

2021-2022

RURAL IMPACT REPORT



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CONTEXT



India has been identified as a source, transit and destination area for trafficking. Lack of awareness on the issue combined with the lack of coordination among the police and welfare departments, health, women and children departments pose major hurdles in curbing trafficking in the country.

Though under-researched, there is global consensus that missing persons and trafficking are inter-linked. Missing persons could have been trafficked or those who go missing voluntarily i.e runaways are more vulnerable to being trafficked.

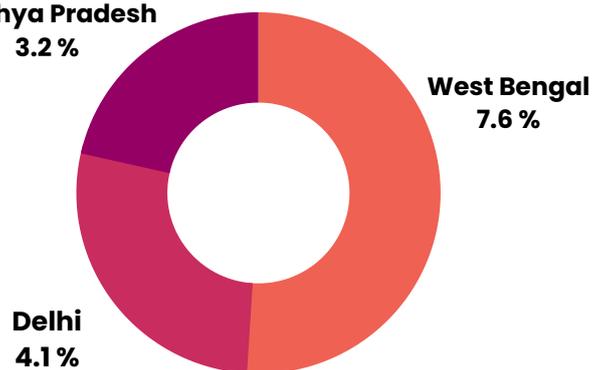
Girl children and adolescents are vulnerable to being trafficked under the guise of child marriage. West Bengal has consistently recorded high numbers of missing persons and child brides.

The rise of the number of missing person reported

2,90,439 2016

3,47,524 2018

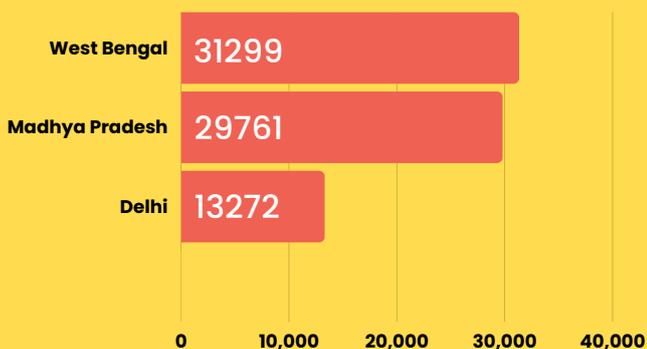
Madhya Pradesh
3.2%



Missing Women in India

According to the records in 2019 by National Crime Records Bureau(NCRB), the total share of cases in West Bengal remains significantly high when compared to states like Madhya Pradesh and Delhi.

State wise data on missing women in India in 2018



ABOUT MISSING

VISION

A world where every girl is safe from sex trafficking

MISSION

Be the motivator and the resource provider and data house for any entity and individual creating awareness against sex trafficking

OBJECTIVES

Prevention of rising demand for non consensual and coercive sex

Combining art and technology in unique ways to engage the public and create awareness against sex trafficking

Become the voice and a thought leader on anti trafficking through leveraging the information and insights collated through research and data analysis



“Missing uses psychological intervention in all its strategies and tools to create that wedge, which shakes the status quo in society. This has a direct correlation to the rise in sex trafficking and the drop in the age of a victim each year.”

**- Leena Kejriwal
Founder, Missing Link Trust**

WHY SUNDARBANS?

Sundarbans is the world's largest delta region that spreads over India and Bangladesh covering around 9630 sq.km. The Sundarbans, is a deltaic plain which has an intricate network of creeks. Natural disasters and adversities in climate have affected sources of livelihood negatively, threatening the very survival of the population dependent on them.

Of Sundarbans' 29 blocks, Kultali ranks **29th** on the Standard of Living Ranking in Infrastructure Development as per the states Human Development report.

The poverty ratio of Kultali-

46.36%*

*pushing the poverty rank to 24 amongst the 29 blocks

With limited resources and options in attaining a livelihood, the women and girls in this region face more hardships than anyone else.

