

**A MODEL ON STRENGTHENING
VILLAGE LEVEL CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE
BY RUPANTARAN FOUNDATION**

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Abbreviation and Acronyms

ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
BDO	Block Development Officer
BLPC	Block Level Child Protection Committee
BMOH	Block Medical Officer of Health
BWO	Block Welfare Officer
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer
CWO	Child Welfare Officer
DALSA	District Legal Services Authority
DPCU	District Child Protection Unit
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
ICPS	Integrated Child Protection Scheme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PLV	Para Legal Volunteer
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
SC	Scheduled caste
SMC	School Management Committee
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VHSNC	Village Health Nutrition & Sanitation Committee
VLAP	Village Level Action Plan (Child Protection)
VLCPC	Village Level Child Protection Committee

CHAPTER 1

Introduction



The Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)¹ is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in the year 2009-10, aimed at building a protective environment for children in difficult circumstances, as well as other vulnerable children, through Government-Civil Society Partnership.

Child Protection Committees (CPC) is schematic body of ICPS and is a community-based group including duty-bearers, who are primarily responsible for creating and promoting a child friendly and safe community environment wherein all children's wellbeing, safety and rights are protected. CPCs is responsible for monitoring, reporting and responding to the issues of child protection in the community. The CPCs also plan and take up innovative activities to raise awareness in the community about the issues of local child protection concern. The CPCs work in close coordination with the District Child Protection Unit for activities in the community on child protection issues. The CPC will develop Annual action plans to address issues of child protection, CPCs refer and report cases to higher level of protection committees. The CPCs will engage various stakeholders and duty bearers to raise awareness on children's rights and protection at the community level.

The village level Child Protection Committees is established in each village (Gram Sansad) for prevention, reporting, monitoring, protection and responding on the issues of child right and protection. The VLCPC is a community-based organisation formed by the participation of community member, children, Government functionaries and elected representatives. The VLCPC initially had below mentioned composition:

Sl. No.	Suggested Members	VLCPC	Designation
1	Children Representative (12-18 years) - If Children Group exists in the community, then the Children Group will nominate, otherwise School Teacher will nominate the children)	2	Member
2	Anganwari Worker	1	Treasurer
3	School Teacher (Local School) (to be nominated by the	1	Member

¹ <http://wcd-icps.nic.in/public/about.aspx>

Sl. No.	Suggested Members	VLCPC	Designation
	school inspector)		
4	Auxiliary Nurses Midwives (ANM)	1 or more	Member
5	Community Based Organisation/ NGO/ VHSC/ Women Self Help Group (Chairperson to decide with Secretary)	2	Member
6	Reputed and respected person from community (Chairperson to decide with Secretary- BWO/ Social Workers or Out Reach Workers of DCPU may be considered)	2	Member
7	Elected Representative of village (Chairperson to decide with Secretary)	1	Member
8	Head of Local Panchayati Raj Institution (Pradhan) /his or her nominee	1	Chairperson
9	Parents from School Management Committee (Chairperson of SMC to decide with Secretary)	1	Member
10	Anganwari Supervisor (CDPO to Nominate) / Block Welfare Officer/Social Worker/Outreach Worker (Contractual)	1	Convenor / Member Secretary
11	Representatives from weaker section (SC, ST, Minorities, Physically challenged) (Chairperson to decide with Secretary)	2	Member

A total of six (6) seats was reserved for female members including one girl as a children representative. Later on, two more Children Representative (12-18 years) were added including one girl as a children representative.

Rupantaran Foundation works on the issues of gender equity, child protection, livelihoods promotion, education, health and nutrition. Since 2009, Rupantaran is working in Indian Sundarbans. Rupantaran engages with children, adolescents, community members, institutions and partner organisations through direct implementation or as technical support organisation. Rupantaran has been quite successful in running structured collectivisation process with adolescents and youth as well as ensuring community led participatory vulnerability and capacity analysis and community development plan.

