

Qualitative feedback from community participants, NGOs and external stakeholders on Freedom Fund interventions to reduce the prevalence of bonded labour in Northern India

Institute of Development Studies, UK in partnership with Praxis

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January 2020

Citation: Chandrasekharan, A; Nanda, R.B; Burns, D and Oosterhoff, P. (2020) Qualitative feedback from community participants, NGOs and external stakeholders on Freedom Fund interventions to reduce the prevalence of bonded labour in Northern India, Brighton: IDS

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Published February 2020

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Funding Freedom Fund

Institute of Development Studies

Brighton

BN1 9RE

UK

www.ids.ac.uk

IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England

Charity Registration Number 306371

Charitable Company Number 877338

The report

This report was produced by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) and Praxis, for the Freedom Fund. It is an output of the programme '*Planning, learning, monitoring and evaluation activities for the Northern India Hotspot*'. The Northern India Hotspot was launched in March 2014, building on past work supported by one of the Freedom Fund's founding investors, the Legatum Foundation. In early 2015, the Freedom Fund committed to an expanded three-year programme aiming to reduce the prevalence of bonded labour and trafficking in 27 districts of the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. At this point (the IDS programme commenced in January 2015) 19 partners were being supported by the Freedom Fund. The Freedom Fund 2018-19 updated strategy (October 2017) Northern India Hotspot strategy (2018-19) outlined the continuation of the Hotspot with an investment of \$4.4 million for the two-year period. The project aims to support learning about the most effective community and NGO activities in combatting bonded labour in the Freedom Fund Northern India Hotspot. The project is funded by the Freedom Fund and directed by IDS. The objective of this report is to present respondent feedback regarding the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, and sustainability of the Hotspot model in reducing bonded labour in Northern India as part of an overall, independent assessment of the Hotspots.

Team

The review has been conducted by an international multi-disciplinary gender-balanced team of researchers from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, UK, in partnership with Praxis. Interviews were carried out, written and analysed by Anusha Chandrasekharan of Praxis India and Rituu B Nanda an independent researcher. Pragya Shah of Praxis supported with the interviews. A second layer of analysis and editing of the early report draft was added by Danny Burns. The report was further edited and checked by Pauline Oosterhoff.

The Institute of Development Studies has a global reputation for its work on international development (www.ids.ac.uk). Praxis is a development support organisation specialising in participatory methods in pursuit of equity and good governance (www.praxisindia.org).

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Acknowledgements

The team would like to extend its gratitude to all the partner organisations that participated in the research process – taking time out for organising interviews with all respondents, and to speak to the research team. We are thankful to all the community members who shared their insights and experiences with the research team and to all stakeholders who took time out of their busy schedules to speak to the interviewers. We would also like to acknowledge the support given by Pradeep Narayanan and M. Joseph at different stages of the report writing process.

Great effort has gone into producing an accurate and balanced report. We apologise for inaccuracies, should there be any, and would be pleased to rectify them.

List of acronyms

AHTU	Anti-Human Trafficking Unit
ALC	Access Livelihoods Consulting India Ltd.
ARG	Action Research Group
BDO	Block Development Officer
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CIG	Common Interest Group
CMT	Community Maturity Tool
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CVC	Community Vigilance Committee
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DM	District Magistrate
GRP	Government Railway Police
HLN	Human Liberty Network
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
JSY	Janani Surakshya Yojana
JVI	Justice Ventures International
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NFE	Non-formal education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIPCCD	National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development
OBC	Other backward classes
PHC	Primary Health Centre
PMUY	Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
RPF	Railway Protection Force
SC	Scheduled Caste
SHG	Self-Help Group
SMC	School Management Committee
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SRLM	State Rural Livelihood Mission
VC	Vigilance Committee

Structure of this report

We have structured this report around the key questions in the interview process. This was more time consuming than the South India analysis, and had the difficulty of answers to one question appearing under another, but it produced a detailed and comprehensive analysis framework. We did an initial analysis against (Development Assistance Committee) DAC criteria to get a feel for a data, but after an initial write up felt that organising the data this way fragmented the assessment of NGO-supported activities (which was key to this report) and broke the flow of the argument. As a result, we decided to structure the report by questions – grouping together a few that were closely connected.

Where this report fits in the overall evaluation

Between late 2018 and early 2019, IDS and Praxis carried out a series of qualitative interviews representing the fourth element of the evaluation and research process of the Freedom Fund Northern India Hotspot (see Annexes 1-3).

- Northern India Hotspot: Narrative analysis and mapping of system dynamics
- Northern India Hotspot: Prevalence (baseline and endline)
- Northern India Hotspot: Action Research
- Northern India Hotspot: Qualitative interviews

The findings of these will be drawn together in:

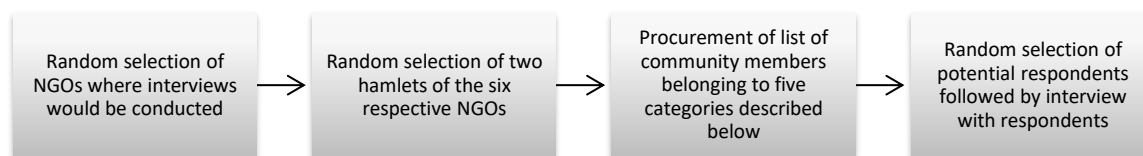
- Northern India Hotspot: Summary evaluation report

The qualitative interviews report, based on 52 interviews across the Hotspot, draws together stakeholder perceptions on what was working and what was not within the Hotspots, and to triangulate findings with the other elements of the programme.

The data tells us about what the respondents think and from this we have drawn summary conclusions section by section. Our team view of the implications of these findings will be laid out in the summary evaluation report which will integrate our learnings from all the above four processes.

1. Methodology

The interview process followed the following steps:



1.1 Selection of sample locations

The IDS team randomly selected six of 12 partners as possible respondents. These were NGO A, NGO B, NGO C, NGO D, NGO E and NGO F. Of these, two of the partners (NGO A and NGO D) had been part of the action research process. We ensured that we met partners from Bihar as well as Uttar Pradesh. Out of the hamlets where the prevalence study had been carried out (six for each NGO), the IDS team randomly selected two hamlets for each

NGO for the qualitative interviews. Selecting prevalence locations meant that interview data could be triangulated with the qualitative data generated by local groups who discussed prevalence findings. Of this pair, one was the main hamlet and the other was a provisional one (selected in case respondents from a specific category was not available in the main hamlet).

The team met with the following groups of respondents:

- 30 community respondents
- 12 NGO staff
- 10 external stakeholders

1.2 Selections of respondents and recruitment

To recruit community respondents, five categories of community participants were identified in close consultation with the Freedom Fund:

- Category 1: NGO supported groups (Community Vigilance Committees (CVCs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Adolescent Groups, Children's Clubs, etc.)
- Category 2: People who have been assisted with micro enterprises and/or access to vocational training or group-based income generation
- Category 3: People who have had legal help (focusing on cases with prosecutions)
- Category 4: People who have received information only (further de-segregate by whether they were a member of an NGO supported group)
- Category 5: People who have had rehabilitation and reintegration support, or parents whose children were reintegrated

Randomly selecting within these categories meant that there was higher proportion of participants who were directly affected by bonded labour than the proportion established in the endline of the prevalence study. Bonded labour reduced dramatically across the Hotspots in the period between the base- and endline surveys, from 56.2 per cent to 11.6 per cent in the intervention communities (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2019a). In some categories, such as 3 and 5, the number of respondents in each category for an NGO in was limited to two to three. In some locations, respondents in these categories were not available in the selected or alternative hamlet. In such cases, the NGO was asked to suggest more than one potential respondent from any available location and from this, one respondent was randomly selected. We also asked them to consider gender whilst shortlisting potential interviewees.

Several of the interviewees overlap categories. For example, one interviewee may belong to categories 1 and 2 or 3 and 5 or more. Not all respondents were meant to have family members in bonded labour. Ten of the 30 respondents or their relatives have experienced bonded labour/child labour/trafficking. And of them, seven were provided rescue and reintegration support through the project partners.

Table 1.1 Community participants profile

Age	Gender	Caste	Micro enterprise / vocational	Legal aid	Reintegration	Provided information	NGO supported group	Affected by bonded labour
NGO C								
19	M	SC	Y					
31	F	SC	Y					
Early 50s	F	SC					Y	
60	F	SC				Y		
55	M	ST		Y				Yes
NGO A								
45	F	OBC		Y				
63	F	SC				Y		Yes
30	M	SC					Y	
55	F	OBC			Y			Yes
50	F	OBC			Y			Yes
NGO B								
53	M	SC					Y	
55	M	SC				Y		
40	M	SC		Y				
15/50	M	SC			Y			Yes (2 people, father and son)
25	F	SC	Y					
NGO D								
62	M	SC	Y			Y	Y	No
30	F	GEN	Y					No
36	F	OBC				Y		Yes (but without NGO help)
45	F	SC	Y		Y		Y	Yes
52	M	NA (Muslim)			Y	Y		Yes
NGO F								
45	F	SC				Y	Y	No
30	F	SC					Y	No
63	M	SC				Y	Y	No
70	F	SC	Y				Y	No
50	M	OBC		Y	Y			Yes (daughter trafficked)

Age	Gender	Caste	Micro enterprise / vocational	Legal aid	Reintegration	Provided information	NGO supported group	Affected by bonded labour
NGO E								
32	F	SC				Y	Y	No
35	F	SC				Y	Y	No
35	M	SC	Y				Y	No
46	M	SC	Y			Y	Y	No
39	F	SC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes (parents and brothers)

Source: Author's own

To recruit the NGO interviewees, the NGOs first sent a list of the staff in managerial/senior positions and of those in community engagement/fieldwork positions. Project heads were selected for interview and subordinate staff were randomly selected up to a total of 12 NGO staff. To recruit external stakeholders, the research teams initially came up with an exhaustive list of external stakeholders whose views might be relevant to the interview process. Of these, IDS shortlisted ten, based upon feedback from Freedom Fund. The external stakeholders included a mix of government officials and sector experts.

Table 1.2 Respondents the team spoke to as part of external stakeholder interviews

Stakeholders specific to Bihar	State Department of Labour
	Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU)
	UNICEF consultant
	Border security (Sashastra Seema Bal)
	State Legal Services Authority
	Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (Jeevika)
Stakeholders specific to Uttar Pradesh	Survivor Leader
	District Child Protection Unit
External to either state	Access Livelihoods Consulting India Limited
	Anti-Slavery International

Source: Author's own

In the text that follows we refer to community members, NGO staff members, and stakeholders. Stakeholders refers to the category above.

Three separate questionnaires were prepared: for community members, NGO staff members and external stakeholders (see Annexes 1-3).

1.3 Ethical considerations

This study is part of a larger research monitoring, evaluation and learning project in the Hotspot that the IDS Ethical Review Board has reviewed and approved.

1.4 Analysis framework

This research report has addressed the following key evaluative dimensions: but the substantive evaluation of these is not to be found in this synthesis of qualitative interview findings, but rather in the final evaluation report:

Relevance

- To what extent do the design and activities of the Hotspot reflect the current needs and priorities of the community members? Are they relevant to the objectives of the Hotspot?
- What are the views of relevant stakeholders (primarily programme participants, with selected inputs from community leaders, government representatives and private sector employers) towards the programme? For example, do they consider it an opportunity, a threat, or are they indifferent?

Effectiveness

- To what extent has the programme achieved its aim of reducing bonded labour in communities in the target areas (as a source for bonded labour)?
- Based on the qualitative feedback from the community and NGOs: (i) how has the programme contributed towards the measured change, including tackling root causes, and (ii) what are the observable links between programme activities and wider systems change (e.g. wider government policies and practices, strengthening civil society collaboration, and generating evidence for anti-trafficking sector)?
- What have the NGO partners undertaken together that they might not have done outside of the Hotspot model, especially in terms of systems change?

Efficiency

- Based on the NGOs' assessment of impact achieved through (i) the different types of programme activities of local NGOs and (ii) the main work streams within the Change Strategy: To what extent do these align with the programme's investment of time and resources?

Sustainability

- To what extent has the programme influenced the approach, organisational capability and quality of activities (including monitoring and evaluation) of the NGO partners?
- What is the key knowledge and skills that NGOs have learned from programme interventions and can they give examples of how this can be applied elsewhere?
- What can the community members and adolescents now do for themselves?

The analysis was structured around the questions agreed between IDS and Freedom Fund team. Therefore, the intention of the analysis was to develop explanations directly from the data to respond to these questions. The interviews were transcribed. Slightly different methods were used for collating data in Bihar and in Uttar Pradesh. Praxis opted to use Excel whereas the Uttar Pradesh consultant decided to use NVivo 12. This was to enable a quicker, simpler way to collate data, without missing anything out and to easily analyse the frequency of responses to a particular subject.

Praxis and Rituu B. Nanda read through all of the transcriptions thoroughly. Rather than analysing their own data, they jointly analysed each question through phone, Skype calls and face to face meetings. Steady communication and clarity of each other's role remained key in this process. This collaborative mode of analysis meant constant discussion between the two evaluators on the data. This process brought multiple perspectives to the body of data and thus enriched the interpretation of the data. There was an element of trust between the two evaluation team members who were ready to listen to each other and felt comfortable to question and critique each other's perspective. From time to time, they referred to Danny and Pauline from IDS with queries. IDS separately read the interviews, coded them in NVivo, and

triangulated the findings – making additions and discussing some of the findings in order to reach a shared analysis.

A challenge of this collaborative approach was increased time demand on the team members.

1.5 Limitations

These interviews should only be seen as supplementary to, and a triangulation of the other research components, because:

- The small sample of 52 for the collection of qualitative feedback from various key stakeholders is not representative but enabled the evaluators to draw broad conclusions about how and why changes were happening. Due to budgetary and timing constraints, however, we were unable to increase the sample of interviewees until we reached the point of saturation where no new information or themes are mentioned by the participants.
- This study was proposed halfway through the research process and was not budgeted for. This means that this element was more budgetarily constrained than would be ideal. Furthermore, with stakeholders being split across two states, the sample is proportionately smaller.
- The views expressed and claims made by both community members and NGO staff have not been independently verified.
- There are times when the interviewees quote percentages – e.g. there has been a 50 per cent reduction in school dropouts, or even a 50 per cent reduction in caste discrimination. Prevalence data and other numerical indicators of change have been collected in a separate base- and endline study (Oosterhoff *et al.* 2019b).
- The study focus was on the community level, and specifically on intervention areas. It was not looking at the whole sector or the whole of the two states.
- People did not always respond directly to the questions. This was especially true for adolescent girls. Even with follow up questions it was not always easy to get as clean a correlation between the questions and answers as we would have liked. This was particularly the case for the external stakeholders.
- More generally, it was difficult to get the external stakeholders to give their time – so these interviews tended to be much shorter, and while providing some additional insight are generally less robust than the community and NGO interviews.
- There is also a question of impact/sustainability time lag. We won't really know the full impact of the work done for some years to come.
- Sometimes, the physical space to conduct the interviews was a constraint, where disturbances from household members ensured that the interviews had to be conducted over more time than others.

1.6 Definition of bonded labour

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the definition of forced labour has been consistent since the passage of the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). However, the focus on particular types of forced labour have shifted as new forms of exploitation of labour have emerged, and similarly the indicators of forced labour have evolved over time (ILO 2014). The ILO (2014) indicators of forced labour are aimed at providing guidance in identifying situations of forced labour. These include abuse of vulnerability; deception; restriction of movement; isolation; physical and sexual violence; intimidation and threats; retention of identity documents; withholding wages; debt bondage; abusive working and living conditions; and excessive overtime (ILO 2014). These indicators are proffered as a useful means to operationalise the concept of forced labour.

Bonded labour is generally described as a type of forced labour and is also known as debt bondage or debt labour. It occurs when a person is forced to use their physical labour to pay off a debt acquired by them or their family, or inherited from their ascendants. They are forced into working for little or no pay, with no control over their debt and the value of their work invariably becomes greater than the original sum of money borrowed.

Within this report, and throughout IDS' body of research on the Freedom Fund's South-Eastern Nepal Hotspot programme, we use the following definition as developed for the participatory statistics based on the life story analysis (Burns, Sharma and Oosterhoff 2017).¹

- The presence of an advance or agreement. An advance, whether completely or partly in cash or in kind, made by one person who is also demanding the labour of the borrower as a means of repayment for a loan.

Plus at least one of these remaining four:

- No freedom of movement: physically constrained or has restrictions placed on his/her freedom of movement.
- Paid less than the minimum wage: a remuneration which is less than the current notified minimum wage under the Minimum Wage Act.
- No freedom of employment: absence of freedom to choose one's employment or other means of livelihood.
- No freedom of marketplace: loss of freedom to sell one's labour in an open market.

2. The Programme

2.1 Approach

The Freedom Fund partners operate in Hotspots with high concentrations of bonded labour, child labour and trafficking incidence in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Here, multiple forms of bonded labour co-exist with other types of social-economic and political inequality. Each NGO has its own expertise, covering a range of forms of bonded labour, including adult and child bonded labour and trafficking, but all focus on community-based interventions.

The aim of the programme is to reduce prevalence in the Hotspot as a whole with partners in specific communities working on direct prevention, protection and prosecution interventions; improving the wider enabling environment for freedom; increasing civil society's capacity for sustained and effective anti-bonded labour action; and supporting rigorous research and evaluation on bonded labour.

A central idea underpinning the programme is that the eradication of bonded labour should come from within communities and that NGO activity should be designed to enable and facilitate this through collective action, including the work of CVCs. NGO activity in villages therefore tends to focus at the hamlet level, the lowest administrative level.

2.2 Interventions

Initially, the Freedom Fund explicitly focused 15 per cent of interventions on commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), 40 per cent on bonded labour, and 45 per cent on child labour. In

¹ Some people argued that the migration of poor illiterate rural persons is always risky – or even that it is always a form of bonded labour because people need to borrow money for the journey – but others pointed out that there are also success stories. Agreement was reached that somebody could only be marked as a case of 'risky migration' if he/she has gone overseas with false documents, or he/she is treated contrary to his/her agreement with agent, or if he/she is paid less than that of agreed salary, or if he/she is given other work than was agreed.

reality, the interventions cross these boundaries – e.g. tackling child labour to end bonded labour and vice versa.

The Freedom Fund chose partners according to the extent to which they met the following criteria: (1) they address bonded labour; (2) they are involved in rescue and/or interception; (3) they equip survivors through effective support for recovery and reintegration; (4) they are positioned to contribute to systemic change, including through community-based reflection and collective action against bonded labour; (5) they are engaged in local, district, state and/or national-level advocacy; (6) they are involved in legal services for victim protection and/or prosecution of those who hold or traffic bonded labourers; (7) their capacity, organisational reliability, trustworthiness, and transparency; and (8) vocational skills and linking communities with jobs and government schemes. They did not expect all partners to be able to do all these things, but these were the competencies they were looking for.

2.3 Roles of different NGOs

In the Northern India Hotspot, there is a wide diversity of NGO types and focus of activities, which provides an important context for the findings. For example, within the sample of NGOs selected for these interviews:

NGO F forms community vigilance committees in District 1 of Bihar, enabling them to examine the root causes of vulnerability and create action plans against bonded labour. NGO F also provide education support for children who have dropped out or never attended school, train government officials, strengthen official anti-trafficking task forces, enable vulnerable groups to access skills training and establish micro-businesses. They also link communities to relevant government welfare schemes.

NGO C engages in rescue and rehabilitation; education for children and vocational training for older youth; SHG formation and income generating activity skills; access to government services, including rural employment guarantee, infant and maternal health care and land rights. NGO C promotes bank linkages for SHGs so they can access loans on low interest, to prevent community members from getting into the debt cycle. Additionally, the organisation trains officials of the state Labour and Police departments on the content of laws related to bonded labour, child labour and trafficking.

NGO A's strength lies in its experience of rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration from trafficking and child labour situations. They also work with officials to implement child protection laws in different districts of Bihar, as well as building community action through strengthened child protection committees. NGO A provides services through shelter homes and drop-in centres, and helps survivors pursue legal justice. They also build on community engagement in ensuring children's access to education, issues of child rights, child protection and safe migration. NGO A non-formal education classes provide life skills, vocational training and paralegal services.

NGO D aims to work with multiple stakeholders to provide support to communities vulnerable to situations of bonded labour/child labour/trafficking. These include strengthening local committees such as the CVCs, conducting life skill classes in government schools to build awareness on the above and related issues, vocational training for adolescents linked to income generation, as well as building the capacity of government officials and networks, with block-level and district-level mechanisms to carry out child protection activities. NGO D also coordinates rescue, reintegration and help with recovery for survivors of bonded labour situations.

NGO E aims to reduce individuals' vulnerability to bonded labour through the creation of Community Freedom Groups, which develop a close understanding of causes of bonded

labour in each area and then decides on collective actions. Through group formation – such as adolescent groups, children’s groups, farmers’ groups and SHGs – NGO E facilitates communities to benefit from schools and non-formal education, income generation activities and vocational skills. NGO E also builds awareness on the cycles of debt and bondage and on the issue of bonded labour in communities they work in.

3.Findings

In the sections that follow we discuss some of the key activities in detail. Before this, we give a brief overview of the most dominant themes to emerge from an analysis of responses, including the top three interventions to have an impact through the eyes of the community and the NGO staff members. While these numbers are small, it is interesting to note some of the differences in perception of the types of interventions that have an impact between NGO and community members.

Table 3.1 Responses from NGO and community members on types of intervention that have an impact

	Community		NGO	
	Number (total 30)	Percentage	Number (total 12)	Percentage
Information/awareness	23	77%	8	67%
Group formation	13	43%	8	67%
Rescue	10	33%	9	75%
Jobs (self or others)	8	27%	2	17%
Vocational training/skills	7	23%	6	50%
Legal aid	5	17%	5	42%
NGO organises meetings	15	15%	6	50%
School admission	3	10%	5	42%
Linking with government	2	7%	3	25%
Rehabilitation	1	3%	3	25%
Work with government/police			5	42%
Action Research			3	25%
Child marriage			2	17%

Source: Author’s own

While a very simple overview, this numerical count does help us to get a feel for the biggest perceived changes and priorities. By far and away the most significant activity for both groups was awareness raising. This is closely followed by group formation. Group formation comes out a bit lower in the community interviews, but this may be because they associate groups with awareness raising. On all other issues there is quite a difference between the NGO and community responses. While three quarters of the NGOs talk about rescue, this is only mentioned by a third of community members. Communities emphasise the livelihoods work more than the NGOs, but in both cases the numbers are low. There is a big difference between the numbers for training and those for jobs, and as we shall see later this can be partially explained by the view of respondents that a lot of the training is not targeted to where there might be realistic opportunities for income generation. Legal aid work is only

mentioned by 17 per cent of community respondents – but is emphasised by 42 per cent of NGO respondents. It is not surprising that the work with government only really shows up in the NGO responses, as much of this work will be invisible to the communities. Perhaps more surprising is how few community members mention the work on school admissions compared to the NGO responses.

What follows is a question by question analysis.

3.1 Question 1. Changes in situation of bonded labour, child labour, trafficking

Thinking about the situation [of bonded labour and child labour and trafficking], can you tell us about a few significant changes that have happened in your community over the last 3 years?

NGOs have intervened in the area of bonded labour, child labour and trafficking, focusing largely on collectivisation to create spaces for community-based action (through groups such as CVCs, SHGs, etc.), awareness building on themes such as bonded labour/child labour/trafficking, providing vocational skills and support with livelihoods, and access to safe loans, rescue and rehabilitation. In addition to these, the NGOs have supported in strengthening the already existing services and systems – for example, improving education in schools and supporting the formation of child protection committees. While some of these interventions, such as rescue and rehabilitation, have directly had a positive impact on the lives of a few respondents, others such as vocational training have had more limited success.

3.1.1 Changes in child labour

Increased awareness, through NGO interventions as well as community experience

There does seem to be an increase in awareness around the issues of child labour. One of the respondents noted, ‘We should not make our children under the age of 18 years’ work’. Another said,

Earlier, at least 10 per cent of boys in our hamlet used to go to work in bangle factories in Hyderabad and Bangalore. The community vigilance committee [CVC] made us realise that it is human trafficking and told us how such work can affect the children’s health. Now, people have stopped sending their children to work.

Several NGO staff also noted that the community was now more aware about laws related to child labour. The rescue of children has also contributed to this awareness. Once a child comes back home after being rescued, others become aware of their plight. NGO respondents noted that because of the rescue activities, community members have understood the repercussions of sending their children outside for work. The staff of another NGO said,

We visited the Mukhiyas and requested them to conduct a survey to get the statistics of a number of children who migrate for work. We then created a system and requested the Mukhiya to keep a track of migrant children and ensure their safety.

Linking children to school is important, but schools should also be improved

One NGO claimed that there was at least a 75 per cent reduction of child labour, as a result of linking children to schools. The NGO staff noted that of this group, a majority have been enrolled and attend school regularly. However, around 25 per cent of the group may have gone back to work. ‘Child labour may be hidden in these cases. We enrolled these children in school, but they don’t attend regularly,’ she added.

There is an increase in awareness among respondents on the importance of going to school. The change in the number of children attending school was reported across hamlets. One woman said,

More children have started going to school. Now, there is not a single child in our hamlet who doesn't go to school. My daughters had also dropped out after Class 3. One of my daughters now goes for tuition classes and the other has started stitching after learning it from the centre (being run by NGO).

Some respondents noted that education was important not only for getting a good job, but also to improve knowledge and become smart and worldly-wise.

Non-formal education (NFE) has played an important role in rebuilding the lives of those children who are vulnerable. One NGO staff member said there has been the reintegration of the most vulnerable child labourers with their families and society through the NFE programmes. 'Six hundred and seventy-five children have been engaged in the NFE classes this year. This has gone up from 125 in the first year,' he noted. Another staff member noted that schools gave the NGO staff feedback on how the re-enrolled children were performing. The staff of another NGO noted

Children who have been rescued from labour or trafficking situations, are enrolled in the NFE classes that we run. Our staff regularly follows up with such children. Ninety per cent continue education. The 10 per cent who drop out are girls.

However, linking the children to school has not always been successful. The underlying issues of discrimination in the classroom, attitude of the teachers, and poor-quality education continue to be a challenge. One of the respondents, the father of a rescued child who had dropped out of school due to behaviour of the teacher, said that despite him visiting the school, the authorities had not taken any action. Two CVC members interviewed from the same village claimed that they had been monitoring the school. The rescued boy said that he still did not enjoy school after the re-admission and his younger brother also does not want to attend school for the fear of being beaten up. It is important that not only are children linked to schools, but that the quality of education, midday meals, etc., are visibly improved so that children are also keen to attend. Unless this is done, enrolling children in school will hardly be enough. In this area, the school management committee can play an influential role. One of the respondents mentioned the School Management Committee (SMC) in their village improving the schooling.

Children continue to be bonded in the brick kilns, but the numbers are falling

Children continue to work in brick kilns in conditions of bondage, along with the entire family, although this is greatly reduced. A CVC member commented,

The payment in brick kiln is made to the guardian on behalf of the whole family. We find children aged 10-12 years working with their parents in brick kilns. We cannot stop this can we? Families are not in good financial condition.

One NGO staff member noted that children are still being sent to work, but the number has reduced. This is echoed by a community member,

Twenty-five per cent of the households in our tola still work in the brick kilns. They take an advance from the brick kiln owner. The change is that earlier, every house in the tola would take an advance from the brick kiln.

This is clearly a perception, but is broadly in line with the prevalence findings.

Children are rescued but still go back to work

The interviews recounted some examples of rescued children who have returned to work (although this may not be to bonded work). In one case, the respondent's son went back to work with his relative after the family rescued him from an exploitative situation. In two more interviews, respondents mentioned that children tend to come back and while they don't get re-trafficked, they tend to work with their families, especially in agriculture. One NGO staff member said that 'there was the risk of children going back to work under difficult conditions', and cited two cases (one from Village 17 and one from Village 18 as examples). One stakeholder (a child protection expert) noted that there has definitely been an increase in the number of children coming back to Bihar. But he added that this meant that more children were being trafficked out of Bihar.

In all these years, I have heard very little about NGOs or officials stopping the transit of children. Definitely, there have been certain actions in this direction, too, but it is in trickles. I don't know whether children who are being rescued and brought back home are actually taking the next train out.

He added that this aspect must be addressed.

Existing institutions and services related to child protection strengthened

The NGOs seem to have succeeded in strengthening already existing institutions. NGOs work closely with the police and the railway police to organise orientation programmes for them. A stakeholder (government official) noted

Some organisations such as NGO A, NGO D, NGO G and NGO H, through the Human Liberty Network², supported the activation of the child protection committees, capacity building of the members, informing them about their roles and responsibilities. They supported from the very beginning - identifying members and training them.

An official from the Labour Department said,

Our department has a close connection with NGO A. It is an old relation and they have multiple projects with the government. We recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with them on child labour and have awarded them a contract for three training centres for elimination of child labour.

One significant impact in this area is the activation of the Village Child Protection Committees. These are committees mandated by the Integrated Child Protection System and are usually on paper. At least two NGOs spoke about activating the child protection committees. Similarly, through the CVCs, the school management committee has also received a boost. One of the stakeholders noted that NGOs such as NGO A, NGO D, NGO G and NGO H supported the activation of the committees by capacity building of the members, informing them about their roles and responsibilities. Similarly, the role of NGOs in activating the crisis response mechanism was appreciated by stakeholders.

3.1.2 Changes in bonded labour

Awareness about bonded labour improved among community members, as well as NGO staff...

Similarly, on the issue of bonded labour, there seems to have been an increase in awareness and a reduction in bondage. One NGO staff member said 'I can confidently say that 60 per cent of the SHG members are now free of slavery'. She noted how issues of

² Human Liberty Network (HLN) (<https://www.humanlibertynetwork.org>) is a strategically developed informal network of 16 grassroots NGOs and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) who consciously work towards reduction of incidences of bonded labour/child labour/trafficking in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh under the umbrella of the Freedom Fund.

bonded labour were the first to come up in discussions. Child labour took longer to talk about, as the community felt that if their children did not go out to work, they would not have anything to eat. At least two NGO staff members noted the change in their own awareness on the issue. As one said,

When we started working on this issue in 2014, we took about a year to understand. Initially we were not even aware that bonded labour took place in these areas. Now we are able to identify cases of bonded labour and even child labour.

The other explained how this knowledge helped him work as part of the legal aid cell of the organisation.

While all CVC members spoke about making communities aware of the problems of bonded labour and one spoke about the violation of human rights, at least 40 per cent of respondents across all six NGOs said there was no bonded labour. However, while they said that there was no bonded labour, at the same time they mentioned that they continued to work with those employers from whom they had taken loan. They had to repay the 'loan' to someone who had helped them in time of need. One female said that there was no other option of work in the village, so she continued to work for the person who had given her a loan. She also said that this work was seasonal.

Respondents across categories acknowledge a reduction in bonded labour with at least 25 out of 30 community respondents saying there was a reduction in bonded labour/child labour/trafficking. A survivor leader, who is a CVC member, said

I think bonded labour is still there, we want to end it. We want to empower people so that they do not get into bondage. If there were 100 cases before, now there are 70 cases. Some people still go to work in brick kilns and in carpet factories. They do not have any land or any access to alternate livelihood. They have no option. Sometimes people send their children to work.

The team met with respondents who themselves, or whose family members, had been rescued with support from the partner NGOs. These included one child who was rescued from a railway station on the way to work, a family in which four members were rescued from bondage, and a couple whose daughter was rescued from a trafficker. The team also heard about other rescues from the NGO staff and a few community members. In at least one case, the rescued person was able to recover Rs 14,000 from the zamindar for whom he worked.

... But traditional understandings of bonded labour are still widespread

On probing further, a few issues emerged. The community still linked a situation of bondedness to being tied to a zamindar or being forced to work on their fields.

Bonded labour is still understood as forced labour, yet respondents did not identify cases of force. One community respondent said that about 50-60 per cent of people in the hamlet are now aware of bonded labour. While 7 out of 15 community members felt that there was no forced labour, they also mentioned that if a person takes a loan, he or she is bound to work to repay the loan. One said that although they have the freedom to change their job, they are paid low wages. As one respondent said,

We have taken loans from rich people or landowners for healthcare or for buying grains from. They do not force us to work. We can work where we want. But people work with the landlord they took the loan from as they have to repay the loan.

Another respondent explained this further,

No one works because of force. We take loans from relatives or powerful people. Sometimes, people who are not able to return the amount by working elsewhere, work for the person from whom they had taken the loan to pay it back.

'It is not bondage. It is my duty to pay off the loan,' one respondent argued. This suggests that paying for high interest loans is seen as normal and the 'obligations' are considered part of the everyday landscape.

Increased awareness about associated issues

Awareness about wages can help reduce bonded labour if it enables them to stop taking loans that keep them in bondage. 'Now, people are aware that they will take the amount is due to them,' a respondent said. Another said that they have realised the importance of keeping track of their loans. Community leadership, especially survivors, were keen to get others out of bondage. 'The CVC keeps an eye on forced labour,' a CVC member said.

Another factor that helped was that the NGOs tried to raise awareness about ways not to get into bondage through loans that are provided on the condition that borrowers use their physical labour to pay off a debt acquired by them or their family, or inherited from their ascendants, and force borrowers into working for little or no pay with no control over their debt so that the value of their work invariably becomes greater than the original sum of money borrowed.

For instance, they encouraged people to take loans for smaller amounts so that they could easily return them and not get stuck in bondage. People from Musahar and Biyar communities continue to go to brick kilns and their children accompany them. If the brick kiln is close to the project site, the NGO was able to help the workers to negotiate and improve their wages.

There has also been an increase in awareness about whom to approach in case there is an incident of bonded labour. For example, two respondents mentioned that they are now aware of who to approach – CVC members, the NGO team and police – if they encounter a situation of bondage. An NGO staff member (NGO F) noted

One of the victims heard about our work with bonded labourers and approached our legal centre. He told us that he had not been paid for several months. With the help of the legal aid centre, he managed to get back Rs 14,000 that was due to him. This case, however, is from outside our intervention area. It is important to us because it shows us that people outside this circle also know about us and thought it important to approach us.

An ex-bonded labourer stressed that unless the reasons behind bonded labour are addressed it will continue. This suggests that while awareness is important in reducing labour for those that have the ability to get other work, for the remaining bonded labourers work needs to focus on some of the underlying causes. Local dynamics can serve to perpetuate bonded labour, as illustrated in this example from the Biyar community. It was reported that men from one community earn a lot but spend a large percentage of their earnings on alcohol. For example, if they earn Rs 500 per day on average, they spend at least Rs 140 per day on alcohol and then take loans for alcohol from owner. One bottle of alcohol costs Rs 70. They beat up their wives, fight with the brick kiln owner and sometimes go to jail. A community participant said,

Unless the organisation works on the issue of alcohol, bonded labour will continue. It is not that we did not try in the village, some of us did but do you think those who drink listen to us? They say it is their money they can spend on whatever they want.

In another instance, the CVC members of an NGO C hamlet heard of a case of bonded labour, intervened, and took action on their own. As a survivor leader recounted,

We rescued 50 people who were bonded for last 4 years in Brick Kiln 2 last year. I went to the District Magistrate [DM] with the NGO C staff and explained to him that I was a bonded labourer and I knew what they were going through. All 50 were freed.

What is interesting is that CVC were more or less associated with broad service provision to reduce poverty, such as making identity documents and improving village infrastructure, and in some occasional cases they also took action specifically against bonded labour.

A number of respondents mentioned that they were now aware that they could take the land from the zamindar on lease for sharecropping and this gave them some autonomy. One community member said,

Earlier people were scared of zamindars and were forced to work under the situation of bonded labour. The zamindars used to abuse them verbally and threaten people working under them. People have now stopped working under the zamindars, they now prefer to work on lease basis to avoid the uncomfortable working situations as well as to prevent themselves from getting into the debt cycles.

However, they did not elaborate on what happened if the crop failed.

The availability of safe loans was mentioned by several respondents. However, there was not much discussion on the reasons for taking these loans. In one case study, a family with three members suffering from tuberculosis had sent their young son to work. He was rescued and brought back, only to go back to work again. While the programme is addressing some systemic issues, others such as health and alcohol have received less attention.

Vocational trainings are provided, but are not always systematic or sustainable

Another major intervention was vocational training for livelihood generation. All NGOs routinely ran trainings such as lac bangle making, duck farming, stitching, electrician work, etc. Sometimes, these were supported with capital to set up a small business. According to the NGO staff, diversifying into non-traditional forms such as duck farming yielded higher returns.

In many cases these trainings did not turn into livelihood opportunities. One respondent noted that at least 15 women and girls in the hamlet learnt new skills of tailoring and bangle making. Of them, however, only two women still stitch. One of them is from a dominant caste. The others stopped stitching because their machine developed some malfunctions. A respondent in City 2 said

Two years ago, my niece learnt how to stitch. She used to stitch at home regularly for the first two to three months. Then she too gave up once her machine developed some snags. There is not much benefit in this, though.

Another respondent, whose daughters learnt lac bangle making, was of a similar opinion. She said those who learnt these skills used it for 15-20 days; but were not able to make an income from it. Another interviewee referred to two to three trainings given to ten boys: 'We all together painted this panchayat bhawan. Now I can paint very well. I have learned but I have not got opportunity'. The reasons for trainings not converting into livelihood opportunities included the absence of resources to deal with contingencies such as a malfunctioning equipment, the lack of a market for the products and thereby the absence of a steady income, and the lack of capital to keep the work going. As a result, the respondents

who continued using the skills they learnt did so more out of interest, than for an income.
[Quote above]

There were some examples of people who had benefited from the economic development initiatives of the NGO. Women who started with making clothes later took on shopping bags and quilt covers. Women also honed other skills such as bookkeeping. One female respondent saw the training as 'liberating from dependency on husband for an income'. As a result of it, she was able to earn a small amount. Similarly, a woman mentioned how her daughter who learnt stitching now stitches to take care of her own expenses. There are cases of women who have started saving from their small profits from activities such as duck farming, and there are some cases of people who are making a living:

They trained me in stitching course six months ago, the training venue was near my house. I bought a sewing machine from my own money. I can make a blouse, suit and Rs 2,000 I can earn per month. I can manage home and run my own business. It suits me as I have small children.

Training may not always lead directly to paid work but it can lead to an increase in confidence which grows slowly. One organisation mentioned that it organised separate trainings for men (electricians) and women (lac bangle making/tailoring). At least one woman mentioned growing confidence as a result of being part of the SHG, but more generally, the benefits from membership of the SHG were less clear. SHG members, as well as the Access Livelihoods Consulting India Ltd. (ALC) firm, said that due to a lack of unity in the SHGs, group economic interventions have not taken off. Everyone in the SHG wants individual livelihoods and there is a lack of trust and cohesion.

One respondent from the NGO noted the trainings were not based on the contextual realities of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and the trainings are not followed with a systematic action plan, which could guide those who are unable to move from skills to income generation and entrepreneurial mindset. It was suggested that there was a lack of market research to see which would work. This raises questions about how sustainable trainings are unless they are supported with a systematic plan to convert learning into an alternative livelihood model which takes the demands of the market into account.

3.1.3 Changes in trafficking

Increased awareness, stepped up rescue and rehabilitation...

Respondents in all NGOs mentioned an increased awareness around trafficking and being conscious about the risks of sending children with strangers. Some respondents also mentioned a few cases of trafficking where those who were trafficked were deceived with false promises of marriage or jobs. According to a community respondent, 'There has been a lot of improvement, now the middleman does not come to take children.' The repercussions of sending their children to work outside or the possibility of them being trafficked has created fear in the community. So, while there is a reduction in the number of children going outside the village to work, this does not mean there is an end to child labour.

Engaging children in child labour in the village, such as working in brick kilns with parents, is not considered as 'child' labour. A CVC member in NGO B's village reported that children (including his own) take leave from school during harvest to help parents. One of the respondents from NGO E noted that now, children did not go out of the village to work. Another respondent from NGO D noted that her daughters would go and help her during agricultural season. One boy sometimes went with his father to his workplace in Delhi and Punjab. Another respondent noted a case in his village where the boy helped his parents, adding that he did so because they were very poor. An NGO staff member from Bihar also noted that while they had managed to enrol 30-35 students a year and none had dropped

out, this did not mean they attended school regularly, adding that they helped out their parents in their work, especially during the agricultural season. An NGO staff member said,

I handle the legal aid cell of the organisation [and] I have been able to successfully resolve one such case. Now the girl who was rescued is studying in school and learning stitching after being enrolled under one of the skill development programme being run by us.

A member of the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit noted that the HLN organisations had trained up to 2,400 constables in the last year on the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 and the POCSO Act, 2012.

One NGO acknowledged the support of the district administration in taking strict measures to arrest traffickers, rescue children and restore them. Some NGO staff, such as from NGO A, NGO B and NGO D, joined the government's Dhava Dal unit, which conducts raids and organises rescues at hotels, teashops and dhabas. The rescued children from two rehabilitation centres of NGO A presented a charter of demands to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in 2016 on the day the child labour trafficking portal was being inaugurated in Bihar.

One stakeholder noted what has worked is that now, the rescued child is not merely returned to the parents. The child is presented before the Child Welfare Committee, sent to a home and due legal process is followed. As a result, it has been possible to file cases against traffickers. This has also made the parents become more aware about the issue of child labour and take it seriously.

A District Child Protection Unit said that while the NGO had significantly improved the situation 'the community does not trust them fully.'

...but there is a need to adapt to challenges and changes in trafficking

The NGOs face challenges from the police too. 'We always tell the team that you should not bend before the police. You must argue with the police, not bend and not give up,' one of the officials explained. To stem the tide of trafficking, the NGOs have also had to adapt their strategies. Traffickers and middlemen try new tricks to lure people. So, the NGOs now keep a stronger watch around railway stations. One significant difference is that earlier, the traffickers would take children and bonded labour in groups. But now that groups have become very conspicuous, they avoid large groups. One stakeholder noted that traffickers also used other less prominent railway stations and looked for land routes while trafficking people, especially children.

Action taken in rescue of trafficked girls, but it is unclear if counselling support is given or effective. While rescue is a big part of the work for some of the NGOs like NGO B and NGO A, and to some extent NGO D, and is often carried out successfully, there is less evidence from the interviews of effective support to survivors in the form of follow-ups, especially for compensation.

An NGO staff member noted,

One man came to Town 6, took 10 bigha land on lease and started getting friendly with a girl's family. He used to eat his meals at their place. He eventually promised to marry her and took her to Nepal. Once the family lost touch with the girl, they realised what happened. Her parents approached our organisation staff and through the CVC, we filed an FIR. We found out later that he was trafficking girls under the promise of marriage. He was apprehended and the girl was brought back to her family. We are now supporting the family with the court case and other judicial formalities.

In the case where a girl was rescued from trafficking, the parents were asked about whether she received any mental health support or counselling. They said she had not.

One NGO staff member mentioned that a survivor was not keen to be a witness in the case against the trafficker because of the fear of stigma. This, however, was different in cases for bonded labour where respondents were eager to file a case. 'If there is conviction and prosecution of the zamindar it will break his pride,' a survivor said. NGO staff also pointed out the challenges that a girl who had been rescued from trafficking faced in reintegration with the community. They acknowledged the need to work on the stigma around trafficking. While at least two respondents said that they did not get any kind of counselling to deal with trauma, it is difficult to say this is a widespread view from the small number who raised the issue.

