

Towards a Child Marriage-Free Society – A Social and Sustainable Goal

Yuva Rural Association: People-Centric. Justice-Oriented.

Yuva Rural Association (YRA) has been actively working across the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra for the past two decades on various social issues. For the **last two years**, YRA has been engaged in community-based work focusing on social justice, gender equality, and child rights protection in **Washim and Latur** districts. Under the “**Access to Justice for Children**” initiative, YRA directly addresses **critical issues such as child marriage**, child sexual abuse and assault, and child trafficking (including child labor, missing children, found children, and child beggars).

Child Marriage: A Serious Social Issue

According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5.3), ending child marriage by 2030 is a global target.

As per the “Marriage Profile of Progress in India 2023,” **34% of girls in India are married before 18**, meaning **one in every three girls is a child bride**.
(Source: NFHS-5)



What Does SDG 5.3 Say?

SDG 5.3 clearly states:

"Eliminate all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage by 2030."

The goal to **bring child marriage down to 0** is not just a slogan—it is a **fight for girls' rights to life, participation, development, and protection**, and their **right to health and education**.



Why Does Child Marriage Happen?

Key reasons behind child marriage include:

- ✓ Economic poverty
- ✓ Lack of education
- ✓ Deep-rooted traditions
- ✓ Fear for girls' safety

✓ Migration and vulnerable families

- **A newly emerging reason:** Overuse of **social media** and **digital pressure**

While technology is useful for education and communication, **excessive use of mobile phones** is leading adolescents in the wrong direction. The unrestricted presence of minors on smartphones, social media, and messaging apps fosters **misinformation about relationships**, impulsive behavior, and a mindset inclined toward child marriage.

Sometimes, online “relationships” rapidly escalate into decisions about marriage, putting **parental and social pressure** that is hard to resist.

This web of factors is so complex that legal measures alone are insufficient—**it demands action**—which some organizations are actively undertaking.

What Needs to Be Done?

- Strict enforcement of child protection laws
- Widespread social awareness and community involvement
- Girls' education and empowerment
- Local-level interventions
- Emotional education with digital literacy

YRA's Local-Level Interventions – Concrete Actions

Project Areas:

100 villages in Washim and Latur districts

Washim is part of the **Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP)**, which identifies 150–200 districts that lag in health, nutrition, education, infrastructure, and poverty. The aim is focused, holistic development.



Key Interventions by YRA

1. Identifying High-Risk Villages

Work initiated in villages with high prevalence of child marriage.

2. Awareness Campaigns

Conducted in schools, colleges, village meetings, and with local communities.

3. Mass Pledge Drive

Over 30,000 villagers pledged: ***“I will not support child marriage – neither will I allow it.”***

4. Training Village Child Protection Committees

Committees trained in laws, prevention strategies, and intervention skills.

5. Participation in ‘Child Marriage-Free India’ Campaign (2023)

Candle marches, awareness rallies, oath ceremonies, information about legal consequences.

6. Identification and Intervention with At-Risk Girls

Identified **600 girls** from migrant, poor, and uneducated families; provided **counseling to their families**.

Successfully **prevented 700 child marriages**.

7. Engagement with Religious Leaders

Collaborated with leaders of all religions to collectively resolve against child marriage.

Displayed posters at religious and public places:

“Child marriages do not happen here – We will not conduct or support them.”

Expected and Observed Outcomes

- Girls continued their education due to prevented child marriages
- Improvement in health and self-confidence
- Legal and emotional awareness against child marriage spread in society

Community Participation



The community recognized child rights as a **shared responsibility** and actively participated in the campaign.

Challenges and Future Direction

For sustainable outcomes, the following are essential:

- Strict enforcement of laws
- Long-term dialogue with parents and youth
- Assured access to secondary education
- Change in family and societal mindsets
- Inclusion of adolescent girls' voices in local decision-making

A Call to Action: Step Forward to Save a Generation

Child marriage is not just a social issue—it's a threat to **the lives of girls and the progress of the nation.**

**Support YRA's Child Rights Campaign –
Saving one girl builds a better society.**

👉 For more information, visit: www.yraindia.org

 *Pallavi Chikare-*

Voices from the Field:



Saddam Sattar Sheikh

*Project Coordinator,
Yuva Rural association*

"Child marriage is an inhumane practice that violates the future of young children. Its eradication is a collective responsibility of us all. Only through education, public awareness, and strict enforcement of the law can we put an end to this vicious cycle."



Diwakar Deshmukh

***Project Coordinator,
Yuva Rural association***

"Even after 75 years of independence, we are still failing to protect the rights of children — a fact that is deeply distressing."