



Department of Women and  
Child Development  
Government of Odisha

# ODISHA STATE STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN TO END CHILD MARRIAGE ( 2 0 2 4 - 2 0 2 9 )





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## MESSAGE

**Shri Mohan Charan Majhi**  
Chief Minister,  
Government of Odisha



The strength of a society is measured by how well it protects and nurtures its children. Child marriage is not just a violation of rights, it is a roadblock to progress, depriving our children of education, health, and the opportunity to shape their own future. Children must be at the core of a nation's perspective for progress. Their dreams shape the future we aspire to build. Odisha has always believed in nurturing its children, and we have come a long way in our fight against child marriage.

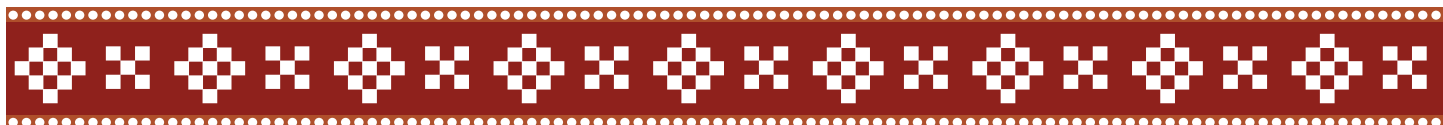
Over the years, Odisha has made remarkable progress in reducing child marriage through focused interventions in education, adolescent empowerment, legal reforms, and community engagement. As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), child marriage in Odisha has declined to 20.5%, a testament to the collective efforts of our people, government, and partners. But even one child marriage is one too many. Our mission does not end until every child has the freedom to grow, learn, and shape their destiny. The Odisha State Strategic Action Plan (OSSAP) 2024-2029 is a bold step in this direction, reinforcing our commitment to eliminating child marriage by addressing its root causes. This plan integrates legal measures, community-driven initiatives, and adolescent empowerment programs to create lasting change. When we invest in our children, we invest in Odisha's future.

Ending child marriage is not just a government mission- it is a collective responsibility. Parents, teachers, community leaders, and every citizen of Odisha must come together to ensure that no child is forced into marriage. We cannot let social practice be a barrier to progress. It is time to challenge orthodox mindsets and replace them with new opportunities.

I call upon every parent, teacher, community leader, and citizen to stand together as changemakers. Let us build an Odisha where daughters become doctors, engineers, and leaders where sons champion gender equality and where every child has the chance to soar.

The winds of change are already blowing. Let us not stop now. I urge all stakeholders to work with dedication and commitment in implementing this action plan. Let us move forward together towards a child marriage-free Odisha, an Odisha, where every girl is educated, every child is empowered, and every future is bright.

  
**Shri Mohan Charan Majhi**





## MESSAGE

### **Smt. Pravati Parida**

Deputy Chief Minister,  
Minister of Women and Child Development,  
Mission Shakti, Tourism, Government of Odisha



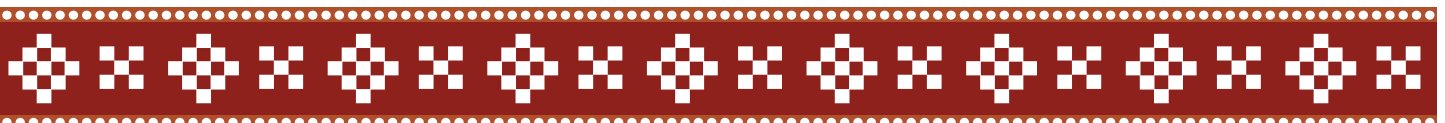
It gives me immense pride to present the Odisha State Strategic Action Plan 2024-2029 to end child marriage. The plan marks a significant step in our journey toward eradicating this harmful practice and empowering our adolescents to lead lives of dignity, health, and opportunity.

Child marriage is not just a violation of human rights but also a practice that perpetuates poverty and gender inequality. This action plan aims to address the root causes, such as limited access to education, restrictive gender norms, and socio-economic barriers, reflecting our Government's dedication to create a brighter and more equitable future for the youth of Odisha.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to UNICEF and all our development partners for their invaluable support in designing and formulating this comprehensive plan. Their expertise and collaboration have been instrumental in shaping a roadmap that is not only ambitious but also actionable.

As the saying goes, *'It takes a village to raise a child,'* and in this mission, it will take the concerted efforts of our entire society to end child marriage. I urge all stakeholders to join hands and work relentlessly to ensure that every child in Odisha can grow up free from the burden of early marriage and its consequences. Together, we can and will create a society where every child's rights are protected and cherished.

  
**Smt. Pravati Parida**





## FOREWORD

**Smt. Shubha Sarma, IAS**

Principal Secretary

Department of Women and Child Development

Government of Odisha



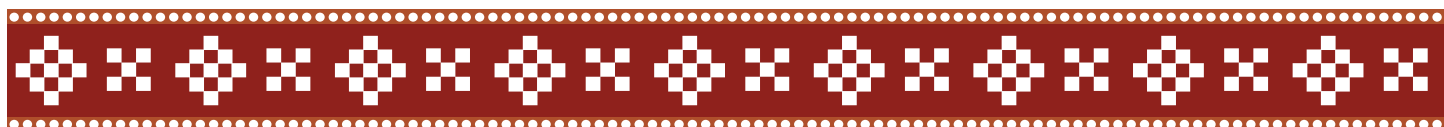
Child marriage continues to be a significant barrier to achieving gender equality, social justice, and equitable and inclusive development. Odisha has achieved important milestones in many sectors. However the persistence of this social evil underlines the need for a concerted and multi-sectoral approach. The Odisha State Strategic Action Plan (OSSAP) 2024-2029 to End Child Marriage is a comprehensive framework that reflects the Department of Women and Child Development's commitment to tackle the multifaceted drivers of child marriage through an integrated and inclusive approach.

This action plan builds on the lessons from OSSAP 2019-2024, addressing challenges and strengthening initiatives for more impactful outcomes. The goal of the OSSAP 2024-2029 is to create an environment where every adolescent can have access to opportunities for growth and empowerment through collaborations across government agencies, civil society, community organisations, development partners, private sector and all other stakeholders. It highlights critical areas such as education, healthcare, gender equality, and legal enforcement to identify and address the root causes of child marriage effectively.

Ending child marriage is not merely a legal mandate, a policy directive, or a goal on paper. It is a commitment to uphold the dignity, health, and future of our adolescents and children. I urge all stakeholders to come together, engage actively, and contribute to the successful implementation of this action plan. I take this opportunity to extend my sincere appreciation to UNICEF, UNFPA and other development partners for their critical role in supporting the Department in the formulation of this strategic plan. With the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders, I am confident we will achieve a child marriage-free Odisha, ensuring every child's right to grow, learn, and thrive.

Together, we can make this vision a reality.

**Smt. Shubha Sarma**





## MESSAGE

**Smt Monisha Banerjee, IAS**

Director, ICDS & Social Welfare,  
Department of Women and Child Development  
Government of Odisha



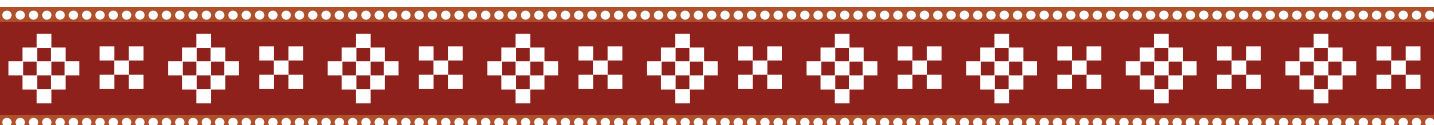
It is with great dedication and commitment that we present the Odisha State Strategic Action Plan (OSSAP) 2024-29, a comprehensive roadmap aimed at ensuring the well-being, protection, and empowerment of children, women, and vulnerable communities across the state. This plan highlights the Government of Odisha's unwavering commitment to strengthening Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and advancing social welfare initiatives that address critical issues such as maternal and child nutrition, early childhood care and education, adolescent empowerment, gender equality, child protection, and the prevention of child marriage and child labour.

Odisha has made significant advancements in improving child and maternal health, reducing malnutrition, and promoting gender-responsive policies. However, challenges persist, particularly in addressing intergenerational poverty, harmful social norms, and access to quality services for the most marginalized populations. OSSAP 2024-29 has been developed with a multi-sectoral and community-driven approach, integrating the voices of stakeholders from the grassroots to the policy level. It focuses on strengthening service delivery, enhancing community participation, building institutional capacities, and leveraging technology for effective monitoring and impact assessment.

This action plan is not just a policy document; it is a collective vision that calls for coordinated efforts among government departments, development partners, civil society organizations, and community-based groups. By cultivating collaboration, accountability, and innovation, we aim to create an enabling environment where every child, woman, and family in Odisha has the opportunity to thrive.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all stakeholders, including field functionaries, policy experts, and community leaders, who have contributed to shaping this strategy. Together, let us work towards a more inclusive, equitable, and empowered Odisha, where every child is nurtured, every woman is empowered, and every family has the resources to lead a life of dignity and security.

