

**PROMOTING RESILIENCE
FOR THE PREVENTION OF AND RECOVERY FROM
SEXUAL ABUSE AND CHILD EXPLOITATION IN ASIA**

Coming together is a beginning, working together is success



BICE (International Catholic Child Bureau)
an international network of organizations at the service of children

Who are we?

Bice is a catholic international network of organizations engaged in the promotion and the protection of the dignity and the rights of the child.
It is a non-profit organization under French law (law 1901) made up of the organizations that are members of its network.

Our mission

Bice operates within a Christian perspective. Its objective is the integral development of all children. Bice dedicates all its efforts to promoting the dignity of children and enforcing their rights that are still too often violated.
In this respect, it relies on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), that it contributed to draft and which application it supports.

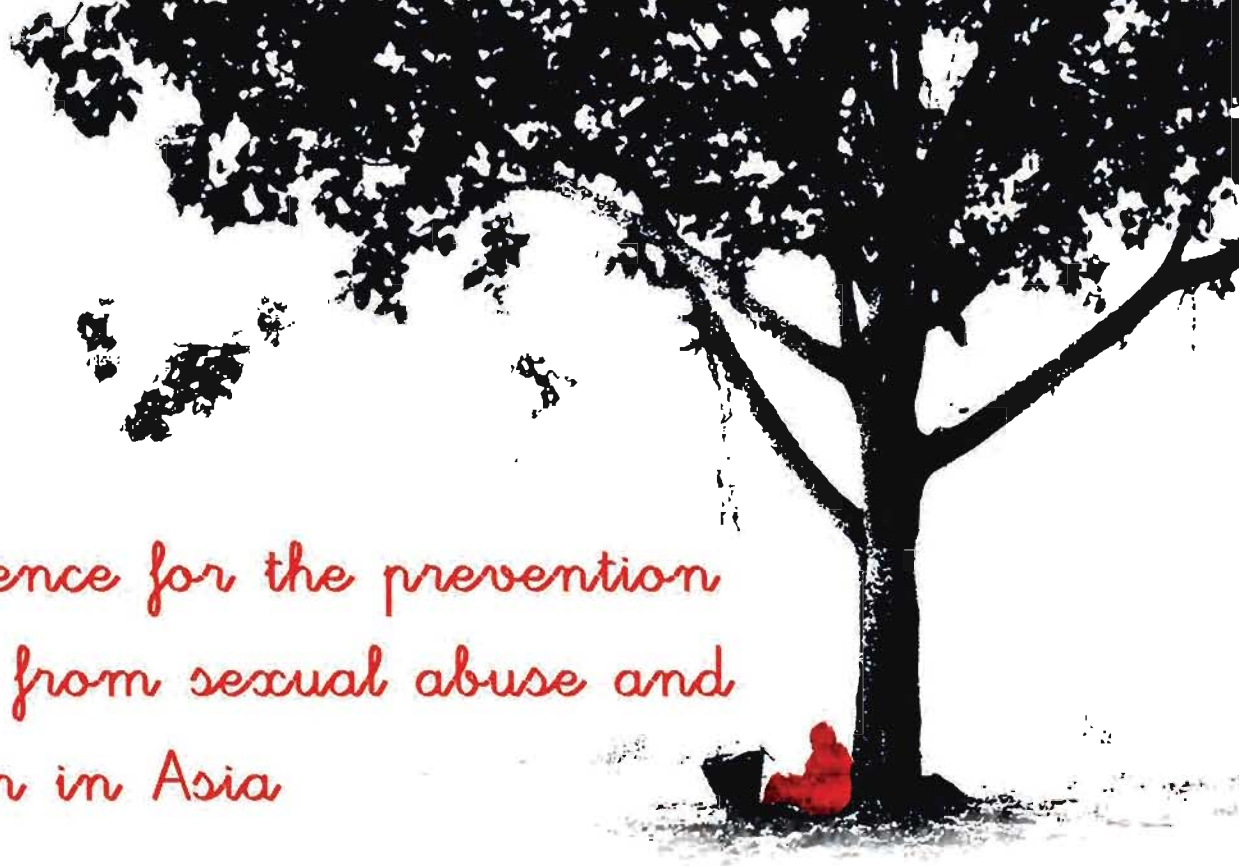
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The best interests of the child and the respect of his or her dignity are at the heart of Bice's engagement. Bice works at the service of all children, with no discrimination or proselytising, in the respect of their nationality, their culture and their religion.
Its representatives must observe a code of good conduct.
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Promoting resilience for the prevention
of and recovery from sexual abuse and
child exploitation in Asia

Learning from practice project



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This paper has been put together “step by step”, thanks to the support of the many people who, from their different positions, have devoted their time and effort to offer this collection of experiences.

It documents the engagement of three local NGOs and the strength of the communities they supported in their fight against sexual abuse and child exploitation in three countries of South and Southeast Asia. This fight is possible thanks to the courage of the children, adolescents, mothers and fathers. As survivors of unjust situations of violence, they succeeded, thanks to their resources and the support of caring people, in facing the challenges of life, in moving on and building a future of hope. All of them are an example of resiliency. By sharing their testimonies and experiences they contribute to keeping our learning alive and give us the courage to keep fighting to make this world a just and kind place for all children.

To all of them, our deepest recognition and appreciation.



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Foreword

The concept of resilience is not a new one. Resilience is a universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity. Resilience generally describes the ability to anticipate, withstand and bounce back from external pressures and shocks in ways that avoid a fundamental loss of identity and maintain an individuals' core functions.

Resilience is important because it is the human capacity to face, overcome and be strengthened - or even transformed by - the adversities of life. Everyone faces adversities; no one is exempt.

Day in and day out, children all over the world face dramatic situations and stresses such as divorce or illness while others confront catastrophe — war, poverty, disease, famine and floods. Whether such experiences crush or strengthen an individual child depends, in part, on his or her resilience. With resilience, children can triumph over trauma; without it, trauma (adversity) triumphs. The crises children face both within their families and in their communities can overwhelm them.

A child's own genetic make-up and temperament are fundamental to whether he or she will be resilient. That is, a child's vulnerability to anxiety, challenges, stress or unfamiliarity determines his or her self-perception, how he or she interacts with others, and how he or she addresses adversities.

In promoting resilience, any work with children must similarly be done within the contexts of their families,

their schools, their communities, and the broader society in which they live. These parents, teachers, communities and societies are essential to promoting resilience in children, so attention is centered on the child within his or her setting.

While external assistance is essential in times of trouble, it is insufficient on its own. Along with food and shelter, children need love and trust, hope and autonomy elements of safe relationships that can foster friendships and commitment. They need loving support and self-confidence, faith in themselves and their world, all of which builds resilience.

I deeply congratulate BICE for launching this manual entitled "Promoting Resilience For The Prevention And Recovery From Sexual Abuse And Child Exploitation In Asia". This manual provides useful feedback on these topics to the communities involved, as well as to other organisations and professionals working with those affected by violence, in particular child sexual abuse. This manual provides lessons learnt from actual life experiences of children and communities, and can therefore serve as models of action for other organisations who wish to encourage the promotion of personal, social and community resilience – in other words, enabling people to make the best use of their resources in finding solutions to their problems.

Najat Maalla M'jid

*Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and
Child Pornography*

Preface

This paper is the product of BICE's partnership with grassroots NGOs in India, Nepal and Cambodia, in an effort to transfer their knowledge and experience in caring for and protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation. The key message which they bring for us to consider is the resilience of children. Among the many NGOs who are serving abused children and their families, they have developed the competency needed to share their experience with child resilience through their work in this area over several decades.

In fact, each child's resilience has been developing since he or she was born. Even though the discussion of whether nature or nurture has more impact on the child's life and behavior has yet to be resolved, we have learned that the child's brain and cognitive development has been influenced by certain kinds of parental care and protection, especially when the child is still a toddler. Furthermore, the child's resilience will develop even more drastically if the child has been nurtured in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Sadly, in real life, many children have been sexually abused and exploited at this crucial age.

As a result, we need to look at and learn from both children who have been sexually abused and exploited when they were a toddler, as well as those who were affected after reaching puberty. Indeed, both groups need a positive and nurturing social environment to facilitate their physical and psychosocial recovery. The field researchers who have participated in the three countries involved in this study can synchronize their knowledge and experience in this work,

and harmonize them with many key messages and suggestions for practitioners who are serving similar children and their families in other locations. These invaluable messages and suggestions cover crisis intervention, including intake processes and investigation of child abuse; whereas safeguarding and supporting child witnesses includes working with parents, hospitals, schools and communities for their long-term recovery and social reintegration.

More than anything else, it is paramount to build up trust with these children and make them feel safe and free to continue their lives. This can stimulate their inherent resilience and lead to greater cooperation from them in the important but difficult tasks of filing legal complaints, depositions and testimonies which ultimately can help achieve the best interests of the child. The key issues when developing the trust of children are therefore safeguarding and promoting their welfare. This is especially important when family members have been involved in the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child, as the family may seek to protect the perpetrator rather than the child. Sometimes the family only seeks to protect their "honor" above all. In this case, practitioners need to monitor the communication between the family and the child, so that the family does not interfere with child protective services or the child's testimony. This will safeguard their immediate welfare and help ensure that their best interests are fully realised in the long-term.

With best wishes,
Sanphasit Koompraphant

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Thailand (until February 2013)



Executive Summary

In 2007, the International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE) encouraged several of its partner organisations to gather together to reflect and learn from their work on child sexual abuse and exploitation. Support was provided to enable BICE's local partners in India (RTUT), Nepal (AAWAAJ) and Cambodia (CCBO) to meet annually over a period of three consecutive years, in order to analyse and discuss their achievements and identify effective tools and practice. Subsequently, this manual was produced to describe - primarily through the voice of children and adults - their experience in working alongside individuals, families and communities.

Two central concepts define the actions of these organisations:

1. *The promotion of resilience* via strategic models and practices designed to encourage and strengthen the natural resources of children, families and communities, enabling them to prevent and respond to the problem of child sexual abuse.
2. The use of *community mobilisation* as a *primary objective* rather than a mere working tool, i.e. the achievement of systematic, integrated responses to child sexual abuse arising from and sustained by the communities themselves.

In short, this manual (and the accompanying DVD) attempt to convey local experiences in the process of promoting resilience through community-based practices. Its content is the result of the collective reflection and testimony of

children and adult survivors of sexual abuse (both males and females), as well as the NGOs who supported them. Their testimonies and experiences made it possible to identify the strategies and activities which have proven to be most effective, including the specific methods used and their results. This document is therefore more than a description of practices; it also presents the results of an investigation into their usefulness using action-research methodologies such as participant observation and frequent action-reflection.

The main purpose in publishing this information is to provide useful feedback on these topics to the communities involved, as well as to other organisations and professionals working with those affected by violence, and by child sexual abuse and exploitation in particular. The process used enabled the participating NGOs to both *reflect on* and *learn from* their field work and its impact on local communities; and most importantly, to learn from life experiences of children, women and men.

The experiences described herein come from three countries within South and Southeast Asia. Each country, each culture, and each community represent a very different and complex reality, yet there are some common lessons that can be shared. The use of a community-based approach to promoting resilience has confirmed the importance of teaching children how to protect and defend themselves against possible abuse, as well as to identify community resources for support and protection.

A key factor in this was the creation of spaces (both individual and communal) that enabled children, parents and other community members to find the strength needed

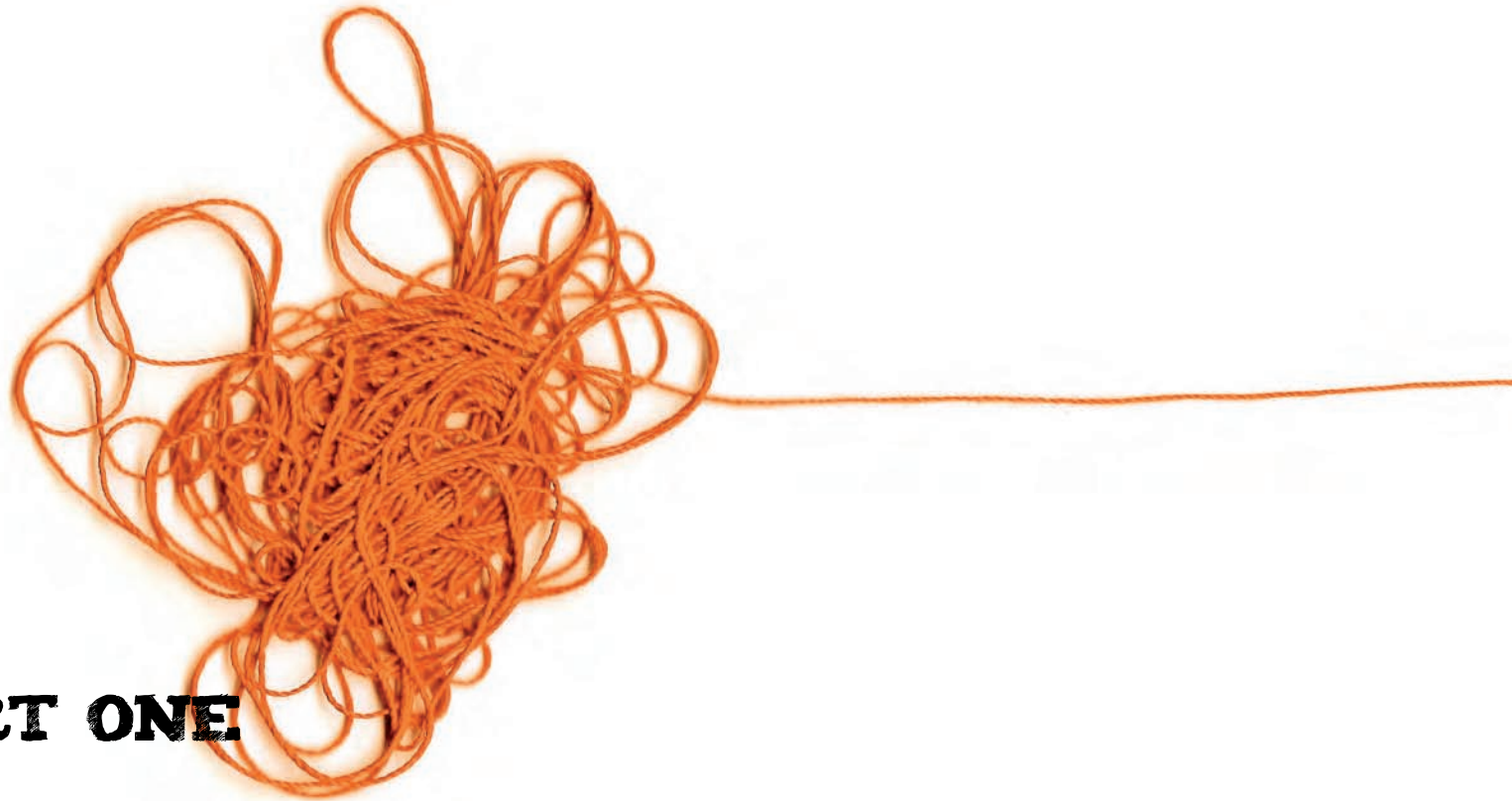
to fight abuse and exploitation. Accessing these caring and supportive environments enabled them to recover and develop their innate capacities to understand and respond to the problem, and eventually take individual and collective action to protect themselves and others. The practices that underpin these achievements emphasise the importance of specific social processes such as community cohesion and solidarity; individual identity and belonging; and meaningful social support as key elements in the empowerment of those affected by child sexual abuse. In this regard, three important observations can be made:

1. *"The most important thing for me from when I started feeling better, was the day I met someone who believed in me" (Discussion with a youth group in Pondicherry, India).* Analysis showed that the support and recovery of people affected by violence is based on acceptance, care and affection. Children's fears, mistrust of adults, or feelings of guilt begin to disappear when they feel accepted in his or her experience. Offering relationships based on trust, respect and the dignity of each individual child is the first step for survivors of sexual abuse to regain their trust in the adult world.

2. *"Coming together is a beginning. Working together is success" (Nepali saying).* None of the NGOs or community members' actions were carried out in isolation, but were shaped by and intertwined with what they termed as "Community Networks for Child Protection". Research and reflection in each location showed that such networks helped to bring about broad social change, and lead to the development of self-support groups that helped prevent potential abuse while supporting the recovery of

survivors. This indicates that the safety and well-being of children is not a thing of chance; rather it is the result of joint community efforts to raise children in a safe and secure environment.

3. *"If the problem is happening at the community level, it needs to be solved at community level" (Irada Gautam, President of AAWAAJ).* The participating NGOs found that the most meaningful changes that had been achieved in the communities stemmed from their increased participation in decision-making. The motivation behind the organisations' focus on participation is based on the fundamental belief in the ability of adults and children to respond positively to adversity when they are encouraged to develop their capacities and resources. Even in cases of extreme crisis and in the most vulnerable contexts, the teams always found committed people with the necessary resources who are willing to fight violence and uphold the rights of children.



PART ONE

Origins of the research and key concepts



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अनुस्का कार्की

I. Introduction

The International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE) has been working in Asia for over 10 years to promote the dignity and the rights of children affected by abuse and sexual exploitation. BICE has been supporting the autonomy and capacity of local initiatives in Cambodia, India, and Nepal, acting as a platform to produce and share knowledge and to promote advocacy strategies at the international level.

