

# Community Monitoring For Prevention of Human Trafficking



Monthly Meeting of a Vigilance Committee

## About the Project

Trafficking is inhuman. This is against the principles of human rights and degenerates the existence of a trafficked person to the extent of being a slave. Despite this, trafficking is rampant. Moreover, it affects the disadvantaged, marginalized and people at the periphery of development in worst manner. One such geography is Ranpur Gram Panchayat in Ranpur block of Nayagarh district of Odisha state in India, which is about 80 kilometers from Bhubneshvar, the capital of Orissa. This Gram Panchayat includes 3 villages Ranpur, Raghunathpur and Mangrajpur. Ranpur is an erstwhile princely state ensconced between beautiful mountains. Trafficking of women and girls is rampant in this area and this is primarily due to lack of education and livelihood opportunities at the grassroots level. People are lured by outsiders by working opportunities or marriage proposals and these innocent people fall prey to the evil designs of these traffickers which results into a large number of girls being trafficked from the area.

In order to combat human trafficking at the community level, a multi-pronged approach was designed and implemented as a pilot project in the area. The project was a bouquet of community based interventions that included awareness generation, developing and promoting local livelihood options, engaging young girls in information dissemination and community monitoring through vigilance committees.

This paper provides the details of community monitoring intervention conducted through vigilance committees in the project area.

## Context

Growing literature and evidence from the field suggests that establishment of community-based vigilance committees are an important tool in preventing trafficking among the vulnerable communities, particularly adolescent girls. An effective Monitoring and Interception system at the community level, created by the community itself is effective in prevention of cases of trafficking. There are other successful examples of effectiveness of community monitoring systems in combating trafficking of girls. Considering this Community Monitoring and Interception System was designed and implemented in one Gram Panchayat of Nayagarh district of Odisha. This paper illustrates the process and outcome of this system.

The Vigilance Committees were established under this project with the following objectives:

- To intercept the cases where a girl is being trafficked away from the community.
- To interrogate and talk to the strangers who enter the community and look suspicious because of their appearance or behavior.
- To help the community people in lodging of First Information Report and pursue the cases of trafficking further.
- To provide a platform to the community where any girl or member of the community can approach and seek help with regards to the problem of trafficking.

## Formation of Vigilance Committee

In the three villages of Ranpur Gram Sabha that comes under the project area, three different Vigilance Committees were formed, one for each village. The membership included members from the local governance structures Gram Pradhan, Ward members, other service providers particularly teachers, Asha and Aanganwadi worker and influential people in the community like retired Policemen and advocates. Total members of the vigilance committees at Ranpur, Mangarajpur and Raghunathpur were 20, 11 and 13 respectively.

## Anticipated Role of Vigilance Committee

Every month Village level Vigilance Committee was expected to meet and discuss the issues at length. Some of the other major activities expected from the vigilance committee are as follows:

- Support individual girls and families to seek legal support who are contacted or approached by traffickers or who feel themselves to be vulnerable to trafficking.
- Counseling to families on managing their young children, particularly girls
- Monitor the movement and activities of outsiders who come to these villages. The committee would take necessary action in case they find their activities to be suspicious
- Participate actively in awareness generation on social issues like human trafficking.
- Organize monthly review meetings to monitor the status of community and families with regards to vulnerability to trafficking and efforts taken during the month.



*Figure 1 : Meeting of Vigilance Committee*

Initially the members of the Vigilance committees were given an idea of the project and the problem of human trafficking in the area. Later on Vigilance committee members were also provided with a one day orientation about the issue of trafficking, modus operandi of the traffickers and the legal remedies and processes that are available with the people to counter and prevent trafficking.

## Capacity Building of Vigilance Committee

Vigilance committees of all the three villages were provided initial training and then regular hand holding support by the project. Rounds of training were organized to make sure that vigilance committee members understand the reasons for their existence, their roles and responsibilities and also the conceptual understanding of trafficking including ways and strategies used by traffickers. Solutions that Vigilance Committees can attempt to support the community were also discussed at length during these interactive sessions.

