

Village Level Child Protection Committees — Making the System Work

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Child Welfare

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Village Level Child Protection Committees are community institutions created under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. They are not a new idea created by NGOs — they are a government-mandated structure at every gram sansad or habitation with an Anganwadi centre.

Legal mandate and composition

A VLCPC is mandated to have:

- Anganwadi Worker (AWW) as Member Secretary — the convening authority
- Ward member of the gram panchayat
- School teacher (primary or upper primary)
- ASHA or other health frontline worker
- Community members including women — minimum six seats reserved for women, including one girl representative
- A child representative (boy and girl both)

The VLCPC's official mandate includes:

- Identifying vulnerable children in the village — children at risk of child marriage, child labour, dropout, trafficking, abuse, or neglect
- Monitoring and referring these children to appropriate government services

- Creating a Village Child Protection Register documenting identified at-risk children
- Meeting monthly and reporting to the Block Level Child Protection Committee (BLCPC)
- Linking vulnerable children with government schemes — Sponsorship, Foster Care, Childline, KGBV, scholarship programmes

The reality

In Odisha as in most states, VLCPCs were formed in a concentrated burst when ICPS was launched — names were collected, meetings were held to formally constitute the committees, and records were submitted to the DCPU (District Child Protection Unit). After that, silence. The reasons are consistent across states and well-documented:

The AWW, designated as Member Secretary, was given no training on what a VLCPC meeting agenda looks like, what a child protection register is, or how to escalate a case. She was given a name and a responsibility and left with neither the knowledge nor the support to do anything with it.

Community members appointed to VLCPCs are typically nominated based on convenience rather than engagement — whoever was in the panchayat office that day, whoever the sarpanch nominated. No selection process, no orientation, no commitment.

Meeting agendas, when meetings happened at all, were vague — "discussion on child protection" — which produces circular conversations that go nowhere and make members reluctant to attend next time.

No link was created between the VLCPC and any actual case resolution pathway. A VLCPC member who identifies a child at risk of marriage needs to know who to call, what form to fill, which official to approach, and what will happen if they do. Without that knowledge, identifying the child is an exercise in futility.

What Activation Actually Looks Like: The UMANG Model

The most rigorously documented VLCPC activation approach in eastern India is the UMANG programme implemented by ICRW (International Center for Research on Women) in Godda and Jamtara districts of Jharkhand. Their documentation from this programme provides the clearest picture of what works.

The UMANG sequence

Step 1: Adolescent group formation as the entry point

UMANG began not with VLCPCs but with adolescent groups — bringing together girls aged 13–19 in structured peer groups with trained mentors. These groups, meeting weekly, created a space where adolescents could identify and discuss the protection issues affecting them and their peers.

Crucially, these adolescent groups were then connected to VLCPCs. Adolescent girls attended VLCPC meetings. They raised issues from their own experience — girls unable to attend school because of household work, girls whose families were planning early marriage, boys being sent for child labour. The VLCPC now had real information from the people most directly affected, not abstract discussions about "child protection."

This is the mechanism that made the UMANG model work where others had failed: the committee was no longer meeting to discuss hypothetical problems. It was responding to specific cases raised by adolescents who were present in the room.

Step 2: Creating a regular meeting cycle

UMANG established a fixed monthly meeting schedule — same day, same time, same location. This sounds trivial. It isn't. A VLCPC that meets when the AWW can organise it will never develop momentum. One that meets on the last Saturday of every month at 3pm at the Anganwadi centre, consistently, develops rhythm and accountability.

The programme also linked VLCPC meetings with the AWW's monthly meeting with her supervisors — not the same meeting, but adjacent in time, so that cases identified at the VLCPC meeting could be escalated at the AWW's supervisor meeting the same week.

Step 3: Building a functional agenda

UMANG developed a standard monthly agenda for VLCPC meetings:

1. Review of identified vulnerable children from the Village Child Protection Register — what has happened since last month?
2. New cases raised by adolescent group members or community members
3. Scheme linkage — which children were enrolled in what schemes this month?
4. Issues requiring escalation to BLCPC or DCPU
5. Planning for the next month

This agenda, used consistently, creates a meeting with a purpose. Members come because decisions are made, follow-up happens, and outcomes are visible.

Step 4: Linking with government systems

The UMANG documentation is explicit about one finding: VLCPCs that produced results were those that built direct relationships with the District Child Protection Officer (DCPO) and the BLCPC. VLCPCs that operated in isolation — identifying cases but having no escalation pathway — produced frustration, not outcomes.

In Godda, a VLCPC that had been dormant since 2014 was reconstituted with help from the DCPO after a UMANG peer mentor brought the situation to the district's attention. The reconstituted committee, with DCPO support, began monthly meetings and produced concrete outcomes: children enrolled in government scholarship schemes, a case of attempted trafficking intercepted and referred to Childline, a girl whose family was planning early marriage enrolled in the residential Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya.