After more than ten years of work, the partners of BICE Asian Delegation have gained significant experience supporting and promoting community-based projects for the prevention and rehabilitation of children against sexual abuse and child trafficking. Each of these initiatives and local programs, which aim to promote individual and community resilience, can become a knowledge base for the organisations, if we are able to identify the specific activities and methods that are the source of change.

For example, this would enable practitioners to answer questions such as *What are the elements necessary to enable a workshop with child survivors of sexual violence to become a space for reparation and recovery?*

The search to answer such questions is the main motivation behind the "Learning From Practice" project. Beginning in 2007, BICE encouraged its partners to gather together and to promote a space for reflection and learning from the field work and its impact on children. This was intended to enable the BICE partners of the Asian Delegation in Cambodia, India, and Nepal to analyse and discuss their work in order to answer three underlying questions:

1. Which methods can promote resilience and positively impact affected children and their communities?

A participatory action-research was proposed so that NGO's members, together with the community members could describe, analyse and identify the reasons why some of their activities have a positive impact.

2. How can this research empower both the community and local teams?

Based on action-research principles, the project promoted a space for NGOs and community members to decide upon improved strategies based on a clear analysis of their past experience.

3. How can the experiences and learning process of these Asian NGOs help in strengthening on-going programs and future initiatives?

The project believes that the evaluation and rethinking of experience is a fundamental step to change actions, to take advantage of useful interventions and either discard or modify those that are limited in their practical use. By combining people's experiences and knowledge it is possible to critically reflect and share what has been learned and to prepare for future interventions.

Each NGO carried out the research in its own areas and adjusted the basic model to its own situation while respecting the characteristics and specificities of each context. The research included three stages:

a) Consolidation of research teams. The NGO teams participated in a capacity building workshop

on the design and development of community diagnosis; identification of indicators of effectiveness; facilitation of focus group discussions about sexual abuse; data analysis and formulation of main conclusions.

b) Collection of information. NGO teams used participatory techniques such as group discussions, a community questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with key informants to gather people's perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes about preventing child sexual abuse and ways to support the recovery of those affected. The discussions with children also included recreational activities to help foster the dialogue.

c) Data analysis and definition of main conclusions. This phase of the analysis provided the basic foundations and contents of this manual.



The three NGOs gathered together once a year during the Asian Network Regional Meetings (September 2008 in Sihanoukville, Cambodia; November 2009 in Surkhet, Nepal, and July 2010 in Pondicherry, India) where they shared their findings, learned from each other's practices and generated new knowledge and strategies in order to improve their work. The results have been organised in this manual.

The manual is organized in four parts:

The first part describes the main aspects of the research, the reality faced by teams and their communities, the expected goals, and the characteristics of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse as described by the NGO workers.

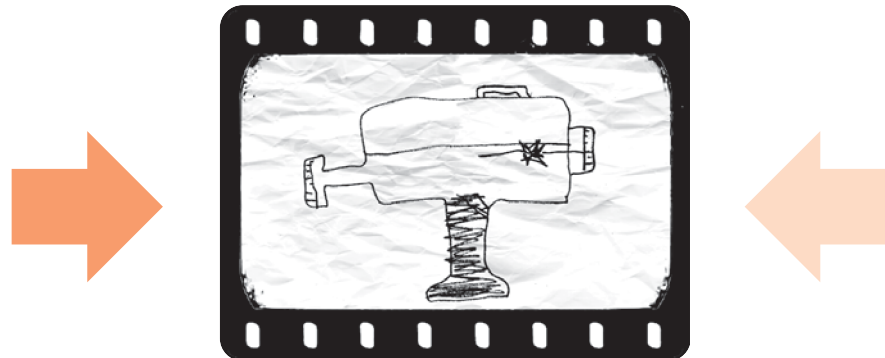
In the second part, the voice of the community members prevails. This section describes the processes underlying different psychosocial support activities accompanied by the testimony of community members along with the theoretical and methodological descriptions provided by NGO teams.

The third part refers to the lessons learnt and offers suggestions for psychosocial support in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in these communities.

The four part collects the main conclusions and recommendations for future interventions.

As part of the "Learning From Experience" project, video interviews were produced with the intention of bringing the people's experiences closer to the readers of this manual. The audio-visual material contained on the accompanying DVD contributes additional information, warmth and empathy to the written work. The tracks are excerpts from interviews conducted with and by members of the participating NGOs, featuring people from the various communities they work in.

The DVD content is organized by thematic areas making it possible to view it separately from the written material, but **it is recommended to use the DVD together with the manual when possible. The video camera icon (see below) indicates that you can access the DVD for additional information related to the text.** From the DVD's main menu, simply click the track number indicated in the manual, then return to the text when finished.



II. Context

This manual documents a set of practices conducted by three NGOs partners of the BICE's delegation in Asia.

AAWAAJ NGO, Nepal. Nepal witnessed a decade of long internal armed conflict initiated by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in 1996, which lasted until 2005. Political mismanagement, corruption, high levels of unemployment, economic struggle, discrimination and a soaring gap between the people in urban and rural settings are considered the main factors which sustained the conflict throughout the country.

The armed conflict disrupted ordinary lives across the country and affected the social order by displacing large numbers of people. Because of the insurgency, many people migrated to Surkhet from other districts. Experience shows that when women are deprived of their homes, separated from their families and lack community structures to protect them, they face increased vulnerability to violence. Subsequently, they are often forced into trading sex for material goods or protection, or for basic survival. AAWAAJ currently works in the districts of Surkhet, Bardya and Dailkeh.

CCBO NGO, Cambodia. Cambodia's history is marked by Pol Pot's genocidal regime from 1976-1979, during which an estimated 2-3 million people lost their lives by the hands of the Khmer Rouge through forced labour, starvation and execution. Today, Cambodia is considered one of the poorest among East Asian countries. Around 35% of the rural population survives below the national poverty line (0.5 USD a day).

In terms of children's rights, Cambodia has been ranked second behind Thailand as both a sending and receiving destination for the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. The coastal town of Sihanouk Ville (where CCBO is based) is an increasingly popular tourist attraction and also one of the main locations of child prostitution in the country. It is also one of the routes for child sex trafficking to Thailand and Malaysia, both from the areas in and around Sihanouk Ville and from Koh Kong, the neighbouring province.

RTUT NGO, India. Pondicherry is a major centre for tourists seeking spiritual experiences. In recent years it has also become an area of commercial sex. Recent studies¹ indicate that about hundred children and adolescents live on the streets of Pondicherry at constant risk of sexual abuse and trafficking. Many of them are living in city slums in situations of extreme poverty, where the risk of becoming survivors of abusive experiences is higher. RTUT currently works in the communities of Earikarai, JJ Nagar, GNPalayam, Arasur Pitchaveeranpet and Gopalankadai.

¹ P.M.Nair, Sankar Sen. (2005). Trafficking of women and children in India. UNIFEM. Ed. Orient Longman, New Delhi.

III. Conceptual Framework

The following definitions were provided by the NGO members based on their experience and understanding of the various concepts related to child sexual abuse. The definitions do not entail a completed process, but rather a continuing interaction between theories and actual experiences, thus constructing knowledge from experience.

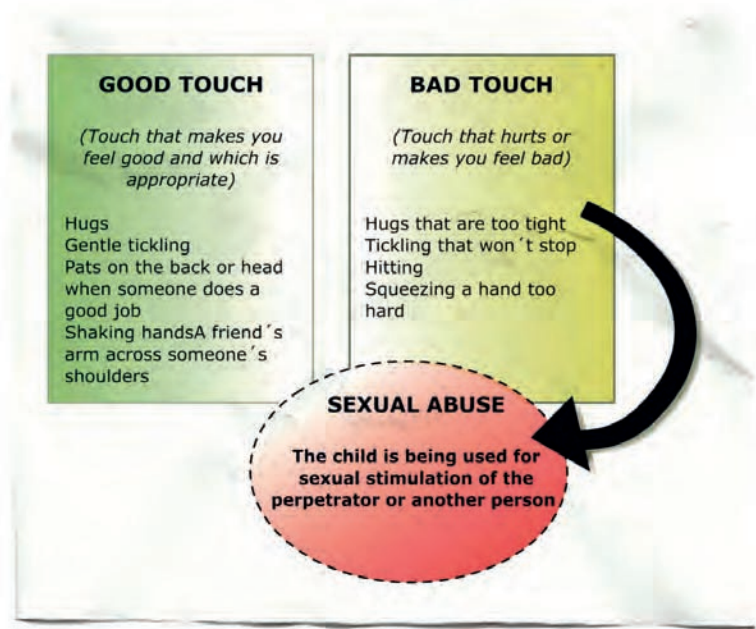
a. Sexual abuse and and exploitation of children in the regions of the study

The teams generally define their interventions based on the World Health Organisation's (WHO) concept of sexual abuse:

Sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who are – by virtue of their age or stage of development – in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the survivor².

In their daily practices, the teams recognise that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between situations of sexual abuse, and other physical contacts that are not acts of sexual aggression but which cause discomfort and are considered socially inappropriate. For instance, they noted that the word "bad touch" is frequently used in awareness activities in reference to contacts causing discomfort, and

that sexual abuse was one simply among many practices referred to as bad touch.



This classification and the use of the expression "bad touch" sometimes caused misunderstandings between participants at the community meetings, who deemed that "any physical contact that hurts or makes you feel bad (i.e. bad touch) consisted of sexual abuse". This misunderstanding resulted in the following negative consequences at the community level as highlighted by the NGO's members:

² Definition extracted from the document Preventing Child Maltreatment: A Guide To Taking Action And Generating Evidence (2006). World Health Organization and International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

- The confusion may lead to a belief that all adults are potential molesters, therefore increasing the level of concern placed on children and the mistrust within community members and damaging social relations. It can also give rise to false accusations and allegations.

- On a family level, the relationship between parents and children sometimes is altered by fear, and the loss of spontaneity in the expressions of affection. In children it may create a feeling of potential danger and mistrust towards their loved ones. Children may become hesitant and distrustful of any contact and normal expression of affection in a family – a strong hug, for instance, or being carried by parents.

- Finally, this confusion can increase the risk of re-victimisation for a child who has previously survived abuse by denying, trivialising, or minimising the sexual abuse's existence and its impact. This situation increases the confusion and difficulty of children in acknowledging the reality of their situation and the severity of the experience they went through.

As a result, the NGO teams agreed on the importance of emphasising that there are two basic concepts to distinguish regarding sexual abuse in children:

»**Domination** is the use of threats, physical strength, trickery, or "grooming" strategies that the adult uses to gain unfair control over the child.

»**Power Asymmetry**, which relates to the fact that children are immature and dependent and are therefore unable to either understand the

actions' meaning or to freely decide. These activities are inappropriate for the child's age and level of psychosocial development, and are imposed through either violence or seduction.

Under what circumstances does sexual abuse occur in your region?

One of the teams' most important challenges has to do with the adjustment of their interventions to the family and contextual resources in the child's context. The teams work with different situations which require adjusting the intervention process. Two main situations are observed:

1. When the sexual aggression is caused by an unknown person

In some cases, orphans, children permanently separated from their families or while at school, or who works on the streets are subject to abuses from strangers. Children living in the streets have particularly little protection. Often, their only adult "protection" is provided by those adults or older children who abuse them in exchange for food or accommodations.

On the other hand, sometimes the school context presents a major challenge to the teams. NGO's members relate the experiences of several children who are molested by school teachers. Children are generally afraid of reporting abuses, since they fear no one might believe them and they might be expelled from school.

"I want that teacher punished but my only evidence against him is my testimony." expressed Maya (not her real name) in the remote Milan Chowk village of Bardiya District in Nepal. "I fear for other students because nobody is complaining about him or other teachers who 'do bad things' to children." Maya said.

2. When sexual aggressions occurs within the family context

The NGO teams made a distinction between two situations:

A. *Families whose children are abused and neglected in times of situations of stress.* An example of these situations is the one described by professionals of the CCBO team in Cambodia; they made reference to cases in which poverty leads the adults in a family to force their daughters into prostitution in order to make ends meet or respond to a financial crisis.

In such situations, parents are usually aware of being overwhelmed by social, political or economic pressure; they acknowledge their difficulty in fulfilling their parental responsibilities and are sensitive to their children's suffering. When confronted with this situation, parents generally show interest in being supported to provide for their families. In these cases, the teams conducted early interventions aimed at mobilising family and social resources for members of the family to find new forms of care and protection for their child.

B. *Families in which a relative intentionally plans to abuses the child physically or sexually.* Violence is generally a consequence of unsolved traumas suffered by the perpetrator's fathers and/or mothers which, together with

rigid and inadequate role models, lead to the use of violence and fear to cope with stress or conflict - or even as an educational or disciplinary method. These parents usually are not aware of the abusive nature of their behaviour and may even consider it normal; they will therefore not seek any help or voluntarily take part to the activities suggested by the community.

In these cases, the main challenge that the NGO teams face is to motivate and to convince these families to get support, while priority is given to child protection. Usually there are no public policies in place to protect survivors, which means that there are no state shelters, nor programs of therapeutic assistance for survivors. Therefore, NGO members along with community organisations try to find an alternative solution for the child.



b. Why do our children suffer from sexual abuse?

The following list comes from the group discussions and individual interviews implemented by the psychosocial facilitators in Cambodia, Nepal and India. They compiled the following list which summarises certain factors that, according to them, could explain the reasons why child sexual abuse emerged in their communities:

Socio-economical factors

»The current economic model operating in the three countries is based on a market economy that has not solved the severe social and economical inequalities that are occurring; rather, it has increased disparities in countries which have historically been marked by high rates of poverty and marginalisation. The social context resulting from this model produces a growing number of injustices and inequalities on the one hand and individualism and consumerism on the other, causing desperate forms of survival and trivialisation of those norms and values that guarantee human rights and children's rights in particular.

In certain cases, this context of injustice may help in understanding that extreme poverty forces children to survive in the streets by prostituting themselves; or that some parents give in to the offers of local recruiters, renting or selling their children to traffickers who will offer them to sexually abusive clients. Indeed, in contexts where "everything is for sale" and "everything can be bought", the pornography business itself has reached unmanageable proportions.

Historical factors

»During the armed conflicts in countries where the programs explained here were applied, the social and family fabric was severely shaken. The relationships between parents and children were disrupted by violence, stress and insecurity during times of war. At the same time, the parties involved in the conflict also used children as spies and/or messengers; in the most severe cases children were even used to report on and blackmail family members. In these situations parents were often faced with impossible dilemmas of "saving their lives or their children's".

NGOs confirmed that during and after these periods many females became widows, orphans, or pregnant teenagers. They were then faced the difficult task of looking after their children, feeding and educating them, helping them to grow in conditions of extreme poverty. The breakdown of the social fabric and sometimes extermination of a whole generation (as in Cambodia) often means that these women had no close family reference to guide them in learning the skills and values of child care.

Legal system

»One of the fundamental tasks of every society is to produce and implement laws and norms aimed at protecting the rights and needs of community members. However, in some countries a very weak legal system exists and judiciary institutions have very few resources to rely on. In other locations there are no State social or child care programs, and the laws punishing violence and sexual abuse of children

are inadequate or simply non-existent. The lack of resources, arbitrariness of the laws and corruption in the justice system encourage the impunity of perpetrators and make the deterrence of child sexual abuse very difficult.

Social beliefs

»In each country the sexual abuse of children was for a long time considered a personal, individual problem. In particular, there was a strong cultural emphasis on preserving family and “parental honor” over justice for children. Other people believed it was unthinkable that someone could abuse young children, thus their attitude was to not talk or think about it. These attitudes and beliefs translated into sayings such as “The less we talk about it the better” or “Time will fix everything”. Moreover, social traditions usually determine those who can and those who cannot talk to children about sex, as well as what and when they can be told. Therefore, sex is for the “experts” and only they are allowed to educate children about sexuality.

Patriarchal ideology in education

»Children are taught to always obey and respect the world of adults, regardless of the child’s circumstances or the adult’s position in the family, school or community. Moreover, in our cultures men are the ones considered to have the strength, authority, protection and competence. However, at the same time men are the ones most likely to sexually abuse children. The children who are part of this culture find greater difficulties in resisting

such harmful norms or reporting abusive actions.

The description of the different levels and factors that play a role in sexual abuse helps us to conclude that the fight against sexual abuse requires having a broad perspective in order to understand the characteristics of the phenomenon. It has to do with a combination of an individual approach - What are the individual characteristics of those who sexually abuse children? - with a more systemic and situational one: What are the social, economical and cultural factors that facilitate the sexual abuse of children?



c. Some consequences of child sexual abuse

In a meeting with community facilitators from the three NGOs, they were asked about the main consequences of sexual abuse in children that they have observed in their communities. They made the following list and pointed that these consequences may vary depending on the child, his/her individual coping/resilient style and the support offered by the cultural and community context.

