



A Participatory Approach to Child Protection in Implementing Mission *Vatsalya*

Fostering Community Collaboration with Panchayat: Participatory Assessment of Needs
and Appetite for Change to Enable Action (PANACEA)

2023-24

An Inter-Agency Initiative to Enable Community Participation in Child Protection



Introduction

Child protection issues are complex and often arise from an interplay of a variety of factors, including social, economic, cultural, environmental, etc. Communities are best placed to guide interventions for preventions than any external agency. However, often community participation is sought to implement external priorities. The absence of dialogue and alignment with local needs and priorities leads to low levels of community participation and ownership in initiatives aimed to support development or child protection. Therefore, in order to protect children, government commitment and mechanisms for child protection need to be complemented by civic action for child protection.

The introduction of Mission Vatsalya 2021, the erstwhile ICPS Scheme, mandates one of the panchayats' standing committees to act as the Child Welfare and Protection Committee, emphasizing embedding child protection within local communities. The scheme directs Panchayats to integrate children's issues into their Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP) and allocates 5% of untied funds for child welfare and protection. These provisions establish vital foundations for promoting child protection at the grassroots level, enabling communities to engage in interventions concerning child welfare and protection, optimize resource allocation, and integrate cultural diversity into child-centric strategies.

However, even before the launch of Mission Vatsalya, the consortium of five agencies conceived a 'Panchayat Collaboration Model' through Participatory Action Research. This action research aimed to establish a community-led process of child protection in select locations of Jharkhand, starting in 2016. communities to drive processes through collective dialogue, planning, action and collaboration with panchayat. This collaborative approach is characterized by the community acknowledging the panchayat's authority and responsibilities in governance, especially regarding child welfare and protection. Likewise, the panchayat values the local knowledge and lived experiences of community members in addressing child protection issues. Mission Vatsalya necessitated the formalization, extension, and enablement of community-led processes. Participatory methods have been helpful in building community capacity and have also received government endorsement.

To support a diverse array of stakeholders, the PANACEA (Participatory Assessment of Needs and Appetite for Change to Enable Action) tool was developed. This tool assists in integrating local children's priorities into panchayat plans through practical steps, enabling community members, panchayats, and organizations employing community-led or other engagement approaches to facilitate participatory decision-making and actions supporting children's wellbeing.

Participatory Assessment of Needs and Appetite for Change to Enable Action

Step 1 – Generate grounded analysis of key concerns related to children and enable community readiness to address the self-selected problem.

Participants: Organise a relaxed process of a series of discussions. This step should be conducted with separate groups of men, women, and adolescent boys and girls. Ensure representation of people from all habitations, with focus on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and children facing different kinds of vulnerabilities to get a diverse and representative sample of the community.

Approach: Children's views often awaken communities, sometimes challenging adult preconceptions and prompting deeper listening and concern for children's welfare. Therefore, initiating dialogue with groups of adolescent boys and girls can help identify issues that make children vulnerable to harm. The outcomes of these discussions can then be shared with various adult groups to gain insight into their perspectives and gather additional insights about the issues identified by adolescents.

Learning from Inter-Agency Action Research on Community-Led Child Protection-

The voices of children can have greater impacts when they speak on issues affecting them. It evokes empathy, emotional response and educate adults.

Process:

- **Organise discussion with adolescents to identify key issues:** Identify what concerns children the most and why. To make children feel comfortable, ask open-ended and non-judgemental questions, for example, *what are the key issues of children in the village that concern you or make you feel sad? What profiles of children are most vulnerable and why?*

List all the issues identified by children separately using cards, chart paper, or simply write/draw on the surface of the land using chalk in a sequence to enable collective analysis and discussion on the reasons for each identified issue. This allows probing various other aspects with ease like the prevalence of identified issues, percentage of girls impacted, ranking¹ issues that children want to get addressed first, etc. [See illustration 1]

¹ For example, children prioritize issues based on their perspective and concerns, ranking them in order of importance. Issues of greater relevance to them may be ranked 1, while those of lesser relevance could be ranked lower in the sequence.

