

“In Disguise”



“Can the softness of flesh be mitigated by the hardness of currency?”

- The Culture of remittances, New Vistas – Jeremy Seabrook



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A study on
Vulnerabilities in Mobility, Migration and
Trafficking in Person

Researchers

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Foreword

In a world of globalisation where we are continuously talking about doing away with the borders, we are not interested to find out what is happening with the majority of women who migrate from one village to another, from their vulnerable families to a bigger world in the cities, chasing the dreams of having a better life. In the global economy millions of individuals, who are particularly women and children, migrate to the city in their search of getting a job, a little extra earning for a square meal or just getting married to someone with a better economic situation. While doing this they are included into the new “slave trade” which serves the men in this patriarchal society where a woman’s body is treated as a commodity.

Trafficking is a phenomenon that affects and implicates all regions and most countries of the world. While trafficking routes are constantly changing, one constant factor is the economic distinction made for countries, families and women. In South Asia the situation is of concern and States need to take immediate action to save the situation. Policies for the development of the rural and urban poor needs to be considered and a change in the political will of the government might bring in some result.

While studying the districts in West Bengal, Sanlaap found 9 districts, which send maximum number of girls to prostitution and cheap labour in the last 15 years. Murshidabad being mentioned as the source district for trafficking, we decided to do our first study there.

The findings gave us information on the status of girl children and women who were uneducated and most vulnerable and need protection by the State. The detailed study provides information and at every point we felt the need to do a lot for the prevention of trafficking of young girls in the name of work and marriage.

This study will be shared with various players and stakeholders at every level in the society and we hope it will help us to extend our helping hand towards the vulnerable women and children who have the right to be safe. It is also important to share with everyone that this is the first study which will be followed by 27 situational analysis from community based organisations of 8 districts who are main partners and supporters for his programme. I personally feel that this was a difficult project to start with, but when 27 organisations were ready to do similar studies in other districts, I feel we are on the right track.

There is no easy solution to trafficking to human beings and its magnitude is frightening and difficult to even discuss. Interdisciplinary and long-term approaches are needed to bring about any change. The job has begun but we should not stay satisfied with whatever little is being done. We have to go to a long way. The failure of anti trafficking initiative will make more children vulnerable and create problems for women who are mothers of tomorrow.

Indrani Sinha
Executive Director

Introduction

Migration has been in process from time immemorial. However it is only in the last three decades that migration as a consistent pattern has seen an unprecedented growth.

The revolution in information technology and the advancement in transport systems also mean that people have more access to not only information but also the opportunity to move. In this process often the most illiterate and not very highly skilled with lesser or no option are the ones who are being exploited both in their own countries or others. In such a scenario the government do little to interfere with the flows of trade and finance and it also does not take action when it comes to Human Beings.

This is one of the main reasons as to why migration patterns have become so complex in recent times and has spawned an entire industry of illegal trafficking. Though not all migration as consequence of globalisation, disintegration of the rural industries, increased stratification of the peasantry leading to landlessness or natural disasters have resulted in trafficking, there have been increasing instances of such migrants being trafficked both as a cause or consequence of these factors.

Trafficking in persons is a phenomenon that occurs due to a large number of vulnerabilities that are created by social, economic and political forces, and in parallel, by a demand for trafficked persons, for purpose of exploitation, whether for purposes for sexual exploitation, or for cheap or bonded labour, organ transplant, beggary and camel jockeying. Trafficked migrants are dependent on agents and employers and are extremely vulnerable to exploitation in an insecure and unfamiliar environment. Exploitation can take not only the form of economic but also sexual, psychosocial and other forms of violation of the migrants' human rights.

Contrary to the common belief that trafficking happens in the case of irregular migrants, it can also happen to persons who initially are regular migrants but are later trapped in extremely exploitative jobs or when they are misled about the purpose of their travel at the time of recruitment or when they become targets of traffickers while looking for employment upon arrival in the receiving country.

Trafficking in persons, especially of women and children have thus reached endemic proportions around the globe. With an estimated one to two million people trafficked each year just into sexual subjugation, coerced prostitution, domestic servitude, bonded sweet shop labour and other slavery like conditions, almost no country in the world has been left unaffected.