Consequences for the child

Loss of trust in others

One of the most serious consequences of sexual abuse observed in children is the loss of trust in others, and the constant feeling of being at risk and in need of protection. Sexually abusive experiences are characterised by a sense of helplessness, confusion and manipulation of relationships, which result in feelings of constant fear and lack of control over what is going on. This sense of vulnerability leads to great stress and anxiety that children often manifest in nightmares, eating disorders, irrational fears, agitation, suicidal ideation or aggressive and threatening behaviour toward their peers.

Feelings of shame and guilt

Children, as well as adults, find it very difficult to find a logical explanation for sexual abuse. This often leads children to search for a self-referential explanation that suggests they are responsible for the abuse or the situations which may have led to it. Children often believe that they are molested because they are bad, or because they deserve it. Feelings of shame are often related to the belief that they have somehow provoked or drawn the aggressor to them, and that they are to blame since they

did not manage to stop the abuse. Experience has shown that children often express guilt by isolating themselves from others, through self-aggression, or attacking other children.

Impact on sexual development

Child survivors of sexual abuse have been exposed to inappropriate sexual practices for their age. Under these circumstances, the child's sexuality will develop inappropriately and with dysfunctional behavioural patterns. As a result of the abuse, the child may exhibit eroticised behaviours or take on sexual interests that are inappropriate for their age; for example, excessive masturbation, touching the genitals of other boys or girls, using inappropriate sexual language, playing games of a sexual nature, etc.

Family and community consequences

Impoverishment of social relations

Unfortunately, many societies still experience attitudes and behaviours that promote the stigmatisation of children who are survivors of sexual abuse. These children are often perceived as sick, problematic, or "honourless". This makes the children feel "marked" and different from others, with a negative and undervalued perception of the self. Children may prefer to be apart from the group, as they may feel enraged or ashamed.

Trans-generational transmission of abuse

When children do not get support to overcome the abuse, they may have greater difficulties in developing appropriate sexual behaviours and relationships. Ultimately, they may repeat and maintain the same abusive practices and themselves become child abusers.

d. Understanding resilience in contexts of violence against children

"I will not become a hooker (..), I hear Pa's voice: 'No one knows how precious you are. You are a diamond in the rough and with a little polishing you will shine.' (..) The foster mother may not give me the love I need, but I know what it feels like to be loved. Pa loved me and believed in me. With that little reminder from him, I know the foster mother is wrong about me. I do possess the one thing I need to make something of myself one day: I have everything my Pa gave me".

Testimony of Loung Ung, from her book "First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers", p. 172.

In the First Asian Regional Meeting held in Cambodia in August of 2008, the teams analysed the meaning of resilience and its application to their practices. According to their experience it seems essential to consider three key aspects:

1. Resilience is the ability of people to meet the challenges of life. This is not innate, but rather **emerges from the interaction** between a context of proper upbringing and the individual person.
2. Resilience is not a fixed personal attribute; instead, **it may vary**. A person may be more or less resilient in a specific context, compared to other situations in a given time and space.

3. Resilience is not about **how to forget traumatic experiences, but rather how to face them so that the emotionally traumatic memories neither determine a survivor's present nor future**. For many, resilience involves the ability to at least preserve the chance of growth.

Given the above it may be asked: *How is it that some children are healthy despite the difficulties encountered? What is it that allows these children to successfully resolve abusive situations?*

Working on resilience is not only to teach a child how to protect him or herself; but to accompany them, to hear their opinions and support them to negotiate challenges as they feel stronger and more able to make good decisions and to face adversity. The important thing to remember when working on resilience is that **the process itself has an element of empowerment**. Thus, all actions that increase resistance and minimise vulnerabilities to abuse will be key factors in the early recovery and coping abilities of the child.

The teams observed that resilient resources are closely related to the conditions associated with a child's interaction with meaningful people in his or her environment. These relationships are characterised by at least three factors:

1. The basic acceptance and respect of the affected children. One of the girls interviewed, who was sexually abused by her uncle, described the elements that enabled her to give an account of her situation and get out of the horror she was experiencing:

"The most important thing when I started feeling a little better, was the day I met someone who truly believed in me, a woman in my community."(Discussion with Young Women Group, India, July 2010)

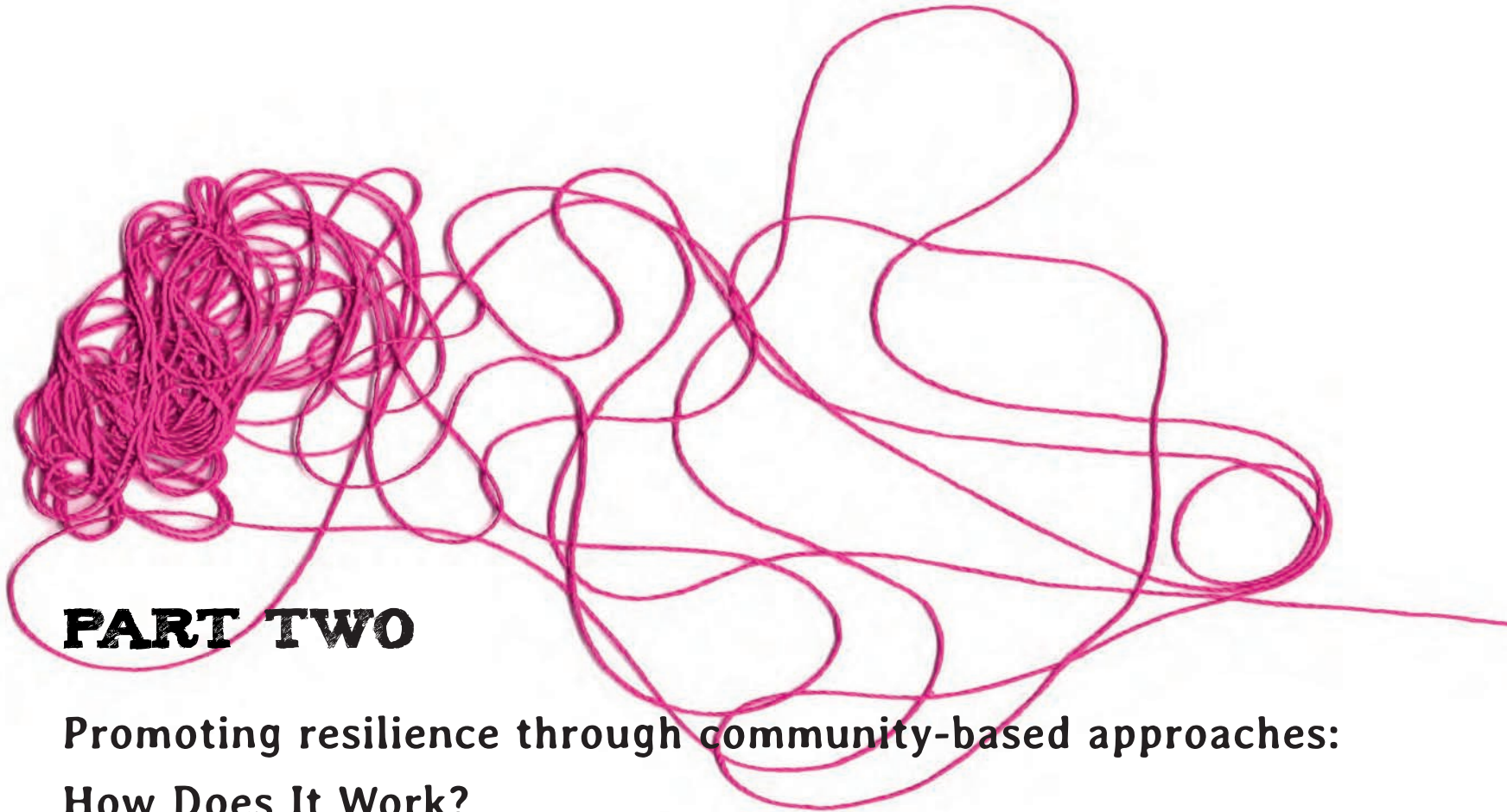
Basic acceptance means undertaking whatever is necessary to change the child's behaviour wherever it has been destructive and inadequate, whilst always accepting the child as a person. When adults express and act with genuine concern for the child, they turn into a source of care and support for the child, no matter what happens.

2. To offer a relationship based on love and solidarity. This can be encouraged through informal social networking. These networks (family, school, community) are often the first ones that provide support for the child.

3. To provide a space to repair the damage and build coherent narratives of the events which aim at understanding and identifying the positive aspects in life, despite negative experiences. Becoming aware of the reality, regardless of how tough it may be, and the promotion of values that help make sense of experiences, are other elements of resilience.

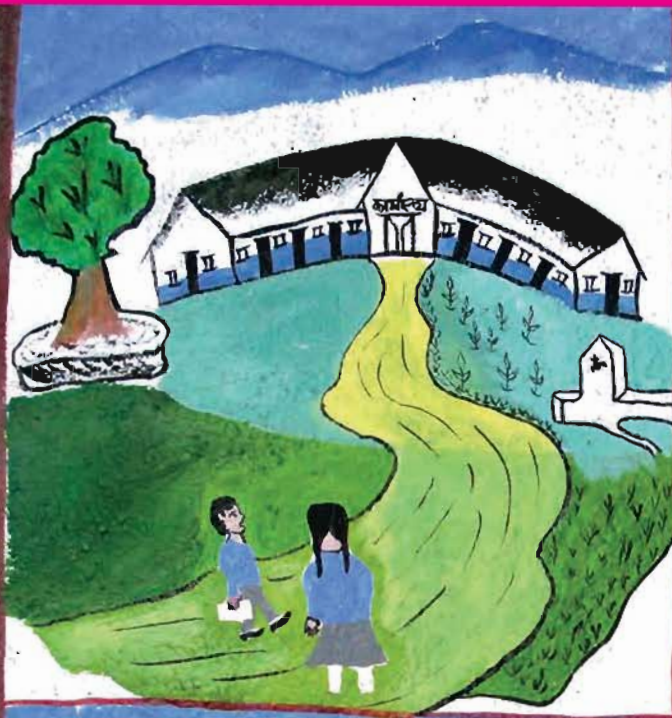


1/ The flower of resilience



PART TWO

**Promoting resilience through community-based approaches:
How Does It Work?**



In this section, we offer a description of some of the activities that the NGO members initiated and supported in their communities. These descriptions are accompanied by the testimonies of children, women and men who are the key actors in these initiatives.

I. Activities for prevention

a/Awareness Activities

To increase awareness means creating appropriate spaces to discuss these issues. The prevention of violence against children, and especially sexual abuse, primarily means to work in order to change attitudes, beliefs, and values that justify these abusive relationships. To change such beliefs we should promote spaces where children and adults can experience relationships based on love and solidarity. (Irada Gautam, President of AAWAAJ, Nepal)

One of the first challenges observed by the NGO teams and community members was to overcome the barriers (especially beliefs) which prevented people from recognising and talking about sexual abuse situations which resulted in a scarce utilisation of available community resources.

Informal talks with community members, including professionals from other services (such as the school, hospital or police), allowed the teams to detect different beliefs and ideas about the origin of sexual abuse of children. A great deal of these ideas has to do with abusers being mentally ill, disturbed, crazy or abnormal, or with the belief that, for example, sexual abuse mainly occurs in low-class and economically disadvantaged families. In the long

term, all these beliefs caused a minimisation of the social importance of the abuse which made it more difficult to raise the awareness in the environment and thus hinders the search for effective solutions to protect and help the children.

In order to promote collective awareness the three NGO's have different strategies, for example:

- In Cambodia, CCBO members use various media including radio, TV or advertising posts as priority channels for the dissemination of basic information about sexual abuse.
- In India, RTUT NGO creates datebooks (agendas) and school supplies containing information. Community members together with the NGO's members use to offer talks at schools, holding meetings with professionals and members of the community network and promoting community meetings for raising awareness and promoting community mobilisation.
- In Nepal, Aawaaj's team use to address issues relating to the country's history and the positive features of their cultures and traditions during the community meetings. They aimed at attempting to strengthen the idea of belonging to a community, a culture and people who in spite of their difficult circumstances, are willing to help each other and for whom protection and self-defence from violence has always been a priority.

For example, AAWAAJ members used messages like:

Our Nepali culture is a culture that has traditionally given priority to relations of support and care for one another. Even in situations where communities were survivors of a situation of oppression and political violence, the people, the neighbours always tried to collaborate with each other, unite against violent situations, even in moments when their life was in danger. This is our culture and our history. And within it sexual assaults against children have no place. They are unacceptable and we must fight together sexual violence against children. Only then we can continue to feel proud of our culture and our history.

Moreover, a constant and common initiative was the participation in and promotion of mass demonstrations that attract hundreds of people who oppose child abuse and demand rights for children.

In the field of promoting awareness an interesting learn should be noted. 'Based on the teams' experiences, the act

of providing awareness-building information to parents or children did not necessarily imply that this know-how was applied or the content learned. Educational activities and an active learning process which promotes the adults or children's capacity to apply the information are also necessary.

In this respect, the NGO teams gradually incorporated activities such as **popular theatre** using a participatory approach to promote reflection and debate. The process involves presenting a performance which dramatises relevant aspects of sexual abuse and then inviting the audience, children and parents to summarise the outcome by sharing their vision of the facts. These practices allowed the NGO's and community members, for instance, to identify biases, myths and beliefs that exist about sexual abuse in relation to claim such "any inappropriate touching is an abuse" or "the abuser is always the father".



2/ Interview to Irada, Aawaaj's director

3/ ONG's narrative

4/ Interview adolescents group in Sihanoukville

b/ Establishing a Child Protection Community Network

*"Coming together is a beginning,
Keeping together is progress,
Working together is Success."
(Nepali Saying)*

The idea of working through a Child Protection Community Network stemmed from the observation of the NGO members, which indicated that informal and spontaneously created networks of neighbours and family members to alleviate the suffering and damage caused by aggressions to children were a common practice even before the implementation of programs.

The NGO members acknowledged these support networks and enhanced their action through the support to key persons who became responsible in their communities for the organisation of early intervention activities in case of the discovery or disclosure of a sexual assault or exploitation of a child. This process means to acknowledge the role of an influential person in order to encourage responsible actions in situations of child abuse.

AAWAAJ cannot be everywhere, but we can facilitate spaces. If the problem is happening at the community level, then it can be prevented and managed at a community level. (Irada Gautam, President of AAWAAJ, November 2009)

The building and strengthening of community support networks, such as relevant training of key actors, required a period of approximately four months. This process consisted in several phases which can be described as follows:

1. Identification Phase: which begins with a community meeting organised by the NGO. In this phase several key points were identified:

- **Personal contact.** Mobilising the community by going door to door or calling through a referral by a community leader was more effective than contacts by way of letters.
- **The NGO is known at a community level.** The participation of NGO workers in the preparation of religious festivals or athletic activities made community members familiar with the nature and objectives of the NGO and raised more interest. On the contrary, in cases where the NGO was unknown to the community, the purpose of the meeting needed to be explained in advance, clarifying that the purpose was not to deliver materials or solve community problems, but rather to take part in a movement in which everyone could work together for the protection of children.
- **Understanding community perceptions.** Through informal discussions and the exchange of experiences, NGO workers aimed to understand the community perception of the phenomenon of sexual abuse of children in their area. AAWAAJ NGO used these questions to promote a debate during community meetings in Surkhet:

- Have you observed this problem in a nearby community?

- Is child sexual abuse a problem in your own community?

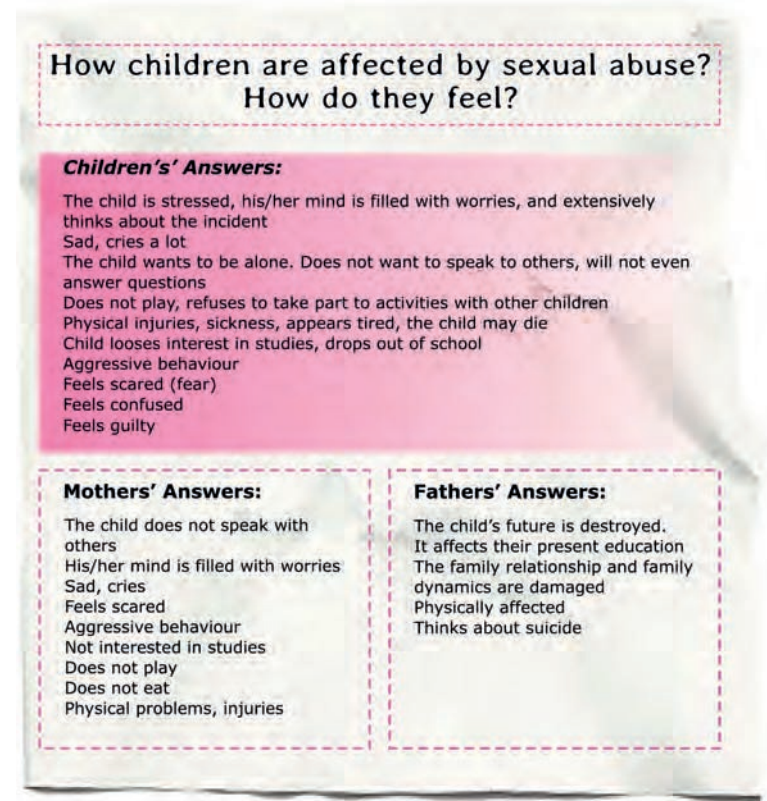
- Why it is so difficult to discuss sexual abuse of children?
- Your children may be affected by abuse and exploitation, what are you going to do about this?
- What do you want to do about this?