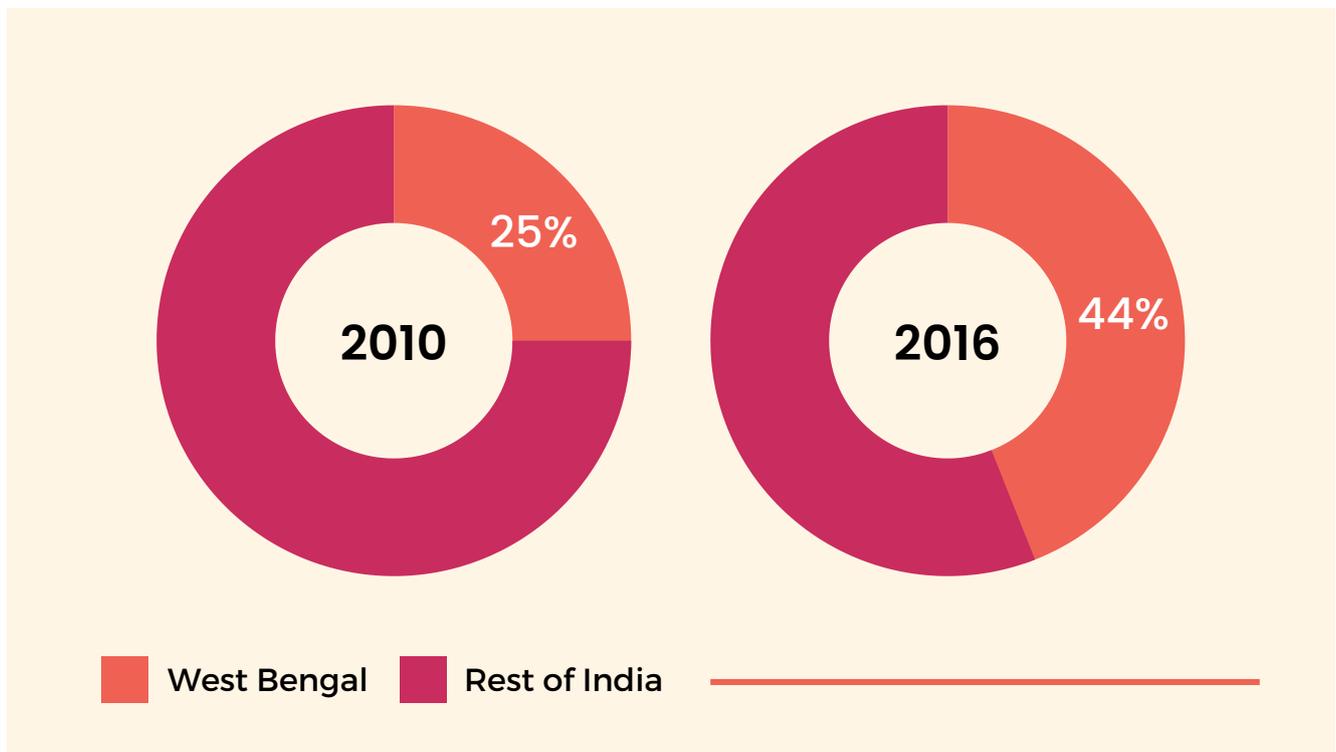


- Sundarbans lies low in the coastal zone and seasonal disasters ravage the lands frequently leaving people in utter deprivation.
- These factors create an environment of vulnerability that traffickers take advantage of. Traffickers and procurers approach vulnerable women and families and promise them a well paying job in a city. But once the woman leaves her home for this job, she is trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation or sexual slavery.
- Traffickers also pretend to fall in love with women and ask them to run off with them to a city. Once they reach the city, the men are never to be seen again by the women and they are sold to commercial sexual exploitation.
- Child marriage is another strategy of traffickers to lure young, under age girls. Families that are desperate to reduce the number of mouths to feed or are unable to pay for the education of their children are willing to marry their girls off. Traffickers use this to their advantage to traffic underage girls.