Information on migration leading to trafficking in persons is scarce, and largely scattered, and at best, compilations of narratives of victims of trafficking, by organisations who have worked in provision of services in red light areas, or work for the rescue and rehabilitation of prostituted children are available. Lack of research on how the vulnerabilities are used by traffickers to poach on women, children, or in fewer situations men, has resulted in a bottleneck for agencies to design interventions to ensure safe migration and thus combat trafficking of persons.

Research Methodology and Data Aspects

Objectives of the Study:

- ☛ To assess the magnitude of migration
- ☛ To identify the reasons of migration
- ☛ To know the mode and nature of migration
- ☛ To identify the profile of those people who are being affected by migration.
- ☛ To understand the scope and manifestation of migration.
- ☛ To understand the possibilities of migration resulting in trafficking.

Research Design

The design of the study has been exploratory in nature.

Study Area:

Five identified blocks of Khargram, Hariharpara, Raninagar II, Murshidabad Jiaganje and Burwan with an average total 50-Gram Panchayats, have been selected for this study. From each of these 50-Gram Panchayat, 1 village has been explored for the study.

Universe:

The respondents for this study have been the family members of those affected by migration. Although in some cases the researchers have been able to interview the migrants also.

Sampling and Sample Size:

The sampling method that has been used for this study is purposive random. Five migration prone blocks of Murshidabad district have been selected on the basis of purposive sampling. One village from each Gram Panchayat of these five blocks has been selected randomly to make sure of an equal probability of inclusion of each unit.

Keeping in mind the objectives of the study, the total number of migrants in a village has been listed under sampling frame. 50% of the total number of families has been chosen randomly.

Sample size of the study was 1225 households whose members have been affected by migration.

1. Among 50 Panchayat Pradhans, 50%, i.e. 25 have been selected on random basis.
 2. Each Block Development Officers of the above-mentioned five blocks and Officers-in-Charges of the concerned police stations were interviewed.
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Data aspects:

Nature and type of primary data used-

Sources:

1. Members of the families those affected by migration.
2. A few migrants who have returned from their place of migration.
3. Panchayat Pradhans of Gram Panchayat
4. Block Development Officers

Officers-in-Charges of Police Stations Pilot Survey:

A pilot survey was conducted to understand the trend of responses, on the basis of which the interview guides were pre-tested.

Nature and type of secondary data used-

Sources:

1. The Panchayat Pradhans, members and other key persons of each village provided the list of total migrants.
2. Newspaper clippings
3. Research reports
4. Books related to the issue

Method of data collection

The interviewers gathered information through one to one interviews. They have taken the information from the family members on the profile of the migrant, reason & place of migration, nature of occupation they are involved in and their present living condition in comparison to their past.

The Panchayat Pradhans, Block Development Officers and Officers-in-Charges were sought to give opinions on the issue of migration and trafficking and their roles and responsibilities to ensure safe migration and combat trafficking.

Tools of data collection

Since the design of this research was purely exploratory in nature, so the respondents under different categories were interviewed with separate interview guides.

Time Frame

- Data Collection: June 2003 – October 2003
 - Report Writing: February 2004 – April 2004
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Limitations:

Since the interviewees were mostly the members of the migrants so many issues which are very subjective could have been better understood on interviewing the migrants directly. In certain cases where the migrants have come back and thus were interviewed, issues of violation and exploitation resulting from migration could be clearly understood.

The surveyors who had conducted the interview, were not the direct implementing agencies in those areas and hence while interviewing quite some time was spent in first beginning a dialogue with the local people and then go ahead with the discussion on a issue as sensitive as this. It was felt that if the surveyors had initial rapport with the locals of the study area, then the interviewing would have been a lot more open and not discreet.