Joynagar – 1 Block is one of the 19 blocks of under the Sundarbans region. The Sundarbans region remains one of the most backward region in terms of quality of life. According to the Human Development Report for the South 24 Parganas district, published in 2009, in the Joynagar I CD block the percentage of households below poverty line was 39.57%. As per the Census 2011, 52.65% population is Hindu, 46.86% Muslims and 0.49% follow other religion. Joynagar – I block is connected through Kolkata by road and also through sub-urban railway network. The block has served as source and transit point for trafficking. Bamangachi is one of the 12-gram panchayats of Joynagar – I Block, South 24 Parganas. Nearly 85% of the total population are from socio-economically marginalised section, early marriage of a girl is quite common and so is the dropping out of school. The girls are treated as second citizens and cases of gender-based discrimination and violence is rampant. There were missing cases of girls and people have negligible amount of awareness on trafficking related issue. In spite of ICPS being launched in 2009, Village level Child Protection committees (VLCPCs) which is a key grassroots body to oversee the situation of child protection in a gram sansad, has not even formed until 2016.

Considering all the vulnerability factors, from the year 2017 Rupantaran took up a pilot project to strengthen the VLCPCs in Bamangachi panchayat.

CHAPTER 2

Capacity Building of VLCPC



The sansads of Bamangachi panchayat were not having any VLCPCs, after series of advocacy meetings with block officials and panchayat members, the VLCPCs were formed in each of the sansads of Bamangachi panchayat. However, VLCPCs required extensive inputs through trainings to understand their role, function as chartered under the ICPS and own the responsibility to ensure a safe environment for children in terms of child protection issues.

▪ **Orientation**

We have conducted an orientation of the key VLCPC members of the each of the 18 VLCPCs of all the sansads of Bamangachi. The orientation was conducted in the gram panchayat hall itself on the following issues:



- The orient key VLCPC members on the objectives and roles of the committees.
- To facilitate a sense of ownership amongst the VLCPC members towards the issue and ensuring child protection in their sansads.

The orientation was designed in the such a way that the participants can understand the responsibility and own it, as it's a voluntary schematic body.

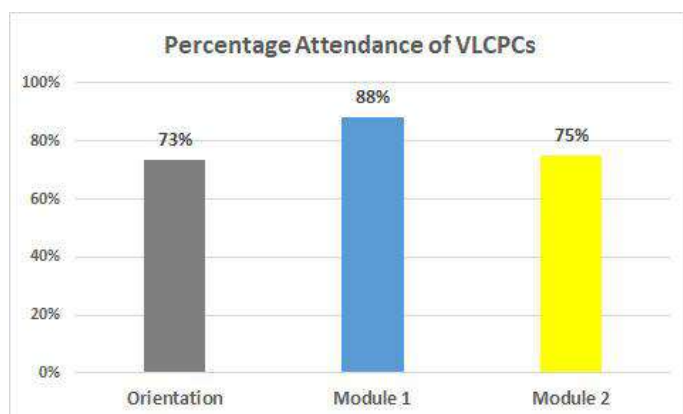
▪ **Induction Training**

The Women and Child Ministry of West Bengal government and UNICEF has developed Induction Training Manual for Child Protection Committees. There are two modules and each module is of two days with below mentioned objectives:

- To assist CPCs in recognising the importance of their role as a key child protection actor particularly in terms of operationalising community-based safety net for children.
- To orient CPCs on specific core content areas to enable them to initiate functioning as mandated under the ICPS.
- To make them aware and build consensus on the Code of Conduct for working with children.

- To help CPCs familiarize themselves with key formats/records and other procedural aspects.
- To establish the importance of collaboration between key child protection actors including referral mechanisms.

Rupantaran provided training of both the modules through the master trainers recognised by government at block meeting hall. During each of the meeting as a strategy to connect the VLCPCs with BLCPCs, at least one of the BLCPC member which includes BDO, BWO, BMOH, CDPO, CWO of local Police Station.



The graph shows the percentage attendance of VLCPC members in orientation, Module 1 and Module 2 training.

