

By: Gargi Banerjee, March 2019

MISSING

IMPACT ASSESSMENT STUDY

Kultali

Analyzing Impact of the Project
'Preventing Trafficking and
Rehabilitating Survivors through
Alternative Livelihood in Kultali, South
24 Parganas, West Bengal

An initiative of Missing Link Trust,
implemented since 2015

Design by Siddarth Karthik Rajan

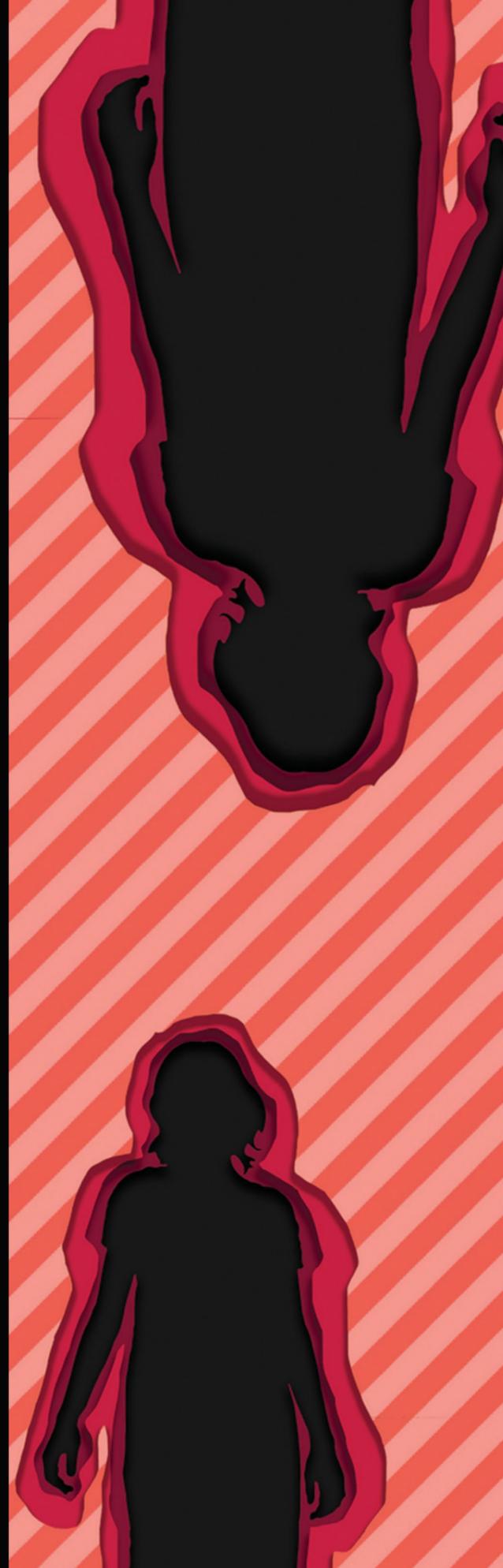
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Inception of MISSING

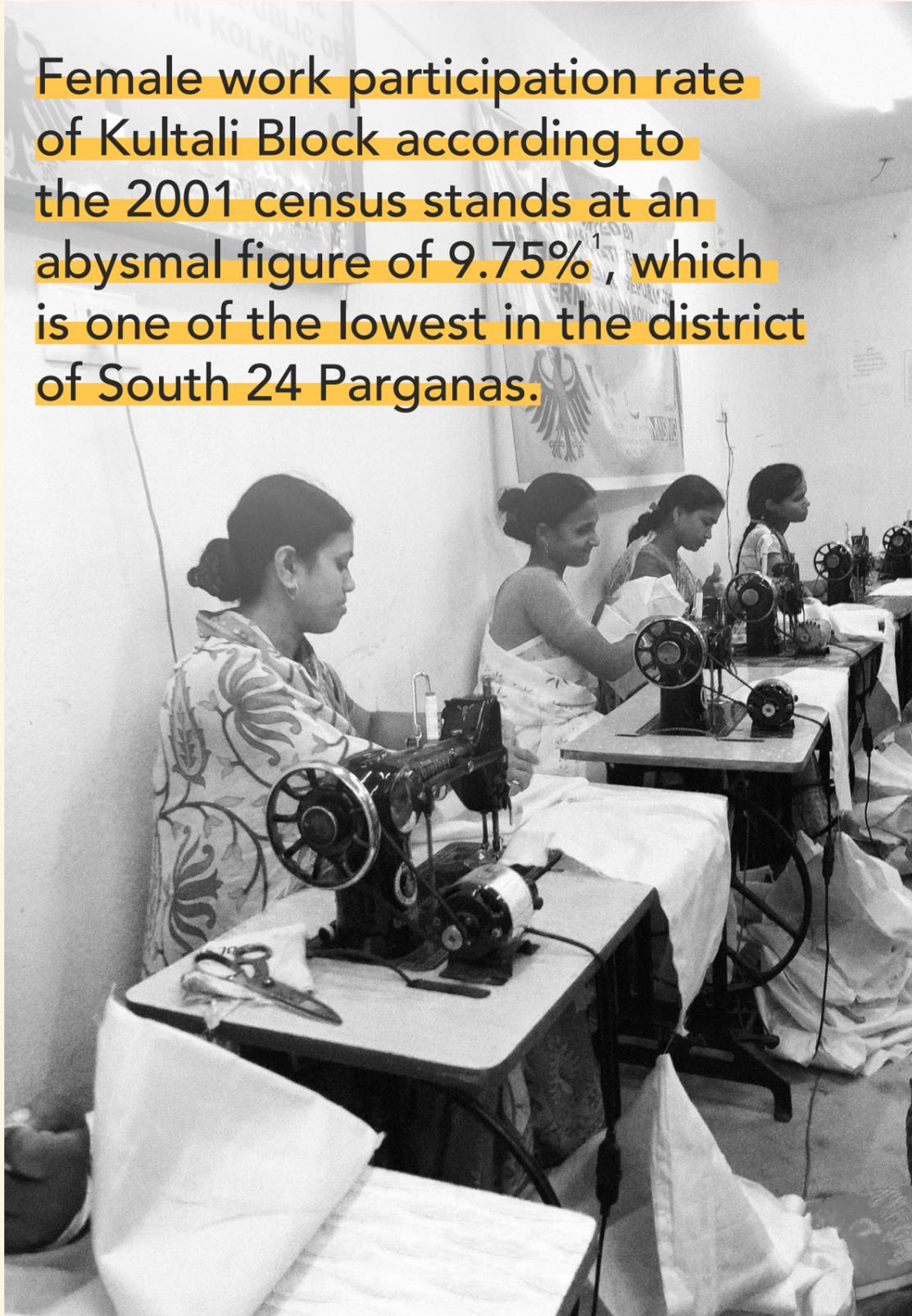
The founder member of the organization had an exposure to work with victims of trafficking in her initial years of working as a freelancer supporting different organizations working with victims of trafficking. The visits to the red light areas made her shudder at the thought that such small girls were sold to these places, where they spent the rest of their lives being exploited in all possible ways – physically, sexually, financially. Her interest was mostly around working with the girls and women in order to prevent them from getting trafficked. Roaming round the brothels, interacting with girls and women there, talking to the members of the organizations, she was getting to understand that these girls and women came from different districts of West Bengal. And in trying to identify which were the most vulnerable districts, she was quite shocked to know that different places of the neighbouring South 24 Parganas were extremely vulnerable to trafficking and many girls were trafficked from the region across India. Thus, when she finally set up the Missing Link Trust, working on prevention in the vulnerable pockets of South 24 Parganas was her obvious choice.

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Female work participation rate of Kultali Block according to the 2001 census stands at an abysmal figure of 9.75%¹, which is one of the lowest in the district of South 24 Parganas.



Why South 24 Parganas?

They collected information about the different vulnerable areas in South 24 Parganas in consultation with the other civil society organizations working in that area. The Sundarbans emerged to be particularly vulnerable because of extreme poverty of the region. Thus, Missing Link Trust started its work in the Kultali block, which is in the Sundarbans areas. The area has very limited income opportunities, with the men working mostly as fishermen and the income from there was grossly adequate to meet basic needs of the family. The access to the available government schemes was also very limited as most of the community members were unaware of the existence of the schemes and the ways to access them. Fishing being the major occupation of the region, there were hardly any economic activities which the women of the area could be engaged in. Female work participation rate of Kultali Block according to the 2001 census stands at an abysmal figure of 9.75%¹, which is one of the lowest in the district of South 24 Parganas.