3.1.4 Reduction in child marriage/fake marriages

One big change in the intervention areas has been the impact on child marriage. 'In City 3 district, child marriages were very common. We carried out many raids with the police and now in fact no marriages are held there,' a staff noted. He added that the District Magistrate (DM) had been awarded for making the district child-marriage-free and his award certification mentioned the role played by NGO B in this regard. One respondent from City 4 mentioned that there were no instances of child marriage in her hamlet in the past year. 'In one case from Community 1, the community called the CVC (vigilance committee) member, who informed the network that we have. They in turn got in touch with the police and Childline and eventually the girl's marriage was stopped,' an NGO worker noted. Similarly, the CVC stopped the marriage of an underage girl in City 6. One community respondent said, 'almost 25 per cent of the population have realised the importance of restraint on early marriage.'

3.1.5 Conclusions and recommendations

- There is clear evidence of reductions in bonded labour and child labour (supported by the prevalence).
- Bonded labourers and young children continue to work in the brick kilns.
- Some children do go back to work after rescue. While the NGOs point out that this is because they come from families with very adverse financial situations or crisis, this obviously intensifies the need to systemically address these family vulnerabilities.
- While there is awareness about taking safe loans, and even limits on the loans one takes according to one's ability to pay them back, none of the NGOs we interacted with spoke about the importance of tracking loans. This process would enhance the work being done.
- Vocational training is often not linked to markets and does not always generate income.
- There have been several changes in the patterns of trafficking – survivors have married, those trafficked by family members, moving children in small groups, the need to challenge stigma, middlemen less prominent in the villages, police trained.
- While education is seen as having potential to reduce and prevent child labour, the focus is on building awareness of education, rather than in making it accessible and even desirable. While it is happening in some cases, is still not very rigorous.
- More tools and capacity are needed on how to help communities plan and strategise with the NGOs.

3.2 Questions 2 and 3. Group formation

Thinking about the activities and services that are offered by [insert NGO name], what group/s have you been involved with? What have the groups been doing? What has the group helped you with? Why do you keep going to the group/s? Has it been worth the time and effort that you have put in?

All NGOs are involved in supporting collective organisation through different kinds of groups to respond to different issues related to bonded labour, child labour and trafficking. All community members interviewed seem to be familiar with the NGO staff. Four respondents mentioned that they were not part of any group. One of them was an SHG member who stopped attending meetings, while the others received rescue and legal support from the NGO. All except one respondent had a broad idea of the information the NGOs provide in the groups. Generally, group meetings are held every month.

3.2.1 Types and function of collectives

During the project period, a number of groups were formed. These included CVCs or Nigrani Samitis, SHGs, age-specific collectives such as Bal Manch and Menna Manch (children's clubs); and ARGs (working on community-led research, action and reflection by six of the partners). Some partner NGOs such as NGO E formed common interest groups (CIGs) such as farmers' groups and labour groups in 2018. Others more recently formed survivor leaders' groups, health interest groups and the kisan samiti.

The groups serve three broad functions – providing information and generating awareness; enabling access to schemes and supporting infrastructure development of the hamlet through monitoring existing resources and advocating for more; and creating access to loans. The unstated role played by the groups through this spate of collectivisation seems to be creation of a community-based response to bonded labour, child labour and trafficking by building support systems within the community.

If we look at the above functions, the CVC broadly raises awareness on issues of bonded labour and child labour and stresses the importance of education. The group meetings are held once a month.

Table 3.2 below gives an idea of the kinds of groups and the role they play.

Table 3.2 Types of group and their role

	Raising awareness	Monitoring	Linkages
Community Vigilance Committee (CVC)	On education, early marriage, alcoholism, child labour, bonded labour and trafficking	Monitoring function of institutions – Anganwadi, schools, midday meal	Support with getting Aadhar cards/bank accounts/pensions Helps community get drains and drinking water through liaising with block and district administration
Self-Help Groups (SHGs)	On issues such as child marriage and bonded labour	-	Linkage with loans through the Jeevika project
Action Research Groups (ARGs) (in two of the interviewed NGOs)	On specific Action Research themes such as alcoholism and debt bondage or intergenerational bondage; education of Dalit children	Monitor, collect evidence on specific ARG theme; followed by action	One ARG reached out to block officers to improve Primary Health Centre (PHC) services in Village 23 One ARG helped 10 members pay off intergenerational loans
Age specific groups such as Mothers' Group, Youth Group, Adolescent Group, Bal Manch, Meena Manch (both children's groups)	On early marriage, child labour, dropouts Youth group holds awareness activities	Keep track of dropouts	-
Common interest groups – health groups;	-	-	Information and linkage to seeds (farmers group);

	Raising awareness	Monitoring	Linkages
farmers' group; labour group			emergency health loans (health groups)

Source: Author's own

CVCs take action directly, build awareness and link community to services

The CVCs are perhaps the most important of the groups formed during the project period. These groups typically comprise between eight and 20 members (ideally 15). CVCs have been constituted at panchayat, block and district level. Composition of the members varies. One NGO had CVC members which mixed powerful people with those who are more vulnerable to bonded labour, whereas the other NGO had more influential people or those trusted by the community. Three of the NGOs said that their CVCs were largely homogenous – as they belonged mainly to Dalit hamlets. In a hamlet of one of the NGOs, the CVC had members from Dalit and Muslim communities. Women are more regular attendees, especially in cases where male members are migrants.

The CVCs have different approaches: 'We keep an eye out so that rich powerful don't force others to work. We motivate people to send children to school,' a CVC member stated. 'The school was not providing meals to the children on a regular basis. The group approached the school authorities about it, after which the meals have been provided regularly,' another CVC member said. One member spoke about the importance of safe migration. Not only had she learnt about it, she also educated others about it. In the CVC meetings, the organisation provides information on bonded labour, child labour, child marriage and alcohol use. This is done in collaboration with the NGO. CVC links people to schemes like Indira Awas Yojana, old age pension, etc. CS5 said,

As CVC member, we had written a letter to the Block Development Officer to get drains installed in our village. But the biggest help from the NGO has been in rescuing my family from bonded labour situation. I am also a member of the School Management Committee (SMC). NGO E does not run the committee, but earlier we hardly used to meet. Now, thanks to the support of the CVC, we do.

NCS1 said,

I am the president of the vigilance committee [VC]. I am also a ward member of Ward No 2. Most people living here are landless Dalits. Many don't have Aadhaar cards. People work as agricultural labour and earn around Rs 200 a day. The committee has helped the community get water points. We wrote three letters to the block officer in Bishnupur to ensure that all the households got a tap for running water. The committee has also helped people get Aadhaar cards and their job (MNREGA) card. I cannot exactly say how many people have got their cards.

NGO FCS3, also a CVC member, noted that they were engaged in raising awareness amongst the children and parents on the importance of education, holding regular meetings with the community at Village 15 as well as the neighbouring villages. He noted that the group helped him understand issues such as child labour in a better way by learning from others.

DCS1 said the CVC in their hamlet had been involved with discussing and meeting different stakeholders such as the block level officer and school authorities in order to provide the school children with accessibility to midday meals and families at the village with ration cards. The respondent added,

The group has helped us with different ways, we are now able to discuss with the community and prevent them from getting into the trap of debt cycle by pursuing to safe sources of loans, working under those people who allow to work them freely and pay

them wages on time, avoiding to work for people who provide them with advance or loans.

'If bonded labour is a problem, they inform us and we are able to deal with it,' one NGO staff member said.

The NGO respondents also mentioned specific cases in which the CVC took action. These included Village 19, where the CVC intervened in a case where a fake marriage was being conducted and stopped it. In Town 5, the CVC was set up in 2015. The committee got 33-35 people papers for land at block level without the help of the NGO in 2017. In 2015, the CVC got a trafficker arrested in a village in Town 1. The workers thought they had worked and repaid but owner was forcing them and taking them in a vehicle. The CVC stopped this vehicle by force and handed the trafficker to police. CVC stopped the marriage of an underage girl in a village in City 6. In March 2018, CVC of Village 16 helped in the rescue of 83 victims from a brick kiln in City 5.

Challenges exist in terms of sustaining their work

Dependency on NGO staff: According to the NGO functionaries, between 25 per cent and 40 per cent of CVCs function independent of them in matters related to the village or panchayat – including organising and holding meetings without the support of the NGO staff. One NGO suggested that at least 60 per cent of their 32 CVCs functioned independently of their influence. For the remaining CVCs, more handholding was required. One NGO staff member dismissed the inability of the CVC of a particular hamlet to hold meetings on their own, saying they were too selfish to be involved in activities for the community. SHGs seem to be largely dependent on the NGOs for facilitation (three quarters of the interviews mentioned this in their comments). NGOs use a Community Maturity tool (CMT) to understand the capacity of the community on the issue of bonded labour. CVCs are at different stages of maturity – the most mature CVC is able to hold meetings in the absence of NGO staff and is able to procure ration cards, open bank accounts and initiate action to access government's pension schemes for widows on its own. It takes four to five years for a community to reach the mature stage.

Across partners, one thing that emerged was that any activity which involved approaching the block or district level authorities required the presence of the NGO staff. Their independence was limited to the panchayat level. Additionally, if any case of violence or a fight was reported the NGO staff had to step in. All the CVC members interviewed reported that they are dependent on the NGO to a certain extent and mentioned how they work in collaboration with the NGO.

Respondents from two villages (NGO A and NGO B) said that they had realised the consequences of sending children outside for work. They worked on these issues, while the CVCs focused their activities on monitoring.

Lack of clarity about which group one belonged to: In none of the groups were the community respondents able to clearly distinguish between the different groups – often confusing between the role of the CVCs and the SHGs. There was also a blurring of activities performed by both. The one clear difference the community respondents articulated was that the SHGs provided access to loans and the CVCs monitored school education, meals, discipline, etc. There was also confusion regarding the role each played in getting Aadhaar cards or bank accounts for the community. Some CVC members mentioned their ability to guide the community in getting access to these schemes. This may not actually be a problem in reality.

The CVCs have the scope to break barriers of gender and caste: The CVC members, as well as the NGO staff in at least three locations, said that CVC meetings contributed to

ending caste discrimination, by virtue of bringing people of different castes together in a common physical place: 'Communities sit and attend meetings with each other.' However, within the constitution of the CVCs there are different layers of **caste and gender barriers**. Given the absence of very specific roles and functions of the groups, there are different ways in which members are selected, sometimes defeating the principle of equity. While one NGO staff member noted that they asked the community to decide who could be their leader and thus brought leaders into the CVC, another exclaimed that people from some castes (Dalits) are not capable of raising demands and hence their CVC had more people from the general and more dominant castes. 'CVC does not have Musahars in the group. We did not keep them as they will not be able to speak. They are not smart people, they are not intelligent enough,' CVC head, NGO A3 said. This becomes a problem, because in such situations, more dominant and vocal people and those from powerful castes tend to get into the CVC rather than survivors of bonded labour or vulnerable people whose leadership can be built through the engagement. This may defeat the purpose of the intervention itself. NGOs do give guidance about the importance of empowering women and Dalits but the differences in the quality of work on this issue from different NGOs here is evident.

Similarly, being a CVC member brought with it additional responsibilities for younger women. 'Women in 20-25 year age group come. No one above the age of 40 comes for meetings. We call only those women who have small children, as they are likely to send their children to work,' an NGO staff noted. But not all women were able to join the committee if they wanted. 'I am the older woman in the house, so my daughter in law does not need to join the meeting. I will go for it,' one of the respondents said. Such views make the CVCs vulnerable to one layer of patriarchy at the outset. Bringing women into the CVC meetings had another challenge. While the CVCs suggested equal space for men and women, it seemed men played more of the decision-making roles and women executed these decisions. There is an absence of girls' participation in these meetings due to restrictions on their mobility and public participation, along with a limited participation of youth. One youth interviewed said he attended some meetings of the CVC but was a passive participant.

Self-help groups source of safe loans, but for smaller amounts

SHGs across Bihar are linked to the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Programme or Jeevika. While the partner organisations supported the formation of these groups, they are managed by Jeevika. In fact, the respondent from Jeevika claimed responsibility for the elimination of bonded labour and said the formation of groups had led to confident women who could stand up and demand their rights. However, one external stakeholder felt that after being taken over by Jeevika, the bond amongst SHG members had weakened compared to SHGs in Uttar Pradesh.

In each SHG, on an average, ten to 12 women attend the meeting and contribute Rs 50-100 per month. Their activity is mainly limited to savings and loans, and women mentioned using these loans for buying assets like goats, farming, etc. SHG loans are safer than other loans and protective for bondage because they are not tied to forcing borrowers to use their physical labour to pay off a debt and have lower interest than some other loan sources, such as informal money lenders.

SHGs also discussed issues ranging from child marriage to education and from livelihoods to child labour. The Jeevika respondent, as well as SHG members, mentioned the increase in awareness because of attending the meetings. In one location, the SHG members intervened to prevent a marriage in Village 20 where the bride was being duped. Staff of two NGOs mentioned that SHGs have worked on child marriage and one SHG stopped a fake marriage in Village 20. While the Jeevika representative noted the role played by SHGs in areas of women's empowerment, prevention of trafficking, bonded labour and child labour, through access to safe loans and increased awareness, the NGOs also acknowledged the role of the SHGs.

NGO F CS2 said she was largely involved in awareness raising programmes like a few other members of the SHGs NGO F helped support: 'I work on issues related to early marriage, importance of education, to prevent children from vulnerable situation. I am also a member of the SHG that is functioning in the village.' NGO F CS1 has been an active member of the SHG for the past three years and she has also tried to bring other women into the SHGs:

Those women who are in need of loans approach me and I take them to the centre to help them get the loans. We have also started refraining from early marriage in order to avoid the harmful impacts on health of the adolescent girls.

The main success of the SHGs is that they provide the household with a safe source of loans in times of need. However, women did mention taking loans apart from the SHGs – from moneylenders, neighbours and relatives, or employers, as well as banks and micro-finance institutions. The SHG loans are useful for small costs in the majority of the cases, as most women deposit small amounts of money as and when they have it in their hand. It was more accessible as they did not have to fulfil as many formalities that have to be followed if one takes loans from banks. However, the SHG loans still come with a challenge. The loans are smaller and can be availed of at a delay of a few days. As seen in the prevalence data, while the number of households taking loans from SHG has gone up, there continues to be loans from other sources that are not seen as safe (such as middlemen) as these are immediate and are available for large sums.

However, access to a loan for starting a business was not very commonly cited. While discussing other interventions, women who had received trainings for lac bangle making and stitching mentioned that they were unable to use these new skills because of an absence of capital.

Action Research Groups function more independently of NGOs than other groups

ARGs largely functioned independently of the other groups, although some were still dependent on support from the NGOs. While they were more comfortable organising their own meetings, they required more support when they had to take steps around evidence collection as well as certain actions that involved stepping out of the village/hamlet. According to NGO staff, one ARG reached out to block officers to improve PHC services in Village 23, while another helped 10 members pay off intergenerational loans. The ARG's biggest contribution was in building self-reliance and encouraging the community to find innovative solutions to their own problems.

The ARG in Town 4 is working to reduce bondage through reducing expenditure on alcohol. Other groups facilitated by NGO A have their meetings organised by the NGO, but in the Action Research, the members are proactive. A staff member from NGO A said,

Initially our people used to call the meetings for Action Research but once the group was structured then it was they who call NGO A and sometimes they even held meetings on their own. In Action Research Group we have mobilised the strengths of the community. This created unity and they have become self-reliant.

Other groups also play an important role

Common interest groups: NGO B has set up CIGs – one is general and another is a health CIG, set up in 2018 after the Bihar government took over SHGs under the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (BRLP), known as Jeevika. NGO B set up CIGs so that in case of emergency, members could avail a small loan immediately and at any time of the day. This is not possible with SHGs, as SHGs (per government regulation) need to have accounts in a bank. The CIG focuses on saving funds for emergency through small deposits of Rs 25-50.

CIGs have ten members. Men and women can be a member of the CIG and there is no age limit. CIG members keep money with them, which they can use when required for inter-lending, and they decide the percentage on the loan. In the health CIG, a certain amount of money has to be retained. This avoids going to the moneylender. People are able to return their loans in one to two months. It seems to be working.

Survivor groups: NGO C has set up survivor groups at panchayat and district level, and one federation of the four districts that can advocate the issues at both state and national level.

A survivor leader said

Survivor leaders let the CVC continue, we will go to the DM. If staff don't come to our meeting, we talk to them phone. Sometimes they don't come, we remember or document the meeting as much as we can. They come in most meetings. If we rely on them, how can we continue. It is our fight and we have to fight. I focus and give example of unity in political parties.

Children's clubs: At panchayat level, children's clubs have been set up. These include boys and girls who are in school, as well as those out of school, who are being facilitated to have meetings with SMCs, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Child Protection Committees (CPCs). Women's groups at tola level campaign to try to convince parents who have sent their children to work to instead send them to school. A staff member said,

Youth group from high school 15-18 years at panchayat level [are] encouraging children to go back to school. Children groups make complaints about dropouts. Women groups are concerned about education, help in sending back children to the school. Youth plan the activities and invite us for support like they want us to come when they want to do something in schools.

The team did not meet any member of children's clubs.

3.2.2 Reasons for attending meetings

According to the community respondents, they attend meetings because they learn about saving money through SHGs, or they want to know more as the organisation provides information on bonded labour, child labour, child marriage. People also attend meetings to share with others.

As NGO B2 community participant said, 'Everyone likes to know what is happening in the village and then we go to the head of the village if we need any help. We all want a better society.'

Those who are not members have attended some of the meetings but do not get time to attend all the meetings. One female participant did not know anything about the NGO as her husband had been attending the meetings. Another community participant wanted help applying to a housing scheme. Influential people who are members of the group want to work towards betterment of the village. 'Our society is very backward, if there is an opportunity to improve the village, I like to do it. CVC gives me this opportunity', said a CVC member from NGO B.

According to the NGO staff, people initially attend because they think that they will get some help from the NGO/government. 'Soon they realise that they get respect due to this group as they start getting recognition. As the group begins to collectivise, they realise that they can make a change for community.'

NGO B staff 1 said,

Initially when we do meetings in the village, we talk about services, as this is of interest to everyone. people come with their issues, then we talk about issues and around three aspects of bonded labour. I am like the madari (entertainer) who uses tricks to attract the audience.

'They come because all issues are related to them,' said NGO C staff 2; 'people attend when they feel this this is a way out of bonded labour,' said NGO F community 2.

Migration is a major reason for people dropping out of groups. People also leave after personal conflicts. One NGO staff member said that a CVC dropout rate of 8-12 per cent was low 'because we meet them so often.' Another said that initially people are interested to join as they find it new and interesting but after some time their interest starts fading away. Some people who get involved at the beginning stop coming when they see no direct benefits: 'I have stopped going to the group and their meetings. We are not getting money as and when we need. We (10 women) have already deposited Rs. 7,000 collectively but still not able to borrow loans,' said NCS5A. A former SHG member said 'the Action Research Group people come because they have chosen the topic.' Action Research members come because they want to bring a change in the community. In children's clubs, children are shy – they have to be mobilised every time for the meeting and the NGO has to work very hard with the guardians. CPC members like AWW (Anganwadi workers who are employees of the Indian Government's Integrated Child Development Services Scheme) come because it is part of their official duty. In CPC there is no dropout because they have to continue as they are paid. Action Research dropouts are there because some members are not available or migrate. The survivor group is new and we are designing things for them but the survivor leader was very enthusiastic about it.

3.2.3 Challenges in collectivisation

While collectivisation has empowered individuals, there is less evidence of collective action. While some individuals seemed to have benefited from the different interventions, there is a question about whether these interventions have been able to create a collective mobilisation to enable the wider community to come out of bonded labour. This is difficult because there are competing interests even at a community level, but this makes community level organisation all the more important. For such labour practices that violate the human rights of individuals, the challenge is that rescuing and rehabilitating a few will always put another vulnerable person in a position of further vulnerability. There needs to be a community consciousness to fend off the threat of bonded labour.

There was a pattern of perception from across the interview categories that people primarily focused on their own concerns. 'People tend to solve their own issues. I wish there was more unity,' said a CVC member. One external respondent said,

When it comes to building communities around some incident, they are able to do it; when it comes to economic issues, they are not in their comfort zone. Creating group in community, they have been able to do that well, but it is not collective. To operate it well needs a learning curve. People in the villages have not been trained to act together for all their needs and aspirations.

Another external stakeholder noted that the NGOs are able to build communities around a particular incident or action, but not when it comes to sustained action on an issue. People in the villages have not been trained to act together for all their needs and aspirations. 'They are a community of shared identity of slavery but not a community which has forced its way

out of slavery,' the respondent said. Three community respondents remarked on the lack of unity and trust in the community and one female respondent said that they could not carry on the vocational activity of production of washing powder because everyone was keen to take on an individual responsibility. 'Women refused to collectivise which was required for business of washing powder. But women wanted to do individual work. Everyone wanted to do their own thing,' said an NGO C SHG member. One external stakeholder suggested that it is important to engage with the family as a unit, as it is the parents who send their children outside for work. At least 4 community members and an external respondent mentioned that this was also a challenge that affected the vocational training and livelihood programmes.

Groups reach out to the larger community, but it is more to provide information and do things for them rather than stimulating the larger community. One example from an NGO B supported village illustrates this problem. There was an issue in the school. The CVC visited the school but could not convince the school authorities. The boy who was rescued by NGO B had left the school due to the attitude of the teachers. He got readmitted in this school but the issue in school continued. The father met the school authorities but without success. The father has not approached the CVC, although he was in touch with them due to the rescue. No one thought of collectivising the larger community, which has not come together to respond to this issue even though it affects children across the village.

