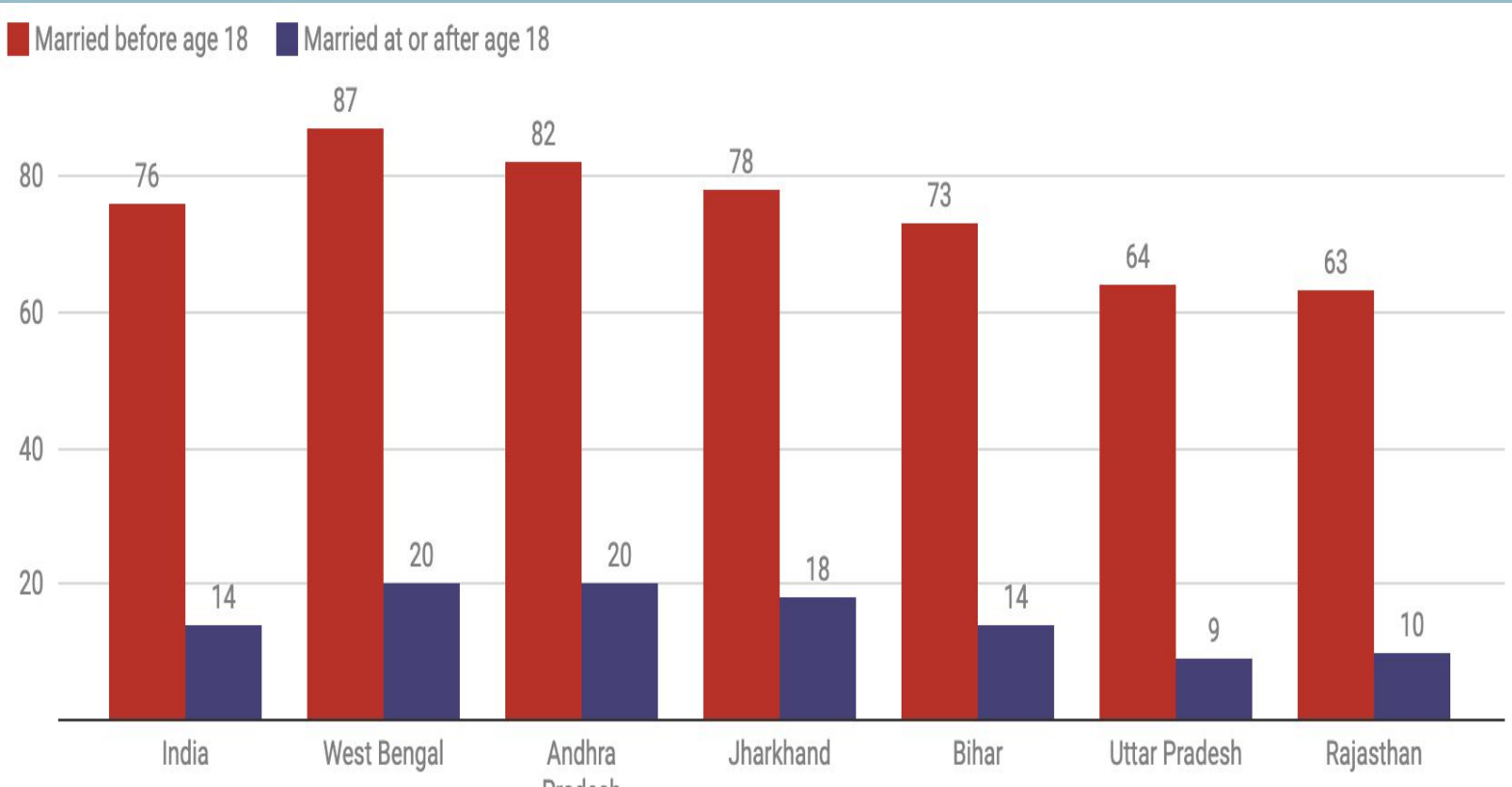


Figure 2 – Early childbearing between Child Brides and Non-child Brides in India and selected states – Percentages of married women who gave birth before age 20 (Bhaduri, 2019).



Introduction about Freedom Charity

The innovative solution that will be demonstrated in reducing child marriage in West Bengal is a charity named "Freedom Charity", led by educated women and men to raise awareness between families and girls. Chose both genders because men will be talking with father figures, and women will support the girls.