¹Vulnerable Condition Of Women In South 24 Parganas District, West Bengal - Supratim Karmakar

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The area hardly has any place where these women could make some earning along with maintaining their responsibilities of household work.

Challenges

As Missing Link Trust started its activities in the area with the women and girls, they were faced with challenges that were difficult to negotiate.

The first major challenge was creating employment opportunities for women, which still remains a major hurdle. The area hardly has any place where these women could make some earning along with maintaining their responsibilities of household work. Another major factor was that the women were never exposed to any kinds of skills building training and hence had no skills which MLT could tap into to generate sources of employment. Thus the challenge was two-fold; on one side the organization had to focus on building skills of the women and on the other was to generate employment based on their levels of skills and expertise. The associated challenge to this was that the women were not willing to devote much time initially in investing their time for purposes of skill building as they were not convinced that it would help them earn money in the long run. It took quite some time to convince them in coming for the training.

The social evil of Child Marriage was also rampant in the area. According to the National Family Health Survey 4, 2015-2016, in the rural parts women aged 20-24 years married before 18 years of age is 53.7%. Thus any work on prevention of trafficking needed to address the issue of child marriage as often trafficking happens in the garb of child marriage. According to an Action Aid report, in South 24 Parganas of the total child marriages that take place 50% of them are trafficked in the name of marriage. In these cases there are absolutely no contact between the girls and their families once they are married off.

50%

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²Too young to wed – Early marriages in West Bengal - Kumkum Kumar

Alcoholism was yet another issue to reckon with while dealing with the issue of violence against women. Majority of the women facing domestic violence complained of husbands being addicted to alcohol, not providing for the house and wasting away the money on addiction. This however does not discount the fact that women faced domestic violence for all reasons. Alcoholism in a way increased the level of violence is what the women to whom MLT was reaching out to have to say. The other major plight that women are faced with that there was hardly any money to feed the children or spend on their treatment and very often leading to debt in many of the village shops.

The government schemes that were available for the families were also hardly accessed as in most cases the family members were unaware of the existence of the schemes and in situations in which they knew about them, they did not know how to get the benefits of the schemes and complained of not being entertained by the Panchayat.

It was against this backdrop that MLT started its work with the women and adolescent girls in the Kultali block with the objective of empowering the women to prevent trafficking. Along with making linkages with the available government schemes and services; creating opportunities for economic empowerment of women was a major focus for the organization.

...family members were unaware of the existence of the schemes

Objectives of the impact assessment

As Missing Link Trust takes its plunge into the depths of newer explorations, it was important to review initiatives undertaken in order to better understand and consolidate the impacts, critically analyze factors/strategies/initiatives that worked and that did not in order to further its program with increased affectivity. Thus the impact assessment was undertaken with the following objectives

Evaluate the impact of the initiatives on lives of vulnerable women and girls through evidence

Evaluate the impact of the initiatives in creating safer communities

Evaluate the quality of the initiatives by looking at strategies, outcomes and management processes.

Consolidate the learning and identify the challenges and gaps.

Recommendations for strengthening and scaling up the initiative

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

The Impact Assessment study has been done through field interactions with staff members of Missing Link Trust and beneficiaries who are part of the organization's alternative livelihood program and the computer training program. To understand the impact of the program, there have been one to one interviews conducted with the direct beneficiaries – both of the tailoring programme and the computer training centre. In-depth interaction was organized with 6 beneficiaries from the livelihood and computer program. The interviews were conducted through open ended questions which gave the interviewee opportunities to express their views, opinions and concerns.

Since the alternative livelihood program caters to women from the age group of 18 years and above, interviews were conducted with across age groups. There was in-depth interview with 3 beneficiaries of the centre aged 18 years, 28 years and 40 years.

In-depth interaction was also conducted with 3 beneficiaries from the computer training centres. These were girls pursuing their graduation and post graduation.

Apart from the in-depth interactions, there were smaller group discussions with the women from the livelihood training and with the girls coming to the computer centre to understand their associations and perspectives about the interventions.

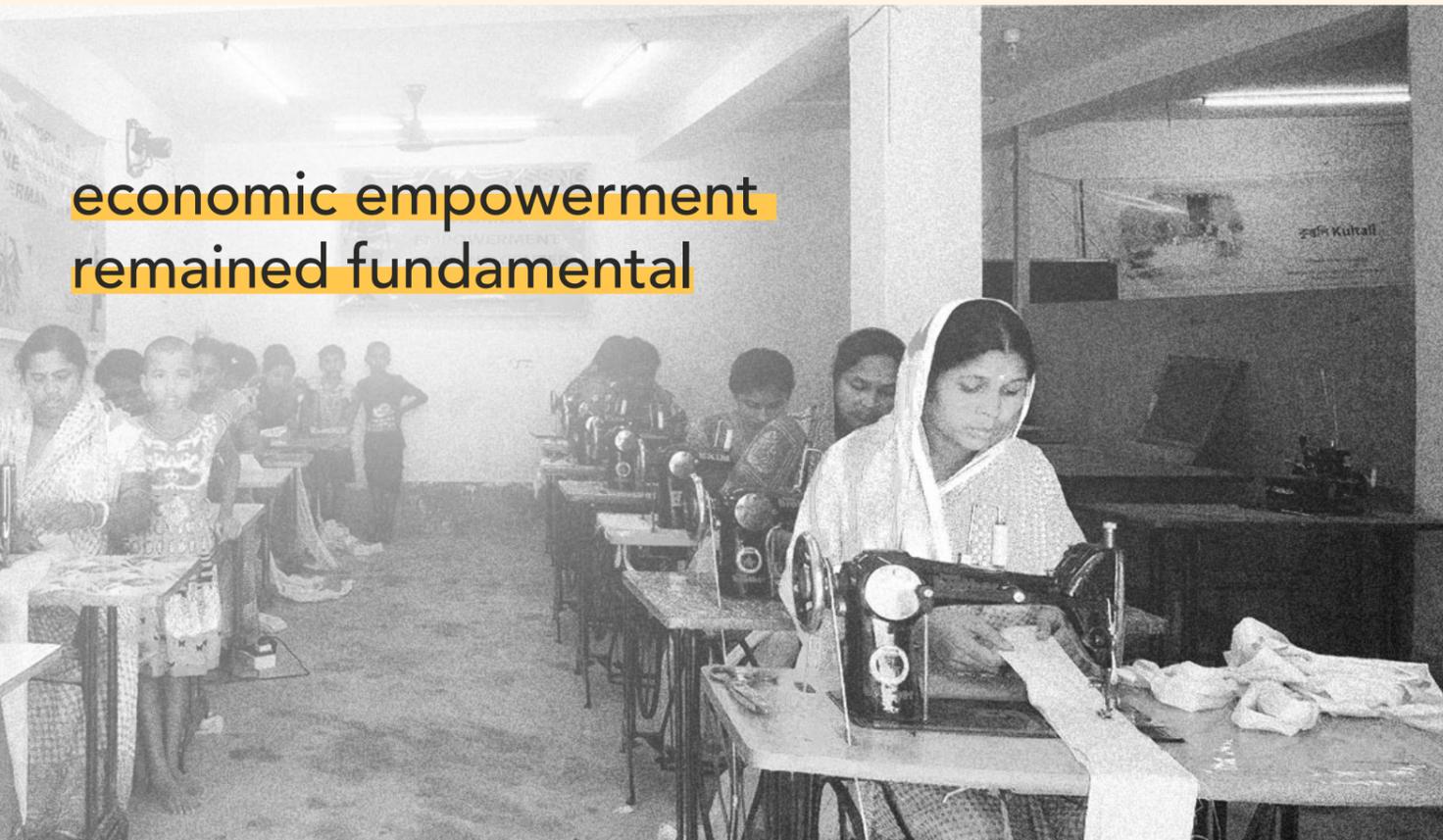
Besides, there was extensive interaction with the core team of Missing Link Trust working in Kultolli to understand the details of the activities, the challenges, the achievements; most of all to understand their perspectives of the impact that the work in having on the beneficiaries.