While planned actions are strategic, they are not seen by community members as part of a wider strategy to end bonded labour

There was a lack of clarity on what action needed to take place to address the structural issues underlying the bonded labour situation.

3.2.4 Conclusions and recommendations

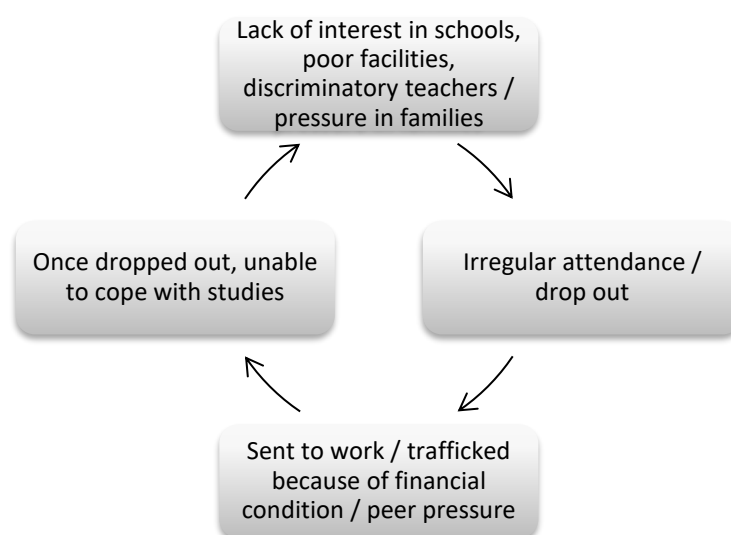
- Sometimes multiple groups are using the same approach or strategy, without coordinating with the other.
- SHG loans enabled people to manage small costs, but for larger amounts and immediate support communities still depend on moneylenders or advance payment.
- Groups have been effective at strengthening individuals, but the interview evidence suggested that many do not generate action collectively.
- ARGs have done better on innovation and community-led action.
- CVCs have made the community more vigilant and accountable. They are fulfilling a strong monitoring role.

3.3 Question 4. Education

Have children been helped with their education? How? Tell us about your children or other local children you know. Do you think [NGO name] has played a role in this?

The interviews highlight the link between the lack of education, and the possibility of the children getting entangled in the web of bonded labour, child labour or trafficking.

Children who do not attend school are prime targets for trafficking and child labour. Firstly, parents tend to push children who drop out of school, to work, either migrating with them or supporting them in income generating activities around the village such as agricultural labour or brick kilns. Secondly, a child may be forced to drop out because of the financial condition of the family and get pushed into the labour market. This becomes more probable in cases where the families are under economic pressure or debt. Thirdly, a child may engage with peers who have dropped out and found employment and under their influence enter a hazardous situation. For girls who have dropped out, too, the pressure may be to get married or work. Table 3.3 lists out the different causes of children dropping out from school identified in the interviews.



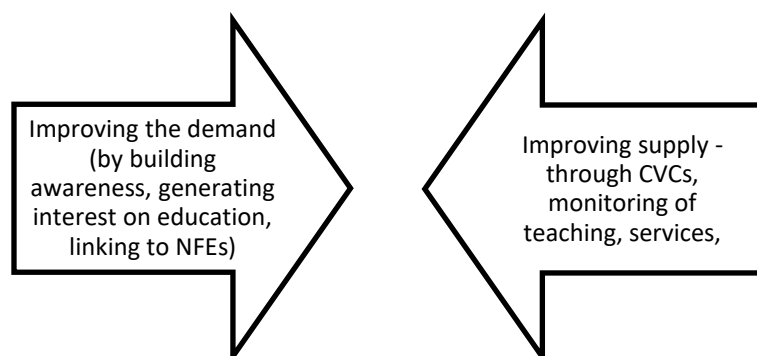
According to the NGO respondents, the challenge has been to prevent children from dropping out, especially after Classes 8-9. Respondent from one NGO said the attendance in primary schools is also more regular. However, with increasing pressure of studies and the family, children drop out. The causes of dropouts are elaborated further in the Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Causes of school dropouts

Individual	Family	Social	Education system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not interested in studies • If dropped out once, unable to cope with pressure of studies • Feels embarrassed to study with others • Peer pressure, influence of other children • Feels pressure to support family financially 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure to earn for the family • Pressure to support household chores, especially for girls • Fights and alcoholism within family, pushing child to run away from family • Lack of importance given to education by parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early marriage • Lack of safety of girls • Dalit students complained of caste discrimination in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not getting good quality midday meals on time • Not getting books, uniforms, or stipends on time • Teachers are discriminatory • Teachers are not interested in teaching

Source: Author's own

The project intervention focused on improving the demand as well as the supply.



3.3.1 Increasing demand for education for its own sake

Parents no longer see education just as a means to employment, but as important in itself. 'Our parents did not send us to schools because they wanted us to help them with their domestic chores. However, all my children attend school. I want them to

become independent in future,' one respondent noted. 'I have educated my children because their life will improve, will learn how to speak. Education may not get jobs, but it improves quality of living.' NGO B community participant 2. NGOs like NGO C and NGO D have worked on the importance of cleanliness of children, as the teachers were sending away children due to unhygienic conditions.

In one hamlet, the CVC enrolled 20-25 children in the last year. One respondent said,

Of the 15 households in the Community 2 hamlet, there were six households that used to send their children to school even before the project period. In the last three years, eight more families enrolled their children in school and started sending them regularly. There is just one family that does not want to send its children to school.

Four respondents said that 50-75 per cent of children in the village go to school. Ten respondents said that girls drop out after secondary school due to distance, safety and to help with household chores. Children also take leave from school when required to help their parents, for example during harvest. Respondents said that CVCs follow up if children are not attending schools. In one hamlet, a respondent said that teachers held awareness camps on education and the NGOs did not play any significant role in the issue. Two NGO staff members mentioned that they identify dropouts and link them to vocational training courses – for example, girls are enrolled in tailoring. The NGOs support the re-enrolment of students through provision of voluntary tuition, non-formal and remedial classes, and vocational training. NGO C also works on delaying age of marriages.

Education is an area where the CVC members play an important and active role. They take part in activities such as ensuring the midday meal, ensuring teachers take classes on time and properly, ensuring eligible students receive the stipend, and so on. These CVC members take up the issue to the Principal in order to address them. The members of the CVC also keep an eye on households which have school-going children to check if the children are regularly attending school or not. While one child mentioned his disinterest in education because of the teaching standards in school, a number of respondents mentioned taking action through the CVC to ensure the teacher reports on time and performs their duties. At least two community respondents and one NGO respondent (NGO B) spoke about the improvement in teaching because of the CVC and NGO interventions. In one hamlet, Village 15, a respondent mentioned that through the efforts of the CVC, a teacher who was irregular was transferred out of the school.

However, several issues, such as caste and gender, remain unaddressed.

As mentioned above, one of the reasons girls tend to drop out is because of a perceived and real lack of safety for them. Parents are hesitant to invest on tuition classes for their daughters. However, none of the respondents mentioned any specific interventions to address the lack of safety. Besides, there is the burden of household chores, including taking care of younger siblings, with children as young as eight helping with household work. Some NGOs mentioned that they linked girls who have dropped out to vocational training classes, such as stitching. Similarly, the issue of caste discrimination was cited in relation to a number of teachers belonging to socially dominant castes and the students in the intervention areas being Dalits. Here, too, neither the NGOs nor the community mentioned any specific intervention to address it, besides making the community more aware of caste discrimination. At least two respondents (from different NGOs) said that they were unaware of any role played by the NGO in this sort of awareness raising.

3.3.2 Children go back to work, leading to dropouts

In some cases, children tend to go back to work because of family pressures and problems. For example, according to an NGO staff member,

There was a rehabilitated child who started going to private school and was a good student. He ran away and was found begging at the railway station. His family problem situation put him on a lot of stress because of his father's alcoholism and domestic violence.

One NGO staff member said that two rescued children went back to the same factory (Village 1) to work. One had lost his father and there was no earning member (he now sends Rs 8,000 per month to his family); another's father is old, and he has a physically challenged brother. His family is landless and is difficult to work in the village as payment is not certain and regular. The staff added that they keep track of them through their families. Another staff member mentioned domestic violence leading to a rescued child running away from home.

NGO staff mentioned that while they managed to enrol rehabilitated children, between 10 per cent and 20 per cent dropped out again. There was also a challenge with continued attendance. Even the rehabilitated children often failed to attend during harvest seasons or when they supported their families in the brick kilns, etc. The latter, respondents said, was more common in the Musahar and Biyar communities. NGOs are able to take action when children are based locally – they follow up and get children to school – but when parents migrate, follow up is not possible. NGO F mentioned a migrant survey tool which helped the Village Head keep a track of child migrants, but it was not clear how successful this was.

3.3.3 Challenges and way forward

One of the NGO staff said,

Eighty per cent of the teachers are not well educated, so the quality of education is poor. We are working under the pressure of funders, so the children will be poorly educated. Now the fight is not on education but on midday meal. Instead of school, it has become a meal provision kind of place. We have tried to organise CVC members and find those in the village who can provide tuition free to such children.

However, this requires the NGO staff to be oriented toward these issues. In some cases, the NGO staff themselves and the community were found to have gendered perspectives around education. For example, one community member mentioned that education would help girls manage their families better, while another said that as the women went to work early in the morning, they were unable to ensure their children were sent to school on time, suggesting that the burden of ensuring children's education was on the women.

3.3.4 Conclusions and reflections

- Both enrolment and prevention of dropouts has been enhanced by the role of the CVCs. While small successes have been made to improve the quality of education, whether it is sustainable or whether the interests of the CVC in monitoring the quality of teaching and services will continue beyond the project period, is a significant question. With staff of some NGOs thinking that children attend schools only to get access to midday meals, or stating that parents do not take adequate care about sending children to school, there may be an urgent need to discuss with the NGO the importance of accountability of the education system, too.
- Where education goes hand in hand with providing parents a better source of income, the intervention's success in linking children to education may be more sustainable. This may prevent children from feeling the burden of supporting the family to work.

- While safety is one of the reasons for dropout of girls, there is not any discussion or intervention to address this. Similarly, there has been no specific intervention aimed at caste discrimination in schools.

Table 3.4 Reasons for school dropout

Reasons for drop out	Cited by
Economic, work	NGO C2, NGO C3, NGO C5, NGO A3, NGO A4, NGO B1, NGO B3, NGO D Staff 1, DCS5, NCS1
Safety, distance from school	NGO A2, NGO A3, NGO FCS3
Early marriage	NGO C Staff 1 (specific to boys, NGO C Staff 2 (specific to Musahar community))
Migration	NGO C Staff 2, NGO D Staff 1
Discrimination by teachers	NGO E Staff 2 (faced by Musahars),
Not interested in studies, parents don't value education	DCS5, NCS1
Household work	NGO B3
Role of CVCs	Cited by
Monitoring role of teachers – are they regular or not; do they teach well or not; two also took action against errant teachers	DCS1, DCS4, NGO FCS3
Home visits to check if students are going to school or not; inform parents about importance of education	NGO FCS1, NCS4, NGO FCS4
Checking quality of midday meal	NGO FCS1
Status of education	Cited by
Improved	All stakeholders
Dropouts exist	NCS1, NCS4
Attendance issues	
Only two of Praxis respondents – NCS2 and NCS5A – categorically stated that the organisation nor CVC had not done anything in respect to education	
Study until which class	Cited by
Girls drop out after 8 th Class; more boys complete senior secondary	NGO C2
Girls drop out after 15 years Economic reason for drop out	NGO C3
Boys study till 10 th Class Girls study till 7 th – 8 th Class, very few girls in grade 10 More boys study than girls Economic reason for drop out	NGO C5
Study until 'some class' and then drop out. We could not afford to send children to school	NGO A1
Boys sent to secondary schools not girls Safety (in this village religion is a big issue, Urdu school is until 8 th class)	NGO A2
8 th class drop out (Musahar very high) Poverty in Musahar community Safety of girls	NGO A3
Girls withdraw after 7 th Class and boys study further Girls take leave from school to help during harvest Poverty is the reason for drop out	NGO A4
Girls drop after class 8 th and 25% of boys drop out to work Boys start working and drop out	NGO B1
Girls drop out after 6 th or 7 th Class 25% boys and girls miss school during harvest Not able to pay for extra tuition fees and expenses for girls and distance of secondary school	NGO B2
8-year old daughter has to cook First three children did not study	NGO B3
30-40% drop out Musahar children thrown out due to hygiene issues Boys due to early marriage	NGO C staff 1
65% children go to school in villages, 20% girls go to school 30-40% drop out after 15 years of age Musahar community more issue Migration, distance, early marriage in Musahar community	NGO C staff 2
50% children in the village go to school and leave in 8 th or 9 th Class	Survivor leader

3.4 Question 5. Caste

Compared to three years ago, do you think there is now more, less, or maybe a different kind of caste discrimination? Could you give some examples? Do you think the NGO has played a role in this – if so- how? If not, why?

The link between bonded labour and caste discrimination is important to the intervention in that the selected hamlets are scheduled caste (SC) dominated. While there seems to be shift toward caste equality and many people talk of an end to caste discrimination – citing examples of visible changes such as sitting together in meetings – when one digs deeper, the issue of caste discrimination remains deeply entrenched in the programme areas.

The project intervention areas have people from different caste groups such as the Harijans, Patels, Pandits, Musahars, Biyar, Thakurs. Among sub-castes, the Musahars are considered most socially and economically backward. Two NGO staff members, one CVC member and one ex-bonded labour noted that bonded labour and child labour is more likely amongst the Musahar, and child labour amongst minority religions. In the Musahar and Rajbanshi communities, about 80 per cent of the community members are likely to work in a brick kiln. The NGO member of staff noted that most of the hamlets in which they operated are inhabited by SC castes such as Musahar, Harijan and Biyar, as these were the groups most vulnerable to falling into situations of bondage. Out of 30 community participants and survivor leaders the team met, three mentioned the presence of caste discrimination and two mentioned discord due to religion. However, the rest stated that while there was untouchability earlier, there had been an improvement in caste-related inequalities.

3.4.1 The role of NGOs in ending caste discrimination

While there is no specific NGO programme focused on addressing caste discrimination, respondents as well as NGO staff noted that meetings included discussions on caste and issues of caste violence, and that they sought the members' views on it.

CVC membership, while largely homogenous, included members from different castes in some hamlets. Joint meetings of people belonging to different castes helped address an initial barrier of caste. NGOs talk about caste discrimination and the importance of brotherhood and unity in meetings, as well as during the vocational trainings they organised. One NGO staff member said that the fact that he (despite not being an SC) would go and drink water or tea in the houses of the SC population worked in two ways – building the confidence and acceptability of the SC community and sending a message of sorts to the other castes that this was a normal, acceptable thing to do.

An NGO staff member noted,

When I visit households during my work, I visit Dalit households too. I drink the tea they offer me. I sit with them anywhere. This makes others conscious. They think if he can do this, why shouldn't we. It also makes the Dalit households feel more valued. Sometimes, in some villages, you also have to spell it out. You tell people, "I am not Dalit, but I am sitting with Dalits."

Another NGO staff said,

In our hamlets, the CVC members are all from SC groups. However, others are not forbidden from attending the meetings. During discussions, when there is talk about issues of debt or wage, this resonates with the others. They are keen to participate. Also, when the CVC members take action, these actions are not limited to the CVC. It

is for the community's benefit. So the CVC also realises that these issues are not unique to only their caste.

NGOs encourage the people from tolas, mostly those who are from lower castes, to meet government officials which gives them confidence.

Two staff from an NGO noted that there has been focus on Dalit rights, especially in the context of land rights and the atrocities they face. At least two NGOs have been working on changing the nature of land ownership – through leases and contracts – which has, in a way, helped weaken the chains of casteism. One NGO noted the support of Justice Ventures International (JVI) in this area. One NGO staff noted,

We have been able to identify leaders and sensitise them on Dalit rights, various provisions and entitlements. There are wards and Panchayats where Dalits have won the elections, even in non-reserved seats. This has put them in decision-making positions. We are now planning on creating an alliance of survivors, especially Dalits.

3.4.2 Changes in caste discrimination

Earlier, SCs were not allowed to touch the grains/crops of people belonging to the upper caste. If they did, they would be ostracised from the community. An NGO staff member and a community member mentioned that earlier, children from different castes were made to sit separately in schools. They would not invite each other to functions and would not drink water in each other's houses. Scheduled castes are working on leased land now and this has weakened the caste system. One of the significant markers of a shift in caste discrimination (mentioned by at least five community members) was that people of all castes invited each other to wedding ceremonies and festive occasions where they would sit together and eat. 'Earlier there was untouchability but higher castes now talk with lower castes and sit together in meetings,' a community participant noted. One community member noted that socially dominant groups now sought the help of her community in building chulhas (a hearth for cooking) which was unimaginable earlier.

Three to four community respondents lamented the lack of solidarity in the village (discussed above) and the absence of collective action by a CVC in the village, although people help each other in times of need. One respondent said, 'All castes live together and there is no discrimination. But no one has worked together for any issue.'

Such practices have weakened to some extent but have not disappeared completely. One such example is commensality (the practice of eating together) in weddings. One respondent explained that weddings are social occasions where a cook/caterer, often not from the SC community, was hired to prepare the meals. Additionally, there are still different plates for people from different castes, another respondent said. Thus, while commensality is a significant shift, a socially dominant caste person still would not go to the house of a backward caste person for a meal, and would not engage in inter-caste marriages or vice versa. For example, two women noted that women from their community do not visit the homes of the socially dominant castes.

Two NGO staff members and two community members mentioned that there is still discrimination in school. An NGO staff stated that certain caste children have been given responsibility for sweeping the school and cleaning the toilets. One NGO staff member noted that the Brahmins looked down upon the SCs as banbasis (forest dwellers) and that they do not want to even offer them a chair.

3.4.3 Next steps

Within the project intervention itself, certain forms of caste bias are exposed, which it does not have any visible mechanism to address. While talking about the reluctance of teachers and Anganwadi centres to take in children from SC groups, one NGO staff member explained that the discrimination was more due to the hygiene of children, rather than caste. There was a case where teacher removed children from school because they were unhygienic. The NGO encouraged them to wash clothes, bath, clean their house and use toilets. Two respondents commented that children now go to schools after taking a bath.

Again, a CVC member said that they have not kept any member from the Musahar caste in the CVC as they do not 'understand' anything and added that service providers such as Anganwadi workers do not want to interact with this caste.

'Bonded labour[ers] are from the lower caste. There is no hate, but those who are employers are higher caste and more powerful. People want to keep a distance,' one of the external stakeholders said. Examples like this point to a pervasive stereotyping of people from SC groups. Unless the project addresses this within its own staff as well as project locations, it will be difficult to change casteism.

Seven out of 12 NGO staff and three external stakeholders said that caste discrimination is still there. It just has different patterns. The caste dimension of bonded labour is rooted in the socioeconomic reality that owners of capital, land, employment opportunities and money (the socially dominant castes) have an interest in keeping equity at bay.

One respondent said that the NGOs had not carried out any awareness campaigns in their hamlet. An external stakeholder amplified this:

I can tell you with guarantee that no organisation is working on the caste issue. Empowering is one thing but in terms of caste, we have to work with all segments. If we empower only Dalits, it is not going to be enough. To see structural change, employers should reduce discrimination. Caste dimension to modern slavery in India and freedom needs work at the panchayat level and all stakeholders have to combine to work towards equality.

One respondent pointed to the wider problem within the state 'even the leadership of the NGOs do not have a caste perspective on issues.' This would not be true for all HLN members who are doing specific work on Dalit inclusion – but there is ongoing work to be done with some.

Unless the deeply entrenched caste discrimination is raised and talked about, such structural inequalities will continue to remain. While some measures such as talking about Dalit rights, especially right to land, property and freedom, do go a long way, these need to go hand in hand with changing narratives about how the different castes are viewed both by the project staff and the communities.

3.4.4 Conclusions and reflections

- It is difficult to draw from the prevalence a sub-caste-based analysis for a specific kind of industry – brick kiln. However, the overall caste bondedness co-relation can be drawn – in baseline as well as endline, among households with exclusive bonded labour, a larger percentage (59 per cent and 78 per cent) belonged to Dalit/SC households, indicating a consistency between the different pieces of research.
- There has been a general relaxing of day-to-day caste inequality, but deeper structural inequalities remain the same.

- While it is reasonable to argue that the whole intervention tackles caste issues, as bonded labour mostly affects Dalits and other backward classes (OBC), projects do not typically target caste prejudice as an issue in its own right, even within their own staff teams. Building on the current activities to layer this focus into the everyday communication of NGOs would enhance the programme.
- There is scope for the project to tap into the economic implications of caste discrimination and aggression. Inevitably, most bonded labourers are in the lower castes. Shifting this will mean, for example, ensuring that lower castes get the same education as others.
- There is a need for the project to focus overtly on equity issues, rather than expecting collateral impact through other project activities.

3.5 Question 6. Women and girls

Compared to three years ago, are women and girls now treated differently in the community? Could you give some examples? Do you think [insert NGO name] has played a role in this - if so, how?

Systemic inequalities of gender are closely linked to bonded labour. The absence of agency in decision-making, the lower status compared to men in their families, the absence of spaces to talk about their plight or voice their grievances, makes women more vulnerable to oppression. Additionally, the fear of stigma by society prevents them from talking about their trauma. In addition, decisions determined by patriarchy affect the quality of life and opportunities that young girls and women experience. These are manifested in the lack of say in decisions around marriage or childbearing, facing the burden of unpaid labour and care work at home and discrimination in education, access to health care, nutritious food, etc.