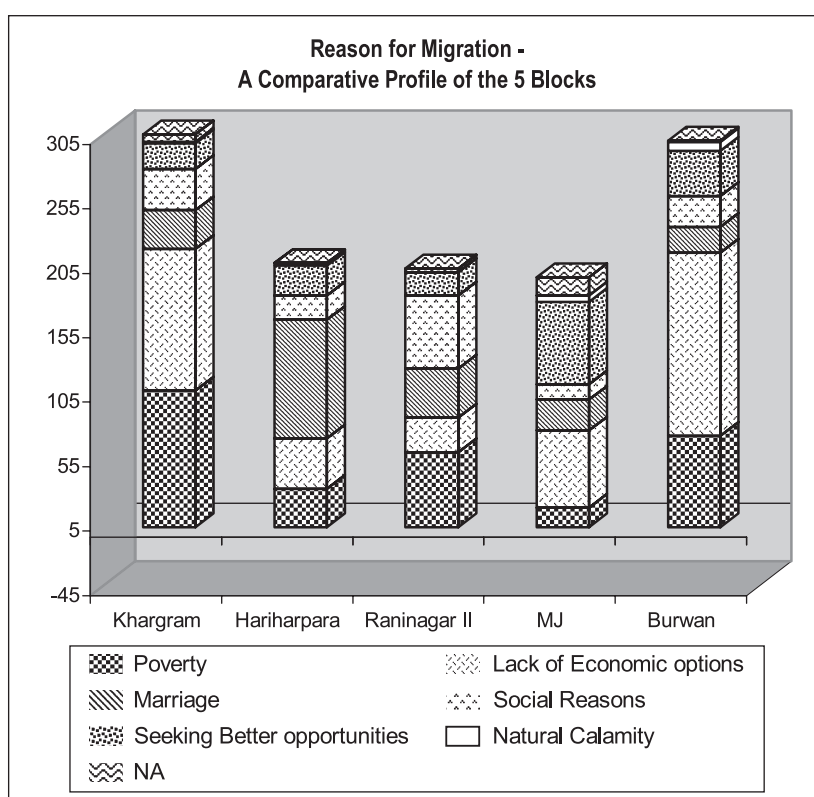
Findings

- It is clearly visible that from Khargram block 35.4% of female migrants have migrated as domestic help ranging from 9 years to 17 years. Similarly 17% of the total migrants working as domestic helps have migrated at the same age range in Raninagar II. In Murshidabad Jiaganje 6.4% of the domestic help had migrated at the age between 12 to 14 years while in Burwan 5.1% of the migrant domestic help had migrated at the age ranging from 15 to 17 years. These statistics indicates that apart from the existing demand for child labour, the parents and guardians of these children do not bother to consider the vulnerability associated with the situation of unknown places where they are forcefully sent.
- In Raningar II 5.2% have migrated when they were below 9 years and 11% of the total factory workers have migrated in the age between 15 to 17 years. Although the latter age group do not fall within the purview of The Factory's Act 1964 but it is definitely violation of child rights as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- In Hariharpara more than 50% of the migrants who had migrated for marriage were married off at the age ranging between 9 to 17 years. In Raninagar II, 5% were married off at the age group of 9 to 11 years, 8% in the age group of 12 to 14 years and 31.5% in the age between 15 to 17 years. This is another forma of violation of Child Rights. These statistics can be further complemented by the findings of the West Bengal Child Marriage Research Source: Intelligence Report 2001 - 2002 which pointed out that 79.1% of Child marriage occurs in Murshidabad and it estimates to be the highest amongst the following districts of Kolkata, South Dinajpur, North Dinajpur, Purulia, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Bankura, Birbhum and Bardhaman.
- It must be mentioned that during the pilot visit, when the researchers visited the villages of this block, they observed lots of instances where the girls have been trafficked in the name of marriage and job. Even they talked to their parents who have no information since 5-6 years regarding their daughters. But, the resistance from the community to reveal the truth was manifested through their responses to the researchers. The researchers could understand that the community people showed resistance in revealing the truth.

