



A SCHOOL FOR EVERY CHILD!

Story of a community-led Initiative against school absenteeism in Jharkhand



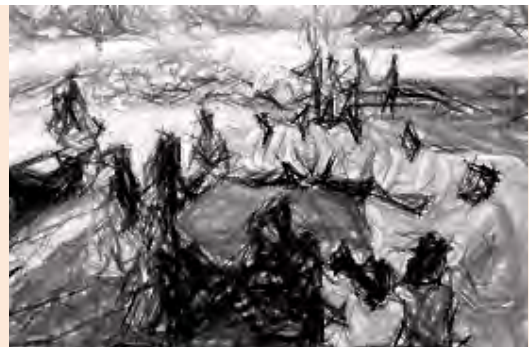
Every summer, Munni and her friends skipped school for a couple of weeks to assist their parents in preparing the field for agriculture.

Skipping school wasn't unusual in this small village of Khunti. Most adolescents missed school for several weeks in a year – during the sowing season, during the days of harvest and also in search of work in and around the village.



One morning in 2016, two young women came to their village. They were associated with an organization working in the area and were keen to learn about the lives of children in the village.

The two ladies started coming to the village regularly and met different groups of women, men and children. They chatted with people to learn about harms faced by children, and also about community's expectations from children.



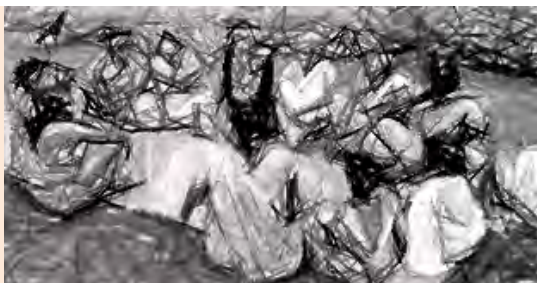
A number of challenges faced by children were identified during those meetings, e.g. excessive alcoholism, high absenteeism in local schools, pressure on children to contribute to family income, etc.

The issues were discussed at length during a village level meeting. The two ladies urged people to think if the community could resolve any of the issues.



'Children must be stopped from skipping schools' - some thought, so that 'they do not fall prey to various harms'. It would benefit children of all social groups and there was no need to approach any external agency for this.

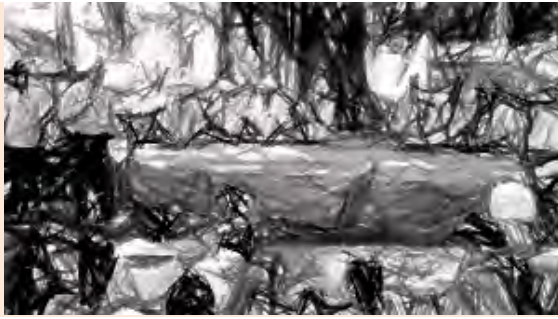
Several people volunteered to take charge. They identified natural leaders from across the village and formed a forum, inclusive of men, women and adolescent children. Only those who were in a position to commit time for the initiative were included.



The forum soon prepared a plan. They decided to reach out to various habitations to understand challenges faced by local families in sending their children to school regularly.

Members of the forum started meeting regularly, initially once every week. They started tracking the whereabouts of every child in the village, using a large sheet of paper.





The forum sought the support of the Gram Sabha for advancing the idea of enabling children to stay in schools. They made history in the process, by creating an opportunity for women and children to participate in the usually male-dominated platform.

Members of the forum also contacted school authorities to explore residential and financial support for children without a guardian and those facing economic hardships. This enabled several girls to stay in school.



Adolescents became active champions of the initiative. The forum organized football tournaments and community feasts from time to time to bring them together from nearby villages as ambassadors of the mission.

Finally, a day came in 2019 when the entire community came together and pledged the following for the children:

- The opportunity to study at least up to the level of graduation;*
- To provide an enabling environment to children to pursue studies.*



Munni and her friends are very happy. They are now attending school regularly. They have found a new mission in life!

Co-learners in the community-led initiative:

