



Village Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPCs) play a crucial role in shaping the future of adolescents

Experiences from Godda & Jamtara districts of Jharkhand

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The mandate of the Child Protection Committee



Child protection and safeguarding are essential components of working with children. The Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) is a centrally sponsored scheme aimed at building a protective environment for children in difficult circumstances and other vulnerable children through Government-Civil Society Partnership. ICPS combines multiple existing child protection schemes of the Ministry under one comprehensive umbrella and integrates additional interventions for protecting children and preventing harm.¹

The Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) was launched in 2009, and its implementation started in Jharkhand in 2011. The program introduced the concept of child protection committees (CPC), which are convergence committees designed to monitor the implementation of all schemes and programs for children up to 18 years old. These include sponsorship, foster care, adoption, and aftercare program schemes. The state of Jharkhand developed detailed guidelines² to roll out these committees (approximately 29,000 VLCPC to be established across districts) in 2014.



Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC) is mandated to be established in each village for prevention, reporting, monitoring, protection & responding to the issues of child rights and protection.

The Block Level Child Protection Committee (BLPC) is mandated to support the formation of VLCPCs and support them in planning, budgeting, capacity building, and developing awareness-raising activities. These protection committees are the only platforms that offer space for taking

up issues like child marriage, school drop-out, linking orphanages with the government schemes, supporting adolescent girls in going to school, and it is also the mandate of these committees to refer and then link the identified cases with appropriate schemes and programs of the government. These are a unique platform mandated by the government and situated at the community level with the scope of convergence with important stakeholders that could potentially be strengthened to take forward for preventive safety mechanisms.

¹ https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Jharkhand123_0.pdf Integrated Child Protection Scheme; Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government Of India – retrieved on 13th Aug 2023

² Notification dated 26th Sept 2014 issued by Women and child development Department, Government of Jharkhand

◆◆◆ Major roles and responsibilities of VLCPC ◆◆◆

- To prepare a village need assessment report on the status of children in the area broadly under the category 'children in difficult circumstances' that should include disaggregated data/information in the prescribed format provided by BLCPC.
- Mapping of villages to identify most vulnerable children, update the same every month and encouraging parents for protection of children in the villages.
- Orientation of community and children on raising voices against any form of violence on children.
- Awareness raising in community to combat child trafficking, to prevent child marriages and prevention of child labour.
- Take initiative for resolving the issue if any such case related to above mentioned issues are found in the village.
- Collate relevant information and inform special juvenile police unit (SJPU) of police station, District child protection society (DCPS) and Child Welfare Committee (CWC) for immediate action.
- Awareness and sensitization of parents to send their children regularly to school.
- Make efforts to get out of school children enrolled in school by meeting the school management committee.
- Time to time campaign to raise awareness on child protection issues in villages.
- Submitting periodic report to the BLCPC to appraise them about the key challenges, achievements and opportunities for child protection.
- Drafting annual child protection plan of villages and appraising BLCPC about the need to finalise and implement the plan and seek inputs.
- Maintaining record of children in the villages, who are not attending schools, migrated out of village for work, missing children etc.
- Forwarding application to the BLCPC of specific cases for referral services.
- Discouraging harmful practices that are against child protection for example sex selective abortion, child marriages, corporal punishment etc.
- Promoting good practices, like birth registration, Aadhar card registration, school enrolment, migrant register maintenance.
- The VLCPC should liaison with the BLCPC and DCPS for restoration and rehabilitation of rescued trafficked victims, orphan child and unaccompanied children. BLCPC to provide support on case to case basis in consultation with the DCPS.
- Promoting community level foster care services as mentioned in ICPS on case to case basis, if any child in need of foster care is present in the villages. The BLCPC will guide the VLCPC in consultation with DCPS in such cases.
- Any such activities instructed by DCPS, BLCPC or SCPS for the child protection.
- VLCPC may engage with the civil society organisation for raising awareness on child protection issues in villages.

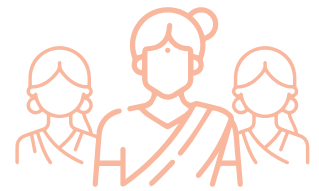
Role of Anganwadi Worker (AWW)

The Jharkhand State Guidelines for Child Protection Committees were notified in 2014. Jharkhand State Child Protection Society (JSCPS) felt that AWWs need to be an integral part of the VLCPCs as they are the community-level point persons for the WCD department & interface with children and

adolescents. Hence, the AWW was named as the facilitator of this convergence committee and was responsible for organizing monthly VLCPC meetings and maintaining meeting and child tracking registers of VLCPCs. It is worth noting here that the AWW is mandated to play an important role in organizing the meetings and coordinating the process in other states like West Bengal as well.

