Southern India Hotspot Annual Report 2018

REPORT DATE: APRIL 2019

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1. Operating context

In November 2018 cyclone Gaja hit Tamil Nadu bringing severe winds, rain and flooding. Rural and tribal populations were most negatively affected by this storm. Parts of Dindigul District were severely damaged, so our partners working in this district were heavily involved in relief efforts, which included helping people seek temporary shelter and food assistance and linking them with government supported aid.

Local authority elections in Tamil Nadu continued to be delayed. Since October 2016 Tamil Nadu has been functioning without 200 ward councillors and 12,524 panchayat leaders. The absence of these officials has resulted in delays at the local level for some government services. The State Election Commission is expected to announce a new election date at the end of May 2019 once the national elections are completed.

Virudhungar District facilitators conference. Photo credit: Thiripurasundari/Freedom Fund.
2. Progress Towards Systems Change

Our partners are engaging at the local, state, and national levels to inform policy debates, improve implementation of existing laws and policies, and encourage systemic change. At the state level, the Tamil Nadu Alliance (TNA) was actively supporting the Tamil Nadu government to take responsibility for the needs of migrant workers coming from other states. It developed a concept for a resource centre and government-supported helpline for migrant workers and are now following up with senior officials to promote the proposal.

In October 2018 TNA worked closely with the Tamil Nadu State Women’s Commission (SWC) to deliver a highly successful state-level public hearing on “Protection of Women Workers in Textile and Garment Industries in Tamil Nadu.” See Case Study below. During the hearing over 40 cases from textile workers were brought forward to a jury panel highlighting the issues prevailing in the industry and seeking remediation for their specific situation.

Partners also engaged with district level officials to promote the registration of mill hostels so they can be inspected by child protection officials as well as for the formation of Internal Complaints Committees (ICC):

- Dindigul District partners held a workshop in August 2018 on how to systematically improve labour conditions in spinning mills. 129 mill staff participated and a major Spinning Mills Association representative was present. Grievance redressal mechanisms were discussed including practical steps for forming ICCs and ensuring the safety of women in the workplace. Since this workshop, 36 mills in Dindigul have registered their hostels.
- Namakkal District partners hosted a similar workshop for mill management in September 2018. 120 mill staff participated along with the District officials.
- Partners’ interventions in Virudhunagar District led to the District Legal Services Authority sending a communication to all key district officials calling for the registration of all mill hostels.

At the national level, hotspot partners continued to work with a network in 11 states of India, the India Working Group Against Human Trafficking (IWG), providing case studies and grassroots information in support of the passage of the Trafficking in Persons Bill. The Bill was passed by the lower house, Lok Sabha, in July 2018. A short video on the survivors’ policy engagement is here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=E5NKQCMscI4

There was hope that the Rajya Sabha would consider the bill in the winter session, so partners continued to raise awareness about the importance of this legislation and its potential impact on survivors. Partners participated in supporting mill workers, survivors, local government representatives and community members to communicate with the Prime Minister’s office through sending post cards, resulting in 97,877 post cards sent from Tamil Nadu. The activities generated considerable interest by local media about the importance of this legislation.

In addition, community members sent 27,600 letters to 18 Rajya Sabha Members of Parliament, urging that they consider the legislation. The TNA was closely involved in coordinating these actions at the state level. TNA members also travelled to Delhi to meet with 13 MPs regarding the bill and they met with Mr. Kamal Hassan, a celebrity politician from Tamil Nadu who wrote a letter to the Prime Minister’s office voicing his support of the bill and encouraging its further consideration by Parliament.
3. Hotspot Outputs & Outcomes

3.1 Headline Results

2,383 Community Freedom Groups supported
These community freedom groups include adolescent girls and boys groups, child parliaments, adult community support groups and survivor self-help group. The freedom groups have become integral community platforms that speak out for change at the local level. Community groups have collectively taken bold steps to prevent bonded labour and exploitation among adolescent girls and women.

