

# MISSING

# IMPACT ASSESSMENT STUDY 2019 -20

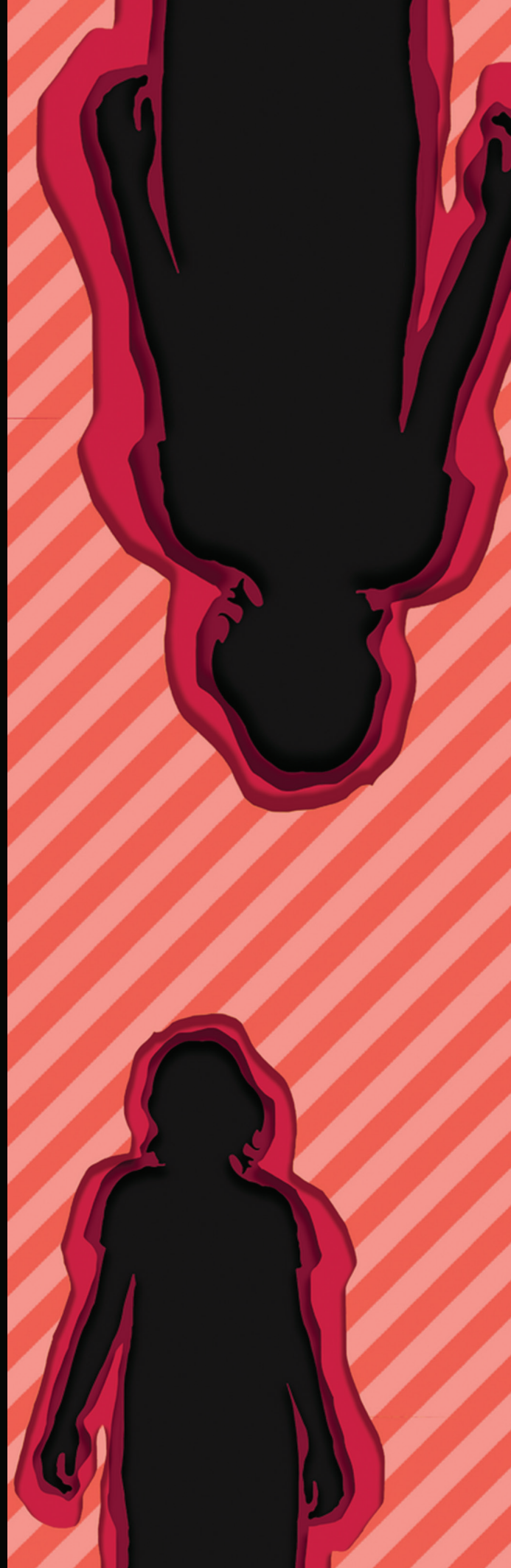
Kultali

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

An initiative of Missing Link Trust,  
implemented since 2015

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

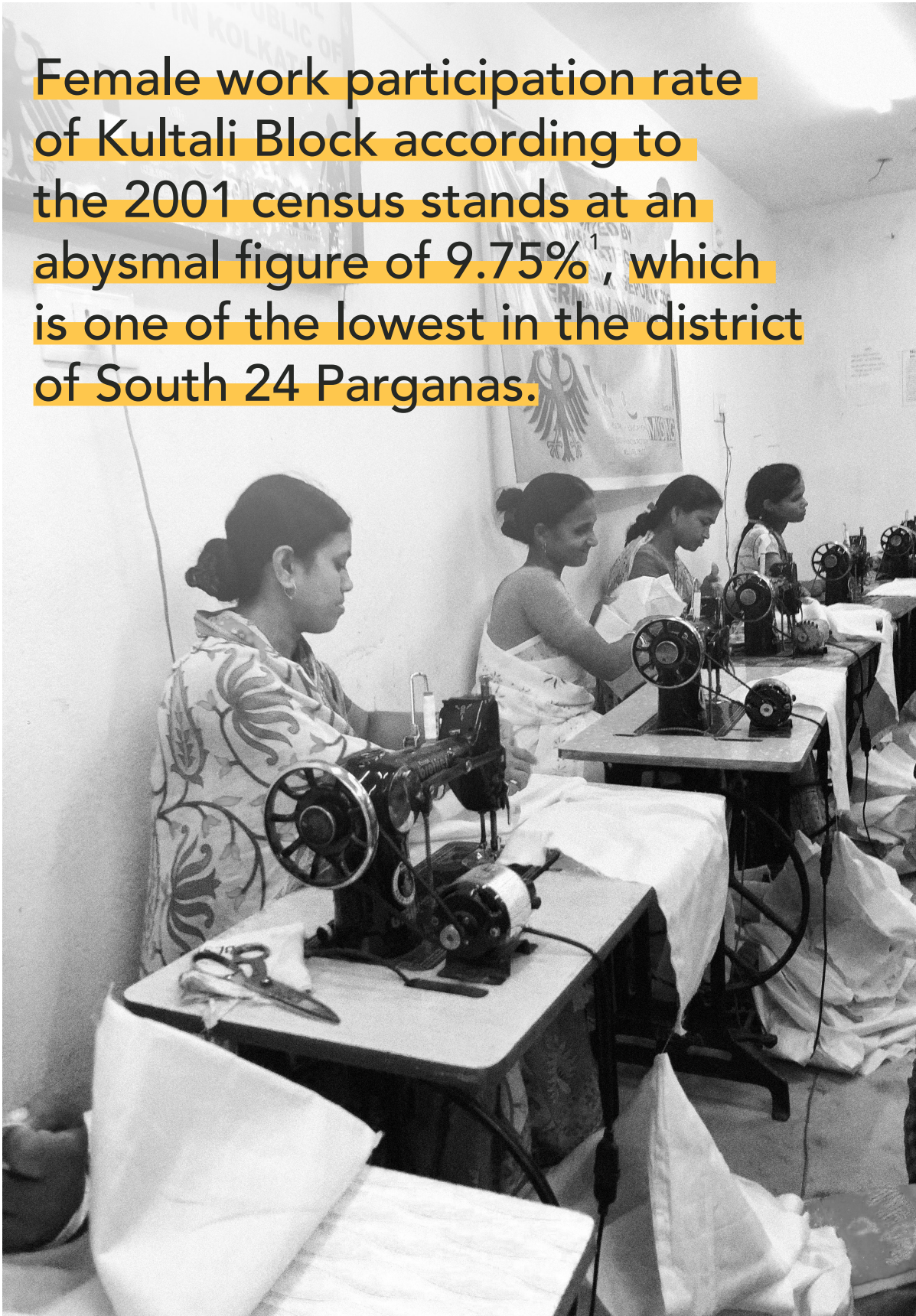
### Inception of MISSING

The founder member of the organization had an exposure to work with survivors of trafficking in her initial years of working as a freelancer with different anti-trafficking organization. The visits to the red light areas deeply impacted her as she tried to understand the different systems involved in trafficking, the networks and most of all the severity of exploitation faced by girls. She thus envisioned working with girls and women in areas of prevention, in creating networks of safety within the community, such that they do not get trafficked. Roaming round the brothels, interacting with girls and women there, talking to the members of the organizations, she was getting to understand that these girls and women came from different districts of West Bengal. And in trying to identify which were the most vulnerable districts, South 24 Parganas emerged as one of the district that was extremely vulnerable to trafficking and many girls were trafficked from this region to different parts of India. Thus, when she finally set up the Missing Link Trust, working on prevention in the vulnerable pockets of South 24 Parganas was her obvious choice.





