



# Northern India Hotspot Annual Report

## 2019



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REPORT DATE: APRIL 2020

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## 1. Operating context

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In 2019, the government did not bring the Trafficking of Persons Bill back to parliament. However, in addition to local work with policymakers to provide information about the importance of the Bill, Northern India partners brought evidence to a national consultation organised in November 2019 by the India Working Group against Human Trafficking, meeting with 18 MPs of different parties from 11 states. The event gave a platform to survivors as well as NGOs to connect and discuss with key policymakers about the Trafficking Bill.

An outbreak of encephalitis and floods in partners' project areas disrupted work in mid-2019 for several weeks and necessitated the adoption of emergency measures to assist the affected communities.

The preparations and the polling process for the national elections held in April dominated the first half of 2019. It diverted state resources and attention away from routine work and activities that required government collaboration slowed down.



## 2. Progress Towards Systems Change

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### Government performance

#### Strengthening the Integrated Child Protection Scheme

Freedom Fund partners have been working to improve the government's Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), which has the potential to protect vulnerable children from trafficking by establishing a child protection system that connects all administrative levels from the village level to state level.

In February 2019, a series of interventions by Freedom Fund partners over the past few years finally contributed to impact: there was a 100% increase in the ICPS budget, which will have a nation-wide effect on child protection. In April 2018, PRAYAS along with the Human Liberty Network (HLN) provided information to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) regarding the need to increase budgetary allocations under the ICPS. Particular attention was drawn to low salaries and delays in disbursement. Within a few weeks, the MWCD invited States' comments on salary revision. Later in the year, the MWCD released its own report where it included the recommendations provided by HLN partners on these two points. In subsequent months, partners reported a significant on-the-ground improvement in implementation as salary payments by the MWCD to Childline work (the mechanism that rescues children from situations of danger/need) became more predictable enabling them to support staff to deliver better services to children. Childline services run throughout the country and benefit thousands of children in need.

Partners are also ensuring that the ICPS delivers tangible on-the-ground change by supporting the establishment and effective functioning of the Child Protection Committees (CPCs): through ADITHI's work in Sitamarhi, the District Child Protection Unit has directed all CPCs to prepare and implement action plans. Through ADITHI's work in Gopalganj, five village leaders have issued orders to ensure CPC meetings are held regularly with the specific objective of preventing children migrating for labour. MSEMVS worked with the District Magistrate of Bhadohi to obtain orders to all the key District stakeholders (particularly those responsible for child protection) to hold convergence meetings to assess how girls need special protection and to deliver this protection. In Mirzapur District, facilitated by ROSA, the Village CPC filed complaints of corruption in the distribution of mid-day meals (an important means of improving school attendance from vulnerable populations). The consequent arrest of the Principal and village head led to an improvement in the quality of mid-day meals throughout the district thereby causing a ripple effect beyond the Freedom Fund project areas.

#### Compensation for survivors of bonded labour

Once liberated from situations of bondage, accessing rehabilitation compensation is vital to ensure that people do not fall back into situations of bonded labour. As a result of outreach by MSEMVS, in April the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued an order to District Magistrates across Uttar Pradesh to act on the rehabilitation of bonded labourers. Apart from providing information to the NHRC, MSEMVS also prepared the ground for implementation of the order by reaching out to district labour departments. This strategic interplay resulted in the State government issuing an order to District Heads to expedite compensation in bonded labour cases in 13 vulnerable districts. The order went a long way in moving bonded labour rehabilitation up the

priority list of government officials. Compensation was promptly released to 24 labourers - some of the cases had been pending for more than five years.

Similarly, MSEMVS' efforts with the NHRC further resulted in an order seeking explanations from the Administrative Heads and Labour Commissioners in two highly vulnerable Uttar Pradesh districts regarding lack of government efforts on compensation and rehabilitation. This initiative tested MSEMVS' ability to walk the fine line between supporting government efforts while using national mechanisms to make them more effective: following the NHRC's intervention, some government officials stopped cooperating with MSEMVS but through persistent follow-up, MSEMVS continued to demonstrate its value to the Department by supporting it to meet the standards laid down by the NHRC.

### Activating the financial sponsorships scheme for vulnerable children

The financial sponsorship scheme is a government cash transfer to children in need of care and protection. By sharing data that demonstrated the non-functioning of the scheme, ROSA obtained an order from the Azamgarh District Administration to local authorities to identify children in need. 41 children received first-time benefits following the activation of this critical scheme. Similarly, MSEMVS' outreach to the Labour Department and the Village Child Protection Committee resulted in the activation of the government child sponsorship scheme in Varanasi. Two child survivors of bonded labour received the first-ever sponsorship in this district.