The Rupantaran Approach: Systematic Panchayat-Level Activation

The Rupantaran Foundation in West Bengal's Sundarbans documented a complementary approach to VLCPC activation, working at the panchayat level across multiple sansads simultaneously.

Their starting point was a social mapping exercise — using Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques to identify vulnerable children in each sansad. This mapping produced concrete, named, specific information: this family has two girls at risk of early marriage; this boy has stopped attending school for three months; this household sent a child for domestic labour last season.

The social mapping results were presented at a gram sabha meeting — making child vulnerability visible to the whole community, not just to a small committee. This public visibility created community accountability for what the VLCPC was supposed to do about the identified cases.

The Rupantaran model then conducted individual orientations with each AWW, helping her understand her role as Member Secretary and what a meaningful meeting agenda looks like. They developed a simple VLCPC Action Plan with the gram panchayat — a written list of what the committee would do in the coming year, which the panchayat formally acknowledged and agreed to support.

Where it worked, the results were significant: VLCPCs that had never met became active monthly institutions. Vulnerable children who had never been registered in any government system were identified and linked to schemes. In some sansads, the panchayat allocated funds — ₹5,000 per sansad — for VLCPC activities (a figure the Rupantaran documentation notes was aspirational in its first year, but the conversation itself represented genuine institutional buy-in).

Step-by-Step Activation Guide for NGO Field Staff

Based on UMANG, Rupantaran, and CINI's work in Jharkhand's Simdega and Lokebira districts, here is a practical sequenced approach for NGOs wanting to activate dormant VLCPCs in Odisha's tribal blocks.

Phase 1: Baseline and stakeholder engagement (Weeks 1-4)

Verify the VLCPC's current status. Get the VLCPC constitution document from the AWW or the gram panchayat. Identify who was formally constituted as members. Visit each member: do they know they're on the committee? Have they attended a meeting in the last year? Do they understand what the committee is supposed to do?

Visit the DCPU (District Child Protection Unit). Every district has a DCPU headed by a District Child Protection Officer. Introduce your organisation, explain your intention to support VLCPC activation in specific blocks, and ask for their technical support. The DCPU can: provide official guidance on VLCPC mandate and procedures; send a representative to the first reconstitution meeting to give the process official weight; create the escalation pathway that makes VLCPC case referrals actionable.

This visit is not optional. VLCPCs that operate without DCPU knowledge and relationship produce frustrated volunteers who identify problems but cannot resolve them.

Conduct a child vulnerability mapping. Before the first meeting, understand what the actual child protection situation is in the village. Use a simple checklist or PRA technique to identify: how many girls aged 14-18 are out of school? How many boys under 14 are doing paid labour? Are there known cases of recent or planned early marriage? Have any children from this village been trafficked or gone missing? This mapping gives the VLCPC a specific, real agenda from its first meeting.

Phase 2: Reconstitution or reorientation (Week 5-6)

Facilitate a gram sabha meeting for reconstitution. If the committee membership is stale (often it is), use a gram sabha meeting to formally reconstitute. Present the child vulnerability mapping results to the gram sabha — not to the committee in isolation. This public presentation creates community-wide awareness and accountability.

At the gram sabha meeting:

- Explain the VLCPC's mandate in simple, clear language — in the local language
- Present the mapping findings: these are the children at risk in our village
- Elect or reconfirm committee members, ensuring women (minimum six) and at least one adolescent girl are included
- Set the monthly meeting day and time — ask the gram sabha to agree to this publicly

Orient every committee member. Not as a group workshop — as individual fifteen-minute conversations. Each member needs to know: why they were chosen, what their specific contribution is, and what will happen at the first meeting. The AWW as Member Secretary needs additional orientation on the child protection register, the meeting agenda format, and the escalation pathway to the BLCPC.

Phase 3: The first three meetings (Months 2-4)

Meeting 1: Focused entirely on the child vulnerability register. Go through every child identified in the mapping. Categorise by risk level. Assign a responsible VLCPC member to follow up on each high-risk case before the next meeting. Fix the date of meeting 2.

Meeting 2: Follow-up on every case from meeting 1. What happened? Which families were visited? Which children were found to still be at risk? Identify which cases need scheme linkage — enrolment in KGBV, scholarship, Childline, or referral to DCPU.

Identify one or two cases to escalate to BLCPC.

Meeting 3: Review of escalated cases — what response came from BLCPC or DCPU? Celebrate any positive outcomes publicly — a girl enrolled in KGBV, a boy withdrawn from labour and returned to school. Add new cases raised by adolescent group members if your programme has one. Fix the agenda for the next three months.