**Smt Monisha Banerjee**



## **ABBREVIATIONS**

|     |               |                                            |
|-----|---------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | <b>ASHA</b>   | Accredited Social Health Activist          |
| 2.  | <b>AWW</b>    | Anganwadi Worker                           |
| 3.  | <b>CMPO</b>   | Child Marriage Prohibition Officer         |
| 4.  | <b>CSR</b>    | Corporate Social Responsibility            |
| 5.  | <b>DWCD</b>   | Department of Women and Child Development  |
| 6.  | <b>GPCPC</b>  | Gram Panchayat Child Protection Committees |
| 7.  | <b>GPDP</b>   | Gram Panchayat Development Plan            |
| 8.  | <b>ITIs</b>   | Industrial Training Institutes             |
| 9.  | <b>MIS</b>    | Management Information System              |
| 10. | <b>NFHS</b>   | National Family Health Survey              |
| 11. | <b>NSS</b>    | National Service Scheme                    |
| 12. | <b>NYK</b>    | Nehru Yuva Kendra                          |
| 13. | <b>OSSAP</b>  | Odisha State Strategic Action Plan         |
| 14. | <b>PCMA</b>   | Prohibition of Child Marriage Act          |
| 15. | <b>RKSK</b>   | Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram        |
| 16. | <b>UNFPA</b>  | United Nations Population Fund             |
| 17. | <b>UNICEF</b> | United Nations Children's Fund             |



## **SECTION 1:**

### **Purpose and Organisation of the Odisha State Strategic Action Plan (OSSAP)**

1.1 The “Odisha State Strategic Action Plan”(OSS-AP) document is a commitment by the Government of Odisha to empower adolescents and eradicate child marriage. It outlines a clear vision and direction that would be implemented by various departments, development partners, and all relevant stakeholders. The document details the goal, vision, guiding principles, strategies, actions, coordination mechanisms, and resources necessary for the effective execution of interventions aimed at ending child marriage in Odisha.

1.2 The OSSAP for curbing child marriage serves as a foundation for numerous initiatives and actions aimed at tackling key factors that lead to child marriage. These factors are complex and necessitate coordinated efforts from various stakeholders, including the government at all levels, judiciary, civil society, academia, media, development partners, communities,

families, and individual boys and girls. It enhances existing policies and programs, emphasizing increased interaction between adolescents, community members, government, and development partners

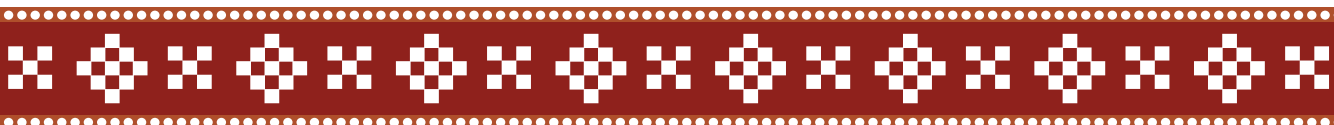
1.3 The Supreme Court’s recent judgment-titled “Society for Enlightenment and Voluntary Action & Another vs. Union of India & Others”, Writ Petition (Civil) No. 1234 of 2017 dated 18th Oct 2024, to reinforce prevention and protection measures against child marriages has laid down specific guidelines for the effective prevention and prohibition of child marriage. These guidelines have been considered while drafting the Odisha Strategic Action Plan (OSS-AP) for Ending Child Marriage to ensure that Odisha aligns with the national legal mandates and best practices.

## **SECTION 2:**

### **Reflections on the Odisha State Strategic Action Plan to End Child Marriage 2019-2024**

2.1 The Odisha State Strategic Action Plan 2019-2024 to End Child Marriage played an

important role in the State’s commitment to end child marriage. This strategy encompassed



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a multifaceted approach focusing on enhancing community awareness, strengthening law enforcement, providing support services, and promoting girl's education. Several initiatives under this plan yielded positive results, including a noticeable increase in community awareness. Successful programs such as community

engagement campaigns and school-based interventions played a crucial role in shifting societal attitudes toward child marriage. Additionally, improved coordination among various stakeholders, including government departments, NGOs, and community leaders, facilitated a more unified response to the issue.

### 2.2 SOME OF THE NOTABLE INITIATIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS THAT RESULTED FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OSSAP ARE :

- 2.2.1 Orissa Child Marriage Prohibitions Rules 2009 was amended in 2019 aligning the rules with Odisha State Strategic Action Plan.
- 2.2.2 Formulation and implementation of the Advika Program in 2020, which later became a government scheme in 2023.
- 2.2.3 Formulation and implementation of a District Action Plan (DAP) for ending child marriage.
- 2.2.4 Formulation of a district-level Task Force to review, plan, and implement the DAP. The task force meeting was later integrated with "A Day for Children."
- 2.2.5 Guidelines were drawn for child marriage-free villages and wards. As a result, 14,000 villages were declared Child Marriage-Free between 2019 and 24.
- 2.2.6 During this period, reporting on Child marriage initiatives were regularised, followed by timely review meetings. This also led to the publication of the State

Annual Report on Child Marriage.

- 2.2.7 Several adolescents rescued from child marriage were linked with a range of government schemes, which substantially increased during 2019-24.
- 2.2.8 Several districts designed and implemented campaigns against child marriage during 2019-24.
- 2.3 However, the strategy faced a few challenges. Despite the overall reduction, the decline in child marriage rates was modest, indicating the persistence of deeply rooted cultural practices and socio-economic factors that continue to drive child marriages. High-prevalence districts like Nabarangpur, Nayagarh, Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada, and Keonjhar, which face compounded socio-economic challenges, showed limited progress. Furthermore, the strategy primarily focused

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on formal child marriages, often overlooking informal unions, self-initiated marriages, and elopements, which are prevalent in certain regions, particularly in tribal areas and bordering districts.

2.4 Another significant challenge was the disparity between rural and urban areas. According to NFHS-4, rural areas had a higher prevalence rate of 21.7% compared to 19.4% in urban areas. While the NFHS-5 data showed a slight overall reduction of child marriage rates in urban areas at 14.5%, rural areas still exhibited higher rates of child marriage, emphasizing the need for more targeted interventions that could address specific local dynamics and barriers.

2.5 The strategy identified areas for growth, including enhancing infrastructure for monitoring and reporting, increasing the availability of support services for children

at risk, and providing comprehensive training for frontline workers. Meeting these logistical and resource needs significantly strengthened grassroots implementation. These lessons learned from the 2019-2024 strategy underscore the need for a more inclusive, comprehensive, and adaptable approach in the forthcoming 2024-2029 strategy.

2.5.1 By incorporating feedback from the previous plan, the new strategy can build on its successes while addressing the identified gaps and challenges, ultimately creating a more effective framework for ending child marriage in Odisha.

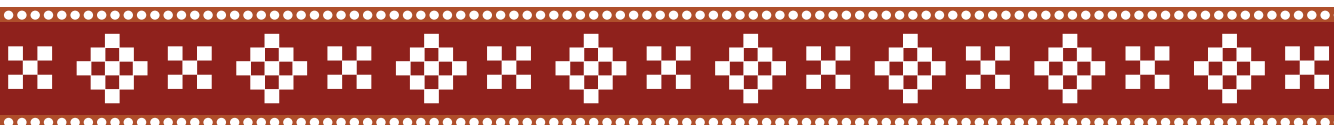
2.5.2 The new strategy has to account for the increase in child marriages of boys, which rose by 2% between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5, emphasizing the critical need for comprehensive interventions that address both boys and girls.

### SECTION 3:

## Introduction

3.1 The achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is closely linked to the protection of the human rights of young people and adolescents, with child marriage being a significant violation of these rights. This practice adversely impacts their health, education, sexual

and reproductive rights, and overall development, leading to far-reaching intergenerational consequences. As a critical focus of the global development agenda, SDG target 5.3.1 - end child marriage aims to eradicate child marriage by 2030, recognizing that it affects both girls



and boys. The plan aims to address SDG 5.3.1 and its strategic linkages with other goals.

3.2 Several scholars, activists, and donors, including UN agencies, agreed that it is not easy to end child marriage, as it is a cultural and social norm among many communities. Child marriage is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a practice sustained by a multitude of intricate factors. Various social and economic elements contribute to the

persistence of this practice.

3.3 These factors encompass patriarchal structures, societal norms and expectations, socio-cultural and religious customs, poverty and financial conditions, perceptions of safety and security, lack of awareness about the law, and lack of access to education and skill training. The significance of a particular factor may vary from one context to another and from region to region.

## **SECTION 4:**

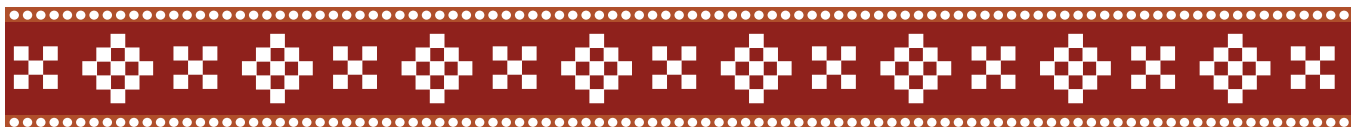
### **Implications of Child Marriage**

4.1 The implications of child marriage are significant and far-reaching, affecting individuals, communities, and the State's ability to leverage its demographic dividend. Child marriage is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, making girls disproportionately affected by the practice, and is usually linked to the safety of the girl child, patriarchal attitudes towards girls, including the need to safeguard family 'honor.' The practice of child marriage can also lead to negative consequences,

such as reducing the physical growth of girls, hampering their mental and emotional maturity, and putting their health in peril during early motherhood.

