



EMPOWER PEOPLE

THIS IS WHO WE ARE

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1) Introduction

Poverty is often cited as one of the reasons that leads to bride trafficking- a term implying trafficking of girls or women for the purpose of marriage or under the shroud of a promise of marriage. A question arises whether it is actually poverty which causes bride trafficking or is it just another extraneous variable of this predicament. If one digs a bit deeper to explore the causal factors leading to bride trafficking, one may see that it is rather a social problem and not necessarily a criminal one. Poverty is just a tip of the iceberg and attribution of the problem of bride trafficking to poverty actually dilutes the entire discourse around bride trafficking. Poverty is rather an intellectual excuse used by society to shift the blame of a social crime to the state. One conveniently chooses to forget that it is the society that perpetuates and reinforces the practice of bride trafficking. It is the social acceptance of this phenomenon which feeds this evil. The moment people believe and justify any unjust practice of society, they also end up justifying trafficking. For instance, in case of a rape, when the girl herself is seen as the culprit by society, then no matter how stringent the laws, the problem will persist as society often refuses to accept the laws meant to address social crimes like trafficking which often go against the belief systems of the concerned community. When a person sitting comfortably in his/her living room watching television, attributes the reason for abduction of a girl/woman to her assumed “flawed character” or her “dressing sense”, problems like trafficking also get reinforced. This is where the real problem lies-the social mentality which is the root cause of trafficking. The perception of girls/women as multi-utility commodities that are available for sale is the cause of such crimes. Notions like “the fresher, the better!” are

the real reasons for this quagmire. Thus, the social crime of bride trafficking perpetuates in the minds of the masses and it is the society which is a culprit of commensurable nature as those of traffickers in this act against humanity. There is an urgent need to challenge this social psychosis where society has deliberately chosen to neglect social realities like bride trafficking. One can contribute by at least starting a conversation around such topics, aiming to an awakening of social conscience of the society.

Empower People (EP) envisages itself not as an organization but as a social movement determined to uproot bride trafficking from the society, through the society. EP focuses on putting forth the survivor's perspective and working for their self-actualization. It aims to develop consciousness in society against bride trafficking through the empowerment of survivors.