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- As far as the missing, trafficked and forced into prostitution is concerned, in Khargram out of the total migrants who are in prostitution, 15.4% were forced at the age between 15 to 17 years. In Murshidabad Jiaganje, out of the migrants who have been forced into prostitution 66.6% had also migrated in the age range between 15 to 17 years. Similarly in Hariharpara the migrants who are missing or have been trafficked, had migrated in age ranging from 15 to 17 years. 505 of the total missing migrants had migrated in the age group of 9 to 11 years and 46.6% of the trafficked migrants at around 9 to 11 years in Raninagar II. In Khargram 50% of the trafficked victims had migrated at 12 to 14 years. All these alarming figures reaffirm the vulnerability of minors and young persons within migration for any purposes.
 - Observing from the data of place of work from all the five blocks, the following facts are evident – migration for domestic help has mostly occurred in Kolkata (Salt Lake), Muradabad and Rajasthan. However minor girls have migrated as domestic help more in Muradabad and Rajasthan rather than Kolkata. This is rather strange because the former two places are absolutely different in culture and language apart from the distance factor. Marriages have mostly occurred in Bihar, Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh. The prime reason as stated by the respondents for these marriages is the fact that the girls' party do not need to pay any dowry to the bridegroom's party but on the contrary the bridegroom pays lump sum money to the girl's parents. In such situations the parents do not bother to find out anything about the bridegroom when they have the opportunity to shove off the burden of girl child.
 - In case of those migrants (all female) who have been trafficked, the places noted are Delhi, Mumbai, Bowbazar and Sonagachhi of Kolkata, Punjab, Bihar, Kashmir and Bangladesh. Migrants have been found to be missing from Delhi, Bihar and Kashmir. Again Mumbai, Delhi, Kashmir, Kolkata and Bihar have been marked as those places where migrants have been forced into prostitution. The places of trafficking, missing and prostitution being common in regard to Mumbai, Bihar, Delhi, Kolkata and Kashmir raise question in one's mind about the purpose of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. It further raises question in one's mind about the fact that the process of missing continues to take the form of trafficking after a point of time in several cases. It is interesting to note here that a few migrants of Raninagar II block of Murshidabad have been trafficked to Bangladesh which is generally the sending country as far as trafficking in persons are concerned. It may be noted here that Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata have been marked as receiving, sending and transit places of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. It may be further noted that Chaturbhujsthan is an infamous red light area located in Bihar.
 - Migrants who are working, as daily labourers were previously engaged in the same kind of job. This is perhaps because they are not skilled in any particular kind of job. While some migrants who are presently engaged in Factories were seen to be working as daily labourers prior to their migration. This is because even though they were skilled but due to lack of economic options within the village, they were forced to work as daily labourers.
 - Factory workers are seen to be the highest paid as compared to other forms of occupation obviously because they are skilled and work in a more structured form. Moreover they get the scope to earn more as they are given over time allowance against extra labour given by them.
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- Most of the migrants belong to the family of daily labourers. This can be explained by drawing reference from the fact that they do not have any land to cultivate with continuous pressure of sustaining large families. These situation forces one to migrate irrespective of the risk factors associated with migration.
 - Some facts that have been eye catching is the fact that the silk weavers are not being able to sell their own products without the involvement of middlemen because they do not have enough capital to buy the raw materials nor do they have direct access to the market and so they are paid a meager amount against weaving the silk. They are paid on the basis of daily labour in spite of them holding the tradition of silk weaving, for which Murshidabad is famous. Some of the respondents have stated that they are paid Rs.60 against weaving a cloth of 11 metres. This takes approximately 4 days to weave. This is hardly enough to sustain families consisting of 4 – 6 members.
 - Another reason for non-profit or underemployment from silk weaving is that in the process of these silk materials being exported from Murshidabad, the genuine product is replaced by cheaper quality materials in Delhi by the middlemen. This has reduced the demand for the silk materials from the district. This has definitely created situation of migration from these families due to lack of any other economic options.
 - It may be worth mentioning here that an NGO had taken initiative in surviving the traditional silk weaving in a few blocks of Murshidabad. The objective was to ensure minimum wages for the silk cultivators who were compelled to sell the silk threads at the rate of Rs.1.25/- to the Mahajans (middlemen) who in turn sold off these at a much higher price of Rs.21/-. This situation occurred because these villages are located at the interiors of the district where communication is beyond reachable and also due to the strong nexus of the Mahajans. Moreover these ignorant rural people have no knowledge about the market as well as the demand for their products.
 - There are cases of children of the age group of 15 – 17 years who migrated mostly for domestic help and daily labour respectively due to lack of economic options. It is unfortunate that, for children, the question of lack of economic option should at all arise surpassing their child rights.
 - There are a number of cases where female migrants have migrated as domestic help at the age of 12, 13, 14, 15 or 16 years with the pressure of sustaining the entire family on their tender shoulders. Along with the pressure of feeding the family, the girl child also has to work with the pressure of saving money for her own marriage as expected by the respondents who are mostly the migrants' parents. Ironically the decision of early marriage is enjoyed by the girl's parents but the pressure of earning money for her own marriage lies upon her own shoulders.
 - Although poverty is a general reason for migration but it is perhaps because of the prevalence of gender discrimination and strong patriarchy women and girl children are forced to bear the burden of the manifestation of poverty. This is clearly reflected by the high percentages of female migrants.
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In case of marriage of migrants to far off places with different culture and language, the prime reason cited is dowry. The girl's parents need to give dowry in case of marriage to a local boy. However when a man comes from places like Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, no dowry is required. On the contrary at times the bridegroom's party gives the parents' lumpsum amount with other assets. With such opportunities in hand the parents do not bother to find out the whereabouts of the bridegroom or his family. They are happy to get rid of the daughter's burden irrespective of any money given by the bridegroom's party. Studies and experiences have revealed that there exist a strong demand for young girls belonging to poor and option less families, from the places stated above because getting married to girls in their own states mean that they need to pay huge amount of money to the bride's party as compared to the amount given in case of marriage with girls outside their states. There is also a strong demand for girls from poverty stricken families because widowers in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are not given in marriage with any girls within their respective communities.