CHAPTER 3 THE PROJECT

Missing Link Trust has been running a range of programs in the district of South 24 Parganas in West Bengal. Based out of the Kultali block, the organization reaches out to the neighbouring blocks of Joynagar I & Joynagar II, Gosaba, Mathurapur, Basanti through their school programs and community initiatives. All the initiatives are geared towards prevention of trafficking and child marriage. The school programs and the community initiatives are mostly awareness generation, mostly making the communities and adolescent girls aware of the impacts of child marriage and how trafficking often happens in the garb of child marriage. This was the fundamental objective with which the programs were initiated in the district. But the need emerging out of the community added newer dimensions and also posed newer challenges. From working on awareness generation as a mode of prevention of child marriage and trafficking, the organization realized that economic empowerment remained fundamental and hence their initiatives were expanded to include components of economic empowerment. The economic empowerment initiatives undertaken by the organization was diverse - it included setting up tailoring units as alternative livelihood opportunities for women of the community, establishing computer training centre for adolescent and young girls of the community to enhance their skills and employability, and finally linking families to different government schemes available. The details of the initiatives are as follows –

economic empowerment remained fundamental



CHAPTER 3 THE PROJECT

A - School awareness program

Introduction & Coverage : This program is being conducted across 23 schools spread across 6 blocks of South 24 Parganas (Joynagar I & Joynagar II, Gosaba, Mathurapur, Basanti and Kultali). Awareness Programs are conducted with students of Class VI to Class X. On an average 4-5 such awareness sessions have been conducted in each of the schools. These programs are being conducted in all girls' school as well as co-education schools. The programs are not done as a one-time activity in a school; instead the programs are planned in small slots of 2 hours and spread over a period of time. This gives members of the organization opportunity to interact with students on a regular basis and talk to them on different issues, listen to their problems and work towards possible way outs. The regular visits also create the required confidence within the students whereby these members of the organization become their friends and guides on issues that they would otherwise feel uncomfortable to share with others.

Over the years, MLT has established good rapport with the schools through the programs. Initially, members of MLT had to meet the school authorities, explain them about the work that they do and their objectives behind having awareness programs in the schools with the children. But presently, in all the schools that the organization is working in, school authorities are more than willing and feel that such programs are very useful for children. They even think that these programs in a way help prevent drop outs. Click here to listen to the school authorities talk about the programs.

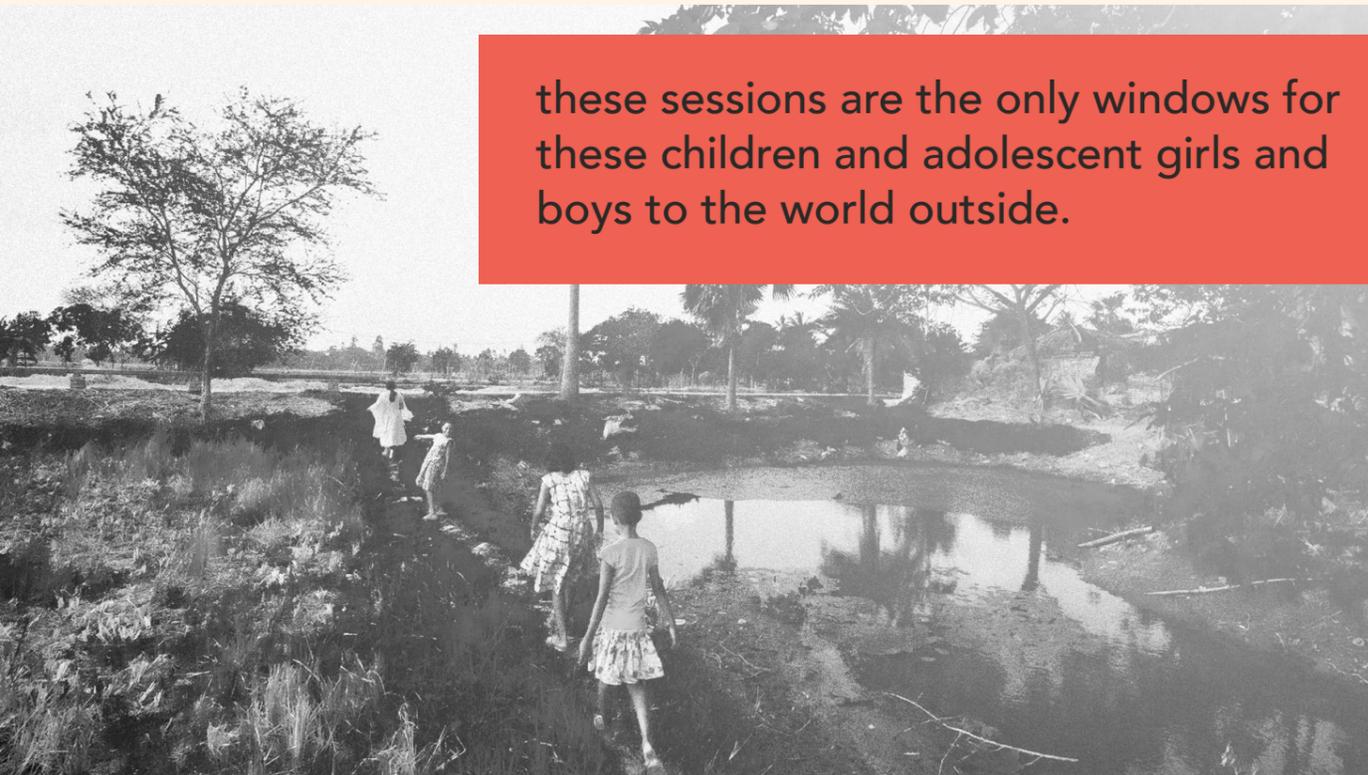
Objectives, Session Points & Method : The different issues and topics that are discussed in these sessions are mostly related to child protection and rights of the child. Though the primary focus of the sessions is to generate awareness and prevent child marriage and trafficking, the sessions and interactions with the students are not restricted to these. To contextualize the entire issue of child marriage and trafficking; to understand the reasons of occurrence, the sessions delve into the deeper terrains of gender discrimination where a girl child is almost always looked upon as a burden to the family. These also give the adolescent girls and boys opportunities to think and reflect on the different discriminations, violation of rights and violence faced by women and children in the society. Prevention being the primary

Through these sessions, the girls not only develop an understanding of the issues, but also develop a resilience whereby they can protest and prevent any such incidents in their own lives.



objective behind these interactions, the harmful effects of child marriage is discussed at length; focusing on how it inhibits the growth of a girl in all aspects of her life and how it becomes a violation of her rights at different levels. Discussions on trafficking revolve round issues of why and how girls and women are trafficked into sex trade, trafficked for labour and for other grievous offences. The sessions on trafficking focuses on generating their consciousness such that they do not fall into any such situation unknowingly. Through these sessions, the girls not only develop an understanding of the issues, but also develop a resilience whereby they can protest and prevent any such incidents in their own lives. These awareness sessions are loosely tied up in form of a module, though there is no strict schedule

these sessions are the only windows for these children and adolescent girls and boys to the world outside.



that is followed. The facilitators ensure that the discussions take the course that the participants' desire. Hence none of these sessions are conducted in a lecture mode; it is interactive, leaving greater opportunities to the participating students to share their concerns and issues. This, in a way also empowers them to engage in discussions, articulate their wants and desires. Different interactive methodologies like games, debates, and quiz are adopted to elicit response for the students.

Uniqueness of the program : In this context, it is important to note that these children of the schools come from impoverished backgrounds where two full meals often remain an issue. And the remoteness of the area in a way keeps them away from receiving facilities in forms of counseling that could result in their mental and emotional well-being. Added to this, they are also completely ignorant of the different schemes, scholarships and other opportunities that they are entitled to as students. Thus, these sessions are the only windows for these children and adolescent girls and boys to the world outside. Along with developing perspectives on different issues like child marriage and trafficking, these sessions also provide them with relevant

information (different schemes, scholarships etc) that will help them to carry on their studies and pursue their dreams of a different future.