UMANG is an ICRW conceptualized, and IKEA Foundation supported comprehensive, multi layered girl's empowerment program to increase their retention in school and reduce prevalence of child marriages in Godda and Jamtara districts of Jharkhand. UMANG is being implemented by ICRW in partnership with SATHEE, Badlao Foundation, PCI, and in close association with the government of Jharkhand. The program uses a socio-ecological framework and gender transformative approaches for multilayered intervention at individual (adolescent girls), family (parents, siblings), community (men & boys, women, and other community members), and system (schools, local governing structures like PRI, child protection mechanism, etc.) levels.

Functional status of VLCPC



As the barriers to access to education and vulnerabilities to early marriages were identified under UMANG program, it was strategized to link UMANG intervention with VLCPCs. However, though formed long back in 2014 with the notification of the state guidelines on child protection committees, VLCPCs were largely found to be defunct. During the assessment process, the UMANG program staff had a meeting with the District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) and District Child Protection Officers (DCPOs) of Godda and Jamtara. They discovered that the VLCPCs were created through Gram Sabhas at the village level across the state at AWC level in 2014. However, upon interaction with the Anganwadi workers (AWWs), it was found that

they didn't know much about the committees and no meetings had ever taken place at the village or even at the block or district levels. AWWs were responsible for organising, facilitating the meetings and maintaining child tracking and meeting registers. However, all the meeting and tracking registers were kept at the District Child Protection Society. No formal orientation of AWWs had been done on the ICPS scheme and on the concept of VLCPCs and their roles within these committees.

These committees were largely defunct in almost all 209 villages of Godda and Jamtara district where UMANG program started in 2018.





Activation of VLPC

Considering the crucial potential role of VLPCs in reducing school dropout, continued education of girls, and prevention of child marriage, ICRW and partners made efforts to activate the VLPCs through the UMANG program which aims for adolescent empowerment. In order to activate the VLPCs a strategic approach was developed. The major components of this strategic approach were as follows -

Situation Analysis

As described in the previous section the UMANG team made systematic efforts to gather information related to the on-ground situation and had discussions with various stakeholders for collecting relevant information. The situation analysis revealed that mostly VLPCs were defunct on the ground and it informed the process of strategy development. And even those that were functioning had not met for very long and members while aware of their responsibilities were not sure how to act upon the mandate. They needed hand-holding and capacity enhancement.

Capacity building of team

The UMANG Peer Mentors³ who are from local communities of Godda and Jamtara have played a crucial role in strengthening of VLPC. They were oriented by the District Child Protection officers of Godda and Jamtara on the child protection systems and were explained in detail the process of VLPC formation, its role and functions. The DCPOs provided supportive guidance in the activation of VLPCs by accompanying peer mentors to the villages.

Initiation of Activation

In coordination with the respective DCPU offices in both the districts the VLPCs were activated in the 209 villages. Gram Sabhas were held and in several of these meetings, the DCPOs also participated along with UMANG team members. VLPC is mandated to have nine members, viz. one representative of PRI, Anganwadi worker, Sahiya, one Active Woman from SHG, one representative of SMC (School management committee) and two representatives of Baal Sansad (1 Girl, 1 Boy). In addition, members of BLPC, DCPU, DSWO, SCPS, SP, and DM can participate during the meeting of VLPC. The committee's tenure will be three years and it should be reconstituted thereafter with due notification from DCPU. At least three seats will be reserved for female members, including one girl as children representative.

The VLPC members (VLPC has 9 members PRI - 1, AWW - 1, Sahiya - 1, Active women -(SHG) - 1, SMC (School management committee) - 1, Baal Sansad - 2 (1 Girl, 1 Boy) were apprised of their roles as members of this committee by the Peer Mentors and the constitution of this committee in the AWC area was brought in the written proceedings of the Gram Sabha. The monthly meetings of VLPCs were initiated with the support of Peer Mentors in the 4 UMANG implementation blocks of Godda and Jamtara.

This process was gradual as the VLPCs are formed at AWC level and a total of 396 AWCs underwent this process of activation and initiation of meetings.

³ Community level workers working in the UMANG program from the local communities.