Charity Goals:

Freedom charity's primary goals are to foster awareness between girls, families and communities. Besides this, following up with Indian police to report any child marriage is the effective primary strategy of freedom charity to track data and follow up with legal authorities. This will reduce child marriage by positively impacting girls' development perspective, the social level and economic level.



Freedom charity aspires to contribute toward the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality).



The Potential Impact of Freedom Charity

Freedom charity will create social and economic impacts by raising awareness between girls and families. Furthermore, following up with the Indian police will reduce child marriage, positively impacting the economy and society's behaviours.



Freedom Charity will have a positive social impact on the communities, including families, women, and girls, by having comprehensive education for girls and women. It will have a progressive effect on their household welfare and educational attainment. Furthermore, which will enable them to become self-empowered and earn a living. Besides this, a noticeable improvement in the health of the Tribes girls and a reduction in the harmful practice toward girls.

Aside from being a critical issue for girl's development, ending child marriage also has economic implications. According to the IMF Working paper (2020), reducing child marriage will significantly improve economic growth and boost the country's long-term economic growth by 0.66 percentage points (Mitra et al., 2020). Moreover, the World Bank and ICRW (2017) research noted that ending child marriage will have economic benefits. Also, it demonstrated that the country could achieve various development goals by reducing its fertility rate and improving the health of its children. which will lead to increased productivity and shifting in demographic dividend with a significant impact on national budgets and welfare (the World Bank, 2017)

- Measuring the Social Impact created by the social Innovation —

What is the problem the charity is trying to solve?

Freedom charity aims to reduce child marriage in districts in West Bangal by supporting and raising awareness among girls and families. Plus, following up with the Indian police.

<u>The charity expected result</u>			<u>Charity plan</u>	
Impact	Outcomes	Outputs	Activities	Inputs
What will change in the long term? Reducing child marriage in West Bengal will have a positive impact on education and the health of girls	What will change in the medium term? Supporting girls by raising awareness in school and conducting events for families. Besides this, building a solid relationship with Indian police and lawyers.	What will change in the short term? The girls will start to be aware of the consequences of child marriage and learn how to defend their rights.	What are the charity doing to bring about change? Works through a unique strategy to stop school drop-out and end an early marriage by empowering women through education by engaging girls in various social interactions. Besides this, ensuring the laws and policies are implemented.	What do we invest into the project ? Professional Lawyers, Police, UNICEF, a wide range of programmes invest in girls, their participation, and well-being, using media to inform and support norm change to end child marriage.
Indicadores: Noticeable advancement in the overall health of the tribe girls and reduction in harmful practice toward girls.	Indicadores: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Lower dropout rates. •Increased years of schooling, •Families, communities and young people are involved in transforming attitudes and manners related to child marriage. 	Indicadores: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Girls are increasingly conscious of their rights. •Girls have the prospect of developing solidarity with one another through peer groups and collaborative action. 	Indicadores: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •High engagement with education. •Health and legal sectors that are integrated and focused on ending child marriage. •Supportive policies and resources help girls avoid child marriage and increase educational, economic and social opportunities. 	Indicadores: Increasing donations from UNICEF and Crowdfunding (Donation Based)

Relative Advantage

The majority of Child Marriage charities in West Bangal (India) focus on the same goal, which is raising awareness and empowering girls regarding child marriage. However, a crucial factor, those charities are not following up with the government and Indian police in that region to report any wedding ceremony and track child marriage data. Freedom Charity's relative advantage is following up with the Indian police to stop any wedding ceremony and penalise families who broke the rules. Furthermore, implementing the law is the only right thing to do as well as it has a positive impact on girls' families and supports them by breaking the cycle of tradition.



Compatibility

Religion has a significant role in the decisions regarding child marriage. Family members, religious leaders, and other individuals play various positions during the wedding ceremonies, and these leaders are typically the ones who are most trusted by the community.

Girls are not allowed to have a conversation or defend their rights with their fathers. In India, it is known that a patriarchal society has a dominant role for women, and there are strict gender roles, with women often having a passive role.

