

The Influencer bulletin

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When we welcomed you to the Influencers journey to empower the disempowered, we had promised that your support and voice will enable millions of nameless, faceless women to access social justice and equal opportunity. This issue brings you stories from the grassroots about how platforms facilitated by our NGO partners Jan Sahas, Milaan, Mann Deshi and Sanjog are enabling women and girls to express themselves; as survivors of violence, budding young grassroots leaders and entrepreneurs.

Systemic change for sustainable impact



In a first of its kind movement in India, **Jan Sahas**, a 65-day-long, nation-wide **Dignity March** is bringing together 5,000 **survivors of sexual violence** who will voice their grievances and call for action against perpetrators, through 200 districts across 24 states/union territories and traverse over 10,000 kms before culminating in New Delhi on February 22. As of today, the last day of the year, the March has traversed 14 cities in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Follow the Dignity March [Facebook page](#) for live updates on its journey.

#ShameToSupport



Enabling grassroots leadership



December was a busy month for **Milaan** with the **launch** of the 2018-2020 Girl Icon Fellowship—the largest adolescent girl leadership program in Uttar Pradesh. The launch was made extra special with stories about adolescent girl leaders from marginalised social and economic contexts emerging strong as Girl Icons, who now have the conviction and confidence to

Stand Up, Raise their Voices and Take Charge to advocate for and action the rights of women in their community. As a call to action to multiple stakeholders to work together for grassroots leadership of girls, the launch brought together over 50 influential people from different sectors corporate, social sector, government and social influencers from UNICEF, CARE, Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (Government health programme for adolescents), Kamdhenu Steel, NGO Breakthrough, Hindustan Times, Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran.

#GirlIcons #grassrootsleadership



Enabling women's economic empowerment for social empowerment

For the third year in a row, **Mann Deshi Foundation** is hosting the **Mann Deshi Mahotsav** a unique exhibition that features art, music, sport, food and products particular to Mann Taluka in rural Maharashtra.

This is a wonderful opportunity for you to meet some of these women, sample their delicious and handmade produce and work, and be part of a movement that is enabling women's economic independence.

Click [here](#) to hear these women speak about why they are excited to be part of the Mahotsav and why should you be there too (Use live video link from Youtube- use icon)

#MannDeshiChampions

Stories of triumph from the grassroots

"Aspiring for a better life and wishing to earn in order support the family financially is not wrong or dirty. Young girls often migrate to other places, or cities, in search for a better life not to be sold, exploited and abused..." "It is the duty of the family and the community as a whole to provide safety and protection to girls who are vulnerable to abuse, violence and trafficking."

These are the statements made by leaders of **Utthan** – a peer-support model of restorative care for sex trafficking victims led by courageous survivor leaders of human trafficking; through youth/adult partnerships and trainings on gender, sexuality, violence, stigma, shame, resilience, and capacity building. The collective, enabled by Sanjog conducted a community meeting they organised at a remote village of West Bengal's North 24 Parganas, to make community members understand the issue of human trafficking, why their daughters and sisters are at the risk of being victims of this organised crime, and how they should create a safety net to do protect them to combat this menace. The village meeting was organised as part of their efforts to counsel and help Madhuraa (name changed), a survivor of trafficking facing threats and intimidation from the trafficker who sold her off at a brothel in Mumbai some six years ago.

Madhuraa was 16 when she was trafficked to Mumbai by a man she had fallen in love with. After three years, she had managed to run away from there and now 25, is married with three children who live with her aged parents in her village in North 24 Parganas. Her case against her trafficker has been going on for many years and the family has recently begun receiving threats from her trafficker's family and goons who are demanding the case be withdrawn. With the villagers and neighbours unwilling or wary of offering support, Madhuraa's family is in a state of constant fear of their safety.

Upon knowing her problems, Utthan leaders decided to intervene and provide support to her and her family at this juncture by calling upon the neighbours, local youths, police officials, members of Utthan and the social worker for a meeting. Emboldened by their presence, Madhuraa felt safe and confident to speak about her ordeal without fear and being judged or criticized by anyone. Utthan members also oriented the community to the issue of migration and human trafficking and reiterated that it should be unacceptable for the community if any of girl or woman from the community is threatened by anyone. They were able to convince the community members that if today they won't support Madhuraa and act against the goons; tomorrow someone else's daughter or sister might go through the similar trauma perpetrated by some other trafficker.

That the meeting had achieved its goal was witnessed when a young boy from the group suddenly participated in the conversation and said "yes, it is our duty to stop child marriage in our village". A 40-year-old neighbour who was initially silent, towards the end volunteered, "I will go to the court and be a witness to the attack on Madhuraa's family members." Few other members also commented that if Utthan members can show such solidarity to Madhuraa, they should also come forward and support her in her fight for justice.

Sanjog's work on community based rehabilitation of trafficking survivors, intrigued and inspired Minh Dang the founder of a US-based non-profit Survivor Alliance to interact with Utthan members to understand how survivors in this part of the world are recovering from the trauma of being trafficked. Read more about it [here](#)

#Utthan #Survivors