### *First Round of Training for Vigilance Committee*

A one day training program for vigilance Committee members was organized in May, 2013 at Ranpur. Members of Vigilance Committees from all the three villages participated actively in these meetings. The basic idea behind these trainings was to sensitize Vigilance Committee members on the issues of human trafficking, the modus operandi of traffickers and roles they can play in combating human trafficking within their communities. These committee members were also sensitized on confronting the traffickers and work with law enforcement agencies to protect women and girls from being trafficked using a rights framework.

### *Second Round of Training*

Another one day training program was organized for the members of the vigilance committee. Resource person for the training program was Shri Biswaraj Pattnaik, a senior Development consultant. The objective of the training was to build the capacity of the vigilance committee members through legal awareness and flag their roles and responsibilities. In this training emphasis was laid on orienting the committee members on national and state legislations and legal provisions in reference to human trafficking.

#### Major points that were covered during the trainings are as follows:

- Human trafficking and modus operandi of the traffickers.
- Importance of community monitoring system.
- Role of vigilance committee in community monitoring
- Domestic violence in the community.
- Sharing of case studies of trafficked women.
- Role of law enforcement agencies in combating trafficking.

## Activities of Vigilance Committee

Since its formation Vigilance Committees have been proactive in carrying out the activities for the community monitoring and interception of cases of trafficking. The Vigilance Committees of all the three villages have developed a robust mechanisms of community monitoring and interception of potential human trafficking cases. These mechanisms were developed with a participatory approach, led by vigilance committee members, ensuring that these are rooted in the indigenous practices of the community.

Some of the activities performed by the Vigilance Committee included:

### *Participation in the Meetings*

A formal meeting of all the members of Vigilance Committee has been organized in every village for last 16 months. The purpose of these meetings was stock taking of the situation in the community and to plan for the future course of action. Members of the Committees have participated in all the meetings consistently. Members took keen interest in the discussions of these meetings. So far a total number of 48 Vigilance Committee meetings have been organized in all the three villages.



*Figure 2 Meeting of Vigilance Committee*

### Sharing of the Contact Details of the Committee with the community

The contact details of the Vigilance committee were shared with the wider community in the villages so that if a girl or her family is in need of a support (particularly in relation to migration or human trafficking instances) they can approach a member of the vigilance community and seek help. These contact details were shared with the help of banners and wall writing in the community.



Figure 3: Wall writing in community

### Helping the Victims and their families in lodging the First Information Report

At the beginning of the project, the community acknowledged cases of abduction, missing people and sexual harassment of the girls and women in the community. They also mentioned that police had an attitude of apathy and carelessness and would not even lodge the First Information Report. But since the establishment of vigilance committees there have been many cases when victim's families approached the Vigilance Committee and members of Vigilance Committee of that respective village pressurized the police officers to lodge the report and take the inquiry of the case forward. Vigilance Committee members have also helped the family in identification of lawyers to fight the cases. So far there have been four such cases where Vigilance Committees have provided direct support to families.

### Increased alertness of people in the community

Presence of Vigilance Committee and its efforts have boosted the confidence of the people in the community and they are now alert to monitor the outsiders entering the community. There have been instances in last one year when people in the community found the outsiders suspicious and interrogated them about who they want to meet and why they have entered the community. This increased vigilance of people has also contributed to the reduction in the vulnerability of women and girls in the community.

### Platform for spreading the awareness in the community

Vigilance Committee has also emerged as a platform and tool to spread the awareness in the community on the issue of trafficking. Whenever community people are in doubt about what to do with regards to a case of trafficking or early marriage, they approach members of the Vigilance Committee to clear their doubts and take the action. Vigilance committee has also been able to earn the respect of the community with their sincere work.

## Contribution of Vigilance Committee Members in Other Interventions

More importantly work of Vigilance Committee has not been limited to community monitoring but as they are the influential members of community they have also provided support in the other components of the project. In particular, they have provided active support in convincing the parents of adolescents to let their daughters to be part of different livelihood and vocational training programs that have been organized by the project. Some of their significant contributions are:

- Each members of committee made an effort to send at least two girls to different skill building trainings that were organized by the project.
- The Members of Vigilance Committee visited some of the training institutes to look into the basic facilities and conveniences provided by the institution and assess the safety of girls.
- Majority of the male members in the community consume liquor. As a result a big share of the household income is spent on liquor. This has also become a reason for rising crime, domestic violence and other disturbances in the community. Vigilance Committee members participated in a peaceful rally that was organized with the support of SHGs. A memorandum was also submitted by the committee members to draw the attention of local administration.