Importance of the program : Thus these school programs are extremely important and necessary and needs to be continued on a much broader base with more efficient planning. These school programs are successful as apart from generating awareness on a range of issues, they are also building perspective and knowledge base of the boys and girls involved in the process. Missing Link Trust remains the only organization reaching out to these children regularly and building an informal complaint and redress mechanism, because children, particularly girls come up to share different personal problems with the facilitator, mostly in one to one conversation. In the course of these sessions, cases of rape of minor, missing children and child marriage cases have come up , whereby participants have shared their personal experiences, which they have hitherto not spoken about to anyone.

Case identification and intervention : The sessions have identified two cases of POCSO Act, 14 cases of children who have gone missing either from their schools or homes and cases of elopement to marry the person of their choice, which would otherwise not be accepted by the family. Besides, there are also 22 cases of child marriage that have been identified through these interactive sessions in school. There are also cases of child marriage that are reported by children over the phone. During the interactive sessions, mobile numbers of Childline and members of MLT are provided to the children. So very often, since they know members of MLT personally, they happen to call them, instead of Childline. In these situations, members of MLT usually send an SMS (message over the mobile) to the local police station as well as to Childline. For cases, where the marriage is in the initial stages of planning, members of MLT visit the families of the children and try talking to them and persuading them to defer the marriage till the girl turns 18 years of age. During conversation with the family members, members of MLT harp on the ill-effects of child marriage that will impact their daughter negatively; and the fact that it is

illegal to get a girl married before 18 years of age and can hence warrant legal action. Regular follow ups is done with the family such that they can be supported to not get their daughter married off before she is 18 years of age.

There are also cases of child sexual abuse that is informed to members of MLT during their sessions with children as well as over telephone. Cases of child sexual abuse need immediate police and legal interventions under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act). In these cases, MLT helps the children and their families to lodge complaint with the police; after convincing them of the importance to complain. Legal support is also provided by linking these families to organizations who work on legal aspects like HRLN and IJM. Even after linking the child and the family with the organization, the members of MLT are in constant touch with the girl and the family for any needs that they might have. There have been situations where members of MLT have assisted the child and the family to reach court as the court is far away from their houses.



B - Community awareness program

one is to strengthen families by linking them to the different government schemes available

Coverage & Objective : This program is being conducted within the communities in the villages across 6 blocks of South 24 Parganas (Joynagar I & Joynagar II, Gosaba, Mathurapur, Basanti and Kultali). The major objectives of these community based awareness programs are two-fold - one is to strengthen the families by linking them to the different government schemes available such that the families are in a position that is comparatively better where they can provide care and protection to their children; the other objective is to generate awareness of child marriage, trafficking and other forms of violence against women and children. Both these would cumulatively lead to Missing Link Trust's overall goal of combating trafficking and creating safe places within the families and communities such that adolescent & young girls and women are not trafficked to the brothels to sustain themselves and their families economically.

Awareness Programs are conducted with community members – both men and women. These awareness sessions are conducted for 2 hours and at regular intervals. These regular interactions help to create the required confidence within community members, whereby they come up to share different problems and incidents of their lives. Thus apart from generating awareness on different issues, these sessions also act as points of sharing for the community members; sharing issues that are deeply personal and issues that they otherwise have none to share with; issues that they have been suffering from a long period of time not knowing that there could be any way out of the situation. Thus, though Missing Link Trust went with the objective of spreading awareness and working on prevention of violence against women and children, they were forced to take up cases and undertake case work because of the nature of the problems that were coming to them from the community and school programs. And this brought MLT to eventually work with the police and judiciary.

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Uniqueness of the program : The major focus of these awareness programs is informing community members of the different government schemes that are available and ways to access them. In almost all the sessions, members of MLT carry with them the different forms that are available, assisting them in filling up these forms and submitting them to relevant authorities. This is followed up with regular meetings to oversee the process such that the community members finally get the benefits of the schemes. The major scheme that is taken up are getting the families job cards under MNREGA (guaranteed 100 days of work) such that they have a secured earning given that financial crisis of the families are acute as work opportunities are very less.

27 families have benefitted from the MNREGA scheme as members of MLT assisted them to get the cards In Kultali. 17 families from Gosaba and 22 families from Sujapur and Mathurapur have also been able to get job cards with support from MLT

The other scheme that is discussed is the Indira Awas Yojana in order to secure a proper housing for the families who in most cases do not have proper houses with toilet facilities. So far, MLT has succeeded in assisting 7 families get the benefit of this scheme to set up their own house in their area of intervention.

Importance of the program : The primary focus of all these is to strengthen the families such that the women and children from these families do not get trafficked to the brothels in the name of securing jobs that would help them to sustain their families. There are extensive discussions on trafficking which revolve round issues of why and how girls and women are trafficked into sex trade, trafficked for labour and for other grievous offences. The sessions on trafficking focuses on generating awareness such that they do not fall into any such situation unknowingly. Child marriage is another issue that is discussed at length in these awareness sessions.

Child marriages are very common in all these blocks; where parents get their daughter married just after their puberty to ensure safety and security of the girls. Child led marriages are also very common, where girls elope with their lovers in search of a better life outside the poverty of their daily village existence landing up in more serious problems as trafficking in the garb of child marriage is a very common phenomenon. The sessions also highlight the importance of getting the children educated, keeping them in schools and also getting them to be part of different skills building programs. These villages are so remote by their location that seldom do information and opportunities reach up to them. Thus these community awareness

The sessions have been so successful that each of the sessions conducted by the Missing Linking Trust at the community level are attended by more than 60-80 people currently.



programs are hugely successful and well received by the communities as they get directly benefited from here. The sessions have been so very successful that each of the sessions conducted by the Missing Linking Trust at the community level are attended by more than 60-80 people currently.

Case Identification & Intervention : Through these sessions, 86 cases of domestic violence have come up to the members of Missing Link Trust who are in constant touch with the community members through regular visits and sessions. Once again, this has pushed the organization to move into the area of case intervention whereby they have attended to all these 86 cases that has come up to them. Of these cases, the members of MLT have managed to strike a compromise within the wife and husband & their families with support from members of the Panchayat in 60 cases. In most of these situations, where a compromise has been made, a resolution is drafted at the end mentioning the terms and conditions under which the compromise has been made. These resolutions are then given to the Para-Legal Volunteers working in the area such that they can get these resolutions approved from the District Legal Authorities Services (DLSA) giving it a formal shape and meaning. One of the important things that need to be mentioned here is the large scale prevalence of child marriage in these areas, as most of the cases of domestic violence are noted to be where there has been child marriage.

From the cases coming to the facilitators during the program, it is seen that adjustment emerges as a major issue in couples who have undergone child marriage; the girl being underage in most of the cases. These girls are the most vulnerable as the family members of these girls fear reporting domestic violence to the police as their daughters were married before 18 years and they have a notion that police would punish them. Thus these cases come to the facilitators after the programs or during field visits. In most cases they seek an intervention from Missing Link Trust to mediate between the couples and the families such that the girl can continue in her marriage. Of the cases of domestic violence that have been dealt with, 9 of them were child marriage, that is, the girl was married before the legal marriageable age. This also brings up the complex relation between child marriage and domestic violence raising the question as to whether girls faced with child marriage are more vulnerable to domestic violence.

MLT has also been forced to take up court cases that have come out of these community sessions and meetings. Currently there are 4 cases where divorce has been filed and the cases have moved up to the court and there are 4 others where charges 498A IPC has been framed against the offending husband and their families. As MLT is not equipped to deal with such court cases single handedly they have linked the women to Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) to ensure that they get the necessary legal support.