### Changing the system through circulars

Hotspot partners have collectively decided to encourage officials to promote policy improvements through circulars and directives. These written mandates ensure a sustainable shift in the government's approach towards trafficking, expand the impact of partners' best practices to non-project areas and help mitigate the risk of non-continuation of good practices when officials are transferred. Most of the circulars allocate additional resources and government attention to enable effective implementation of established policy rather than to change policy.

Over the past six months, partners have increasingly pursued circulars and directives to achieve systems change. Some examples include:

- police stations ordered to be particularly vigilant against child marriage on "auspicious days", days on which marriages are usually planned;
- a circular to strengthen CPCs, a step forward towards effective safety nets for children;
- a notice from block-level government to village authorities holding them accountable for children leaving the village for labour;
- an order setting up a Committee against child marriage in Azamgarh District which is expected to collect district-wide data on child marriage, fix responsibility on a district-level official to prevent child marriages and bring in civil society perspectives.

However, though there is often formal change through circulars, partners still need to make sure this is translated into substantive on-the-ground change. For instance, a State-wide directive on the ban on the employment of children in dance-troupes had no impact in East Champaran until NIRDESH worked with the District Administration to issue a specific order fixing the responsibility for its implementation on the Child Welfare Police. The order specifically guided them to monitor these troupes, inspect their licenses, rescue any children still being exploited and take legal action against the owners.

## Supporting effective law enforcement

Community policing can help create a protective environment that reduces the risk of exploitation. With AANGAN's encouragement, the Bihar police have committed support for a district-wide program across Patna where police stations will coordinate with AANGAN-supported women's and girls' safety groups to assist police with risk-mapping of communities through a gender and child protection lens.

Expedited trials could potentially address a key gap in rehabilitation of bonded labourers because linking rehabilitation packages with conviction of perpetrators often results in delay in compensation critical to victim recovery. MSEMVS and its survivor collective, are leveraging their membership of the District Bonded Labour Vigilance Committee to generate administrative willingness for summary trials, and this initiative has expanded beyond Freedom Fund project areas. While summary trials can negatively skew the incentive structure as the State, rather than employers, pays for victim recovery, and the low sentences and fines cannot deter employers, given the judicial backlog, these expedited trials hold the best hope for bonded labourers to receive the resources they need for rehabilitation. However, the hotspot is also supporting efforts to improve the working of the criminal justice system so that victims can receive compensation as well as justice, and perpetrators can be deterred.

MSEMVS' multi-stakeholder meetings with Labour and police departments resulted in the setting up of six child-friendly police stations in Bhadohi and Varanasi – leading to the actual designation of Child Welfare Officer – a legal provision that was not implemented. MSEMVS provided initial handholding support to these officers. This has caused a ripple effect beyond the Freedom Fund project areas as the child-friendly police stations have been replicated in some non-working areas and there has been a noticeable improvement in their dealings with children.

## Community Organisation

Freedom Fund partners continue their important work to empower communities to take collective action against discriminatory practices and gain access to vital services to address vulnerabilities. This work has also shown to bring normative change among communities about the issue of child labour and trafficking. Community Vigilance Committees (CVCs) have played an important part in this.

Below are a few examples of how, over the past year, communities, with partner support, have pushed for their own liberation:

### Communities stand against child labour

- Safe Migration Brigades consisting of children and young people are taking the lead in tracking migration in 42 villages. In one example of their alertness, nine children were prevented from being trafficked for child labour in Gujarat. (MSEMVS)
- Based on a demand by communities, two Gram Sabhas (in Minapur and Manikpur) declared their panchayats child-labour free and the village leadership negotiated with local shopkeepers not to employ children (IDF)

## Communities support rescues and legal cases

- Communities secured the arrests of two local traffickers, rescued children being trafficked to Jharkhand through the CPC, provided intelligence to police on child labour rescues and filed complaints against corrupt police for demanding bribes in return for information about the children's court cases. (Centre DIRECT)
- Following awareness sessions around child marriage, trained community members led action against child marriages and filed police complaints for missing children. (ADITHI)

## Communities hold government to account on vital services and infrastructure

Effective action to secure entitlements have caused several ripple effects beyond the Freedom Fund's project areas. A few examples:

- Thirteen CVCs collectively complained against a corrupt local leader who was siphoning off funding. Not only was the leader arrested and the money returned but the CVCs leveraged this opportunity to educate people in the neighbouring wards to make sure public money was spent on public services (FSS).
- Communities challenged a common practice of village leaders who used to usurp the housing instalments of the villagers and based on a complaint by CVC leaders to the District Magistrate, one village leader was arrested (MSEMVS).

In these cases, effective action generated social demand and political will beyond the Freedom Fund's project areas.

## Communities prioritise education

- Some communities now monitor the village schools and have secured improvement in the attendance of teachers as well as the curriculum. (IDEA)
- One village-level Child Protection Committee is tracking school attendance of the children of brick kiln workers (ROSA)

## Communities stand against caste discrimination

- Training to 27 Dalit leaders on rights and entitlements has enabled them to fight discrimination, and now four of these leaders are standing for local elections. (RBMUS)
- Following outreach by Musahar communities to the District Magistrate, 42 Musahar families received their land rights (for the first time in a very long while) and a longstanding application for a road was sanctioned. Moreover, the District Magistrate has begun to personally monitor initiatives like Upasana Diwas aimed at the inclusion of Dalit voices in governance, directed officials to hold registration camps in villages thereby increasing ease of access and adopt villages for improved governance. The impact rippled beyond the 22 project villages reaching 80 villages in total. (ROSA)

## Communities make progress against gender discrimination

- Communities in Musahri and Minapore blocks effectively advocated for wage equality and 50 women in five villages now receive equal wages (IDF)
- In RBMUS-supported communities, higher number of girls are being enrolled in formal schooling following their bridge education demonstrating the community's changing gender norms

Communities use collective pressure on economic and worker rights issues

- Communities in Musahri and Minapore blocks effectively advocated for wage equality and 50 women in five villages now receive equal wages (IDF)
- One community worked with the Labour Department to pressure employers to pay back wages. (FSS)
- Another community refused to work for exploitative employers and instead started their own agrobusiness enterprise which has resulted in better wages and improved health conditions. (PGS)

Communities recognise the benefit of rehabilitation and reintegration

- As a result of Centre DIRECT's persistent efforts, 80% of returning children in their community received support from their parents to access rehabilitation services rather than be pressured to return to work.

Communities use data to release government funds to improve health services

- CVC members effectively negotiated with the Gram Panchayat and the Health Department officials to release some of the untied funds to improve regularity of health services. The demand, accepted by government officials, was supported by a gap-analysis and joint action plan that communities developed with IDF's support.



## 3. Hotspot Outputs & Outcomes

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### 3.1 Headline Results

**21,989 persons received new access to government services:** In 2019, Freedom Fund partners worked both at community level to generate social demand and at government level to support efforts to make sure essential government services were smoothly delivered. This year's numbers represent a 43% increase over the previous year, much of it due to specific focus on labour registrations and access to health insurance – key factors in reducing vulnerability to debt bondage.

**124 additional communities became resilient to debt bondage and trafficking,** impacting a total of 29,781 people. Notably, the example set by these communities resulted in ripple effects to neighbouring non-project communities. Their actions demonstrated how government can work for the poor and inspiring others to begin registering for entitlements, take action against corrupt officials, stop child labour, encourage better functioning of schools and other community-level protection mechanisms.

**30 policy changes informed by grassroots data and evidence:** Connecting grassroots voices and evidence with decision-makers led to tangible changes in the way policy was implemented. These policy changes spanning national, state and district level brought more resources and focused attention to interventions on child protection, child marriage, child labour, labour rights, health insurance coverage, child sexual exploitation, Dalit inclusion, minimum wages etc.

**525 media stories generated:** Through a proliferation of media stories the program increased its focus on bringing issues of vulnerability and bondage into the mainstream to generate widespread social demand for a debt bondage free India.

### 3.2 Progress towards hotspot objectives

#### Hotspot Objective 1: Reducing the prevalence of human trafficking and bonded labour

The hotspot continues to make progress toward reducing the prevalence of human trafficking and bonded labour in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh by empowering communities to not only access government entitlements that reduce their vulnerability to exploitation but also to resist and raise their voices to change the systems that enable exploitative practices.

#### Demonstrating collective power against key drivers of child labour and bonded labour

Freedom Fund-supported research in Bihar has found that medical costs are among the main causes for indebtedness among adults, increasing their vulnerability to bonded labour. To address this, many partners have worked on enabling communities to access government healthcare. For example, through IDF's efforts, community members effectively petitioned local authorities to secure regular healthcare visits; ADITHI secured activation of district-level committees to monitor healthcare in Sitamarhi; DUNCAN's support of communities resulted in access to regular paramedical services. MSEMVS, IDEA and PGS supported communities to

access government-funded healthcare. Notably, two community members from MSEMVS's project areas accessed around \$3,000 in healthcare benefit.

BMVS, with support from our policy-engagement partner, helped ease access to health insurance through a district-wide directive that moved the registration process closer to vulnerable communities and provided the necessary resources for effective implementation. Though the circular merely expanded on provisions in schemes and directives, it led to a fourfold increase (over the previous three quarters) in registration of applicants as officials became aware of the State-wide directives and their own duties. The circular also caused a ripple effect: now that access to health insurance is easier, BMVS-supported CVCs are able to mobilise communities (outside the FF project area) to demand their rights to government-funded health insurance; BMVS is planning on capitalising on the circular by supporting the district government to register vulnerable communities for health insurance on a mass-scale to reduce vulnerability. This initiative demonstrates how strategic interplay of top-down and bottom-up pressure can drive change.

Partners have also supported communities in reducing vulnerability to other types of debt. For example, PGS helped couples who were intending to get married to hold their ceremonies together, to save on expenses. They also supported grain banks (currently at 64 locations), which have reduced food insecurity for 8,000 people; Centre DIRECT provided legal support to receive government land; and FSS facilitated meetings between communities and banks resulting in extension of safe lines of credit.

### Reducing demand for exploitative practices

Freedom Fund partners are continuing to address the demand for exploitative practices among employers and acceptance of these in the wider community. For example, wedding dance troupes have been found to serve as an entry point for child sexual exploitation. Recent pledges by communities against the hiring of dance troupes resulted in impact beyond project areas. Because the dance troupes perform at weddings which include guests from across the district, their conspicuous absence becomes a topic of conversation and thus raises awareness about this issue. Because dance troupe performances during weddings are a cultural imperative, law enforcement action alone is ineffective and partners' work with communities is critical as described in [this](#) story. Communities are playing a growing role in curbing demand: for instance, in Adithi's project areas, CVCs are monitoring pledges by community members not to hire dance troupes as well pledges by dance troupes not to engage children.

Freedom Fund partners have also successfully engaged directly with business sectors where exploitative conditions are prevalent, including brick kilns, hotels and garages. For example, IDF obtained an agreement against the employment of child labour from the owners of such businesses with employers putting up "No Child Labour" signs on their premises. Similarly, MSEMVS' meeting with 25 brick kiln owners in Varansi resulted in owners inviting MSEMVS to participate regularly in their quarterly meetings and working with them to improve working conditions in the brick kilns.

In July, JVI conducted operations on a red-light area (an area geographically carved out for prostitution) which began with the rescue of children and arrests including six customers, and ended in the shut-down of illegal activities in the area. Following the rescue, JVI worked with police and the community to display warning signs to men entering the area to purchase sex and also mobilised the community to secure the closure of illegal activities thereby ensuring that rescues can be a catalyst for sustainable change in the ecosystem that enables

demand for trafficked girls. The community also advocated that alternative employment be found for those whose livelihood was disrupted by the shutdown.

### Asserting rights and accessing entitlements

The project has enabled communities to assert their rights and create significant value for individuals and communities in terms of land rights, educational scholarships, healthcare, infrastructure etc. Securing access to entitlements is fraught with difficulty and partners have enabled communities to act decisively to secure their due.

Partners innovate to make sure benefits reach the most vulnerable: Refusing to be stymied by a gap in current law which uses 2012 census data to determine beneficiaries of critical health insurance benefits, MSEMVS is using a provision in the Economic and Social Survey to help these families get the benefits important to preventing debt bondage. Similarly, MSEMVS expedited labour registrations under the Building and Other Construction Workers Scheme by using a provision that permits the Labour Enforcement Officer to register 20% of the labourers under their jurisdiction.

FSS mobilised the village authorities and the communities to ensure that government officials prevented middlemen from siphoning off entitlements. BMVS escalated long-pending grievances through the Prime Minister's NaMo App, a mobile-based grievance mechanism, resulting in 250 families gaining prompt access to electricity. BMVS also supports communities in making online applications for entitlements. PGS escalated complaints directly to the Chief Minister's Office through another mobile grievance mechanism app, the IGRS app. The effective use of IGRS has caused a ripple effect the Freedom Fund project areas and has accelerated in the delivery of food grains, toilets and hand pumps.

Spurred by news of successful achievement of land rights in BMVS-project areas, people from neighbouring villages have started approaching CVCs in these areas for assistance with filing land rights applications for 164 families. Similar effects have been noticed with labour registration: following work with the Labour Department, 100 families from BMVS project areas received benefits. These successes caused a ripple effect beyond the Freedom Fund's project areas by generating more social demand and resulting in 700 families receiving benefits.

### Supporting alternative livelihoods

Partners enabled individuals to access new incomes and employment in a wide variety of occupations: collective farming, vermicompost production, mushroom production, animal husbandry, poultry farming, urban micro-enterprises, tailoring, employment in companies and shops, hairdressing, plumbing, jewellery-making, auto repair, tents, pole-barns, hand-pump repairs, rickshaw trolleys, incense sticks etc. Results from new agricultural methods introduced by RBMUS have incentivised non-project villages to adopt similar methods to increase yields. Government officials visited the RBMUS project areas to hear first-hand about the increased yields and encouraged farmers to apply for their entitlements.

### Accessing the legal system

During the year, CENTRE DIRECT supported survivors of child labour to provide more accurate testimony to courts in Jaipur; in three Bihar cases, through TSN's efforts, deterrent sentences ranging from 10-14 years

were awarded for trafficking crimes against children; in one UP case, GURIA secured life imprisonment in a case of trafficking; ADITHI's efforts resulted in a deterrent fine in a child labour case.