The diffusion of the Social Innovation - Freedom Charity-

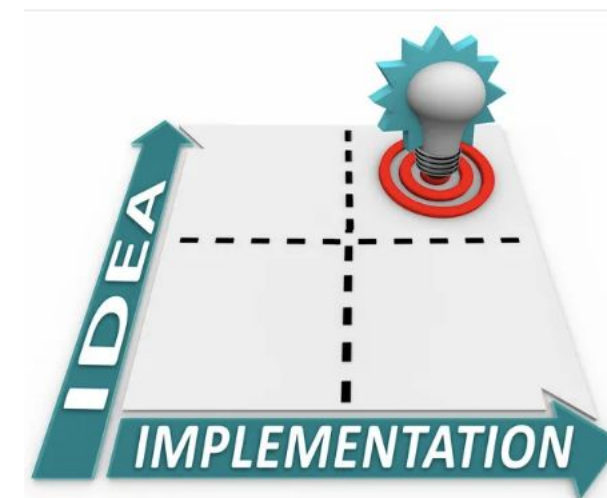
Complexity

According to the research, various charities have similar programmes to reduce child marriage in West Bangal. However, the main difference between Freedom charity and other charities in West Bangal focuses on various issues such as trafficking. Moreover, second-generation prostitution and child marriage in two red light areas of Kolkata, learning about the government hotline number to call when a child is in danger (Girls not brides, 2017). In comparison, Freedom Charity only focuses on one issue, child marriage, by raising awareness and following up with Indian Police which is the most crucial to reducing child marriage and eliminating it. Furthermore, the research and charities reports indicate that the Charities based in West Bengal slightly impact reducing child marriage because of the lack of following up and poor strategies (Bhaduri, 2019). Overall, The innovation is easy to be implemented in West Bengal.



Trialability

Freedom Charity is not a new innovation in India (General) and West Bengal (specifically) because there are already former charities that share the same concepts, which means the innovation is acceptable and trailed previously; the famous leading charities tackling child marriage in India are Saarthi Trust, Aangan Trust and IHMP (the Borgen Project, 2019). The main difference is that the new charity will focus on reducing child marriage by following effective strategies.



Observability

Firstly, the new charity concept will be introduced to the tutors because will be approaching girls by conducting events in schools. According to the researcher by Commonwealth Foundation (2016), tutors in West Bangal are open to eliminating child marriage and aware of the consequences of it). After introducing the concept to the tutors and visiting schools, the first session will invite a person who experienced child marriage, received support from a similar charity, and has a success story that will build trust between girls and schools.

Secondly, most of the families in West Bangal are aware that child marriage is illegal. To stop that will be conducting events outdoors in the villages, and the speakers will be men from the charity.



After introducing the concept and conducting the event, the families, girls and tutors will observe what the charity will be working on; through that, the charity will build a strong relationship with the community and get accreditation.



The Business Model Canvas

Freedom Charity

Key Partners:

UNICEF :



The UNICEF will be an essential partner because it will influence the charity by strengthening the services that allow the charity to implement its activities and support the charity financially (ENPA, 2021), as explained below:

- UNICEF India will provide financial support to the charity. For example, the Programmes by UNICEF are highly supported by the governments of various countries (the UK, Belgium, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, the European Union and Zonta international).
- UNICEF can involve working with various government agencies. Besides this, a global programme will accelerate action to End Child Marriage (UNICEF, no date).
- UNICEF is implementing an “End Child Marriage” project in a few districts in India which is an excellent opportunity for the charity to collaborate in this project to reduce child marriage in West Bengal as it is the common goal of the charity and UNICEF as it shared same activities which are: engaging the girls with life skills package, engaging the parents, community persons, religious leaders to reduce child marriage (UNICEF, 2020).

Indian Police:

The charity's primary goal is to reduce child marriage in West Bengal by following up with the proper authorities, such as the police. Having the Indian Police as a partner will help the charity report any child marriage happening around West Bengal to the police to stop the wedding ceremony.

Donors (Rich Families and Business):

The donations from Rich Families and Businesses will support the charity by providing high standard activities to raise awareness between girls and communities. Besides this, donations will help the charity provide all the essential resources.



Lawyers:

Lawyers will have a massive role in providing advice regarding charity commissions' various activities and keeping up with India's charity law developments. We will also help girls defend their rights.

Educated women and men:

The charity must be led by educated men and women that know the law, human rights, child protection and women's developments to provide suitable strategies to prevent child marriage in West Bengal.