4.2 Child marriage among boys, while less prevalent than among girls, has significant and often overlooked impacts.

4.3 The consequences can be wide-ranging, affecting boys' health, education, economic prospects, and social development which are mentioned below:



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| ASPECT                           | GIRLS                                                                                                                                                                                   | BOYS                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Education                        | Often forced to drop out of school early, limiting opportunities for education and future employment.                                                                                   | May face pressure to support a family, leading to reduced focus on education and skill development.                                                |
| Health& Psychological Well-being | Increased risk of maternal mortality, complications during childbirth. Mental health issues like depression, anxiety and low self-esteem due to loss of autonomy and agency are common. | May face pressure to provide for a family at a young age, leading to stress, mental health challenges, and increased risk of occupational hazards. |
| Economic Opportunity             | Limited job prospects due to early marriage, reinforcing poverty and dependency.                                                                                                        | Reduced economic potential due to interrupted education and early workforce entry.                                                                 |
| Gender Equality                  | Reinforces gender inequality, perpetuating societal norms that value girls less than boys and denying them autonomy and equal opportunities.                                            | Perpetuates traditional gender roles and stereotypes, reinforcing patriarchal structures and limiting boys' ability to challenge societal norms.   |
| Physical Development             | Increased health risks due to early pregnancy and childbirth, including stunted growth and nutritional deficiencies.                                                                    | Physical development may be stunted due to early responsibilities and lack of access to proper healthcare and nutrition.                           |
| Social Development               | Social isolation due to restricted mobility and heavy domestic responsibilities.                                                                                                        | Restricted social opportunities lead to limited social skills development and potential peer isolation.                                            |
| Legal Rights and Protections     | Vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, lacking legal protections against early marriage and its consequences.                                                                            | Similarly vulnerable to exploitation, lacking legal protections and avenues for redress against early marriage and its adverse effects.            |
| Family Dynamics                  | Disruption of family dynamics as girls transition into marital roles, potentially altering relationships with parents and siblings.                                                     | Strained family dynamics as boys take on adult responsibilities prematurely, potentially leading to conflicts within the family.                   |
| Reproductive Rights & Health     | Denied reproductive rights and access to contraception, leading to unintended pregnancies and health complications.                                                                     | Limited access to reproductive health information and services, impacting decision-making and health outcomes.                                     |
| Interpersonal Relationships      | Strain on relationships due to pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations within marriage.                                                                        | Challenges in balancing familial responsibilities with personal desires and aspirations potentially lead to strained relationships.                |
| Psychosocial Factors             | Coping with trauma, loss of childhood, and navigating marital challenges at a young age.                                                                                                | Dealing with societal expectations of masculinity, role confusion, and identity formation amidst adult responsibilities.                           |
| Behaviours                       | Increased likelihood of experiencing domestic violence and substance abuse.                                                                                                             | Potential engagement in risky behaviours due to stress, peer influence, and lack of guidance.                                                      |
| Community Dynamics               | Perpetuates harmful cultural practices and norms, reinforcing social acceptance of early marriage.                                                                                      | Impact on community cohesion and dynamics as early marriage disrupts traditional family structures and social roles.                               |

## SECTION 5 :

### Situational Analysis

5.1 Odisha has shown steady progress on several goals related to child marriage in the past decade. The primary method used to assess child marriage in women involves calculating the "Women aged 20-24 years married before age 18 years," as indicated by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 21.3% of women aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 18 years; the same has fallen to 20.5% (NFHS-5). This is a marked improvement from 37.2% a decade ago (NFHS-3) and lower than the national average of 23.3% (NFHS-5). However, this decline has been uneven, with regional variations in the state.

5.2 As per the NFHS-5 Survey Report, more than half the districts in Odisha have a child marriage prevalence rate of more than 20%. Child marriages are reported to be the highest in Nabarangapur at 39.41%, followed by Nayagarh (35.67%), Koraput (35.54%), Rayagada

(33.16%), Malkangiri (32.40%), Mayurbhanj (31.25%). The other districts reporting more than 20% child marriage are Keonjhar, Gajapati, Balasore, Boudh, Angul and Dhenkanal.

5.3 The analysis of the data on child marriage among women aged 20-24 in various districts of Odisha reveals a mixed trend. Most of the districts show a positive declining trend for the incidence of women aged 20-24 years who were married before 18 years, with some notable decline seen in the Districts like Sambalpur (37.63%), Bargarh (37.45%), Ganjam (25.27%) among others. However, in 12 districts, there has been an increasing

**While there has been progress over the past 15 years, the decline has slowed in recent years. There are also significant district-level variations:**

- **Highest prevalence: Nabarangpur (39.41%), Nayagarh (35.67%), Koraput (35.54%)**
- **Lowest prevalence: Khordha (17.11%), Cuttack (14.23%), Puri (10.22)**

| PARTICULARS | NFHS-5 (2020-21) |       |       | NFHS-4 (2015-16) |       |       | NFHS-3 (2005-06) |       |       |
|-------------|------------------|-------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|
|             | Urban            | Rural | Total | Urban            | Rural | Total | Urban            | Rural | Total |
| Odisha      | 14.5             | 21.7  | 20.5  | 19.4             | 21.7  | 21.3  | 24.3             | 39.7  | 37.2  |
| India       | 14.7             | 27.0  | 23.3  | 17.5             | 31.5  | 26.8  | 29.3             | 56.2  | 47.4  |

Source: NFHS-5, NHFS-4 and NHFS-3

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trend for the incidence of women aged 20-24 years who were married before 18 years, with Bhadrak noticing a 68.06% increase in the indicator. These fluctuations highlight the dynamic nature of child marriage prevalence within different regions of Odisha. Overall, the data underscores the importance of targeted interventions and continued efforts to address and reduce child marriage rates in the State.

5.4 With respect to the National Average Scores in NFHS-4 and NHFS-5, there has been an improvement in the number of districts that have scored above the National Average between the two rounds, improving from 22 districts in NFHS-4 to 17 districts in NFHS-5. However, concerning the State Average, the picture transforms into the opposite, with five districts scoring less than the State Average (falling from 17 districts in NFHS-4 to 12 districts in NFHS-5).

### WOMEN AGED 20-24 YEARS MARRIED BEFORE AGE 18 YEARS (%)

| SL. NO. | DISTRICT      | NFHS-4 (2015-16) % | NFHS-5 (2019-21) % | ABSOLUTE DIFFERENCE IN % | % DIFFERENCE IN NFHS-5 OVER NFHS-4 |
|---------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| A       | B             | C                  | D                  | E                        | F                                  |
| 1       | Angul         | 22                 | 25.04              | -3.04                    | -13.82                             |
| 2       | Bolangir      | 14.7               | 14.02              | 0.68                     | 4.63                               |
| 3       | Balasore      | 25.9               | 26.38              | -0.48                    | -1.85                              |
| 4       | Bargarh       | 13.7               | 8.57               | 5.13                     | 37.45                              |
| 5       | Boudh         | 23.4               | 25.25              | -1.85                    | -7.91                              |
| 6       | Bhadrak       | 6.2                | 10.42              | -4.22                    | -68.06                             |
| 7       | Cuttack       | 17.6               | 14.23              | 3.37                     | 19.15                              |
| 8       | Deogarh       | 23.4               | 19.21              | 4.19                     | 17.91                              |
| 9       | Dhenkanal     | 25.4               | 23.69              | 1.71                     | 6.73                               |
| 10      | Gajapati      | 25.3               | 28.07              | -2.77                    | -10.95                             |
| 11      | Ganjam        | 29.8               | 22.27              | 7.53                     | 25.27                              |
| 12      | Jagatsinghpur | 9.7                | 11.99              | -2.29                    | -23.61                             |
| 13      | Jajpur        | 8.1                | 11.36              | -3.26                    | -40.25                             |

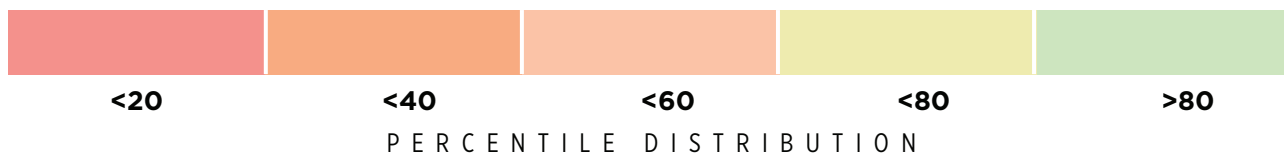
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|    |               |              |              |             |              |
|----|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| 14 | Jharsuguda    | 11.2         | 8.52         | 2.68        | 23.93        |
| 15 | Kalahandi     | 21.7         | 16.33        | 5.37        | 24.75        |
| 16 | Kandhamal     | 22.1         | 20           | 2.1         | 9.5          |
| 17 | Kendrapara    | 12.2         | 9.38         | 2.82        | 23.11        |
| 18 | Keonjhar      | 27.6         | 28.99        | -1.39       | -5.04        |
| 19 | Khordha       | 18.1         | 17.11        | 0.99        | 5.47         |
| 20 | Koraput       | 34.7         | 35.54        | -0.84       | -2.42        |
| 21 | Malkangiri    | 39.3         | 32.4         | 6.9         | 17.56        |
| 22 | Mayurbhanj    | 35           | 31.25        | 3.75        | 10.71        |
| 23 | Nabarangapur  | 37.9         | 39.41        | -1.51       | -3.98        |
| 24 | Nayagarh      | 31.3         | 35.67        | -4.37       | -13.96       |
| 25 | Nuapada       | 19.1         | 15.64        | 3.46        | 18.12        |
| 26 | Puri          | 8.3          | 10.22        | -1.92       | -23.13       |
| 27 | Rayagada      | 34.4         | 33.16        | 1.24        | 3.6          |
| 28 | Sambalpur     | 11.8         | 7.36         | 4.44        | 37.63        |
| 29 | Subarnapur    | 22.2         | 16.88        | 5.32        | 23.96        |
| 30 | Sundargarh    | 15.5         | 12.93        | 2.57        | 16.58        |
|    | <b>Odisha</b> | <b>21.30</b> | <b>20.50</b> | <b>0.80</b> | <b>3.76</b>  |
|    | <b>India</b>  | <b>26.80</b> | <b>23.30</b> | <b>3.50</b> | <b>13.06</b> |

Source: NFHS-4 and NFHS-5

### COLOR LEGEND FOR COLUMNS C & D

Women aged 20-24 years married before age 18 years (%)



### COLOR LEGEND FOR COLUMN F

Women aged 20-24 years married before age 18 years, % change in NFHS-5 over NFHS-4





## SECTION 6 :

### Causes and Drivers of Child Marriages in Odisha

#### 6.1 OVERVIEW

6.1.1 Child marriage in Odisha is a complex issue, deeply rooted in socio-cultural, economic, and structural factors, particularly in tribal and rural areas. Traditions like dowry and gender-based norms, combined with poverty and limited livelihood opportunities, drive families to marry off daughters at a young

age to ease financial burdens. Limited access to education and healthcare, along with social pressures and patriarchal norms, further perpetuate child marriage. Natural disasters and climate vulnerabilities exacerbate these challenges, making early marriage a coping mechanism for many families.