### Using policy to achieve change at the local level

MSEMVS leveraged orders by the National Human Rights Commission by ensuring that government officials took the lead in a rescue of 46 bonded labourers. A former survivor, who is part of the survivor collective, provided the information for the rescue and supported the Labour Department officials during the intervention. BMVS's outreach on the Trafficking of Persons' Bill resulted in a member of the CPC initiating efforts to bring a trafficked child back from Delhi.

Authorities in four districts Varanasi, Mirzapur, Chandauli and Bhadohi partnered with MSEMVS to set up block-level CPCs, serve as a mentor-NGO by conducting training and sensitise and review their functioning on a quarterly basis. This training and accountability model gives MSEMVS the opportunity to help the State institutionalise indicators to assess the work of these safety nets for children.

### Hotspot Objective 2: Widening the enabling environment for freedom and improving the effectiveness of government

Over the past six months, Freedom Fund partners have continued to work collaboratively with government to support a system that protects and prevents vulnerable populations from falling into situations of extreme exploitation.

### Improving the local child protection system

The hotspot is supporting government efforts to set up a better functioning child protection system that protects vulnerable children from exploitation and supports those who require recovery support. Partners' offers of logistical and technical support and provision of evidence to relevant local authorities has resulted in closer coordination and better follow up by the government duty bearers. For example, following an inter-State workshop for Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), the CWCs requested several HLN partners to conduct home verifications (check-ups on the address of the child's family and their ability to take back the rescued child) and follow-up of reintegrated children. While CWCs should be requesting district level child protection units (DCPUs) to do such follow-up, DCPUs currently do not have the appropriate resources for these activities. The fact that the CWCs referred to NGOs is an improvement to a lack of follow-up previously, but in the long-term, the program hopes that DCPUs can take on these responsibilities.

Child Protection Committees (CPCs) are official committees mandated to exist at all local levels (ward, village, panchayat and block-levels) and are responsible for identifying children who are at risk of exploitation, abuse or neglect; they are an integral part of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme. Unfortunately, many of the CPCs are not functional or have not been established yet. Partners like NIRDESH, BMVS, RBMUS and ADITHI supported the government in the formation of Child Protection Committees at different levels. ADITHI's efforts, supported by Centre DIRECT and BMVS, resulted in the Sitamarhi District Magistrate taking tangible steps to improve the functioning of CPCs. Following this intervention, deadlines were set for their formation and calendars of meeting dates were released in advance and CPC members have approached partners for training on how to carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Partners also assist government authorities with cases that require immediate attention and rescue. For example, PRAYAS's efforts with the Railway authorities resulted in the railway officials initiating rescues of child labourers and putting in place coordination measures. Similarly, at the request of Child Protection Units in several districts, TSN provided data on the number of children in brothel areas, which informed the government plans to set up night shelters.

Following outreach by Program Advisor Abhijit De, based on evidence-generated by partners, the Bihar Labour Commissioner issued a circular to process the compensation of returning child labourers from Jaipur.

Apart from government, partners like RBMUS and Prayas are also cultural gatekeepers like religious leaders to combat child marriage. Following the cascading of one training by the chief priests themselves, junior priests are growing reluctant to perform child marriages.

### ICPS Pilot in Gaya district

The Freedom Fund began implementing a pilot project aiming to demonstrate how the government's Integrated Child Protection Scheme could be made effective, to protect children from trafficking and child labour and help reintegrate rescued children. In 12 villages in Gaya district, the pilot enables community members to gather information about vulnerable households and work with them to submit applications under the ICPS sponsorship scheme as well as other household assistance programs. The sponsorship scheme should provide Rs.2,000 per month to vulnerable children, but hardly any payments have been made across the state, especially because of complex eligibility criteria. The groups then follow up the demands made. At the same time, partners for the pilot (JVI and Centre Direct) are making the official village Child Protection Committees become active and track their performance through an online dashboard. The project aims to integrate funding for child protection within the village development budget. The project models how statutory bodies could support ICPS to become effective in protecting young people at risk.

### Supporting law enforcement

Freedom Fund partners assist and provide information, where appropriate, to allow law enforcement to follow up on cases of exploitation. In East Champaran, PRAYAS's efforts with the anti-human trafficking police units resulted in a decision that legal action would be taken against dance troupes that hire children, as described above.

Similarly, following an initiative by AANGAN which focused on supporting police to prevent children going missing at fairs, PGS piloted an intervention during the kumbh mela festival to prevent children from going missing and being subsequently trafficked. Law enforcement and religious authorities appreciated the initiative which was covered by [Thomson Reuters](#) and quoted a priest at the mela saying, "it seems like a small intervention but the impact is big. So many sacred activities go on at this event but what can be more sacred than ensuring the safety of children".