Educated women will have an influential role in understanding girls' needs and wants. Besides this, it is easy and comfortable for girls to open up with activists of the same gender.

Educated men will have considerable importance in the charity to engage men and boys to support gender equality. Furthermore, they will support boys, fathers, brothers, future husbands' uncles, religious leaders e to change their attitude toward child marriage. It is practical to deliver the main message to men of the same gender without debates.

The Business Model Canvas

Freedom Charity

Key Partners:

Tutors:

Tutors play a massive role in keeping girls in school and track the attendance by reporting if there are any increases or decreases in the attendance to the charity. Besides this, ensuring accessing essential social services for girls at risk of marriage and raising awareness in communities together with the charity.

Crowdfunding

(Donations-based)

Through Crowdfunding (Financial support), the charity can raise funds and cover its costs without resorting to harsh economic measures.



Key Activities:

Running events to empower girls and raise awareness about child marriage through activities below:

- Helping the girls further to be educated about the consequences of child marriage through events at schools, conducted by educated Indian women and inviting people who experienced Child Marriage.
- Helping to reunite the girls with their families and communities and providing psychological counselling to reduce child marriage through discussion/ debate between girls and their families.



Education and teaching programmes:

- Teaching them about empowerment to defend their rights.
- Educating the parents and community members about child marriage to prevent it from happening to others in the future and getting their support for annulments through outdoors events in the villages, conducted by educated Indian women and men. Besides this, debates between women and men regarding child marriage.

Following up with Indian police and authorities by implementing the activities below:

- Creating platforms for police to regularly engage with women and girls to address issues that impact girls.
- Working with principals and other educators to ensure they know what to do when a girl student is at risk.

Building relationships with UNICEF and Doners for financial support:

The relationship will be built online and in-person with UNICEF. For instance: arranging a meeting with UNICEF to introduce charity and its strategies.

The relationship will be built with doners, funders online and on-site:

- Online: Community building through social media
- On-site: Event Management – Generating and promoting donations through on-site events with communities to maximise the effectiveness of these events

The Business Model Canvas

Freedom Charity

Key Resources

- Educational Materials, tools and information to support the youth-led initiative included information and resources for donors and women activists.
- Fundraising Staff
- Volunteers
- Office
- Car because will need to visit families and girls for individual discussion and check-ups.
- Equipment (laptop, chairs, tables, internet and mobiles)

Value Propositions:

Creating sustainable social change in West Bengal by teaching former child brides and girls about other options, Freedom charity can change the norms surrounding child marriage by achieving the aims below:

- Raising awareness between families and girls to reduce child marriage in West Bengal in India
- Following up and reporting to the Indian police about any illegal ceremony wedding

Customer Relationships:

The relationship will be built in person **with girls, families, schools, police, and online with volunteers**. For example:

- Mentoring and teaching about child marriage in classes on site
- Rewards and incentives to families and girls who report any wedding ceremony
- Creating a campaign (Volunteering forms) to be filled up online via social media, then seeking the willing volunteers by conducting meetings with them to introduce the charity's strategies.
- The charity staff will visit schools to introduce the charity and agreement to have access to schools to raise awareness.

Channels:

Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, website and campaigns):

- Social Media is a vital platform for Freedom charity to keep up with conversations among users to engage them with the aim of the charity, and it is crucial. Besides this, advertising the charity to be known nationally and globally
- Creating websites containing all information about the charity.
- Setting up a link to be shared on social media to collect donations (Donation Accepted Online)
- Events will be conducted in schools and outdoors by announcement through newspapers and social media.

Customer Segments:

- Former Girls Bride
- Families
- Schools

Cost Structure :

- Site facilities costs.
- Staff services and Benefits (for non-volunteers staff).
- Programmes / Events Deliver
- Information technologies dedicated to infrastructures and operations, plus (charities supplies).
- Marketing (Campaigns Cost) .
- Hiring events places and food costs.