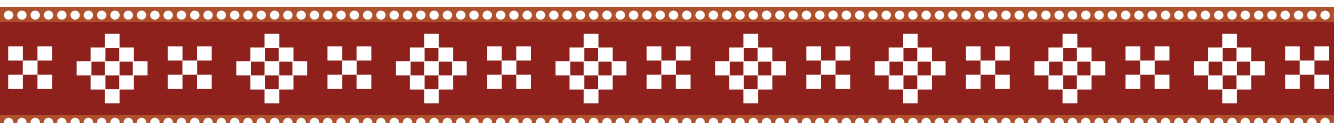
#### 6.2 SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND CULTURAL NORMS

6.2.1 Marriage is deeply influenced by social norms and cultural practices across all communities in the State. In tribal and PVTG communities, practices such as Jhika, Udulia, Mangini, Ghara Jamai, and Jhola do not consider age as a factor for marriage, making both boys and girls highly vulnerable. Although child marriage is prevalent across various communities, it is notably more common in tribal areas compared to non-tribal ones.

6.2.2 Customs in certain communities like Jhikinawa, Baaliphool, and traditional live-in practices encourages social interaction among young adolescents. However, the lack of awareness about safe sexual and

reproductive health often leads to teenage pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies. This, in turn, forces many adolescents into early marriages to avoid social stigma, trapping them in a cycle of vulnerabilities associated with early marriages and teenage pregnancies.

6.2.3 Poverty and unsafe migration are significant factors driving child marriage in bordering Odisha districts. Girls from poor households are more likely to marry young as it is seen as a way to reduce the family's size and economic burden. However, the costs associated with marriage can further entrench families in poverty.



6.2.4 High costs and dowry expectations also pressurises families to marry off girls early, particularly when other family ceremonies are taking place or older siblings are getting married. In non-tribal communities, girls are often seen as economic liabilities, and

the dowry amount increases with the girl's age and education level. This perpetuates the practice of child marriage, especially in coastal and southern districts where the fear of dowry for older girls is a significant factor.

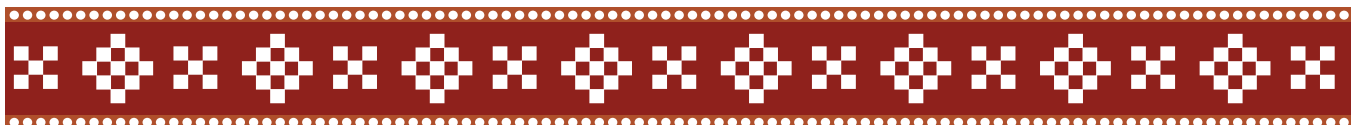
### **6.3 MIGRATION AND OTHER VULNERABILITIES**

6.3.1 In bordering districts, high levels of migration among young boys searching for jobs are linked to early marriages, love marriages, and inter-state and inter-caste marriages. Male migration increases the vulnerability of girls, contributing to early marriages.

6.3.2 Limited opportunities for higher education and the low value placed on it force young adolescents into situations of dropout and absenteeism. For girls, dropping out of school often leads directly to early marriage, driven by inadequate educational

opportunities and safety concerns while travelling to school.

6.3.3 Practices such as cross-regional marriages and bride trafficking are prevalent, particularly in coastal and western districts. These practices thrive on the preference for younger brides and have reinforced child marriage. Additionally, fears of inter-caste marriage and the increasing incidence of sexual abuse contribute to the persistence of early marriages.



## **6.4 GENDER NORMS**

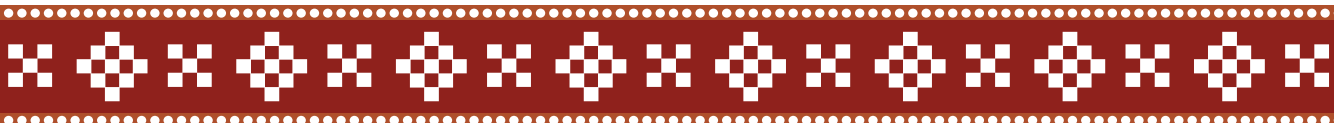
6.4.1 Data from NFHS-5 reveals a concerning correlation: Districts with low sex ratios at birth also show a high prevalence of child marriages. This imbalance often results from cultural preferences for male children. This correlation also underscores the deep-rooted gender-based discrimination and cultural norms that prioritize the birth of male child and son preference in the society on one hand, and the resulting low social value of girl child thus devaluing daughters. The skewed sex ratio also reflects that, the discriminatory mindset and the preference for male child begins at birth itself leading to sex selective abortions, female feticide and continues beyond where girl child is seen an economic burden, to be married off early, both to reduce financial strain and to conform to societal pressures. These gendered norms and practices not only perpetuates and fuels child marriage but also pushes them in cycles of poverty, denies them educational opportunities, and restricts their agency building by restricting their ability to make independent life choices, reinforcing gender inequality for generations to come.

6.4.2 As per NFHS-5, we can observe that the average school attendance rate among females (above six years) across all districts

is approximately 69.36%. The attendance rates range from 48.86% to 84.66%, and such a significant variation in female school attendance rates among districts suggests differences in access to education, socio-economic conditions, and cultural factors. Some districts like Malkangiri (48.6%), Koraput (50.63%), and Rayagada (50.81%) have the lowest rates of female participation in schools; hence, understanding the factors contributing to these differences could guide targeted interventions to improve education access and participation.

6.4.3 In societies with low sex ratios at birth, there are entrenched social norms and expectations surrounding marriage and gender roles dictating girls marry at a young age to fulfill their perceived societal roles as wives and mothers. Cuttack, Puri, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, and other districts rank lowest regarding females born in the last five years as per NFHS-5. Potential gender imbalances at birth resulting from factors such as sex selective practices (e.g., female infanticide, sex-selective abortion) and cultural preferences for male children, among others, also seem to be factors in exacerbating the problem of child marriage.

6.4.4 Family honor was cited as a primary reason



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for early and forced marriages. Parents in industrial areas married off their daughters early out of fear that the girls might engage in premarital sex, which they believed would make them unsuitable for marriage.

6.4.5 While formal child marriages have been the primary focus of previous strategies, it is essential to recognize and address the growing trend of informal unions, self-initiated marriages, and elopements. These forms of child marriage, although not legally recognized, pose similar risks and challenges to the well-being of children. High instances of

elopement marriages were reported in industrial regions like Dhenkanal and in northern districts such as Mayurbhanj, Kendujhar, and Balasore, where a high number of boys and girls are engaged as laborers.

6.4.6 Elopement marriages are also high in Bargarh, Sambalpur, Nuapada, and Kalahandi districts in the tribal-dominated locations and close to the border with Chhattisgarh. These areas require targeted interventions due to the unique socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to the persistence of informal unions.

### 6.5 IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION

6.5.1 The Government of India enacted the PCMA 2006 to take legal action against child marriage, and the state government created the Orissa Prohibition of Child Marriage Rule (OPCMR) in 2009 (amended in 2019) to help enforce this law. Although the Women and Child Development Department oversees this issue, preventing child marriage requires coordinated efforts across multiple sectors and departments.

6.5.2 A greater emphasis is needed on the legal provisions for annulment, injunction, custody, and maintenance as outlined in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006. Strengthening the application and en-

forcement of these provisions is essential for ensuring that child marriages are promptly annulled and affected individuals receive appropriate legal protection and support. This focus would not only uphold the rights of children by providing them with avenues for redress but also deter the practice by reinforcing the legal consequences of child marriage, thereby contributing to its overall reduction in the State.

6.5.3 One of the significant reasons communities do not pursue legal action against child marriage is their lack of access to and awareness about legal provisions. Despite well-intentioned legislation and established

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structures and mechanisms, implementing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) remains sub-optimal. Because of traditional beliefs and social norms which override the legislation.

6.5.4 The situational analysis reveals that child marriage is more of a socio-cultural issue than a legal one. Perceptions, awareness, and strong social norms and cultural practices regarding the universality of marriage are primary factors driving early, forced, and child marriages. There is also a significant lack of knowledge about rules and policies concerning child marriage. Empowering adolescents, both boys and girls, with knowl-

edge and understanding of the negative impacts of child marriage is critical and urgent. This understanding should be coupled with instilling aspirations for higher education and a better quality of life in young minds.

6.5.5 The Odisha State Strategic Action Plan (2024-2029) is a detailed and timely approach to speed up efforts to end child marriage. OSSAP would act as a "multi-layered and multi-sectoral intervention" with the goal of eliminating child marriage. It aims to create opportunities for young people, especially girls, to have the rights and informed choices needed to shape their futures.

### SECTION 7:

## Government-Level Efforts to End Child Marriage

7.1 The Government of Odisha has initiated extensive efforts to address the situation of child marriage in the State. A High-Level Committee, under the chairpersonship of the Principal Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development has been constituted to review the Implementation of 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.

7.2 Department of Women and Child Development, Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSPCPR), UNICEF, and UNFPA are members of this Committee. The Odisha Prohibition of Child Marriage Rules, 2019, were formulated with specific amendments.

7.3 The Committee has wide representation, which includes the Departments of Schools and Mass Education, Higher education, ST and SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare, Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water,

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Home, Health and Family Welfare, Sports and Youth Services, Skill Development and Technical Education, Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, and Law.

7.4 The State also launched a multi-sectoral Strategic Action Plan (2019–24) and published the State Annual Report on child marriage to ensure coordinated efforts by multiple departments to eliminate child marriage. The High-level Committee tasked district administrations with developing contextualized District Action Plans (DAPs) for the smooth implementation of the State Strategic Action Plan.

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

7.5.1 **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 a regular basis. During COVID-19, webinars and online training sessions have been conducted at state and district levels to continue the capacity-building efforts across all 30 districts.

7.5.2 **Issuing guidelines at district, block, and panchayat levels:** The guidelines mandate the formation of District/Block/Panchayat-Level Child Protection Committees/

Task Forces on Adolescent Empowerment and Ending Child Marriage. They also clearly outline the committees/task forces' roles and reporting formats.

7.5.3 **Implementation of Advika Scheme:** With the vision to maximise the impact of various schemes on adolescent girls across all age groups, the State Government launched the Advika program a transformative initiative on 11th October 2020, on the eve of International Girl Child Day. This state-wide program, implemented in collaboration with UNICEF and UNFPA, marked a renewed commitment to foster and promote education, life skills, gender equality and empowerment of adolescents. Central to Advika are 'Kishori Diwas' sessions, conducted every Saturday at Anganwadi Centres. These sessions equip adolescent girls with essential life skill education, enabling them to navigate daily challenges, realise and articulate their dreams and ambitions, and access social protection schemes for themselves and their families. By addressing key issues like early marriage and school dropouts, Advika actively promotes education and aspiration-building among girls, while fostering a community that values their potential. The program also emphasizes the critical role of boys in achieving gender equality through its "Sakha/Bandhu" initiative, which

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educates them about positive masculinity. Boys are encouraged to challenge harmful stereotypes, embrace values of empathy, respect, and shared responsibility, and act as allies for gender justice. This approach aims to redefine traditional notions of masculinity, ensuring boys become advocates for an equitable and supportive environment.

**7.5.4 Police-Led Community Initiatives:** The Odisha police have also been involved in the effort, conducting monthly meetings to discuss dropping out from school and child marriages with representatives of the panchayat, parents, and children. Police stations have been made child-friendly so girls feel empowered to approach the police. Further, police officers receive specialized training in identifying and responding to cases of child marriage. This training shall include understanding relevant laws, such as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, and techniques for sensitively managing cases involving children and families. Police departments collaborate closely with child protection agencies, such as the Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSCPCR) and Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), to identify and address cases of child marriage. This collaboration involves sharing information, coordinating interventions, and providing support services to children at risk

of or affected by child marriages.

**7.5.5** Some Districts have also undertaken encouraging initiatives to curb the social evil of Child Marriage. These district-level initiatives demonstrate a proactive approach toward combating child marriage through community engagement, awareness generation, and collaborative efforts involving various stakeholders. These initiatives aim to create a safer and more inclusive environment for young girls in the State by addressing the underlying social norms and empowering vulnerable children.

**7.5.6 Vulnerability Mapping:** To effectively combat child marriage, the Odisha government shall implement a comprehensive vulnerability mapping initiative. This multidimensional mapping will identify and assess key factors contributing to the increased risk of child marriage, such as socioeconomic conditions, educational attainment, gender norms, and geographical disparities. Special attention would be given to vulnerable groups, including children especially girls from marginalized communities, those with disabilities, and families facing economic hardship or social exclusion. The government would engage local leaders, community organizations, and service providers in this mapping process to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the data. The insights gained shall guide targeted

interventions and strategic resource allocation

to the areas and populations most at risk.

## 7.6 UNIQUE APPROACHES TAKEN BY DIFFERENT DISTRICTS IN ODISHA TO COMBAT CHILD MARRIAGE

7.6.1 Odisha has implemented various innovative strategies across its districts to address the issue of child marriage. Here are some unique approaches taken by different districts:

**7.6.1.1 Nayagarh District-Data-Driven Approach:**

Nayagarh has adopted the Aliva initiative to maintain comprehensive registers of adolescent girls. These registers include birth registration dates, Aadhaar numbers, family information, and educational status. Anganwadi workers are tasked with identifying and tracking every adolescent girl in their jurisdiction, which will enable the district to monitor approximately 48,642 girls over ten years (2020-2030). This initiative has proven effective in preventing child marriages, with the district administration successfully stopping 61 child marriages within the first eight months of its implementation. The registers also aid law enforcement agencies in verifying the ages of girls when child marriages are reported.

**7.6.1.2 Ganjam District-Marriage Registration Mandate:** In Ganjam, the district administration has made it mandatory for couples to produce their Aadhaar

numbers during marriage registrations. This measure aims to ensure that marriages are conducted legally and that the ages of both parties are verified. Ganjam has focused on community awareness, working with local leaders to promote the importance of delaying marriage until the legal age.

**7.6.1.3 The Nirbhaya Kadhi Programme in Ganjam:**

Ganjam, severely affected by child marriages, became Odisha's first child marriage-free district on 3rd January 2022. The 'Nirbhaya Kadhi' (Fearless Adolescent) campaign, launched in September 2019, aimed to eradicate child marriage by empowering adolescent girls with information and improving existing services. The program, inaugurated by various officials, saw participation from local leaders and community members.

**7.6.1.4 Subarnapur District-Cultural Engagement:**

The Subarnapur District Collector creatively used a Kathak performance on the occasion of the Subarnapur City Festival "Lok Mahotsav" to create awareness on the prevention of child marriage and sending girls back to school. The performance featured a song, "O Ri Chiraiya," addressing injus-



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tices against women and linking cultural expression with social issues. The district emphasizes engaging with girls aged 15 to 18 who are dropouts, encouraging them to return to educational institutions, and addressing the cultural practices surrounding elopement and early marriages.

**7.6.1.5 Nabarangpur District-**Community Mobilization: Community leaders from various castes, tribes, and religious groups have been mobilized to raise awareness about the consequences of child marriage. This approach aims to change social norms

and attitudes towards early marriages. The district has identified 50 vulnerable panchayats based on high incidences of child marriages, allowing for focused interventions in these areas.

**7.6.1.6 Sundargarh District-**Community Declarations: Community Organizations: Local community-based organizations, such as the Paudi Bhuyan Samaj, have made public declarations to not allow marriages for girls under 18 and boys under 21. This grassroots approach aims to shift cultural norms and practices regarding marriage.

### 7.6.2 Critical aspects of the programme:

**7.6.2.1 Sector Convergence:** Providing tailored solutions to end child marriage.

**7.6.2.2 Committee Formation:** Establishing committees at village, gram panchayat, block, and district levels.

**7.6.2.3 Coordinated Implementation:** Collaborating among stakeholders for maximum impact.

**7.6.2.4 Staff Sensitization:** Training law enforcement and key government officials.

**7.6.2.5 Strengthening Structures:** Enhancing

existing frameworks.

**7.6.2.6 Community Awareness:** Motivating adolescents and engaging traditional leaders, priests and parents.

**7.6.2.7 Regular Monitoring:** Reviewing program activities, tracking dropouts, and providing counselling.

**7.6.2.8 Recognition of Champions:** Appreciating and rewarding active contributors.

### 7.6.2.9 Steps taken by district administration:

**7.6.2.9.1 Monthly Nirbhaya Kadhi Day:** Village-level awareness programs.

**7.6.2.9.2 Mass Pledge Campaigns:** In schools and health establishments.

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7.6.2.9.3 Adolescent Platform: Establishing Balya Bibah Pratirodh Manch (BBMP) for advocacy.