In collaboration with the Border Security Force, RBMUS organised an event against child marriage and children employed in dance troupes. RBMUS is now reaching out to each of the 600 participants to equip them to become champions against these types of exploitation in their own areas of influence. Co-hosting these awareness sessions with law enforcement agencies helps to transfer knowledge to the State and secure their action on issues that receive low priority because they are considered social rather than criminal. From July to December, 22 child marriages were prevented in RBMUS project areas.

## Engaging government for action on labour rights

Following outreach by ADITHI and BMVS, the Labour Department obtained a pledge from 40 employers that they would no longer employ child labour - these partners are now monitoring the performance. MSEMVS worked with the UP government to identify out-of-school children and child labourers and support their rehabilitation. PRAYAS's outreach to the Bihar Labour Department resulted in the formation of District-level Child Labour Task Forces - a key first step to securing convergence of government efforts for the rehabilitation and reintegration of child labourers.

In July, at the district-level, by bringing data and evidence to the notice of district authorities, TSN prevented a district from inaccurately being declared child-labour free. The declaration would have significantly reduced State action on child labour but because of TSN's efforts the district has now decided to hold awareness sessions to make the issues of child labour and child marriage visible and also to train stakeholders in how to address these issues.

ROSA worked with the Deputy Labour Commissioner, Azamgarh District and the District Social Welfare Officer to issue a letter to local authorities to organise camps for labour registration and registration of other entitlements like healthcare, pension, land schemes etc. Working with government not only accelerated the labour registration process but also caused a ripple effect beyond the Freedom Fund project areas.

## Participating in government committees:

Involvement in government committees provides partners with the access to influence government policy beyond their project areas. Notably, ADITHI was invited to meetings of the Sitamarhi anti-trafficking police and is also working with local authorities to create a model CPC; MSEMVS was empanelled in the list of NGOs supporting the Labour Department; JVI was appointed as part of the District Inspection Committee for Shelter Homes in Gaya. Three members of MSEMVS-supported survivor collective have been elected to the District Bonded Vigilance Committees - the first time ever survivors have been chosen to represent civil society.

## Leveraging Media

Partners are increasingly able to mobilise media attention to raise awareness about the issue of extreme exploitation. For example, media coverage of TSN's intervention against two forced marriages of children below 15 sent a strong signal against these crimes. Similarly, by securing widespread media coverage of a priest who performed child marriages, TSN is addressing the complicity of key actors in the crime. IDF-supported CVCs reached out to the media to raise issues related to education and livelihoods.

Through CHETNA's efforts, survivors participated in a radio show, which reaches millions of urban listeners. They illustrated trafficking issues through compelling stories and statistics and spoke of the imperative to deter customers from seeking venues and services that are facilitated by traffickers.

## Progress in Strategic Litigation

In August, JVI secured directions from the Patna High Court ordering the Gaya Labour Department to look into the matter of Minimum Wage claims and take legal action including fulfilling their (Labour Department's obligation) to file a complaint under the Minimum Wages Act. The complaints would focus on delivering fair back-wages to the labourers as well as taking action against employers who violate these provisions.

Following this order, JVI then obtained a State-wide order from the Labour Department. The State Labour Department implemented the directions of the Patna High Court by writing to the Gaya Labour Commissioner and sent a copy to ALL District Magistrates in Bihar for their information and action. This litigation and subsequent order have clarified and specified the duties of the Labour Department with regard to bonded labourers and can be used by NGOs throughout Bihar not just our partners. In 2020, JVI will continue working to build government will towards compliance of this judicial order

### Bringing a human rights spotlight to important issues

Engagement with NHRC: Based on cases provided by HLN partners in both Bihar and UP, JVI secured invites for three partners (MSEMVS, BMVS and IDF) to a national workshop held by NHRC to assess the response (rescue, rehabilitation and compensation) of 9 States on bonded labour. These States included Bihar and UP - Bihar was specifically invited by NHRC at JVI's request. JVI's presentation on the difficulties experienced by bonded labourers in receiving compensation as well as the presence of survivors supported by HLN partners was important in keeping the focus on action to reduce the vulnerability of the Musahar community: 1) following the NHRC invite, the Central Government immediately responded to the 9 States' request for funds; and 2) the NHRC made a public assurance to JVI that a letter for action will be forwarded to the Chief Secretary of Bihar - the video is [here](#), the news report of the event is [here](#) and the NHRC official report is [here](#). JVI will now follow-up to ensure that: 1) NHRC passes a direction to the Bihar and UP governments to connect survivors to the non-cash components of the Central Sector Scheme; 2) issue of directions and circulars: 3) release of interim compensation to the survivors present; and 4) implementation of circulars and orders passed by NHRC. As a result of JVI's follow-up work, the NHRC Chairperson sent directions and orders to the Chief Secretary of Bihar to provide time-bound rehabilitation. In a move towards accountability, the Chief Secretary was also directed to provide an action-taken report on the recommendations (in 2020).