42,615 Individuals provided with social and legal services
Services include support for survivors such as education scholarships, health screenings, psychosocial counselling, legal guidance, and skill trainings. These services are key to helping survivors come out of situations of exploitation, rebuild their lives, and receive justice.

4,897 People gaining new access to government services
Vulnerable families and individuals are provided assistance to apply for government schemes for which they are entitled, such as housing assistance, old age pension, maternity benefits, and government food assistance. Partners are helping to empower community members by ensuring they receive the government benefits and services they are due. This assistance helps families supplement their income and prevents them from sending adolescents into risky work.

8,917 Workers in spinning mill join in workplace improvement groups
Workers inside the spinning mills are empowered through worker peer educators to learn about their rights and understand how to raise issues inside the workplace.

Orientation to Internal Complaints Committees at a mill in Erode District. Photo credit: Vizhuthugal
3.2 Progress towards hotspot objectives

Hotspot Objective 1: Increased community capacity to prevent forced and child labour.

In 2018, the Freedom Fund continued to support and strengthen 13 local organisations in Dindigul, Erode, Namakkal and Virudhunagar Districts in Tamil Nadu to combat bonded and child labour especially in spinning mills. These partners have been working in 410 communities to prevent this kind of exploitation and help survivors recover. Key activities include: helping individuals to exit situations of bonded labour; facilitating community support groups (CSGs), self-help groups and adolescent girls’ and boys’ groups to address root causes of vulnerability to exploitation; and supporting the recovery of survivors.

Developing the adult Community Support Groups
CSGs continue to be a driving force in the implementation of the hotspot program and 411 of them were active in 2018. CSGs create social change in each village and escalate key issues related to forced labour and the exploitation of children, such as child marriage and child labour, at all levels of local government. For example, in one of the areas where our partner TEST works, the CSGs influenced the Block Development Officer to issue a circular to all village government institutions encouraging attention to women’s and children’s rights and entitlements.

CSGs have been taking stronger action and negotiating directly with mill management to ensure rights for mill workers. One CSG supported by our partner Vizhuthugal helped secure government-mandated benefits, such as Provident Fund (PF) and Employees’ State Insurance (ESI), for a group of workers after discussions with mill management and informing them of what the law requires.

Some CSGs are now planning to federate together at block and district levels in order to strengthen their collective impact. In Erode District CSG members have already formed a district-level federation which meets once a month to develop collective solutions and advocate with district level officials.

Many CSGs are working towards making their villages child labour free zones, which involves promoting education and instituting monitoring systems to help them track child labour. Many are linking girls with educational support, scholarships and skill development programs in order to prevent them entering risky employment. The film-based curriculum, “Call me Priya”, has also continued to have a positive impact on school retention rates - many parents who watched the film were motivated to stop sending their children to work and ensure they complete their education. In Virudhunagar District, where our partner SPEECH is active, CSGs in four villages have declared drop-out free zones where no children have dropped out of school for the past two years, and this achievement is proudly displayed on boards at the village entrances.
The strategies within the hotspot have benefited from the completion of the first round of the action research process in a wide range of villages. Supported by the Institute of Development Studies and Praxis, the local solutions generated by this included various approaches to communities themselves tackling issues such as:

- Overspending on festivals and gifts to the temple;
- Removal of alcohol shops from villages;
- Actions on sanitation and health in order to reduce health expenditures;
- Removal of moneylenders from villages;
- Household by household interventions in cases where girls were not attending school; and
- Proper appraisal of livelihoods options by community members.

Partners who joined in the action research appreciate the value of participatory research as a method of deeper community engagement and for finding solutions to issues that lead to girls’ vulnerability to bonded labour. The full report is on the Freedom Fund website: [here](https://www.freedomfund.org).