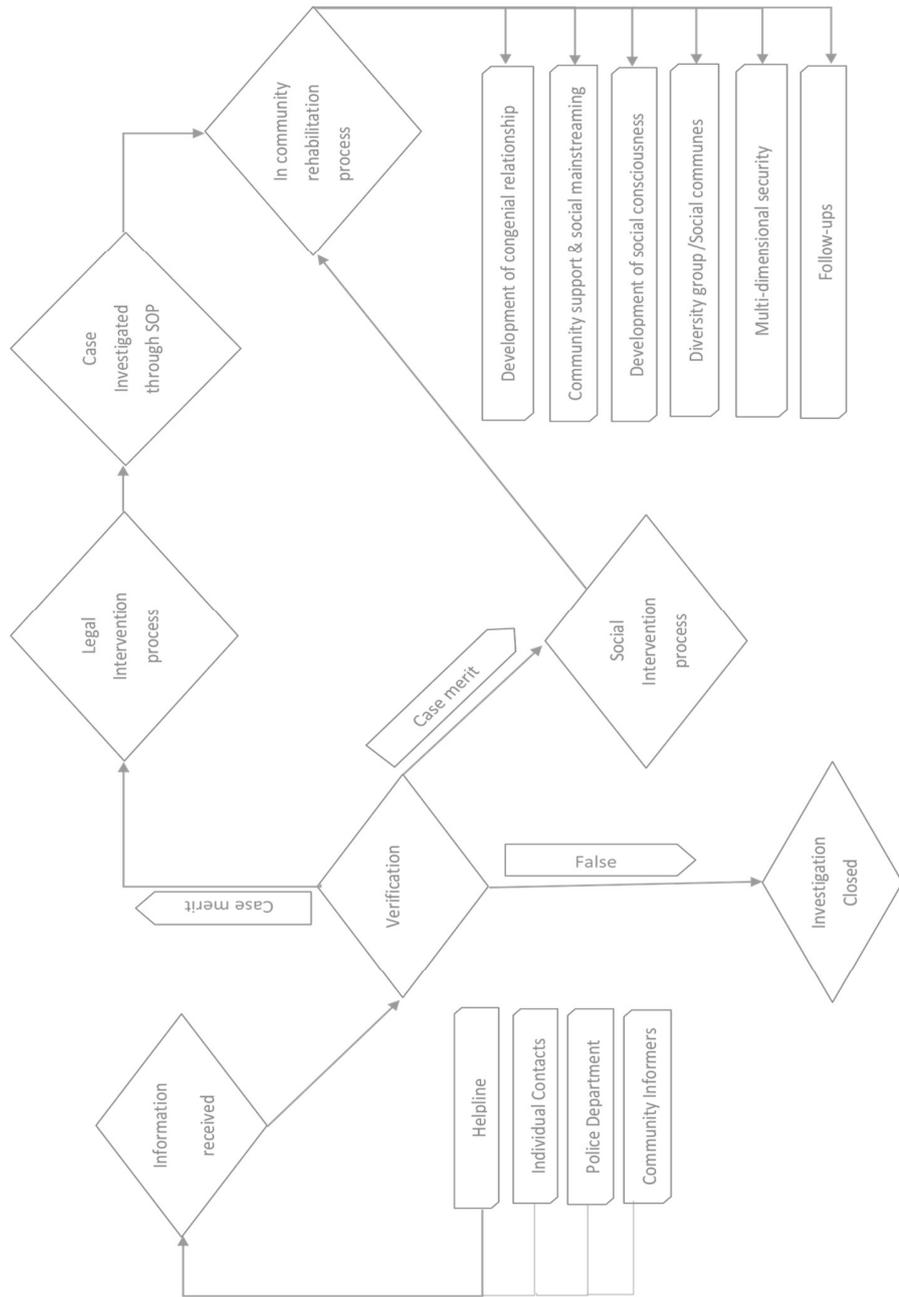
2) Intervention Process

Intervention process includes the set of actions and steps adopted by EP in cases related to BrideTrafficking. Other than the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) laid down by the government which needs to be followed in cases pertaining to trafficking, the steps defined by EP have gradually evolved over a period of time based on the needs of victims and the experience gained while working with them. Empower Peoples sees these processes as drivers of change which are evolved from the survivor's perspective.

“Empower People believes in handling every case uniquely and in its entirety. For us, each case is a journey of empowerment.”



INTERVENTION PROCESS



A) Information Source

For any organization working in the area of Human Trafficking, accurate information is of the highest importance. It is the information which actually establishes the basis for any case. We can understand its importance from the fact that governments around the world fail to tackle crimes due to lack of accurate information and a gap in understanding operating mechanisms whether in case of trafficking or terrorism. In fact, the entire business of trafficking has been thriving for centuries owing to shrouded information sharing. Credible Information sources are the only means to break the backbone of the business of Bride Trafficking. Sans information the very mechanisms that are established to tackle the situation, lose their utility and relevance.

For any and every organization, a credible information source is the terminus a quo for working in the area of Bride Trafficking.

i) Community Informers

Working in the area of bride trafficking from the past decade has helped EP to establish a network of individual contacts that provide back-end information about the situation in the area. These contacts are passive observers of the society who are generally located in the hotbeds of trafficking. Their identity remains anonymous and they have been a primary means of information procurement in the nascent years of the organization.

ii) Police Department

Police is a major source of information- Sometimes it is the police as department and sometimes it is policemen as people who ask for help. The organization often supports the police department by organizing training sessions for the officers about handling of cases related to human trafficking and developing awareness on issues like procedural requirements or procurement of resources.

iii) Helpline

The recently launched Anti Human Trafficking Helpline (8297038128) of Empower People has helped receive information about trafficking related cases as well. Since its launch in 2018, almost 400 cases have been discovered through the helpline. It was initiated in the northern region of the country with the objective of simplifying means of accessing help. It has helped in enhancing the reach of the organization manifold.

iv) Individual Contacts

Individual contacts include individuals who do not have any formal relationship with the organization but are concerned citizens or relatives of persons in distress, who inform EP about the cases through different media, which are then taken up by the organization. This set of contacts also include sensitized individuals who have an intention to prevent such cases but at the same time do not want to get mired by any uninvited problems or legal hassles.

B) Verification

Verification is a litmus test for every case. For EP, each case is a revelation of a story. No case is straight and simple. They maybe similar but never the same. That's why the organization believes in handling each case independently. During the verification process, the nature of the case is determined and based on its merit, the necessary kind of intervention method is adopted. Other than establishing the veracity of the information received, an assessment of the case is also done at this stage which provides a basis for action.

