



Enhancing Aspirations and Social Support for Adolescent Girls through Theatre in **UMANG**



UMANG is an ICRW conceptualized, and IKEA Foundation-supported comprehensive, multi-layered girls empowerment program to increase their retention in school and reduce the prevalence of child marriages in Godda and Jamtara districts of Jharkhand. UMANG is being implemented by ICRW in partnership with SATHEE, Badlao Foundation, PCI and in close association with government of Jharkhand. The program uses a socio-ecological framework and gender transformative approaches for multilayered intervention at individual (adolescent girls), family (parents, siblings), community (men & boys, women, and other community members) and system (schools, local governing structures like PRI, child protection mechanism, etc.) levels.

Umang project has an important goal of enhancing the agency of adolescent girls so that the girls recognize their abilities, know themselves, and grow up with the belief that “they are no less than anyone”. Perhaps that is why when Project Umang was choosing mediums to convey the messages to the community uniquely and effectively, theatre emerged as one of the essential choices.

Umang Project has linked theatre in many ways at multiple project junctures. These included capacity building of the girls associated with the project through theatrical trainings and presenting the plays (skits) prepared by them in front of the villagers, organizing street theatre shows by professional theatre troupes in an edutainment format for enhancing school retention, continued education with parental support and employment of girls. In addition, during the pandemic, the UMANG program produced and broadcasted small radio plays on the importance of taking the vaccine against COVID-19 and practicing COVID-appropriate behaviour.





Objectives and achievements

UMANG program believes that despite prevailing restrictive social and gender norms, if girls have agency and are supported by an enabling environment, they can overcome challenges in their way.

In this context, UMANG program chose theatre not only as an effective medium of communication for continued education and employment of girls through street theatre shows but also as an important enabler for enhancing the self-efficacy, agency, and personality development of adolescent girls through residential theatre workshops with girls and boys.



The approaches

Theatre-based communication workshops for adolescents

During these workshops, participants produced several skit performances, and scripts of these were prepared based on real-life experiences of the participants. The challenges and discriminations they faced in their society/family and how they want to change those scenarios were creatively brought out through these scripts and performances. In the workshop, along with theatre skills, the adolescents learned other aspects such as personality development, financial literacy, cyber security, effective communication skills, etc. After completing these workshops, theatrical performances on issues like gender inequality child marriage were performed and staged by the participants at their native villages and govt. office premises to engage the system and society.

Community street theatre campaigns

In community shows, professional theatre troupes performed in villages to discuss the importance of continuing formal education of girls and the impact of child marriage. These street theatre shows also became the platform for recognizing those parents who helped their daughters pursue higher education. An important part of this campaign was a pledge by the parents that envisioned taking concrete steps to send their daughters to school by signing the pledge banner and committing to support their higher education. During this street play campaign, the artists also pasted posters related to messages conveyed in the street plays as a reminder medium.



Challenges

Adolescents participated enthusiastically in these residential trainings. However, in the beginning, there were many challenges faced by the adolescents, particularly regarding leaving their families and staying in a residential workshop for five days along with other male participants. Receiving training in drama and other performing art mediums and finally performing in front of the community was no small feat for them. The initiative of UMANG's key staff, their constant interaction with parents and adolescent girls about this workshop, and their rapport with families were very helpful in overcoming these challenges.



The collaborations

All these workshops were conducted under the skillful guidance of UMANG's implementing partners, SAHYOGINI and Banglanatak Dot Com. They implemented the street theatre campaign in consultation and associative guidance of ICRW's technical team. The community level street theatre campaigns were inaugurated and flagged off by respective DC's of Jamtara and Godda districts for all the rounds. In addition, the demonstration shows (skit productions) performed by participants of the adolescent workshop were also felicitated by respective BDOs of intervention blocks.





Reach

UMANG organised three “Adolescent theatre-based communication and personality development workshops” with 272 adolescent girls and boys from 32 villages of intervention districts of Jamtara and Godda districts in December 2021, April 2022, and January 2024. More than 40 skits were developed during these workshops and later enacted by adolescents at village and block levels on issues like gender equality, girls’ education, and the prevention of child marriage. This intervention reached nearly 5000 audiences, including the native villages of participants. UMANG aims to bring forth the talents and voices of adolescents through these workshops so that they can continue to use their art and self-confidence to change perceptions related to gender norms at the community level.

Similarly, three rounds of community level street theatre campaigns were initiated by professional theatre troupes to promote messages on the prevention of child marriage, gender equality, and continuing girls’ education in March 2021, November 2022, and December 2024, and each round consisted of 2-3 months campaign. Altogether, 738 street theatre shows were performed across 216 villages, reaching nearly 130000+ audiences, including adolescents, parents, school teachers, students, PRI members and other influential persons over three rounds.

Furthermore, about 10000 parents and guardians signed the pledge and consented to support their daughters in pursuing higher education, thus aligning themselves with the ambitious vision of UMANG.



Voices from the field

“On the first day, we were all scared and didn’t know what to say, how to speak, but as the workshop progressed, the fear started to fade away and we started feeling more confident. Today, when I acted in front of so many people and everyone cheered for us with applause, I was convinced that we are no less than anyone”.

– **Bristy Bauri from Kalipahadi village of Nala block, a teenage girl who joined the workshop**

“This play has helped all villagers, even those who can’t read or write, to understand the importance of girl child education and has enlightened parents on their role in supporting their daughters. This play has helped to communicate the key message that, ‘first think about your daughter’s education, then marriage.”

– **Sabitri Roy AWW, Godda.**

“If such street drama had happened earlier and my parents could have seen it, then perhaps I would not have married at such a young age, perhaps whatever wrong happened to me would not have happened.”

– **Khushbu Kumari ,
Motiya Village, Godda.**

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