**Support economic self-help groups, joint liability groups and cooperatives**

Partners supported an additional 26 women’s self-help groups (SHGs) during the reporting period (making a total of 635 SHGs currently supported) and they continued to maintain a focus on economic alternatives to mill work. Through micro-enterprise trainings, groups have learned how to maintain registers and accounts, set rules for internal lending schemes and interest rates, and how to have good bookkeeping practices. Most partners report that SHG members have stopped borrowing from moneylenders on high interest rates. Partners also worked with slavery survivors to support their engagement in a variety of livelihood activities including tailoring, running petty shops, and goat and cattle rearing.

![Image of a woman in a self-help group](image)
Support adolescent girls’ groups and boys’ groups

Partners continued to empower adolescents to protect their rights, and in the second half of 2018, they supported 675 adolescent girls’ groups with 11,731 members and 438 adolescent boys’ groups with 6,812 members. The adolescent girls’ groups have gained a tremendous amount of confidence and have begun taking decisions by themselves. Older girls have begun mentoring the younger girls, teaching them and encouraging them. They understand how to better protect themselves from entering risky work situations and know how to report violations. Adolescent boys have also shown significant change in their behaviour. They now understand better the risks to the safety and security of the girls in their village and use their energy towards promoting positive change in the village.

Additionally, adolescents have become more aware and vocal about their needs. In one of the villages where our partner CARE is working, the adolescents expressed that their parents were not spending enough time with them and they felt their parents didn’t care about them. The community facilitator arranged for a meeting between children and parents so the children could openly express their feelings and parents could understand the need for family communication. Now the parents and children have agreed to reserve one hour in the evening of uninterrupted time to spend together and parents are more proactively prompting their children to discuss about their day and they are asking what they can do to help support them in their studies and personal growth.
The effects of the film-based curriculum, “Call me Priya” have also endured. Partners have reported that it has acted as a catalyst for behaviour change in the community, empowering adolescents to stand up for their rights. The film has encouraged adolescents to live their lives with aim and purpose, just as Priya did. By visualizing a different future for themselves adolescents realise what possibilities are available outside of their current situation. For example, one beneficiary of Vizhuthugal had gone to work in the mill due to her family situation while dreaming of teaching in a primary school. With the intervention of a CSG she is now continuing her studies and working towards a teaching certificate.

Partners are also continuing to support Community Resource Centres (CRCs) in each village as a place where children can get tutoring and education support, referrals to vocational training institutes, and information about rights of workers. Parents encourage their children to attend in the evening hours. In addition to providing help with homework and opportunities for extracurricular activities, CRCs have emerged as a place where children can learn new skills such as drawing, singing, writing, and public speaking. They have helped reduce the number of school dropouts in their villages as students are more motivated to study.

Support and guide CSGs and adolescents in dialogue with village self-government bodies, and provide training to these bodies

CSGs have been taking the initiative to organise regular meetings with local government officials to discuss the major issues faced by families in the community such as transport, health and hygiene, suicide prevention, enforcement of Protection of Children from Sexual Offense (POCSO) Act, welfare schemes and means to access them. Petitions are prepared by CSGs and regularly submitted demanding action from the Grama Sabha (village self-governing body) and follow up is done to hold officials accountable.

CSGs have also been largely successful at helping vulnerable families to access various schemes. 4,897 individuals gained new access to government schemes during 2018. Farmers have secured crop insurance for loss caused by rain; the elderly have received government pensions due to them; families have received housing scheme benefits; pregnant women have received maternal benefits; and disabled individuals accessed pension which was due to them.

The meetings between CSGs and government officials also serve as important platforms to share information with the community regarding any new measures and entitlements that have been introduced and how to access them. Demands from the community have been fulfilled through these meetings. This in turn has enhanced the confidence level among community members that they can claim welfare benefits and legal entitlements successfully.

Partners also report that most villages supported by the hotspot program are now regularly holding the official Village Child Protection Committee (CPC) meetings every month where they discuss child care and protection issues, problems that are affecting children and possible remedies and solutions. Enabling these CPCs to function is an important component of sustaining the changes created by the program. Community facilitators are an important part of making this happen: Facilitators from our partner TEST recently become members of the CPC at the request of school teachers and Panchayat members.
Hotspot Objective 2: Survivors are reintegrated and attain viable livelihoods.