Table 1: Status of VLCPC activation

Block	Villages	No. of AWC	VLCPC activated	Meeting held	Participants
Nala	30	51	48	673	7141
Jamtara	51	109	108	896	13018
Godda	74	140	129	632	9737
Mahagama	54	122	111	527	9223
Total	209	422	396	2728	39119

Understanding community level needs and mapping of key government schemes for linking potential beneficiaries

Several issues of children in difficult situations emerged in VLCPC meetings. These issues included bringing children back to schools and enrolling them if they have never attended school and guiding parents, guardians, and community on getting basic identity documents of their children like Aadhar, birth certificates, etc. for accessing government schemes.

Many cases of children and adolescents deprived of education owing to family level issues like poverty or belonging to single parents families emerged as well. Several of these drop out girls were vulnerable to marriage and trafficking. Once specific cases of such children started coming up at VLCPC meetings, the members struggled to provide answers to their problems and redress their situation.

In this context, ICRW and partners developed a detailed compendium of government schemes from different departments (education, health, women & child development, Panchayati Raj, labour, rural development, water sanitation, etc.). This compendium was developed after visits and meetings with all line departments that are working on adolescent and children issues either directly or indirectly. The compendium was not just a listing of schemes related education, skills trainings, housing, etc., but it also outlined the criteria and documents needed for availing these schemes.

This document was provided to the UMANG peer mentors, who were trained to use it. Subsequently, they provided orientation to AWWs and adolescents on how to use it. It generated awareness on available schemes and provided clarity on documents required to access them. Such linkages to government schemes are expected to help reduce children's vulnerabilities and resolve emerging needs during VLCPC meetings.

Yasmeen Khatuun was prevented from getting dropped out of school by VLCPC of her village by ensuring that she gets benefit of sponsorship scheme of the government. Yasmeen lives in Godda district of Jharkhand and regularly attended UMANG group education activity (GEA) sessions. Her father, a daily wage labourer went to jail owing to a family feud. She lived with her mother (a housewife) and four siblings. The family's economic situation deteriorated. Yasmeen continued to attend the UMANG GEA sessions but continued to face problems at home owing to their economic condition. She was anxious that she will have to leave school soon. Around same time, during UMANG session she came to know about the VLCPC and went to attend its meeting. Her case was registered in the tracking register after which she called the Childline. They assured her of redressal and after a month a member of the district level child Welfare Committee visited her house to verify her details. She was then linked to the Sponsorship scheme and is getting Rs 2000/- per month as stipend.

“ I have received the benefit of sponsorship through VLCPC, which has allowed me to continue my education. Today, I have become recognized as a youth champion, and I have connected girls like me with the benefits of sponsorship, enabling all of them to continue their education as well.

Bulty Mondal of Nala block, Jamtara district

“ After my father’s death, my education was disrupted. My mother worked as a laborer to keep the household running and support my younger brother and our elderly grandparents. I benefited from the Childline-sponsored scholarship program through a VLCPC meeting. Both my brother and I receive 2,000 rupees each month, which has allowed us to continue our education and receive support at home. My goal is to become a pilot.

Deep Kumar Mandal of Nala block, Jamtara district

The following table (Table 2) depicts an account of adolescents who were provided linkages to different government schemes through the Umang program with the assistance of peer mentors at the

community level. The VLCPC forum played a crucial role in connecting the adolescents and families with various government schemes.

Table 2: Schemes linkage provided to adolescents

District	Adolescents provided linkages with government schemes: Till Sept 2022						
	Block	Sukanya Samrid-dhi Yojna	Kanyadan Yojna	Wheel-chair/ tricycle	School admissions (including KGBVs)	Spon-sorship scheme*	Skills training
God-da	Mahagama	467	25	25			
	God-da	321	86		32	2	
Jamtara	Jamtara	1068	142		KGVB – 40 Class 9- 92	10	
	Nala	822	61		KGVB – 74 Class 9 – 38	11	67

* Both boys and girls were linked with the sponsorship scheme and educational institutions. The other schemes linkages were for adolescent girls only



Active participation of adolescents in VLCPC

Since the issues of adolescents and children are at the core of these meetings, it was strategically decided to increase their participation in these meetings.

It reduced dependency on peer mentors to organize the meeting. The peer mentors talked to the leaders of adolescent groups created in 209 villages. The concept and role of VLCPC was explained to them. Such interactions gradually enhanced adolescents' understanding that VLCPC could be a platform for providing the space to discuss specific issues of their peers and could also offer some solutions.

Hence, they gradually started participating in VLCPC meetings. They raised issues that were making them or their peers vulnerable like not being able to go to school for various reasons, including being engaged in household work, being sent to work for money, not being able to cope with studies, etc. These issues in turn were leading to child marriages, child labour, etc. Amongst the boys, it was mostly the school-going ones who participated at these meetings along with the UMANG adolescent group girls. On an average 5 to 6 adolescents participated per meeting.