C) Legal Intervention Process

This refers to cases that fall under the purview of the legal definition of trafficking as provided under the Indian Law. The Standard Operating Procedure of the Police and concerned department is applied in such cases, where the organization provides assistance to the survivor throughout the process in any required manner. The organization ensures that all steps which are in the best interest of the survivor are carried out by the administration. Here, it should be noted that the organization primarily works for the survivor's empowerment and not for the criminal's punishment, the latter being the duty of law enforcement agencies. However, this doesn't limit the organization from extending legal aid to the survivor.

- **Case Investigation through SOP**

Once the information is verified, the case is further investigated through a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). The SOP primarily includes a step by step approach enabling the different departments and supervisors to effectively carry out the process. The organization provides voluntary assistance during the whole process.

Before the rescue, a pre-rescue meeting is organized where all the concerned local departments come together (including police and health departments, civil society, etc.) to discuss about all the dimensions of the rescue and the resources (transport, money, legal support) required for the same. A contingency plan is also envisaged during the meeting. Once the meeting is done, the rescue is carried out immediately. All the concerned local authorities and NGOs are alerted about the rescue maintaining confidentiality of the details.

Post rescue, the focus is on necessary treatment for the survivor. Voluntarily we ensure that the survivor feels safe and all her immediate needs are fulfilled (like food, shelter, clothes, and medical assistance). The Investigating Officer (IO) is the officer entrusted with the responsibility to keep the survivor safe. He also sends proposals to concerned authorities to provide an interim relief and avail benefits wherever applicable. Once the primary needs of the survivor are met, an FIR is filed in case it wasn't filed before undertaking the rescue. The filing of an FIR is a crucial step in the entire process and it forms the basis for the whole case. The FIR is ensured to be self-contained and cross-verified. The statements of the victim and the witness are recorded by the IO at this step.

Further investigation is carried out aimed at collecting evidence to support the version of victim/survivor. The suspects/ accused are interrogated keeping in mind

all aspects of the trafficking process. The procedures of arrest and filing of charge sheet are undertaken in due course of time as per the demands of the case. Certain post-conviction steps may be taken up by the IO and are appealed to the court. It may include enhancement of punishment, fines, suspension, etc.

Referral mechanisms play an important role during the whole process. It includes involvement of different stakeholders who are responsible to coordinate creation of an effective system consisting of counseling, health care, psycho-social intervention, legal representation, compensation and rehabilitation.

D) Social Intervention Process

Social Intervention process is undertaken when the case is socially entangled and where there is less or no scope for legal intervention. This process arises out of admission of a fact that in many circumstances, a rescue and legal intervention isn't the best possible solution. The social intervention process attempts to link and assimilate the survivor with her present society. In these kinds of cases, an endeavor is made to bring the society closer to the survivor especially because of the socio-cultural differences between them. The organization's aim is to pacify the distraught social relationships in order to develop a positive environment where the survivor can thrive without fear of society.

E) In-community rehabilitation process

In-community rehabilitation process involves integration of the survivor within society. The survivor's wellbeing and her concerns are the central focus for EP because the organization doesn't believe in becoming a law enforcement agency and doesn't see punishing of criminals as its task. Rather, EP believes in filling the gap where the law falls short of the objective of rehabilitation and integration of the survivor within the society in a true sense. Such clarity in the approach helps the organization to keep its focus intact and to work for those who truly need it. The in-community rehabilitation process is thus designed with the survivor's perspective at its center and it aims towards assimilation of the survivor in the society while keeping her identity intact.

i) Development of a congenial relationship

The survivor has undergone a phase that leads to her having apathy towards society and sometimes even towards herself. Thus, developing a congenial relationship involves a first basic step of extending a hand of support to them. The organization assures them through various gestures that that it is here for them and not the other way around. During this step, EP tries to develop a relationship in which there is no hierarchy or dominance. This relationship is aimed towards creating a conducive environment in which the survivor can re-evolve into her original self. The endeavor is to provide survivors an open space for free dialogue.