By meeting three, members should have seen enough concrete follow-up to believe the committee produces results. This is the turning point. Before meeting three, attendance and engagement are often tenuous. After it, members are invested.

Phase 4: Sustaining momentum (Month 4 onwards)

Connect with adolescent groups. If your programme or a partner programme works with adolescent girls, invite group members to attend VLCPC meetings — not as passive observers, but as contributors who raise issues from their peer network. The UMANG experience is clear: adolescent participation transforms VLCPC meetings from adult deliberations about children to conversations that include young people's own testimony.

Build the BLCPC connection. Arrange for VLCPC representatives to attend one BLCPC meeting — to understand that there is a functioning system above them, that escalations are heard, and that VLCPC work is recognised. This connection is essential for motivation and for practical case resolution.

Monitor and document. Track three indicators monthly:

1. Was the meeting held? (Yes/No — date and attendance)
2. How many children are in the Child Protection Register?
3. Of those, how many received a scheme linkage, referral, or follow-up action this month?

These are not elaborate metrics. They are the minimum indicators that tell you whether the VLCPC is functional. Share this data with the DCPU quarterly.

The Specific Tribal Odisha Context

Migration and seasonal vulnerability

Many tribal communities in Odisha's interior districts experience seasonal migration — the period between the kharif harvest and the rabi planting season when households move to brick kilns, construction sites, or sugarcane harvesting in distant states. This period — roughly November to March — is when children face the greatest protection risk: taken along for labour, withdrawn from school, or left behind with inadequate supervision when parents migrate.

An active VLCPC should specifically plan for this migration season. Before migration begins, the committee should identify which families are likely to migrate, whether children will be taken along, and what alternative arrangements exist for children who remain behind. This requires one additional annual meeting — a pre-migration planning meeting in October or November.

Language and community trust

In tribal blocks where communities speak languages different from the AWW's or the NGO field staff's, committee meetings conducted in Odia will exclude the community members who most need to be included. Use community interpreters. Ensure that the adolescent girl representative on the committee speaks the community's language. Documentation can be in Odia for official purposes, but meetings must be in the language the community uses.

The sarpanch relationship

In many Odisha tribal villages, the gram panchayat sarpanch exercises significant informal authority that can either support or undermine a VLCPC. An active, supportive sarpanch who attends early meetings and publicly endorses the committee can dramatically accelerate activation. A sarpanch who sees the committee as a source of opposition to community practices (particularly early marriage, which may be broadly accepted) can undermine it.

Engage the sarpanch early — before the gram sabha meeting. Explain the committee's mandate. Frame it as strengthening the community's own capacity to address child vulnerability, not as external interference. And when the sarpanch attends a meeting, acknowledge their presence and their role publicly.

What Success Looks Like at 12 Months

By the end of twelve months of sustained activation support, a functional VLCPC should be able to demonstrate:

- Twelve months of documented monthly meetings with consistent attendance
- A Village Child Protection Register with identified vulnerable children, updated monthly
- At least three cases resolved — a child enrolled in a government scheme, a marriage prevented, a trafficking case referred to Childline
- An escalation relationship with the BLCPC that has been used at least twice
- At least one meeting attended by adolescent group members

A committee that meets twelve times and produces three concrete child protection outcomes in twelve months is doing more for children in that village than any project that constructs infrastructure.

Common Failures and How to Prevent Them

AWW doesn't attend her own meetings. Common where AWW feels the VLCPC is not part of her "real" work. Solution: reframe the VLCPC as the mechanism through which the AWW accesses government schemes for the children she already knows are vulnerable. The committee makes her work easier, not heavier.

Members stop attending after two meetings. Almost always because meetings had no agenda, produced no decisions, and wasted their time. Prevention: use the standard agenda from meeting one. Never hold a meeting without a specific follow-up item from the previous meeting.

Cases identified but never resolved. Most damaging to long-term motivation. Prevention: the DCPU relationship is the solution. Without a functioning escalation pathway, case identification is an exercise in futility. Build that relationship first.

Sarpanch co-opts the committee for panchayat purposes. Occasionally, panchayat functionaries see the VLCPC as a resource to be captured for their own purposes. Prevention: ensure the committee's mandate is publicly documented and known to the DCPU. DCPU oversight provides external accountability that prevents capture.

Related Knowledge Commons content: Child Welfare Sector Primer (Sector 01) ·

Practice Note: Mapping Entitlements — Helping Tribal Communities Access What They Are Owed · Practice Note: Community-Based GBV Response in Remote Tribal Contexts

Evidence Grade: B — Multi-study. This Practice Note draws on ICRW's UMANG programme documentation from Jharkhand, Rupantaran Foundation's VLCPC activation model from West Bengal, and CINI India's Simdega and Lokebira district work. Last reviewed: April 2026.

Questions or corrections: knowledge@jabasu.org

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