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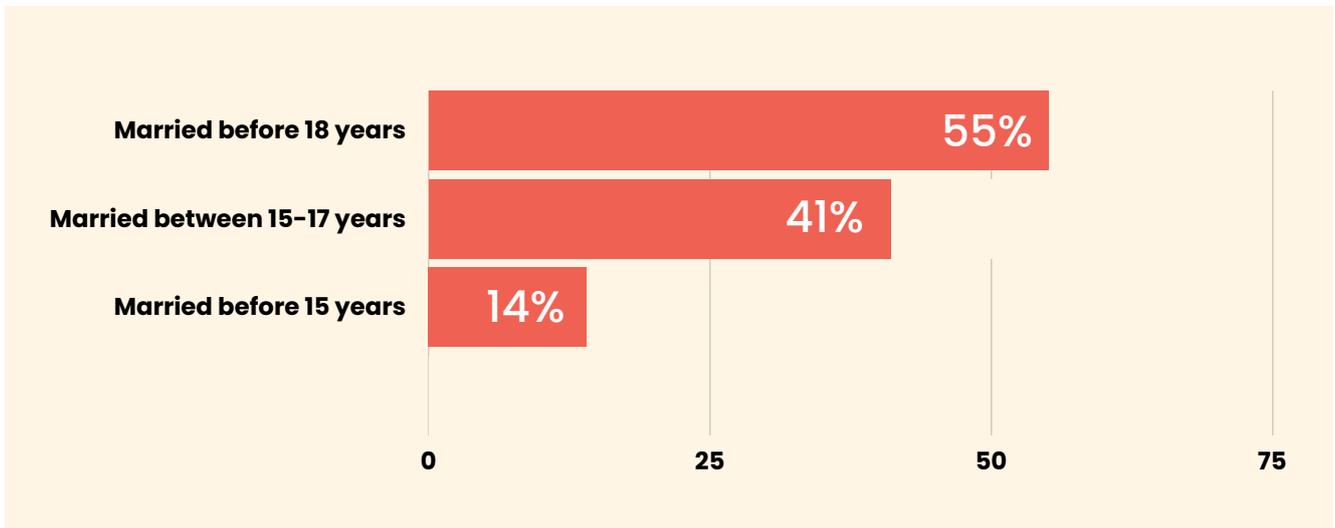


Understanding Trafficking



- **West Bengal accounted for 25% of India's trafficking cases between 2010 and 2016. In 2016, the state recorded a whopping 44% share of the total cases related to human trafficking in India.**
- Taking a look at the human trafficking victims, it has been found that trafficking is not always forceful and unwilling in nature. Several villages across West Bengal have broker rackets who offer financial aid to extremely financially backward families and purchase kids and sell them off to the sex market.
- Moreover, West Bengal shares porous, international borders with Bangladesh and Nepal. With the easy access to the borders, West Bengal acts as the point of transit to the other cities.
- The trauma and stigma associated with trafficking is way beyond measure and the way to prevent this is through systematic awareness of those who make up 'society'.
- Considering the geopolitical scenario of the state and the threat of trafficking, better access to education, awareness, social security and empowerment are the needs of the hour for every woman in this state.

Understanding Child Marriage



- According to UN reports, 55% of currently married women aged 20-24 in West Bengal married before 18 years, 41% married between 15 and 17 years and 14% married before 15 years. **One in three of the world's child brides live in India.**
- West Bengal is home to 22 million child brides, despite the significant increase in female literacy levels and narrowing gender gap in literacy rates.
- COVID-19 has intensified this issue. Between March and August 2020, the national childline, 1098 received 92000 calls on child abuse and exploitation in 11 days. 30% of the reported cases were of violence and child abuse, said Harlin Walia, Deputy Director of Childline India.

CASE STUDY

Sarathi Shaw, a student of class 8 lost her mother to suicide. She and her brother moved in with their grandparents. This lockdown took a heavy toll on her grandmother who felt forced to marry Sarathi off to a middle-aged man. When MISSING heard about this, Sarathi being 14 years of age and this being a child marriage, she was sent back to her home by the team and her grandmother was counselled against it. Sarathi is now staying with her father and has also been admitted to a school and MISSING regularly follows up on her.