7.6.2.9.4 Household Surveys: Identifying adolescents to monitor and support.

7.6.2.9.5 Increased Rewards: Incentivizing reports of child marriage.

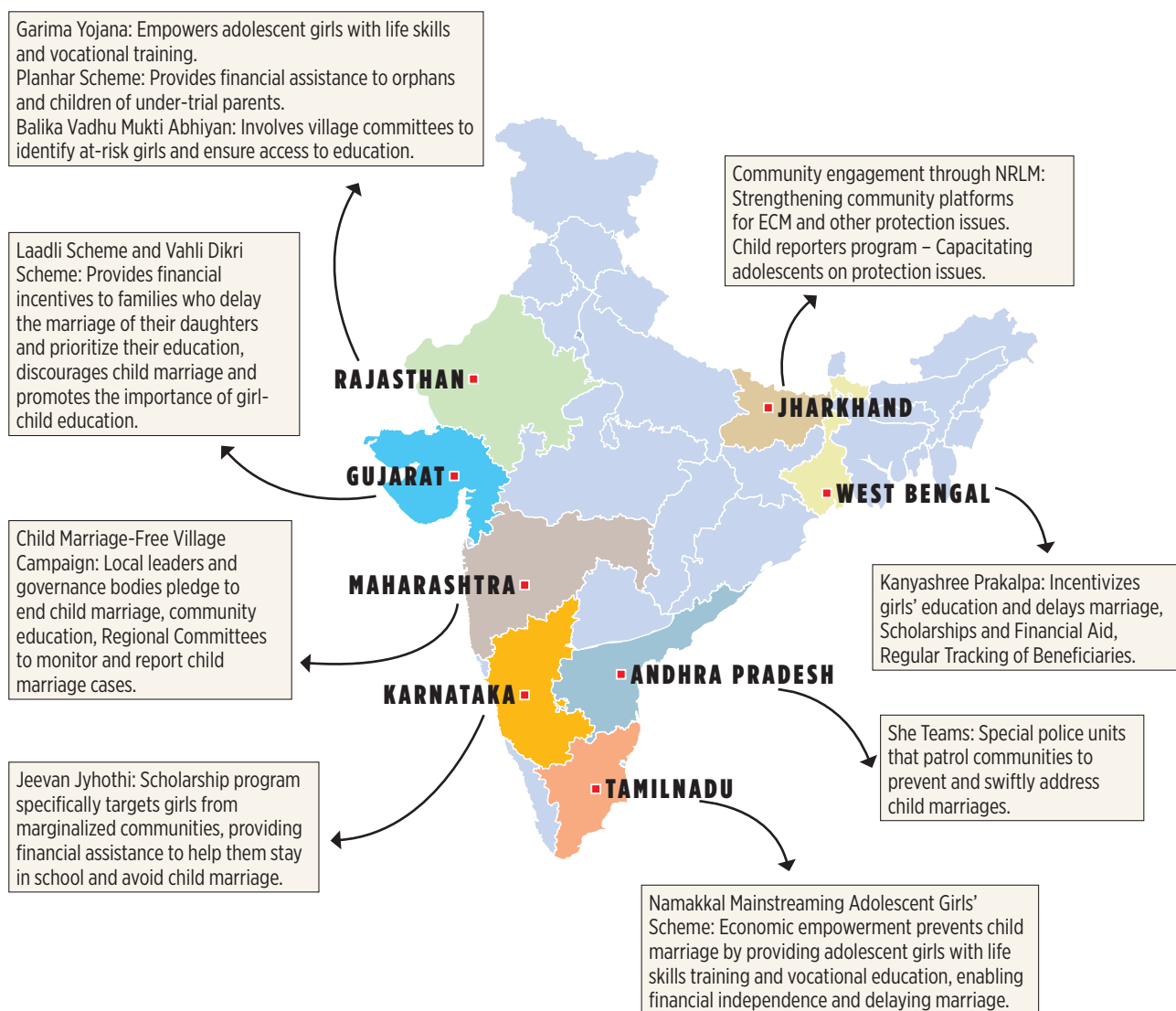
7.6.2.9.6 Community Meetings: Monthly educational sessions by Anganwadi and ASHA workers.

7.6.2.9.7 Verification Visits: Officials confirming non-occurrence of child marriages.

7.6.3 The Ganjam district administration's efforts were recognized at the State level. It received the SKOCH GOLD Award for the 'Child Marriage Free Village' initiative through 'Nirbhaya Kadhi' at the 75th SKOCH Summit and was honored on OSCPCR's 9th Foundation Day in 2019.

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### 7.7 BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER STATES



## SECTION 8 :

### Goal, Vision and Guiding Principles of the Odisha State Strategic Action Plan to End Child Marriage

8.1 **Goal:** This Strategic Action Plan aims to eliminate the practice of child marriage in Odisha by 2030, which is in line with SDG target 5.3.

8.2 By 2030, reduce the incidence of child marriages from 20.5% to 10% across the State.

8.3 **Vision:** “Create an enabling environment for adolescents, to have rights and make informed choices with equal opportunities to grow, acquire knowledge and skills, and access opportunities for holistic development and an empowered future.”

8.4 **Guiding Principles:** The OSSAP is guided by key principles from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the National Policy for Children, 2013. The CRC defines a child as anyone under 18 unless the law states otherwise. Similarly, the Constitution of India classifies individuals under 18 as children. The PCMA (2006) sets the legal marriage age at 18 for girls and 21 for boys. These guidelines extend to adolescents and young people, emphasizing the best interests of the child,

| ASPECT                                        | GIRLS AND BOYS                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Non-discrimination                            | Every child shall have the same rights regardless of sex, religion, gender, age, ethnicity, and culture.                                                                                                     |
| Best interests of the child                   | All programs and interventions shall be designed and implemented to promote the child's best interests.                                                                                                      |
| Survival and development                      | Every child shall be entitled to the highest standards of living and shall be able to thrive in an enabling environment.                                                                                     |
| Confidentiality & Privacy                     | In all programs to end child marriage, issues of confidentiality and privacy shall be ensured.                                                                                                               |
| Protection                                    | Children shall be protected from all forms of abuse, violence, and exploitation, including harmful practices.                                                                                                |
| Participation                                 | Children shall be allowed to voice their opinions on all matters that concern them, depending on their age and maturity.                                                                                     |
| Partnership                                   | Programs shall entail strong partnerships with the development partners, civil society, religious, traditional, and tribal leaders to address the drivers and consequences of child marriage and its impact. |
| Community ownership                           | Action to end child marriage and empower young people would be led by communities.                                                                                                                           |
| Building on the positive socio-cultural norms | All programs aiming to prevent child marriage would recognize the role of negative and discriminatory socio-cultural beliefs, norms, and practices in causing and perpetuating child marriages.              |

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non-discrimination, participation, and the right to survival and development. The following core principles guide the OSSAP. The OSSAP has been drafted in alignment with the guidelines issued by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in its judgment dated 18th October 2024 pronounced in the case titled as "Society for Enlightenment and Voluntary Action & Another Versus Union of India & Others",

Writ Petition (Civil) No. 1234 of 2017. These guidelines emphasize the need for stringent preventive measures, comprehensive rehabilitation, and accountability at various levels of governance to end child marriage across the country. The OSSAP incorporates these directives and adapts them to Odisha's specific needs and context.

### SECTION 9 :

## Focus Areas and Strategic Interventions to End Child Marriage

9.1 The main strategies for ending child marriage are based on current data, trends in different regions, and consultations with adolescents, communities, civil society, and officials at various levels. Ongoing government programs that empower adolescents and prevent child marriages were also reviewed, with input from different departments.

9.2 The strategies and action plan focus on improving the implementation of laws and policies by the Government of Odisha and influencing community norms through social mobilization. Empowering adolescents is crucial for fostering self-reliance and a broader vision for their future beyond marriage. This approach aims to address gender inequalities and change gender norms in families across

all social groups. Follow-up actions should allow adolescents to explore their potential, gain self-confidence, and make informed life choices.

9.3 The outlined actions would involve strong coordination among all stakeholders and levels of governance. Raising awareness among primary stakeholders and government levels about various sectoral interventions is essential. Local communities, youth platforms, civil society organizations, and key stakeholders shall work together to create an environment that prevents child marriages.

9.4 Coordinated efforts by multiple departments are crucial to achieving the goal of ending child marriage. Each department would have specific actions, and outcomes shall

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be measured with indicators across various sectors, departments, and programs. The state and district action plans would be dynamic

documents, allowing for additional activities to help achieve a child marriage-free Odisha.

### 9.5 FOCUS AREA 1: STRATEGIC INTERVENTION FOR STRENGTHENING IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 9.5.1 Encourage and evaluate governmental policies and initiatives and define the roles and duties of various stakeholders at various levels to enhance their execution and enforcement of the law.
- 9.5.2 Build capacities and empower government functionaries on relevant legislation and policies for the prohibition of child marriage and to promote gender equality.
- 9.5.3 Simplification of procedures for universalization of marriage registration in the State.
- 9.5.4 Strengthen actions for rehabilitation of rescued children from child marriage under the Victim Compensation Scheme.
- 9.5.5 Strengthen the functioning of dedicated Children's Courts at the district level.
- 9.5.6 Establish proper coordination between the enforcing authorities and the Mission Vatsalya structures and statutory bodies to ensure prompt referral of cases, particularly for girls who are survivors of child marriage, which requires immediate care and protection.
- 9.5.7 Strengthen governance structure for implementation of PCMA at state, district, block, and panchayat levels.
- 9.5.8 Improve communities' knowledge of relevant legislation and policies to promote rights, especially of girls, and address gender inequalities.
- 9.5.9 Map out existing resources and allocate additional resources in consensus with key departments to address issues around child marriage.
- 9.5.10 Mapping of children vulnerable to child marriage, especially school dropouts and children of migrant workers' families, and strategic intervention for their inclusion with education and family strengthening.
- 9.5.11 Provide comprehensive guidelines at district, block, and panchayat levels, mandating the formation of Child Protection Committees/Task Forces. These guidelines should include detailed roles and responsibilities and standardized reporting formats. Conducting vulnerability mapping to identify at-risk children.
- 9.5.12 Incorporate special initiatives to combat elopement and self-initiated marriages

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before the legal age. This can include proposals for the provisions under the Protection of

Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act to prevent teenage pregnancies.

### 9.6 FOCUS AREA 2: STRATEGIC INTERVENTION FOR CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

9.6.1 Establish and promote partnerships with elected representatives at the state, district, block, and gram panchayat levels as strong advocates against child marriage.

9.6.2 Implement State wide social and behaviour change communication strategy to end child marriage.

9.6.3 Engage tribal, caste, religious and other such leaders to change practices that are prevalent among different tribal groups that promote child marriage such as *Jhika*, *Udulia* and *Kanya Jhola*.

9.6.4 Promote the education of both girls and boys at secondary and higher secondary levels, particularly in vulnerable communities, through tribal leaders and influential persons in the community.