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



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

## Why South 24 Parganas?

In the initial days Missing collected information about the different vulnerable areas in South 24 Parganas in consultation with the other civil society organizations working in that area. The Sundarbans emerged to be particularly vulnerable because of extreme poverty. Thus, Missing Link Trust started its work in the Kultali block of the Sundarbans areas. The area has very limited income opportunities. Men of the area mostly work as fishermen and the income remains grossly inadequate to meet basic needs of the family. The access to different government schemes was also found to be limited due to lack of awareness of schemes and ways to access them. Fishing being the major occupation of the region, there are hardly any economic activities which the women of the area could be engaged in. Female work participation rate of Kultali Block according to the 2001 census stands at an abysmal figure of 9.75%<sup>1</sup>, which is one of the lowest in the district of South 24 Parganas.



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



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

## Challenges

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

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

The social evil of Child Marriage is rampant in the area. According to the National Family Health Survey 4, 2015-2016, in the rural parts women aged 20-24 years married before 18 years of age is 53.7%. Thus any work on prevention of trafficking needed to address the issue of child marriage as often trafficking happens in the garb of child marriage. According to an Action Aid report, in South 24 Parganas of the total child marriages that take place 50% of them are trafficked in the name of marriage. In these cases there are absolutely no contact between the girls and their families once they are married off.<sup>2</sup>



50%

The total child marriages that take place 50% of them are trafficked in the name of marriage.

<sup>2</sup>Too young to wed – Early marriages in West Bengal - Kumkum Kumar

**Alcoholism** was yet another issue to reckon with while dealing with the issue of violence against women. Majority of the women facing domestic violence complained of husbands being alcoholic, not providing for the house and wasting money on addiction. This however does not discount the fact that women faced domestic violence for all reasons. Alcoholism was perceived by the women of the area as a reason for increased violence. The other major plight that women are faced with was lack of money to cater to basic food and medicine requirement of the children leading to perpetual debts with the village shops.

**The government schemes** are hardly accessed as in most cases the family members are unaware of the existence of such schemes and ways to access them. Women also complained of not being entertained by the Panchayat.

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

**Family members  
are unaware of the  
existence of such  
schemes**



## Objectives of the impact assessment

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

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

Evaluate the impact of the initiatives in creating safer communities

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

Consolidate the learning and identify the challenges and gaps

Recommendations for strengthening and scaling up the initiative





## CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

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

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

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

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

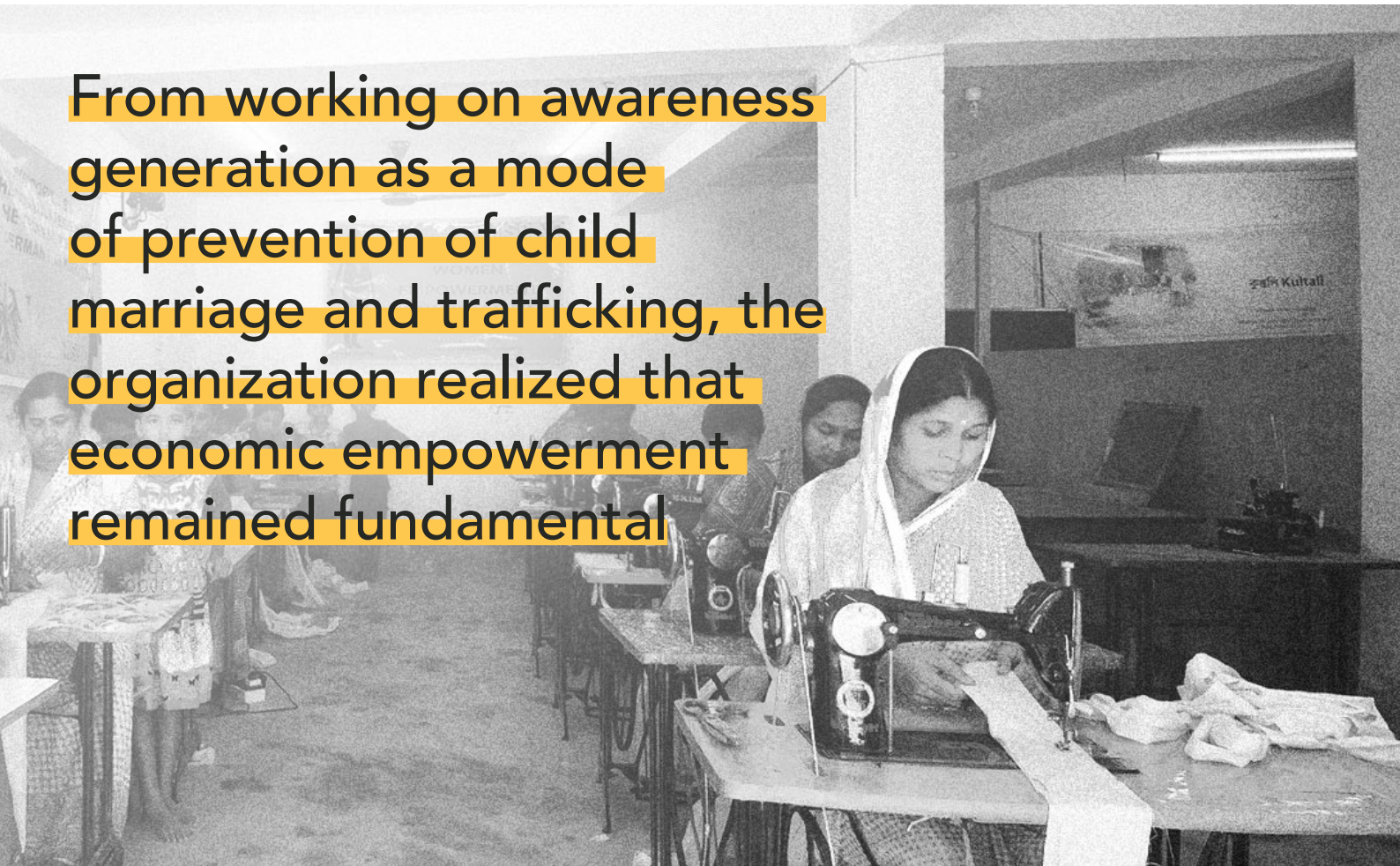
There was also extensive interaction with the core team of Missing Link Trust working in Kultolli to understand the details of activities, challenges and achievements. The discussions also aimed to bring out their perspectives on the impact of the work in bringing about change within the community.