Revenue Streams:

Mainly Donations by:

- UNICEF (Financial Support)
- Crowdfunding (Donation Based)



Conditions that may influence the innovation

Freedom Charity

Competencies:

Right people with the right skills to lead the charity in West Bengal

- Recruiting Women who have undergraduate degree awardees across West Bengal in India. Kanwal (2022) stated that over 150,000 female students graduate from universities in West Bengal compared to male graduates who are considerably less.
- Collaboration with law associations to help the charity connect with Powerful Women in law to guide the charity legally and boost the charity for Hope and Justice. The research showed that various institutions in West Bengal are in support of Gender Equality, such as Advocate Shilpi Das & AK legal Advisors, RD Lawyers & Associates Advocate Maity (Legal Advisor, 2020).
- Inviting the most successful females in women's advocacy who have a good background in human rights and women's rights activists in India , which are:



Vrinda Grover :She has also represented various human rights cases, including domestic and sexual violence and victims of communal violence. She has also appeared in court cases related to the extrajudicial killings carried out in India. She was also named one of the most influential individuals in the world in 2013 by the Times magazine (the better India, 2022).



Flavia Agnes: She advises the government on the implementation of laws. She and her co-founder, Madhushree Dutta, are the co-founders of Majlis, a legal and cultural resource centre that provides legal services to women (the better India, 2022).

Meenakshi Arora: She was part of the committee that drafted the regulations regarding sexual harassment and discrimination against women lawyers at the Supreme Court of India. The regulations were issued in 2013 to provide adequate protection to women lawyers (The better India , 2022)



Conditions that may influence the innovation

Freedom Charity

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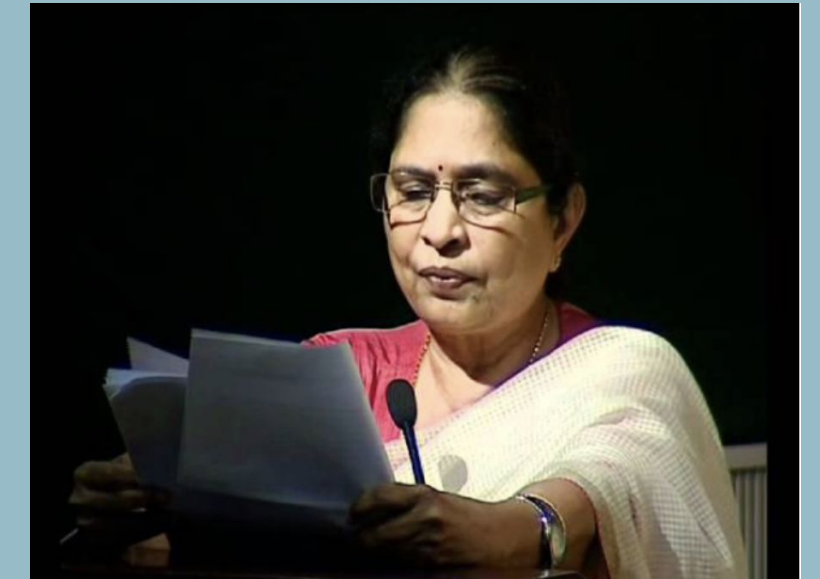
The events will be held by experienced Indian leaders who agreed to end child marriage to deliver an influential message to girls during the events (Girls not brides, no date).



Leila Seth: Former Chief Justice



**Sharmila Tagore :Actor and UNICEF
Goodwill Ambassador**



**Shantha Sinha: Chairperson of the
National Commission for Protection of
Child Rights**

Conditions that may influence the innovation

Freedom Charity

Economic Inducement Mechanism:

The local demand mainly from girls require support and help to continue their education, be financially independent to support themselves and defend their rights (UNICEF, no date) because West Bangal is driven by the low status of girls and a lack of education and economic opportunities for girls and women (UNICEF, no date)

Girls seem to be open to receiving support regarding preventing child marriage; according to the UNICEF report for every child (no date), the girl’s attitude has shifted against child marriage. They are aware of the minimum age of marriage. Furthermore, girls seek help and guidance in case of arranged child marriage. Moreover, the high demand of girls was able to resist child marriage through the support received from Child Marriage charities, such as the Kanyashree Prakalpa charity. (UNICEF, no date). As shown in figure 3 that female drop-out from school (Primary level and secondary level) have decreased, which shows a positive impact on how open to accepting support from Charites that are working on preventing child marriage.