ii) Community-support and social-mainstreaming

Community support and social-mainstreaming process is aimed to provide the survivor a place in society, which she rightfully deserves. The organization strives for the assimilation of survivors with the society such that her own identity is not lost. Apart from supporting the survivors and making them aware of their rights, EP also aims to establish her as an individual who has her own distinguished identity in society. This goes against the societal conception of the survivor as an object with no identity or human rights. The organization believes that an individual and the society ought to co-exist as both are necessary for each other's existence. Thus, mainstreaming the survivor with the society means assimilation of mechanisms to work together and not assimilation of identities. We aim for a society which realizes Tagore's dream-*Where the survivor's mind is without fear and her head is held high.*

iii) Development of social consciousness

For EP, carrying out a rescue is not the main agenda, rather it's just the first step of a long-drawn process. It is very important to sensitize the community and make them conscious of what is assumed to be an obvious reality. For this, the organization brings together local leaders and panchayat members and other stakeholders of the community and involves them in the whole process. This firstly establishes their social accountability and secondly gives them a sense of ownership in the decision making process. It is this ownership and participation which develops a social consciousness about the issue in the society. Periodic interaction with the community ensures that the relationship developed with the society is sustained over a period of time.

iv) Social commune/Diversity group

- **Social commune**

Keeping in mind the sensitivity related to the issue of bride trafficking, any open intervention in society makes the situation graver. To tackle this, certain indirect mechanisms are developed to carry out the intervention. One of these is social communes, a set-up created to provide a safe space for survivors to come together and interact. These communes are created usually in places where the survivors' societal interaction is restrained through various socio-cultural factors. It aims to bring together the trafficking survivors who are marginalized in the community. These social communes provide them with the strength to face the adverse situations posed to them by society and enables them with support from other survivors. They function to provide an important message to the survivors that *they are not alone in this fight* and provides them with a positive sense of care for which they have yearned for long. The interaction is facilitated through sharing of their stories of strength and courage in a safe space, where they discuss and talk to ventilate their negative feelings and the various thoughts they have internalized over the years. This helps the survivor to stand tall in a society which treats them as just another commodity.

- **Diversity group**

After community rehabilitation of a survivor to her native place, a diversity group is created in order to ensure her safety from being trafficked again and to mitigate the social stigma prevailing in the area. This group consists of people with different backgrounds from the same society who act as her guardians in the

society. They are entrusted to provide support and care for the survivor. This concept has evolved from the successive experiences of EP and aims to provide social security to the survivor and prevention against any biases which may go against the interests of the survivor. This diverse group engagement not only provides her with a social base and support but also familial support in a now “alien” land. This engagement acts as a medium to knit the survivor with society again.

v) Multi-dimensional security

The security of the survivor is of prime importance for the organization. Security not just in terms of providing social security but also economic and emotional security which are necessary for revival of the survivor as a complete social functioning being. Economic security is provided through advocacy for compensation and by linking her to various schemes provided by the government. This includes extending help in claiming their rights on land, home and other benefits under various schemes. Measures are taken to remove stigmatization against her to restore her social security. The stress is on providing them a normal living, in every possible manner. These efforts include their re-enrollment in schools and inclusion in any entrepreneurial activity or business activity. Apart from these, efforts are made to enhance the emotional support base for survivors in society, through consistent dialogue and regular positive interaction.

vi) Follow-ups

Social integration is not a one-time activity. All these activities are social functions that require sustainability not just to support the present survivor but also to act as a watchdog against the practice in the future. This lends relevance and importance to the function of follow-ups where the society is constantly engaged with the organization and thus remains ever vigilant. EP believes that trafficking is the function of society, thus it is society that needs to be made conscious to tackle trafficking. Through repeated interactions, such consciousness is developed and sustained over a period of time. This strategy aims to build their confidence in the survivor and sets the collective responsibility and accountability of the society.



3) The revolutionary in every survivor

A trafficking victim is one who is denied her/his basic dignity and respect and whose fundamental control over her/his body, conscience and life is snatched away. Perhaps, disregarding any person's innate worth of being a human makes her/him a victim of that situation, a victim of those circumstances.

Although all trafficked women are worlds apart in terms of time, place and situation, there is something common that connects them, which binds them. It is something which is rooted in their minds, hearts, and spirits. This commonality isn't the experience of similar victimhood of being a trafficked woman. It is something that exists much before these women were even trafficked. It is the revolutionary spirit of change. This spirit refers to a state of dissatisfaction in which a person is constantly exploring new opportunities and looking for better alternatives for change. She/he is someone who challenges the status quo. She/he is someone who refuses to follow the social order set by the society.

