



# Condition of Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC) in Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu

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## Abstract:

**Background:** Every child has the right to live free from violence, exploitation and abuse. But children constitute the most vulnerable section in our society. The Government has many protection and development programmes for children to ensure equal opportunities, reduce risks and promote overall well-being. Government of India has merged several existing child protection programmes under one roof i.e. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) (MWCD, 2014). This scheme aimed to build a protective net for children with an objective to bring together all essential services, strengthen structures, develop capacities, promote preventive measures, maintain and monitor database and many more. The scheme was introduced in 2009-10 with cardinal principles of "protection of child rights" and the "best interest of the child" with an objective to institutionalise services. **Objective:** The study conducted focuses on the condition of village level child protection committees in 6 panchayats in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu. **Method:** The researcher uses random sampling to select the samples for case study method. The respondents have been identified with the support of a representative from an NGO working in that District and an in-depth interview has been conducted using structured questionnaire among the village leaders. The information gathered from the village leaders provides us the evidence that they are aware about issues and whom to reach out, VLCPC and its functions. **Result:** A constant support / back up is required to ensure its continuation. The coordination with the Government functionaries and village leaders is required to make the system functional and effective. But the Government functionaries are limiting to their boundaries and not going beyond their comfort zones to make sure the systems placed are functional and effective. Child line 1098 has created a greater impact in service delivery but it also has not observed the gap between the community and systems which was not even reported. **Conclusion:** The village leaders ensure that they will take support of the parents whose child got affected which can be constantly monitored and recorded for follow up.

**Key words:** Child Protection, Child Protection Committee, Child line, Integrated Child Protection Scheme, IEC, Child Rights

## Introduction

Protecting children from or against any danger, harm and risk requires greater efforts. Government is entail therewith responsibility to provide Care, Protection and Support for all children. Failure to ensure the rights of children adversely affects other rights of children and fulfilling both constitutional and international commitments. We can witness some encouraging moves made by Government, as also by society in recent past on awareness about child rights, abuses, seeking accountability, etc. Child budgeting is now an accepted concept with governments and governments started implementing it. But children share in the national budget has shown a decline. This shows a gap between the budget estimate, actual expenditure and the means to translate into outcomes and impact for children (Ganguly, 2019). The total crime rate against children in 2020 is 21% (4338 nos) and charge sheet filed is 90.6 (Crime data reported in India against children, n.d.). With improved norms, Government of India has merged several existing child protection programmes under one roof i.e. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) (MWCD, 2014). This scheme aimed to build a protective net for children with an objective to bring together all essential services, strengthen structures, develop capacities, promote preventive measures, maintain and monitor database and many more. The scheme was introduced in 2009-10 with cardinal principles of "protection of child rights" and the "best interest of the child" with an objective to institutionalise services. Several measures taken by the Government like adopting in National charter for children (2003 and 2004), considering in National Policy for Children (2013) and finally in the XI and XII plan of Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). ICPS focus on building civil society organisations and individuals for ensuring child protection at all levels from National – State – District – Block and Village level protection committees. This provide protection and conducive environment for children at all level.

## Goal

To study the condition of village level child protection committee in Ramanathapuram.

## Objectives

- To know about the present conditions of VLCPC
- To know the support mechanism available for effective functioning of VLCPC

## Research Methodology

Study has been conducted among 6 panchayat in Ramanathapuram Districts, Tamil Nadu, to understand the condition of VLCPC. The researcher uses random sampling to select the samples for assessing the condition of VLCPC through case study method. The respondents has been identified with the support of a representative from an NGO working in that District. An in-depth interview has been conducted using structured questionnaire among the village leaders. All the interviews were transcribed in English. Consent have been taken from the village leaders to avoid ethical issues.