## CHAPTER 3 THE PROJECT

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

**From working on awareness generation as a mode of prevention of child marriage and trafficking, the organization realized that economic empowerment remained fundamental**



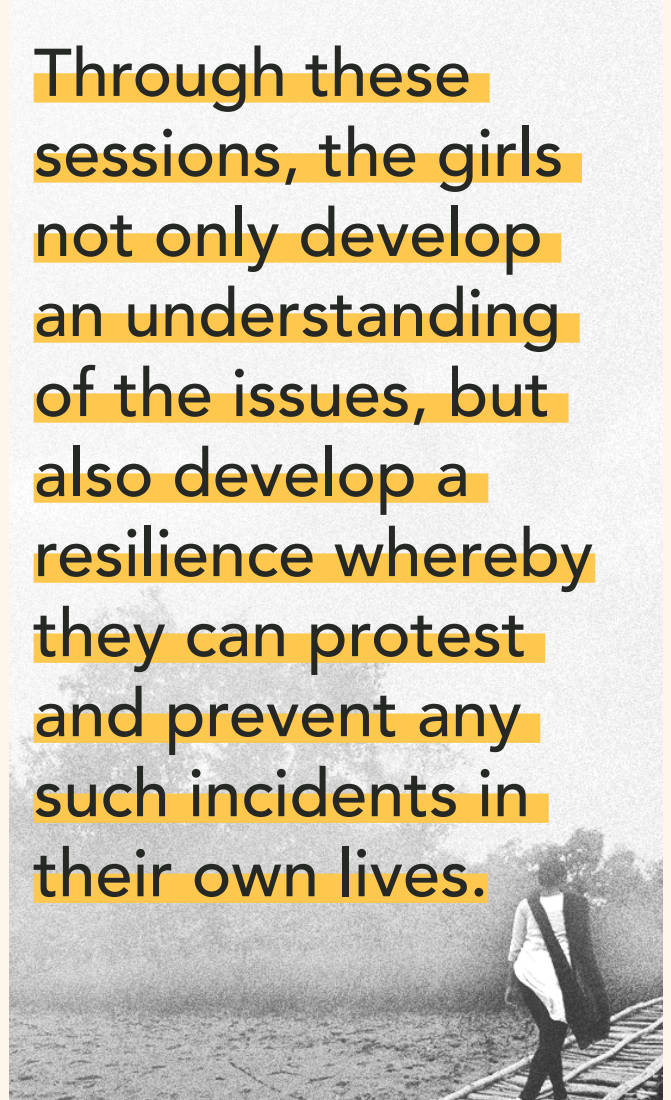
## A - School awareness program

**Introduction & Coverage:** This program is being conducted across 23 schools (girls schools and co- education schools) spread across 6 blocks of South 24 Parganas (Joynagar I & Joynagar II, Gosaba, Mathurapur, Basanti and Kultali). Awareness Programs are conducted with students of Class VI to Class X. On an average 4-5 such awareness sessions have been conducted in each of the schools. The programs are not conducted as a one-time activity in a school; instead they are planned in small slots of 2 hours and spread over a period of time to ensure continued interactions with students that enables them to voice their problems/concerns/challenges. These regular interactions generate confidence within students whereby they share incidents and seek advice and support on issues which they would otherwise hesitate to share with anyone else.

Over the years, MLT has established good rapport with schools through the programs. Initially, members of MLT met school authorities for permissions to conduct such awareness sessions. There were extensive discussions on the requirement of such sessions with school authorities. After the few initial programmes school authorities have been convinced about the need for such interactions and make efforts to find time from the daily routine such that more and more such interactions can be organized. Schools also see these programmes as means of preventing drop outs. [Click](#) here to listen to the school authorities talk about the programs.

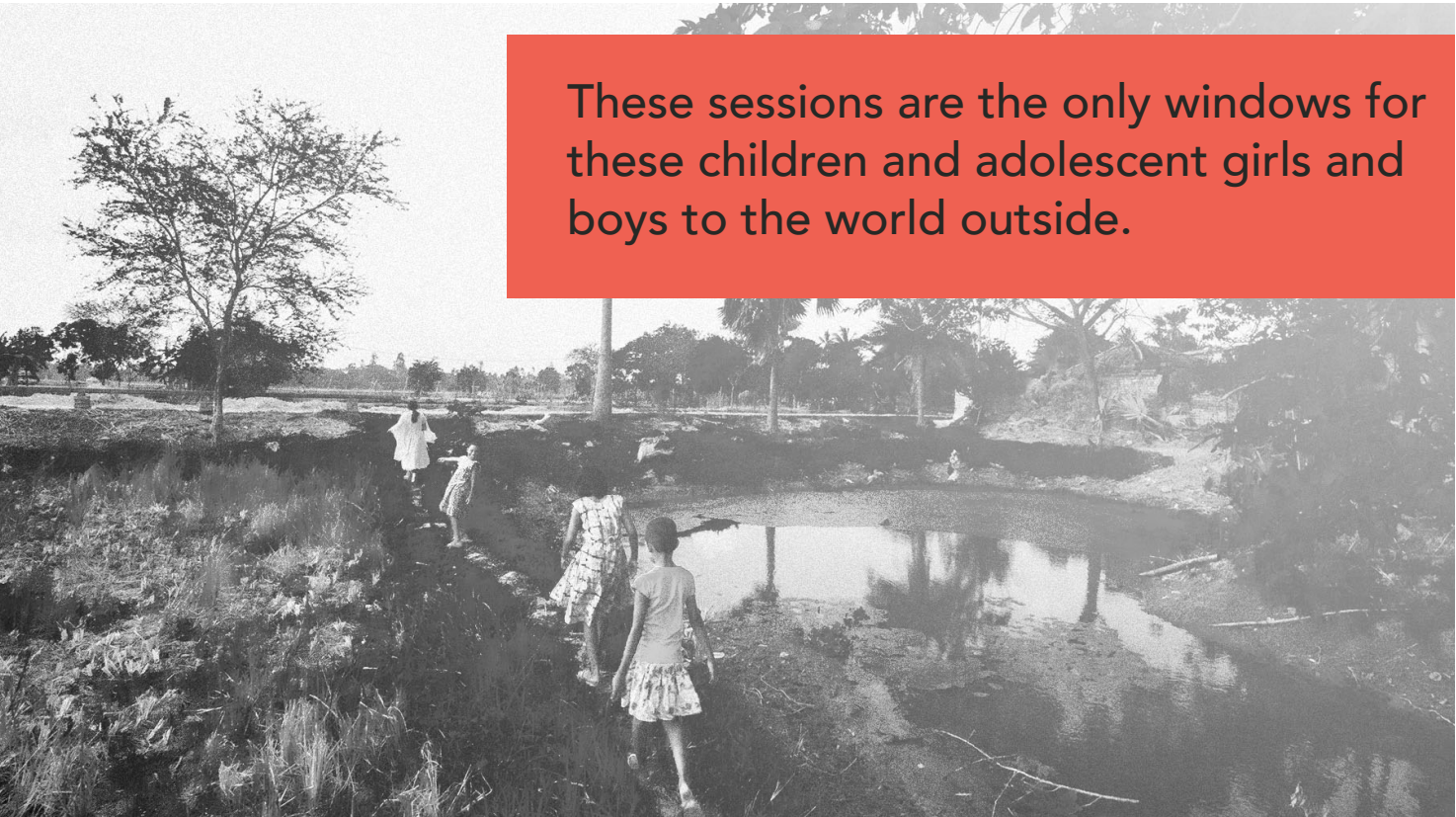
**Objectives, Session Points & Method:** The different issues and topics that are discussed in these sessions are mostly related to child rights and child protection. Though the primary focus of the sessions is to generate awareness and prevent child marriage and trafficking, the sessions and interactions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

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



inhibits the growth of a girl in all aspects of her life and how it becomes a violation of her rights. Discussions revolve round issues of why and how girls and women are trafficked into sex trade, for labour and for other grievous offences. The sessions on trafficking focuses on generating their consciousness such that they do not fall into any such situation unknowingly. Through these sessions, the girls not only develop an understanding of the issues, but also develop a resilience whereby they can protest and prevent any such incidents in their own lives. These awareness sessions are loosely tied up in form of a module, though there is no strict schedule that is followed. The facilitators ensure that the discussions take the course that the participants' desire.