If discussions are being organised one after the other, the facilitator can also get the discussion outputs validated by the next group and add additional layers of information and analysis from the perspective of the next group. Capturing the outputs of the discussions neatly on a chart paper would be important for further discussions, validation, and the planning process.

- **Organise separate discussions with adult men and women.** Share the outputs of the discussion with children, the types of issues identified by them, perceived reasons, and priorities set by them. Ask what adults feel about this, if there is any other issue related to children that concerns them, and whether they would like to add any other issue to the list. Probe reasons for the identified issues from their perspective and add layers of new information to the previous discussion output or capture the discussion outputs on a chart paper for further processes.
- **Assess the need for multiple iterations and validation of the findings:** In case the village is big, and habitations are scattered, multiple iterations of the process could be done with validation of the issues identified by the first habitation to understand whether they exist in other community, and to add new issues, if any.
- **Collate findings to share with the larger community:** A combined picture could be developed before the collective discussion with the larger community to share the findings and prioritisation of the issue. [See illustration 1]

Prioritise the issue that the community wants to address first: To facilitate meaningful community participation and support to ensuring wellbeing of children, it's essential to value community knowledge, wisdom, and collective care for children. Prioritizing children's issues according to local concerns and fostering consensus on which issues to address first are critical steps in enabling community action and collaboration.

Share identified issues of children with the larger community during Aam Sabha/Gram Sabha, ensuring the active participation of adults and adolescents from all habitations, social groups and genders. Discuss overall findings and group or habitation-specific key findings to encourage reflection and facilitate selection of the priority issue they wish to address first.

For instance, in the illustration below, numbers represent the approximate prevalence of identified issues, rated on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 indicating the highest prevalence. Scores from all habitations are averaged to determine the village-level perceived prevalence of issues (e.g., sum of ratings for issue prevalence divided by number of iterations).

The prioritisation of issue by enabling the community to rank or vote on which issue to address first could be undertaken by the community itself through ranking or voting, based on their own rationale for selecting the most important issue. For example, an issue that affects both boys and girls might receive high priority, as would an issue that is highly feasible to address or, if worked upon could help address other issues as well.

Illustration 1: Identification and prioritisation of issues of concern

Issues that concern people	Prevalence								Priority ranking
	Tola A		Tola B		Tola C		Average		
	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	
Issue 1	8	0	8	0	8	0	8	0	
Issue 2	5	3	7	4	2	1	4.7	2.7	
Issue 3			5	5	6	4	3.7	3.0	
Issue 4	3	1					1.0	0.3	
Issue 5									
.....									

Step 2 (as needed)- Examine the root cause of the problem to enable participatory planning of actions.

Participants: This step should be conducted with separate groups of men, women, and adolescent boys and girls. Ensure representation from all habitations in the group, especially the most vulnerable social groups.

Approach: As many discussions on the causes of the problems would have taken place in the first step, this step can be undertaken if the planning process occurs after a gap of several days and/or if enabling participants to identify needs towards addressing the identified problem feels somewhat difficult.

Having a free-flowing, in-depth discussion on issues and their underlying reasons is more important than using a tool. Each insight into the problem needs to be probed deeply. This step can work as a primer to support the development of a robust plan of action (as outlined in step 3) and can help in identifying different trajectories of interventions required to address the problem.

