

Child Club is a milestone for others....

"We are trying to motivate the parents to send their children to village school if they don't listen to us we start beating drums in front of their homes till they send their children said Laxman Khsla president of Puki village child club.

Now all the girls in New Puki village under the Badakarenga Panchayat in Koraput district attend the school. Thanks to the efforts of Bal Sanghas (children groups) formed in various villages of the panchayat.

Bal Sanghas comprise all the children of the villages between the age group of 6 to 14 years. 78 such groups have been formed in various villages of the district with Total 6739 Children (B-3291, G-3439) as its members among which 52 are special children and 98 are orphan. The formation of these groups started in the year 2003-04 in different villages under the guidance of a local voluntary organisation called **SOVA (South Orissa Voluntary Action)** with the support of **save the children** an international Agency.

These Bal Sanghas have now become torchbearers for others in the tribal district of Koraput. The child club members go from door-to-door in their villages and motivate parents to send their children to school. They try to motivate parents, teachers and members of the village education committees, panchayat members, and ICDS staffs to strengthen the existing education centers. They spread awareness through puppet show about malaria and ways to prevent the disease from spreading. They also inculcate a sense of citizenship among the children and create awareness on child rights and campaign for it.

"Due to low illiteracy and poverty, children of tribal areas are deprived of many facilities they are entitled to. These village-level child clubs are formed to provide children an opportunity to express themselves and to increase their participation in village development programmes, especially in the area of education and health," said Sanjit Patnaik, secretary of SOVA.

He added that, "Children clubs are an effective strategy for implementing the activities pertaining to the development of children. Issues presented by children in such a platform are acknowledged more sincerely by elders and duty bearers.

The adult groups initially did not give much attention to the children's efforts but now they are praising their activities and encouraging them. "Due to the efforts of these clubs the school dropout rate in our panchayat has come down. These children's are now participating in all our village-level meetings and putting forward their problems," said Mr Tripathi Jani, Sarapanch of Bada kerenga Gram panchyat.