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

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

**Uniqueness of the program:** In this context, it is important to note that these children of the schools come from impoverished backgrounds where two full meals often remain an issue. And the remoteness of the area is a hindrance for them to avail facilities like counseling that could result in their mental and emotional well-being. Added to this, they are also completely ignorant of the different schemes, scholarships and other opportunities that they are entitled to. Thus, these sessions are the only windows for these children and adolescent girls and boys to the world outside. Along with developing perspectives on different issues like child marriage and trafficking, these sessions also provide them with relevant information (different schemes, scholarships etc) that will help them to carry on their studies and pursue their dreams of a different future.

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



**Case identification and intervention:** The sessions have identified two cases of sexual violence that fall under the POCSO Act, 14 cases of children who have gone missing either from schools or homes and cases of elopement. Besides, there are also 22 cases of child marriage that have been identified through these interactive sessions in school. There are also cases of child marriage that are reported by children over the phone as the Childline number and members of MLT are shared in the sessions. So very often, children call MLT members to inform about the different cases. In these situations, members of MLT inform Childline or local police station. For cases, where the marriage is in the initial stages of planning, they visit the families and try persuading them to defer the marriage till the girl turns 18 years of age. Regular follow ups are done with such families in order to render all kinds of required support such that the girl does not become a victim of child marriage.

Cases of child sexual abuse need immediate police and legal interventions under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act). In these cases, MLT helps the children and their families to lodge complaint with the police. Legal support is also provided by linking these families to organizations like HRLN and IJM. Members of MLT are in constant touch with the girl and the family for any needs that they might have throughout the process. There have been situations where members of MLT also assist the child and her family to reach court; the court being far away from their village.





## B - Community awareness program

To strengthen families by linking them to the different government schemes available

**Coverage & Objective :** This program is being conducted within the communities in the villages across 6 blocks of South 24 Parganas (Joynagar I & Joynagar II, Gosaba, Mathurapur, Basanti and Kultali). The major objectives of these community based awareness programs are two-fold - to strengthen families by linking them to the different government schemes available such that the families are better equipped to provide care and protection to their children; and to generate awareness on child marriage, trafficking and other forms of violence against women and children. All these are geared towards Missing Link Trust's overall goal of combating trafficking and creating safe places within the families and communities to resist child marriage and trafficking of women and girls.

Awareness Programs are conducted with both men and women within the villages at regular intervals. During these interactions the community members often share different problems and incidents seeking support. Thus apart from generating awareness, these sessions also act as spaces of sharing for the community members. Though Missing Link Trust went with the objective of spreading awareness and working on prevention of violence against women and children, they were forced to undertake case work because of the nature of the problems that were coming to them from the community and school programs. And this brought MLT to eventually work with the police and judiciary.

To generate awareness on child marriage, trafficking and other forms of violence against women and children.





**Uniqueness of the program:** The major focus of these awareness programs is informing community members of the different government schemes that are available and ways to access them. During these sessions, MLT members also support them in filling up forms and often accompany them to respective authorities. Regular follow ups are done till the family gets the benefits of the scheme. Focus is given on getting job cards for the families under MNREGA (guaranteed 100 days of work) such that they have a secured earning that could address the economic situation to a certain extent. The other scheme that is focused upon is the Indira Awas Yojana to help them secure proper housing for the families

**MLT members have supported** 27 families from Kultali, 17 families from Gosaba and 22 families from Sujapur and Mathurapur to avail benefit from MNREGA.

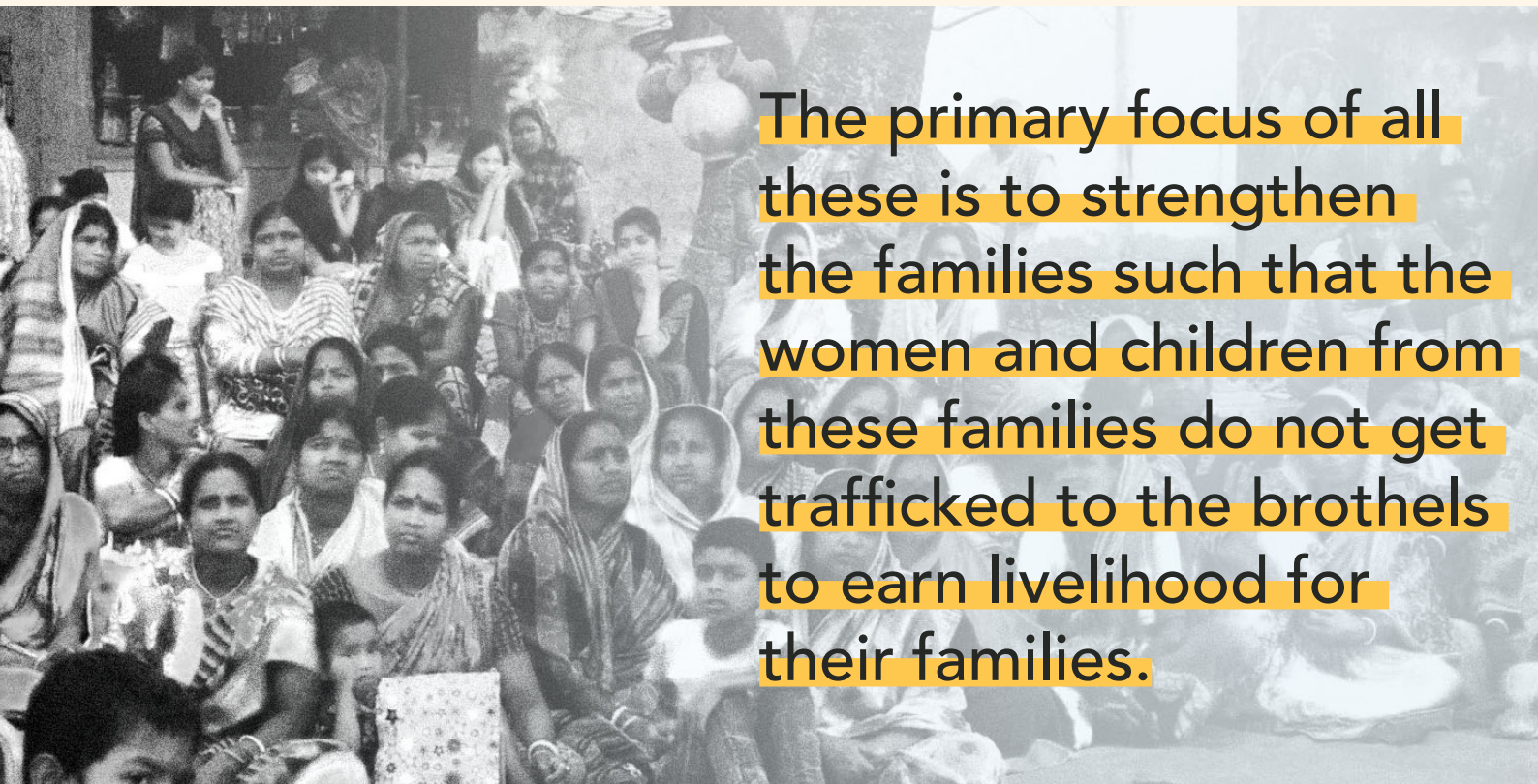
**MLT has succeeded** in assisting 7 families get the benefit of the Indira Awas Yojana to set up their own house in their area of intervention.

**Importance of the program:** The primary focus of all these is to strengthen the families such that the women and children from these families do not get trafficked to the brothels to earn livelihood for their families. There are extensive discussions on trafficking which revolve round issues of

The success of the sessions lies in the fact that each of these sessions is currently attended by more than 60-80 community members.

labour and for other grievous offences. The sessions on trafficking focuses on generating awareness such that they do not fall into any such situation unknowingly. Child marriage is another issue that is discussed at length in these awareness sessions. Child marriages are very common in all these blocks; where parents get their daughter married just after their puberty to ensure their safety and security. Child led marriages are also common, where girls elope with their lovers in search of a better life outside the poverty of their daily existence often ending up being trafficked to a brothel in some other state outside West Bengal.