Learning from Inter-Agency Action Research on Community-Led Child Protection-

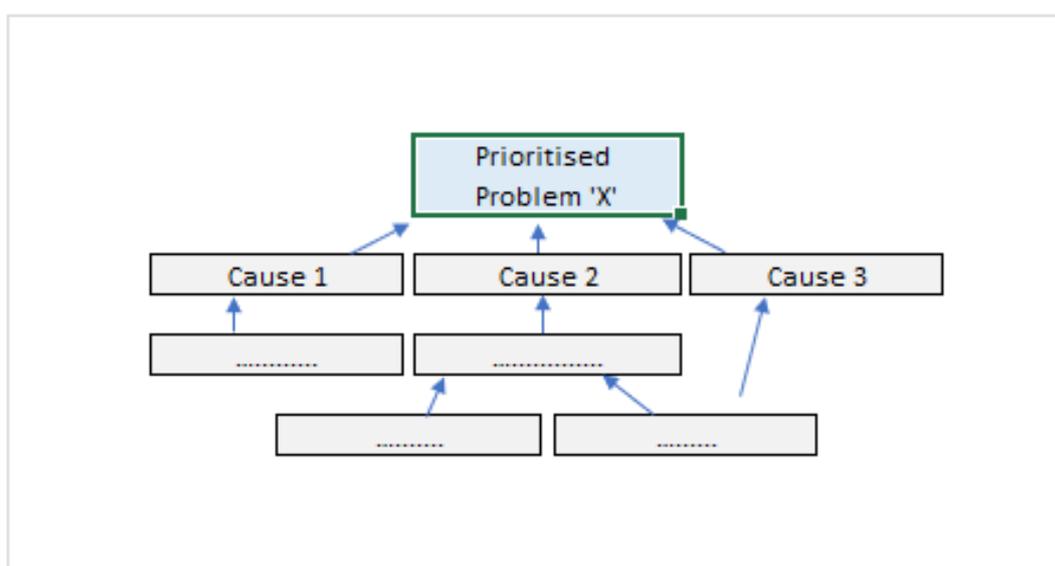
Enhanced awareness of the vulnerabilities faced by specific families and children fosters a sense of solidarity within communities, ultimately contributing to improved social cohesion.

Process:

- **Understand how participants want the discussion to proceed:** The facilitator can begin by asking the participants whether they would like to investigate the root causes of the prioritised problem first to identify the intervention needs better and whether free-flow discussion or the use of a visual means (Cause-effect tool) will work better. This will help the facilitator achieve better participation and understand time limits before starting a detailed discussion.

- **Analyse the problem prioritised by the community:** The facilitator can start by encouraging participants to identify the key causes of the prioritised problem. Use flashcards or chart paper or simply write on the surface of the ground, each identified root cause one by one as illustrated in the picture below. After writing all the identified causes, explore what factors contribute to these causes, and probe for each one by one. Identify interconnectedness and draw arrows between them to discuss whether it's an immediate, intermediate, or underlying cause. Probe until all possible issues have been identified by the participants.
- **Generate more information to support planning:** To support the development of a village-level action plan, relevant pieces of information could also be generated wherever needed for the specific cause and effect of the problem, for example, the prevalence of affected children, habitations and social groups mostly affected, etc. for targeted interventions. Finding areas that can be acted upon immediately with community support or panchayat directly can help score 'quick wins', build people's confidence in the process, and encourage participation.

Illustration 2: Root Cause Analysis



Step 3 – Enable communities to articulate key well-being needs of children in the village and develop a participatory village-action plan to achieve the same.

Participants: Separate discussions should be conducted with men, women, and adolescent boys and girls to identify the perceived needs, as gender barriers often limit women's and girls' participation in the presence of men. Ensure representation from all habitations in the group, especially the most vulnerable social groups. If the process is being facilitated by the panchayat, this process can be undertaken at the ward level with support from ward members.

Approach:

Collectively prepare an action plan, this not only builds community capacity and trust in the process but also builds ownership and a sense of responsibility. A systematic approach to the discussion could help achieve active community participation in developing a robust plan of action, identifying different trajectories of interventions, finding opportunities for collaboration, and developing an appreciation for the collective strengths to deal with the problem. The outlined sequence of discussions must be undertaken to develop a village-action plan owned by the community.

Learning from Inter-Agency Action Research on Community-Led Child Protection-

Collaborative problem-solving allows communities to identify shared challenges faced by children and encourages collective resource pooling—whether through time, skills, money, or materials—to address the needs of all children, fostering a supportive environment.