APPROACH: EMPOWERMENT

Understanding the region and the specific concerns of this location, MISSING identified that the intervention to prevent trafficking and help survivors would tackle the following :



Raise **awareness** among the population of the region and share with them how to identify and protect themselves from being trafficked



Provide **skill training** and **employment opportunities** to reduce vulnerability



Provide **legal assistance to survivors** and help them return to their homes



Get to the root of the issue - raise awareness and counsel against child marriage, domestic violence and other issues that make girls and women more vulnerable



Awareness and Counselling Sessions

Addressing the problem :

Trafficking is a threat to mental health along with the physical health of the person. Research from various countries shows that depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm and attempted suicide are common among survivors of trafficking. (Source: *The Hindu*)

Project :

MISSING has been raising awareness in Kultali to prevent vulnerable young girls and women from being trafficked. These awareness workshops include discussions on understanding gender, gender-based discrimination, rights of women, trafficking and how the entire trafficking nexus operates. Further, through the workshops, it identifies adolescents/women who are survivors of trafficking or women who are vulnerable due to poverty, lack of education and awareness. It then helps empower these vulnerable women by counseling them, providing skill training to become financially independent and provide alternate means of livelihood.



CASE STUDY

Lilufa Molla, a resident of Kultali block in South 24 Parganas lodged a domestic violence complaint on September, 2020 against her husband. She was married four years prior when she was 17 years old, and today has a son. In the past four years she was repeatedly beaten up by her husband. She was tied up, thrashed, chained to the gas cylinder and threatened for her life. Boiled water and oil were thrown at her and the room was set on fire. She was locked in a room and her husband took her child away. MISSING has been providing her support and provides for her expenses for travel to the Baruipur Court.

Women Empowerment Centres

Addressing the problem :

Women empowerment is a radical approach concerned with transforming power relations in favour of female gender, it can change the social dynamics of the community. It is through financial inclusion that can help the women fight against the vulnerability to make their own decisions.

Kultali being a remote block in South 24 Parganas, is the hotbed of trafficking in the state. To prevent this, it is crucial to provide livelihood opportunities. Empowered women would be less vulnerable to trafficking, sex abuse and exploitation

Project :

To prevent trafficking, it is crucial to provide livelihood and entrepreneurial opportunities and ensure financial empowerment of vulnerable community members.

Missing has two Women Empowerment Centres (WEC) - in Madhya Gurguria and Madhusudanpur to provide livelihood skills to vulnerable women and girls and to disrupt the status of trafficking from this area. It is believed that women, if provided with dignified sources of income, can have a better life. It would then not lead to the early child marriages and trafficking that is rampant. During the Covid-19 outbreak the Centre has seen 55 more women enrolling in the Rural Program of the organisation. Financial autonomy leads to equality in the family dynamics and helps change the social dynamic of the region. These Centres act as a safe space and help the women educate their children.



**120** women enrolled in Madhya Gurguriya**86** women enrolled in Madhusudanpur

- A total of 120 women are being enrolled in Madhya Gurguriya (Bhasha) Centre, of which 55 women are presently being trained and 37 are very regular.

- In Madhusudanpur the number of listed women are 86, of which 48 women are being trained presently and 21 are very regular. These women are currently being trained in the centres in stitching, tailoring, and bag making. Apart from that they are trained to stitch shirts, salwar and items required in daily necessities like pillow covers.

**1 lakh+**
Bags

- A total of 1 lakh+ bags have been made by the women against orders.

- Women are able to earn a monthly stipend, enabling them to support their families.

- Despite the COVID-19 setback, MISSING's Women Empowerment Centres (WECs) continued to provide vocational training and awareness programs to vulnerable women and survivors from across 10 villages under Kultali Block (Madhya Gurguria, Bhuvanewari, Dakshin Duragpur, Debipur, Purba Gurguria, Baikunthapur, Jwalaberiya, Chuprijhara, Ambika Nagar, Madhusudanpur).

**5500+**
Reusable
Masks**MASK MAKING AND DISTRIBUTION**

- **Impact:** The ladies completed orders for 5500+ reusable masks and were able to receive remuneration against the orders completed individually. 1,000 masks were provided to the Community for a COVID Awareness and Mitigation Program covering 8 villages conducted by the Trust from November - December 2020.

CASE STUDY

Suchitra Shaw, aged 33 has been a prominent face in the Women Empowerment Centre since last two years. She had enrolled herself in the centre and was very eager to be a part of the Centre. When asked about how the Centre helped her, she said that now she feels more confident and can earn for her family of four members including her husband, a farmer and two sons. She could send her children to schools and now exhibits ownership of her work.