● **Identifying key actors.** These encounters helped in identifying individuals who expressed an interest in community work and children's welfare. The NGO members invited them to join a group of future "Community Facilitators". Identifying a large number of people, twenty to twenty-five, is important since, despite their willingness to participate to the group, personal commitments may prevent them to comply with the meetings' requirements. There were no specific criteria in selecting participants to these groups. The very dynamics of the work and the responsibilities it carried caused a natural selection resulting in a group of people who can take responsibility for the work in their own communities.

2. Capacity building phase: This phase is six-days long and its participants – specifically, the volunteer Community Facilitators - come from different locations. One or two NGO members are in charge of training. It is described as follows:

● Recognition of Community Experience. The training begins with a group discussion focused on the recognition of the participants' own experiences. Based on their experiences, the future Facilitators identify lists of symptoms reported by sexually abused children or those living in violent environments. For example, the

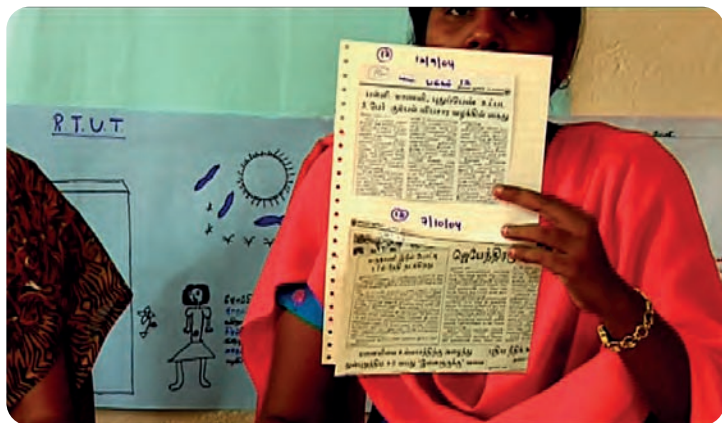
facilitators supported by RTUT collected the opinion of children and mothers through a questionnaire asking them *how do you believe sexual abuse affects children?* The results were as follows:



The sharing of knowledge based on experience allows the Facilitators to collectively build an explanation of how abuse can affect the health of survivors while establishing protocols for detection, especially amongst those most affected.

- **Emphasis on breaking the silence.**

Participants talk about their own fears and reluctance to discuss this issue in public. Community Facilitators search for ways to promote social awareness by determining what can and cannot be discussed, and how it should be addressed. For example, RTUT members used newspaper clippings of news about child exploitation in the area to promote a debate about this subject. This type of group activities enabled the participants to acknowledge the presence of this phenomenon in their current reality and to critically analyse situations which occurred in the past, in order to then reconsider different courses of action for the future.



- **Promoting active listening skills.** Participants learn a structured way of listening and responding to children, focusing attention on what he or she is saying by suspending judgment and avoiding their own internal mental “chatter”. This communicates value of the child and his or her statements, and allows the adult to be less reactive and offer thoughtful and sensitive responses.

- **Identification of personal and community resources.** Participants reason about possible ways to intervene as they discover situations of sexual abuse, based on the recognition that they are members of the community who have specific resources. Participants analysed situations which occurred in the community and reflected on: *What was done? Why did they act in a certain way? What was the impact of this on the child’s welfare? How can we use community resources to increase the protection of boys and girls?*

- **Knowledge of the laws and rights of the child in their environment.** This involves conveying the necessary information about the rights of the child and the characteristics of the judicial system: *What laws are there to fight child sexual abuse? What are their implications? What standards are there to report the facts to local authorities?*

- **Empowering leadership skills.** One of the main tasks of the Community Facilitators consists in intervening when a sexual abuse is disclosed; therefore, expertise in conflict resolution and community mediation is very useful. Participants discussed strategies to encourage families to hold awareness workshops to increase local recognition

of the issue, and strategies to address abuse when it occurs within a family.

3. Consolidation and Support Phase: After the training phases are completed the participants return to their communities, where the following activities are conducted:

- **Promotion & Mobilisation.** The Community Facilitators used their knowledge and skills to promote awareness of child sexual abuse among families and children; acted as a bridge between the community and local authorities (police, doctors, other NGOs), mobilised a large number of people to identify and respond to abuse, and promoted the formation of self-help groups of children, women and men.
- **Support & Supervision.** During this period, NGO staff provided on-going support for the Community Facilitators. The responsibility of serving as

a Facilitator and as well as a family member with its related domestic demands raises various questions such as:

- *How does this dual role affect the community and myself as a Facilitator and family member?*
- *Do I feel supported?*
- *Do I have room to talk about how I feel and am I afforded the space to rest when I am tired from time to time?*

Based on this experience, it seems important to initiate Child Protection Community Networks by understanding how people live and cope with various facets of their lives, then to interpret and finally proactively respond to them. It is recommended to start networks based on the realities experienced by the people, and to not treat them as if their problems were related to a specific personality trait or status as a group.



c/ Working With community Self-Support Groups

The NGOs have chosen to promote self-support groups with members sharing the same situation in life, e.g. mothers, fathers and children. The NGOs applied two strategies in forming these groups: (a) to encourage and support new initiatives in communities where no groups or networks had been formed, or (b) to use a group that was already established and build on existing relationships among community members so as to include prevention activities.

The self-help groups usually meet once or twice a month and are guided by either an NGO member or one of the group members acting as facilitator. The participants discuss issues currently affecting the community as well as different strategies to prevent child sexual abuse and to promote the well-being of local children. The use of informal saving groups in India and the vocational training groups in Nepal are two examples of this.

Credit and savings groups: The experience of RTUT members in Pondicherry, India.

RTUT started to promote savings groups and credit management in the Pondicherry area ten years ago, with the objective of providing the most economically disadvantaged groups with long-term access to financial services. Those who showed interest in being a part of the savings group were identified through informal meetings, and groups of 12 or 15 members were established. RTUT members helped and trained them on the use of collective saving systems, accounting management, budgeting, and resource tracking. Moreover, RTUT acted as an intermediary with the banks.

The testimonies of several men from the saving group in Pondicherry allowed identifying two empowering factors that emerged from this experience:

1. Promotion of social recognition and personal dignity. The group enabled members to gain financial independence through the saving system. The most financially disadvantaged families could cover their basic needs for food and housing, and thanks to the extra money obtained through loans, they could invest to improve their homes, to start a small business, or to pay for the uniform and school supplies for their children.

"We are living below the poverty line, so it is very difficult to save money when you only earn the minimum required to eat. Within two months we formed a saving group. Now we can save 100 rupees a month to fulfil our needs. Also we have some savings in the bank and through the loans we get, some of the members can start a small business. This is how we work for the community, helping our children and families. We developed our confidence to help others with whatever is possible."

(Men's Group interview in Arasur, Pondicherry, India, July 2010)

2. Increased social support and feelings of belonging to a community. Part of the money obtained through credit was used for the organisation of community work days on Saturday mornings, to which young and old participated. Competitions such as cricket or football games were also organised with people from the nearby

neighbourhoods. These meetings allowed participants to experience supportive relationships with their neighbours frequently in a peaceful and friendly environment.

Vocational Training Workshops: The experience of Aawaaj's members in Nepal.

Vocational training workshops allow people to learn a job. Due to the socio-economic context in Nepal, AAWAAJ generally offers this resource to women since cultural traditions prevent them from having access to professional training sessions.

AAWAAJ team members are convinced that, in addition to learning trade skills, CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE PROCESS ENABLE THESE WORKSHOPS TO HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON SOCIAL MOBILISATION TO PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE. These aspects are:

1. Building Relationships with Families. NGO members began by visiting the families once a week to discuss with them the benefits of vocational training and to work with potential cultural resistance, so that young women could see the possibility of combining their responsibilities as housewives with an additional role of working outside the home. These visits fostered an atmosphere of trust with young women and their families, thereby increasing social and family support.

2. Building a Vision of the Future. NGO workers discuss with the young women and other potential group members the importance of being

economically independent; inquire about their personal interests and skills, and help them clarify their vision of future projects, among other things.

3. Conducting Market Assessments. Prior to the workshops, a market assessment is conducted in order to adjust resources for the vocational training to local market characteristics and demands.

4. Inclusion of Training on "Life Skills". Women are provided with training on essential "soft skills" which help ensure the success of vocational training, including: conflict resolution, self-protection strategies, building self-esteem and mapping community resources. It is notable that most of the young people who were interviewed for this study agreed that the most useful part of the program was the life skills component - even more so than the technical job skills they had learned.

5. Establishing Links with Employers. Upon completion of the training, contacts are facilitated between the young women and potential employers.

These experiences have produced very positive results that sometimes extend beyond those expected by the vocational training alone, as shown in this statement by one participant:

"When I decided to join the Vocational Training group I was very afraid because I didn't know anything about jobs or market. In the beginning the facilitator encouraged me to go and to explore the market and to see what kind of skills were needed. When I returned from that research I felt more confident. The vocational training will be a source of economic income and it will help me to get out of the house. It will help me be socially respected again and have the dignity that women deserve."

(Interview to the Vocational Training Group of Women in Nepal, February 2010)

The above process of forming these groups was therefore crucial in creating a climate of trust and security which subsequently allowed the self-help groups to further introduce the problematic issue of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the Pondicherry and Surkhet region.



>> Self-Support Groups with women

In the Surkhet District in Nepal, AAWAAJ members held informal conversations with the women at school meetings, in the market, or during religious celebrations. They realised that the women's situation was closely linked to the traditional roles of caring for the home and the children. In some cases, during these informal conversations, women dared to share their own experiences of domestic violence. The AAWAAJ members found that these highly stressful experiences may cause a decline in the ability of these women to care for others, especially their children. Although children may have had access to safe and protective environments in which to participate in recreational and other activities (such as at school), the same atmosphere may not have been found at home.

This observation coincided in a similar way for the three NGOs. This led the teams to conclude that in order to promote the children's well-being, they needed to work with the members of their families. The challenge was devised as *how can we support these individuals in their roles as women and mothers?*

This concern led to the suggestion of the creation of women's groups within the community. The process was similar to that of other groups; it began by calling all the women of a particular location to a general meeting. Based on the discussions and subsequent interventions that emerged from these meetings, women who showed more sensitivity toward the care of children or who openly expressed their interest in working for the welfare of their children were identified. The facilitator gave them positive feedback, reinforced their efforts to protect themselves and their children, while at the same time inviting them to

create a self-help group interested in generating changes in their community.

These groups were formed with eight to ten women of similar ages. Most of them were mothers. Each group had one or two facilitators who used a participatory and experiential methodology to promote debate, reflection and exchange of information. The issues relating to the prevention of sexual abuse and child protection were introduced gradually so as to ensure that women didn't feel questioned in their role as caregivers.

Usually, there is not a closed or pre-planned agenda to be followed at the meetings. Women themselves, once assembled, prioritise the discussion of a specific topic. The group's facilitator then guides the discussion and encourages participation of all members. After analysing the discussions held by women's groups in Surkhet and Pondicherry we identified the following topics as among the most common:

1. We as women, daughters and mothers

Frequently, the first issue to be discussed dealt with the women's experiences when they were children, as little girls. The women were aware of the changes since their parents' generation in terms of how to care for children and how to relate to family members.

"When I was a young girl I had a very hard time with my parents. Despite I wanted to go to school they didn't let me. Instead they sent me to take care of the cows. They told me that whatever I learned in school would be useless to me because in the future I would get married and my only responsibility would be taking care of the children. I

was very scared when I got married very young. My husband always stopped me from going outside and kept me at home. I was always living under that pressure. But now things have changed. When I joined this group of other women, the situation is different. Look! Old times are changing. If we do the same things that our parents did to us, our children will feel scared as well."

(Mother's testimony in a Self-help Group in Satakhani, Nepal, November 2009)

Statements such as these reveal that the women's motivation and interest in analysing the challenges of being mothers stems from their reflections on their experiences as little girls (what made them happy, what did not, and what they would change). This is what the teams called experiential methodology, because knowledge comes from shared experience.

2. Identifying the needs of our sons and daughters

Interestingly, the above reflections made it easier for women to identify the current needs of their children. Their discussions raised issues such as: What challenges do children have in their growth? What risks exist for our sons and daughters? What settings and interventions promote the healthy development of children? These reflections usually lead to specific actions. The Children Welfare Group in Pondicherry identified that for a child to respect himself he must look "respectable", in other words clean and neat. Thus, one of the first actions of the groups was to organise weekly activities to promote personal hygiene of their children.

3. Talking about child sexual abuse

The debate included reflections about the challenges and risks that exist for children in the community, focusing first on physical attacks in general, and later considering violations of children's private parts. The facilitator supplemented the women's reflections with basic information about private body parts, what constitutes "good" and "bad" physical contact in these areas, what are risky situations and why. Emphasis was placed on the unacceptable nature of such attacks and the importance of their role as mothers as the ones who could best care and protect their children.

4. Time for personal experiences

During these meetings, some women regularly shared stories about violence and sexual abuse inflicted on them during periods of conflict in their country. In these situations, the attitude and role of the facilitator was crucial to promote an atmosphere of respect and above all, confidentiality. There was a feeling of trust, which implied that what was discussed in the group, stayed in the group and was not to be shared with outsiders. This understanding made it easier for women to talk about these difficult experiences, to support each other, and consider questions such as How can we help other women who are living in these situations? How can we prevent these situations from happening to our own children?

5. Identifying personal and community resources

In later stages of discussion, women were encouraged to identify personal and community resources that could help prevent sexual abuse, and think about strategies to

intervene in situations of abuse which may occur. Women's groups in Gopalankadai, Arasur and Pitchaveeranpet (India) identified and developed some ideas and strategies to protect their children as follows:

| How can we protect our children? | |
|---|--|
| Some ideas... | Putting ideas into practice... |
| <p>Children have to know about the risks of sexual abuse and their rights</p> | <p>>Teach children self-protection: shouting, alerting neighbours, striking and biting the offender, running away, etc.</p> <p>>Foster awareness activities with other parents, persuading other families to change their way of raising their children.</p> |
| <p>To become trustful person for our children so they can talk to us in case of abusive situation</p> | <p>>Encourage leisurely activities for parents and children.</p> <p>>Convey the message to children that they can always count on their mothers, and help children identify their family as a resource in case they are in an abusive situation.</p> |
| <p>Always keep children under observation. Watch who they talk to, and to supervise contacts with strangers.</p> | <p>>Sometimes the journey between home and school was long and the children walked alone, at times for up to an hour. In order to reduce the risk of abduction or being molested by strangers:</p> <p>(a) The school teacher was contacted to verify whether children had arrived to school in order to be alert for potential abductions.</p> <p>(b) When resources allowed it, changes were made so mothers could accompany their children.</p> |
| <p>To protect vulnerable children (orphans) from abuse</p> | <p>>Organise a "crisis intervention group" when necessary. When the group identified children who were abandoned on the street, some of the members took care of these children until they located appropriate resources.</p> |

The analysis of these practices allowed the identification of several key factors:

1. Commitment over Education. The educational level of women was not an obstacle for development groups. The engagement in the protection and care for their children does not depend on the educational or training level achieved. Many among the women participating to the group of child health promoters had never attended school, could not read or write. This did not prevent them from coming together and creating a group to care for their children.

2. The Power of Solidarity. Groups who came together to share and act on personal experience brought about an increased perception of social support which served as a basis for the process of change.

"It is very hard to talk about domestic violence and sexual abuse with the families in the community. In our experience, it is better to approach this issue as a group of women; they believe in us more. As more people recognise these wrongs, others will be more easily convinced. If you explain the consequences of violence, people will understand; they are human beings, not animals."

"This group gives me recognition in my village. I previously used to stay at home all the time, but now I am a well-known person in the community and people respect me because of what I tell them."

(Group of Women in Satakhani, Nepal, November 2009)

3. Consolidating & Leveraging Collective Experience.

By sharing individual experiences, the groups generated more information and knowledge about the characteristics of the situation and better identified the resources and vulnerabilities within the environment.

"Previously, we never spoke with other women about this issue - we were not aware of the magnitude of the problem in the village. And we didn't have enough confidence to fight these issues. Also, we were not sure of how to express ourselves about this problem. We used to stay at home most of the time, doing the housework and watching TV, never went outside of the village and were not really involved in community issues. If we had a problem, such as the death of a husband, we didn't know how to manage the education of the children. After joining the group, we support each other. Presently, the people at the village recognise our job as a group, and take our opinion into account in community decisions."

(Discussion with the Women Self-help Group in Pondicherry, India, July 2010)

4. Fostering Belonging & Identity. The group work encouraged a sense of belonging to a collective and community identity. Women could share their experiences not only as mothers, but also as the daughters they had been. They could relate to what they liked about their parents and what they did not, and working with these memories and emotions enabled them to reflect and be empowered in their current role as mothers. Since they shared similar experiences and features, it was easier to obtain support in their communities and to form relationships.