C - Alternative employment generation

Objective : Alternative employment generation was a natural progression that Missing Link Trust made. Even before the initiation of their program in Kultali, the organization had undertaken an extensive survey of Madhusudanpur and the nearby villages. It was seen that women and girls went for work outside the village from almost all families. Some of the families even openly admitted to their daughters working in the red light areas of Sonagchhi. The survey was conducted among 1620 families with 2200 men, 2500 women and 1900 children (total population being 66,000). The disaggregation of the female population was as follows

1025 girls under 18 years of age; only 634 among them were school going at the time of the survey

900 women between 18-25 years of age

780 women between 25-35 years of age

820 women above 35 years of age

Of the 1620 families spoken to, 110 families admitted to having sent one woman from their families to work in Kolkata. And of them 25 families admitted of knowing that the woman of their families are in the different brothels of Kolkata and earning through prostitution. They were mostly at Sonagachi, the largest brothel of Kolkata. The average age of the women who are in Sonagachi were identified to being between 23-50 years based on the conversation with their family members. There were 4 other women who were interacted with as a part of the survey confessed to being at Sonagachi and has returned back because of their age. The other 85 families who said that they had women from their families working in Kolkata remained silent on the kind of work they do and preferred saying that they were not aware about it, which leaves legitimate concerns about the nature of work they are engaged in. As a part of the survey the families were asked as to what kind of earning from the locality would they be comfortable with locally and women would not have to go to unknown locations in Kolkata for work. The average amount mentioned by the respondents was Rs. 7500/-

The majority of the families did not admit to their women working outside (only 110 had admitted), but it was interesting to note that when the survey team reached the houses in the day time (morning, noon and afternoon) most of the houses did not have women in the houses during daytime; which also generates concerns about where and what are the women involved in.



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Need of a sustainable employment also emerged across all the community meetings and programs. As a response to this need, Missing Link Trust set up a Tailoring Centre in Kultali to provide sustainable alternative employment opportunities to women from the neighbouring areas.

Thus lack of employment, poverty was an overarching condition that existed across the areas where the organization started its work and in most cases the incidents of trafficking were found to be very closely related to this situation. Need of a sustainable employment also emerged across all the community meetings and programs. As a response to this need, Missing Link Trust set up a Tailoring Centre in Kultali to provide sustainable alternative employment opportunities to women from the neighbouring areas.

The process: There was a dilemma about the location of the Tailoring Centre as MLT wanted it to be accessible to the neediest women. But getting an appropriate area was a challenge and finally the Centre was set up at the current location given the centrality of the place; as women from the neighbouring areas could reach their in local conveyance or by walking. The fact however remained that women of far of villages where the organization carries on its community initiatives could not be part of this Centre; but then the organization could in no ways accommodate all women who were in dire need of income. Enrolling

women was also a challenge as there were 112 applicants when the news of the Centre being set up was spread across the villages. The Centre could only accommodate a maximum of 30 candidates. Thus criteria had to be put in place in order to choose from the 112 applicants. Women were selected from BPL category, women from families who had absolutely no land and women who had a girl child.

5 of them are survivors of domestic violence living in their natal family under lots of pressure

6 of them have been abandoned by their husbands and they are the sole earners of the families fending for themselves and their children

3 of them were from families where they would perhaps have been sent to brothels (this is what has been understood from talking to them)



the training centre has ceased to just be a centre that provides training and income opportunities to women; it has emerged to be a place of sharing and bonding for all of them.

The women coming to the Centre are between 18-40 years of age and their average family income varies from 3000 to 4000 a month which is hardly enough to make a living for the family with an average of 5 members. Thus these women are very eager to make an earning from here such that they can contribute to their families.

Uniqueness of the Initiative : Since the main objective was to provide income to the women, getting orders and ensuring sustainability was the focus from the initiation. Thus the women did not have to spend long days in getting trained and practicing; the first order came by within 2 months of establishing the Centre. The women started their training in making bags and currently all 34 of them are working together in both shifts to deliver their second

A sense of collective has developed within this short span and hardly any woman is seen to miss their timings.

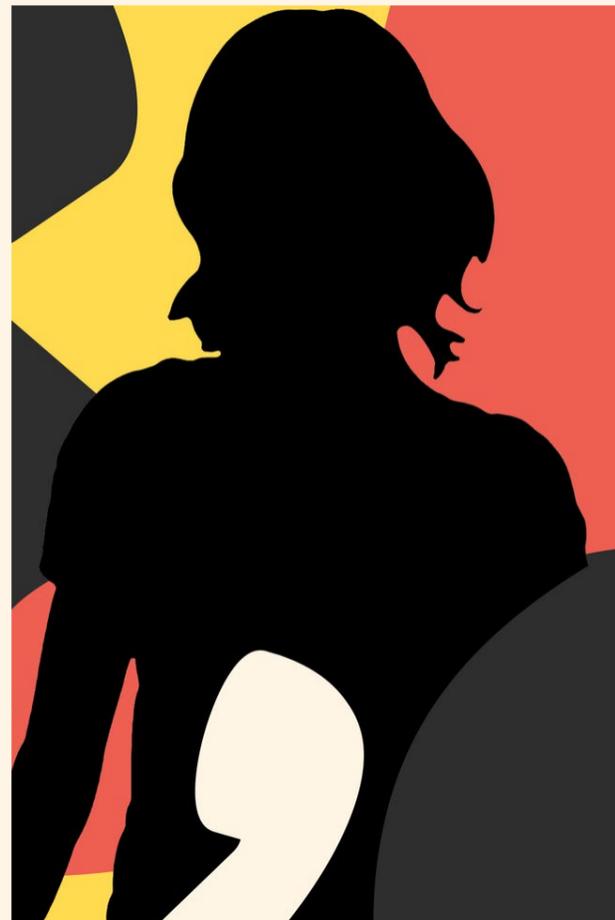
order of 11,000 bags under the supervision of their training. The uniqueness lies in the fact that the training centre has ceased to just be a centre that provides training and income opportunities to women; it has emerged to be a place of sharing and bonding for all of them. Since for all of them this is their first venture outside the regular life of the family and village community; they have developed a sense of freedom simply by coming to the space – traveling out of the home alone for work. To quote one of them ' leaving back all domestic works and family pressure, this is a place where we are free, we forget everything and we are all so happy working, chatting and eating together'. For another member, ' every morning, I complete my works at home with lots of zest just to be here on time .' The Centre provides them a break from their drudgery of life and living and is the first of its kind experience for them whereby they are empowering themselves along with skills building. The sharing and bonding is also a way of healing for all of them; as they discuss their lives and pain they know they are not alone. A sense of collective has developed within this short span and hardly any woman is seen to miss their timings. One of the women, who had for so long being withstanding

the torture of her alcoholic husband, has started protesting with help from the members of MLT and her friends at the Centre and she says that she has succeeded in resisting.

Importance of the Initiative : The Centre is very important and vital to all the works being done by MLT in the area. The organization started its work in the area to combat trafficking and prevent small girls and women from falling prey to trafficking and economic empowerment remains the key in this regard. The Centre, though on a very small scale compared to the need of the area, has started this work of economic empowerment of women. Along with economic empowerment the Centre is also acting as a space for women outside their homes, opening up several other possibilities of action for the betterment of the community. Empowerment sessions are held with these women once every month, where they are encouraged to share their stories/concerns and trying to work towards a way out within the group. Besides they are also made aware of the different schemes that they can avail for themselves, for their children and families. Discussions also take place around the issues of rights of women and the violence that women face, the available legal measures. Thus the Centre has not limited itself to economic empowerment of the women.

Cases: Indrani Maity, aged 23 years is associated with the Centre since its inception. She was married seven years ago and has a daughter who is 6 years old now. She faced domestic violence since her daughter was born and tolerated it helplessly not knowing what to do or where to go till the time she was thrown out of the house with her daughter. She was forced to come back to her natal family which hardly has the means to support themselves; so she and her child are now the burden to them. She has filed a case under Section 498(A) and also a case for claiming maintenance from her husband for herself and her daughter with support from members of MLT. The court has ordered maintenance of Rs.5000 per month, but the husband is not paying the amount regularly. In this circumstance she has so way but to secure an earning for herself and her daughter. She wants to ensure that her daughter goes to school and wants to support her education and secure a better future for her.

Bijoini Naik, 35 years old is an active member of the alternative learning programme of MLT. She was married at the age of 17 and currently has 2 sons who are aged 16 & 14 years. The elder son reads in Class X and the younger one in Class IX. She was abandoned by her husband who married another woman when the younger son was 3 years old. She struggled a lot with her sons, worked in Kolkata (she is however silent on the kind of work that she was involved in Kolkata) and managed to set up a small house with her earnings from Kolkata. Currently she is working at the Centre and not going to Kolkata for work. Padmarani Bhakta, 37 years comes to the Centre regularly without fail and has lots of eagerness to pick up new skills. She along with her husband and children were thrown out of the house by her father-in-law. She has 2 children and her husband has no interest to work and prefers being at home. She has married off her daughter and her son is in Standard X. She is supporting her family from her work at the Centre.