CHAPTER 3

Child Representatives of VLCPC



As per ICPS guidelines, there were two children in the VLCPC and one seat out of which were reserved for a girl child. Later, the guideline suggested four child representatives in the committee. Conceptually, the Child Representatives represent the children of the area and are expected to voice out the child protection concerns that children may be facing at villages.

This ideal place of the children in the child protection committees is incredibly difficult to implement given the broader social context of age-based inequality. Despite good intentions, adults and children replicate deeply structured patterns of behaviour that give adults greater power in the committee. With this unequal power, low social status and almost no confidence, children often do not remain present or participate in the committee. Rupantaran felt there is a need of working with the child representatives as well as the adult representatives to ensure greater participation in the child protection committees.

Conducting workshop with child representatives of VLCPCs:

Workshop 1

We have conducted a day-long workshop with the child representatives of all the sansads of Bamangachi panchayat to orient them separately in a child friendly language on following issues:

- Understanding on basic child protection issues like child marriage, trafficking, child sexual abuse etc.
- Village Level Child Protection Committee and their roles and responsibility as child members in this committee.

The entire workshop was designed in such a way that it would be a combination of gaining knowledge as well as participative, to work towards a comprehensive and experiential understanding. Multiple modes of exploration were used in the forms of fun activities, group discussions, games, film show, lectures, and power point presentations.



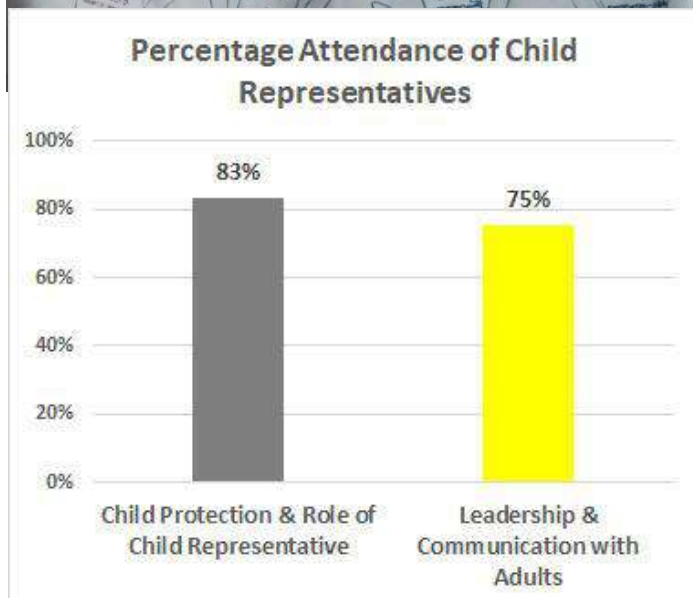
Workshop 2

The second follow up workshop with the child representatives of all the sansads of Bamangachi panchayat was to orient them on following issues:



- To understand the inner and outer challenges to deal with adult VLCPC members and how to overcome those challenges
- Skill building on effective communications with adults and building leadership

The workshop was designed such a way that the children can learn in fun as well as participative way.



The graph shows the percentage attendance of child representatives in the workshops.

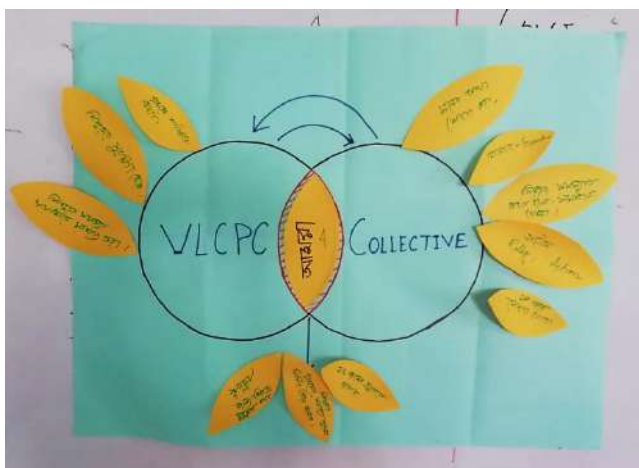
I used to be bit scared during the VLCPC meeting, but the training help me understand the child marriage and other issues better. Also it gave me confidence to share my opinion. In fact, after training I have talked to many on these issues.