"I have a drunken husband, three children and financial problems, but despite it all, I now have more courage to make my community a better place for all. I now feel braver and confident in sharing my problems with the rest of the group."

(Discussion with Group of Children in Pondicherry, India, July 2010)

Based on this experience, it is possible to say that the protection of children begins with the empowerment of their mothers as protective figures. Women deemed it very important to meet other mothers, to form a group and share the same concerns, to recognise the challenges that exist in being mothers, and to develop ways to protect their sons and daughters.



11/ Mother's group in Satakhani, Nepal 12/ Young women group in Pondicherry, India 13/ Women group at Safe House Steng Hav, Cambodia

>> Self-Support Groups with children and adolescents

RTUT in India and AAWAAJ in Nepal engage in prevention activities through the promotion of self-help groups with children. This idea arose as an attempt by the teams to reduce the time that children spent alone on the streets exposed to risky situations. Several small groups of children were initially created, and as the NGO members encouraged the children to take part to recreational activities, they talked to them and helped those who attended school.

Often, adolescents and children who participated to these meetings lived difficult lives (e.g. precarious family finances, alcohol abuse by the father, arguments at home,

aggression and humiliation when the father is drunk, etc.). Despite these issues, adolescents and children sought support among each other. The meetings were held in places where they could recover some peace of mind, share their concerns and seek the group's support to find alternative ways to address the circumstances.

"Despite my big problems (my father is an alcoholic, and often harasses me) I found in this group enough courage to concentrate on my studies and manage the situation in my family. Now I have very good grades in school."

(11 years old girl from group discussion with Self-support Group in Pondicherry, India, July 2010)

The groups of children met on a daily basis, after school. Two NGO members usually accompanied and guided the work with a group of ten to fifteen children of similar ages. These meetings gradually became an appropriate place to share and experience significant emotional relationships of mutual support in a group setting. As a result, the NGO teams decided to integrate certain activities concerning the issue of sexual abuse, thereby promoting prevention and self-protection in potentially abusive situations. However, this addition was gradual to minimise a feeling of threat. In addition, when the teams started carrying out this group work, sexual abuse was seen as a taboo among children and it was not openly discussed in public:

"At the beginning we were very shy to talk about difficult experiences. Little by little, our madam (the facilitator) helped us a lot, made us feel more relaxed and confident. She told us why it is good to talk about these issues, and how to communicate when we feel bad. She gave us all game items, books, copies to teach us. This helped a lot in changing our attitude and behaviour."

(Group of Children in Pondicherry, India, July 2010).

Being the survivor of sexual abuse was (and still is) culturally associated with a loss of honour. A significant stigma was attached to the child who was a survivor. Yet the general public, and especially children, had minimal information on these issues. In order to reduce the level of fear and stigmatism in children, facilitators gave priority to specific actions **as described below:**

Prior to the First Meeting:

- **Gaining Informed Consent.** This involved talking to children and explaining what would happen in these groups, what topics were going to be dealt with, etc. so that they understood and agreed with the purpose of the groups.
- **Conducting Family Visits.** Visiting relatives and explaining the benefits of the group, why it was important for their children to participate in fun activities and also in those where they can share their concerns. The objective was to gain the support and commitment on the part of parents for their children to attend these groups.
- **Careful Selection of Children.** The teams had no strict criteria to select or exclude children, but they tried to ensure that all participants had their basic needs for food, health and accommodation guaranteed. Otherwise, priority was given to addressing these needs.
- **Providing an Appropriate Environment.** A private room was secured for the group's meetings. Facilitators planned the activities, prepared all necessary equipment and ensured that children could have a snack during the break.
- **Clear and Consistent Scheduling.** To ensure regularity and predictability, the group always met in the same place, at the same time and same days. Teams recommend to hold meetings on a regular basis..

During The First Meeting:

- **Managing Individual Needs & Group Dynamics.**

When the meeting began the teams made sure the children had understood the purpose of the group, and had the physical and mental resources to keep up with the activities. Sometimes some of the children were very sad and nervous, annoying peers, etc. In these cases, it was helpful to hold one-on-one conversations with them to attempt to find out what bothered them or what they had experienced.

- **Putting Children At Ease.** A welcome game is advisable to make children introduce themselves and answer simple questions to get to know each

other. Some questions were: What motivated you to come to this group? What would you like to learn from this group? Why do you think that other children did not want to come? These questions lead to discussions about their motivations and expectations for the group.

- **Clarifying Behavioural Expectations.** Set rules for the group and clarify what was, and what was not allowed during the activities, and why rules must be observed.

- **Skilled Planning & Facilitation.** The teams found that it was important to clearly set the duration and frequency of the sessions, as well as its content and organisation.



In front of parents he always appeared very gentle and pretended that he was not doing anything wrong.



There is no any justification for the sexual abuse of children. To say "I am extremely sorry" it is not enough for us.



The happiest time was when I was 6th ranked in my class.



14/ Children at risk in Nepal

15/ Adolescent's group in Hadu Community, Nepal 16/ Children's group in Steng Hav, Cambodia

Group Resilience Activities

The teams identified several activities to promote resilience that were included in group work with children:

- **Include games, races, sport competition, etc.**

It is important to make group work an experience of joy and humour. Involve children in the preparation of banners, posters and brochures. These fun activities promote the children's ability to enjoy life. In a workshop discussion with Cambodian children between 8 and 10 years the CCBO team learned that the ability to enjoy positive experiences in life has much to do with resilience. For these Cambodian children the moments that strengthened their heart were related to: (a) having access to education and to get good schooling marks, (b) the feelings of personal reward after doing or building something with their own hands (to grow a plant, to build a toy with wood... etc.) and (c) to do fun activities with their family (such as travelling, having nice meal...etc.).

- **Share stories using puppets, skits or role-playing.**

Telling or performing stories can help children understand and recover from abuse by enabling them to construct a clear and understandable narrative about what happened to them. This must be done sensitively, however. It is important to avoid labelling the perpetrator as a monster or a crazy person, as this would distort the child's understanding of the context; but rather as a person who did not learn to care for and respect children (probably because of abuse or neglect in his own childhood). Abusive situations can become a source

of learning as well. Through using puppets or role playing children can be assisted to identify positive learning from difficult situations (for instance, to identify that the child was strong when he or she reported the abuse or asked for help).

- **Introduce psycho-educational activities.**

These activities were useful in clarifying concepts which children were unaware of or unclear about. As an example, the teams used a news report on sexual abuse of children to discuss the occurrence and see how it was interpreted. At this stage, difficult or complex concepts may be introduced by using a simple illustration which will help children focus on and identify key points of references. By using several such examples, clear messages on sexual abuse can be conveyed, such as:

"There are certain forms of touching that are not good. It's okay to shake hands, a hug might be okay, but it is not okay if someone touches your private parts or if you touch the ones of another person. It is important that you report if something you don't like is happening to you. Children, even if you are younger you have the right to say no if someone tries to touch you in ways that you do not like".

- **Prepare children for potential scenarios:**

Using the technique of the eco-map, groups of children work to identify resources that existed in the community who could help children in situations of abuse. For example, if a school teacher attempted to touch a child's private parts as he/she is changing in the locker room for gym class, the

group can discuss: What can I do if this happen to me? Where do I go? How do I defend myself? Who could I tell? Using this method, children in Self-support groups in Surkhet and Pondicherry identified the following self-protection strategies:

Children's Self-Protection Strategies

Personal resources

I will escape from the dangerous place, and will call the police or the authority (the chief of the village). Some adults came and promised to take me to Thailand to work, but I knew that was not good and I ran away.

Support of Authorities

If my friends are in trouble I will run from the place and call the police and villagers (not to face or fight the abuser directly).

Peers support

There was an old man who was always around the village. He was nice and pretended to love us; he tried to touch young girls' bodies pretending it was an accident. He told us "I will give you money" and then asked to touch our private parts for his pleasure. He only looked at the girls, not boys. In front of parents he appeared very gentle and pretended there was nothing wrong. At one of the local festivals this man tried to take one of our girl friends; we all screamed, and shouted "aunty, aunty!!" to someone nearby, even though she was not our relative. The man ran away; he got scared when he thought our relatives were present.

These reflections were contrasted with the statements of several children participating in self-support groups in Pondicherry, India. Children discussed what aspects made them feel better. They identified the following from their perspective:

- **The facilitator's attitude of fundamental support.** The attitude of the facilitator is essentially one of acceptance of the child, even while he or she is firm and formal in dealing with behaviours that are not appropriate or may harm the child or others.

- **The need to be treated equally.** The facilitator should treat all members equally, listening to and treating every participant with respect. Devoting time to gather the experience of every child is important to help them reconstruct meaning, a shared vision and a sense of belonging.

"I don't have a mother and father but I no longer feel alone. I feel that I belong to the RTUT family. I got to know the people during our frequent meetings, and they were very friendly with me."

(Discussion with the Group of Young Women in Pondicherry, India, July 2010)

- **Respect the children's pace.** Do not rush the process. Children need time to accept and trust the group as a safe or protected space. It is therefore important to respect the silence of boys and girls when they are unwilling or unable to share their experiences, while letting them know that adults are available to listen whenever they

want to talk. From the perspective of the children interviewed, the success of these groups depended a lot on the attitude and ability of facilitators to handle discussions with the children.

"Before I couldn't speak to anyone even if somebody asked me how I felt, I never shared my feelings with them. After joining this group I feel happier and I developed the courage and confidence to speak openly. The facilitator always speaks freely and in a friendly way, and treats everybody equally. She is very clear and we understand her. When we speak about something important she listens and takes our opinion very seriously."

(Discussion with the Group of Adolescent Girls in Pondicherry, India, July 2010)

These experiences taught us that facilitators have the opportunity to provide children with a safe context in which they can understand their own sexual feelings and develop an appropriate understanding of their sexual experiences. The child who learns to accept his or her sexual feelings and sexual explorations, who feels good about his/her body parts and understands that there may be times when an adult can use his/her power to misuse children sexuality for their own adult gratifications, may be in a much better position to protect themselves.



17/ Children Saving Group (Child Friendly Spaces)

18/ Young Woman Group meeting

19/ Children Group in Aawaaj

20/ Roselin interview 21/ Gopalankadi village

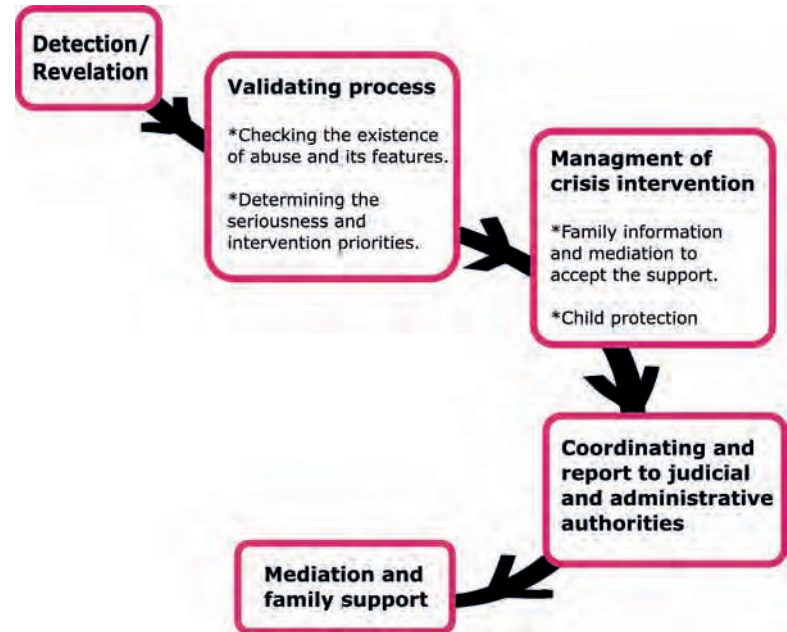
II. Activities for Reparation

a/ Psycho-social and legal intervention

The three NGOs who contributed to this study have a great deal of experience in responding to child sexual abuse and helping children to recover from the resulting social, emotional and physical trauma. Recovery activities, as understood by the NGO members, are designed to achieve three fundamental objectives:

- 1. Child Protection:** Guaranteeing an environment where children are respected, cared for and protected.
- 2. Recovery & Rehabilitation:** Promoting child therapeutic reparation of physical, psychological and social damage. This means mobilising child's personal skills, family resources and community resources to reduce stress, anxiety and pain.
- 3. Finding Meaning:** Supporting children in finding an explanation that allows them to understand that they were survivors; the context in which they were hurt; who is responsible for the abuse; why other adults were not able to protect them properly, and why there are judges who sometimes do not have enough courage to punish the aggressors.

The NGO teams utilised a variety of strategies to achieve these objectives, which when combined provide an integrated set of psychosocial and legal services that are set in motion as soon as it has been discovered that child sexual abuse has occurred. A comprehensive process is then followed which includes the following phases:



Each phase of the process is briefly described as follows:

1. Detection

NGO teams intervene in a situation of child sexual abuse or exploitation as soon as someone (either an adult, another child or the affected child) contacts them directly, or through a Community Facilitator asking for support. A child will usually give an account of the circumstances when he/she finds a person with whom he/she has enough confidence to tell the story. These people are usually the Community Facilitator or their own parents if the abuse is not taking place within the family.

2. Validation

Once the NGO members are informed of a sexual abuse situation, they implement several steps to confirm such situations. They base their analysis on:

- A careful review of direct and indirect indicators of children's suffering.
- Determination of the nature of the abuse (intra- familiar or by unknown person), the level of harm done to the child, and the risk of recurring abuse.
- Assessment of family dynamics and the availability of resources to support both the family and the area.

One of the main tools used by the teams during the validation process consisted in holding interviews with children and their families. The community facilitator usually conducts the initial interview. Then, if necessary, NGO staff can step in.

The testimony of several children along with the reflections of the NGO's members has enabled the development of formal guidelines which enable effective yet sensitive first interviews with children when they are suspected of having suffered an abusive situation:

- Introduce yourself and invite the child to introduce him or herself. Invite him/her to a quiet room to provide support with no interruptions.
- Give a warm welcome and offer some water or tea.
- Foster an atmosphere of relaxation and tranquillity. Take breaks if necessary.

- While meeting with the child, give information about the place where she/he is: *Who we are and the role of the NGO staff or Community Facilitator; when meeting in the NGO offices, explain the purpose of the organisation and the kind of support that is provided there.*

- Throughout this process, always give messages that convey safety such as *"other children who had the same experiences you had often come here and have the same difficulty in sharing their story"*.

- Stay with the child's rhythm without pressuring him or her.

- Remember that listening does not necessarily mean fully believing that what the child is saying is true. Listening is helpful in creating a relationship with children, enabling them to understand that the adult believes that what he or she is saying is important and that there are good reasons to reveal it.

- It is usually advisable to tell the child that some basic information about him/her can be very helpful, such as: *"Is the offender an acquaintance? Is there still a risk of future abuse? Is there any other child that is at risk? If you came alone, does your family know the situation?"* It is important to explain that the intervention does not aim at harming them or their family rather at supporting them in order to stop the abuse.

- Once the abuse has been confirmed, show sympathy through expressions such as: *"I regret what has happened to you. It is an unfair situation that should not happen to any child"*.

Help the child to understand that you will do everything that is possible to change this situation

and preventing it from happening again. However, it is important to not promise anything that cannot be fulfilled.

These interview guidelines allowed the NGO teams to obtain the information they needed with the child and their family members, in order to assess the urgency of intervention and the specific situation affecting the child.

3. Crisis and Intervention Management

Once the validation process is completed and an abuse has been confirmed, the next step aims at informing and confronting family members about the situation. This can happen in several ways depending on the relationship of the perpetrator to the child:

When the perpetrator of the abuse is not a family member

In this case the NGO staff contact the parents to inform them about the abuse according to the information gathered thus far. During these meetings, based on the specific context, the team aims at discussing issues such as:

- Recognising and strengthening the courage and bravery of the child who related the situation or of the person who helped identifying it, whether his/her own family, schoolmate, teacher, or member of the extended family.
- Discussing what family issues may have increased the risk of abuse.
- Discussing the impact of sexual assaults on children and the proper care the child should receive in these situations.
- Providing information on the legal system, the

applicable penalties, and the process of filing of a formal complaint with judicial authorities.

- Positively reinforcing the parents' cooperation with the police investigation, while trying to prevent them from falling into self-blame; they must be convinced that the perpetrator is the guilty party and that all family members were survivors in different degrees.
- If support groups are available, it can be helpful to invite mothers to participate to self-help groups where they can meet with other mothers who have gone through similar situations and with whom they may share experiences and ideas to improve their protection and care for their children.

When the abuse occurs within the family

If the abuser is a parent or a family member, sometimes the mother's attitude may suggest complicity with the abuser, or she may be afraid to report it due to fear of retribution from the perpetrator. The shame of family sexual abuse and the social consequences if it were to become public must also be considered, as well as the potential economic impact on the family if the primary breadwinner were to leave or imprisoned. In spite of the complexity of these cases, the top priority must be to identify measures to protect the child from further abuse, while not neglecting the important role of mediation and family support.