Skills development

Introduction & Objective : As Missing Link Trust has been working in the schools, students have kept expressing their desires of learning computers. But the remoteness of the area coupled with the financial situation of the families, learning computer remains a distant dream. Thus apart from the school based education, there were no other skills building opportunities or hands on trainings that the students are exposed to. To fill in this gap, the Missing Link Trust has opened a Computer Training Centre for girls. Yet again, resources being a constraint, this Centre can accommodate only 36 students. Though this falls way less than the need but it has been a positive start. The major objective of the training is to orient the students on the basic handling of computer and the internet in particular. The special focus on the internet is due to the fact that all kinds of applications (ranging from admission forms of colleges to applying for the different schemes) are becoming online. Thus they are being trained in writing mails, in downloading forms and ways to fill them up and submit online. It has been seen that at the village level there are hardly one or two people who can carry out this work on the internet and they charge quite handsome fees for any such assistance to others. Once these students complete their training they can be resources for their families and neighborhood as well.

Profile of the Students : Given the limited number of seats that were available, there were certain selection criteria that included the family background (BPL) and for girls above class VIII. Most of the students are of the age range 16-18 years, but there is also a girl from class VI and a girl who is pursuing her Master Degree (post-graduation). Though all girls are above Class VIII, this girl from Class VI was admitted for the course as she is very bright and was really eager to learn computer. Moreover, she is from a very poor background with only her mother.

The girls also say that training in computer is so expensive that without this Centre it was beyond their means to learn computer.

The major objective of the training is to orient the students on the basic handling of computer and the internet in particular.

Her father is not there and hence members of MLT felt that she was very vulnerable and her coming to the Centre would also be a means for MLT to be in regular touch with her. At present there are 70 students undergoing skills training at the centre. More than half comprise of women (59%). 39% of females have had education beyond the secondary level (10th std) of schooling as compared to just 10% of males.

However, the students often come from poor backgrounds with 85% of them falling in the very low annual income bracket of just Rs. 36000-48000 per annum. This also makes them extremely vulnerable and susceptible to the perils of trafficking.

Importance of the Centre: All the girls of the computer centre are first generation learners thus this exposure means a lot to them. Talking to them reveals how immensely they are benefitting from this training; they are also hugely excited with the opportunity and learning internet is opening a world in front of them. They even come to the Centre beyond their regular hours when they have to submit any form or application online for themselves or for their families. The girls also say that training in computer is so expensive that without this Centre it was beyond their means to learn computer.

D - Case interventions

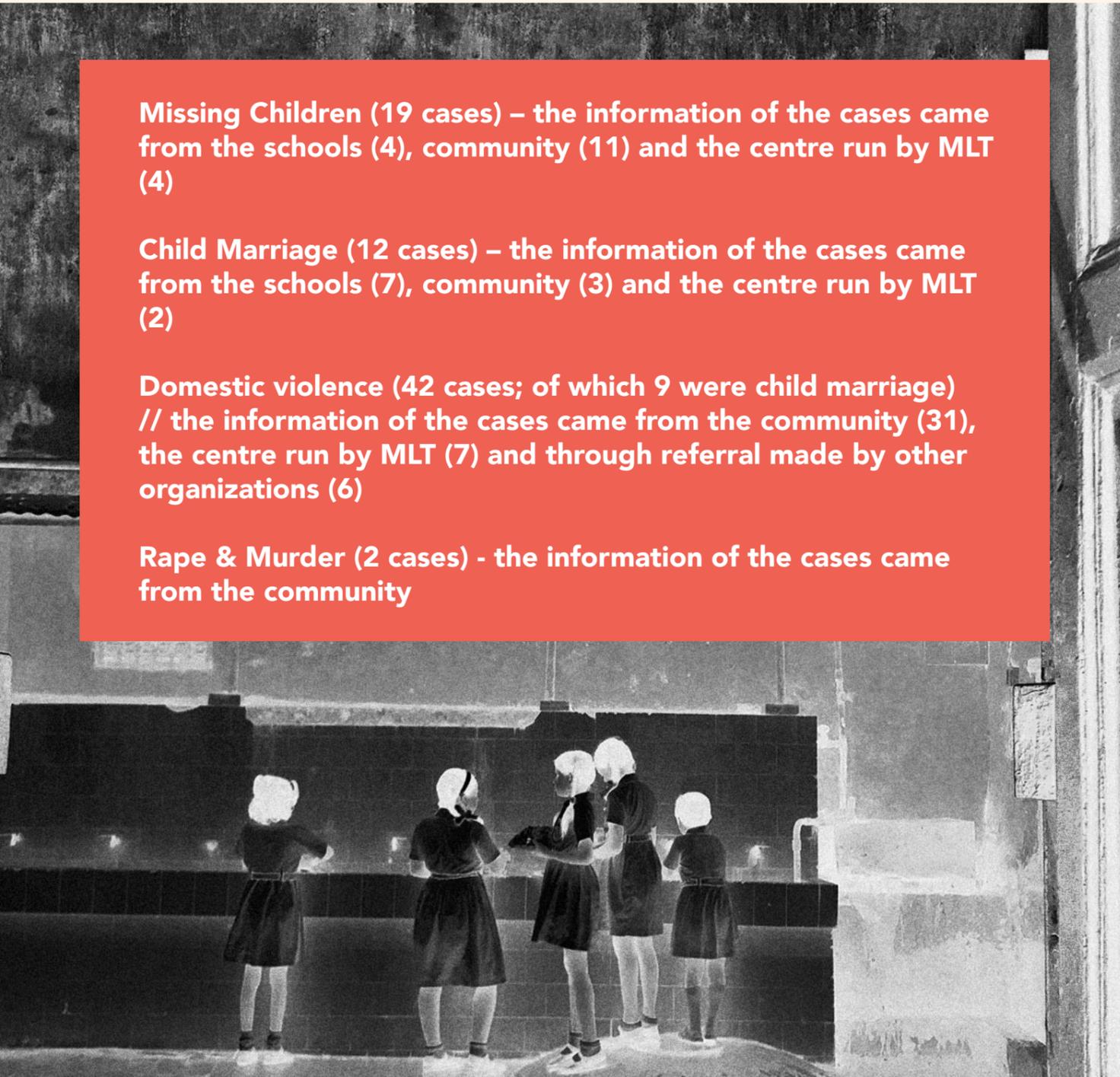
MLT has been receiving cases because of their constant interactions with the school students and the community through the different awareness programs. The organization has received 77 cases in the year 2018. The breakups of these cases are as follows

Missing Children (19 cases) – the information of the cases came from the schools (4), community (11) and the centre run by MLT (4)

Child Marriage (12 cases) – the information of the cases came from the schools (7), community (3) and the centre run by MLT (2)

Domestic violence (42 cases; of which 9 were child marriage) // the information of the cases came from the community (31), the centre run by MLT (7) and through referral made by other organizations (6)

Rape & Murder (2 cases) - the information of the cases came from the community



D - Case interventions

MLT has provided a range of services for these cases.

In the cases where children have gone missing, they have assisted the families to lodge missing complaint with the families in 9 cases. Members are also in constant touch with the police and the families to oversee the development of the case. MLT has been able to trace the children with the help of family and members at MLT centres in 4 cases.

For cases of child marriage there has been 2 cases where the organization has produced the girls before the Child Welfare Committee and sort support of school to prevent to child marriage in 3 other cases.

In situations of domestic violence, MLT first speaks to the women to understand how she wants the situation to be dealt with. In most of the cases the women want

to live with their husbands and wants MLT to strike a negotiation and compromise. Members of MLT have done that in almost 30 cases. They have assisted women to register complaint and go for the legal battle in 8 cases, where the women were willing.

In the rape and murder incidents, cases are in court and MLT is assisting the family with legal contacts and other supports to carry on the cases.

MLT is thus working constantly with different stakeholders including the police, school authorities, community members to ensure maximum possible justice to the cases that reach them. In doing this MLT members have felt the brunt of political pressure that has led to serious situations and needed interventions from higher levels to mitigate the situation.



CHAPTER 4 ACHIEVEMENTS & IMPACTS

Reach out & Increased Awareness: The greatest milestone achieved by the program has been the reach out .