It was mostly the girls who actively participated in the meetings and talked about issues ranging from losing interest in studies to wanting to work for money instead of studying.

Like many other villages the VLCPC was not active in Pandha village. When the District Child Protection Officer (DCPO) was informed about this, he recommended activation of VLCPC through Gram Sabha since the first formation was done in 2014. The committee was hence re formed at Gram Sabha with the help of the DCPO. Monthly meetings were initiated but the objective of the meeting were not clear to the members and similar discussions kept happening at every meeting which were mostly on child marriage, child labour etc. Sometimes the members also refused to participate by giving excuses. Considering the situation, UMANG peer mentor and adolescent group leader Bharti Kumari discussed this issue and devised a strategy. Bharti asked girls from her group to join the VLCPC meeting of their AWC. She also encouraged Baal Sansad, male members to participate regularly in the meeting because there was no participation of adolescent boys. Since they are school going children and are already known to the AWW, neither she nor other members resented their presence at the meetings or even writing in the registers. When Bharti and her friends saw that VLCPC meetings record keeping was not being done by the AWW, they took onus of it and started writing proceedings of the meetings in the designated register. They also learnt how to handle cases that were put up at the VLCPC. They started looping in the district level helpline CHILDLINE for bringing relief to children. This initiative of the adolescent groups in this village became an example which was showcased by other UMANG peer mentors at VLCPC meetings.

Jyoti lives in Afzalpur village of Nala Block of Jamtara district of Jharkhand. She is a member of the Geetanjali Adolescent Group formed under UMANG programme. Her father works as a carpenter and the family is dependent on the daily wages earned by him.

Jyoti flunked in matric exams and her education ceased. She got engaged in household work and her parents and relatives started looking for a suitable match for her. She was 16 years old at that time. Her father finalised a match and started preparing for her wedding. These developments disturbed Jyoti and she discussed her situation at the Geetanjali group meeting. She expressed that she didn't want to get married. She attended few VLPC meetings and learned that underage marriage is not legal. Subsequently, Jyoti and a few adolescent group members went to talk to Jyoti's parents along with the UMANG peer mentor. Jyoti found such courage due to collectivization of girls and the support of VLCPC. She mentioned that underage marriages are not legal as it was discussed at VLCPC meetings. Her parents signed a bond that they will not get Jyoti married before she completed her studies. She got re-admitted to nearby school to continue her studies.

Fatima Khatoon (Bandardiha village of Jamtara district) and her younger sister came to know about the Umang sessions at village and started attending them with great enthusiasm. After some time Fatima's family started discussions at home regarding her marriage. Fatima didn't want to get married and she was only 17 years old at that time. But she couldn't gather the courage to say no to her parents and refuse the marriage. She wanted to study further and become independent by standing on her own feet but with each passing day her dreams felt increasingly distant and far-fetched. Meanwhile, Fatima visited Anganwadi centre and participated in VLCPC meetings. She had learned during Umang sessions that she could talk about her issues to Anganwadi Worker and other members of VLCPC. She gathered courage to mention the issue in the VLCPC meeting and spoke about it. The Anganwadi worker responded positively and visited her house with couple of other members. They met Fatima's parents to discuss the matter. However, Fatima's parents didn't agree at first. Next time they went with the school teacher and discussed the matter again. This time Fatima's parents agreed to change their plan for Fatima's marriage. Thus, Fatima was able to put forward her issues at VLCPC meetings and get positive response from VLCPC members. She has decided to become a nurse and is presently getting trained at an institute in Dhanbad. Thus VLCPC helped Fatima realise her dreams.

The presence of adolescents in these VLCPC meetings helped since the key focus of discussion at these meetings were the adolescents themselves.

Such participation helped in identifying more children who needed assistance under difficult circumstances.

Leveraging system level mechanisms for record keeping, review, and monitoring

The State Government had sent the circular on child protection committee guidelines to all AWWs. However, the AWWs and other VLCPC members were not oriented on their roles. This was affecting the functioning of VLCPCs. Hence, a strategy was developed to leverage the monthly meetings of AWWs at CDPO's office to orient them on ICPS and child protection committees.