9.6.5 Create platforms at state and district levels to encourage civil society, NGOs, and community-based organizations (CBOs) to reach out to vulnerable adolescents, particularly those out of school in rural and urban areas, through their programmes to educate parents, the community, and adolescents, emphasizing their rights and choices.

9.6.6 Use resources from Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) funds for various initiatives that empower vulnerable adolescents and for action against child marriage.

9.6.7 Mobilize caste *Jaati Samaj* and religious leaders to act against social norms and practices that promote child marriage and gender inequalities in their respective communities.

9.6.8 Leverage and mobilize community-based structures, such as *Gram Panchayat Child Protection Committees* (GPCPC), *Gaon Kalyan Samitis* (GKS), and Farmers Groups, against child marriage.

9.6.9 Build capacities of key duty bearers to discharge their roles in a gender-responsive manner.

9.6.10 Formation of Ward-level child protection and welfare committees at urban local bodies. The state needs to issue a circular and a guideline on this.

9.6.11 It is crucial to place more emphasis on "A Day for Children," which involves the Fixed Day Meetings of Child Protection Committees at various levels. Integrating these meetings, along with the newly constituted Village Level Child Protection and Welfare Committees.

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- 9.6.12 AWWs must identify and track adolescent girls and boys vulnerable to child marriage and work closely with GPCPC to reach out to families to prevent child marriages.
- 9.6.13 Standing committees for women and child development of rural (Gram Panchayat) and urban local bodies to facilitate vulnerable families' access to schemes and programs.
- 9.6.14 Include issues of children and adolescents in the *Gram Panchayat* Development Plan (GPDP) with a focus on addressing vulnerabilities to child marriage.
- 9.6.15 Define and track child-friendly panchayat indicators that have direct implications on child marriage and the value of girls, such as sex ratio at birth, school dropouts, and violence against girls and women.
- 9.6.16 Strengthening community watch groups, implementing comprehensive data systems for tracking progress, and conducting regular surveys.
- 9.6.17 Popularize reporting mechanisms such as child-line/hotline/women's helpline and establish local redress mechanisms like complaint boxes in educational institutions.
- 9.6.18 Engage with service providers for marriage ceremonies, such as priests, tent house providers, event managers, and others, to prevent them from being part of the solemnization of child marriages and to encourage them to report to concerned authorities.
- 9.6.19 Identify civil society organizations having expertise in addressing the issue of child marriage and engage them in building awareness, community mobilization, developing models, and promoting good practices.
- 9.6.20 Create more child-friendly spaces and offer increased opportunities for parents to engage in positive parenting. Facilitating access to parenting programs would help caregivers adopt positive, supportive practices that contribute to the well-being of their children and challenge harmful norms that perpetuate child marriage.
- 9.6.21 Partner with academic institutions and research agencies to generate evidence to demonstrate the benefits and economics of delaying marriage and keeping girls in schools and to document good practices for dissemination.
- 9.6.22 Continuously train District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs), Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs), Protection Officers (POs), and District Child Protection Officers (DCPOs) on child marriage laws and effective intervention strategies.
- 9.6.23 Provide comprehensive care, protection, and counselling services to married girls, teenage pregnant adolescents, and adolescent mothers to ensure their well-being and empowerment.



**9.7 FOCUS AREA 3: STRATEGIC INTERVENTION FOR EMPOWERING ADOLESCENTS THROUGH MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACHES, LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION AND GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES**

**9.7.1 Emphasize Gender Equality and Participation:**

- 9.7.1.1 Integrate gender equality and respectful relationship education into school curricula to challenge harmful gender norms and promote girls' rights.
- 9.7.1.2 Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), aligned with WHO and UNICEF guidelines, shall be incorporated into the Odisha school curriculum. The curriculum shall focus on sexual health, rights, consent, and reproductive health to empower adolescents and prevent early marriages.
- 9.7.1.3 Provide girls with life skills education to empower them to make informed decisions and resist pressures related to child marriage.
- 9.7.1.4 Develop programs offering vocational training and entrepreneurship opportunities for girls and young women, enhancing economic independence and reducing financial incentives for child marriage.
- 9.7.1.5 Engage men and boys through targeted campaigns and workshops that educate them on the harmful impacts of child marriage, promote positive masculinity, and encourage supportive roles in ending child marriage.
- 9.7.1.6 Work with traditional leaders, religious figures, and influential community members to shift societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate child marriage.

**9.7.2 Education and Skill Development:**

- 9.7.2.1 Facilitate the enrollment of girls and boys in higher secondary, vocational, and technical education programs.
- 9.7.2.2 Increase and improve residential facilities for girls and ensure safe transportation to improve enrollment and retention in schools.
- 9.7.2.3 Engage school management committees and communities to track and reintegrate dropouts, ensuring regular school attendance.
- 9.7.2.4 Ensure the adequacy of higher secondary schools to meet demand and initiate career counselling in high schools.
- 9.7.2.5 Introduce market-oriented vocational

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training for out-of-school adolescents and enforce guidelines for transitioning vocational students to higher education.

9.7.2.6 Promote sports as a career option for girls

and boys, increasing sports hostels for girls and promoting non-traditional sports to build leadership among girls.

### 9.7.3 Health and Safety:

9.7.3.1 Strengthen Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics (Shradha Clinics) with counsellors to enhance access to health services.

9.7.3.2 Ensure safety and security measures in all educational institutions and hostels.

9.7.3.3 Improve responsive policing through initiatives like Ama Police, and utilize mobile apps for prompt action against child marriage.

9.7.3.4 Increase convergence with the Home Department to ensure proactive measures against child marriage, including making it an agenda in 'Ama Police Samiti'.

9.7.3.5 Provide counselling and support services for girls at risk of or affected by child marriage, including legal aid, health services, and psychosocial support.

### 9.7.4 Adolescent Empowerment and Life Skills:

9.7.4.1 Introduce life skills education in all schools, especially residential schools, hostels, ITIs, and polytechnics.

9.7.4.2 Include life skills education in the curriculum for classes 5 to 9, teaching financial literacy and economic opportunities to adolescents.

9.7.4.3 Empower adolescents, especially girls, with knowledge and skills to make informed decisions through government programs and civil society initiatives.

9.7.4.4 Utilize the Advika Scheme, Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG), and other

programs to mobilize adolescents against child marriage and gender inequalities.

9.7.4.5 Promote platforms like NYK, NSS, and youth clubs to take action against child marriage and encourage GPCPCs, with SHG and CSO support, to assist vulnerable or married adolescents by connecting them to education and social protection schemes.

9.7.4.6 Create safe spaces where girls can gather, learn, and support each other, such as through the Advika program's Kishori Diwas sessions.

### **9.7.5 Community Engagement and Legal reforms:**

- 9.7.5.1 Work with traditional leaders, religious figures, and influential community members to shift societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate child marriage.
- 9.7.5.2 Ensure robust implementation and enforcement of laws against child marriage, including the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA).
- 9.7.5.3 Advocate for policy reforms supporting girls' rights, such as increasing the legal age of marriage and ensuring access to education and health services.
- 9.7.5.4 Foster collaboration between government departments, NGOs, community organizations, and international agencies to create a comprehensive strategy.
- 9.7.5.5 Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress, identify challenges, and adapt strategies as needed.
- 9.7.5.6 Continuously train and sensitize government officials, law enforcement, educators, and community workers on gender issues and child marriage prevention.
- 9.7.5.7 Design and implement community-based interventions that address the specific needs and contexts of different districts, ensuring culturally sensitive approaches.

## **SECTION 10 :**

### **Communication Strategy to End Child Marriage**

- 10.1 Given the complexity and challenges of addressing child marriage, a strong communication strategy is needed to engage various stakeholders – including lawmakers, administrators, enforcement officers, community members, social leaders, and influencers – to achieve the goal of ending child marriage.
- 10.2 Besides urging communities to stop child marriage, the communication strategy would focus on five key areas: Gender, Education, Health and Nutrition, Opportunity, Entitlements and Legal. This strategy would be developed through consultations and implemented in phases, each with specific methods, objectives, and indicators for monitoring and evaluation. The W&CD Department's mascot 'Tiki Mausi,' launched in September 2019, would be widely used in all media to spread messages against child marriage.
- 10.3 This strategy document highlights advocacy

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and communication as crucial components of intervention, using various media and tools over five years (2024-2029). The main communication strategies include:

- 10.3.1 **Mass media at state and district levels:** To shape public opinion, create a supportive environment, and influence behaviour change among primary stakeholders, such as children, parents, and other family members.
- 10.3.2 **Advocacy:** To address structural issues and ensure essential policies are created and implemented.
- 10.3.3 **Community Mobilization and Mid-Media Activities:** To engage stakeholders and promote collective action at the community level.
- 10.3.4 **Inter-Personal Communication (IPC) at the Household/School/Community Level:** To support children, parents, and other relevant stakeholders in adopting, practicing, and maintaining positive behaviours.
- 10.3.5 Audio-visual messages are placed in public places like railway stations, bus stands, and digital displays in the town.
- 10.3.6 YouTube channel of district level ADVIKA and uploading the videos of their action, case studies on ECM.
- 10.3.7 The mascot "Kuni" shall be introduced as a symbol of child protection and empowerment. "Kuni" would serve as a relatable and engaging figure in campaigns,

representing the values and messages of the strategic action plan. The mascot would be used in various communication materials to create a strong visual identity and foster community recognition.