Digital Empowerment Centres

Addressing the problem :

Youth in rural India are deprived of the benefits of modern technology, simply because they cannot afford to access it. Thousands of students in government schools in these areas lose out on the benefits of computer education, a vital skill to shape their future.



3-Month Training Program

for ever youth under the Digital program
run in partnership with



South 24 Parganas
Kultali Block



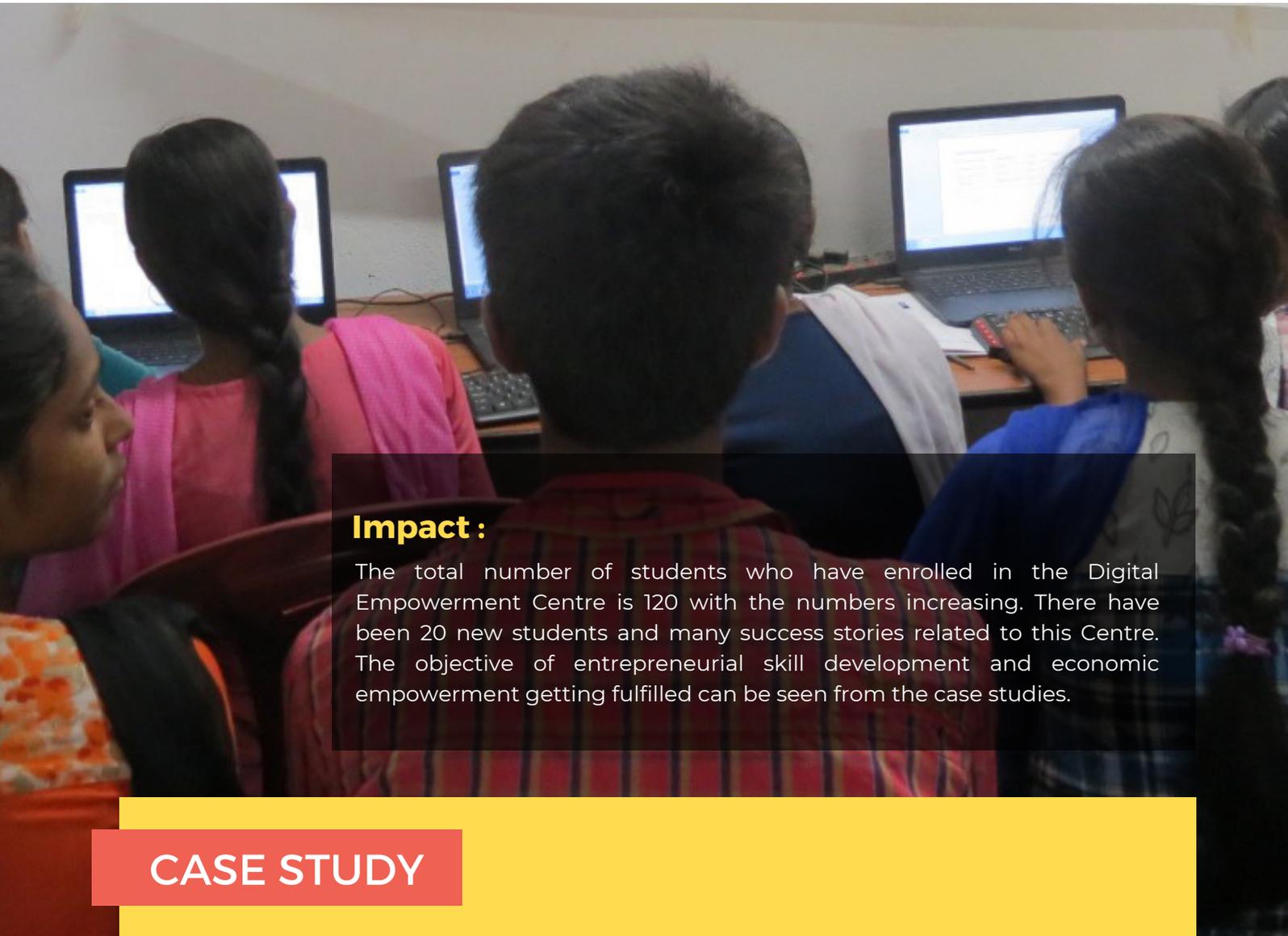
120
Beneficiaries

Project :

The Digital Empowerment Centre in Madhusudanpur has been built in collaboration with the Digital Empowerment Foundation. The Centre has been providing skill training, digital literacy education and more importantly safe spaces for vulnerable children and adolescents from the communities to come together, learn and build their skills. In their efforts to do that, they have influenced the youth who now think it to be an opportunity to learn and apply it in their daily lives.