Identifying Protective Interventions

When selecting protective measures for the child, NGO teams seek to identify those which cause as little harm as possible to the child and promote the team's work with parents. A temporary separation of the children from their

family residence may be necessary to remove them from the context and source of violence, to provide initial medical care and counselling assistance, and provide the intervention team with the necessary time to assess the need for support and to change the family mechanisms.

"The first objective is to protect the children. The group attempts to find community solutions; if the abuse persists, it will be reported to the police. We are not suggesting that the police neglect their duties; there are however two reasons to give priority to community interventions: a) after his detention, an aggressor may return to the community and once again pose risks for the children; b) to avoid child stigmatisation if the villagers learn about the issue."

(Interview to Child Welfare Group, Pondicherry, July 2010)

Some projects are fortunate to rely on a safety house (a "shelter" or "safe-house ") where teams can temporarily welcome children or women who need immediate protection or who are at a high risk of recurring abuse. Whenever possible the safety house is located near the target communities; it has several rooms, a kitchen and common areas. One or two members of the NGO or Community Child Protection Network live in the house and are responsible for the maintenance of the household, especially when children are present. Household chores are distributed among the mothers, children and adolescents present.

"Two years ago I was in a very bad situation. One night I was beaten heavily by my husband. I couldn't stand on my own. My mother's home is very far and I found myself alone on the streets. Then I came here (to the safe house) and all the members welcomed me. I stayed for a week. They provided me with medical care, and listened to my problems. My heart was filled with happiness in this shelter. I received love, care and support from all of you, and it felt like being at my mother's home. I felt very safe. Then mediators went to talk to my husband and they convinced him to avoid violence. I got information on legal norms and procedure. I remember I was so sick. I was in a really bad shape; the shelter sisters gave me food, they encouraged me to eat. By the time of my next visit I was feeling better and I could actually work and help them with kitchen chores."

(Woman's testimony in Nepal, July 2010)

In some cases a long-term separation of the child from his/her family may be necessary, such as when the severity of abuse at home endangers the child's life or affects his/her healthy development. In our experience this occurs in situations where sexual abuse and general abuse occurs in families which in turn are badly damaged and reject any kind of help. On these occasions, the interventions are aimed at assisting the child to benefit from alternative care (i.e. non-institutional), preferably with a member of his or her extended family.



22/ Interview with a mother in Awaaj's Safe House, Nepal

4. Coordination and report to judicial and administrative authorities

In order to coordinate actions with responsible administrative, law enforcement and judicial authorities, the NGO teams take the following steps:

1. Inform the survivor and their parents / guardians of their legal rights and the procedure to file a complaint.
2. Inform them of the risks and gaps in the country's judicial system. For example, speak of how long a trial may last and of the possibility that many incompetent or corrupt judges do not dare to stand up for children against adults with economic or political power.

3. Accompany the survivor to the police to file the complaint. Ideally, the complainant should be one or both parents; if this is not possible, the Community Facilitator or a member of the community network may replace them. The presence of a caring and knowledgeable advocate helps in reducing the anxiety and stress caused by the circumstances.

The intervention team's presence during the complaint process usually has a soothing and positive effect on children, since it encourages the police handling the investigation to actually listen when children explain the circumstances of the incident and to explain their work and the means available to catch perpetrators and protect survivors. As a result, the children feel acknowledged and supported. They are also more likely to collaborate with the investigation and their feelings of helplessness decreases

as they gradually feel more secure.

From time to time, the police may not be willing to assist either because the judicial system may not be accessible, or corrupt lawyers and judges may give priority to the interests of the adult offenders. In these cases, when the children's experience and feelings are not taken into account, NGO members and community facilitators noticed that children continue feeling unsafe, helpless, fearful and distrustful of adults.

"It is upsetting to know that these people (aggressors) will never be in jail. I so desired to testify against them, and on the other hand I wanted to forget them and go on with my own life. I would like to grow strong like my tutor so I can help the other girls as she does".

Testimony of a 17 year-old girl. Sihanoukville, Cambodia, February 2010).

Moreover, NGO's members noted that the legal complaint process itself strongly affects the children as well as their social environment. The complaint of an abusive situation in a family brings about a crisis that breaks any sense of balance, however dysfunctional, experienced in the family and environment to that date. Sometimes the teams find that the family members and even the whole neighbourhood applied much effort in attempting to silence or minimise the abuse, usually by disqualifying the child's story, considering him or her as guilty or a liar, or simply denying the facts. This pressure explains why children or young people may withdraw their charges after filing a complaint.

In these cases, mending the aggressive act and achieving

recognition of children as survivors largely depends on the broader actions of social justice that the community can carry out. The AAWAAJ members assert that "social justice" begins when the community-at-large recognises the child as a person who suffered a violation of his or her fundamental rights and the adult perpetrator of the aggression is solely responsible for the abuse. This process significantly helps to rebuild the self-esteem of the child, and his/her ability to overcome a trauma and develop new resources.

Despite these challenges, it must be remembered that the work of the teams is to bring about positive changes. A growing number of people become sensitive to such violence and have the resources and capabilities to actively support survivors. In this respect, support, mediation and awareness-raising initiatives represent key factors in reducing set-backs and strengthening the social support mechanisms needed for families and communities to address sexual abuse.

5. Mediation and family support

The great challenge in this is fostering a change in family relationships by establishing a dialogue with parents by any and all means necessary. Family Mediation is a very important as well sensitive issue in these contexts. It cannot be understood or compared with other countries without taking into account the cultural, social, economical and political contexts involved. In Nepal for example, when a woman suffer domestic violence and she wants to divorce her husband, most of the times she has to face enormous social pressure. Society often blames her, considers her a

"disgrace" and responsible for "breaking up" the family. Moreover, economic dependence on men makes it almost impossible for a woman to leave if she does not have sufficient resources to raise her children alone. For Nepali women, social exclusion (including denial of access to essential services and support) often is worse than adopting protective strategies and staying with her husband. Given this, it is understandable that AAWAAJ members invest so much effort and energy on family mediation in order to promote a better family environment for women and their children.

In this sense it may be said that the NGOs apply a non-traditional pattern of family mediation which considers parents as the responsible parties as well as the main

players. The goal of NGO members as community facilitators is to assist family members with the identification of resources and as well as responsibilities. This may be done by raising issues that question certain parenting practices before abuse occurs, as well as encouraging discussions that identify effective care and protection for their children. When abuse does occur, NGO members or the Community Facilitators visit the homes to talk with parents and initiate mediation, if deemed appropriate and in the best interests of the children.

The objective of family mediation - while not always achieved - is to allow family members to come out of the crisis and be empowered so as to learn to manage such conflicts.



23/Pavitra Interview, Aawaaj member 24/Community support Mechanism in Satakhani 25/Gopalankadi village woman group

b/ Child-centred socio-emotional support

The evaluations showed that most of the children who were provided with family and community support developed this capability and were able to overcome sexual abuse experiences, to continue growing and developing sound resources to protect themselves from future attacks. Sexual abuse caused them harm and suffering, but did not determine their lives.

However, NGO teams noted at times that children who have been chronically abused display signs of prolonged and severe suffering such as emotional blocks, panic attacks, fear and sudden mood swings; these prevented them from developing in a regular manner.

These cases require a type of support that focuses on the experiences lived by the child and that enables their recovery by mobilising personal resources. The Community Facilitator or members of Self-help groups are the ones to usually provide this kind of support. Some programs include a Para-counsellor. He or she is a member of the NGO who has been trained briefly in strategies of active listening and emotional support in crisis situations. The works of the counsellor do not replace community resources, but it seeks to complement and support the community support network.

This specific support is done individually or in group. Some programs like RTUT in India, or AAWAAJ in Nepal, focus on these same elements through group work, particularly when a child who has received individual support continues being at risk due to a family breakdown, for instance.

Based on the interviews with Community Facilitators and two Counsellors from AAWAAJ and RTUT, the following table was prepared to list some of the key elements in providing socio-emotional support of children who have suffered abuse:

| Key elements | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊙ The aim is to create an environment of trust and safety for children. ⊙ Convey the message that he/she is now in a safe and protective place, and you are there to support him/her in whatever he/she needs. ⊙ After several sessions when the child is more relaxed and calm, we can open up the subject by asking him/her about his/her feelings: <i>"I see you have a beautiful face, and it would be even more beautiful if you smiled. What can I do to help you smile again? If there is anything you want to share with me, I will be very happy to listen to you".</i> ⊙ Respect the pace of the children. The child will talk to you when she/he feels comfortable and safe. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊙ Do not ask a child for too many details about the abuse during the first session. ⊙ Avoid questions that can be upsetting to the child, such as: Why did this happen? What did you do to cause it to happen? ⊙ Do not force the child to speak. ⊙ Do not interpret what the child does or does not do. It is better to observe, listen and be straightforward. |
| | Ineffective actions |

Some guidelines resulting from the experience of teams for the emotional support of child survivors of sexual abuse are:

- **Understand the children's experience.** In general, children exposed to traumatic events for prolonged periods can verbally express their experiences to the outside world, but they have difficulties in using language to express their emotions and descriptions of a problem. This is particularly true in cases where children have suffered abuse within their families. One goal was to teach children some ways to communicate without fear in a pleasant yet assertive way. This allowed them to not only put these events in perspective, but also to organise thoughts and ideas about what happened and reduce confusion and anguish.

"I was very afraid about what you would ask me. I didn't say anything, I kept quiet. At that time I didn't like to speak to anybody. I really wanted to tell the counsellor about all my problems, but at the beginning I could not speak, I was paralysed and very scared of what would happen to me if I told them the truth."

(Interview to a 14 years old girl who took part to the RTUT counselling program in Pondicherry, India, July 2010)

- **Build empathy and connections with other children.** It is important to convey the message that other children may also have had similar experiences. Besides giving children the

opportunity to thoroughly discussing their situations, as children realised that their peers/other children experienced similar problems they felt relieved of their own pain are encouraged to confront their reluctance in either reporting their experience or asking for help. The most important message to get across is that there will always be someone with whom they can talk to and trust.

At first the children and young people kept their experience to themselves and did not want to share with others because they felt shame, guilt, fear or pain when they recalled what had occurred. As they realised that they were not the only ones who faced difficult experiences, they managed to support each other, talk, play together, etc. Establishing this basis promotes an environment of tranquillity and trust.

(Roseline Sheela, Child Group Animator, RTUT, India)

- **Normalise the reactions.** Spend sufficient time to explain that the child's reactions are normal and legitimate in abusive situations (which in turn are not normal), and help them understand that these occurrences place them in physical and psychological danger. Once children manage to understand their physical and emotional reactions ("Why does my head ache? Why can I not sleep? Why am I angry for no apparent reason?"), their sense of confusion decreases and they gain a greater sense of control over their body.

- **Provide tools for self-control.** Situations of abuse can bring about feelings of fear, anger, shame, confusion and insecurity in children. In order for them to communicate their experiences, they need to be able to use words to express feelings and emotions:

Many children commented that they felt ill, discouraged, too confused, and sad and could not focus on their studies.

(Notes from a Focus Group of Children in Pondicherry, India)

In these cases it was advisable to help children understand their emotions, to put them into words, to recognise what they feel and the situations that bring out these emotions.

- **Help them to answer the Question “Why Me?”** Children (as well as adults) do not understand why certain things happened to them. When they are unable to understand or to make sense of the violence, they often feel responsible for what they went through and feel very guilty. It is therefore important to work on these negative misconceptions, emphasising that they are never to blame for being sexually abused. A child with a healthy vision of him/herself, who grows in self-knowledge and self-awareness, can recognise his or her own strengths and weaknesses and will have greater resources for self-protection.

- **Focusing on what is positive.** Focusing on the positive aspects of a story emphasises the child’s

reaction to escape or avoid an abusive situation. For instance, it would be appropriate to say *“It was brave to pretend to be asleep when Mr. X came into your room”,* or *“You were clever to start screaming to alert your neighbours.”* At the same time this helps the child to make sense of their negative experiences: *“Adults are stronger than children; you might think that you could have prevented this from happening, but we know that’s not true. It is normal to be angry at everyone when such things happen. How could you not be?”*

“If we treat children as if they were creatures, unable helpless and hopeless, they will feel as such. We need to teach children to have a positive image of themselves, to feel valued and loved, so that they develop greater confidence in themselves and better coping mechanisms.”

(Nisha Poudel, Senior Counsellor, AAWAAJ, Nepal)

- **Identify the learning.** Talk to the child about *How can I protect myself if this happen again? Who can I talk to? Who do I trust?* Helping children to learn from the abuse, however hurtful, can give meaning to the experience and help empower them with a positive sense of control over their lives in the future.

- **Use child-friendly methods.** During sessions, counsellors used informal, flexible and conversational techniques adjusted to the child’s level of development. These exercises make it possible to work on difficult and painful issues in a fun and constructive manner.

"At the beginning of the sessions children and adolescents usually had difficulties in putting their traumatic stories into words, but through drawings, they managed to express their feelings and perception of the experience. This allowed me access into his/her vision of the problem thus tailoring the support and therapeutic interventions to their needs. As they grew, girls stated that they felt stronger and less vulnerable".

(Barmavathy, Senior Community Animator, RTUT, India)

The testimonies of young women in Pondicherry and Surkhhet identified several key factors that enabled social-emotional support to have a positive impact:

**What makes you to trust the counsellor?
Adolescents feedback on effective social-emotional support**

Availability. However I felt, whether sad or happy, the counsellor was always there to talk about my worries.

Confidentiality. Whatever I say won't be shared with others by the counsellor. This made me to trust her more and more.

Authentic care. The counsellor gained my trust by showing me that she cared about me. I felt her caring as she frequently visited my home and showed a real interest in my life issues.

Promoting social network. The counsellor encouraged me and motivated me to participate in cultural activities and athletic games.

Based on the teams' experiences, it is important to note that the positive effects of their interventions do not necessarily arise from the activities itself (eg. drawing). It is rather the result of the process of working with and reflecting together with the child or the adolescent and the control they exercise over their emotions and experience as they are supported. Tools such as exercises and activities (role playing, drama, puppets, and targeted games) are not an end in itself; instead, they allow us to explore the experiences lived by children.



26/ Valli counselling and workshop

27/ Nisha counselling, Aawaaj

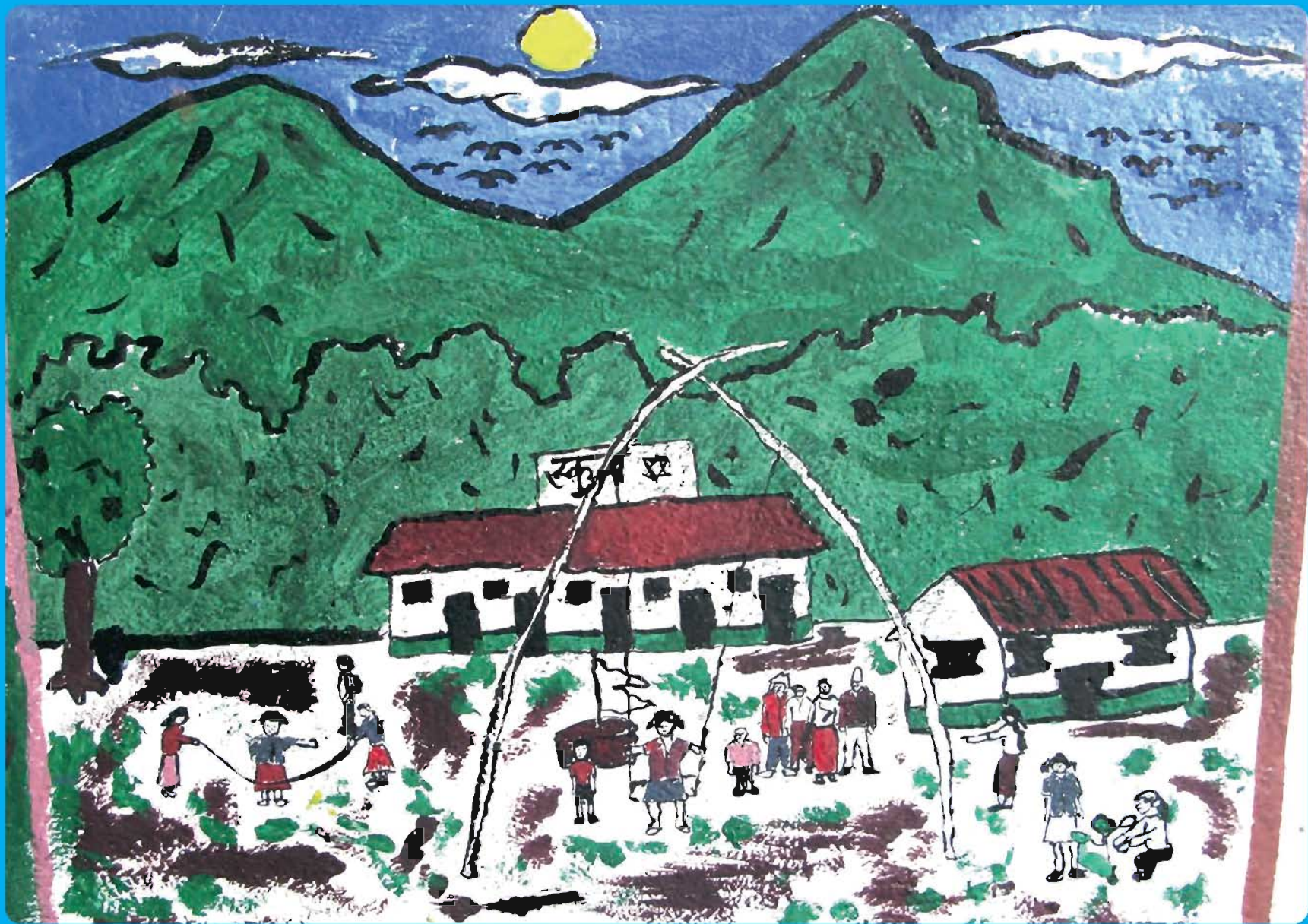
28/ Children group in Surkhhet, Nepal

29/ Interview to Jenny, participant of counseling program, RTUT



PART THREE

Reflections, learning and challenges



I. Self-Evaluation.

The objective of the “Learning from Practice” project was not only to analyse the processes underlying the activities, but also to promote self-reflection and evaluation of the NGOs activities and their impact on communities. Thus, the research teams included a self-evaluation questionnaire for the NGO teams and community members to indicate achievements and remaining challenges at both the individual and community levels.