The sessions also highlight the importance of education of children, keeping them in schools and also getting them to be part of different skills building programs. These villages are so remote by their location that seldom do information and opportunities reach them. These community awareness programs have been received well by the communities as they are directly benefitted through these interactions. The success of the sessions lies in the fact that each of these sessions is currently attended by more than 60-80 community members.



The primary focus of all these is to strengthen the families such that the women and children from these families do not get trafficked to the brothels to earn livelihood for their families.


**Case Identification & Intervention :** Through these sessions, 86 cases of domestic violence have come to MLT who are in constant touch with these women and families. Once again, this has pushed the organization to move into case intervention and MLT has attended all 86 cases that have come up to them. In 60 of these cases, MLT has managed to strike a compromise within the wife and husband & their families with support from members of the Panchayat. In most of these situations, where compromise has been made, a resolution is drafted mentioning the terms and conditions under which the compromise has been made. These resolutions are then given to the Para-Legal Volunteers working in the area such that they can get these resolutions approved from the District Legal Authorities Services (DLSA) thereby formalizing the procedure.

One of the important things that needs mention is the prevalence of child marriage in these areas, as most of the cases of domestic violence have also turned out to be cases of child marriage. From the cases coming to the facilitators during the program, it is seen that adjustment emerges as a major issue in couples who have undergone child marriage; the girl being underage in most of the cases. These girls remain extremely vulnerable; family members of these girls fear reporting domestic violence to police as their daughters were married before 18 years as they have a notion that police would punish them. In most of these cases they seek intervention from Missing Link Trust to mediate between the couples and the families such that the

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girl can continue in her marriage. Of the cases of domestic violence MLT has dealt with, 9 of them were child marriage, that is, the girl was married before the legal marriageable age. This also brings up the complex relation between child marriage and domestic violence.

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



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## C - Alternative employment generation

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

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

**900** women between 18-25 years of age

**780** women between 25-35 years of age

**820** women above 35 years of age

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

Majority of the households did not admit to their women working outside (only 110 admitted), but it was interesting to note that when the survey team reached the households in the day time (morning, noon and afternoon) women were not seen around; which also generates concerns about where and what the women are involved in.

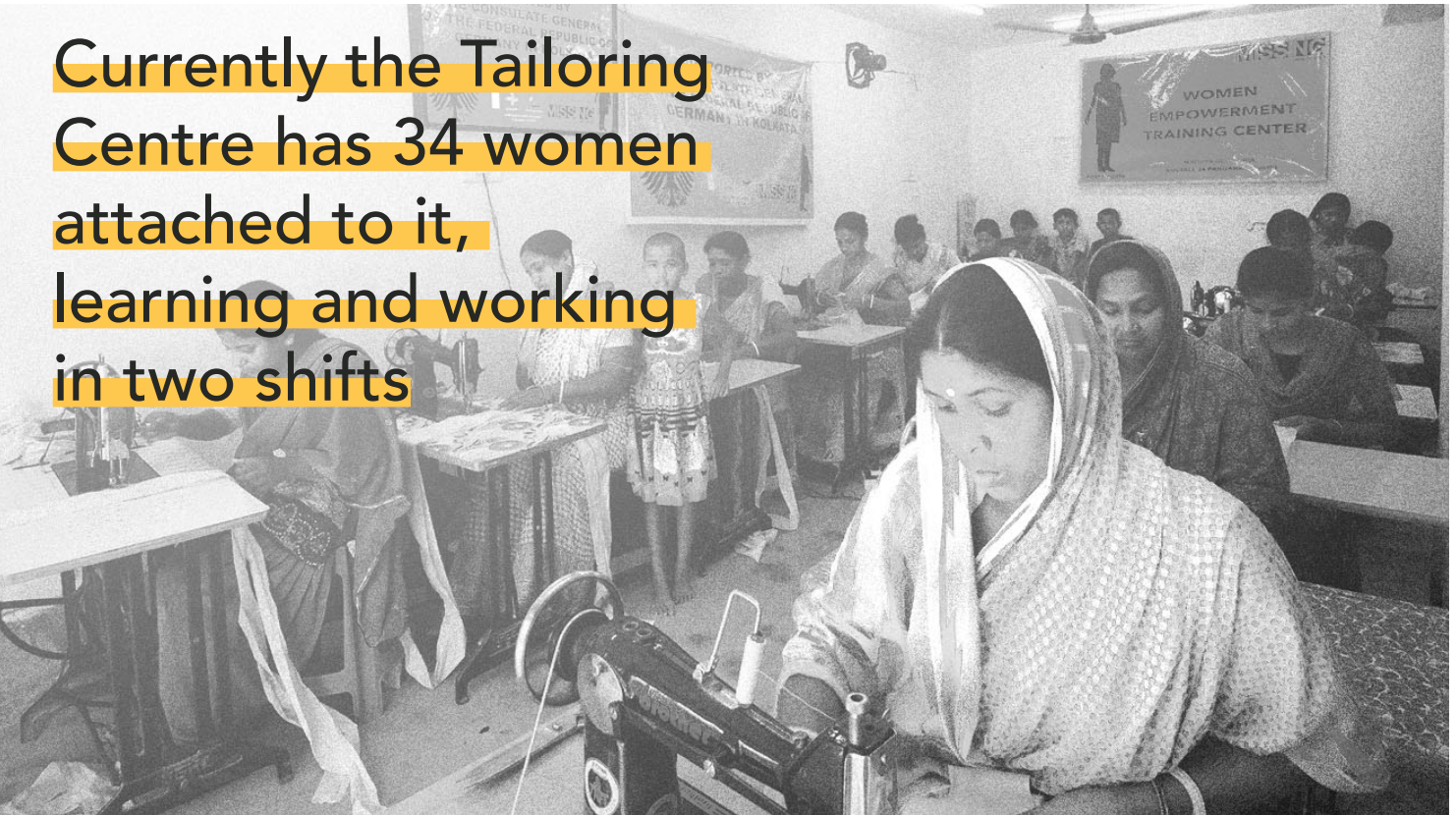
Thus lack of employment, poverty was an overarching condition that existed across the areas where the organization started its work and in most cases the

women and girls went for work outside the village from almost all families. Some of the families even openly admitted to their daughters working in the red light areas of Sonagchhi.





Currently the Tailoring Centre has 34 women attached to it, learning and working in two shifts



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

**The process :** There was a dilemma about the location of the Tailoring Centre as MLT wanted it to be accessible to the most underprivileged women. But getting an appropriate area was a challenge and finally the Centre was set up at the current location given the centrality of the place; as women from the neighbouring areas could reach their in local conveyance or by walking. The fact however remained that women of far off villages where the organization carries on its community initiatives could not be part of this Centre; but then the organization could in no ways accommodate all women who were in dire need of income. Enrolling women was also a challenge as there were 112 applicants when the news of the Centre being set up was spread across the villages. The Centre could only

accommodate 30 candidates. Thus criteria had to be put in place in order to choose from the 112 applicants. Women were selected from BPL category, women from families who had absolutely no land, women who had a girl child and women led families.