Total Number of School Programs = 150

Total Number of Community Programs = 250

Total Number of Students Attending = 10,500

Total Number of Community Members Attending = 12,500

This reach out reflects the fact that the organization has been successful in generating awareness on issues of child marriage and trafficking among a large population of people in the area. The impact of the increased awareness can be understood when members of Missing Link Trust gets phone calls from different school students informing them of child marriages happening in their locality such that they can be prevented. Some real life instances of this have been illustrated below.



Maman

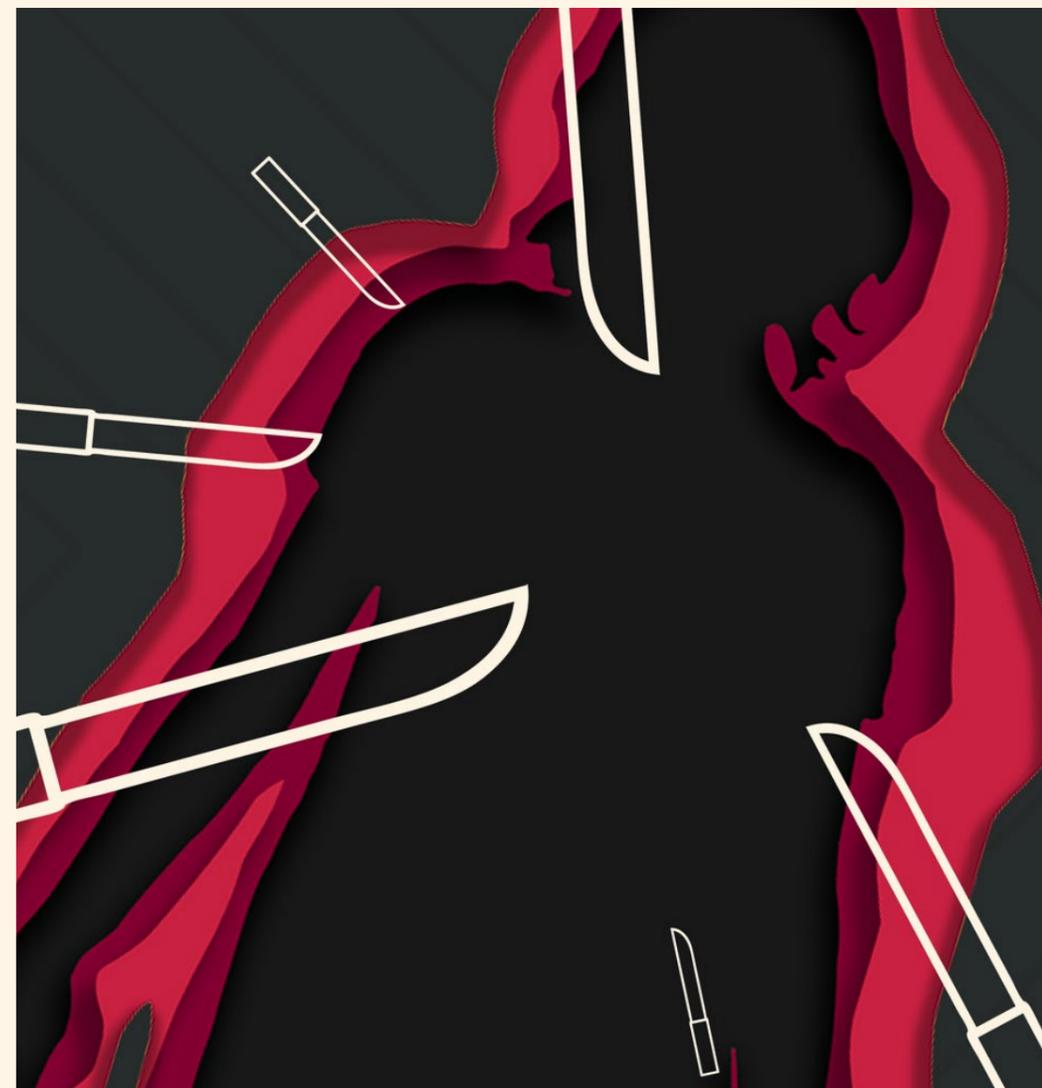
A year after Missing conducted a school awareness session in Jaynagar, class 9 student Maman began to face pressure from her family to get married. Now aware of not only the dangers of child marriage but also how to stop it, she went to the police station herself and lodged a complaint against her father.

The marriage was stopped, Maman was moved to a home and her parents are currently undergoing counselling to ensure that they do not force their minor children to get married.

Mita

The class 7 student was raped on her way home from school. When her parents found her, she was in shock and numbed. Mita's father got in touch with the Missing team through the contact number provided in the community program. Despite resistance from the community, the Missing Team Leader, Prabir, helped the family lodge a police complaint and even got Mita enrolled in a different school to shelter her from the ostracization she faced in her own locality.

Prompt action ensured that her perpetrator was jailed and that Mita's vulnerability to trafficking as a rape victim was minimized through counselling, education and acceptance from her family.



Strengthening families by linking them to government

schemes : This has been a major achievement of the program, whereby communities have not only been made aware of the different government schemes and entitlements; they are actively accessing the schemes to the advantages of their families.

Thus, families have enhanced social security which in turn has positively impacted the children as they are being sent to school and kept out of child labour. The risks of trafficking have also formidably being reduced because of this. Families from across the communities have been linked to MNREGA and Indira Awas Yojana. Apart from the government schemes, MLT on its own account has raised fund and constructed 304 toilets for different families across the communities.

Economic independence: This has been another milestone in the program, whereby women have started to get their earnings from being part of the Tailoring Centre. The Centre has been planned in a business mode and constant efforts are being made on parts of Missing Link Trust to

secure orders such that there is a constant flow of income for the women. Currently the Centre has been providing an earning to 34 women who are contributing to their families. In fact there are separated and deserted women in the group, who have found it extremely helpful to run their families.

Reducing risks of child marriage and trafficking : Linking the families to the government schemes have in a way enabled the families to have an increased income, particularly through the MNREGA scheme, where they are guaranteed hundred days of work. The houses built under the Indira Awas Yojana have also been to the advantage where families have made permanent houses adding to the assets of the family. Some of the women are also earning from the Tailoring Centre. Though that number is less compared to the need, but there has been a very positive start. The increased awareness has also helped in this regard, where the communities and the adolescent girls are themselves aware of the dangers of unsafe migration and not to be lured by promises of better job and earnings in the cities. This has had a very strong impact on reducing risks of

trafficking. The strong presence of MLT in the community also has made an impact as all such instances gets reported to them and members of MLT often mobilize different stakeholders to make an intervention.

Creating safe spaces within the community has also remained a commendable achievement of this program. Once again the Tailoring Centre and Computer Centre have emerged as space of bonding and sharing for the women and the girls. Here they meet six days in a week, discuss different issues & problems being faced by them trying to arrive at a collective solution.

Collectivization : The constant sessions, meetings and visits by members of the organization in the community have led to collectivization of community members whereby they are taking collective actions in cases where they are being denied access to different schemes and entitlements. They have collectively moved the Panchayat and the Block offices to access the schemes that they have been made aware of by MLT

Empowerment of women, children and community : This has been a constant focus that has remained one major cross cutting objective across all the initiatives undertaken by MLT over the years. The impact gets reflected in the women becoming more vocal in matters of violence against them, having a say in the financial matters of the families as they themselves contribute financially. The children in the schools have also mustered up the courage to call 1098 (Helpline for Children) or inform members of MLT when they encounter instances where there are possibilities of child marriage or unsafe migration. They have also become empowered to understand what constitutes safe and unsafe migration, thereby in a position to make safe decisions for themselves. The community empowerment is reflected in the increase in the numbers of people seeking information and accessing the different schemes and also taking initiatives for collective actions.

MLT on its own account has raised fund and constructed 304 toilets for different families across the communities.



The children in the schools have also mustered up the courage to call 1098 (Helpline for Children) or inform members of MLT when they encounter instances where there are possibilities of child marriage or unsafe migration.

CHAPTER 5 LIMITATIONS

One of the major limitations of the program has been the **working with the government child protection systems and mechanisms** available in the district. There are problems of the Child Welfare Committee not being in place over the last few months, but still more efforts need to be put so as to access schemes available with the District Child Protection Unit for the children, in particular the Sponsorship Scheme, which is a preventive mechanism of the government.