This section lists some of these achievements and challenges. After analysing trends and patterns among the testimonies of the participants we identified four strong dimensions:

1. “We have more knowledge”. Most of women, men and children interviewed say they have gained new information about the sexual abuse of children related to consequences in the health of children, children’s rights, laws, how to prevent situations of abuse and exploitation.

It is important to note that this knowledge was acquired in part through information provided by members of the NGO, but mostly by experiential knowledge. The children’s group in Cambodia reported having learned several self-protection strategies which include using personal resources, such as screaming, running away, biting and protecting teammates. The women’s and men’s groups in Surkhet and Pondicherry met and discussed initially about the needs of their families and communities, then the search for resources, ideas and actions to promote the welfare of their children.

2. “There are community support mechanisms”. The NGO teams recognise that there is a strong network in communities in terms of mutual support and cooperation amongst friends and families. Community members participate in community-based organisations, such as the self-help groups, which are an effective means to help members to identify their needs and to look for resources to fulfil them.

The role of the Community Facilitators is ever-present. Most of the young women interviewed in Surkhet, Nepal could identify a Community Facilitator whom they could ask for support and help in case of need. In addition, the sustainability of the activities is frequently recognised. In Pondicherry, for example, three of the five women’s groups that we met conduct their meetings even when RTUT members do not assist them.

3. “We understand personal empowerment”. This is a key aspect of the programs. Community members work and participate in communal activities based on self-confidence. Discovering and beginning to trust one’s own resources and being willing to help others is an excellent starting point for community empowerment. For example, in Pondicherry, Indian women recognised several changes in their lives and this was a powerful motivating factor. The achievements of the groups worth noting included: no longer fearing to talk about and report abusive situations; being able to suggest strategies to protect the children and to mobilise other families and women to join self-help groups. The women in Surkhet felt stronger and more confident and willing to share their

experiences with other women, which allowed them to give a greater contribution to their communities.

4. "We are willing to work for the children's wellbeing". The development of the activities enabled participants to understand that the help of 'experts' is an important resource; but more importantly, both parents can now broach sensitive topics with their children. There is a general will to shift the attention away from individual self-interests to collaborative mutual benefits and interests. A majority of participants in the men's groups in Pondicherry or in the women's group in Surkhet reported to be more interested in doing things for their community. They play a willing part in community activities and feel that they have developed a greater social conscience.



II. Learning

Based on the above, we recognise that there are some factors which facilitate the positive impact of the NGO actions in the communities. It seems essential to consider the following:

1. Working with the network: "Together We Can"

All the prevention and recovery activities are articulated through networking. The practice of networking begins with the identification of existing resources and the existing social dynamics that characterise community life. They are then approached and coordinated preferably through interviews, meetings and informal discussions with key players. Prior to starting their action, the teams try to learn:

- ⇒ Who or what institutions are aware of the fight against child sexual abuse and trafficking?
- ⇒ How can we get in touch with these people/institutions and establish a supportive relationship?
- ⇒ How could we convince them? What messages will they use?
- ⇒ What are the benefits of working together? And the risks?

While recruiting a community leader can facilitate mobilisation and the development of collective meetings for awareness activities, a supporting relationship with the manager of the education department can promote the access for children with fewer resources and excluded, thereby reducing the risk of their long-term vulnerability.

An awareness workshop with the teachers' board in a school allowed us, on the one hand, to point out different types of abuse in school contexts, and on the other, to get collaboration, which enabled us to include sexual abuse in the academic curriculum.

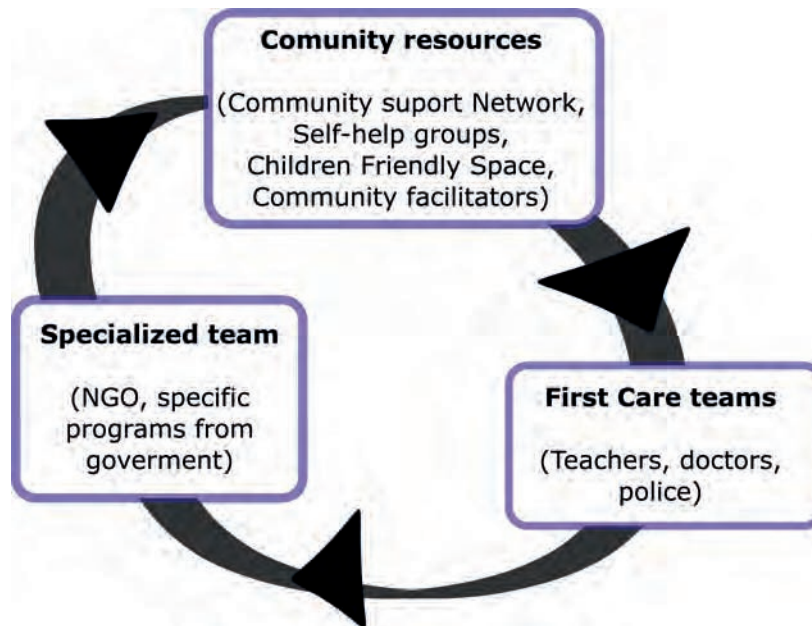
(CCBO experience in Sihanoukville, Cambodia)

Meetings with the health and medical staff increased their awareness and encouraged a more sensitive and kinder treatment of affected children.

(AAWAAJ experience in Surkhet District, Nepal)

From this perspective, both places are privileged spaces affording valuable opportunities for child sexual abuse prevention, as they can serve as social reference models through appropriate attitudes and behaviours.

A map of the network is found below. Except for some contextual peculiarities, at least three resources were identified that played a crucial role in the prevention and reparation of child sexual abuse in the three regions where the research was performed:



- *Community Resources:* This refers to existing local resources including community leaders, parents' organisations, self-advocacy groups, etc. Usually their main tasks are raising the awareness of the entire community through educational activities and the organisation of discussion groups, and community-led advocacy for the prevention of violence against children. They also guide and encourage parents involved in situations of violence in how to receive support either from local self-support groups or from the specialised team
- *First Care Teams:* These consist of a network of professional health services, doctors, teachers, lawyers, and police. These professionals actively participate to the validation of the different cases of sexual abuse and must ensure the welfare of the child, after an abuse has been identified. They also participate in the development of activities for the prevention of abuse, using resources in their area.
- *Specialised teams:* This role is usually played by the different NGOs and specialised programs offered by other institutions. The main tasks consist in promoting community mobilisation, promoting and guiding opportunities for reflection, transfer of information, legal assistance, etc. Usually one of the primary responsibilities of these team is to coordinate the activities of the different sectors and to contact them when abuse is discovered.

2. Promotion of people's dignity

Sexual violence is not limited to causing physical injuries; it also represents an aggression to the identity and inherent value of the survivor. Acknowledging the importance of promoting people's dignity through every action is one of the key elements to promoting people's resilience and the unconditional respect that each human being deserves. This is fundamental for children because it is through the example of receiving respect that they learn to respect themselves as well as others. This essential respect of children and women is shown by the facilitators when they:

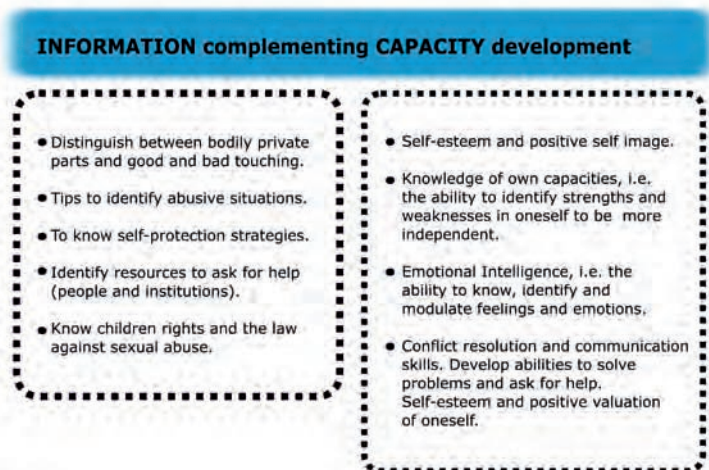
- **Believe In The Person.** Believe in the affected persons' own resources, and trust that when the contexts and conditions allow it they will use them.
- **Provide a warm and respectful welcome.** Sometimes it is not easy to ensure the best conditions to support women and children in contexts of violence or poverty. However, it is essential to take time and invest the necessary resources to provide warmth, care and respect when working with people who were survivors of sexual violence. For example, the NGO RTUT attempt to make visitors feel at home at their offices by making them a comfortable place to sit and offering them some tea or a drink. Small details can convey support and care.
- **Acknowledge the survivors' experiences.** Recognise that they have been treated unjustly and deserve affection and solidarity. At the same time, facilitators also transmit their admiration for the children's courage in testifying to their story and

report an unfair situation, reaffirming that through these actions they help other children who are living in similar circumstances. There is respect for each person's unique case.

3. Promotion of personal and community resources

Prevention is not just about reducing risks; it must also involve strengthening personal capacities. A good way to protect children is to facilitate the acquisition of certain knowledge, but it is necessary to empower children's skills and self-confidence so they are able to resist people who try to take advantage of them, even if they are bigger, stronger and more powerful.

The challenge for the NGO teams has been to combine the educational activities (focused on transmission of knowledge) with the promotion of resilience capacities. The following are some of the contents and skills that can be included in the programs:



4. Building ties of trust

Based on the team experience, one of the most severe consequences of sexual abuse is the damage that it causes in children as far their ability to trust others. Often, children lose their trust in others, their sense of security and even their family belonging, as they are often blamed for what happened. When this happens, the child's development may be compromised since the ability to trust others allows children to explore their environment and promote healthy development.

It is therefore essential to prioritise building relationships of trust, as a way to re-establish the children's ability to trust those people who are able to provide love, support and protection. The process of building trustful relationships seems to be marked by:

»**Basic acceptance.** A fundamental acceptance of the child means to acknowledge that inadequate and destructive behaviour in a child can change, while still accepting the child as a person. Facilitators must express and show a genuine concern for the child to serve as a source of support and care that is always available, no matter what happens.

»**Facilitate spaces for listening.** Facilitators convey the message that *"we do understand you here"*. As one woman stated, *"Every time we talk I have the feeling that our interests and opinions are considered. There is an authentic dialogue where information and suggestions are exchanged"*.

»**Avoiding blame.** Blaming results in a sense of re-victimisation; not blaming promotes understanding

and growth: *"They never made me feel guilty about what happened" "When I do wrong, there is no punishment. Nobody scolds me. They always give me good advice, and suggest us (not force) to make positive decisions. What I mean is that they help me identify good and bad decisions, and good and bad limitations so that I can make my own best decisions"*.

»**Ensuring confidentiality.** Children who suffer abuse from their loved ones feel particularly betrayed. This can be addressed by ensuring privacy and loyalty: *"They take seriously all the things we say. Besides, what is told within the group is not divulged outside. That is very important because I would not like other people to know how I feel. There are people who don't understand me; they make jokes and bother us"*.

»**Support with the legal procedures.** As legal systems can be complicated and daunting even to adults, most of the girls highly appreciated the support needed to fill out requests, to contact the police and also in mediating with their families if necessary.

»**Providing protection and security.** Physical safety is a basic need of all people, and in particular those who have been abused. As one of the children stated, *"I feel safe with them. Nothing bad can happen"*.

5. Promoting community mobilisation

Children's welfare is not a matter of good or bad luck, but rather is the result of the hard work and joint effort of the society as a whole. If violence against children and sexual abuse occur, it is because there are certain social, political and economic conditions which tend to tolerate relationships based on violence and abuse. This is why community mobilisation is a key aspect in providing children with effective protection and support services. Thus, the work of the NGO teams is especially based on emphasising the promotion of local initiatives through the creation of spaces for reflection and support of these processes.

From the beginning, the teams established different programs and recognised themselves and their actions as "facilitators of change", as well as providing specific support when necessary. This occurs, for instance, when the self-support groups ask for more information about the legal consequences for abusers; or on how to report an abuse through the Women Commission Department. Communities are not taught to work in isolation; however, the aim is to facilitate their participation and community ownership.

Programs focus on the idea that the dialogue among teams and community does not have to serve as confirmation or validation of a previously agreed program with the NGO. On the contrary, much effort is necessary for negotiations and reflections among all players and agents to ensure they are integrated from the beginning on an equal level. This is one way to establish bonds of trust and mutual support among the people engaged in the children's welfare.

- a) Finally, community involvement differed depending on the contexts. The level of participation depended on three elements: The degree of community organisation, ensuring the viewpoints of all members are considered (particularly in the presence of leaders or formal groups, etc.).
- b) The level of organisation of the NGO.
- c) The level of trust between NGO staff and the community.

6. Periodic accompaniment

The community's participation must be understood as the full exercise of their social rights and social responsibilities of community members. In this respect, the role of the NGO teams as facilitators in creating the conditions for such participation is significant. According to the teams' experience, the support of local initiatives is crucial. This support was highlighted in the following ways:

»**Regular visits to the community.** NGO staff visit every community at least once or twice a week, showing a genuine interest in the situation. During these meetings, they discuss everyday life issues as well as the management of recent incidents; they reflect with the community facilitators on the last incidents and provide specific information about legal procedures if needed.

»**Cultural Adaptability.** Training programs need to adjust documents and their contents to the unique characteristics of the people, taking into account differences in language (for example, the Tamil

language spoken in rural areas is very different from Tamil spoken in urban areas), educational level, abilities of people in understanding the content, culture, and local history of each community.

»**Flexibility.** A community approach requires a flexible and patient attitude on the part of NGO team members. One of the aspects that was most appreciated by community members was the flexibility shown by RTUT members in setting schedules and adjusting to the people's free time – even if this required meetings to be held on weekends or at night.

»**Accessibility.** The accessibility and availability of the NGO staff is also important. All the members, especially managers, are available to receive community members at any time. The office location or NGO assistance centre is located inside the community, or in an easily accessed area (close to a bus station, next to the road), even though this may sometimes imply poor office conditions.

7. Promoting self-care amongst NGO members

On bad days, a dear colleague always tells us that if we were flower sellers we would not suffer from pressure or stress.

(Statement of NGO team members)

NGOs that work to promote children rights constantly face challenging situations since their work is carried out in complex and difficult contexts. Stress, tension, anguish, powerlessness, frustration, rage, etc. are all familiar

feelings to NGO workers. Nevertheless, they also recognise their many times of satisfaction, joy, strength and hope.

Everyday stress is caused by the pace and levels of work required, frustrating life conditions, threats, problems with unrest or lack of social support, as well as by the work of defending the children who represent the most vulnerable members in society. All these feelings add up and can lead to symptoms of burn out which manifests itself through physical and mental health problems, including exhaustion and depression.

One of the main sources of pressure and stress is the feeling of powerlessness that rises from the doubts concerning the usefulness and effectiveness of the activities, or from overwhelming confrontation within their work environment. NGO workers often express doubts such as: *What can we do about these atrocities? How I can I help, with so few resources?*

The NGO teams carry out several activities to take care of themselves:

»**Group Support.** In group-work exercises, they foster an atmosphere of trust and acceptance among all team members. AAWAAJ members reported that in an environment of trust and acceptance, they could better assist each other and felt more confident to share personal problems. This helped establishing and strengthening relations among members and reduced a sense of loneliness when facing issues.

»**Regular Reflection.** Provide a space for a group reflection to analyse and review complex cases. The weekly group meetings in RTUT helped members to share the

responsibilities facilitated the sharing of other opinions to seek for solutions.

»**Taking Time Off.** CCBO members recommended searching for things and activities that allow enjoying the beauties in life such as: leisure time and a time to relax, meditate, share with friends, outings, dancing, or spending time with family and personal support sources.

There is a family environment. There is a lot of flexibility in sharing ideas and listening to all AAWAAJ members. There is true participation by all. We feel like coordinators and trust our own resources to feel more effective.

