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News ID-IPR/WCD(Eng)/159/ Dt.30.04.2021

### State Level PCMA Committee meeting Conducted for Prohibition of Child Marriage in Odisha

Bhubaneswar, 30/04/2021

The 11<sup>th</sup> State Level PCMA Committee meeting for Prohibition of Child Marriage in Odisha was held under the chairpersonship of Principal Secretary Ms Anu Garg, WCD and MS Department. It was organised virtually and was attended by Committee members from UNICEF, UNFPA, ACTION Aid, OSCPCR, CID,CB, Police (Home) besides representatives from School and Mass Education, ST & SC, Skill Development and TE and PR & DW Department.

The meeting is held bimonthly to review the implementation of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act- 2006 and the State Rule 2019 with regards to the State Strategy Action Plan to end child marriage by 2030. Stressing upon the efforts being undertaken by the department, Smt. Garg appreciated the consistent efforts put in by the district officials in declaring more and more villages as child marriage free. During the meeting it was informed that till 31st March, 2021, 3007 villages have been declared as child marriage free with not a single occurrence of child marriage in these villages during 2020-21.

The district, blocks and panchayat level Task Forces/committees constituted for the purpose are being regularly sensitized to take forward district specific programs and campaigns with the support of partner agencies to sensitise the public in the emotional, physical and mental hazards of child marriage. In this meeting the Committee appreciated the innovative programs taken up by the district administration of Koraput, Ganjam, Nayagarh and Kandhamal.

Senior officials from PR&DW Department, Skill development and Technical Education and School and Mass Education also appreciated the on-going initiatives of the department and highlighted the schemes like Sudakhya, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) etc for engagement of adolescents and easy hostel facilities. It was felt that necessary intervention of Panchayati Raj and Law department in incorporating instructions/ guidelines to prohibit religious institutions like temples and marriage mandaps and sensitise religious heads/temple priests to verify birth certificate while solemnising marriages.

The instances of child marriage amidst COVID 19 lurking high and the fact that Akshya Tritiya is an occasion where mass marriages take place, vigilant efforts of the Task Force at the district level will be geared up and all out measures would be taken to stop any instance of child marriage. Also efforts like putting up of information board with the message that the temple authorities do not support child marriage can also help to curb the issue. Besides this, it was felt that if initiative like submission of date of birth or school leaving certificate is made mandatory, the same will also help strengthen the efforts to stop child marriage.

In the meeting it was also decided that as a post intervention effort of linking the rescued adolescents especially girls either with schools or appropriate skill training opportunities and making them economically independent to reduce their vulnerability to child marriage will be actively explored. Sri Aravind Agarwal, Director, ICDS&SW also stressed upon the need to address other social issues like Dowry, domestic violence, sexual harassment at workplace, human trafficking etc in convergence with above departments and increase surveillance and functional monitoring mechanism to create a safer society for all especially girls and women of the State.

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