Bringing better data to inform decision-making: based on a High Court directive, the Bihar Social Welfare Department was asked to produce a status report of minors engaged in orchestras. In Siwan the Department reported that there were no children in the dance troupes. Adithi, from its cases, provided evidence to the District Magistrate, about the continued employment of children in dance troupes and ensured that accurate data was provided to the High Court. Similarly, following a rescue of bonded labourers in 2018 by Duncan and JVI, the East Champaran district administration is beginning to recognise the existence of bonded labour which it had earlier denied. In the reporting period, the District Administration itself called a review meeting and instructed the Labour Department to submit the status of bonded labour and Central Sector Compensation in the District.

### Hotspot Objective 3: Increasing Civil Society's Capacity for Sustained and Effective Action against trafficking and bonded labour

The Freedom Fund continues to invest in initiatives that build civil society's capacity to collectively and effectively address trafficking and bonded labour in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Technical assistance, organisational capacity support and the convening of our partners in a community of practice are vital components of the program to achieve sustainable change.

## Technical Assistance and Organisational Capacity Support for Freedom Fund partners

Over the past 12 months, the Freedom Fund has continued its strategic support to strengthen CSO capacity to address extreme exploitation in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In this vein, partner staff attended trainings on a large variety of topics, including monitoring and evaluation, prevention of sexual harassment, legal and para-legal training, child protection and safeguarding, formation and functioning of child protection committees, livelihoods, right to food, human rights, gender, child rights, communication, resource mobilisation, investigation, prosecutions, rescues, micro-enterprise scaling, organisational policies, Freedom Fund's global indicators, self-care and stress management, community maturity tool, land rights, teaching pedagogy, evidence-generation, online and traditional marketing, finance and HR policies, management, leadership, documentation, and narrative-building through the media. Furthermore, the Freedom Fund also supported mental health training to select partner staff, livelihoods capacity building to 4 partners and ongoing capacity building on policy work to all partners. Strategic communication training to the MSEMVS-supported survivor collective group has helped them to set priorities. JVI worked with HLN partners to review the effectiveness of Legal Aid Cells and provide targeted capacity building.

Some partners saw tangible benefits of the Organisational Capacity Analysis Tool (OCAT); NIRDESH developed a human resources manual to improve organisational culture and invested in an accounting software to improve the rigour of their financial systems. Partners also conducted several exposure visits to each other's field areas but as these were mostly in the last quarter, the impact of the cross-learning is difficult to measure.

## The Strength of the Human Liberty Network

In addition to the external technical assistance, the hotspot's community of practice, i.e. the Human Liberty Network, continues to become stronger and benefit its individual members and the collective through joint learning and action. In 2019 district-level coordination among partners led to joint media workshops and joint outreach to District Administration on reintegration of returning children. Other collaborations included ROSA and MSEMVS conducting a joint rescue in Gujarat, Prayas and BMVS helping rescue a child from Jammu and Kashmir and Duncan and Prayas working together in Raxaul against child marriage. Partners also share effective models with each other for others to replicate. For example, PGS replicated the Aangan model of child protection at religious festivals while ADITHI is replicating the model for protection of adolescent girls and BMVS is replicating PGS's grain bank model to reduce food insecurity. Partners visited each other's project areas to learn new ideas on legal work, livelihoods, grain banks, work of CVCs in preventing child marriage. Partners have also demonstrated collaboration with non-FF partners, in particular with members of CCHT, a Bihar-wide network of anti-trafficking networks.

In the first half of 2019, HLN Uttar Pradesh increased its reach within the State by expanding its membership by 5 new organisations, taking the total count to 8 active civil society organisations. The new partners, who joined HLN UP, reported greater effectiveness through cross-learning, strength through collaboration and being able to escalate issues to the State level.

## Empowering Survivors for Effective Action

The program grew richer through survivor's insights on policy: survivors in Uttar Pradesh provided insightful feedback on studies conducted on rural employment guarantee schemes, child protection and victim compensation, helped triangulate the findings and craft a way forward as the network selects entry points for

government collaboration on change. Similarly, two female survivors of bonded labour shared with a Bihar Minister their journey from debt bondage to becoming leaders in their community and preventing child labour. In another instance, through the forum provided by the India Working Group, survivors from North India spoke to 15 Members of Parliament about the urgent need to pass the Trafficking of Persons Bill.