Sunita Mondal, 16 years old

(Child representative of Chalteberia Sansad, Bamangachi GP)

Ensuring dignified dialogs between the child and adult representatives of VLPCs

Child participation is much more than having a presence. It is about being informed, engaged and having a voice in the committee. For that, the committee should create a safe space for the child representative to talk, heard and get importance. To ensure that we did a meeting with each VLPC committee on the importance of creating a dignified dialogs within the committee.



The child representatives shared that the process was very helpful for them. We have observed the increased participation within each VLPC by the child.

CHAPTER 4

On field handholding support to VLCPC



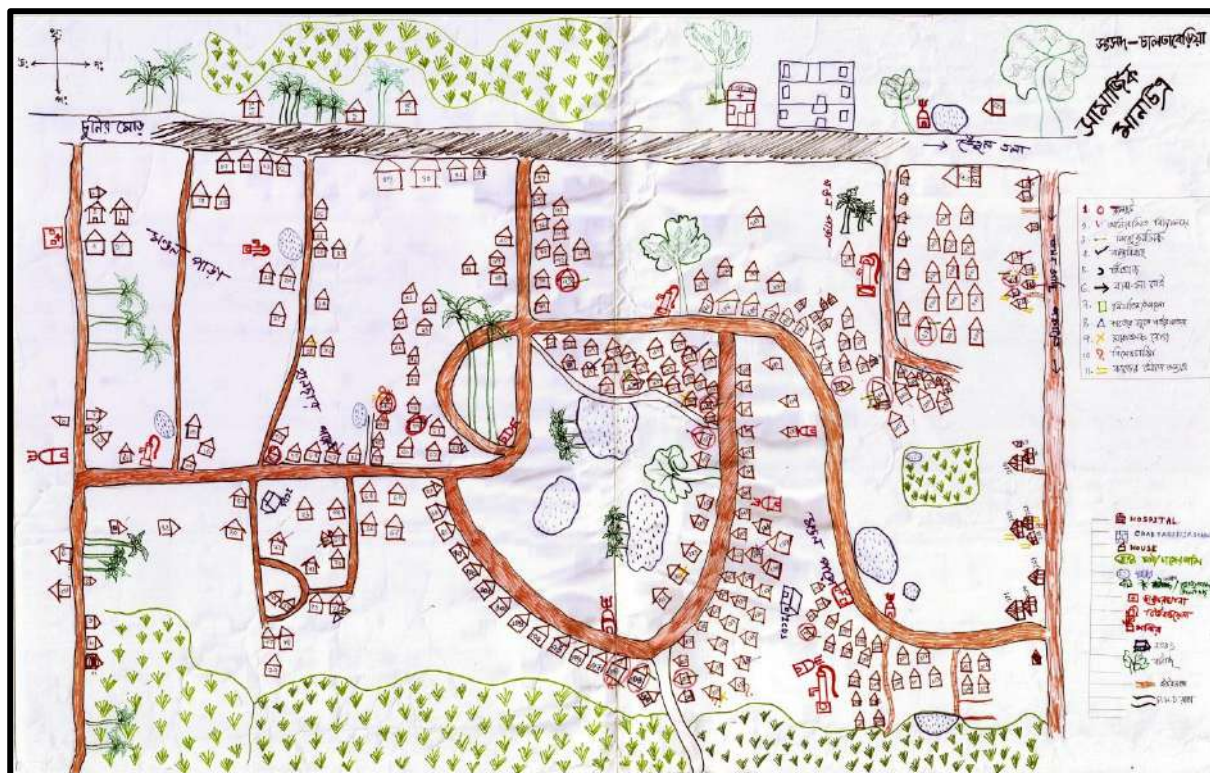
From working with the VLCPC members closely and having rounds of discussions with them, we learned that capacity building is not enough. To ensure that the VLCPC members can do some community based work in their respective area we need to handhold them on field. We have given the handhold support in two areas:

1. Identification of vulnerable children through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method.
2. Making Village Level Action Plans (VLAPs).

