



Marjorie Aziz: Unnati Sansthan

## MAKING CHILD PROTECTION A PRIORITY

*Without gender equality,  
there will be no development,  
says Marjorie Aziz*

**By R Rochin Chandra**

Originally founded in 2000 by a small collection of social workers, Unnati Sansthan is an Udaipur based organization that focuses on local level solutions to prevent the exploitation of women and children. Since 2007, Marjorie Aziz has led the organization's work in local tribal areas. Supported by Unicef, to date the organization has helped over 10,000 children to enrol in school and 5000 to be rescued from child labour.

*'Education is the only thing that can break every barrier in life'*

Marjorie strongly believes that development only happens when we view boys and girls as equal. In tribal areas, there is often a focus on men and boys, yet she considers how opportunities should be the same for girls. She believes that equality is the most important weapon against poverty, and that no child should be left behind based on their gender: every child has the right to a basic education. Yet in the areas where Marjorie works, many children, particularly girls as young as 6 or 7 are kept at home to look after households or sent to work. Getting these girls into school is one of the issues that is at the core of Unnati Sansthan's work.

***Making the most vulnerable people in society feel valued***

Amongst the most disadvantaged children in these communities are orphans and those with disabilities. Marjorie reinforces the importance of spending time with each vulnerable child. She encourages her staff to sit and talk with families and children, saying giving them this time has a huge impact on their mental and emotional well-being. She says that the organization helps link these children with the government so they can access the rights and support that they are entitled to.

***"If we give children education,  
it will give them confidence and  
allow them to move through  
society with confidence, knowing  
the rights they are entitled to"***

### ***Working Together***

Mobilising the whole community to protect children is one of Marjorie's key focuses. One example of this is organization's recent strategy to stop children being sent to cotton fields in the early summer months. As well as offering monetary compensation to parents who do not send their children, community members are also educated to alert Unnati Sansthan field workers when they feel a child is at risk. Ultimately, this helps to keep vulnerable children in school.

### ***Vision for the future***

'I'm a very optimistic and positive person' says Marjorie. She is always striving to reach more children in distress, and will continue to approach external agencies to raise awareness and funds to help better these communities. Importantly, Marjorie

recognises that the organization must be sustainable and not dependent on the drive of a few motivated individuals: 'We must become a rock for these children, stand behind them and let them enjoy their rights so they can feel good in society'.

*The author would like to thank Dr. Sian Lewis for conducting the interview.*

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