

An essential part of Plan's work is to help create spaces for children and young people to discuss together the issues which affect their lives, then ensure adults respect their views so that children may be involved in community decision-making. This communication has been prepared with and by children directly and is intended to give a general sense of the kinds of issues children discuss and how they work together.

“Teach us how to fly and we will touch the sky!”

Dear Sponsor,

Greetings from the members of Dhia-Putra Manch!

Plan and its local partner organisation ADITHI have been working in our area since 1999. The children’s clubs – **Dhia-Putra Manch (DPM)** were formed in 2002.

Initially, parents used to hesitate in sending their children for various trainings, but after seeing the change in the personalities of the children who had attended the trainings, they started encouraging their wards to go for the trainings and participate in our club activities. DPMs-our clubs have been working to spread awareness on various problems that people in our area, especially children, face. Normally we work on one particular issue and try to spread awareness on that issue such as health, hygiene, education, alcoholism, physical punishment and discrimination in schools, child labour, child marriage and many more, but recently, we took part in a very interesting exercise – **our own village’s development planning!**



Children’s club members after attending the training

“In our villages, it is common for children to work in Litchi farms, on construction sites to carry bricks and as a result, discontinue schooling.” - DPM, Akash

This year 29 children’s club members, of which 9 were girls, were given training on how to analyse our situation to identify problems that are impeding our development and also their causes. We also learnt how to find solutions for our problems, make a plan to apply the solutions and ways to involve everyone in executing the plan. All this was very exciting as we were not going to work on issues identified by adults but were going to be a part of the process of from the beginning. As a part of the training we also learnt different communication and facilitation skills.



Children’s club members talking to a government officer

One summer morning this year, the people of village Athari were surprised to see a number of vehicles arriving, that too full of children and adolescents! They watched us with a mix of fascination and scepticism as we invited men, women and children for a discussion. Using various methods learnt during the training to encourage people to speak up, we discovered that the



Children's spreading awareness on health & hygiene

main problems of the village were: various diseases especially skin related, lack of potable water, throwing trash in the open and other unhygienic practices, defunct early childhood care centres, child labour, child marriage, childbirth at home, female infanticide caste based negative discrimination, lack of toilets in the school, misbehaviour of teachers and bullying by older students.

Now that we had identified the problems, the challenge was to come up with solutions, make a plan and convince everyone, especially adults to help us in putting the plan into action. The discussions had space for everyone to voice their opinions. We discussed different possible ways of changing people's mind sets towards different health and hygiene issues and ways

of sensitising parents on the ill effects of child labour and child marriage among other issues. Everyone felt that even if during a discussion people understand and agree, it is difficult to change habits. Therefore, people needed to be constantly reminded of the problems, the consequences and changes that we had agreed to bring into our habits and decisions. We are now spreading awareness on all the identified issues through rallies, street plays, sound speakers, displaying comics made by us on various issues in the village and in schools and also on different government schemes. We also had meetings with the teachers and the village council together with our parents to talk to them about the lack of facilities, bullying by older students and eve teasing in the schools. ***"Dhia-Putra Manch, has been spreading awareness on ill-effects of child marriage. It is very heartening to see that even if married off as a child, girls are being sent to their in-law's house until they turn 18."*** - DPM, Raunak

We succeeded in convincing the adults that for many things, we will need their support to take our problems to the relevant government authorities. They agreed and even women came with us to talk to the village head and to the government officials. The comics we made on health, hygiene and child abuse were especially appreciated.

"I have observed that in the road construction near my village the material being used is of substandard quality. With a few adults of the village, I am going to file an information request now that I know about the Right To Information." - DPM, Roshni

We feel really proud to share with you that we have had seen many positive results of our efforts. We have been able to stop quite a few child marriages, a big number of births have been registered, our news letter 'Hamari Awaz' has brought to light some very serious irregularities in the government schemes and schools, we have been able to get a recreation fund and hand pump in the school with the help of the village head. In the district meet for village's Self Help Groups we were allowed to put up a stall and main media houses and news channels covered children's club activities. An exposure visit to police station to understand how the system works and orientations on different government schemes were also conducted for us.

"These trainings have helped us a lot, but We feel we need to be more confident and learn to express ourselves better while speaking about our issues and problems. We need more training in speaking and writing." - DPM, Akanksha



Children and adults- village development planning in Athari village

This document was prepared in consultation with the members of different Dhia-Putra Manch, viz. Akanksha, Raunak, Muskan, Roshni, Akash, Chanak, Chhaya, Badhte Kadam and ADITHI_Plan team by Richa Silakari, Manager-Program Communications (Plan India)

* Individual names have not been given for child protection purposes

"I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do." – Helen Keller