This training gives them the opportunity to pursue entrepreneurial skill development and economic empowerment and there have been reports of a few students of the Digital Empowerment Centre running their own business in setting up digital centres to link Aadhar Card.



**Impact :**

The total number of students who have enrolled in the Digital Empowerment Centre is 120 with the numbers increasing. There have been 20 new students and many success stories related to this Centre. The objective of entrepreneurial skill development and economic empowerment getting fulfilled can be seen from the case studies.

CASE STUDY

Sandipa Shyamol, 19 years old could never understand the importance of education and how it can shape her future, give her abilities to dream and make them successful. She left going to school and was left with no hope. Her desire to help the family financially seemed a distant and far fetched dream. She lacked the basic Computer Skills required to land her a decent job. When she heard about the Centre, she enrolled herself in the Basic Computer Training Course by DEF in the MISSING Centre. With the training she has been able to have a job in the general store and sustain her family.

Purnima, a 16 year old girl studying in class 12 found it very difficult to sustain her educational expenses post the cyclone. Her father being a farmer with a meagre amount of 4000/- per month to sustain a family of four people was finding it difficult to maintain her expenses. She has enrolled herself in the Digital Empowerment Centre with a hope to learn and earn in the long run to sustain herself.

Swadhikar Youth Program



Addressing the problem :

Children, especially those from poor families, are most vulnerable to trafficking. While addressing the objective of child trafficking, abuse and exploitation it was understood how important it is to have a community of youths being the leaders.

The proportion of students coming from SC, ST, OBC and other backward classes residing in the regions have a high dropout rate. The reason can be attributed to poor infrastructure, non-adaptability to the teaching learning process and consequent alienation from the education system, detention in the same class and more importantly pressure to join work force as a child labour

Low human development characterizes the Sundarbans region, with wide inequities in multiple arenas including educational attainment, work participation, and gender-based violence which further exacerbate the grave issue of sex trafficking.

Project :

MISSING provides training to vulnerable youth for leadership, capacity building in the form of entrepreneurship skill development and youth-led advocacy on social issues. Through the community awareness workshops regularly conducted, it engages with the youth to equip them with the knowledge and skills to overcome vulnerabilities and risks which empower them to become catalysts for social transformation.

Impact :

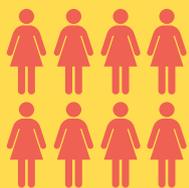
- **Mobilising 156 vulnerable youth across 9 villages** (Madhusudanpur, Gurgurya Bhuvaneshwari, Deulbari Debipur, Maipith Baikunthapur, Debipur, Maipith Nagenabad, Madhya Gurguria, Kantamari, Gopal Ganch)
- **Empowering them to become community leaders in the age group of 13-20.**

TRAINING VULNERABLE YOUTH FOR LEADERSHIP AND YOUTH-LED ADVOCACY ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Creating youth partners on-ground as ambassadors and advocates for community programs focussed on social issues; giving the youth community a voice and be agents of change.

We now have 155 young girls across 6 villages who have found their voice and are helping other girls find theirs. This has resulted in a difference in the child marriage in the villages where our Swadhikar Youths work, impacting the lives of girls.

On an average, every month, 3-4 girls report conversation in the family regarding their marriage wherein they have been able to convince their parents otherwise and to let them continue with their education.



155
young girls



**South 24 Parganas
Kultali Block**



Missing Awareness and Safety School program



Project:

To address this, the youth leaders are undergoing training for the **MISSING Awareness and Safety School Program (MASSp)**. The Program sensitizes and educates young adolescents' about various pertinent issues in a systematic manner. Through the program they will become aware about the legal and public discourse on issues surrounding adolescents' sexuality, gender-based discrimination and violence.