1. Identification of vulnerable children through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods

We have provided PRA training to representatives of each of the 18 VLCPCs on how to identify the vulnerable children of their area. Social Mapping and Seasonal Mapping are used in this respect.

Social mapping: Social mapping is a visual method of showing the relative location of households and the distribution of different people (such as male, female, adult, child, landless, illiterate etc.) together with the social structure, groups and organisations of an area. After getting the training, VLCPC members organised a meeting in their respective gram sansad where they have invited local people along with some respected person of the area to make the map. Below is a sample social map of Chaltaberia Sansad,



Bamangachhi Panchayat. Below is the compiled data that came out through the social map of all the 18 sansads of the Gram Panchayat.

SI No.	Types of Vulnerability	Number came out from the Social Map
1	Drop out children	544
2	Irregular school going children	194
3	Child labour	442
4	Child marriage	173
5	Missing/ Trafficking	20
6	Children without parents	72
7	Child abuse	53
8	Unattended children	62
9	Family having chronic diseases	200
10	Special Child	217
11	Migration within family	396

Verification of data: After getting the data, the VLCPC has visited all the identified houses to verify the data. While doing this home visits they also made those families aware regarding the ill effects of child marriage, dropout, child labour, unsafe migration and trafficking.

Seasonal mapping: Seasonal mapping is the seasonal activity profile and seasonal analysis. Seasonal diagram is one of the popular PRA methods that has been used for temporal analysis across annual cycles, with months or seasons as the basic unit of analysis. Here we used this tool to identify the time / season of dropping out, child marriage, migration etc. so that the VLCPC members can plan the targeted awareness programme on a specific time.



2. Making Village Level Action Plans (VLAPs)

After identifying the families and child protection issues of their respective sansad, a training was organised in Joynagar I Block on presenting the data came out from the PRA to Block level officials. Three key persons from each VLCPCs were trained by us on how to make the VLAP and budget. After getting the training, they shared it to other VLCPC members of their respective committee and each VLCPCs prepared Village Level Action Plans (VLAPs) and draft budget for their particular Sansads.



- Submitting the VLAP to BLCPC:** After finalising the VLAPs, few representatives of VLCPCs presented the plan and budget to BLCPC in presence of Block Development Officer. The BDO was very happy about this initiative and promised to support all the VLCPCs when needed.
- Execution of VLCPC annual action plan:** In the Gramsabha meeting, the panchayat allocated 5000 Rs. per sansad for FY 2018-19 to work on the basis of VLAPs developed. Unfortunately, they were unable to complete the budgeted plan because the VLCPCs unable to access of the panchayat fund due to some technical issues. Despite this obstacle, the VLCPCs have tried to execute the plan onto the non-budget. For example - Kashipur I sansad VLCPC members organized an awareness generation meeting on the issues of child marriage and dropout in the locality without any cost.

CHAPTER 5

Creating Synergy for VLCPC Functioning



For the VLCPCs to function smoothly, a synergy is required from four levels children, community, panchayat as well as block level.

• **Children**

At Bamangachi VLCPC worked closely with the children especially the children's group of their sansad. In fact, the child representatives of VLCPC were from these children's group only. The synergy with children helped the VLCPCs to get information about cases of vulnerable and also, the VLCPCs planned community awareness building events jointly with the children. One of such joint awareness building activity was covered by Anandabazar Patrika (shared in right hand side).



• **Community**

The VLCPC was a new body which community was not aware of. Awareness in community regarding this body is a critical component as until and unless the community is aware of this body, the community will not approach them for any child protection vulnerability. So, to make the community aware we displayed the names of each VLCPC members and contact details (with due permission) at the key locations of each of the sansads. We used wall writing which is a popular tool to



spread message in rural Bengal.