3.5.1 Differences in experience of bondage by men and women

According to NGO staff, men and women experience bonded labour in a different way. One NGO staff member said that while employers are crueler to men, making them work long hours, and do hard labour, they tended to exploit women sexually. Girls are not sent for child labour because people who recruit them feel it may be hard to ensure their safety. Girls tended to be bonded in agriculture or domestic work in their own village. An NGO respondent said women are less able to take verbal abuse by employers. For example, we have had women say they wished they would die when they hear the language the employers use against them. Then again, while men in bondage work outside, women tend to be employed within the house. Women do not get food on time; they may be asked to work late.

According to an NGO staff member, alcohol is manufactured in brick kilns. In one case, a family from Islampur had gone to work in a brick kiln in Haryana. The father had to leave behind his daughter with the employer as he was sick and unable to repay the full advance. The NGO had to eventually rescue the girl. 'She is blamed she is trafficked, if she is being abused, she does not want to talk about it. She is scared that they will blame her for what she is facing. It is a life-long label for her,' the staff member noted.

While one NGO said their interventions are not different for men and women, with both focusing on empowering them to resist bondage, another NGO said they used social interventions for girls and rescue and rehabilitation for boys, whilst a third NGO said they had different kinds of trainings. While women opted for lac bangle making, stitching, or bindi making, men tended to opt for electrician training.

The NGO experience of working with men and women has also been different. One NGO mentioned that women are more open to listening to and accepting what the NGO has to

say. At least two of the six NGOs mentioned that women are more often available, as many men travel far to work and are not interested in meetings when they return to their village.

One NGO staff said while women were capable of being strong leaders and their commitment is full, men tend to compromise. 'If you are able to win their trust, their participation is high. Women take more time to understand but when they do, they become strong allies.'

3.5.2 Changes in the lives of women and girls

All respondents noted that there was an improvement in lives of girls and women during the project period. These changes are described below.

Increased confidence and opportunity, but patriarchal barriers continue

With the NGOs organising training programmes for women and girls, their confidence has increased and their livelihood capacity has been enhanced. 'My sister-in-law now is very confident about talking to people because she attends the group,' one respondent said. Their participation in the activities of the CVC, such as monitoring the education quality, midday meals in schools, supporting people to get government services such as Aadhaar and the involvement in SHGs has brought about a change in the agency of women.

According to NGO staff, leadership has emerged amongst women at the block level and they are able to take the lead. During CVC meetings, youth and men also help. One NGO staff member noted that in Village 4, a survivor leader led the rescue of workers from Brick Kiln 1. The staff of another NGO noted that on the issue of land rights, women have taken the lead. The women have visited government offices on land issues many times. On one occasion, the women of three villages came forward to sit on a dharna (sit-in demonstration) before the DM and sat face to face with him and demanded their land rights.

Around 60 per cent of community participants said that now more girls attend school than before. One respondent said that 50-60 per cent of the girls in his village study in school. Interestingly, while parents acknowledged the importance of educating their daughters, there is still the belief among some respondents that there was not much use in educating girls as she would eventually get married and go away. As a result, around the age of 13-14, when they hit puberty, girls have to take on the household chores: 'A woman's position is always secondary, she is dependent on the man,' a young mother noted. Education is still seen as an investment which it is better to make for sons, as it is believed that they will support the parents in old age. Another respondent said,

The school is far. Who will buy a girl a bicycle to go to school? One can buy it for boys as they will get a job. Any boy should have information so that he can earn and look after his family.

According to interviewees, people from Ravidass and Manjhi castes are less likely to educate girls, while the situation of education of girls in Rajvanshi caste has improved.

Another change directly related to the project intervention is that girls and women are acquiring new skills such as tailoring, lac bangle making and learning how to use computers. One respondent shared that her daughter, who had dropped out almost four to five years ago, started stitching after receiving training from the NGO. She earns enough money to buy clothes and cosmetics for herself. However, while the NGO used to run tailoring centres for girls in 2015, the demand has gone down as girls want jobs and the NGO is not able to provide them with suitable jobs.

Out of a total 30 community members interviewed, only two mentioned an increase in the age of marriage, saying that they were hesitant to marry their daughters off before the legal age of 18. The rest cited the age of marriage as being after classes 8 or 10. It is clear there is an increase in awareness about the legal age of marriage as several respondents mentioned the age of 18 as the ideal age of marriage for their daughters, and it is likely that this has led to an increase in the age of marriage.

Women also expressed a sense of independence at being able to earn a small amount through the vocational skills acquired. However, financial decision-making is still an area where women have little agency. The amounts earned may in most cases still lead only to an income supplement rather than a substantial change in circumstances.

When the man takes an advance, his wife also has to go to the brick kiln. Women and girls are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and harassment at the hands of the supervisors and employers at brick kilns. However, as discussed earlier, they are reluctant to talk about these issues for fear of social stigma. The chances of resisting harassment are also very limited given their dependence on the employer for financial need and their disadvantaged social status.

In addition to the vocational trainings, opportunities are provided by the NGOs for women to attend events. In many respects the focus of the interventions has been women-centric. At least one NGO mentioned that women dominate the Freedom Groups (as the CVCs are called). NGOs also set up adolescent girls groups such as Meena Manch, which not only supported each other, but also contributed to awareness building in areas such as early marriage and trafficking. Forty to 50 per cent of girls who were bonded are now married and not in bondage, an NGO staff said.

'Whenever there was project activity, even if it was not in their blocks, we would invite them to attend. Now, in at least four to five hamlets, they inform our staff about meetings and ask them to attend,' an NGO staff said.

Women are getting to know and are aware of government schemes and are able to seize the opportunities available to them. One NGO staff noted that two young girls had become computer literate through the programme's vocational training. She said that the girls aspired to open an internet centre in the block. If successful, such a centre would be successful in bringing more women and girls to the centre and make more of them computer literate and internet-savvy. Such a step would no doubt go a long way in making women more qualified to use technology in different ways, and potentially enable them to use it directly to work on the issue of bonded labour.

While the situation of women and girls has seen some improvement, there are challenges too, especially when it comes to the issue of trafficking. According to NGO staff when a woman gets trafficked, people do not want to accept her. There are cases where girls have refused to be the witness in trafficking cases despite the chances of getting compensation or of getting the trafficker put behind bars. No NGO mentioned specific emotional support to survivors of trafficking.

Mobility and safety of girls was another concern of the parents and guardians, which often prevented them from continuing their studies beyond the level easily available in their hamlets or finding a job outside the village where they lived. 'I do not allow my daughters to go out even to collect firewood,' a respondent said. At least three respondents expressed concern about the safety of their daughters and said that it was risky to send them to school unless it was close by. However, there are those who have been able to challenge this narrative. One example was shared by NGO B. A girl who studies in Class 9, after the NGO got her re-enrolled, started going to school. She also learnt to make bindis and goes to the

market in the block area with her friends to sell the bindis. Her parents are very happy with her.

3.5.3 Next steps

Five external stakeholders felt that NGOs working on child labour generally needed to pay more attention to gender in their work. The government officials said that while women are becoming more aware about schemes and their rights, and some of them do come forward, the majority of them are still dependent on male members of the family. They felt that empowering women leaders can bring about social change. Another stakeholder felt that the NGOs have focused more on women as men tend to migrate, adding burden to women's tasks around the home. They said that more needed to be done, keeping in mind the shifting power relations and making the intervention at a family level.

One of the stakeholders noted,

These organisations focus on child labour and within that, on migrant child labour. Ninety-five per cent, almost 99 per cent, of migrant child labourers are boys. So they are conditioned to think about boys when they think about this issue. For example, they do not work on domestic child labour.

While SHGs have increased the access to safer sources of loans, families tend to take loans from other sources, such as moneylenders. In such situations, it would be useful to see whether the access to loans from SHGs are actually making the families less vulnerable to bonded labour situations.

3.5.4 Conclusions and reflections

- NGOs have been effective in the necessary task of bringing together women and girls, but given the high number of boys who are still in bonded labour by comparison to girls (as indicated by our prevalence data), a higher priority should now be given to boys.
- There is lot of good training but no jobs to meet the demand.
- In the context of a residual prevalence of 10-15 per cent of bonded labourers, an approach to accessing livelihoods which is more targeted to this group will be important.
- Increase in the age of marriage is a good outcome. The prevalence data also points to the drastic reduction in child marriage cases among boys as well as girls.

3.6 Question 7. Public services

Over the past three years, what are the public services that have improved the most? Are there more, or less villagers now accessing this service? Do you think the NGOs have played a role in this - if so, how? If not, why?

All respondents acknowledged the existence of multiple schemes like Mahatma Ghandi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) job cards, toilet installation under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, pension scheme, housing scheme under the Indira Awaas Yojana, the Janani Suraksha Yojana for safe deliveries, and the public distribution scheme through ration cards, among others.

3.6.1 Role of public services in reducing vulnerability to bonded labour

Schemes indirectly impact vulnerability

While some of these public services providing a direct link to help communities emerge from bonded labour, others play a more indirect role. For example, land rights, ration and job cards are seen to directly reduce the vulnerability of families – with government-supported

measures to fall back on. At least two NGO respondents and three community respondents noted the importance of ration cards. Another direct form of support comes through the disaster relief fund. One respondent noted that this had improved from the previous year. The NGO of this locality had mentioned during an earlier interaction that they had supported the ARG members to prepare a list of all eligible households and submit it to the Block Development Office, and one of their CVC members took the initiative to follow up with the block office. On the other hand, as an NGO staff member noted, schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) on housing and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on sanitation may not have helped directly, but have helped people in a round-about way – ‘by reducing their vulnerability to loans for housing and illness.’ Gas connections such as the PMUY scheme, along with health insurance schemes, had reached the hamlets in bits and pieces where district officials were active. In some areas, the following protection measures were available: Buildings and Other Construction Workers’ Welfare Board, registration of workers, and access to compensation for bonded labour.

NGON1 said,

While the rehabilitation assistance promises up to Rs 3 lakh in case of special cases of exploitation and bondage, this is released only if there is conviction. But even without the conviction, they are able to get immediate assistance of Rs 20,000 to Rs 30,000. Even this is very helpful for the families.

MNREGA’s efficiency reduced

External stakeholders mentioned that the MNREGA, which was popular and had the potential to address vulnerability to bonded labour, is now no longer implemented well. Some community respondents mentioned during interactions that the village head or some strongman would keep the MNREGA cards and refuse to give them to the cardholder, thereby forcing them to work for him. The prevalence data shows that while there has not been a very significant difference in MNREGA card holders in the baseline and the endline, among those who did have cards, the number of households that received payment for more than 25 days of work has reduced by almost 50 per cent (from 182 to 93), indicating the scheme’s inefficiency.

Government officials said that there is improvement in terms of public services, but progress is not enough. Community members are coming forward to access these but women in villages are not educated and do not know much. One stakeholder felt that the NGOs need to create market-based models and not rely on government assistance. Looking at the past and comparing it with the present, another stakeholder noted that public services, such as infrastructure, education, transport, electricity, law and order, had improved. He noted that the role of NGOs should be to create awareness amongst the people about their rights to have accessibility to those services.

Significant role of public services in reduction of child labour

A stakeholder, noted for his work on the issue of child rights, said that the crisis response system was what worked best: ‘The labour department has become more sensitive about the issue of child labour in mobilising and supporting anti child labour activities and the District Child Protection Units have also become active,’ he said. Another stakeholder noted the role of education and the linkages provided to safe loans through SHGs by the Bihar government’s Jeevika programme, as well as the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Banking. He noted that the SHGs provided a space for awareness building on the different insurance schemes, the government’s flagship schemes, and the livelihood support schemes. He specifically mentioned the Vermi-compost production through the Bihar Skill Development Mission, noting that on the one hand it provided livelihood access, and on another it contributed to improved agricultural yield.

3.6.2 Role played by NGOs in enabling access to public services

NGOs are not the only stakeholder in creating access to public services/schemes

All NGO staff noted that they helped communities to access schemes and had built the capacity of the CVCs. A CVC member talked about how they were using this capacity: 'I myself go with any person in my community who has not got the old age pension to the ward member and seek his help for the same,' said NCS1, a CVC member.

Five community respondents mentioned directly receiving public services through NGO support. One had received a pension through the NGO and the NGO had also helped her with filling in forms for Indira Awaas Yojana. Two respondents got Indira Awaas Yojana with support from the NGO; one respondent, DCS5, got immediate assistance (up to Rs 30,000 per member) as part of the bonded labour rehabilitation scheme. But they have not yet got the rehabilitation financial assistance (up to Rs 2 lakh). NCS2 received disaster relief on time this year, unlike previous years. This was again through the CVC with active support of the NGO. In addition, there are people who have said they helped others access schemes, but the number is not specified.

Some community members said they did not get access to any scheme.

Out of 30 community members interviewed, nearly one third got support through others like the Village Head, Ward Member or Gram Sevak for public services, and one through a middleman.

It's not just about filling forms, but also building capacity

NGOs played different roles in connection to accessing the different public services and schemes. These are broadly divided into the following categories:

- **Increasing awareness about the different schemes.** The NGOs and the community respondents spoke about their role in talking about different schemes and making communities aware so that they were able to demand the schemes. This included accessing such schemes as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, PMUY, and helping people to get birth certificates. DCS5 said,

Earlier, people were not aware of the different schemes, how to avail of its benefits, who to approach, the procedures involved. However, after the interventions of the NGOs, the communities themselves have become much more aware and have also started discussing about it with others.

A NGO F staff said,

NGO F has increased people's awareness on the issues of bonded labour and child labour and on the importance of having an Aadhar card, so that they are able to avail of different facilities/schemes. For example, regarding the JSY [Janani Surakshya Yojana] scheme, our social worker talks about the scheme in the CBO meetings.

At least five community members mentioned getting services like through the Pradhan/village head, the wards, the bank officials and the block officers without intervention of the NGO.

- **Actively helping frame letters/fill in forms.** 'I personally have helped rescued persons fill forms to access benefits from the rehabilitation schemes,' an NGO staff noted. One female community participant said that the NGO had filled forms for Indira Awaas Yojana. NGO F NGO1 said,

Our staff have helped people frame letters and fill forms and do follow-ups for at least 25 people who wanted to avail of the Indira Awaas Yojana (Housing Scheme). They guide them on how to speak to the BDO [Block Development Officer]. Now some of our CBO women have also become capable of doing this.

- **Identifying beneficiaries and linking them to scheme.** For example, NGO D works on identifying people who are eligible for the rehabilitation scheme and the Sukanya Rashi scheme. An NGO D staff member noted,

When children have been rescued and enrolled, they get school uniform money. NGO D does the liaising for this. For example, in Village 22, 44 girls from District 2 in the 12-13 years age group received the Sukanya Rashi because of our constant follow-up visits to the village and to intimate the parents.

- **Strengthening CVC to support access to schemes.** While the NGOs have supported CVCs to help people access schemes, the survivor leaders also help. A survivor leader said that he helps in 'writing an application, if they are not able to do so. I help as I am educated till Class 8.' Another CVC member said, 'I myself go with any person in my community who has not got the old age pension to the ward member and seek his help for the same.'

3.6.3 Challenges in public services reducing vulnerability to bonded labour

Corruption, inefficiency, bureaucracy betray people's trust

For all these schemes, the bottom line is they have the potential to reduce vulnerability, but only if they work. Pointing out the challenge in a scenario where the government service delivery is poor, DNGO2 said:

Monthly ration worth Rs 170 is given to those who have the ration card. Though this scheme exists, the money does not come regularly or even predictably. By contrast, if you agree to migrate, you get immediate money in the form of an advance from the future employer.

She added that her team helped people fill up and submit the ration/pension forms and submit it to the block office. But the block had not issued the money to all eligible people. 'We have not done enough to make these schemes function successfully or provide the desired benefits,' she said.

On the other hand, these situations can also lead the NGO staff to waver. While their understanding of public services and its role in reducing bonded labour has improved, and they work hard to help community members access different services, NGO C staff 2 noted: 'I am not sure if these services are able to reduce cases of slavery.' Public services are at times not effective because delivery of schemes is very poor, such as for the MNREGA and the Indira Awaas Yojana.

The gaps sometimes emerge because of corruption too. NGO FCS3 said,

Mukhiyas seize people's job cards as a result of which they are unable to get benefits under it. We have not taken any step for that. If we ask them for the cards, they say it has expired and has no use for us.

One village did not have state approved identity cards as they had been resettled in a different area. NGO B community participant 1 said,

We are still fighting to get papers for land. NGO B has said it will help. The ordnance factory management who provided us homes in the resettlement site handed over the responsibility of giving us our papers to the Bihar government, but the government is not taking any action. One thousand one hundred and sixty-one houses were given to our community. But we are not able to avail of services because we do not have land or residence proof.

For others, it is simply the weight of loans which stops them from accessing government schemes to improve facilities. NCS4 noted,

Not all houses have toilets. Even we do not have a toilet. We never got any money to build toilets. We already have a lot of loan because of a marriage in the family. Now, how can we take another loan to build toilets? Around 10-15 households have toilets. They got money to build it, I have not.

3.6.4 Suggestions for improved public services

- **Land rights:** The importance of land rights cannot be understated. Bihar government agreed to distribute three decimals of land to the state's Mahadalit families to build houses. They try to get land rights under this initiative. This can help them as SCs and scheduled tribes (STs) live on government or private land.
- **Labour card:** Having an active labour card will help a person get access to 17 schemes, such as a pension after 60 years. Registration must be renewed annually.
- **Job cards:** MNREGA is one of the most important government schemes as without it, people tend to fall into bonded labour. However, given its poor implementation, what could potentially have been a very successful measure to prevent vulnerability to bonded labour has become a lost opportunity. The prevalence data indicates households with members in bonded labour are in higher possession of MNREGA card as compared to the other households. What is important is that delivery improves and the gaps that currently exist are addressed.
- **Improved service delivery through deadlines:** The government service delivery must improve. There should be a deadline on accessing government entitlements – the government should be told that they must provide entitlements within a fortnight/month to those who apply. This will help people start having faith in the schemes.

3.6.5 Conclusions and reflections

- NGOs are linking people up with public services but because public services are unreliable, they have limited impact on bonded labour.
- Public services, with schemes such as ration cards and job cards, have the scope to play a significant role in reducing vulnerability to bonded labour, if they work properly. While the NGOs focus on linking people to schemes, there is less focus on improving service delivery, other than for education.
- It is important to note that the NGOs not only link people to schemes, but also support the CVC in helping the community access these schemes. This builds the capacity of the CVCs.

3.7 Question 8. Recommendations to improve the situation

For families in your community that are in bonded labour/child labour/have been trafficked, what else should be done to a) help improve their situation b) help them get out of bondage? Can you give some examples of activities that the [insert NGO name] could have done but didn't, or could have done better? How did [insert NGO name] involve you in deciding on what activities to carry out?

Relationship with NGO staff marked by high levels of trust

All the community respondents found the NGO staff helpful as they provided information on trafficking, kept records of migrants who went out of the village, facilitated access to public services and were helpful at times of need. The behaviour of the staff and a long-term association has built trust in the community. All agreed that the staff are trustworthy, friendly and punctual. All said that the NGO staff communicate the purpose and benefits of activities clearly and provide support and follow up. 'They always help find solution,' NGO C community participant 2 said.

'They are very nice because the way they approach is good and we trust them,' more than one respondent said. CVC member NGO A3 said,

Since they have been coming, our village has improved a lot. Women used to not know about health, hygiene, send children on time. I do not remember any training on law, but they gave information on what age should children go to work. They encourage children.

NGO B2 said 'NGO people are like family to us and they give us useful information, as our situation has improved. We trust them because they did not want to exploit us. I have met organisations who have cheated others.'

One cautionary qualification to this is that according to two senior NGO staff and an external respondent, interventions and selection of some activities was seen to be top down – influenced by the Freedom Fund team, and to some extent by the suggestions of capacity building organisations.

Wish lists and lack of clarity about what the project goals of NGOs were

Most of the community members were not very clear on the project activities of the NGO and had a wish list, such as advanced training on tailoring to improve their skill and funds for building a house, construction of a hospital, etc. Seven community members stressed livelihoods, one mentioned training for alternate livelihoods and two members mentioned access to safer loans to support such livelihoods. One parent wanted the NGO support for improved education quality, as his children were not keen to attend school due to the school atmosphere, and another stressed education in general. A few were more specific. They wanted the NGO to write to the government of Bihar requesting them to provide people with any source of livelihood so that they would not have to take advance from the brick kiln owner. He also added that NGO F should employ two or three people from the locality itself and train them so that they can gain people's faith and win their confidence.

'They do some meetings; I cannot say what else they can do. Can you help us for getting the home they had promised?' NGO A2 asked.

Community members rely on NGOs

NGO B community 5 said,

Sometimes, during the CVC meetings, I meet others. NGO B people have been coming but meetings have not happened in the last two months. When NGO B asks, then meeting is organised. Otherwise who in the village will meet on their own. No one has the time.

One community respondent's view drew from the experience of her family, four members of which were in bondage for 18 years. She said her family had received a lot of support from the NGO to fight the case as well as receiving immediate compensation.

The ARGs are more independent. An NGO staff member said, 'the Action Research Group functions quite independently like taking out many rallies on its own. Only in case of a problem, or if it's doing something new it invites staff from NGO A.'

3.7.1 Recommendations for programmes from community respondents

Involving the community in decision-making builds ownership

At least three respondents from one NGO's hamlet spoke about how the programme encouraged them to discuss certain issues and provided support for the decisions that came up – for example, they mentioned the formation of the Kisan Samuh (farmers' group) as an outcome of meetings with the community. 'We suggest to the NGO about running some agriculture-related livelihood programme after which the Kisan Samuha was formed,' DCS4 said. This pointed towards their ownership in the NGO's intervention, as they felt part of the decision-making.

Two respondents also raised the importance of awareness on allied areas such as minimum wage and how to increase one's savings, hoping that increased savings will help them invest in some income generating opportunities. These strands of self-sufficiency among community respondents are very important for the programme to succeed.