In Jamtara block, multiple monthly review meetings of CDPO were leveraged to orient the AWWs on their roles as VLCPC convenors. UMANG Block Coordinators facilitated initial orientations, followed by Lady Supervisor and District Child Protection Officer (DCPO). Such a gradual shift in taking up responsibility helped enhance ownership among system level stakeholders to play active role in this initiative and reduce future dependency on UMANG program staff. This is expected to strengthen initiative sustainability in the long run.

Another important aspect was reporting through system level processes and platforms. At several AWCs, the meeting and tracking registers were regularly updated. However, these registers were not part of the reporting of AWWs. They were submitting ICDS monthly reports to CDPOs at their review meetings. However, no reporting was done for ICPS. Hence, at DLCPC meetings of both districts, the UMANG team suggested that AWWs submit VLCPC reports every month as a part of their regular reporting to CDPOs. The suggestion was accepted and several AWWs started submitting VLCPC reports

to CDPOs. This report is in the form of copies of child tracking registers and VLCPC meeting registers. Specific cases of children are then forwarded for schemes linkages to respective DCPUs by Lady Supervisors or CDPOs.

However, monthly reporting by AWWs on VLCPCs varied across the blocks. In Jamtara Block 75% AWWs and in Nala Block 80% AWWs were submitting these reports to their Lady Supervisors. However, in Mahagama, only 15% of the AWWs have started reporting. It was noted that in Mahagama some Anganwadi centres were not operating regularly and only few AWWs took interest in reporting.

Supporting vertical linkages

The District level child protection committees were activated in both districts in the initial phases of the project through liaison with the respective Deputy Commissioners. The BDOs started to organise BLCPC meetings at their block offices. However, the frequency of these meetings is largely dependent on how responsive the system is and how much time and agenda space is provided on children's issues.

In Godda district, 2 DLCPC meetings and in Godda and Mahagama blocks till date 2 BLCPC meetings each have been held. However, due to the pandemic, there was a break in these meetings. In Jamtara district, 3 DLCPC meetings, 4 BLCPC meetings, and 5 BLCPC meetings were held in Jamtara and Nala block until March 2022, respectively.





Challenges and Mitigation Strategies



Some key challenges relating to the effective functioning of the VLCPCs were that they needed to be operational and required systemic support to be reminded of their mandates and capacitated.

One of the biggest challenges was the dormant status of VLCPC which had resulted due to lack of awareness and accountability of stakeholders. The UMANG experience demonstrates that it can be addressed by developing a strategy and implementing it through a systematic approach. During the initial phase, the VLCPC meetings were initiated largely by the UMANG peer mentors, as neither the AWW nor the other VLCPC members were aware of their roles as members of this committee. However, gradually, the scenario changed over time and we saw active participation of AWW and other members of VLCPC.

VLCPC is essentially a convergence platform where stakeholders from different government departments, governance structures, community members, and adolescents come together. However, it was difficult to get members (who are from different departments) to come together as they did not perceive any direct benefit or incentive to participate. In order to address this issue, the orientation of AWWs and PRI members on the roles

and responsibilities of Child Protection Committee with special focus on child marriage-related issues was purposively included as part of strategy for enhancing their engagement. Organizing monthly meetings with stakeholders such as AWW and PRI members has helped increase their participation and regularize the meetings. However, going forward, it is crucial to secure a high-level commitment from district and state authorities to ensure that all concerned departments recognize the significance of the VLCPC. This should include implementing a regular monitoring mechanism.

Many AWWs perceived this work as additional burden. They were already maintaining many registers and considered two more registers for the VLCPCs as additional work. Therefore, mainstreaming this work as part of a larger agenda was quite important. In addition to that, it was important for AWWs to mainstream the reporting process. Such reporting, along with her existing reporting cycle and mechanisms, helped mainstream the VLCPC work. Encouraging the BDO to take ownership of VLCPC meeting and creating processes for monitoring the VLCPC meetings supported enhancing system-level ownership.



Way Forward

The UMANG program has demonstrated that VLCPCs (Village Level Child Protection Committees) can effectively address the issues affecting children and adolescents in the community. VLCPCs can involve important stakeholders, including children, in finding solutions to these issues. The program has also shown that civil society organizations can play a significant role in activating VLCPCs. In Godda and Jamtara, the activation process created a meeting cycle for VLCPCs and AWWs (Anganwadi Workers), which helped to regularize meetings in the long run. Efforts to link VLCPCs with government schemes have resulted in tangible achievements in terms of education access, scholarships, and skill development at the community level. It is recommended that the state acknowledges the experience and learning of civil society organizations and collectively develops a roadmap for the long-term sustainability of the VLCPC platform, along with its block and district-level interfaces.

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