

Engaging Young Girls to Combat Trafficking



Peer Group Meeting

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 Ranpaur 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, community monitoring through vigilance committees, developing and promoting local livelihood options and engaging young girls in information dissemination

This paper provides the details of the intervention carried out with young girls in the project area.

Context

Odisha is one of the trafficking prone state of India and as in any trafficking prone communities, young girls especially adolescents are most vulnerable for trafficking. Therefore, awareness generation among adolescents was one of the important component of the multi-pronged strategy adopted in this project to prevent trafficking in the Ranpur Gram Panchayat of Nayagarh district of Odisha. In the past, major target of traffickers have been young girls and adolescents as they can be lured and trapped very easily. The project sought to empower them by engaging them as peer groups. Formation of Adolescent Groups was not only aimed at making them aware to prevent trafficking but the larger purpose was to empower them by making them understand the gender inequality in the society and importance of participatory decision making in their lives.

Formation of Peer Groups

Total 15 Peer Groups were formed during the project duration with 143 members. Majority of the members of these groups are young girls in the community. As the population in Ranpur is more than double of the combined population of Mangrajpur and Raghunathpur villages, Ranpur has highest number of Peer groups. There are 12 groups in Ranpur while Mangrajpur and Raghunathpur have 1 and 2 groups respectively. Average size of groups is 9 to 10 girls. More than 80% of the girls are in the age group of 15 to 20 years.

Activities of the Groups

Meetings with Peer Groups

Monthly meetings have been conducted with the Peer groups. A least 15 meetings have been conducted by each Peer Group during the project duration. Different audio visual media were used during these meetings. Other participatory activities like role play, dancing, drawing competition etc. have been a regular feature of these meetings. A detailed agenda for these meetings were established early in the process to ensure that new topics are incorporated after every few meetings. This was helpful as it retained the interest of the group members and they were always curious to know what is coming next. Some of the major themes discussed in these meetings are:

Group Formation and Rapport Building

Initial few meetings were about group formation and building the rapport among the girls. This stage took a bit longer as these girls were not in the habit of sitting in formal meetings and it required a lot of efforts to convince the parents to let their girls be a part of peer groups.

Gender Discrimination and Perception of Girls about Themselves

Next few meetings were aimed at understanding the perceptions of girls about themselves and their aspirations and hopes. Gender issues and how gender discrimination restricts the choices of girls in the community were discussed. Girls were also motivated to share their experiences of gender discrimination



Peer Group Meeting



Role Play during Peer Group Meeting

both at the family and community level. Other issues including sexual abuse and eve teasing were also prioritized for discussed.

Issue of Trafficking and Migration in the Community

Next round of meetings were used to discuss the issues of trafficking and migration in the community. Strategies that are generally used by the traffickers to lure young girls were also discussed in these meetings. Trafficking of women and girls and its effects on the lives and families of those women were the themes of next few meetings.

Livelihood Options and Vocational Training

Options of starting livelihood activities for girls were also discussed in these meetings, integrating it with the Issue of safe migration. Some of the meetings also included components of personality development of the members through participatory exercises like out of the box thinking and goal setting. Through these sessions, girls were primarily motivated to start thinking of making themselves economically empowered, ensuring their safety either through gaining livelihoods at their homes or through safe migration.

Celebration of Important Days

Throughout the duration of project important days were celebrated in the community. Peer groups of all the three villages were the main organizing force behind the celebration of these days. All the members of peer groups have participated actively in these celebrations. These celebrations have been used to spread awareness in the community about the prevention of trafficking and mobilize the community to act against trafficking. Some of the important days that have been celebrated are given below:

Republic Day

Different competitions including drawing and creative writing were organized on the Republic Day. The basic objectives behind organizing these events in the community were:

- To give a platform to the young girls to exhibit their skills and knowledge
- To inspire young girls to do something for their community

Drawing Competition

The topic of drawing competition was “Different institutions and their roles in the community”. This was an inter Peer group competition. Winners of this competition were

- *DURGA Sathee Samuha (Peer Group)*- First Prize
- *ABHILIPSA Sathee Samuha (Peer Group)*– Second Prize
- *SMRUTI PRAGYAN Samuha (Peer Group)*--Third prize



Drawing Competition

Creative Writing Competition

The topic of creative writing competition was “Are you proud of being a girl If Yes, what is the reason and if no then why not?” The girls in the community took part in these programs with great enthusiasm and verve and enjoyed the programs thoroughly. Winners of creative writing competition were

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| ➤ <i>Archana Ghadei</i>
First Prize | ➤ <i>Monalisa Mohapatra</i>
Second Prize | ➤ <i>Sradhanjali Ghadei</i>
Third prize |
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International Women's Day

International Women's' day was celebrated on 8th March with lots of fanfare among women and girls in project villages. After the welcome speech by Project coordinator, the Project director briefed the girls and Women regarding the significance of celebrating the women's day. All the women and girls expressed the importance to fight for their rights and also took oath to check the selling of country liquor in the community which they consider to be the root cause of domestic violence.