(Kanti Khadka, Senior Program Officer, AAWAAJ)



III. Discussion And Future Challenges

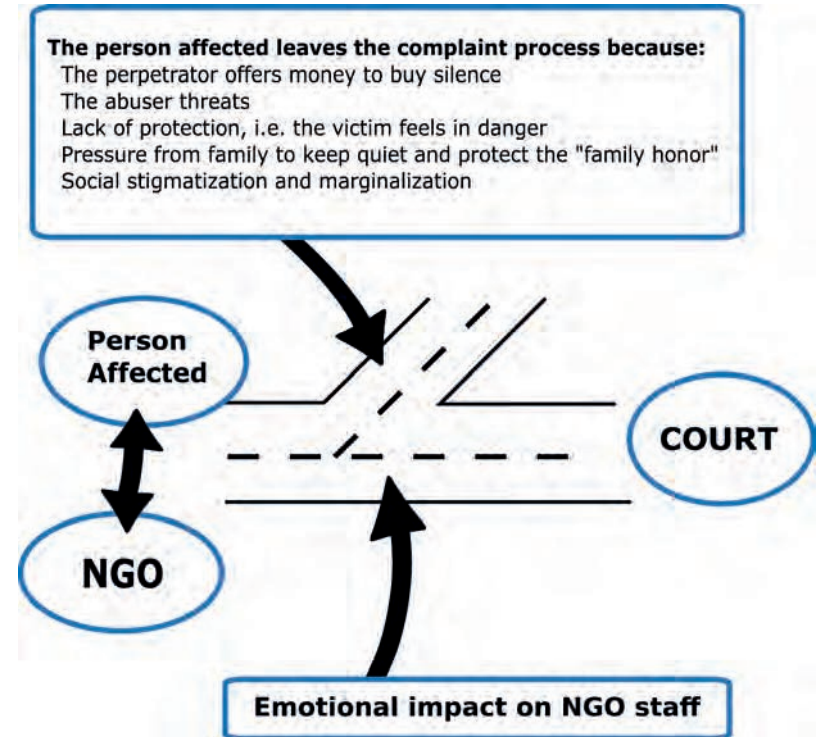
It may seem that the actions and achievements found by this report consist of decisions without conflict; a fluid process with no ups and downs, in which teams have all the answers to any issue. Nothing could be farther from truth. Every attempt to approach a community action, especially if it pertains to preventing child sexual abuse, entails different challenges and ethical questions.

Indeed, the teams were regularly reviewing their daily practices, decision-making processes and adjust action criteria if necessary, always trying to overstep on the ethical ambitions involved. To display these values in concrete actions represents a challenge in their daily practice.

Some of the most frequent dilemmas NGO teams faced are:

a/ Social support of survivors vs. Institutional interests

Supporting the survivor during legal procedures is a constant challenge for NGO members. The stigma that often accompanies sexual abuse makes it very difficult for children and young women to file legal complaints in contexts where there are usually no guarantees in life; they can be exposed to new violations or suffer negative consequences in their own family or community. In other cases, parents choose alternatives to legal redress for child sexual abuse, and instead prefer out-of-court settlements or marriage to perpetrator as acceptable "solutions". In these circumstances the person affected sometimes decided to abandon a legal procedure and not proceed with it. Some of the reasons identified for this are illustrated in the following diagram:



As show at the bottom of the diagram, these situations often have an emotional and social impact on the NGO members working on the case. Experience has shown a variety of reactions in NGO workers:

a) Feelings of helplessness, frustration and anger, but also solidarity, understanding and empathy with the pressure experienced by survivors

b) Feelings of anger and helplessness are channelled toward the decision made by the survivor. NGO staff feel "challenged by their work", "disappointed", with a sense of "wasted effort" or concern about their reputation in their partnership with authorities (police, lawyers). In some extreme situations, the decision of the survivor is sensed as a failure of their support.

Trying to move forward in a positive and constructive way becomes difficult at this point. Some of the questions raised by the teams to attempt to assess the most appropriate action include:

»Is the implementation of the complaint a requirement for continued support to the survivor?

»If he or she does not want to report, what are the objectives of additional support?

»Regardless of the withdrawal of the complaint, should we carry on the legal proceedings? If so, how?

In light of the situation, NGO teams agreed to the following options to protect the relation between the affected person and the NGO staff:

- *Link Legal Justice with Recovery.* With regard to supporting the decision to file a report with judicial authorities, a consensus was reached to consider the complaint as an important prerequisite for the recovery process, in order to publicise the existence of a crime with the hope of enabling the survivor to remove any doubt about his/her guilt.

- *Offer Unconditional Support.* Although legal justice is desirable for many reasons, experience has shown that the most logical (if not compassionate) action may be to recognise and empathise with the pressure affecting the survivor, and despite the importance of legal proceedings, continue to support him or her even if no report is filed (or if he/she changes his/her mind). This further applies when we consider that legal proceedings do not always find in favour of the person affected. In this respect, we must underline a minimum of two truths: the social truth of a difficult experience survived with the help of unconditional support, and the legal truth which may not always be just, especially when the survivors are children or women.

- *Build For The Future.* Teams do not intend to downplay the role of the legal system or abandon the legal process, rather prioritise the relationship of trust and mutual support established with the person affected. Efforts must be made so as to promote the personal and environmental conditions that allow a continuation of the legal proceedings. The accompaniment of NGO members fulfils a need for community support, family mediation, etc. The teams trust that in the future the context will favour the reporting process and that the survivor can be empowered with resources sufficient to meet the challenges of the judicial process.

b/ Problem solving by NGOs vs. Strengthening community resources

It may occur that prior to initiating preventive actions the NGO teams are warned or aware of children who are victims of an on-going situation of abuse or violence.

The simple awareness of these situations is evidence of the commitment of the NGO members who feel compelled to intervene somehow. They recognise that their first impulse is to call on every NGO resource to remove the child from the abusive situation and protect him/her. However, it is known that in contexts where the children's protection greatly depends on the communities' internal mechanisms and resources, NGO actions that only focus on the detection and solution of the problem turn out to be insufficient in the long-run. This is increasingly necessary when there are neither administrative offices nor public institutions (social services in other countries) that are responsible for carrying out emergency actions to ensure immediate and long-term child protection.

In such situations, medium- and long-term actions allowing the empowerment and development of the community's own resources make more sense to enable community members to obtain the capacity and resources to fight the phenomenon.

c/ Expansion vs. Specialised Programmes

After several years, different teams reached a phase of consolidation of their work, which means that there is a relationship with the community based on mutual knowledge and respect; there is a consensus on protocols for intervention; activities are systematised, etc. This

experience leads to a reflection on future actions. There are nearly always two options: a) extend the activities and projects to other nearby regions, or b) optimise existing resources to provide a more therapeutic and specialised support to those affected.

The choice between (a) and (b) was made by evaluating the different characteristics of the NGO resources, of the communities and the context. It seems essential to at least consider the following factors:

»*The human and material resources of the NGO.* This means asking the questions: *What are the costs and benefits of expanding or specialising? What are the qualifications and skills of NGO staff, and how much financial and human effort (or dedication) will need to be focused on specific issues? What would be the cost of extending the programme to other regions?*

»*Performance aspects related to the activity and the team's ability to maintain them.* For example, in Pondicherry, one of the aspects that communities valued the most was the personalised service offered by RTUT members, as well as the assistance in developing self-support community groups. In light of these results, RTUT members reevaluated the proposal to expand its activities and reach more sectors since resources were insufficient to ensure a presence or a frequent long term support in new communities.

»*The cultural and social factors of sexual abuse.* In the presence of a major taboo in the society, the teams should perhaps begin in new location only by

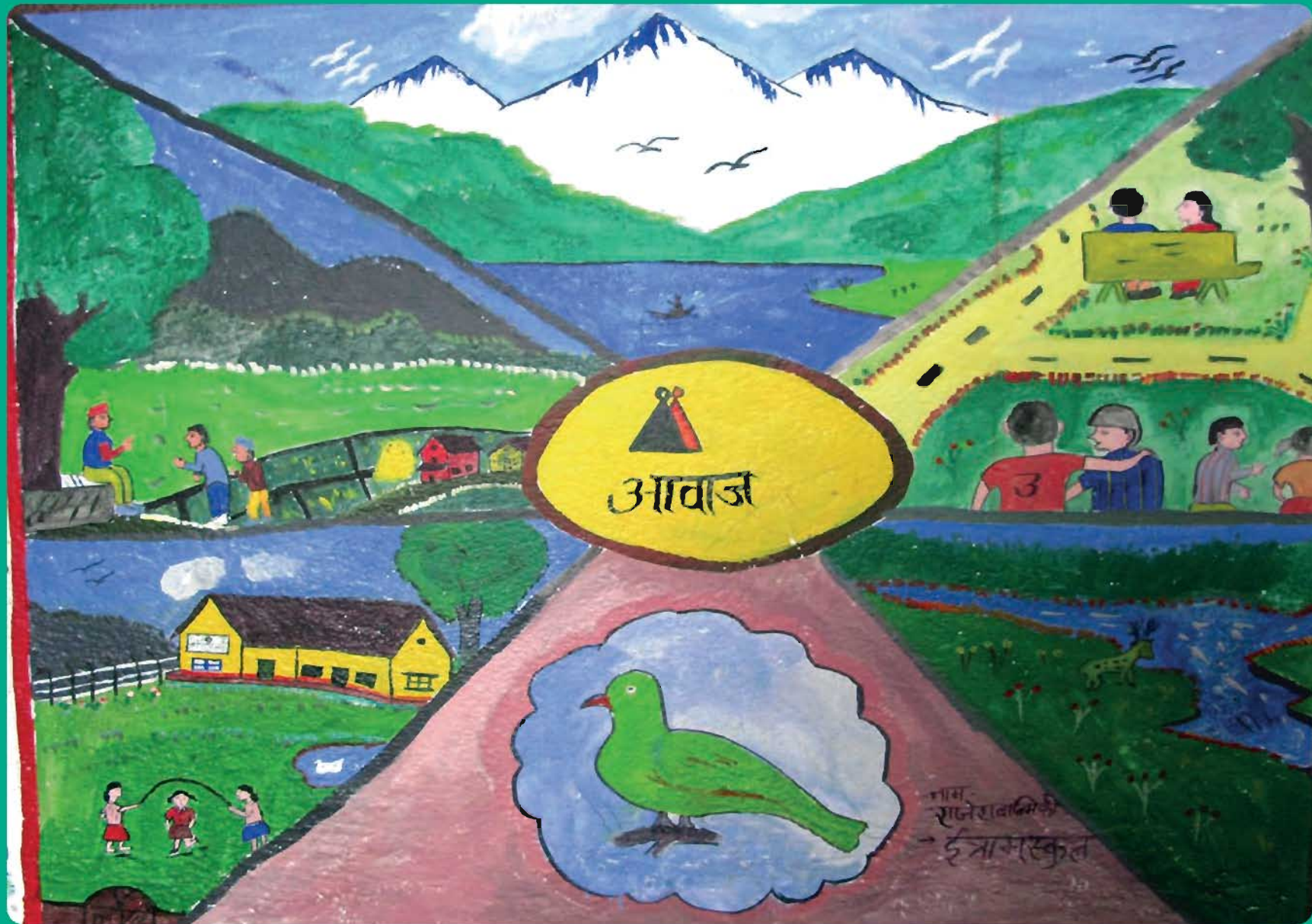
conducting minor awareness activities to break the silence and provide basic information, rather than launch a full-scale replica of older and well-established programmes.

»*The available community resources.* In the event other associations are already involved in preventive actions, it might be appropriate to complement the general awareness and prevention resources with a more specialised type of support, or vice-versa.



PART FOUR

Conclusion and Recommendations



आवाज



श्री
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The "Learning From Practice" project has documented significant experience among NGOs working to promote resilience for the prevention of and recovery of children from sexual abuse and exploitation in Asia. The collective experience generated by this project has underlined the self-generating capacity of communities to protect and care for their own. It also identified the achievements and lessons that should be employed in any community-based programme that seeks to promote resilience in communities and children affected by sexual violence. Key recommendations for this are:

1. Social Networking

The basis for all prevention and recovery activities is broad and effective networking. The practice of networking begins with the identification of existing resources and the existing social dynamics that characterise community life. Key actors fulfilling specific roles should be identified and supported to systematically prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. These include Specialised Teams consisting of governmental and/or non-governmental institutions who coordinate activities and facilitate access to services; *First Care Teams* consisting of professional service providers assisting survivors and their families including doctors, teachers, lawyers, and police; and existing *Community Resources* such as community leaders, parents organisations, children's clubs, support groups, etc. who promote local awareness and community-led advocacy on child sexual abuse.

2. Community Mobilisation

In order for awareness-raising and networking to be effective, child sexual abuse should be addressed within the context of each country's history and the positive features of their cultures and traditions. A resilience-based approach to mobilisation involves strengthening a communities' idea of belonging to a country and culture for whom protection and self-defence from violence - especially for children - has been and must always be a priority. Beyond this, the project found that an active learning process which enables local child protection networks to take effective action is also necessary. Capacity-building activities should include, at a minimum, the *Recognition of Community Experience* regarding past cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation; the *Identification of personal and community resources* available to those involved with the protection and recovery of survivors; an *emphasis on breaking the silence* by addressing taboos limiting public discussion and action on the issue; and the *promotion of active listening skills* enabling adults to give value the views and experiences of child survivors while offering appropriate guidance.

3. Community Accompaniment

A community's participation in child protection must be understood as the full exercise of their social rights and social responsibilities of community members. In this respect, the role of the NGO teams as *facilitators* in creating the conditions for such participation is significant. *Regular visits to the community* are therefore necessary to engage and reflect with community facilitators and networks on incidents and appropriate responses; *Cultural Adaptability* should always be a priority to ensure that

training and other activities are relevant to the unique characteristics of the local people, culture and history; adopting a *flexible and patient attitude* is essential for NGO staff to show respect for the time and personal commitments of network members and adjust meetings and activities to their free time; and finally, ensuring that NGO teams are *accessible and available* to receive and assist community members whenever a crisis occurs.

4. Care of NGO Staff

NGOs that work to promote children rights constantly face challenging situations since their work is carried out in complex and difficult contexts. Stress, tension, anguish, powerlessness, frustration, rage, etc. are all familiar feelings to NGO workers. All these feelings add up and can lead to symptoms of burnout which can manifest in physical and mental health problems, ultimately affecting their work with children and communities.

Nevertheless, NGO staff also recognised their many times of satisfaction, joy, strength and hope. In order to prevent burnout and foster positive attitudes and feelings, it is recommended that NGOs be proactive in ensuring that activities such as staff support groups, team reflection meetings and time off, are provided to all team members.

5. Cross-Cutting Principles

In addition to the above recommendations, an emphasis on resilience also requires that the following cross-cutting principles are internalised by all team members and incorporated into all activities:

PROMOTION OF DIGNITY:

Sexual violence represents an aggression to the identity and inherent value of the survivor. Acknowledging the importance of promoting people's dignity through every action is one of the key elements to promoting people's resilience and the unconditional respect that each human being (and each child) deserves. This can be done by *believing in the survivors*, i.e. in their capacities and resources. *Acknowledging the survivors' experience* affirms that the child has been treated unjustly, while also showing admiration for their courage in telling their story. Finally, *warmly and respectfully welcoming* child survivors can help them relax and gain confidence at official places and meetings. Small details such as making them a comfortable seat and offering them a drink can convey immense support and care.

PROMOTION OF RESILIENT RESOURCES:

This involves combining educational activities (focused on transmission of knowledge) with the promotion of personal resilience. Some of the most important resilience capacities that can be strengthened in work with groups or individuals include: *self-esteem* and a positive self image; *self-knowledge* or the ability to identify one's strengths and weaknesses; *emotional intelligence*, i.e. the ability to know, identify and modulate feelings and emotions; and *conflict resolution / communication skills*.

DEVELOPMENT OF TRUST:

Often child survivors of sexual abuse lose their trust in others, their sense of security and even their family belonging, as they are often blamed for what happened. It

is therefore essential to prioritise building relationships of trust, as a way to re-establish the children's ability to trust those people who are able to provide love, support and protection. The process of building trustful relationships seems to be marked by *basic acceptance* and genuine concern for the child, no matter what happens; by *facilitating opportunities for listening* which convey the message that "we understand you here"; *Not blaming* the child and respecting confidentiality, the lack of which can result in a sense of re-victimisation; and finally *providing physical protection and security* which is a basic need of all people - in particular those who have been abused.

While the collective recommendations above may be considered an effective model of promoting resiliency, we acknowledge that the children and communities who participated in the "Learning by Experience" project remain our best teachers of resilience. They have kept our learning alive and give us the courage to keep fighting alongside them to make this world a just and kind place for all children. From them we have learned the meaning of the phrase,



***"Coming together is a beginning,
but working together is success".***





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The Invisible Pain Of Childhood. A Reading Ecosystem Of Child Abuse (Paidós, Spain 1998)

The Invisible Challenges Of Being A Mother Or Father: A Manual For Assessing Parenting Skills And Resilient Resources (Paidós, Spain 1998)

Successful Treatment Of Childhood: Parenting, Attachment And Resilience (Gedisa, Spain 2005)

Daughters And Mothers Resilient (Gedisa, Spain 2007)

A Guide To Biological Parents, Foster Parents And Professionals (Gedisa, Spain 2010)

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