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This spirit isn't the fallout of modernity but it is something which has existed since ages and society is well aware of it. Since the presence of such ideations goes against the very idea of society, the society feeds mechanisms into the social conscience of the masses to work against non-conformist social behavior. If one talks about a typical societal context, it is no secret how the freedom of fellow citizens especially women is curbed in society. Notions like "Freedom spoils" are

widely used to school the individuals in a uniform fashion. At the same time, it is evident from history how even a single individual can bring about radical change in society. So, there is always an ideological tussle that exists between an individual's idea of change and a community's idea of change. These ideas of change which seem to be contrary to each other, are actually complementary in nature. Many a times we see an individual affecting a whole society while at other times we see society exerting influence and even force upon individuals to conform to its values. It is actually the synthesis between these two ideations which rotates the wheels of change in society. It is important to clarify here that these ideations don't work in isolation and are affected by external factors like economic conditions, conservatism or progressiveness, gender and various circumstances. The problem of bride trafficking emerges when people carrying these ideas of change fall into potent circumstances reinforced by external factors which increases their likelihood of getting trafficked.

So it is not the ideas per se but people with revolutionary ideas whose external situation makes them a vulnerable target for trafficking. Here one also needs to see that trafficking isn't a linear process but a complex and dark conundrum characterized by distortions and charged emotions. In order to understand the state of mind of a victim during the process of trafficking, one has to understand the state of mind of the victim before trafficking.

As discussed above, a mind filled with a revolutionary spirit is very ambitious and entrepreneurial in nature. It is not scared of taking risks. It is aware but isn't deterred by the external circumstances prevailing in its immediate neighborhood. This outlook exposes it to other people who by leveraging external factors try to

cage this flight of liberty and when these uncontrollable external factors are able to trick the mind and extract the initial consent from it in a shroud of connecting it to its aspirations, their dreams are used against them to tie them without using any physical force. This exploitation of dreams and alternatives gives a way for trafficking to take place.

In the next step of trafficking, there is an invasion and coercion against the individual's will as that isn't what she/he signed up for. Then the harsh reality strikes the mind and its ambitions are shattered to the ground. At this stage, it is in a state of shock and turbulence, gasping to breathe again in a free sky. Since this condition is one in which its dear spirit of freedom is incarcerated, the mind falls into a state of stupefaction and resorts to self-blame when nothing seems to be going right. Anger begins to arise, not against the oppressor but against themselves. To add to the misery, there are external shocks like an alien language and culture that they have to deal with.

In the next step, the mind has two options- either to fight or to accept the situation. It is here where the deep-rooted concept of honor starts to emerge. Many feel that it is better to be dead than to go back to the family or society again. It is this dilemma and fear that pushes many to choose incarceration of their freedoms over rescue. Eventually, they succumb to their own false-guilt and try to adapt to the situation annihilating their flame for change forever. At this point, their mind enters into a state of inescapable void thus losing its vitality and the woman surrenders her control

She is either stigmatized or pitied upon but never treated as just another individual who faced a difficult situation.

over her mind, body, and soul. She becomes a lifeless slave catering to the wants of others. Others, who revolt against the situation, fight and emerge victorious as survivors.

Here, the society doesn't provide her with a better response mechanism but labels her in order to set an example, warning others of the same fate thereby reinforcing its conformist values. This labeling is aimed to victimize her to ensure that she is never treated normally again. She is either stigmatized or pitied upon but never treated as just another individual who faced a difficult situation. That is why even after a rescue, a woman remains vulnerable and requires rehabilitation intervention to regain normalcy in the daily affairs of her life. Thus, rescue doesn't really improve the state of her mind. Rather it pushes it deeper into the dungeons of darkness where she develops an apathy towards the society. She becomes rigid and detached from the society.

The following lines aptly describe her state after rescue:

"Sun athilahiye log sab baantnalahiye koi" – everyone will listen to the pain, share will none.

She thus buries all her pain inside her and what remains is a skeleton with flesh on it, devoid of feelings, emotions, and belief. After all, this is what society wants from her. Then she is transferred from one jail to another, which the system calls a "shelter". A shelter sabotages her idea of freedom and she gets covered with a veil of protectionism. She is told when to brush, eat and sleep, thus taking away her freedom of choice, which anyway was never hers as a victim. She is pushed to her receiving end. At this point, her mind is continually haunted by society. The sheer fear of facing her family and society again is what threatens her the most,

as a result of which she internalizes the societal image of her and the stigmatization. She is not the one who she used to be as her perspectives are now colored by society. She gives up her identity to find a place in society. This has a cathartic effect on her mind as it helps her to find some sort of accommodation in society but one which accepts her only as a labeled survivor and never as an individual. She starts celebrating her victimhood as it seems to be the only way to get back to society again. The survivor now fights a battle to survive in the system.