- In Hariharpara 45.6% girls were married off in the village where their parents got the scope to see their son-in-law, but in 45.6% case, the marriage took place in Bihar, U.P. and Kashmir. It is mention worthy that, there is a strong taboo in the village in regard to the relationship of a boy and a girl. The parents and the community at large are very conservative in relation to the communication with the outside world. It implies specifically on the women. On the contrary, the parents do not hesitate to allow their daughter for going to an unknown place and marry an unknown person of different culture speaking different language. Even, there is no proof whether the marriage had actually taken place or not, because none of the parents have seen a photo of the marriage ceremony. It is clearly evident that the parents themselves are forcing their daughters [majority are below 18 years of age] to be a victim without knowing the fact what kind of abusive situations are awaiting them. Although this percentage has been visible in this particular block but the same fact could possibly imply to the remaining four blocks.

- It has been a common finding that most of the migration including those trafficked, found missing, those forced into prostitution or whose source of income has not been disclosed, has occurred through mediators who are either known friends, near relatives, fellow villagers or neighbours. This ascertains the fact that it is much easier for known people to act as mediators for migration for any purposes because of the established trust. This can be strikingly noted in the Raninagar II Block where a huge list of names have been found who have been responsible for acting as mediators for purposes of marriage in far and unknown lands.

Village: Tartipur

Locality: Bedepara

Respondent: Roopbhan's sister-in-law and two other relatives.

Roopbhan stays in Bihar with her daughter who has been married there. Surprisingly Roopbhan's grand children live in the village itself. Roopbhan's relatives had shown a lot of resistance while giving any information about Roopbhan. One of her relatives whose daughter has also been married in Bihar defended Roopbhan saying that although Roopbhan has acted as a mediator for many marriages and taken many girls from the village to Bihar, it would not have been possible if these girls' parents had not given permission. Roopbhan had come to the village 6 months ago. She is presently in Bihar.

While talking about Roopbhan, one man was trying to give a lot of information about Roopbhan but rest of the villagers tried to stop him.

Later we spoke to that man. He informed that Roopbhan has taken many girls from the village to Bihar and his information definitely indicated that they were trafficked for prostitution.

He informed that Roopbhan has taken two girls amongst many others from the village – one below 18 years and the other above 18 years. He had tried to stop Roopbhan from taking these girls but she went ahead with it. This information has been gathered by the researchers of Sanlaap during the Pilot Visit of this particular study.

On the same day of our visit we informed the Officer – in – charge of Hariharpara Police Station.

Later on a local organisation BAPU had informed that the OC of Hariharpara has lodged a suo moto case based on Sanlaap's information against Roopbhan and conducted a raid in Tartipur and the accused was arrested. Presently the case is on trial.

This case study is an ideal example of known persons acting as mediators for trafficking in the pretext of marriage.

It is also a remarkable example of direct intervention by the law enforcing agencies towards combating trafficking in the pretext of migration.