3.7.2 Recommendations for the programme from NGO staff

Some NGO staff felt that they carry out a lot of activities from rescue to rehabilitation and that the number of those in bonded labour, child labour and trafficking is reducing. But they feel that entire system must change. 'What we can give them is relief,' said NGO B staff 1 – structural change, such as land allotment, housing schemes, etc., can only be done by the government. The following are views that were expressed by NGO staff in the interviews about what they thought needed to be done (these are not necessarily the view of IDS/Praxis):

Programmatic issues

- Superficial work is being done like linking to education. Alcoholism, domestic violence in families, economic and other underlying drivers of bonded labour need to be worked on. They spend money to resolve issues such as conflicts, illness and informal health providers and as a result get into debt. Traditional healers ask them to stop medicine for TB.
- Survivor leaders need to play a major role, as their experience of having been victims makes them the best source of empathy and support within the community.
- Get more PRIs involved so that government bodies at local level are more supportive. Develop good relations and seek collaboration with local level government officials. 'If they don't help, then state and national and international pressure is necessary, because brick kiln owners don't listen. We can do more advocacy with employers.'
- Politicians do not represent the working class. The Trafficking Bill has represented a 'legal measure' approach. We have seen mixed response from politicians.
- One NGO respondent noted that it was necessary to nuance the language of the programme – rather than discouraging migration, it was important to encourage safe migration. 'Migration will happen for employment opportunities. We have to think how migration can be safer and so that people are not exploited. Reality does not change when they are rescued. They still have no livelihood and are still landless.'
- Some felt the focus should be on education – especially linking deserving students to tuition fees. 'While we have laid a lot of stress on education, it would be great if deserving students who are very vulnerable are supported with tuition fees for a few months,' DCS2 said. She felt this will incentivise education. Another NGO staff member

stressed the importance of creating role models, by engaging with residential schools so that parents felt motivated to send their children there, rather than to work.

- Another NGO staff member highlighted ‘there is the need to extend the Action Research Groups and the community maturity tool to other hamlets too, as both helped the community become independent and think and take action on its own.’
- One staff member noted that subsequent programmes should very specifically focus on the Musahar community, as they are the ones that still struggle with bonded labour and child labour and are the most vulnerable.
- Another NGO staff member stressed the need for awareness building and monitoring and vigilance within the community.

With regard to the last two points, however, it is important that these solutions may turn out to be focused on the symptoms and not the root cause of bonded labour. Community-led research may play a stronger role to address this.

Staff related issues

- One NGO B staff member said,

I think there is no spirit of partnership or equal status with the funding agency. We are scared that we will lose funding and forced to commit quick results, affects quality of our work if you don't give freedom and overload, this will happen. Organisations are not independent in working, new things are being introduced throughout the project, the pressure on the staff is high, we are overworked, and we are very stressed. When we submit a proposal for a project, additional activities are being added.

- If NGOs had fewer villages (40 per cent less) then they could have better results, as they would be able to address the underlying issues. NGO work is limited to addressing emerging needs in the communities.
- Growing anxiety existing in the staff. Staff-work and staffing balance. Overload of work.
- NGO staff need training, orientation and exposure in legal knowledge, stress management, and interpersonal communication skills.
- NGOs are losing staff because State Rural Livelihood mission (SRLM) has higher salaries of Rs 20,000 block level, whereas NGOs pay Rs 17,000.
- Programme design should be uniform for all the partners, resulting in convergence of outcomes as well as adding specific programmes to add value to the present programmes.
- NGOs need to give more time to the community in terms of their education and income generation, as well as health services so that they can go to government centres - building trust with PHCs, which will cut down expenses for health prevention programmes. ‘We need to make sustainable community – which has to work on its own, which has happened in Action Research,’ NGO A staff 1 said.
- At least three staff reported that they are involved in too many activities and are unable to provide sufficient effort, in terms of how much time or depth of response they can offer to issues. An NGO staff member said,

We are doing too many things. Each staff member is responsible for 12-15 villages, where they have five to six issues. Planning should be feasible and focused. There is limited space of working. We will focus better if we move away from the number and focus on limited number of villages. We need to focus on underlying issues which are not visible, else we will not be fully successfully.

- Instead of doing several things, we need to get more focused so that we can achieve good results. 'If you are doing so many things very quickly your main flow is diluted. Disadvantage is that you won't have people orienting new things,' said NGO C staff 1.
- NGO B staff 1 said,

This is affecting the quality of our work and increasing workload on our staff. When recently, a person wanted interviews for CVCs a week later, we had to ask him to delay the interviews by a month.

NGOs working to support movement building

As some respondents highlighted, there is a need to build movements as there are limited numbers of organisations working on the Hotspot model. An external stakeholder also pointed to the importance of the NGOs working in collaboration with each other.

3.7.3 Recommendations for programmes from external stakeholders

The following reflections were offered by external stakeholders. They are not articulated in any priority order and do not denote a weight of opinion. They should rather be regarded as food for thought.

Entrepreneurial approach

According to one external stakeholder:

They need to take entrepreneurial approach to the whole thing. They need to enjoy and relish the challenge of designing, executing and making businesses grow. They need to unlearn what they have learned as not-for profits. They do good training programmes, which is only giving you intermediate outputs. They need to step out of their comfort zone.

External stakeholders were very appreciative of the Freedom Fund's investment in building capability of partner NGO budget for organisational development. Partners need to see this as seed capital as it is not all technical capital – they should find ways to raise additional resources and invest in livelihoods.

The Freedom Fund needs to encourage NGOs to be more risk-taking and become outcome driven like they do in other components – e.g. how many people have been rescued from bonded labour? How many supported are by livelihoods?

Partners need to work more on the experiment so that they become models. They are on the right path but need to do it in a more integrated way. Do you teach them new designs, and how does it cater to the market? Are women getting training so that they can just be a producer? The endeavour is to create entrepreneurs, as well as to capture the value, market, and sell it.

One of the community respondents also noted the need for innovative ideas for income generation.

Ad hoc collective organisation

Organisations have selected individuals to develop as entrepreneurs. A key question which this raises is whether the programmes should support individual or group entrepreneurship. While there are strong arguments to support individual entrepreneurship, promoting collective organisation can increase the possibility of higher achievements. It could be argued that the Freedom Fund needs to develop a stronger community collective action model as this can provide a strong base for livelihoods, but also other elements of the project. There are conflicting views on this. Sometimes individuals will work harder at their

individual entrepreneurship. Getting the balance right between group and individually-based economic development is not easy, but would this benefit from further reflection from the NGOs?

Similar points were made about other aspects of community organisation, Unfortunately, in Bihar the SRLM is in control of SHGs and this has diluted the collective power of the groups. Savings are low, community institutions are weak, borrowings are driven by what the government can offer. The idea of the SHG is comes from the government-managed system, which prevents a true community-owned finance system from emerging. But in Uttar Pradesh there is no such constraint.

While village-level forums are good whilst the project is operational, sustainability is the fundamental challenge for all NGOs. All NGOs must address the question about how to make it sustainable so that workers who have been empowered through different kinds of support from the programme can sustain their agency in full swing. Another stakeholder stressed the importance of collective responsibility and collective action within the community to eradicate bonded labour/child labour completely. Here, it is important to look at building community support through empowered groups, as well as through collective action rather than providing benefits to individuals.

Family-centred approach: senior government official

A senior government official said,

I would say involve the parents. If parents are not addressed as the nexus is between parents and middleman. A cycle has become how many years can we continue to do this. In 2008 I had gone with police for release of 135 children from Jaipur bangle factory ... So you see, a cycle is continued through how many years. Root canal is required here. We need to attack the root cause.

Other comments included:

- Seek more cooperation from brick kiln owner.
- NGOs need to work specifically on women as this situation has not improved. Get vocational training to girls and women so that they can earn. Enable girls to use the rehabilitation fund to access funds.
- NGO should think about caste discrimination.

Improving access to basic rights

A stakeholder from the anti-trafficking unit said that children should have access to quality education. 'We see Bihar children migrating for work everywhere. Families are big, the income is low and moreover, the education standard is low. Parents don't find the value of sending children to school as the standard is low.' He also noted that corruption in disbursement of social welfare schemes must be rooted. 'The mediator takes the benefit; it doesn't reach the needy; if children get basic food, then their parents will not work in desperate conditions,' he noted.

Need to also focus on less glamorous areas of work

A child rights expert noted that 'Unfortunately, rescue is more glamorous, so that's what NGOs focus on more. The rest is just about procedure and follow-up. This gets lost somewhere.' He also stressed the importance of focusing on the commercial sexual exploitation of children. This includes all steps, from rescue to outlining the next step of action, such as 'What kind of home should they be sent to, what should be their future and what steps need to be taken?'

Two other stakeholders stressed the importance of making the community aware about schemes they have a right to.

3.8 Question 9. Willingness to talk about bonded labour

Compared to 3 or 4 years ago, are community members more or less willing to talk about bonded labour/child labour/trafficking? Do you think community members are more or less able to protect each other from bonded labour/child labour/trafficking?

3.8.1 Child labour is the most talked about – there remains some hesitation to talk about bonded labour and trafficking

Out of the 30 respondents, two chose not to comment on the question. Of the remaining 28, 21 said that people talk about bonded labour and child labour issues but most of the responses were around child labour. They said, for example, that as a result of this, they were able to keep track of parents who may be keen to send their children to work and talk to each other to prevent them from sending their children to unsafe places. 'We are hesitant about sending their children for work because we are now well aware of legal procedure and actions that might follow. The community has started discussing with each other about the importance of sending children to school,' a community respondent said. Interestingly, another added that they had started raising the issues with the sarpanch where necessary. Increasing awareness and open discussions within the community on issues related to child labour was also highlighted to be one of the contributing factors in the changing scenario.

'Yes, people talk about child labour and they are scared about consequences of sending children alone outside for work,' NGO B participant 1 said.

Three respondents spoke about the challenges of talking about issues related to bonded labour and wages and trafficking.

NCS4 said,

The NGO staff tells us to ask for the right wages. They tell us what the correct wage is and how we should argue for it. But the employer does not listen to us, what do we do? Under such circumstances, we are all on our own. Nobody can really help us.

The survivor leader said,

Yes, they know but they do not talk about it much. We think that due to the 1976 Act, [the] employer is able to get away due to loopholes related to human trafficking. He is able to pick up [a] worker even after rescue. We want to do a campaign on this issue.

3.8.2 Fear of threat of violence, internalisation of exploitation, shame act as taboos

DCS5, who had four members of their family in bondage in a non-intervention village, was also of similar opinion:

People did not come out in support of them because they were afraid of what would happen to them. Initially, people were too scared to raise their voices. But now that the case has been filed against him, they are ready to come forward and give evidence against him. For example, the Mukhiya's nephew, who was from the Yadav [OBC] caste, was a police officer. Instead of helping my family, he quashed a complaint they filed against the zamindar. In fact, he even came to our house at midnight to threaten my brothers and accusing us of filing false charges against the zamindar. A few of our neighbours came and protested, saying that what he was saying was just lying. We do

not blame them. What more could they have done. It is difficult to stand up against a powerful man.

External stakeholders from the AHTU said there was definitely a willingness to talk on and act on issues of bonded labour and trafficking. He said the police were also more aware of their role in raid and rescue thanks to the training by the NGOs. Another stakeholder mentioned that while there was openness to talk about child labour, and in a limited sense on trafficking, there was a reluctance to talk about trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation of children. 'The state government refrains from talking about this issue. It may be wondering, why should it enter into such murky areas?' he added.

Among the NGO respondents, only one said that the community was open to talk about bonded labour issues. Three NGO staff said that it was still taboo to talk about bonded labour. According to staff at NGO E, the community had just started internalising the issues of bonded labour and recognising that it was a violation of human rights. However, they were not yet comfortable talking about the situation. This resonates with the example seen from the community respondent above. Talking about the specific respondent, the NGO staff said,

Even the family you just met is talking about it only because of our constant counselling and support. Otherwise, there is obviously a fear that they will have to pay for talking about it. In fact, even with this family, we came to know about their situation only at least a year into the programme.

Another NGO staff said,

People are very willing to talk about human trafficking as well as child labour and child migration. They acknowledge this as a violation of their human rights. But they are not yet confident about talking about bonded labour. There is a fear that they might land in trouble.

However, while it was okay to talk about risks of trafficking or whom to approach in such cases, it was not considered okay to talk about one's own experience of trafficking.

NNGO2 said,

In the communities I work in, people are more comfortable talking about issues such as child labour and trafficking and its dangers. But bonded labour is still a taboo subject. It is still seen as a shameful experience. When we speak about bonded labour, especially intergenerational labour, there is recognition that their human rights are being violated. There is acknowledgement that they want to leave this situation. But they do not talk about it openly.

The partner organisations are giving a lot of attention to local level government functionaries. Anganwadi workers are involved in training about this, and as a result more conversation is happening.

3.8.3 Response of political leaders is not uniform

There was a real mix of perspective across the NGOs on the extent to which politicians are willing to engage with these issues

A number of community members and NGO staff felt that political leaders were not interested in the issue, although some ward members have begun to discuss it. There are two scenarios here – either politicians do not know enough, or they know enough. 'One MP said

he did not know about bonded labour in City 6, where more than 600 brick kilns exist,' an NGO C staff 1 said. 'Politicians are not very interested in these issues, we do sensitisation programmes,' NGO B staff 1 said.

However, the experience with the other set of NGOs was different. At least two NGOs – NGO E and NGO F – mentioned that candidates from across the political spectrum – Bharatiya Janata Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal and Janata Dal (United) – had raised the issue of bonded labour. NGO FNGO1 said,

Even among politicians, there is a keenness to raise these issues. For example, in the 2015 elections, the Janata Dal (United) candidate raised child labour as part of the election manifesto. Prashant Kishore (political strategist now with JDU) also raised this issue.

3.8.4 Conclusions

- More conversation is happening, but people are much more prepared to talk about child labour, and to some extent trafficking, than bonded labour.
- People still fear the consequences of talking about powerful local people.
- The police are more aware of the issue.
- There was a mixed view of the interest of politicians. Some are completely ignorant. Others are discussing child labour but there is a perceived relative silence on bonded labour. Even many government officials do not recognise that bonded labour exists.

3.9 Question 10. Community perspectives on the situation of those in bonded labour/child labour/trafficking

In the last three to four years, has anyone in your family or community been in bonded labour/child labour/trafficking? What sort of work were they doing? Has their situation changed, are they still in bonded labour/child labour/trafficking?

Five out of 30 community participants did not respond to this question. Seven respondents said there had been situations in the community, but this had now changed. At least four acknowledged that bonded labour/child labour continued to be there in their hamlets, although not in their families. This is probably because those formerly in bonded labour/child labour/trafficking acknowledged the role of the organisation in supporting them and did not see the situation within the community. Additionally, it should be noted that while the community may be comfortable talking about these issues by externalising it, when it comes to talking about cases in their own village, there is reluctance. It is also possible that they did not come across such cases and hence were not aware about it.

Three respondents, including one ex-bonded labour, noted that bonded labour and child labour had not been completely eradicated but it was substantially reduced. Similarly, other stakeholders including two government officials, a survivor leader and all NGO staff considered that bonded labour, child labour and trafficking had been reduced but not eradicated.

Community respondents to this question are from different categories (refer to Table 3.5 below). Out of six community respondents who had been in a bonded labour or child labour situation, four were rescued as a result of project intervention. One young boy was rescued from a hotel he was working in. Another was rescued from the railway station where he had run away to work. For the former, the family claims that he is staying with a maternal aunt in a different village and pursuing studies. Two families were rescued from inter-generational bondage. One family who had four members in bonded labour for 18 years were rescued. The project staff were informed of their plight by one of their SHG members in an intervention

village. The project found out details about the case, approached the police and kept up the pressure to ensure that the family did not have to go back to the situation of bondage.

3.9.1 Brick kilns are still the centre of bonded labour, although the situation has improved

Six community respondents noted that bonded labour exists in brick kilns. Bonded labour is more common amongst people who go to distant brick kilns. In nearby brick kilns, VCs and NGOs are able to negotiate the wages with the brick kilns owner. It is mostly Musahar and Biyar community members who go to brick kilns. One respondent (NGO A2) said that she works in the brick kiln near the village because wages are higher compared to what is offered for other work in the village (but NGO staff mentioned her bonded labour status). She has attended a few NGO meetings and the NGO has helped her in filling up a form for a housing scheme. According to another respondent (NGO FCS3), from a hamlet where every household took an advance from the brick kiln owner and paid it off through labour, both for themselves and their families,

Currently, the situation of bonded labour has improved. As compared to the past, now 25 per cent of the people in Village 15 are in bonded situation. Majority of the people working at the brick kilns are found to be in such situation. They take advance or loan from the brick kiln owners and thus fall under their trap.

A survivor leader said,

I work as a daily labourer in brick kilns, I have learned mason work... The brick kiln is near to our home, while the earlier one was 30 kms. I will not take advance. I get paid every day. I earn Rs 11,000 monthly. I also had an agreement on farming where we invest 50 per cent.

One respondent noted that the awareness about trafficking had increased, especially for girls, with parents of girls becoming more aware about the possibility of them being trapped in the wrong places. This has reduced trafficking to some extent as a result. NGO B staff 1 noted that there is a pattern of close relatives involved in trafficking. 'We learned how close relation like grandmother "nani" and aunt were involved, it was shocking for us' (see the 'Story of fake marriage' below). NGO B has stopped fake and child marriages. One example involved working closely with a sub-divisional officer in Town 5, as a result of which eight child marriages were stopped. The government official was awarded by the Chief Minister. 'Forty to 50 per cent of girls who were bonded are now married and now not into bondage,' said NGO C staff 1.

All six NGOs have supported the rescue of children and have also supported with their legal cases. The survivor provides the information and attends court proceedings but does not have much information about their own case. 'In my experience, about 20-30 per cent [of] children are re-trafficked,' a respondent from NGO A said.

Understanding of bonded labour is still strongly shaped by their historical experience. The understanding by some community members of what bonded labour and child labour is remains limited. There is internalisation that being forced to work, or working for very small amounts of money, or children going to work under difficult conditions, are not wrong.

'Since I have got married, there is no case of people being forced, or paid less,' NGO C community participant 3, a woman in her thirties, said.

NGO B community participant 1 said,

There is no bonded labour in our area. Children above 14 years still go out to work painting, construction work, factory, plastic factory in Gujarat. We can't stop children from going because the family is not in good economic condition. I think children are always paid less than adults because they cannot do the quality of work adult men can do, can they.

Interestingly, survivor leaders and ex-bonded labourers are much clearer on what constitutes bonded labour and child labour. They are more aware that being in such a situation violates their rights and that such a person may require support.

Sometimes, while there is awareness about not involving children younger than 14 in forms of labour, some families engage their children in work because they are helpless. They do not associate children working during the harvest as child labour. Some try to justify sending slightly older boys to work. In some cases, the NGO shares stories of children who have landed in trouble. This dissuades the family from sending children to work. But despite this, children continue to work in brick kilns and families continue to work for an advance.

3.9.2 Follow-up mechanism through tracking registers

NGOs do not necessarily keep track of all rescued people to note their progress. For example, NNGO1 said that they were aware of two children who went back to work after rescue. In the third case, while the respondent said the boy was studying in an aunt's house, this could not be verified. There are also at least two cases where the NGO did not have much to do with the rescue situation. In both, the family dealt with the employer and brought the child back and in both cases, the child went back. The family, however, said that the child was now an adult. In the case of NGO C, they help youth in the community to record names and phone numbers of those who go out of the village. This helps the NGO keep a track of the migrants and support them when they reach out for help.

3.9.3 Story of fake marriage (NGO B)

There has been a conviction in trafficking Village 21, where a 12 year-old girl was trafficked by her aunt/mausi and grandmother/nani for Rs 12,000 and sold in Uttar Pradesh under the pretext of marriage. After marriage, the girl came to visit with her husband. Her mother wanted to marry her according to Hindu rituals. The 'husband' resisted this marriage. Her mother approached NGO B and NGO B, with the police, got the traffickers arrested.

Table 3.5 gives an idea of the number of respondents who shared different views around bonded labour in their families and communities.

Table 3.5 Number of respondents who shared different views around bonded labour³

Respondents whose family members were rescued in the project duration	Respondents who said that members of their communities are currently in bondage/child labour
Twelve respondents had family members who were in bondage/child labour/trafficking situations	Seven respondents had family members currently in a situation of bondage/child labour/trafficking
	<p>One respondent said while earlier every house took an advance from a brick kiln owner, now it has gone down</p> <p>One respondent says it has reduced from 20-30 households to 3-4 households.</p>

Source: Author's own.

³ Five respondents did not reply specifically to this question.

3.9.4 Conclusions and reflections

- A difficult issue is that a number of close relatives are involved in trafficking.
- As indicated above, brick kilns are still centres of bonded labour and there are still many children working in the brick kilns.
- Many people still see taking an advance as normal.
- There is a widely held view that a significant (but contested) proportion of children who are rescued end up being re-trafficked.

3.10 Question 11. Freedom from bonded labour

Has anyone in your family or community been able to leave a situation of forced labour in the last three to four years? Are they still free?

There have been cases of rescued child labourers going back to work.

3.10.1 Community response to rescued child labour/bonded labour/trafficked persons

Of the 30 respondents, 18 community members said that there were no cases of rescue from forced labour/child labour. The 12 others had family members who had experienced bondage situations/trafficking or child labour. One said that small children are no longer going out to work and one did not respond. One said that the CVC stops the children before they are sent out to work.