At such a point, rehabilitation intervention appears to be a hoax to her. She has already relinquished all her rights to society. It is important here to tackle the isolation which she has packed herself into. Hence, she is provided with a safe space and a free environment where she can resume her native identity. Her mind is deliberately displaced from its state of being at a receiving end, by neutralizing the social conditioning. Now the focus is on normalizing the situation to end the victimhood within her. This leads her towards owning up her story and eventually her life. She becomes engaged with society as an individual with a distinguished identity. The processes of neutralization and normalization are aimed at resuscitation of the revolutionary in her again.

This journey though, doesn't end here. Sometimes she starts imbibing the image of the powerful in her life, who in many cases is that of the oppressor. Her mind now attempts to exhibit tendencies similar to those of the oppressor. This is due to the absence of her interaction with the ideals of equality, justice or even solidarity. This phase is one of the most challenging parts of the whole process as here the stress is on making her believe in kindness, something which she has not experienced in her entire life. Society never provided her an appropriate response

but now she is asked to believe in a concept strange to her. Here the society comes into action to embrace her with kindness, thus the revolutionary in her meets society again.

The falcon of freedom in her flies, and this time soars high in the sky, giving society an indication that the revolutionary in her is still alive!

4) Empower People Structure

Empower People will carry out its operations through different teams assigned with specific roles and responsibilities. Each team would be in-charge of ensuring execution of a defined set of activities on a regular ongoing basis.

A) Case Intervention Team (Rescue crew)

Led by a director, a team of activists, lawyer and counsellor would be based in Delhi to intervene in cases: The team would be responsible for conducting rescue operations, searching and locating missing persons and responding to field inputs. The team would respond to emergency situations in the field.

Activities

1. Conducting inquiry/investigation of particular cases
2. Conducting rescue operations
3. Keep updating information resource with new court orders and government notifications
4. Following court cases/follow up with local lawyer
5. Networking with activists and local lawyers

B) Community Intervention Team (Programteam)

Led by District Activist, field operations would be undertaken by this team. It will be responsible to support survivors' union and organize events or community trainings in their respective areas. This team would be responsible for gathering information, meeting local government officials and building rapport with the community. The team will also be responsible for follow up of cases and would keep an eye on the safety mechanism for the target group.

Activities

1. Profiling of area (Village, Block and District)
2. Identification of needy and connecting them to appropriate government schemes
3. Formation of solidarity groups
4. Regular meetings of Survivors' union

5. Organizing events and meetings with local population (community engagement)
6. Identifying needs and problems of target population
7. Working as a bridge between survivors, local population and the organization

C) Administration

A remotely operating team would work to raise funds and it would also look after day to day activities happening in the field. The team would also be responsible for media coverage, advocacy and networking for the organization. This team would also work to promote institutional volunteering engagement with the organization.

Activities

1. Profiling like-minded institutions
2. Partnering with institutions
3. Representing organization on different forums.
4. Identifying needs and problems of target population and organizations
5. Developing innovative ideas related to organization and its interventions

D) After-care and skilling

A team would work to oversee after-care of survivors and their skilling. This team would also ensure self-sustainable livelihood options for each survivor.

Activities

1. Sensitisation and regular connection with guardian groups
2. Occasional check on life of survivors

5) Epilogue

Survivors' rights-based perspective forms the bed-rock of the organization. This social movement is aimed towards restoring the basic dignity and the inherent worth of an individual which is neglected in this state of social psychosis. The focus is on understanding the underlying mechanism and social matrix which reinforces the practice of trafficking and then tackling them. The worldwide failure of efforts indicates that there is something wrong with the current approach and understanding. Purity of intents is not under doubt but the question arises whether intentions alone are enough to solve the problem. It would be a scar on humanity if we cannot put a tap on the practice which goes against the very idea of being a citizen. Trafficking evolves from us and our societies. It is a need of the hour to develop a strong response mechanism which emanates from the society through the State. The basis of our humanity is the bond of TOGETHERNESS since inception. In fact, we exist because of this thread that connects us all as humans. Our endeavor is to revive this dying humanness to embark in a society where everybody is empowered to LIVE as humans, A society with awakened social consciousness where there is belief in SERVING the humanity that we are a part of. It is this horizon that we all await where we BUILD together an empowered humanity.

“Empower People: Together to Live, Serve and Build”



www.empowerpeople.org.in