Along with that, each VLCPCs were provided with a kit which included a banner, meeting resolution book and stamp along with other stationaries so that VLCPC is formalised and recognised in the community. Also, this helped in members of VLCPCs to feel a sense of self-respect and responsibility towards the cause.

▪ **Panchayat**

To strengthen the functioning of the VLCPCs, the local panchayat has to play an important role. Since the beginning, we worked closely with the Bamangachi panchayat, be it forming the VLCPCs, revising the list after the panchayat election, or to allot a designated space for VLCPCs to conduct meeting. The panchayat extended their full cooperation and proactively took part in the VLCPC strengthening processes. Along with that to institutionalise Child protection issues in panchayat's functioning, we periodically tried to encourage panchayat to include child protection as an agenda for the fourth Saturday meeting.

Unsafe migration is one of the prime factors contributing to vulnerability of children in terms of child protection issues, be it trafficking, early marriage or labour. We conducted a consultation on unsafe migration in the Bamangachi panchayat with the key persons including Pradhan, Upa-pradhan, other elected representative, ASHA, ANM & ICDS workers. The objective of the consultation was to have a basic understanding of:

- What is migration?
- When we call migration safe or unsafe?
- How unsafe migration is linked to Child protection issues?
- How to mitigate unsafe migration?

Towards the end, it was decided that a migration register will be maintained at the panchayat office, recording the details of person going out for migration.

▪ **Block**

The block level child protection committee (BLCPC) is the next tier of child protection committee. For VLCPCs to function smoothly specially to handle cases, the support

of block level officials / BLCPC members is pivotal. We worked closely with the key persons of Joynagar – I block including BDO, Joint BDO, BWO, CDPO, BWO, BMOH and police.

Regular interface of VLCPCs with members of BLCPCs were conducted where the VLCPCs provided update of their work and also shared the challenges faced to seek support from BLCPCs.

Gender discrimination is one of the root causes of many child protection vulnerabilities be it child marriage or trafficking. We conducted a consultation on gender equity where the intersectionality of gender issues and child protection issues was discussed. Along with that together with DCPU, we conducted a consultation on Juvenile Justice Act, ICPS and role of Child Protection committees for block level stakeholders.

CHAPTER 6

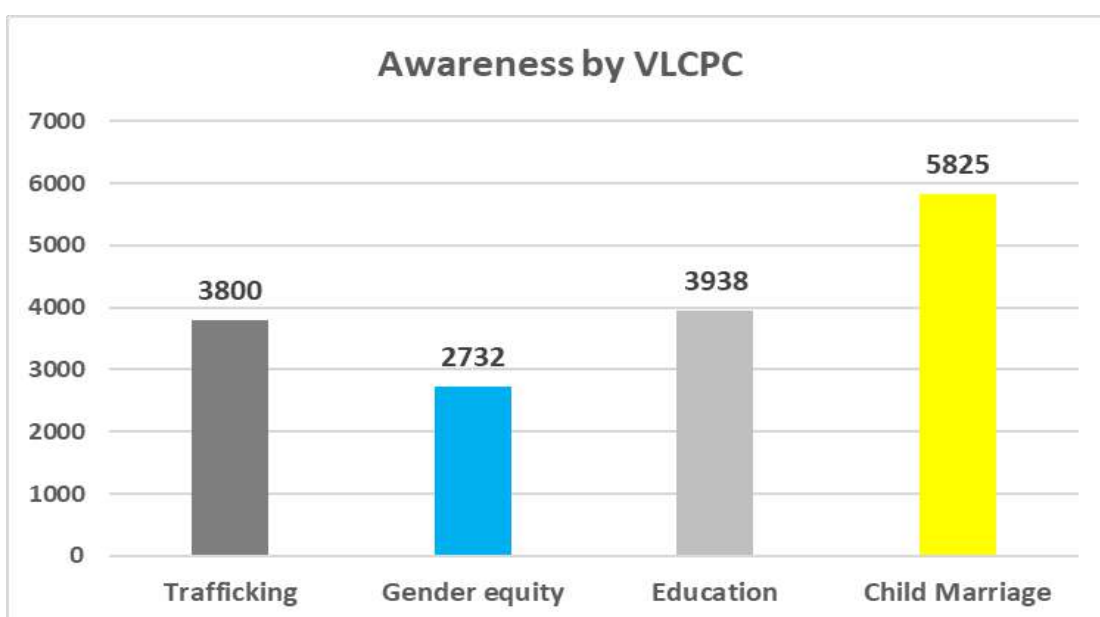
VLCPCs in Action



Once the VLCPCs were capacitated on child protection issues, they owned the responsibilities and started having synergy with the community, and in turn came into action.