School year	Drop-out rate for girls after grade 8 (at upper primary level)	Drop-out rate for girls at secondary level	Transition rate for girls from secondary to higher secondary level
2014–2015	3.1%	19.8%	69.3%
2015–2016	2.9%	19.1%	64.2%
2016–2017	6.7%	27.3%	74.2%
2017–2018	0.0%	15.1%	78.0%
2018–2019	0.0%	19.6%	73.9%
2019–2020	0.0%	13.6%	76.2%

Figure 3 – Female drop-out and transition rates (UDISE)

Raising awareness about child marriage in West Bengal has raised public awareness and positively affected families to be aware of the consequence of child marriage (UNICEF, no date). However, through the years, Families, specifically father figures, are not becoming open to adopting the support from charities, as the UNICEF report for every child (no date) noted that despite the availability of cash transfers by current charities and authorities. Moreover, the lack of proper services for the education and employment of girls in West Bengal has been identified as a significant cause of child marriages. As the families require, this issue can be solved by establishing more effective services that help girls transit into work (UNICEF, no date).



Conditions that may influence the innovation

Freedom Charity Institutions:

Religious institutions:

Religion plays a crucial role in the decision-making process regarding child marriage (Marshal, 2018). Family members and religious leaders play various roles in the ceremonies and rituals of marriage because religious leaders are often trusted above the other groups of leaders (Marshal, 2018).

The table shows that the prevalence of child brides among Hindus is higher than in other religions. for the other religions, the child bride incidence is more minor, except for Buddhists and Muslims residing in urban areas. This is also an interesting finding as the Buddhists rank higher in this category than the Hindus. According to Girls, not brides’ charity (2022) claimed that working with religion is complex because of the different beliefs in each religion.

For instance, in some countries, such as Lebanon, religious and customs law young women to marry at the age of 9, and in Israel, girls can get married at 12 (Girls not brides’ charity, 2022). Similarly, child marriage is illegal in India, but the practice is seen as an ancestral tradition and deeply rooted and widely accepted in the Hindu religion, which led to the Hindu priest, called “wedding Pandit” in India (Planning a Hindu Wedding, 2022), and the majority of them accept to conduct the traditional wedding ceremony “child Marriage “(Sharma et al., 2013)

religion	total	rural	urban
buddhist	.969	.91	1.127
christian	.627	.615	.679
hindu	1.0268	1.0235	1.017
jain	.686	.835	.716
muslim	.975	.983	1.003
sikh	.674	.53	.737

Figure 3 – Comparative statistic of child Brides below 19 years of age (Prashant, 2016)



Conditions that may influence the innovation

Freedom Charity Institutions:

Legal authorities:

The explanation below demonstrates the challenges and the issues within Government and Police in India as there is a correlation between the authorities to implement the laws:

Despite a law prohibiting girls from getting married before they turn 18 (, it is still deeply rooted in tradition (Finnigan, 2019). Although it is regarded as a crime, it is rarely reported. Officials are reluctant to prosecute offenders, evident in the existing crime records (Thukral and Ali, 2010). For example, the number of cases of child marriage registered in the last ten years is far less than the outdated DLHS and NFHS (Thukral and Ali, 2010).

It is also found that the officials of the child Marriage Prohibition Department hold other responsibilities; to meet the requirement of law related to child marriage, officials must focus on the child marriage issue. In Haryana, the department of women and Child Marriage employed a full-time protection cum child marriage prohibition officer on a contract basis for each District to meet the requirement of the PWDV and PCMA on stroke.17, which made it challenging to keep up with child marriage and conflicting laws with poor implementation (Thukral and Ali, 2010)

Overall:

The implementation of the law and legal efforts have failed to break the stranglehold of traditions that continues child marriage (Finnigan, 2019). Similarly, West Bangel has the same challenges at a regional and national level as the statistics show the highest rate of child marriage in the Malda districts in West Bangel (Bhaduri, 2019) (Figure 1)

Conclusion

After deep research, child marriage is a complex issue in India and West Bengal specifically as it has the highest child marriage. Child marriage is related to various issues in India, such as culture and tradition, poverty and lack of education. Each issue has to be solved by a specific authority. The various research showed that charities are working on preventing child marriage through various schemes and programmes to support girls' development.

Similarly, Freedom charity will focus on girls' physical and mental health and raise awareness among communities. Freedom charity will focus on tracing child marriage data in West Bengal Districts and following up with legal authorities.

Furthermore, this is a suitable innovation to end child marriage. It will be achieved and possible to protect young girls from child marriage if all the various stakeholder groups, including government, educational, and community organizations, come together. Moreover, the Indian government must be more innovative in getting the message out and applying penalties.



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