As indicated above in answer to other questions, there is a widespread view that society is more accepting of rescued child labourers than bonded labourers as there is fear about how the employer will retaliate, and for others because the power equation and the relationship of dependency between the employer and the bonded labour is so deeply internalised as normal. In cases of trafficked girls, it is all the more difficult, given the high premium that is given to a girl's honour. In a few cases, the families are not even keen to fight the trafficker. Cases of rescue which were shared were mostly of children – in one village, eight boys were stopped from going to work and in another village, one boy was stopped from being trafficked.

In another case, an entire family – four members (father, mother, and two adult sons) were rescued from a situation of bonded labour that they were in for the past 18 years.

As narrated by the sister:

Four members of my family in Village 24 have been in bonded labour for 18 years. My 62-year-old father, my 59-year-old mother, and two brothers, aged 36 and 29, were in bondage for 18 years. They had taken a loan of Rs 30,000 and had paid up more than Rs 1.3 lakhs in lieu of the loans in interest as had been told to them. They asked him for the papers. He in return asked them why they needed papers and offered to may them rice regularly. However, he refused to let them work for others, saying that they now had to pay up Rs 3.2 lakh (Rs 1.9 lakh more). Whenever they refused to work, the zamindar threatened to call the police and also got them beaten up by his henchmen. They were forced to work for a pittance. While other labourers engaged in agricultural labour get paid Rs 250 per day and 5 kgs of paddy, this family gets only 3kg paddy and no money. They did not have any papers related to the initial loan they had taken.

My family sold land that they had for Rs 1 lakh and paid him the money. But he refused to let them go. They were abused, verbally and physically and called at odd times of day and night to work on the field. At one of the CVC meetings about a year ago, I informed NGO E about their plight. Since then, the NGO E team counselled my family and supported them in demanding written proof of the paid-up amount.

They also helped the family liaise with the police by approaching the BDO.

DCS5 added,

The case is currently going on, but we are not aware about the details. Through NGO E, my brothers have now got work in the construction sector. In the last three months (before the interview), the zamindar or his henchmen had not come to my parents' house or bothered them in anyway. The police, because of pressure from senior officials, is now sympathetic to their cause. Now they have a bank account and no loan. But the most important thing is they do not have to go and work on his fields anymore. I believe if there is conviction and prosecution of the zamindar who kept them bonded for 18 years, then it will break his "guman" (roughly translated as pride/vanity). This will probably give some courage to more people to talk about their plight.

One young boy who was stopped and brought back home from the railway station is currently at his aunt's place where he is completing his studies.

One 14-year-old girl who had been trafficked is now back at home. There is currently a case against the trafficker. The girl initially attended NFE classes run by the NGO but has now stopped attending, although it is not clear why.

In the other three cases, the rescue was not linked to the project period. For example, one respondent's son, along with a few of his friends, left the village without informing anybody. They went to work at a coconut oil company at Tamil Nadu. They were all minors. They used to work for 12 hours a day. He used to visit the family twice a year. His mother said,

We asked him to come back to home because we were worried about him and his safety. He however did not listen to us and continued working there. Later he came back on his own. He is already an adult now and is working at some other place.

3.10.2 NGO perspective

Who the rescue is done by depends on where it is carried out. At village level, they are informed by the CPC, the local police station or Dhava Dhal. Mostly, NGOs, the government or joint teams rescue them. Two per cent of them come back on their own. Different actors have different roles – the government revenue department and police (for release amount and other services), NGO (counselling, follow up), and mature CVCs help by going to the police station, providing food and shelter.

An NGO staff member noted,

Rescued people are not seen properly. We advise them to change their mindset, as there is also the fear that they can take their own life. We support the rescued children. We try to convince the community that they should also support them. They tend to see only the negative. Not the positive.

According to NGO staff members, when they rescue bonded labourers, they provide thorough follow up and support, and they were not aware of any instances in which the ex-bonded labour was bonded again. This was reaffirmed by the bonded labourers rescued by the NGOs. However, it was asserted by one respondent that in the case of male child labour, there are higher chances of children going back to child labour. 'Out of ten children I can say about four children go back to bondage,' said an NGO senior official. Another thought about 5 per cent of children went back into labour. NGOs were generally aware of the risks of children going back into labour. None of these estimates can be verified. What is clear is that

there is a percentage that are re-trafficked, and that further information is required here in order to understand better what follow up support can best be provided.

3.10.3 Rescue and rehabilitation

Rehabilitation of rescued adult workers is likely to succeed

Interviews with ex-bonded labourers and three staff stated that adults who were rescued were unlikely to go back into bonded labour.

'Once a person has been rescued, he is not likely to get into again bonded labour. We give them our mobile number and also make them aware of their rights and laws, said staff NGO B2.

NGO C staff 1 said,

Those who went to the brick kiln, came back after six to 12 months. Some got rescued for minimum wage so don't get release certificate. Sixty per cent we rescue. No one goes back as we link children with training, we raise awareness.

In bonded labour cases, there is more acceptance of the rescued person by the family. This is despite society's hesitation of repercussion by the employer or zamindar. This is true even for child labour cases. A few years ago, there were children from Town 6 who were rescued from Jaipur. In these cases, too, the families accepted them. In cases when the 'employers' of the bonded labourers who have been rescued are nearby and can send goons to threaten the villagers, the acceptance of the rescued person can be an issue. In other cases, they are accepted. The challenge tends to be when trafficked women are rescued.

At the same time, in some areas, the level of internalisation of bondedness is so strong that the survivor does not see themselves as a victim.

DNGOCS1 said,

While there is a growing acknowledgment of bonded labour, there is still hesitance to accept. At least 25 per cent people believe that the zamindar/money lender/contractor is actually there for them in their time of need. If we get work and leave, who will help out our families in times of need? There is also the worry about not getting a job after rescue. We try and link people to existing job market. We also provide them some skill training.

In this context, it is important that a community respondent had noted that the contractor pays us the money and 'sometimes even forgoes smaller loans.'

Besides this, there is the fear of the zamindar's clout. 'Despite fear of the zamindar, there are at least a handful of people in their [bonded labour survivor as narrated by sister above] hamlet who are publicly ready to accept them. Others are still awaiting the prosecution of the zamindar,' the staff added.

More work is required for rescued women

Rescued boys are easily accepted but villagers do not accept rescued girls. NGO staff felt that they needed to work more for women as girls and women face sarcasm their whole life. Those who get into fake marriages often find themselves in sex work and are usually willing to go for rehabilitation. Those who work in a brothel have no other options. They earn more money and do not find rehabilitation lucrative. 'We help establish them, but we have not been able to get respect for them or change mindset of people towards them,' said NGO B staff 1.

In the trafficking case from Town 6, the family have been supporting the girl and fighting the case against the trafficker. They take an interest and ask the NGO when the date of the next hearing is. But this is not always the case. Nine months ago, there was a case of elopement from Village 6. The family and her community refused to accept her. Eventually, the boy's family accepted that girl, NGO FNGO1 said.

DNGO2 said,

There was a girl from a Muslim family in Village 8. She got married and after three to four months, her husband migrated to Mumbai for work. The girl left her in-laws' house and went to her paternal house. Her parents scolded her for coming home on her own and said she should go back and return with her husband. The girl went to the Village 9 railway station where she was trafficked. When she was rescued (by another NGO), neither family wanted to keep her. After our intervention, her parents finally agreed to take her in. She started attending tailoring classes at her centre. Meanwhile, our staff counselled her husband and he is now ready to take her back.

Rehabilitation of rescued men and families

Usually, more male bonded labour and families are successfully released, so generally there is no stigma. Adult men who were rescued said that it was not easy to adjust after rescue, due to the mental trauma as well as a lack of livelihood options. There are a few cases when bonded labourers have not been accepted by the people of their village. This happens when the person's ex-employer lives nearby and villagers fear that they will face harassment from the owner. In these cases, the villages do not discriminate but encourage bonded labourers to migrate. For the first two to four months, it is tough as they have been away. They no longer have a close relationship with people as they only used to come back to the village for a short time. They do not get work. Others are suspicious but soon realise that those rescued are not at fault. Amongst the ex-bonded labourers there is the trauma of harassment and constant fear. They are often not able to trust others for months after rescue. They face challenges getting jobs, housing, school education for children, fear of the employer retaliating and fear of police. During rescue, the police and administration provide support, but later they try to pressurise. The employer may even come to convince them to go back to work.

'Our liberation model is that not only we rescue but we liberate them. There is no drop out in our case. The survivor is with us for long time,' NGO C staff 1.

Challenges of working with government

One NGO staff member noted the challenges of working with the government on the issue of bonded labour:

It is very difficult to work with government officials, because the system is not willing to acknowledge that it exists. Even the community does not acknowledge it. This has been internalised, so it is more difficult to stay out of bondage. People do not see their situation as bonded labour until a crisis occurs.

Rehabilitation of male children

Boys are sent to brick kilns, hotels, factories, the plastic industry, and sesame grinding for sweets. Parents are happy but when the boy is rescued and comes back, it creates a suspicion or allegation on the child – if the police brought him back, maybe he committed a crime? Rescued children are teased that they ran away to earn money but were arrested by the police and have been brought back. The rescued children feel isolated and do not want to mingle with anyone. The father also scolds the child that because of the child he cannot repay the loan. The mother supports the child and says he did the right thing. Problems arise when the boy is the only child and an earner, and the father is alcoholic or falls sick and so

he is sent back to work. In big families, girls have to be married and boys are sent out to work. The environment in the village is such that if four to five have gone then others are encouraged to go.

Staff member NGO A1 said,

He is groomed by middleman and relatives to go back to the work. We do regular follow up by providing facilities like linking, second follow up based on first follow up. We keep doing constant follow up. Out of ten children I can say about four children go back to bondage. We are able to successfully rehabilitate at least 60 per cent.

Staff member NGO A2 said,

Such boys become very aggressive, so the settlement of such children is not easy. Then there was a case when parents went to Rajasthan to meet the son as he had phoned them, the girl died back home as there was no one to look after her. This is from Village 10. The family refused compensation of the rescued son as they were very disturbed.

There are challenges in successful rehabilitation, especially in cases where the family's economic situation is not good. NNGO2 noted,

If they receive continued counselling, there are higher chances that they may not get back into the situation. I would say, there are at least 5 per cent families whose members are at risk of returning to the bonded labour/child labour situation. There is an example from Village 17. Around ten children were rescued and linked to school, where they were counselled. However, one 13-14-year-old boy returned to Mumbai to work. Similarly, there is another boy who is around 15 years old. He is from Village 18. He doesn't have a father. His mother is very ill. He was rescued from a factory in Bangalore and taken to a home in City 7. From there, he was taken home and reintegrated with his family. There are seven to eight members in his family. He is still at home. He has not gone to work again, yet, but given his family's financial condition, he may eventually go and find work somewhere.

Box 3.1 Case Studies

Child labour

Community participant NGO A1:

There is a man in our village who runs a shop. He told us about a job in Mumbai of making bags. Two boys, one was my son, from the village had gone for the job. Both were arrested. I think it's been six to seven years since then, government does not allow children to work below 18 years. We rushed to Village 9 and after we gave ID we got the boys back. But the police took him to City 8. The boys were not doing anything wrong, were they? They had gone to earn. Why did police keep my son in custody for eight days? After returning, he stayed five years at home and now is working in Mumbai. I have six children.

Multi-generational bonded labour

NGO C staff 1:

In October a grandfather, daughter in law and two grandchildren were enslaved by a dominant family in City 6. The son ran away and then the daughter in law started working. The son came back, but then ran away. The employee took to the two children to help for cattle rearing. The police and the NGO got the three generations released. Multi-generational bonded labour cases need more counselling, homework. This case came to the NGO in February, but they were only able to rescue in October. Community members think they are at mercy of master because he gives them food. Seventy per cent of Musahar live on the land of owners and eat from what the employer gives them, so they feel compelled to work for them.

3.10.4 Conclusions and reflections

- A male worker is more likely to be accepted back into the fold of society and family, while girls and women face stigma, especially in cases of trafficking.
- Rescued boys are under pressure to be re-trafficked or re-migrate despite the follow up and efforts of the NGO.
- Not all NGOs do rigorous follow up with the families of rescued persons. Comprehensive follow up and documentation could improve the impact of the project.
- There is still a challenge resulting from the fact that often neither communities nor officials recognise the existence of bonded labour.

3.11 NGO Question 13. Lessons on advocacy

What do you know now about what does and does not work in relation to advocacy with local and regional/national policy makers that you did not know three or four years ago?

On the question of advocacy, most of the responses were from the senior staff. The staff working in the field did not have experiences to share on advocacy.

3.11.1 Relation with the government

NGOs have developed cordial relationships with the government and are invited for meetings and their inputs are sought for issues related to forced labour. NGOs act as intermediaries between the government and the communities, supporting their demands for rehabilitation money, linking of schemes, questions about guidelines, etc. NGOs try to align their activities

with the government. On health issues, NGOs have carried out district level programmes with the Chief Medical Officer. NGOs decide about areas to work based on their relationship with the government structure, vulnerability of the community and availability of staff. 'We cannot work in all areas, therefore through greater advocacy we should be able to influence the district level administration to take more ownership of the forced labour issues,' NGO C staff 1 said. As a result of these efforts, people are getting release certificates. The government is in denial mode but despite this, they are going with NGOs to rescue.

Government officials during the interviews spoke highly of the NGOs and their professional and dedicated work. They acknowledged how they seek inputs from the NGOs for designing and implementing their programmes. A government official said,

We have learned from their suggestions. They told us that there are certain trains through which children are taken outside the state for work. So, we used GRP [Government Railway Police] and RPF [Railway Protection Force] who did raids in trains and were able to get children and were successful in arresting middleman.

3.11.2 Factors which have helped in advocacy

Advocacy with the government has been a long-term process of building trust. Slowly, the government has begun to value their work, such as making identity cards for community members, follow up after rescue, school admission, meeting the parents, and so on. Whenever government officials call upon them, the NGO staff are available. Police and government officials are also trained and sensitised on issues of forced labour. NGO B staff 1 said,

They know if they call us, we will immediately go. We take risk as we work criminals, we are available to them any time and season. If they call me now, I will immediately go, even if it is very cold. Now we are called, our opinion is sought, and we have influence over policy making.

3.12 Question 14. Hotspot model and HLN⁴

Thinking about the Hotspot model which brings NGOs together to tackle bonded labour/child labour/trafficking, what are the biggest benefits of working in this Hotspot model, could you give some examples? What are the drawbacks of working in this Hotspot model, could you give some examples? Have you worked with any of the specialist organisations supported by the Hotspot (e.g. on livelihoods, legal work or use of community maturity tool) – and if yes, was it helpful in building your organisation's skills?

Can you give any examples of the ways in which your activities as an NGO influence higher-level decision making and implementation (at district, state or national levels) on bonded labour/child labour/trafficking? Can you give examples of what you have done in partnership with other NGOs funded by the Freedom Fund (within the Human Liberty Network)? Has it brought any changes?

Senior and managerial staff of NGOs responded to this question.

3.12.1 The Hotspot model brought together experiences, learnings and common vision

Earlier, organisations were working in isolation, but the Hotspot model brought the organisations under one umbrella. It has been successful because different NGOs have taken the lead at different times for various issues. For example, HLN arranged a camp with

4 The Human Liberty Network (HLN) is a group of NGOs who work together on advocacy.

the state legal services authority in Gaya to link rescued bonded labourers with relevant government departments. As a result, applications of rescued children submitted to departments are being followed up by the family.

DNGO1 also said that as

there are organisations from grassroots level organisations to national organisations, each with their set of experiences and strengths, there is the opportunity to learn many things. There is mutual contribution among the different partners as they are all on the same platform.

NGO F NGO2 added that

The best thing about working in this hotspot model is that we are all working on the same objective. The liaison with the partners helps, even if a partner is from another state. For example, we have learnt a lot from NGO J.

As a result of HLN, many organisations have started doing interventions they were not doing before like rescue, prosecution, etc. 'No trafficking' zones were established. Those in bondage were rescued. People saw that a difference has been made at state level because of this focused approach. Now people can see that bonded labour is seen in other sectors beyond the carpet industry because of the Hotspot approach.

3.12.2 Network succeeded in influencing government officials and departments

The National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) has included NGO material in their training for government officials. With the state child rights commission in Uttar Pradesh, HLN developed a state plan of action for elimination of trafficking in 2016 for the Ministry of Home Affairs. It has not been accepted but it is on their website as a reference.

Police sensitisation training was not as effective as hoped for, because of the frequent transfer of police officials and the difficulty of follow up. NGOs have therefore developed small pocket size booklets on forced labour and a database which are provided to new officers. NGOs have placed banners in the police stations explaining what to do in cases of forced labour. In return for government support, NGOs must support government in additional programmes, which takes time. HLN is setting up a research desk. This will generate research reports that will help in advocacy, for example on the trends of safe migration.

Through HLN, NGOs have been able to do state level advocacy. The labour department district plan of action for child labour free districts was compiled by HLN. HLN commissioned research on minimum wages in brick kilns in Town 1. This research was on how many bricks are made in eight hours and was submitted to the labour department. 'We want that brick kiln workers are paid by hours and not piece rate. Both women and men should be paid separately,' said NGO C staff 1.

NGO1 noted that its work has 'polished by some technical agencies like IDS, Praxis, Shaju Chacko, Rajshekhar ji. This has given HLN recognition.'

There is exposure to new techniques such as the CMT. CPA⁵ has provided a lot of financial inputs through trainings. Local programme advisors have also encouraged the partners by building capacity wherever needed. The efforts of Shaju Chacko in building the capacity of

⁵ <https://freedomfund.org/partners/cpa/>

partners in results-based monitoring were also noted by multiple respondents. In addition, they have learned about legal investigations from JVI; the CMT from Free the Slaves (FTS); about financial updates from CPA; about results-based management (RBM) from Shaju Chacko; and about goat rearing from Goat Trust Lucknow. These were all counted among the successes of being part of the Human Liberty Network and the opportunities it raised.

3.12.3 Challenges emerge in geographical differences and pressure to perform

An NGO staff member said,

Our coverage is less in Uttar Pradesh because we are few organisations. There are too many visits which affects the targets, meeting project deadlines. Earlier visits were organised, but NGOs were given 15-30 days. Now new things come up every day and they are asked for visits frequently without sufficient time.

NNGO1 noted similarly that sometimes, expectation is of immediate success. But this is not possible. Change will happen only gradually. 'Sometimes HLN accepts it, sometimes it doesn't understand,' he added.

3.12.4 Way forward for Human Liberty Network

The following thoughts were offered about what the HLN could do to build on its success:

NGO A staff member 1 said,

Could be more influential if more time by partners and strategy should be more defined with plan and timeline. Trying to engage new organisations beyond FF has not worked as we are not yet stable [so] how can we add more people to it?

NGO staff suggested that for the Hotspot, NGOs can do district profiling – assessment in districts where are the pockets of forced labour – so that focus can be on these pockets. Increasing partners at destination, transit and source sites in Uttar Pradesh.

When CSOs come together they can collectively advocate with government as there is denial of existence of forced labour in the country.

External stakeholders appreciated the Hotspot strategy but stressed the need to bring together organisations working in brick kilns. Support is needed in source states, 'So we value collaboration with Freedom Fund partners', said NGO staff.

DNGO1 noted some challenges with working in the Hotspot model:

As there are two states involved, certain geographical and legal realities are different. There is a need to be conscious of this. Also, because bonded labour is in itself a sensational issue. At times, we may feel that prevention is not important. But it is equally important.

3.12.5 Conclusions and reflections

The Human Liberty network is widely seen to be successful. There are many examples of successful lobbying. Its strength lies in the cross learning between organisations and the fact that it can harness the different strengths of organisations

4. Overarching reflections

In the sections above, we draw conclusions which relate specifically to the issues. Here we reflect on the bigger picture narrative about the Hotspot as a whole. What are the big lessons and what are the priorities for change over the next few years? We do not, however, make recommendations here. Our integrated recommendations are contained in the Summary Evaluation Report.

Community organisation is high

There is a very high level of community organisation. People come to the groups, learn in the groups, and take action. They provide opportunities for different constituencies to speak and to organise. The interviews suggest that more than half could be considered self-sustaining. There was, however, some suggestion that the sheer number of groups was confusing and may be difficult for the NGOs to sustain.

There remains a residual core of hard to shift bondage

Great strides have been made in shifting bondage and stopping school dropouts for the majority in the intervention area, and awareness strategies have been broadly successful. However, there is a core percentage which will not shift as a result of awareness raising. For these families, the only long-term solution will be alternative livelihoods, coupled with the ending of gender discrimination. Working with this group of extremely marginalised people requires a different strategy to that used for the larger part of the population. This could involve targeted multi-stranded interventions on particularly marginalised families beyond the general village intervention. It is also likely to require a shift in focus towards boys and migrants.

Need for greater emphasis on collective responses

Efforts to collectivise are important. Ironically, even though the groups are successful they tend to focus on changes for individuals and their families. ARGs have provided one successful response to this with the focus of action being much more at village level than individual level. As one NGO staff member said: 'You cannot solve the problem unless you go for a system change because if you help individuals it will be individuals. If I work in system change mechanism then it will be helping a larger population,' NGO A1. We think this is absolutely right but could be misinterpreted. This does not mean that work should focus on abstract policy and environmental changes (which are likely to have far less impact than what is demonstrably effective community work) but rather they should be focusing on collective and system change at a local level. Another dimension of this is caste. Clearly there have been shifts in some of the surface manifestations of caste discrimination, but the deeper underlying patterns remain – such as resistance to inter-caste marriage.

The role of the middlemen

Some success has been achieved through different strategies targeted at middlemen. These range from an awareness campaign (which cautions people from taking advances), to stopping middlemen coming into villages, to prosecutions. This is valuable systemic work which targets one of the key facilitators of the system of bondage.