International Women Day

National Youth Day

The celebrations on National Youth Day were attended by members of the peer groups, vigilance committee members and parents in the community. The basic objective of this celebration was to sensitize girls about their rights and to create awareness on different issues that affect the dignity, safety and security of women in the community.

Vocational Training

Any kind of improvement in skills and capabilities in young girls is always an important instrument for their empowerment. Considering this, project motivated and organized vocational training programs for the members of these peer groups in partnership with different specialized skill providers. A brief description of these vocational training activities is given below:

Beautician Course for Members of Peer Groups

A refresher beautician training course was organized for the members of peer groups. This was a ten day course organized in the Lovlyn beauty parlor in Ranpur. An experienced beautician provided this training which included basic skills like hair cutting, skin care and applying henna.

As a result of this training, the trained girls have started getting calls from wedding ceremonies to provide these services to the brides and their relatives. This has become a source of earning to some of these peer girls. Two of the girls are in the process of opening their own beauty parlor.

Tailoring training for Peer Girls

A training program on tailoring was also organized by the project. Project collaborated with Rudset, a training institute of Government of India at Bhubaneswar to provide these trainings. Rudset institute provides different skill training to the rural youth in Odisha. 21 girls participated in this training program which was organized at Bhubaneswar. Initially it took a lot of effort to convince the parents to send their girls to participate in this 20-days long program, outside of their homes. During the 21 days of training the girls learned stitching and designing of different dresses and Rudset institute provided certificates to the girls after completion of the



Certificate Distribution Ceremony



Certificate Distribution for Vocational Training

course. Project has now provided 4 sewing machines to the girls to start their own business. Participation in this course has really made the girls confident and they have started thinking about opening their own business.

Challenges of Working with the Adolescents

Some of the broad Challenges faced while working with the adolescents and young girls in the community include:

Mobility of Girls

The community and its surroundings are very patriarchal in nature. Women and especially young girls have a very restricted mobility in terms of distances. No girl was allowed to come out of her home alone, primarily because if she comes out on her own, the local boys would do eve teasing. So one challenge was to motivate the girls to come out of their homes to participate in different activities like celebration of important days or participation in the vocational trainings.

Recruitment of female peer educators was very helpful in dispelling the fears of the community. The fact that all the peer educators were recruited from the community only proved to be very decisive in winning the confidence of the families. Once initial few meetings were held, parents developed confidence and became comfortable in letting their girls cross the house boundaries.

Convincing the Parents

People in the community were very skeptical about why the peer groups were being formed. More than the girls it is the parents of the girls who were more doubtful and apprehensive about why project team was trying to strike a rapport with them. Moreover the context of trafficking in the community made parents even more skeptical about the efforts of project team.

Special meetings were conducted by the peer educators in the leadership of project officer to convince the parents about the concept of forming Peer Groups and how in the long run it would support the girls and empower them. Support of Panchayat members also proved very helpful in this regard.

Convincing them to be part of the Groups

Organizing the girls into peer groups was a big challenge in itself. More than the formation of groups, having regular meetings with the girls in the initial months was also a big challenge as these girls are not in the habit of sitting in formal and organized meetings.

Different kind of games and fun activities were used to initiate their interest in initial few meetings with the girls in the community. Once the girls got interested in the activities, their participation increased. The rolling agenda of the meetings, integrating new things after few meetings kept their interest alive in the groups.

Culture of Silence

In the peer group meetings initially girls would not speak anything and they would not participate actively. One very basic reason for their prolonged silence was that these girls have never been asked to express themselves. They have always experienced themselves to be suppressed in front of their brothers and other male members in the family. It took a lot of efforts to make the girls express themselves confidently and assertively.

Different role plays and activities were organized in the peer group meetings to reduce the level of shyness and hesitation of girls. Peer educators were specially trained by the project staff to hold such activities at regular intervals.