Support participation of survivors of bonded and hazardous labour in mills in community freedom groups, economic self-help groups and advocacy. Provide mental health and legal support.

The hotspot has continued to help partners strengthen their support to survivors to pursue sustainable livelihoods. Partners support and encourage vocational training opportunities for former mill workers in occupations such as tailoring, jute production, nursing, and hotel management. Career guidance programs are developed and exposure visits to training institutes are arranged to help survivors determine the most suitable vocation for them. Survivors have also been participating in enterprise development trainings, which provide guidance on the business ventures that are most marketable in the area in which they live, and they are then referred to suitable training courses. In addition, partners have been helping survivors seek compensation from mill management for wages owed, accidents and injuries, and accessing other benefits to which they are entitled, including PF and ESI. 66 compensation cases were won during 2018.

Hotspot Objective 3: Improved brand and supplier practices deter forced and child labour.

Support Tamil Nadu Multi-stakeholder Group (TNMS) Worker Peer Groups with strong focus on worker rights.

With FF’s support, the Ethical Trading Initiative’s TNMS worker peer group program focused on workplace rights has now been implemented in 20 mills and as of November 2018, the program had reached 7,660 workers through 439 peer educators. Each of the 20 mills has established an internal complaints committee (ICC) and all are enrolling women workers in their Employees’ State Insurance (ESI) schemes. Other positive changes include the following:

- Ten mills now allow mobile phones in the workplace;
- 15 allow greater freedom of movement for their workers;
- One mill has reduced excessive working hours;
- Workers in 15 mills have reported they are no longer forced to work overtime;
- Five mills have promoted some of their female workers to better positions;
- Workers in 12 mills have reported improvement in health and hygiene; and
- Workers in 14 mills reported they are given payslips.

A significant achievement is that all 20 mills supported under this project are no longer employing girls under the age of 15. All mills have also applied for hostel registration but are awaiting approval from the government.

There may be many additional important improvements still needed at these mills, but the worker peer group program is beginning to protect workers and offers a positive step that mills can take to improve conditions.

FF is currently finalising a second phase of work to begin in April 2019. This will allow ETI to formalise trainings for management and supervisors that will complement the worker peer groups in each mill. In addition, ETI plans to adapt the worker peer group materials with a specific focus on migrant workers from out of state as well as for male workers. Migrant workers are often the group most vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace. ETI also plans to hire a business development manager to more readily engage with mills and mill associations.

Support worker groups and complaints committees in mills

In addition to ETI’s efforts, Freedom Fund partners have also been working directly inside mills. Our partners, Don Bosco, Peace Trust, and WORD have established workers’ groups where they provide rights and protections focused trainings, and create a space where workers can come together to collectively take action about issues they are facing. In total the three NGOs have supported 34 groups that have reached 636 workers. Other partners are also conducting health awareness campaigns and health camps as an entry point to work in local mills. They also tried to help workers better articulate their needs in the workplace, by
training them to identify issues and making them aware of the mechanisms they can use to raise them to management.

Partners continued to support mills to establish Internal Complaints Committees and provide ongoing training and support to ensure these committees function properly. **10 of our partners supported 98 ICCs in the second half of 2018.** Partners have noted that workers in the ICCs have an increased understanding of their basic rights in the workplace and that they feel more confident in resolving their issues. Partners will continue to regularly monitor the ICCs and ensure that mill management are cooperating with the process.
4. Supporting a Community of Practice

Hotspot partners continue to regularly collaborate through the community of practice. In 2018 the Freedom Fund provided a number of capacity building trainings and support to partners including:

- The Freedom Fund launched a second phase of work with MS Chellemuthu Trust (MSC Trust), a mental health organisation, to conduct a series of trainings for partners that cover basic counselling skills and information on common mental health issues faced by adolescents as well as proper referral mechanisms. FF facilitated a partnership between MSC Trust and Sanar Institute. Sanar is a US-based organisation that works to reduce the impact of trauma caused by human trafficking through direct services, training and education. Sanar developed a toolkit for healing professionals to guide providers who work with trauma victims. They will be working alongside MSC Trust to adapt this toolkit to incorporate into trainings for FF partners, providing practical tools that field workers and community facilitators can use to help survivors.