## Mobilizing Support of Panchayat Members

Establishing and functioning of any kind of vigilance system demands active participation of Panchayat representatives as they are the formal leaders of community and have an obligation to present an opinion in all the major decisions of community. Considering this, the project made conscious efforts to develop the ownership of community monitoring system among Panchayat members and also deliberately made them an active member of the system. Panchayat members are part of Vigilance Committees of all the three villages.

### *Meeting of Panchayat Members*

First meeting of Panchayat members was organized on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2013 in the community. A total of 17 ward members participated in these meetings. The purpose of this meeting was to draw the attention of Panchayat members to the issues and problems of young women and girls in the community. Major points discussed in the meeting were:

- Issues of young girls and the support that can be provided by Panchayat members to them
- Their support in combating human trafficking at the community level
- Their expected contribution in implementing various project activities

### *Orientation of PRI members on Human Trafficking*

A one day orientation program was then organized for the Panchayat members. The purpose of this training was to give them an orientation about the issue of human trafficking and its gravity in the community. Some of the major themes that were covered in these trainings were:

- Extent of human trafficking in the community
- Processes of human trafficking that are employed by the traffickers in the community
- Human trafficking and Human rights
- Indian laws and legislations on human trafficking
- Ways and strategies to prevent human trafficking in the community

## Benefits of the Community Monitoring System

As identified by the community and the Peer Educators of the project, following are the clear outcomes of the project implementation in the community:

### *Reduced Vulnerability of Young Girls and women to trafficking*

Establishment of community monitoring system has led to greater alertness of the people in general in the community about movement of outsiders. The moment someone spots an outsider the person is confronted and is asked about her/his whereabouts and the reason for coming to the village. This kind of alertness and vigilantism in the community has deterred the traffickers to enter the community.

### *Increased Confidence of Community in lodging FIR*

Earlier community would fear the police officials and they would not approach the police station anticipating that officials would not listen to them and would not lodge their complaints. But with the pressure of Vigilance Committee and other Panchayat members police is now receptive to the grievances of community.

### *Reduction in the Number of Cases of Trafficking. No case identified in last 10 months in the project areas*

Though quantitative data may not be available to substantiate the claims of reduction in the cases of trafficking but it is very clear from the word of mouth and anecdotal evidence that not even a single case of trafficking has been noticed in the community in last 10 months.

### *Increased Mobility of Girls in the Community*

Before the commencement of this project girls in the community were not allowed by the families to go outside without the company of brothers or other male members in the family but with the help of peer groups and their

participation in activities like celebration of important days in the community families have started believing that their girls can go out safely out of the house. Even the girls have developed the confidence to move out in all girls groups.

## Challenges Faced

Community initiatives would always have challenges and this project had its own share of challenges which were worked out and acted upon. Some of these challenges were:

### *Convincing the Influential People about the Existence of Problem*

Convincing the influential people in the community about the existence of human trafficking was a major challenge. Initially majority of them were not willing to accept that such a problem exists in the community. More importantly they did not know how unsafe migration has resulted in trafficking in many cases in the past.

Initially regular meetings with the influential people in the community were held to soften their stance. Once they were willing to listen to the project team, detailed discussions were held with them. These discussions were aimed at making them understand the gravity of problem and its harmful consequences on women and girls.

### *Mobilizing the Influential People in the Community*

Influential people were not even willing to accept that organizing themselves into groups and having monthly meetings to discuss the problems related to trafficking is even a possibility. It took a lot of convincing from the project team that such groups and committees exist in other areas and that their activities have resulted in reduction in trafficking cases.

Though they had started accepting the existence of problem in the community but their participation in the project activities was still not forth coming. For this purpose a formal one day orientation was organized to enlist the participation of influential people in project activities.