Decline in the Strength of Groups

One of the major challenge has been the declining strength of the peer groups. One to two members have left from almost all the groups because of the marriages. Two groups especially faced the problem of reduced strength as a good number of girls got married from each group. Because of this problem these groups were merged with the other groups. This is the major reason for decline in number of groups. Currently 10 groups are functional and active.

Peer educators have not only discussed the harmful effects of early marriages in the peer group meetings but they have also tried hard to convince the parents to go for marriages of their girls at the age stipulated by law. Besides it peer educators have also made an effort to make the group activities relevant, interesting as well as context-specific for the peer girls so that their interest level in peer group meetings remains undiminished. The group members and peer educators were constantly motivated to engage new and younger girls as their members so that their membership does not drop any further.

Challenge in taking them out of the Community for different Vocational Trainings

It was a huge challenge to convince the girls in the community to commute to city or to stay in Bhubaneswar to attend different vocational trainings that were being proposed to them. After a lot of convincing girls would get ready to move out but then their family members would not agree. On many instances females in the family got convinced to send the girls out to attend vocational trainings, but male members in the family did not agree and expressed many concerns. Dates for commencement of these trainings had to be postponed to get consensus within the families to let their girls attend these trainings.

Project staff met and convinced the Panchayat members and other influential members of the community to convince the parents of the girls. Meetings of the parents were organized with the trainers from training institutes to develop the confidence of parents to send their girls for vocational trainings. A group of parents and Panchayat leaders was taken to the residential and coaching facilities of training institutes in Bhubaneswar to show them the safety measures that would be taken to ensure the safety of girls during the training period.

Achievements

- Spatial mobility is a very important step for boosting the confidence of girls in the community. It gives them a sense of autonomy. Project has been able to improve the mobility of the girls in the community. They are no longer dependent on their brothers or father to get even basic items from the nearby shops or grocery stores. Some of the girls who participated in the vocational training stayed in Bhubaneswar for the duration of trainings which is a big achievement in itself
- Level of confidence of peer girls has really been boosted. Girls have developed the confidence to talk to the elders and influential people in the community. In many meetings where Panchayat functionaries were present girls could articulate their concerns confidently and assertively.
- Before the implementation of this project, girls in the community could not have even imagined that they could take part in vocational training. But project ensured that adolescents from the community develop some vocational skills and act as role models for other girls to follow. These trainings have not only

boosted the confidence of these girls but they have also given confidence to other girls in the community who were not even part of these trainings.

- There has been a sharp decline in the number of cases of trafficking from the community in last one year. This is a massive achievement as this community witnesses trafficking cases at regular intervals. Generally adolescents and young girls in the community would be the target of traffickers but now because of the increased awareness among the adolescents through the peer groups trafficking is practically eradicated from this community.
- One of the main reason of trafficking was that when girls would receive telephone calls or other gifts from the traffickers then they would not tell anybody about this as parents would not listen to them, and would only blame the girls for such efforts. But with the meetings of groups now girls have become expressive and have developed the confidence to share their concerns with their parents as well as with the fellow per group members.
- There was hardly any interaction among the boys and girls in the community. Whenever a boy and girl would interact it used to be considered something that should be avoided. With the implementation of project this barrier has weakened and community is beginning to accept healthy interaction between boys and girls.

Learnings from the Project

- Communities that have experienced trafficking are very skeptical and it becomes very difficult to work with the women and especially young girls in such communities. Unless the community starts believing the project team or unless the project is able to strike a rapport with the community, intervention is extremely difficult. It means that the project needs to make extra efforts to establish a rapport with the community in such settings.
- Having the peer educators from the community proved to be very helpful in working with the girls from the community. The fact that peer educators were from the same community helped in convincing the parents to let their daughters attend the meetings of peer groups. It also helped in building good rapport with the project team. Peer educators, therefore need to be engaged from the same community.

Measures to Ensure Sustainability

Some of the measures that have been taken to ensure the sustainability of these efforts are:

- A lead group comprising two members from each peer group has been formed. This lead group will ensure the continuous monitoring of activities of all the groups. Another major responsibility of this lead group is to motivate more girls to join the Peer Groups so that groups are able to retain their membership
- This lead group has also been provided orientation about the ways to ensure the sustainability of these groups.
- Trend of celebrating the important days has also been established in the community. This trend will also be helpful in sustaining the awareness generation efforts in the community.





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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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