- The Freedom Fund has continued to work with Manonmani Trust, a women-led lawyer’s collective, who hosted a series of trainings for partners on legal skills and strategies, best practices for conducting fact finding, filing Right to Information (RTI) applications, and drafting and submitting complaints to the police.

- The Freedom Fund also continued work with Access Livelihoods Consulting (ALC), to strengthen partners’ economic livelihoods programs. This has helped partners better understand how to conduct market assessments, help communities select appropriate livelihoods, and develop business plans. The next phase of technical support around livelihoods will focus on developing simplified business training tools that can be easily used by community members, particularly those with lower literacy rates. In addition, we will focus on helping partners to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of livelihoods activities so they can better help community members mitigate economic challenges and have a sustainable income.
5. Case Study

On 23rd October 2018 in Chennai the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Women organised a state-level public hearing on “Protection of Women Workers in Textile and Garment Industries in Tamil Nadu.” During this event over 40 cases were brought forward from textile workers highlighting the issues prevailing in the industry and seeking relief for their specific situation. Cases were related to accident, death, and non-payment of government mandated benefits (Provident Fund, Employer Sponsored Insurance). A panel of jury members—including the chair of the commission, commission members, retired high court judges, and human rights lawyers—heard each case. The jury provided directions to concerned government departments for resolving each case and summoned the mill management and requested their swift action and response. The event was the first of its kind in Tamil Nadu to specifically address issues faced by textile workers and served as a platform to bring these issues into the spotlight and demand action on the part of businesses and highlight the need for enhanced government oversight to ensure the proper enforcement of laws and regulations.

The Tamil Nadu Alliance—a group of networks and organisations all working on issues related to textile workers—was asked to be involved in preparation of the cases for this hearing and has been closely involved in following up with the women’s commission after the hearing to ensure action is taken. The Freedom Fund is a founding member of the Alliance and Freedom Fund partners were also involved in bringing cases forward for this hearing.

Following the hearing a few important steps have been taken:

- South Indian Mill Association (SIMA) sent a circular to all their members requesting that they ensure registration of their hostels and formation of Internal Complaints Committees at each workplace.
- The State Women’s Commission sent a letter to all District government leaders asking them to swiftly approve any hostel registrations that have already been submitted.
- By end November, eight of the cases presented were known to have been compensated by the mill owners, and further follow up is taking place.
- The State Women’s Commission is drafting a policy for workers in textile and garment industries in coordination with Department of Labour.
During the reporting period, Praxis India has also completed the follow up assessment of “Call me Priya” assessing changes in a sample of 769 adolescent girls from the baseline. 36 groups were selected randomly for the baseline and follow up, and all the girls in the group were sampled. Praxis is currently working on a full report.

Some highlights include:

- 44% were from SC/ST background (compared to 23% across Tamil Nadu generally)
- 80% attended all 17 of the sessions where the curriculum was used.

### Propensity to take greater action against

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying at work</th>
<th>Sexual harrassment at work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Your supervisor often bullies people in the workplace, and this time the supervisor is unfairly scolding one of your friends at work”</td>
<td>“Your male supervisor is repeatedly touching you in ways that you’re uncomfortable with”</td>
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### Proportion of participants who showed a 10% improvement (~1 SD) between baseline & endline

- Mental health score: 40.2%
- Resilience score: 39.5%

### Most memorable topics from the modules

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with harassment</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship with family</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision for the future</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal finance, saving and debt</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcoholism</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rights of women and girls</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workers’ rights</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical relaxation and coping skills</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental health &amp; resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
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