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- In case of those migrants who are in forced prostitution their age range concentrates around 18, 20, 21 or 22 years and do not communicate with their families. This can be perhaps explained by the fact that younger girls in prostitution are not allowed to communicate regularly with their families by the commercial associates of prostitution.
 - It is a general but relevant finding from all the five blocks that communication has been only from the migrants' side. In case the communication seizes from the migrants' side, the family members are left with no other option to communicate. This is definitely an added vulnerability associated with migration to unknown lands.
 - A remarkable percentage of migrants are willing to continue the same occupation in the same place. They had migrated due to lack of economic option from their respective localities. So, they do not want to return in the same situation where there is no option left for them. This factors is definitely an indirect force which is encircling the lives of these migrants.
 - There is a constant pressure on the young girls to migrate from the village and earn money, which will be given to the bridegroom during their marriages Such girls have planned to return whenever they will save enough money for their dowry. In Burwan, a married woman was forced to migrate because her parents were not able to give the said amount of dowry and as a result she was constantly tortured and abused both physically as well as mentally. This woman plans to come back to her in-laws only when she has saved the money that has been assigned as her dowry. Observing such incidents, it can be deduced that, inspiteof the introduction of the *Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961* and its subsequent ammendments, the act proves to be a dead law.
 - The fact that male migrants have migrated more as compared to females migrants as stated by the Panchayat Pradhans is contradictory to the findings of this study, which reveals that female migration is more than the males.
 - Like the findings of this study, the Pradhan have admitted that the favourite destinations for marriages are mostly Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Kashmir and Punjab. However there exists a strong resistance and denial of the fact that those girls who are married off to these far off places and eventually have no communication with their families are in a vulnerable situation and there could be all possibilities of trafficking in such pretext.
 - In regard to one of the issues where one of the Pradhans have stated that female migrants working as domestic help “prefer” places like Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi. But in an optionless situation can “preference” at all exist and it should not be forgotten that demand does exist for minor and young women in such places, which creates the push factor for vulnerable children and women to migrate to such places in quest of economic sustainability.
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Recommendations

“Migration can not be prevented by force, or through rules and regulations. Migration is desirable per se, but such movements should be voluntary and should not be induced by natural, social or political calamities or should not be largely due to various inequalities.”

With reference to the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be listed as below:

- Monitoring of the drop-out children enlisted under the ICDS, DPEP, Kishori Shakti Yojna and other similar government run programmes
- Follow up of the drop –out children in the mothers’ meeting organised under the above mentioned programmes as well as in the Home Visits conducted by the Anganwadi Workers
- To generate awareness on the issue of trafficking and ill effects of child marriage in the existing platforms of ICDS mothers’ meeting, Anganwadi mothers’ meeting, Gram Sansad Meeting, Meeting with the BDO and with the community at large
- The Panchayat needs to take up the responsibility of issuing birth certificates, especially in case of the girl child. This would enable them to monitor and prevent child marriage.
- The Panchayat should take the responsibility of referring cases of missing and trafficking to the State Legal Aid Cell, which do have provisions for free legal aid services.
- A Body of Community policing involving the local clubs, community members, Panchayat, grass- root level government workers and the police needs to be established and activated to monitor safe migration and combat trafficking. At the same time this body should have measures to keep constant vigil on those agents who act as mediators in the process of migration
- There exists a gap of information between the victims’ parents and the Police although in most cases the Panchayat members are aware of the occurrence. Thus there is a need for identifying an agency, which can monitor the migration of the community.
- Activating the Women’s Grievances Cell, provisions for which already exist within the instrument of law enforcing agency.
- Protection of rescued victim children after restoration, is to be ensured by the Panchayat

- Any child victim should be given enough time during interaction. The concerned police personnel should deal with them with patience and empathy, otherwise it may become difficult for them to open up or disclose facts about the incidents and perpetrators. It should be kept in mind that the child is a victim and not an accused and hence must not be stigmatised.
- Any individual who is aware of a case of trafficking is eligible to lodge the First Information Report to the Police. This fact is unlike the common understanding that no one except the parents of the victim can lodge a complaint. Of course the complaint of the parents is mostly prioritized in any case.

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- The parents need to take initiative to report to the police in case their child is missing or have not communicated for a remarkably long time. This would help the police to follow up in future.
 - The Panchayat needs to take responsibility for informing the local people about the existing vulnerability of trafficking through migration
 - Apart from informing the Panchayat about a case, the BDO can also be informed who would in turn inform the police. In the latter case the police is more likely to be informed since the Panchayat in most cases is guided by political pressure where as the BDO's activities are independent of any political party and hence is more transparent.
 - The Panchayat should take up its responsibility of activating the existing government schemes, which ensures economic empowerment of women and children and thus address the problem of lack of economic options.
 - The Panchayat needs to make provisions for educating the girl children so as to provide her with more options and thus reduce her vulnerability.
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