Process:

- **Identify key needs of children:** Organise separate discussions with men, women, and adolescent boys and girls to identify the key needs of children in the village. Ask participants to review the identified root causes of the prioritised problem to seek their response on two aspects:
 - Articulation of the well-being needs of boys and girls in the village.
 - Understanding how this can be addressed.

This essential problem-solving dialogue serves as the foundation for meaningful collaboration. List each identified need one by one using chart paper or on the surface of the ground for collective review and discussion on how this can be addressed. In addressing a prioritized issue concerning children, identified needs may pertain to various sectors, including health, nutrition, education, livelihood, social security, and protection.

Sample Village Action Plan to Enable Collaboration and Inclusion of Needs of Children in Panchayat's Priority							
Prioritised Problem---- XXXXXX							
Key needs of children in addressing the prioritised problem, considering the underlying causes.	Actions needed to address the identified needs.	Responsibility/ Role players (Explore areas where the community can provide support)	Resource requirement	Timeline	Data needs to support implementation and sources	Monitoring	Referral support

- **Develop a participatory village-action plan, building on the local knowledge:** Encourage participants to collaboratively formulate a plan to address the prioritized problem. This

discussion can involve mixed groups or separate groups of men, women, and adolescents. Ensure that the plan developed by the initial group is validated by subsequent groups, with additional inputs incorporated. The village action plan will evolve through a stage-wise discussion, covering key children's needs in addressing the prioritized problem, resource requirements, key stakeholders, timeline, data needs and sources, monitoring mechanisms, and referral support. Consider discussing the necessity or availability of community monitoring mechanisms for vulnerable children and the referral process for challenging cases through CWPC.

- *Actions:* Encourage participants to break down the prioritised problem into specific, actionable tasks. Each identified action should be clearly defined, including elements of what and how. This includes delineating the steps required to meet each identified need effectively. These actions could range from scheme linkage, conducting awareness campaigns, collecting data, providing training, allocating resources, and establishing monitoring mechanisms, among others.
- *Responsibilities:* Encourage identification of potential areas of collaboration with panchayat, where mutual support can be provided to ensure child well-being. Develop understanding on collaboration methods and add that as one of the actions/ interventions. This will enable communities and panchayat to join forces in creating a child-friendly environment. For example, communities can support Panchayats by raising awareness, identifying vulnerable children or families, and undertaking other relevant tasks. Conversely, Panchayats can address local priorities in collaboration with communities. This collaborative approach ensures that initiatives are inclusive, responsive to community needs, and sustainable in the long term. Through combined efforts, they can leverage their influence and networks to mobilize support, allocate resources, and implement innovative solutions that enhance child protection and well-being.
- *Resource Requirements:* The identification of resources, including those within the community, encourages individuals to focus on their strengths and seek solutions rather than dwell on problems. Participants should be encouraged to identify relevant resources for each identified need. These resources encompass a wide range, including schemes, programmes, institutions, financial resources, materials, and individuals with relevant knowledge, skills, etc. that can contribute to addressing the identified needs. Understanding the types of support available from communities will be crucial to address potential resource gaps and would encourage collaboration.
- *Data Requirements:* Addressing identified needs may necessitate identifying vulnerable children requiring support. For each identified need, prompt the community to think of types of data necessary for effective implementation of action and potential data sources. This will help communities understand the need for cooperation. Data obtained through ongoing community monitoring processes should be accorded equal significance. Additionally, if data is unavailable for certain issues, community assistance may be sought to collect the necessary data.

- *Monitoring and referral:* For each identified action, discuss the aspects that need to be monitored to address the need effectively and its modalities. Discuss to what extent communities can help with that. Additionally, discuss how communities can support in tracking the implementation of programs and interventions, evaluating their effectiveness, and identifying areas for improvement.