Awareness:

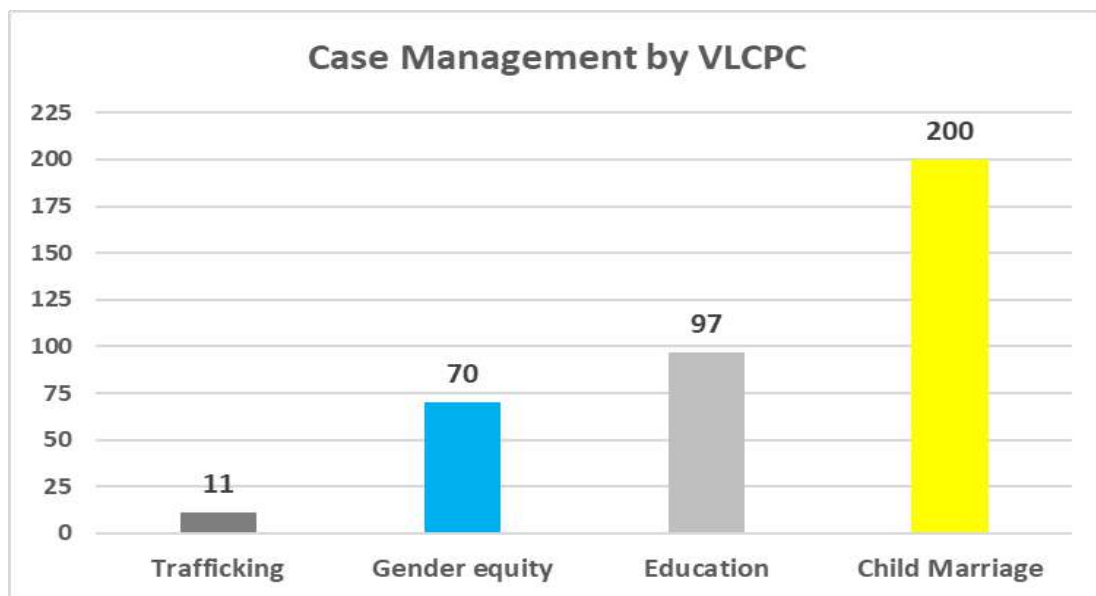
During the initial phase the VLCPCs conducted awareness with the community members on the issues of trafficking, gender equity, education and child marriage. They used different awareness methods like organising community meetings, even used one of the popular mass awareness techniques like rally. One of the VLCPC even prepared a skit on child trafficking and used that skit to aware and initiate dialogue around trafficking issues in the community. Below mentioned is the cumulative reach to community members by the VLCPCs of Bamangachi panchayat.



Case Management

The VLCPCs played a significant role in managing the cases of vulnerable. After the VLCPCs identified the vulnerable children through PRA techniques, they started taking actions to address the vulnerabilities. To address the vulnerabilities, the VLCPC members conducted meetings with the group of vulnerable children and their parents, sometimes with the fathers, mothers and children separately to understand the cause and to find a meaningful solution. Also, they visited the households of the vulnerable child to understand the individual situation and to try providing one to one customised case management strategies. The problems they addressed had a diverse range, be it stopping the drop-out from school, preventing eve-teasing, protecting girls from early or forced marriage, or taking proactive role to rescuing girls from trafficking.

The VLCPCs of Bamangachi undertook 378 cases of vulnerable children to resolve which includes 11 trafficking cases. Below mentioned is the chart depicting the cases vis-à-vis vulnerabilities.