**Profile of the Women :** Currently the Tailoring Centre has 34 women attached to it, learning and working in two shifts as the space and number of machines cannot accommodate 34 of them together. Out of these 34 women

**5** of them are survivors of domestic violence living with their natal family under pressure of moving out

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bijoini Naik, 35 years old is an active member of the alternative learning programme of MLT. She was married at the age of 17 and currently has 2 sons who are aged 16 & 14 years. The elder son reads in Class X and the younger one in Class IX. She was abandoned by her husband who married another woman when the younger son was 3 years old. She struggled with her sons, worked in Kolkata (she is however silent on the kind of work that she was involved in Kolkata) and managed to set up a small house with her earnings from Kolkata. Currently she is working at the Centre and not going to Kolkata for work.

Padmarani Bhakta, 37 years comes to the Centre regularly without fail and has lots of eagerness to pick up new skills. She along with her husband and children were thrown out of the house by her father-in-law. She has 2 children and her husband has no interest to work and prefers being at home. She has married off her daughter and her son is in Standard X. She is supporting her family from her work at the Centre.





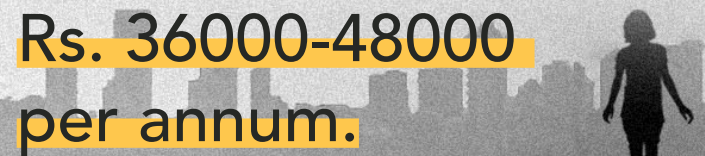
## Skills development

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

**Profile of the Students :** Given the limited number of seats available, there were certain selection criteria that included the family background (BPL) and for girls above class VIII. Most of the students are of the age range 16-18 years, but there is also a girl from class VI and a girl who is pursuing her Master Degree (post-graduation). Though all girls are above Class VIII, this girl from Class VI was admitted for the course as she is very bright and was really eager to learn computer. Moreover, she is from a very poor background with only her mother. Her father is not there and hence

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

the students often come from poor backgrounds with 85% of them falling in the very low annual income bracket of just Rs. 36000-48000 per annum.



members of MLT felt that she was very vulnerable and her coming to the Centre would also be a way of being in regular touch with her.

At present there are 70 students undergoing skills training at the centre. More than half comprise of women (59%). 39% of females have had education beyond the secondary level (10th std) of schooling as compared to just 10% of males. However, the students often come from poor backgrounds with 85% of them falling in the very low annual income bracket of just Rs. 36000-48000 per annum. This also makes them extremely vulnerable and susceptible to the perils of trafficking.

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

## D - Case interventions

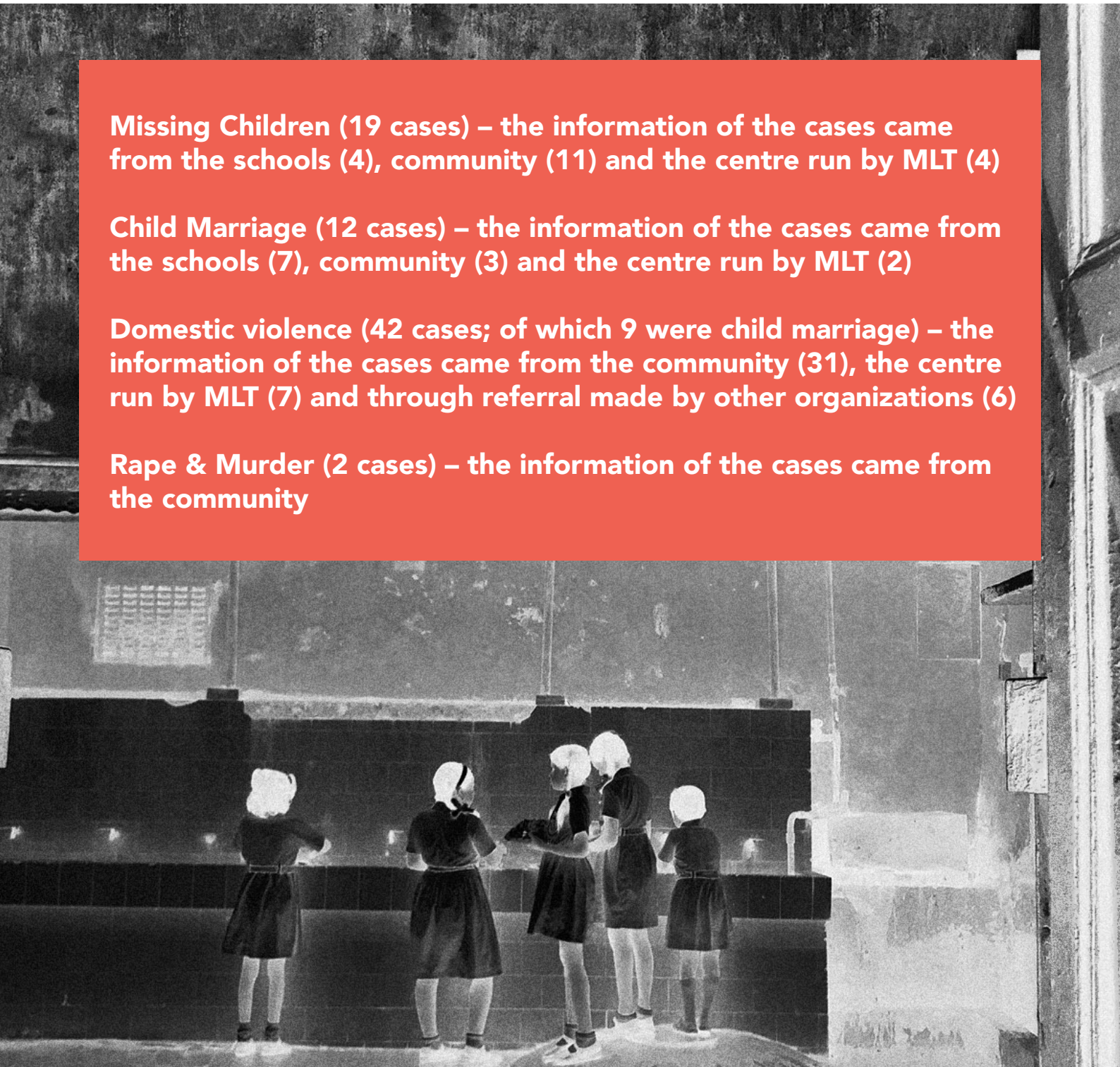
MLT has been receiving cases because of their constant interactions with the school students and the community through the different awareness programs. The organization has received 77 cases in the year 2018. The breakups of these cases are as follows

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

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

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

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



## D - Case interventions

MLT has provided a range of services for these cases.

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

In 2 cases of child marriage, the organization has produced the girls before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and sort support of school to prevent child marriage in 3 other cases.

In situations of domestic violence, MLT first speaks to the women to understand how she wants the situation to be dealt with. In most of the cases the women want to live with their husbands and wants MLT to strike a negotiation and compromise. Members of MLT have done that in almost 30 cases. They have assisted women

to register complaint and go for the legal battle in 8 cases, where the women were willing.