There may be a well-defined referral system for child protection, along with guidelines for it. It is important to also understand the community's perspective on how they would like these referrals to be strengthened as reinforcement for service providers. Facilitating agency should avoid imposing external indicators.

This discussion should be sensitively undertaken with the community, without creating fear or apprehensions, by simply asking what type of children will require specialised systemic support in the context of prioritized problem and the needs. Note down the suggested profiles. Avoid engaging in unhelpful debates during the planning process and respect everyone's perspective and ideas. Inputs can be solicited from concerned duty bearers when sharing the evolving plan with the wider community, as outlined in the following step.

- **Seek Feedback and Collaboration from the Larger Community on the Evolving Plan of Action:** Once the plan is prepared, organize an "Aam Sabha" or discuss it during the "Gram Sabha" to share the plan with the wider community. This discussion will be beneficial in obtaining Gram Sabha approval so that the plan can later be presented to the Panchayat. Ensure the participation of men, women, and adolescents for this discussion, as many may not have been able to participate in the planning process initially. Encourage community members/ natural leaders to take leadership in presenting their village action plan with the wider community and seek feedback. External facilitators can facilitate discussion as and when needed.

The presence of local duty bearers such as Anganwadi workers, school management committee members, panchayat representatives, and teachers as observers and contributors can facilitate meaningful collaboration. At the start of the discussion, explain the purpose of the process, the methodology used, and the plan that emerged from it. Invite feedback and suggestions from the community and other stakeholders to further enhance the plan. The local duty bearers associated with child-facing institutions may possess greater clarity regarding referral needs and procedures, which they can share with the community and give input for the emerging plan.

It is possible that this community meeting may need to be organized more than once before the Gram Sabha approves the plan. If the process is facilitated by an external organization, provide a copy of the draft plan to members of the community collective or community leaders. The community should be the primary custodian of the plan. This will enable them to revisit the plan for future discussions, reflect on approved activities, consider collaborative actions with no cost implications, and evaluate the need for changes in strategies.

Step 4: Enable mutual learning and collaboration between communities and panchayat to support vulnerable children and integrate community priorities into the GPDP for an effective response to the problem.

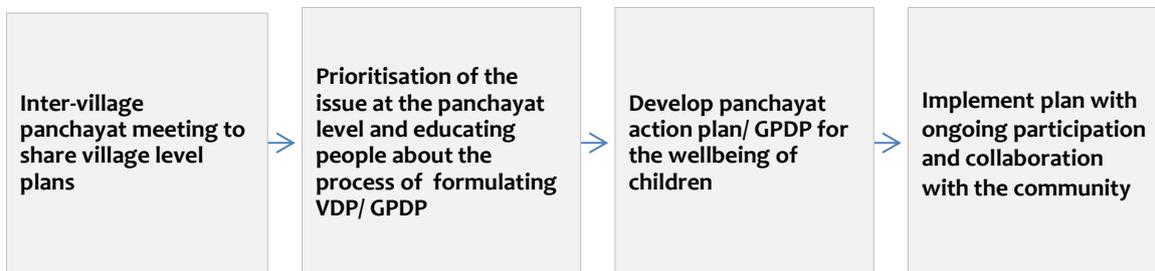
Participants: Representatives of communities, Gram Sabha and Panchayat (Mukhiya, sarpanch/gram pradhan, executive body members, etc.)

Approach:

Engaging the community as an important stakeholder, with the power to make collective decisions for the wellbeing of children, is a crucial aspect. It fosters trust in the panchayat and a collective commitment to preventing harm to children, ultimately supporting in the implementation of Mission Vatsalya. Through a participatory approach, the village action plan empowers panchayats to identify community priorities concerning child wellbeing at the local level. To achieve this, the following sequence of activities can be undertaken for the development and implementation of the panchayat action plan to support children:

Learning from Inter-Agency Action Research on Community-Led Child Protection-

The community collaboration with local institutions helps in mobilizing support, accessing resources, and co-creating innovative solutions to address pressing challenges.