MASSp inspires them to become catalysts in spreading awareness among their peers and families. They will be equipped with a know-how of legal recourse and the skills for community mobilization to drive behavioural change.

It is designed not only to educate learners about forms of abuse and exploitation but also to create awareness about social norms and their contemporary manifestations that shape our environment. The Program also provides the safe space for them to make choices, voice their concerns and clarify myths.



6000
students

at the government schools in Kultali Block in the South 24 Parganas in West Bengal, since 2018

Impact :

The Program is conducted by the Swadhikaar Youth leaders across multiple villages which have high occurrences of child marriage and sex trafficking and will contribute to reduction in cases. They will create safe spaces for community members and report cases to concerned authorities.

The Program curriculum is broken down and adapted for the requirements of the community and are in sync with the sensibilities and social evolution of the community. There is continuous impact assessment throughout the program in the form of quick surveys, feedback, interactive questionnaires etc. The ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) Questionnaire is embedded to identify childhood experiences of abuse and neglect and levels of risks of health and social problems in the regions the program is implemented in.



Impact Analysis from offline sessions
(On an awareness scale of 1-10)

2-3 average awareness rating **BEFORE** the sessions

6-7 average awareness rating **AFTER** the sessions



PROJECTS UNDER COVID-19

Addressing the problem:

With the Covid-19 pandemic ravaging the globe the vulnerable people of the Sundarbans were left with only struggles. The distant lands and the pockets of the South 24 Parganas were left with no savings and a complete stop in the income for a majority of the people residing. There was an acute shortage of food resources, leading to communities constantly battling for daily necessities in the region.

MISSING continued to implement the overarching objectives of skill training program and awareness initiative against sex trafficking under the Rural Livelihood Program. Under worsening situations, the following projects were implemented.

UNICEF PROGRAM

Addressing the problem :

COVID-19 is more than a health crisis; it is also an information and socio-economic crisis. The pandemic and the associated response have prompted the deepest global recession in nearly a century and pushed an estimated 70-100 million more people into extreme poverty

Project :

In collaboration with the UNICEF RCCE (Risk Communication and Community Engagement), the Swadhikaar Youth Group implemented an awareness program in the months of September, October and November, 2021. The objective was to spread awareness and reach as many households as possible. The programme reached door-to-door, provided masks and sanitizer. It also helped to mitigate the rumours associated with the virus and drove the requirement of preparedness in the community. It conducted loudspeaker announcements in communities and used whatsapp broadcasts to send information.



Impact :

UNICEF RCCE Program reached approximately **12,500 beneficiaries in 12 villages** Purba Gurguria, Madhya Gurguria, Shyam Nagar, Dakshin Durgapur, Madhavpur, Debipur and others with **25 volunteers**. The volunteers included **16 community members and 9 youth leaders** who conducted **5000 door to door visits**.

The Youth Volunteers today are more equipped with stakeholder management and problem identification. It also gives the youth of the region the opportunity to financially support themselves in these difficult times. This could not have been possible without such programs, said one of the team members of MISSING working with the ground team in Kultali.

TECH MAHINDRA KITCHEN- YAAS RELIEF

Assessing the problem :

For the past year and a half, the community has been combating the threefold challenges of COVID-19, cyclones and ecology conservation programs. The economic toll, the pandemic has had on the region has been devastating.

Reverse migration along with a lack of any foreseeable income, acute shortage of food resources, and loss of connectivity has led to communities constantly battling for daily necessities in the region.

Project :

Sunderbans this time was ravaged in a way that distribution of ration was not an option. The Ration Kits for a family was not always sufficient as it had a fixed amount of dry rations for use. Moreover, the salt intrusion left no hope for the people there to cook for themselves. Thus, MISSING in partnership with TechMahindra started a community kitchen project to help the families. Here they could cook and have food. From the months of June to July, it reached over **670 beneficiary families (3600 members)** through our kitchens in Uttar Debipur, Purba Gurguria and Shyamnagar, providing them 3 meals daily for 3 days. The women of the Kultali block took the responsibility of the execution. It was a way for involving the stakeholders and empowering women.



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