## Review of literature

This study talks about the informal village child protection committees and children groups in Bihar. It attempts to make a case for child protection system from community driven bottom up approach. The major indicators covered are inclusive participation, mandates, awareness, attitude and behavioural changes, linkages to formal structures and collaboration with local stakeholders (Menon & Rangel, 2021). Child protection was given little attention before 2002, but today it is the area of specialisation. From 2011-2019 there are lot of laws, policies, protocols and standard operating procedures (SOPs). In the 2001 census, children below the age of 18 years made up 41 per cent of the population. In the 2011 census,

they formed 37 per cent. There were 593 districts during Census 2001 and 640 during Census 2011. In 2019, there are 731 districts in India. In 2001 there were 227,590 gram panchayats. In 2019, there are 250,000 gram panchayats. These are not numbers, but these change affect the children greatly to avail services in their own districts and at panchayat level (Ganguly, India's children continue to challenge our conscience, 2019). From 2012-13 to 2019-2022 We see a slight decline in child protection budgeting with just 0.04 to 0.07 (Bishnoi, 2019). Child protection is not viewed as requisite for access and effective participation in key determinants like health, education, access to public services, quality childhood and entitlements. The complex nature of child protection has been left discourse with limited understand and reach because of lack of data nationally. Majority of the core child protection workforce is informal, with less incentive or unprotected job employment because of which a systematic and systematised capacity building, role clarity, sensitivity and financial support is required to enable them function effectively. The VLCPC has greater potential to bring change at levels closes to children in the community and their families. Corporate Sector through their social responsibility has contributed to child protection work, but there is no published data on the quantum of work and contributions made (Menezes, 2019). The need for sustained intervention is multi-pronged approach which has ability to function within and across structures of multidimensional programmes and activities related to child protection and child rights (Ali, 2019). Child rights, protection and exploitation are linked to poor economic conditions. The reforms in laws, rules and procedures should follow the best interest of the child. Government need to adopt or accommodate few laws which are more child friendly like strict punishment for child pornography and voyeurism, protect vulnerable witnesses and children cases are handled neatly and children is not victimized in judicial processes (Negi & Ojha, 2019).

## Case presentation

### Story 1:

Mr. Muthuvel, 54, Male, Vilankulathur Village, Vilankulathur Panchayat, Ramanathapuram. When we heard of any children issues in the community, we inform 1098 immediately and support the parents in addressing the issues. My village do not have children committees or forums. But, I know we had it in past and 10 people were members. They conducted the meetings monthly and address issues of children like child marriage and child drop out. Information has been given to all villagers about issues of children and requested them to inform me. Till date, I have not received any complaints from the villagers on children issues. If any members who wish to take up and strengthen the committee, I am ready to support them. We have not received support from authority in establishing the VLCPC. We don't have any IEC materials in our village pertaining children issues but get some materials from 1098. All the villages are also aware about the children committee and its paralytic condition.

### Story 2:

Ms. Pushbhalatha Palani, 46, Female, Achankulam village, Achankulam Panchayat, Ramanathapuram. All the issues related to children in the community will be informed to 1098 immediately. The parents of the child will be provided with moral support by the panchayat. There is no children committees or groups or forums in my village. I am also not aware about them. In case of issues like child marriage, dropout, love, etc. we will address through panchayat with the support of Government Officials. No special programs has been conducted to create awareness to the community. I have not received any complaints on children issues till date. I am ready to support them through my panchayat whoever wish to develop and strengthen the children committee in my village. Authorities have not informed us about the need for establishing the VLCPC. There are few awareness materials in our village pertaining children issues like child marriage.

Till date, I have not received financial support from anyone to initiate VLCPC and I am not aware about it. I wish to develop my village as a model village and incase if anyone who can support me, I am ready to work with them.

#### Story 3:

Mr. Sanmuganathan, 60, Male, Kovilangulam Village, Kovilangulampatti aaraiyadi Panchayat, Ramanathapuram. Any children issues in the community, it will be informed to the police immediately. I know about the need for children committees or forums in the village but it is not present in the village. I am aware about the requirements and the procedure for forming the VLCPC. Information has been given to all villagers to inform the panchayat leader for issues related to children. There is no complaints registered or reported so far in my village. I am open and ready to support in case of any financials commitment, I need to check with the Chairman before promising for starting the VLCPC. Authorities are always helpful and provide support when we reach out to them. I will surely reach out to them to establish VLCPC in my village. There is no awareness materials in our village on child issues. I will get it from the authorities because we hear lot of news on children in the television. I will inform all the villagers about the children committee and the need for establishing them.