Rapport building with local elected representatives needs to be done much more proactively, even before starting work in a particular village. Keeping the elected representative in confidence will boost the different initiatives at the community level and make efforts of the Missing Link Trust much more visible.

Working across and liaising with different stakeholders needs to be worked upon. The formidable work that MLT has done needs to be taken across to different stakeholders and explore opportunities of strengthening their work through concerted initiatives with different stakeholders.

Training of program staffs of MLT in program management and dealing in crisis situations:

Members of MLT are doing a great work definitely, but they need more orientation and development of their skills to take the program ahead and dealing with different crisis situations. With the growth in the program there will be different crisis situations which would need judicious handling. They need to be further oriented on these issues.



CHAPTER 6 ROAD AHEAD

Develop Community Leadership - Having acknowledged the phenomenal journey that has been undertaken by MLT, there is a need to consolidate their work in the communities and developing community leadership through groups or other mechanisms needs to be thought of.

Increased interaction with parents and guardians is required as a part of the school program. MLT needs to have dialogue with the school such that they can organize interactions with parents and guardians at least twice a year. This would help in consolidating the work that is being done in the school.

Developing specific training modules and audio visual materials for the schools - The programs at the schools needs to be tied up together with definite training modules allowing for flexibility in time and issues. Audio Visuals will lead to better understanding and lead to a more interest among children.

Creating audio visual materials for the community programs will also help in getting people to be more involved and interested about the issues as any audio visuals have increased impact on the community.

It is important to increase **linkages with district level and local administrative systems** to ensure a greater impact and acknowledgement of the initiatives. The initiatives can only be sustained in the longer run if integrated with government programs and schemes. This needs strategic planning and systemic intervention.



CHAPTER 7 DETAILED CASE STUDIES

CHAPTER 7 DETAILED CASE STUDIES

1. MITA HALDER, 15

BACKGROUND

Mita is from a family of 5. Her mother, 2 sisters and brother are dependent on her father's earnings as a daily laborer, where he makes a maximum of 4000 rupees per month. With only one breadwinner, the family lies in the average income strata in Kultali but below the poverty line in India. On her way home from school last year, Mita was abducted and raped by a local man. She found her way home the next morning but the fear and shock had numbed her. She refused to speak to anyone. Her family did not know what to do and once the word of the incident spread, the local community too grew hostile. The general sentiment in Kultali was that rape victims always have some part to play in the rape and are therefore partially to blame.

INTERVENTION

Mita's father had previously attended one of the community programs Missing conducted and reached out to the organization for help. The Missing Rural Support Team helped the family lodge a police complaint against the rapist despite severe pressure from the community. On their advice, the father filed the case under POCSO, ensuring much more severity. Missing then went on to provide legal support to the family for the ongoing court case. They moved Mita to a welfare home where she was able to receive counselling before returning home. However, on her return she was denied admission into the local school due to the stigma surrounding her. Missing helped enroll her in a school close to their office.

CHANGE

Mita's perpetrator is currently in jail which makes her locality much safer for not only her, but all the girls who live there. Missing's intervention allowed her to continue her education. Despite the hurdles she faced, she is studying in class 7 with the full support for her family and her perpetrator faces a minimum of 20 years in jail.

2. PADMA RANI BHAKTA, 34

BACKGROUND

Padma Rani Bhakta has a family with 6 members. Soon after her marriage her father-in-law got married for the second time. She and her husband stopped receiving support from them and began struggling to make ends meet alone. Her husband was forced to move to Bangalore to find work but the money was still insufficient.

INTERVENTION

Padma Rani approached the Missing Digital Empowerment Centre in Kultali. She began learning computer skills and soon became one of the best students in the centre. The DEC also provides students with opportunities to earn that Padma Rani was soon proficient enough to access. She is single handedly earning 4,500 rupees per month, making her the highest earning student in the centre.

CHANGE

Job opportunities, especially for women, are very hard to come by in Kultali. The alarming rates of sexual trafficking in the area are due to these limited opportunities forcing women to resort to prostitution. The DEC provides Padma Rani and other women like her the chance to support themselves and their families without having to go down the same path. Her involvement with the DEC has allowed her to send her 15 year old son to school, ensuring a secure future for him as well.





3. PARAMITA GIRI, 15

BACKGROUND

Paramita is in class 10 in secondary school. She is fifteen years old and is also a minor. There are four people in her family. Her mother teaches in SSK which is a higher secondary school and is able to support their family. Her father also does agriculture and owns a large plot of land. Paramita had been meeting a local boy who had become her boyfriend. She didn't tell her parents what was going on. Her relationship got serious very quickly. Her boyfriend made very rash decisions and threatened to kill himself if Paramita didn't run away with him to get married. Out of fear, she went with him to Haryana. When they arrived to Haryana they got legally married. She soon called her parents and told them she was scared and wanted to come back home.

INTERVENTION

Paramita's parents contacted the police and filled a report for a missing girl. Her parents also contacted Missing and we went to work to find their daughter. The reason Paramita and her parents knew about Missing is because of the community programs, and the rural support team. As a result, when this incident happened they knew exactly what the right course of action was. Soon after contacting Missing, Paramita was found and returned home successfully. The boy was apprehended by the police and went to jail for marrying a minor. This was reported as a child marriage case. Paramita was helped by Missing even after she returned home.

CHANGE

The change that occurred after Paramita returned to her home village was that she got reunited with her family. She was also able to relocate to a Child Welfare Community. This is where Missing provides homes for children who have survived traumatic events. Since this event she has been reintegrated into her old life and has successfully joined her parents at home.

4. BIJAYANI NAYAK, 34

BACKGROUND

Twenty years ago, Bijayani got married at a mere 14 years old. Shortly after marriage, she had two sons. This did not foster a stable household situation. Her husband abused Bijayani and this became a common occurrence. She was caught up in a case of domestic violence and she didn't see a way out. It eventually got so bad that she had no other choice but to take her sons back to her father's house.

INTERVENTION

She was stuck inside a relationship of domestic abuse and she didn't know her rights. But she remembered a community program that was held near her house and knew how to reach out to us. This was when she contacted Missing. Her livelihood and happiness has improved a lot since then. She became able to support herself and her two sons by working with us.

CHANGE

She now works at our Women's Empowerment Centre and earns 2.5k -3k per month. Now her sons go to school. She had no hesitation to join Missing's initiatives and even asked to become involved. She in-fact benefited from our programs especially the Women's empowerment centre when she could learn the new skill of bag making. Her life has drastically improved since she has been employed. Bijayani started developing her own skill and becoming more independent and left her father's house.



MISSING

5. MAMAN HALDAR, 16

BACKGROUND

Maman Haldar is a champion of her own body and her rights. She comes from a family of six. Their combined family income is 4000 per month. Maman resisted her own child marriage. When she was in class seven in Jaynagar, when Missing came into her school, and conducted a school awareness program. She learnt about the dangers of trafficking and what her rights were. She also learned where to call if she even felt she was in a situation that she was uncomfortable with, the child help line 1098. One year after this she switched schools, she started facing pressure from her family to get married.

INTERVENTION

She was now aware of her rights and the possible dangers of getting married as a child. Maman was not only aware of why this was wrong, she also knew how to stop it. The first step she took was that she called the child help line. After the calls she felt she needed more immediate action, so

she lodged a complaint against her father. The action that was taken by Missing was that she was able to move out of her house and separate from her parents who put pressure on her. Then Missing initiated private counselling with her parents to share with them why marrying their child may not be the best choice or option for them.

CHANGE

This case of bravery from the victim and the involvement of Missing resulted in her child marriage being stopped. It was because of Maman's awareness that was sparked by Missing which had helped her protect her own rights. She was moved to a home and her parents are currently undergoing counselling to ensure that they do not force their minor children to get married. She was is no way resistant to Missing's initiatives at any point during the interactions. On the contrary, Mamam is an ambassador of Missing who sets a healthy standard for all children who may ever feel vulnerable.



MISSING LINK TRUST, 73, Bentinck Street, Kolkata - 700001, West Bengal, India.
www.savemissinggirls.com, reachus@savemissinggirls.com, +91 9836353362

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