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

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





## CHAPTER 4 ACHIEVEMENTS & IMPACTS

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

Total Number of School Programs = 150

Total Number of Community Programs = 250

Total Number of Students Attending = 10,500

Total Number of Community Members Attending = 12,500

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

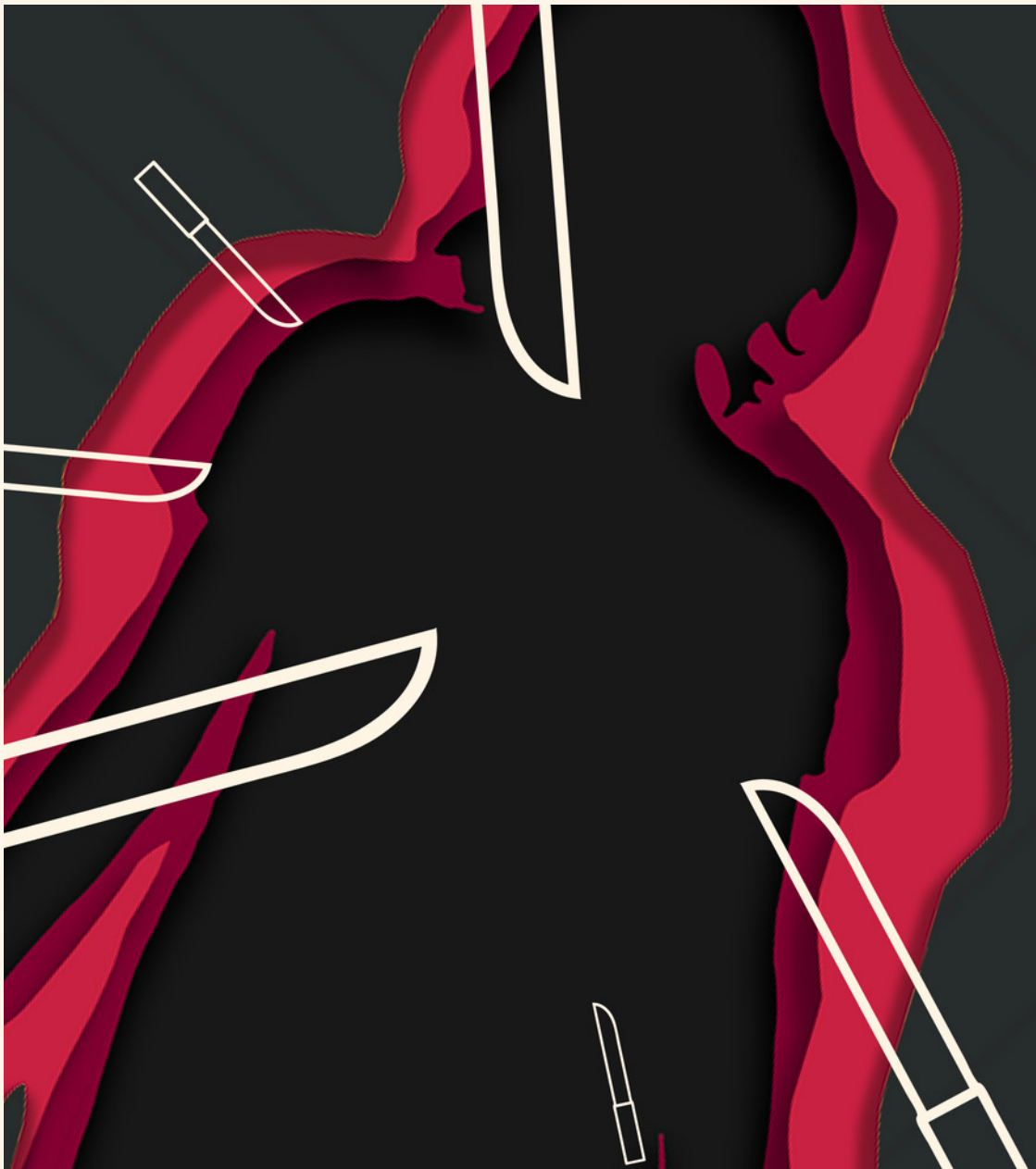


### Maman

A year after Missing conducted a school awareness session in Jaynagar, class 9 student Maman began to face pressure from her family to get married. Aware of not only the dangers of child marriage and ways to stop it, she went to the police station herself and lodged a complaint against her father. The marriage was stopped, Maman was moved to a home and her parents are currently undergoing counselling to ensure that they do not force their minor children to get married.

**Mita**

The class 7 student was raped on her way home from school. When her parents found her, she was in shock and numbed. Mita's father got in touch with the Missing team through the contact number provided in the community program. Despite resistance from the community, the Missing Team helped the family lodge a police complaint and got Mita enrolled in a different school to shelter her from the ostracization she faced in her own locality. Prompt action ensured that her perpetrator was jailed and that Mita's vulnerability to trafficking as a rape victim was minimized through counselling, education and acceptance from her family.



**Strengthening families by linking them to government**

**schemes :** This has been a major achievement of the program, whereby communities have not only been made aware of the different government schemes and entitlements; they are actively accessing the schemes to the advantages of their families. Thus, families have enhanced social security which in turn has positively impacted the children as they are being sent to school and kept out of child labour. The risks of trafficking are also being reduced because of this. Families from across the communities have been linked to MNREGA and Indira Awaz Yojana. Apart from the government schemes, MLT on its own account has raised fund and constructed 304 toilets for different families across the communities.

**Economic independence:** This has been another milestone in the program, whereby women have started to get their earnings from being part of the Tailoring Centre. The Centre has been planned in a business mode and constant efforts are made on parts of Missing Link Trust to secure orders such that there is a constant flow of income for the women. Currently the Centre has been providing an earning

to 34 women who are contributing to their families. In fact there are separated and deserted women in the group, who have found it extremely helpful to run their families.

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

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



to them and they mobilize different stakeholders to make an intervention.

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

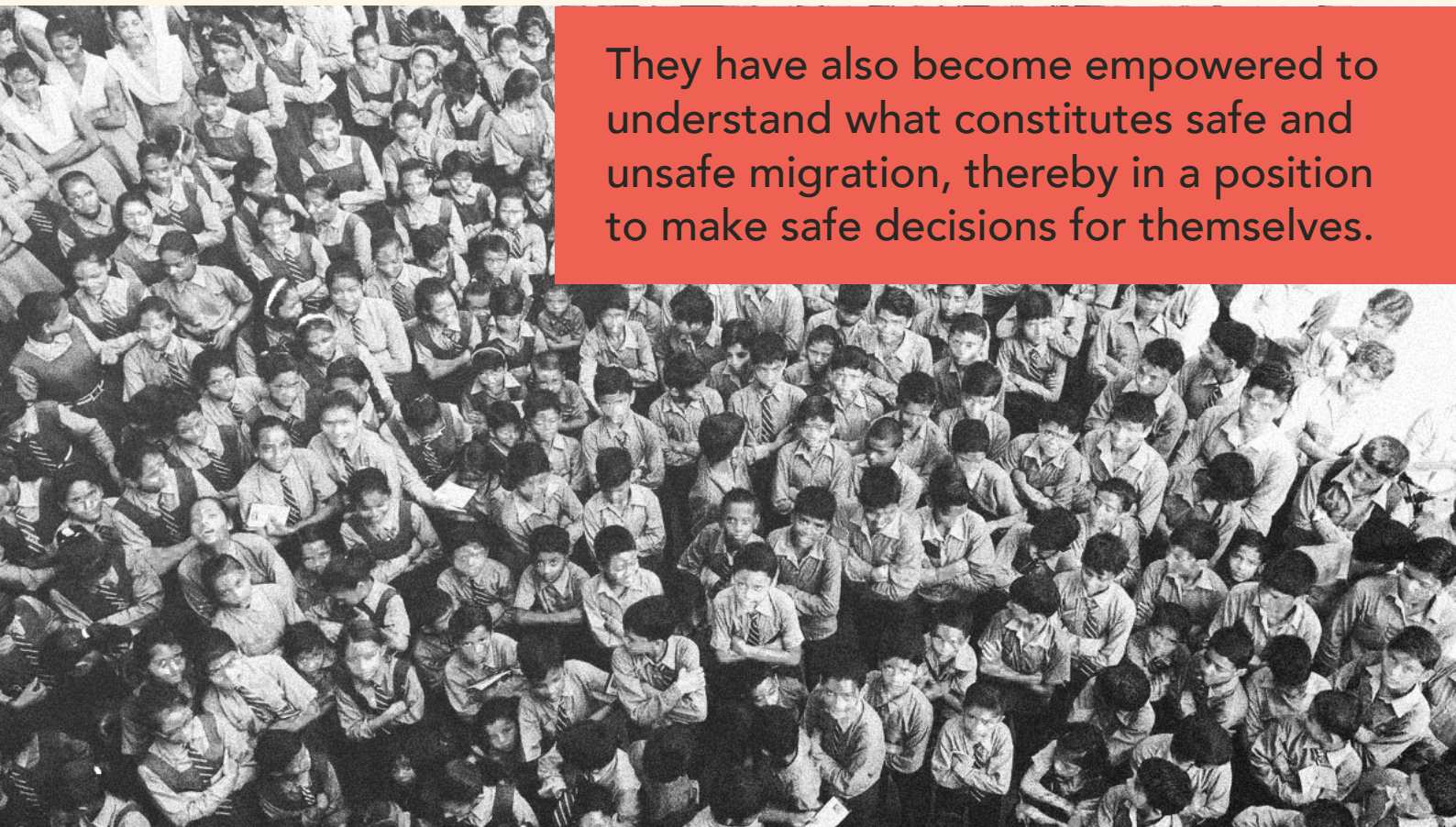
**Collectivization:** The constant sessions, meetings and visits by MLT to the community have led to collectivization of community members whereby they are taking collective actions in cases where they are being denied access to different schemes and entitlements. They have collectively moved the Panchayat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