### *Misunderstanding among the Vigilance Committee Members*

There were times when there was some mistrust among the members of vigilance committee about the purpose of project. It took some effort from the project team to dispel those concerns. Once such concerns were addressed Vigilance Committee members participated actively in all the activities

## Measures to Ensure the Sustainability of Efforts

- Establishment of Vigilance committee was in itself an important measure to ensure the sustainability of efforts as these members are from the community. However, a final orientation was organized to motivate and convince them to continue the efforts that have been made so far.
- Besides it another way of building the sustainability is the presence of peer educators in the community. Peer educators have also been given an orientation to continue to provide support to Vigilance Committees to organize their meetings and undertake other activities.
- All the members of vigilance committees have given a word that they will continue to work to make their villages trafficking- free. Important reading materials especially on relevant legislation and procedures has also been provided to vigilance committees so that in case they need any kind of clarification of doubts or confusion then they can take help from these documents.

## Case Studies

### Case Study 1

*This case study is about a 17 year old girl named Sarla (name changed) from Ranpur village who was abducted and sexually abused by her neighbor in the month of January 2013. After abusing her he threatened her of dire consequences if she reveals it to anyone. Besides it he promised to marry her. As a result, the girl did not tell anybody in her family about the incident. But once the word about the gruesome incident spread in the community the boy left the village and did not come back for days. Family then approached the local Police station to register the case but police officers did not listen to the family. After this Sarla's family requested the vigilance committee to help the family in lodging the complaint with the police. With the help of the pressure of the Vigilance Committee members Sarla formally lodged an FIR and gave statement against the accused at Ranpur police station on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Police registered a case under section 376 in IPC and started investigation. Vigilance committee member gave moral support to victim's family and pressurized the police to arrest the accused as soon as possible.*

### Case Study 2

*This case study is about a 21 year old girl from village Mangarajpur who was murdered by the husband and her in-laws on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2013 and her husband and in laws tried to pass it off as a case of suicide. She was married in February 2013, when she was 21 and her father gave her a dowry of INR 75000 in cash and jewelry and household goods worth a sum of INR 425000. But her husband and in-laws were not happy with this dowry. They asked her to get more money from her parents but she refused. Later on they started harassing her for more money. Gita used to complain to her mother and brother that she was being harassed by her husband, her brother in law and other in-laws for more dowry, but her family told her to adjust and in the meantime they would try to meet the demand. On April 24, 2013 two months after her marriage, Gita was murdered. Her husband's family said that she had committed suicide (her neck strangled with a rope). Case was booked against four persons under section 498 (A), 304(B) of the IPC (FIR crime No 388/99) filed on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2013 at the Ranpur Police Station. Her husband is absconding with other family members. Vigilance committee has been proactive in providing support to the victim's family in not only lodging the First Information Report but also in pursuing the case further. Vigilance Committee has also played an active role in facilitating the meeting of victim's father with Superintendent of Police, Nayagarh. As the family of victim is illiterate and without any access to legal support Vigilance Committee members have also been active in providing support to them in accessing the legal support.*

### Case Study 3

*Malti, a sixteen year old girl from Ranpur was abducted from her village when her parents had gone to a relative's house outside the village. She was abducted by Rama Nayak, from Ganjam district in Odisha. Before abducting her Rama Nayak would call the girl and ask her to come along with him but she would always refuse. Father of girl contacted the Sarpanch of village and Vigilance Committee members to provide assistance in lodging the FIR and finding the girl as Police was not cooperating with the family at all. Sarpanch and Samiti people offered full support to the victim's family and pressurised the local police station to lodge the FIR and find the girl. After few days the girl was rescued by the police from a nearby area and handed over to her parents.*



### IMPACT Partners in Social Development

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### CBATN (Cross Border Anti Trafficking Network)

CBATN is a coalition of NGOs coming together from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal to fight the menace of cross border trafficking between these countries. CBATN is registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860. The mission of CBATN is ***“To eliminate all forms of violence against women and children, particularly human trafficking”***. As its long term goal, CBATN will ensure that ***“Permanent systems and institutions are established to ensure significant reduction in cross-border human trafficking, adequately supported by quality care to survivors and deserving punishment to the perpetrators”***



### Madhyam Foundation

Madhyam Foundation is registered under Societies Act 1860. It works with more than 23,000 poor and marginalized families in 8 districts of Odisha including project district Nayagarh. Madhyam mainly undertakes capacity building and core expertise in formation of Self-Help Groups. Madhyam is also working on raising awareness on the issues of migration and human trafficking. It works on improving the access of migrants to different social security schemes.

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