Process:

- **Sharing of village-level plans at the panchayat:** Organise an inter-village panchayat meeting, Gram Sabha chairman and/or community representatives who participated in the planning process from all the villages, can present participatory village action plan in the panchayat meeting. This sharing is important to educate panchayat about the diversity of issues affecting children and that people are concerned about it. These discussions would help set collaborative priorities for the well-being of children.
- **Prioritisation of the issues of children at the panchayat level:** Different villages may have different priorities, so to determine the panchayat’s priority attention to the issues discussed in the step above would be important. For example, if five communities indicated that issue ‘X’ is a priority that might make the issue of greater salience and priority for the panchayat than

an issue that affected only one community. However, panchayat can find meaningful ways to support even low-priority issues, through convergence, collaboration, and garnering other sources of support.

Additionally, agencies facilitating this process may consider organizing an interface, where PRI representatives can explain communities about the process of developing GPDP. This includes clearly identifying months against specific processes such as assessment of needs, selection of projects, determining resource envelopes, seeking approvals, integration of new projects, etc. Furthermore, they can explain communities when and how they could integrate the needs of children into the panchayat action plan. Encouraging people to ask questions like, “What kind of actions could be included as part of GPDP, and which of these could be supported by the panchayat through collaboration or convergence” would help develop trust in panchayat processes.

- **Integrating priorities of communities into the panchayat action plan:** Based on the priorities identified by the panchayat, it can critically review the village action plans with the same priority. The areas of action, data needs, resource requirements, etc., outlined in the action plans would enable panchayats to generate additional information with support from local stakeholders for an effective planning process. Panchayats can map each identified need in the village action plan against relevant subjects outlined in Schedule XI (Article 243G), generate relevant data to plan activities, and estimate the available resource envelope to plan both cost and no-cost activities. For example, panchayats may prioritize households with children under specific social security schemes to reduce their vulnerabilities or support such families through other sources of resources.

Taking into account the priorities of communities and the scope of issues, panchayats can develop their action plan and follow mandatory processes to obtain approval from concerned authorities for plan implementation. Local communities and panchayats could collaboratively implement various activities, such as awareness campaigns, tracking vulnerable children, and monitoring implementation.

- **Implementing panchayat child wellbeing plan with support from local communities:** Mission Vatsalya envisages local bodies playing a crucial role in creating a robust ecosystem at the community level by reaching out to children, engaging with communities, and encouraging them to take ownership of the well-being of children in their areas. This is envisaged to be achieved by equipping families and communities to identify risks and vulnerabilities affecting children. Panchayats and local bodies can implement the plan by seeking participation and collaboration with the communities or vice-versa. This allows mutual learning on what works better for preventing risks and ensuring the well-being of children. This approach highlights the importance of a systemic process that is close to the ground, responsive to the needs of the people, and based on active collaboration between communities and panchayats.

Key Facilitation Tips for Engaging Communities in Micro-Planning Process

1. Prepare yourself before conducting discussions, keep the required materials ready.
2. Sit in a circle with participants for easy communication and administration of participatory exercises. This also breaks the sense of hierarchy.
3. Encourage all the participants to speak and avoid just a few people to influence the discussion and decisions.
4. Build consensus within the group during discussions, if achieving consensus on the prevalence of an issue is difficult, do not force instead capture both opinions. The scores could be averaged out later for consistency.
5. Do not coerce to extract information. Build trust. Child protection issues are sensitive and can induce a feeling of fear or distrust.
6. Maintain confidentiality of sensitive information and deal appropriately in the best interest of the child.
7. Respect local knowledge and experiences. Encourage them to find solutions that they feel would work best for them.
8. Document the discussion outputs for better planning of actions.
9. The community should be the primary custodian of data they shared. Leave a copy of the outputs of each exercise with the community to ensure their ownership.
10. Thank the community for their time and participation and request their support and participation in the implementation of the plan, and monitoring of child specific vulnerabilities.