- 10.3.8 Communication materials would be prepared in tribal and local languages to effectively reach diverse populations. This approach shall ensure that messages are culturally relevant and accessible, thereby enhancing community engagement and understanding.
- 10.3.9 The communication strategy would leverage online platforms to disseminate information, raise awareness, and engage with the public. Social media, websites, and digital campaigns would be utilized to reach a broader audience and facilitate interactive dialogue on the issue of child marriage.
- 10.3.10 A dedicated page on the department's website would be established to provide comprehensive information about child marriage prevention efforts, resources, and updates on the strategic action plan. This centralized platform shall serve as a valuable resource for stakeholders and the public.
- 10.3.11 Provisions shall be made for inter-district exposure visits to child marriage-free villages to promote best practices and inspire action. These visits would allow

stakeholders and community members to learn from successful interventions and replicate effective strategies in their areas.

10.3.12 Communication materials would be developed specifically to engage boys and men in the fight against child marriage. By addressing gender norms and involving male figures in the conversation, these materials shall promote positive behaviours and encourage supportive roles in

preventing child marriage.

10.3.13 Community radio stations in Odisha would be harnessed to broadcast and narrow cast messages aimed at ending child marriage and ensuring zero dropouts. These local radio programs shall reach remote and underserved areas, providing critical information and encouraging community-wide action.

## **SECTION 11 :**

### **Institutional Arrangements for Overseeing Implementation of the Strategy**

11.1 The Odisha State Policy for Girls and Women and the Child Marriage Prohibition Rule would serve as the main framework for guiding the implementation of the OSSAP. The numerous factors contributing to the high incidence of child marriages in Odisha and the key priorities for action outlined in the OSSAP require immediate interventions from various stakeholders in Odisha to ensure significant improvements in the empowerment of adolescents over the strategy period. This calls for swift and coordinated efforts to address gaps in ongoing programs that are crucial for adolescent empowerment and have a high potential to prevent child marriages and their consequences in the State.

11.2 The existing State Task Force for the Care, Protection, and Development of Girls and women shall oversee the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan. This task force, chaired by the State's Chief Secretary, includes Principal Secretaries/Secretaries of key departments and representatives from relevant commissions and agencies. The task force would review the progress of SAP implementation every six months and resolve issues related to inter-departmental coordination and convergence.

11.3 The Department of Women and Child Development would act as the nodal agency responsible for coordinating actions across various agencies. A Programme Support Unit

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equipped with a Management Information System (MIS), staffed by experts and data analysts, would provide secretarial support to the Department. Each department involved in the Plan would develop detailed strategies to extend the proposed interventions to the grassroots level, aiming to impact the practice of child marriages.

11.4 District and block-level task forces would be established under the leadership of the District Child Protection Society and the Block Development Office, respectively, chaired by the District Collector and Block Development Officers. These task forces would include representatives from relevant line departments, sector experts, and key stakeholders. Gram panchayats would be responsible for governing the OSSAP at the grassroots level to ensure the effective implementation of the strategy. At urban locations, ward-level and ULB-level child protection committees need to be formed and activated for sensitisation, monitoring and action against child marriage.

### 11.5 **Strategic Interventions**

11.5.1 **Robust Management Information System (MIS):** Develop a robust Management Information System (MIS) to track the implementation of the Odisha State Strategic Action Plan (OSSAP) to end child marriage.

11.5.2 **Streamline Reporting Process:** Regular

reporting through the Women and Child Development Management Information System (WCD-MIS) shall be consistent, accurate, and simplified to improve data accuracy and ease of use, thereby enhancing monitoring efficiency.

11.5.3 **Regular Reviews and Reporting:** Review the progress of OSSAP implementation biannually at the state level by the "State Task Force for Care Protection and Development of Women and Girls," chaired by the Chief Secretary.

11.5.4 **Quarterly District-Level Reviews:** Conduct quarterly reviews at district, block, and panchayat levels by the respective Child Protection Committees to ensure effective implementation and monitoring.

11.5.5 **Annual Report Publication:** Publish an annual report detailing actions taken against child marriage in the State, providing transparency and accountability.

11.5.6 **Review of "A Day for Children" Proceedings:** Systematically review the agenda, proceedings, and decisions made during "A Day for Children" at various levels (VLCW-PC, PLCPC, BLCPC, DTF) to ensure effective coordination and a unified approach to child protection issues.

11.5.7 **Data Utilization and Research:** Use both primary and secondary data to demonstrate the benefits of delaying

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marriage and keeping girls in school during adolescence, with analysis at national and sub-national levels.

**11.5.8 Research and Sample Studies:** Conduct research and sample studies to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of strategic interventions, providing insights into outcomes and identifying areas for improvement.

**11.5.9 Targeted Monitoring and Action Plans:** Develop and incorporate a specific action plan to map and address early marriages among boys, aiming to reduce child marriage rates among boys from 13.3% to 6% by 2030.

**11.5.10 Annual Review of District Action Plans:** Conduct an annual review of District Action Plans by District Magistrates (DMs), who serve as nodal officers, to assess progress, identify challenges, and ensure alignment with the overall objectives of the OSSAP.

**11.5.11 Recognize and Reward Efforts:** Recognize and reward the efforts of individuals and communities actively working to prevent child marriages, similar to the incentive increase in Ganjam for reporting child marriages. This recognition would encourage continued community engagement and support for child marriage prevention initiatives.

**11.5.12 Legal Action and Accountability for Non-Compliance:** Initiate strict legal action against public servants who fail to perform their duties in preventing child marriage or neglect CMPOs' responsibilities, as directed by the Supreme Court.

**11.5.13 Incentivizing Delayed Marriages:** Propose a scheme to incentivize delayed marriages, offering financial rewards or education scholarships to girls who delay marriage until the legal age of 18.

## SECTION 12:

### Monitoring of the Strategic Action Plan

#### 12.1 OUTCOME INDICATOR:

**12.1.1** Reduce incidences of child marriage among girls from 20.5 % to 10% in the State by 2030.

**12.1.2** Reduce the incidence of child marriage

among boys from 13.3% to 6% in the State by 2030.

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### 12.2 MEANS OF VERIFICATION

12.2.1 NFHS 5 data is considered as a baseline for this purpose. Further NFHS 6 data would be used as end-line Steps would be taken to assess the situation annually at the

end of each year and to measure periodic progress; the following output and process indicators would be used.

### 12.3 OUTPUT INDICATORS:

12.3.1 Hub for Empowerment of Women/Gender Cell established at the Department to coordinate and monitor actions to end child marriage.

12.3.2 Rules and policies reviewed to stipulate roles and responsibilities of stakeholders for better implementation and law enforcement to end child marriage.

12.3.3 SOP for enforcement of PCMA 2006 in Odisha developed and rolled out.

12.3.4 Guidelines issued on simplifying marriage registration in the State.

12.3.5 Action to end child marriage reviewed at state and district levels.

12.3.6 Gender-responsive curriculum developed and integrated into the training institutes' curricula (GAA, SIRD, BP, State Police Academy, SIHFW, SCERT, Mission Shakti, etc.)

12.3.7 Increased number of institutions for higher education and improved facilities such as separate functional toilets, hostels, and

transportation for girls available.

12.3.8 Circulars issued for School Management Committees to review and track regular school attendance and dropouts.

12.3.9 School safety guidelines include issues specific to girls, including safe transport and safety in hostels.

12.3.10 Adolescents provided opportunities for skill training in school and under the Odisha Skill Development Authority.

12.3.11 Adolescents vulnerable to child marriage covered under schemes of institutional and non-institutional childcare.

12.3.12 Guidelines/notifications/ circulars issued for GP on key child protection issues and actions at Gram Panchayats.

12.3.13 IEC materials developed and circulated focusing on legislation and policies to promote and protect children's rights, especially girls.

12.3.14 Adolescent girls' groups under various



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programs such as Scheme for Adolescent Girls, BKRY, and RKSK activated for action against child marriage.

12.3.15 Guidelines issued for youth platforms such as NYK, NSS and youth clubs to pursue action against child marriage.

12.3.16 Partnerships developed between corporate

bodies and government departments for adolescent empowerment.

12.3.17 Annual report on action against child marriage in the State published.

12.3.18 Collaboration established with academic institutes to generate evidence on child marriage.

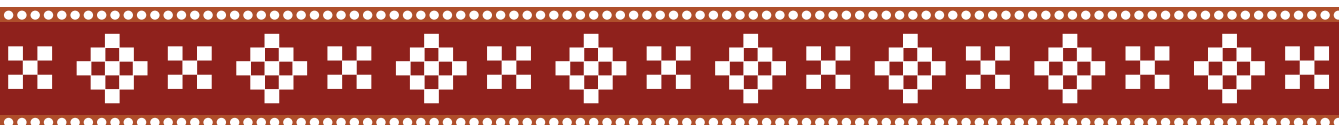
### SECTION 13:

## Conclusion

13.1 The Odisha State Strategic Action Plan to End Child Marriage (2024-2029) is a comprehensive and well-structured approach that addresses the multifaceted issue of child marriage in the state. It builds on the lessons learned from previous initiatives, focusing on strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing educational opportunities, empowering adolescents, and engaging communities. By targeting the root causes of child marriages such as poverty, gender inequality, and social norms the plan aims to create an

environment where every child, regardless of gender, can thrive and make informed choices about their future.

13.2 The plan's success depends on the coordinated efforts of various stakeholders, including government departments, NGOs, community leaders, and the public. With clear goals, strategic interventions, and robust monitoring mechanisms, the OSSAP(2024-2029) sets the stage for significant progress in reducing and ultimately eliminating child marriage in Odisha.



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**Department of Women and  
Child Development  
Government of Odisha**

**ODISHA STATE STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN TO  
END CHILD MARRIAGE (2024-2029)**