Livelihood programmes

The interviews suggest that livelihood programmes are not as well targeted as they could be, and that they are often not accompanied by any sort of market analysis. This leaves lots of people with skills and no opportunities to turn these into jobs. Where they are turned into jobs this often only generates supplementary income. This may be enough to help support daily living but is not likely to be enough in the current form to replace a bonded labourer's income with an alternative. Better targeting might help, but in the end the deficit in jobs relates to the structural dynamics of the local economy - a problem which local NGOs are not well

equipped to deal with. This raises questions about the extent to which livelihood programmes can meaningfully contribute to the change that is needed.

Rescue is a core part of some of the NGO programmes

This may be effective but there is a need to reconsider the strategic effectiveness of rescue programmes where some of those trafficked find their way back into bondage, and if they are simply replaced with a steady supply of new people. If this strategy is to be pursued there is a need for more comprehensive follow up. Field workers have recently been recruited for this purpose in Bihar and the programme would benefit from further investment in follow up. This seems to be working better in the South India Hotspot although the model (emphasising a staged withdrawal of girls from local labour) is different and there may be some useful cross Hotspot learning here about how to do it.

Focus on the core delivery that you do well

In Northern India (in comparison to South India) there was a great deal of concern expressed by the NGOs that the Freedom Fund was constantly adding new priorities, and that the diversity of what they had to do was too great to do it well.

Cross NGO networking and policy work

The HLN seems to have visibility and traction. It would make a lot of sense to build on this initiative.

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Annexe 1 Questionnaire for community members

Categories of community participant – interviewees will be drawn from the following groups:

- NGO supported groups (a tailored list of these groups - relevant to the hotspot - will be provided by country programme officers)
- People who have been assisted with micro enterprises and /or access to vocational training or group based income generation
- People who have had legal help (we are focusing on cases with prosecutions)
- People who have received information only (further de-segregate by either is a member of an NGO supported group)
- People who have had rehabilitation and reintegration support or parents whose children were reintegrated

Ideally 1 person from each of the above groups will be interviewed in each village. NGOS will provide lists of people for each group (Including 15-18 year olds) and individuals will be randomly selected from the list.

INTERVIEW GUIDANCE

- Interviews will take place across one / two or three hamlets per NGO
- Six NGOS have been selected in Northern India
- 30 interviews to be conducted in total (5 in each location)
- Interviewees are expected to be individuals who are either actively participating in Freedom Fund programmes (e.g., survivors and members of Community Support Groups).
- Interviews with programme participants will be approximately 60 minutes in length and will follow the below prepared structure

Instructions for interviewing

- Try to interview in a private space where no other individuals can interrupt or overhear
- Please make sure that no NGO reps are present when you are interviewing community members
- At the beginning of the interview you will need to introduce yourself and explain what this study is for
- You should let people know that they do not have to be interviewed, and that they will not be able to be identified from their answers or from any data that we publish
- Then the person nominated for the interview should give his/her prior informed consent for the interview (and also take consent for audio recording)
- You should collect their personal details. Each interview should have a code number, which is both on the interview transcript and on a separate sheet that holds their personal details. Personal details should be kept in secure storage and should not be stored in the same place as the interviews. These details should include: Name, village, caste, if they are in a group and if so which group they are part of, mobile phone – if they have one etc.
- We will also want to know whether they, as an individual, are bonded or not - or if anyone in their family is bonded. This direct question is scheduled for later in the interview (question 10). Disclosure of their personal status may come before reaching

question 10 but if they seem uncomfortable disclosing it early on the questions have been designed to be broad and community focused until question 10.

- In addition to writing what the person says you should also record any important observations such as 'she seemed uncomfortable when talking about the landlord'
- Try to ask the questions in as open a way as possible and to record as much as possible. We advise where possible for audio recordings to be made as back up, but not as the primary source of data as they tend to go wrong. The focus of the interviews should be trying to understand if and how the NGOS or CVCs have made progress towards reducing or ending bonded labour. Prevalence facts will be captured through other mechanisms e.g. participatory statistics data collation.
- For each question ask people how things have changed in the last 3 - 4 years
- Try to get people to give examples and to indicate what the evidence is that they are drawing on in their answers

QUESTIONS

Personal details: Tell us your name, age, caste, sex. Have you been participating in some of [insert NGO name / prompt if they don't know the name of the local relevant NGO/s]'s activities?

Note to interviewer: Ideally castes cited will match census castes

- 1) Thinking about the situation of [bonded labour and child labour and trafficking], can you tell us about a few significant changes that have happened in your community over the last 3 years?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Thinking about the activities and efforts to improve things in your community that the group and /or the NGO have been involved in here, what are some of the ones (if any) that you feel have made the most difference – for you and your family?
- For others in the community?
- If you could select three NGO interventions that had the most significant impact on you and your family / community-which would these be?
- Do you feel you have more information and knowledge than you had 3 years ago, that is helping you and your family?
- Can you give any examples of the kinds of information you have gained?
- What new information, knowledge do you have (Compared to before) in relation to: Local health services? Legal frameworks and rights? How to secure land rights? Take action against coercion from landlords? Identifying bonded labour in your community? (What are the signs, what would you advise them and why?) Identify when trafficking might be happening?
- What new skills do you now have? What can you do now that you could not do before? Has this helped improve your family's income?
- In the past three years, have you gained access to new government services or entitlements? Which of those have been most helpful to your family?
- Have you been involved directly in working for a particular improvement or to protect others – can you tell us about it?

Note to interviewer – this is about teasing out how the NGO activities have helped people to avoid or escape bonded labour– i.e. becoming less dependent on loans from the landlord etc.

- 2) Thinking about the activities and services that are offered by [insert NGO name], what group/s have you been involved with? What have the groups been doing? What has the group helped you with?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

If respondent is unable to answer what groups they've been involved with, prompt with examples:

Why do you keep going to the group/s? Has it been worth the time and effort that you have put in?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Have the groups helped you or/and other people to become involved in other local committees/ decision-making groups
- 3) Have children been helped with their education? How? Tell us about your children or other local children you know. Do you think [NGO name] has played a role in this?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Why do you send your children to school?
 - Are the opportunities for education girls different to the opportunities for boys?
 - Children who are still not in school – why are they not in school?
 - What do you think your child would be able to do with an education that they would not have been able to do without it? (Note to interviewers: If they say 'a job' ask what kind of job – and do those jobs exist locally? Has the community group or NGO tried to improve the quality of the village school?)
- 4) Compared to three years ago, do you think there is now more, less, or maybe a different kind of caste discrimination? Could you give some examples? Do you think the NGO has played a role in this – if so- How? If not, why?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

Tell us about it. Are people more ready to challenge abusive caste behaviour?

- 5) Compared to three years ago, are women and girls now treated differently in the community? Could you give some examples? Do you think [insert NGO name] has played a role in this - if so, how?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Can you give examples of things that women and girls can do and achieve which they could not do three years ago?
 - Have NGO and group activities helped women and girls to have more say in the community?
 - How?
- 6) How has your access to essential services changed over the last few years? Can you give some examples? Who has helped you to get these services?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Which services are you now accessing to support yourself / support your family which you did not access before?
 - Do you know who provides these services (government or NGO) how did you find out about them? Who helped you?
 - What is the quality of the services?
- 7) For families in your community that are in bonded labour / child labour / have been trafficked what else should be done to a) help improve their situation b) help get out of bondage? Can you give some examples of activities that the [insert NGO name] could have done but didn't, or could have done better? How did [insert NGO name] involve you in deciding on what activities to carry out?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- What do you think the programme should have done differently?
- Referring to NGO staff - are they helpful?
- Are they trustworthy (do they do what they say they will do)?
- Are they friendly?
- Are they on time?

Note to interviewer - Please record a separate response for each of the above.

Further explore and prompt suggestions:

- Do the NGO staff help you communicate together about the activities that might be useful and beneficial?
 - Do they communicate the purpose and benefits of activities clearly to you?
 - Do they help you follow up after meetings, or after providing advice or support?
- 8) Compared to 3 or 4 years ago are community members more or less willing to talk about bonded labour / Child labour / trafficking? Do you think community members are more or less able to protect each other from bonded labour / Child labour / trafficking

Explore and prompt suggestions

Do you think local politicians are more or less willing to discuss the problem?

10. In the last three to four years, has anyone in your family or community been in bonded labour / Child labour / trafficking? What sort of work were they doing? Has their situation changed, are they still in bonded labour / Child labour / trafficking?

Note to interviewer: Do not ask for identifying or sensitive details about the person in bonded labour

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- What types of problems did this person face? (e.g., tricked into a low wage, forced to work excessive hours, tricked into a large debt, physical or sexual abuse)

11. Has anyone in your family or community been able to leave a situation of forced labour in the last 3 to 4 years? Are they still free?

Note to interviewer – people may need prompts about what being ‘free’ means – e.g. escaping a situation of enforced labour

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Do you know of people who were brought back to the village after being taken away to work? When did they leave / come back to the village?
- How did they leave bonded labour / Child labour / trafficking? Who or what helped them? Are they still out of bonded labour / Child labour / trafficking or did they have to go back? Are they still in the village? Are they accepted back into the community?
- What kind of problems you think people who return to the village face – including emotional problems?
- Are you aware of any support specifically around trauma and depression being made available to these people? Are you aware of any support specifically around stigma being made available to these people?

PLEASE ALSO NOTE

- End time of interview
- Was the entire interview conducted in a private space?
- What was the interviewee’s mood during the interview? Did they seem relaxed / anxious?
- Was the interview disrupted in any way? Was anyone else present during part of the interview?
- During the interview, did the respondent:
 - Mention experiencing serious abuse (physical, sexual, verbal, psychological)?
 - Request help from the interviewer relating to their safety or potential abuse?
- (IF yes to either of the above, the case should be recorded and referred as per ethical protocol which interviewer will have a copy of and will be familiar with).
- Anything else worth noting?

Annexe 2 Questionnaire for NGO staff members

Categories of participant – interviewees will be drawn from the following groups:

1. NGOs (individuals from across the NGOs involved in the study)

Ideally, a mixture of senior staff member and field level staff will be interviewed.

Instructions for interviewing

- At the beginning of the interview you will need to introduce yourself and explain what this study is for
- You should let people know that they do not have to be interviewed, and that they will not be able to be identified from their answers or from any data that we publish
- Then the person nominated for the interview should give his/her prior informed consent for the interview (and also take consent for audio recording)
- Try to interview in a private space where no other individuals can interrupt or overhear
- You should collect their personal details i.e. name, sex, employer, job role (what they do and what their personal position is). Each interview should have a code number, which is both on the interview transcript and on a separate sheet, which holds their personal details. Personal details should be kept in secure storage and should not be stored in the same place as the interviews.
- In addition to recording what the person says you should also record any important observations such as ‘the participant seemed uncomfortable when discussing x’
- Try to ask the questions in as open a way as possible and to record as much as possible. We advise where possible for audio recordings to be made as back up, but not as the primary source of data as they tend to go wrong. The focus of the interviews should be trying to understand if and how the NGOs or CVCs have made towards reducing or ending bonded labour. Prevalence facts will be captured through other mechanisms e.g. participatory statistics data collation.
- For each question ask people how things have changed in the last 3-5 years

PRE-INTERVIEW INFORMATION (after obtaining consent from interviewee)

- Village/location ID:
- NGO ID:
- Interviewer ID:
- Interviewee ID:
- Date of interview:
- Start time of interview:

QUESTIONS

- 9) Over the last three years, what do you think are the most significant impacts on bonded labour/ child labour / trafficking in the communities that you work in?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- How has your NGO contributed to this changed, can you give us some examples?

- If you could select three NGO interventions that had the most significant impact on the communities you work in - which would these be?
- What have you personally learned in the last 3 years that is helping the NGO to work more effectively?
- What do you think the NGO learnings have been (staff team/ management)?
- What data have you collected in order to verify your most significant impacts?

Note to interviewer – this is about teasing out how the NGO activities have helped people to avoid or escape bonded labour – i.e. becoming less dependent on loans from the landlord etc.

10) What community group/s have you helped to set up? How effectively do you think the groups are functioning? Do you feel that the leadership and responsibility for the older groups falls to you or have community members started to take on responsibilities?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Can you give some examples?
- Do you normally facilitate the meetings or do Community members facilitate the meetings?

11) Why do you think community members come to these groups and what makes them keep coming to the group/s? When they drop out why do they drop out?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Do you have any examples of how people involved in these groups have taken action or leaderships roles because of the skills and /or confidence they have gained?

12) Thinking about the members in the community group that you support, have they become more able to seek help or take action independently? Can you tell us which are the areas they are able to take care of on their own and in which areas they are dependent upon you partially/completely?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- For example, do you go to get entitlements and issues sorted on behalf of community members, or do they come with you, or do they now go on their own in some cases?

13) Is there any evidence that children from bonded labour families are able to maintain their attendance in schools? If they are not attending schools regularly, what are the reasons? E.g., are the financial pressures too strong / are they quickly forced back to work?

14) Compared to three years ago, do you think there is now more, less, or maybe a different kind of caste discrimination? Could you give some examples? What specific things have the NGO done to help with this – if so- How?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- What other forms of caste discrimination still exist? How do you think your NGO could help address these?

15) Do you think bonded labour/child labour/ trafficking affects women and men differently? If so, how? Have you / the NGO taken any specific action to enable women and girls to avoid or leave these situations? What actions have been taken and Can you give examples of these actions and their impact?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Can you give examples of things that bonded women and girls can do and achieve which they could not do three years ago?

16) Compared to three years ago, what do you think is the one public service that is most important for reducing bonded labour / child labour/ trafficking in your community? What has your NGO done to widen people's access to, or improve the quality of this important public service? Could you give some examples?

17) Despite the work of the NGOs, bonded labour/ child labour/ trafficking still exists in this region. What else could be done to improve the situation of these families? Are there other activities that your NGO could be doing, but isn't currently, to tackle the issues?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- What do you think you could do differently (as an NGO)? What should the hotspot programme should have done differently? How does the NGO and programme need to adapt in the future?

18) Compared to 3 or 4 years ago are community members more or less willing to talk about bonded labour / child labour / trafficking? Who do they talk to, could you give some examples?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Do you think local politicians are more or less willing to discuss the problem?

11) Thinking about people who have exited from bonded labour / child labour / trafficking, do you think they are typically accepted back into the community and are able to stay out of bondage? Why do you think this is or is not the case?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- What specific type of bonded labour were they in? (Going to the city with the middleman, trafficked overseas, mills, sex work etc.) When did they leave / come back to the village?
- How did they leave bonded labour - Who or what helped them?
- Are they still out of bonded labour or did they have to go back? As a result of lack alternative employment (for example) Are they still in the village?
- Are they accepted back into the community? What kind of problems you think people who return to the village face – including emotional problems?

12) Can you give any examples of the ways in which your activities as an NGO influence higher-level decision making and implementation (at district, state or national levels) on bonded labour / child labour / trafficking? Can you give examples of what you have done in partnership with other NGOs funded by the Freedom Fund (within the Human Liberty Network)? Has it brought any changes?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Do you think the Human Liberty Network is an effective way to influence policy, why or why not? What are ways to make this network more influential?
- Are there activities performed by the Human Liberty Network that you don't find useful, why?

13) What do you know now about what does and does not work in relation to advocacy with local and regional /national policy makers – that you did not know 3 or 4 years ago?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- What messages do you think they are most likely to engage with and what kind of policy response do you think they might display? (E.g. budgetary response, legislation change, enforcement etc.)

14) Thinking about the hotspot model which brings NGOs together to tackle bonded labour / child labour / trafficking, what are the biggest benefits of working in this hotspot model, could you give some examples? What are the drawbacks of working in this hotspot model, could you give some examples? Have you worked with any of the specialist organisations supported by the hotspot (e.g. on livelihoods, legal work or use of community maturity tool) – and if yes, was it helpful in building your organisation's skills?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Before the hotspot, how did NGOs share knowledge and advice to inform each other's work? How has this changed since being part of the hotspot?
- How has being part of the hotspot shaped what your organisation is doing to address bonded labour, could you give some examples?

15) Can you provide any examples of how local institutions have been strengthened to provide support / services at a future point when FF funding might end?

PLEASE ALSO NOTE

- End time of interview
- Was the entire interview conducted in a private space?
- What was the interviewee's mood during the interview? Did they seem relaxed / anxious?
- Was the interview disrupted in any way? Was anyone else present during part of the interview?
- Anything else worth noting?

Annexe 3 Questionnaire for external stakeholders

Categories of participant – interviewees will be drawn from the following groups:

– 10 interviewees in total will be drawn from the following groups:

- District level officials such as Labour officials, CWC, DCPU, senior police (to be tailored)
- Local teachers
- Local health workers
- Local Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members
- Representatives from civil society groups/policy advisors working on similar issues:
- N India: UNICEF in UP and/or Bihar, District Legal Services Authorities, Jeevika program, Jharkhand Anti-Trafficking Network (e.g. Srijan) or in the network in West Bengal
- Other technical experts who have occasionally been paid by FF to provide advice/training to our hotspot NGO partners:
- N India: Justice Ventures International (for all the legal work - quite a substantial piece), Access Livelihoods Consulting
- Government officials

Instructions for interviewing

- At the beginning of the interview you will need to introduce yourself and explain what this study is for
- You should let people know that they do not have to be interviewed, and that they will not be able to be identified from their answers or from any data that we publish
- Then the person nominated for the interview should give his/her prior informed consent for the interview (and also take consent for audio recording)
- Try to interview in a private space where no other individuals can interrupt or overhear
- You should collect their personal details i.e. name, sex, employer, job role (what they do and what their personal position is). Each interview should have a code number, which is both on the interview transcript and on a separate sheet that holds their personal details. Personal details should be kept in secure storage and should not be stored in the same place as the interviews.
- In addition to recording what the person says you should also record any important observations such as 'the participant seemed uncomfortable when discussing x'
- Try to ask the questions in as open a way as possible and to record as much as possible. We advise where possible for audio recordings to be made as back up, but not as the primary source of data as they tend to go wrong. The focus of the interviews should be trying to understand if and how the NGOS or CVCs have made towards reducing or ending bonded labour/ Child labour / trafficking. Prevalence facts will be captured through other mechanisms e.g. participatory statistics data collation.
- For each question ask people how things have changed in the last 3-5 years

Note to interviewers - adapt the interview questions when necessary. If the respondent denies the existence of BL, then continue the interview using alternative phrasing such as:

Bonded Labour => rural workers vulnerable to debt bondage

QUESTIONS

- 19) What is your role within the organisation and how have you come to know the (insert name of local NGO)/s work? What have your interactions been with them and are there any particular activities or issues where you have closely connected?
- 20) Thinking about the issue of bonded labour/ Child labour / trafficking in this region, do you think the situation has changed over the past few years? What changes have you observed, could you please give some examples?—Do you think, bonded labour, trafficking, child labour etc. still exists in this region? If yes, what might be the reasons behind it?)
- 21) Do you know what the NGO/s are doing to tackle this issue? Do you think their work has led to a change to the lives of people affected by bonded labour/ Child labour / trafficking in your region? Which activities (that the NGO/s are carrying out) are most effective?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- List 5 things the NGO does – ask for reflections on these interventions and what is working well and what is not?

Notes to interviewer

- Please specifically check if interviewee (or their colleagues) participated in training sessions organised by the NGO
 - This question is about teasing out how the NGO activities have helped people to avoid or escape bonded labour – i.e. becoming less dependent on loans from the landlord etc.
- 22) Compared to three years ago, have you observed a change in the level of activities in the community to protect villagers from bonded labour/ Child labour/ trafficking? Why do you think this has occurred?

Note to interviewer (this question may not be relevant to those working at district level)

Explore and prompt suggestions

- From your observation is there a higher level of community led activity or do you still think the community is very dependent on the NGO?
- 23) Compared to three years ago, do you think there is now more, less, or maybe a different kind of caste discrimination? Could you give some examples? Do you think NGOs have played a role in this – if so- How? If not, why?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Is there less or more or maybe a different kind of caste discrimination? Tell us about it

24) Compared to three years ago, are women and girls now treated differently in the communities that you work in? Could you give some examples? Do you think NGOs have played a role in this - if so, how? If not, why?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- Can you give examples of things that women and girls can do and achieve which they could not do three years ago?

25) Over the past three years, what are the public services that have improved the most? Are there more, or less villagers now accessing this service? Do you think the NGOs have played a role in this - if so, how? If not, why?

26) For families in your community that are in bonded labour/ Child labour / trafficking what else should be done to help improve their situation? What do you think the NGOs could be doing but are not, or could do better?

Explore and prompt suggestion:

- What do you think the NGOS should have done differently? And how does the programme need to adapt in the future?

27) Compared to 3 or 4 years ago, do you think organisations like yours are more or less willing to talk about and act on bonded labour/ Child labour / trafficking?

Explore and prompt suggestions

- Do you think local politicians are more or less willing to discuss the problem? Is there more discussion in political and professional circles?

28) Do you think NGO services to help trafficking and bonded labour / child labour survivors to recover are helpful - or would you put a greater focus on work in the village to stop the supply of bonded labour?

Explore and prompt suggestions:

- With people who are rescued – do you think they are accepted back into the community and are able to stay out of bonded labour/trafficking?
- Or are local labour and family relationships such that they will be forced back into bonded labour?
- What else could be done to help people stay out of bonded labour/ Child labour / trafficking?

29) Do you think NGOs are accountable and transparent towards communities? Do they involve community members and stakeholders in planning process?

30) Can you give any examples of the ways in which NGO activities have influenced higher-level policy making /decision making and implementation of schemes (e.g. at district or state level) on bonded labour/ child labour / trafficking?

PLEASE ALSO NOTE

- End time of interview
- Was the interview completed in one visit, or multiple visits?
- Was the entire interview conducted in a private space?
- What was the interviewee's mood during the interview? Did they seem relaxed / anxious?
- Was the interview disrupted in any way? Was anyone else present during part of the interview?
- Anything else worth noting?