**Survivors withstand exploitation:** One survivor of bonded labour filed a complaint with the District Magistrate against exploitation by his owner who retaliated against him and his co-villagers. The entire community stood firm against the owner, forced him to leave them unharmed and then leveraged this incident to cause a ripple effect beyond the project communities: the message spread to all neighbouring brick kilns that they would face the collective force of the communities who were now against bonded labour. (ROSA)

**Survivors liberate others:** The survivor collective, Azad Shakti Abhiyan, has built strong relationships with the police and secured their assistance in several rescues. Moreover, seeing their journey from bondage to liberators, the police are motivated to conduct rescues and share these inspirational stories with others. Azad Shakti Abhiyan has also made sure that lack of cooperation from government officials does not deter them: when the Assistant Labour Commissioner in Bhadohi did not act on complaints of bonded labour, Azad Shakti Abhiyan used mechanisms like the NHRC, which then conducted an inspection and rescued 43 bonded labourers.

**Survivor-led initiatives win awards:** PGS' producer company, run by former bonded labour survivors, won praise from top officials of the State's Ministry of Agriculture as well as awards for the best Farmer Producer Company at the State-level.

#### Hotspot Objective 4: Supporting rigorous research and evaluation in the hotspot

**Endline Prevalence Study:** In 2019, the Freedom Fund received the results from the IDS/Praxis Prevalence study, where the baseline had been carried out in 2016 and endline in 2018. The study found that bonded labour has reduced dramatically across the hotspot in the period between the base- and end-line surveys from 56.2% to 11.6%. The final report notes that the households have been able to change the characteristics of their working relationships through a combination of interventions at the heart of which is collective local mobilisation and action through community vigilance committees (CVC). The study concludes that a targeted approach which focuses on a hotspot with high levels of bondage using a variety of community-based interventions, community mobilisation and organisation seems to be particularly effective in reducing the prevalence of bondage. They also corroborate the central idea of the hotspot approach, that slavery eradication should come from within communities and that NGO activity should be designed to enable and facilitate this through collective action.

**Sustained Liberation Research:** The Freedom Fund's Sustained Liberation research project is focused on investigating how best to ensure sustained freedom and quality of life among survivors of modern slavery. The project, drawing on the experiences of survivors of slavery in India and Ethiopia, seeks to understand the factors which promote reintegration and continued freedom, as well as the risk factors for re-exploitation. By mapping survivors' journeys to freedom we hope to understand how best to provide survivor-centred rehabilitation and reintegration services.

The research, carried out by University of Nottingham Human Rights lab, consists of qualitative interviews with frontline NGO's and survivors in Northern India as well as in Ethiopia. The findings of the North India study are currently being compiled, and a full comparative report of North India and Ethiopia is expected in late 2020.

**“Pathways” Case Management System:** The Freedom Fund, in collaboration with Praxis India and supported by the UK Home Office, is currently in the pilot phase of a two-year project to develop a digital case management system for survivors of slavery. The system, called Pathways, is designed to help local Indian NGOs in providing integrated, survivor centred care to individuals and communities affected by modern slavery. As part of the pilot, 10 Freedom Fund partner organisations across Bihar and Tamil Nadu have been selected to trial the system and give input on its development. A successful training was held with the Bihar pilot partners in March where NGOs were able to give their insight into providing high quality care. The Pathways system will continue to be developed with partner input with the aim to give organisations a powerful tool in care provision."

## 4. Case study

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Healthcare costs are a significant driver of debt bondage. The national government's healthcare scheme, popularly known as Ayushman Bharat, provides health insurance and cashless health treatment up to USD 7,200 a year to economically vulnerable individuals. Despite the government's best efforts to increase the reach of this scheme, debt-prone communities face difficulties accessing the scheme not only because they do not know how, but also because they cannot afford to forgo daily wages to make multiple trips to registrations offices that are often hundreds of kilometres away.

BMVS, with support from a technical services partner, helped ease access to health insurance through a directive from the district health authorities that moved the registration process closer to vulnerable communities and provided the necessary resources for effective implementation. While previous provisions in schemes and directives were already in place, this particular circular led to a fourfold increase in the registration of applicants over the previous three quarters as officials became more aware of the previous State-wide directives and their own duties. The circular also caused a ripple effect: now that access to health insurance had become easier, BMVS-supported community vigilance committees (CVCs) are able to mobilize communities (outside the Freedom Fund project area) to demand access to government-funded health insurance. This initiative demonstrates how the strategic interplay of top-down and bottom-up pressure can drive change.

One survivor of bonded labour, Nagina Devi, who paid off her debt to her employer through her earnings from a fruit shop, said: “When we heard about the Ayushman Bharat Scheme, we eagerly submitted applications but were disappointed by the delays. Supported by BMVS, we raised this issue in our village meeting and wrote a letter to the village head. Through BMVS’s support a government camp was held and all the CVC members were registered for health insurance. This has come as a huge relief to me as fear of healthcare emergencies was always at the back of my mind – we have no savings and would need to take a loan all over again. Having insurance makes me confident that I can continue to live free of bondage.”





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