Whenever they found that a case, which is beyond their capacities to resolve, they took help of BDO, BWO, Childline and even Police. This support was required especially in the cases of trafficking or when the parents were quite adamant to forcefully marry their girls at early age. 15 cases of child protection vulnerabilities were referred by VLCPCs to BDO, Police and Childline.

Jahanara Khatun (name changed) is an adolescent girl studying in class IX in Chaltaberia High School. One day, on the way to school few boys stopped her way, and one of them proposed his love for Jahanara. Jahanara refused and told him that she does not love him and warned him not to disturb her any further as she wants to continue her education. Since then the boys started harassing her and threatened that they will kidnap her and she will be trafficked. Jahanara was very scared and decided to approach local VLCPC for help.

The VLCPC members of Kashipur 1 Sansad listened to her issue and decided to help her. Two members of VLCPC went to the place where the boys normally tease her. The VLCPC members talked to them and instructed them to apologise to Jahanara for their misbehaviour otherwise VLCPC members would hand them over to police. The boys apologized to Jahanara for misbehaviour and promised they will never do such work again. Since then they are not seen teasing any girl.

Beyond Child Protection

Even during the lockdown due to COVID pandemic, the VLCPCs continued to try their best to initiate a process of spreading awareness on the precautionary measure of corona amongst the community. Along with the health workers, they helped in organising COVID checking camp and kept a record of migrant workers, supported Anganwadi workers to distribute the dry ration. They spread message to update the MGNREGA job card and suggested applying for it for those who do not have access. VLCPCs even identified the vulnerable family who were facing difficulty in terms of economic issues and distributed the dry ration to support the families to survive.

CHAPTER 7

Our Learning



The pilot initiative to capacitate the VLCPCs gave us good amount of experience as well as learning. Below mentioned are few of the learning from the pilot phase:

- **Training of VLCPCs on vulnerable identification**

The charted roles and responsibilities for the VLCPCs as per the CPC guidelines include preparation of a village need assessment report on the status of children in the area broadly under the category children in difficult circumstances and mapping of villages to identify most vulnerable children and encouraging parents for protection of children in the villages. The induction training which contains two modules doesn't capacitate on vulnerability mapping and need assessment for vulnerable children. In order to undertake the charted role and responsibilities by the VLCPCs, they require training on vulnerability mapping and need assessment.

- **Fund for Actions of VLCPC**

The VLCPCs are expected to take up different activities like awareness raising in community to combat child trafficking, to prevent child marriages, child labour practices and migration of children for labour purposes, sensitisation of parents to send their children regularly to school, campaign to raise awareness on child protection issues in villages along with case management, and record keeping. The smooth implementation of these activities requires certain fund (though not much). The VLCPCs in Bamangachi undertook village level action plan (VLAP) which was ratified by the panchayat, however without much clarity on how the funds will be mobilised and spent, the implementation of the VLAPs remained a challenge. There is a need to have clarity on source of fund, and its process of implementation.

- **Linking of VLCPCs with children's group**

We have observed that the presence of children's group and its linkage with VLCPCs help the VLCPCs to undertake its chartered role more effectively. When the children group have access to VLCPCs they have a support of a local committee which can help them in countering any child protection vulnerabilities. The benefit of these is not just limited to the members of children group but goes beyond as the children group as they act as a bridge between the other children and VLCPCs.

There are different children and adolescent groups like child cabinets, Meena manch members, Anwasha peer groups, Sabla & Kanyashree groups and also NGO run

children and adolescent groups which might be present in the community. If there is a concerted effort to link these groups with VLCPCs then the objective of addressing child protection vulnerabilities will be addressed more effectively.

- **Dignified Dialogue between**

Often participation of children become tokenistic in nature in the committee. To ensure that children participate fully in the committee we felt there is a need to create a safe space for the child representative to talk, heard and get importance. The meeting with each VLCPC committee on the importance of creating a dignified dialogs within the committee was the key to ensure child participation in the committee.



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