**Empowerment of women, children and community:** This has been a constant focus and has remained a cutting objective

They have collectively moved the Panchayat and the Block offices to access schemes that they have been made aware of by MLT

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

They have also become empowered to understand what constitutes safe and unsafe migration, thereby in a position to make safe decisions for themselves.



## CHAPTER 5 LIMITATIONS

One of the major limitations of the program has been the **working with the government child protection systems and mechanisms** available in the district. There are problems of the Child Welfare Committee not being in place over the last few months, but there needs to be increased efforts for establishing linkages with the District Child Protection Unit and to access schemes like the Sponsorship Scheme that has been designed as a preventive mechanism.

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

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

**Training of program staffs of MLT in program management and dealing in crisis situations:** Members of MLT need further orientation and development of their skills to take the program ahead and in dealing with different crisis situations. With the growth in the program there will be different crisis situations which would need judicious handling. They need to be further oriented on these issues.





## CHAPTER 6 ROAD AHEAD

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

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

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

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

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





## CHAPTER 7 DETAILED CASE STUDIES



**1. MITA HALDER , 15****BACKGROUND**

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

**INTERVENTION**

Mita's father had previously attended one of the community programs Missing conducted and reached out to the organization for help. The Missing Rural Support Team helped the family lodge a police complaint against the rapist despite severe pressure from the community. The case was booked under the POCSO Act. Missing then went on to provide legal support to the family for the ongoing court case.

They moved Mita to a child welfare home where she was able to receive counselling before returning home. However, on her return she was denied admission into the local school due to the stigma surrounding her. Missing helped enroll her in a school close to their office.

**CHANGE**

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

**2. PADMA RANI BHAKTA, 34****BACKGROUND**

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

**INTERVENTION**

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

**CHANGE**

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







**3. PARAMITA GIRI, 15****BACKGROUND**

Paramita is in class 10 in secondary school. She is fifteen years old. There are four people in her family. Her mother teaches in SSK which is a higher secondary school and is able to support their family. Her father is into agriculture and owns a large plot of land. Paramita had been meeting a local boy and eventually a love affair developed. Her parents were unaware of this. Her relationship got serious and her boyfriend made very rash decisions and threatened to kill himself if Paramita didn't run away with him to get married. Out of fear, she went with him to Haryana. They got married in Haryana. She soon called her parents and told them she was scared and wanted to come back home.

**INTERVENTION**

Paramita's parents contacted the police and filed a missing complaint. Her parents also contacted Missing and the organization assisted them to find their daughter. Paramita and her parents knew Missing through the community programs conducted by the rural support team. Missing facilitated the process that the girl can return to her house safe and secure. The boy was apprehended by the police and was jailed. This was reported as a child marriage case. Missing is still in touch with the girl and assists her in different ways.

**CHANGE**

Paramita got reunited with her family. She was initially put in a child welfare home for counselling support to assist her deal with her trauma. Since this event she has been reintegrated into her old life and has successfully joined her parents at home.

**4. BIJAYANI NAYAK, 34****BACKGROUND**

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

**INTERVENTION**

She was stuck inside a relationship of domestic abuse and she didn't know her rights. But she remembered a community program that was held near her house and reached out to Missing. She is now a part of the Women's Empowerment Centre, making an earning for herself and her family. She is now supporting herself and her sons.

**CHANGE**

She works at the Women's Empowerment Centre and earns 2.5k -3k per month. Now her sons are going to school. She had no hesitation to join Missing's initiatives and even asked to become involved. She sees her life to have improved for the better since her association with Missing. Through this association she mustered the courage to leave her father's house and stay separately with her sons and support the family on her own.



**5. MAMAN HALDAR, 16****BACKGROUND**

Maman from Joynagar comes from a family of six. Their combined family income is 4000 per month. Maman resisted her own child marriage. She was in class seven when Missing came into her school, and conducted a school awareness program. She learnt about the dangers of trafficking and what her rights were. She also became aware of the Childline number of 1098. One year after this she switched schools, she started facing pressure from her family to get married.

**INTERVENTION**

She was aware of her rights and the possible dangers of getting married as a child. She had also learnt about ways to stop child marriage. The first step she took was calling Childline. After the calls she felt she needed more immediate action, so she lodged a police complaint against her father. She contacted Missing and they helped her to move out of her house. Then Missing initiated the process

of counselling with her parents to share with them why marrying their child may not be the best choice or option for them.

**CHANGE**

This empowerment of the child because of the sessions conducted by Missing gave her the strength to stop her own marriage. She was moved to a home and her parents are currently undergoing counselling to ensure that she can return to her family without any further pressure from them. Maman is an ambassador of Missing who has set a standard for all children who may ever feel vulnerable.



# MISSING

Report assessed and complied by : Gargi Banerjee

Gargi has studied Economics and Women's Studies from Jadavpur University & has been associated in different research capacities with the University. She has worked with the Centre for Child Rights at National University of Juridical Sciences. She has led various state level researches and developed manuals for different stakeholders in the child rights & child protection domain. She has also been part of researches with UNICEF, International Justice Mission on different child protection issues including CSA, trafficking. She has also conducted impact assessments for various government & NGO projects. As program Manager-Child Protection of FADV, an international organization, headquartered in Milan, she has been part of implementation program in India, Bangladesh & Myanmar and conducted various research and feasibility studies across the countries. She had led an implementation project on cross border trafficking in West Bengal & Bangladesh and worked with different stakeholders in the region. She has also worked with different grassroots organization in implementing projects on child protection, trafficking, gender & sexuality.

Report designed by:  
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