#### Story 4:

Palani alagarsamy, 53, Male, keelaramanathi village, Kamuthi panchayat, Ramanathapuram. Our villagers are aware about children issues in the community and immediately inform 1098. Always support the parents morally and in case of any legal support required too. But we don't have any VLCPC or any other children committees or forums. I know we had in the past with 10 members who use to conduct meetings whenever children issues like child marriage and child drop out arise. Information has been given to all villagers about issues of children and requested them to inform me. I have not received any complaints from the villagers on children issues so far. I am ready to support if anyone who wish to support in establish and strengthen children committee. I have not approached the authorities for establishing VLCPC and neither requested for any awareness materials. More information is required for me to set up VLCPC in the village and in case of financial needs, I may need to wait before taking any decision.

#### Story 5:

Bala, 37, Male Papankulam Village, Sadayanethal panchayat, Ramanathapuram. All issues related to children in the community will be informed to police and 1098 immediately. Our village do not have children committees or forums and not aware about we having it in the past. During the panchayat meetings the issues of children like child marriage and child drop out will be addressed. All the villagers are instructed to provide child protection information to the panchayat office. No complaints from the villagers on children issues. We are always ready to support to establish and strengthen the VLCPC. IEC materials are not available but can get some materials from 1098 / BDO.

#### Story 6:

Paulsamy, 61, Male, Selvanayagapuram village, Muthukulathur panchayat, Ramanathapuram. When discussed with the panchayat leader he informed that we have not heard of any children issues in the community. All are aware in the village to inform 1098 in case of child issues. The village always stood by the parents in addressing the issues. The village do not have children committees, but I know about VLCPC. They conducted the meetings monthly and address issues of children like child marriage and child drop out. Till date, I have not received any complaints from the villagers on children issues. If any members who wish to take up and strengthen the committee, I am ready to support them. We have not approached

for support from authority in establishing the VLCPC. We don't have any IEC materials in our village pertaining children issues.

## Key findings

- All the village leaders informed that there is no child related issues so far and they are aware about 1098 for registering complaints immediately.
- Villagers are about children related issues and aware about whom to reach out to.
- All the villages do not have VLCPC.
- 4 of 6 village leaders are aware about VLCPC and its function.
- All the village leaders are open to establish and strengthen VLCPC in their village if support is provided.
- Mostly the village leaders has not connected with the government officials.
- The concerned officials are not proactive to support the village leaders in establishing / strengthening VLCPC.
- None of the village leaders are aware of need for the IEC materials required to create awareness among the villagers on VLCPC and children issues.
- When asked about the financial requirements if required, all the village leaders are ready to support without any financial assistance.

## Recommendations and conclusion:

As we have the child safety net at the community, but the net is not visible or not effective to address the issues of children. The Government functionaries are limiting to their boundaries and not going beyond their comfort zones to make sure the systems placed are functional and effective. Child line -1098 has created a greater impacts in service delivery but it also has not observed the gap between the community and systems which was not even reported. Considering the children protection issues going around, the village leaders are very much aware and open to provide support in establishing the systems in their village with proper support from NGOs and Government functionaries. The need for convergence between the government officials and village leaders is essential to drive children issues in the community.

The village leaders are mostly aware about VLCPC and its function but need a push to initiate the structure in the villages. A constant support / back up is also required to ensure its continuation. The leaders need to be in close coordination with the Government functionaries to make this system functional and effective. From the discussion, it is observed that the villagers are aware about children issues and whom to reach out. The village leaders also ensure that they will take support of the parents whose child got affected which can be constantly monitored and recorded for follow up.

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