A WICKED PROBLEM

Human trafficking is not a problem that can be solved through one program or intervention alone. It is deeply connected to poverty, lack of education, unemployment, social stigma, and long histories of exploitation that affect families and communities over generations. Because of this, lasting change often requires different organisations to work together instead of working in isolation.

Across Kolkata, many organisations are already doing crucial work connected to anti trafficking in different ways. Some focus on rescue and crisis support, while others work in prevention, education, trauma care, livelihood support, and long term rehabilitation. Each of these efforts matter. But there are still very few spaces where organisations intentionally come together to build trust, share resources, learn from each other, and coordinate their efforts toward the larger shared goal.

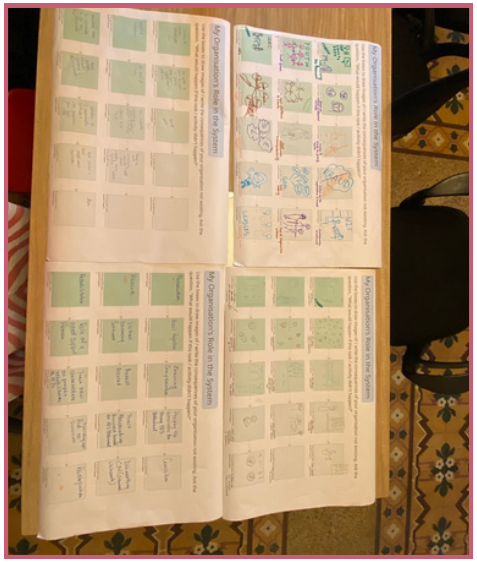
At the moment, many of the organisations still largely work independently. Years of emotionally demanding work in the anti trafficking sector have often meant organisations are focused on sustaining their own teams, programmes, and immediate responsibilities, leaving little time or energy for deeper collaboration. There is a need to build trust, strengthen relationships, and create a greater sense of shared ownership and collective purpose among the organisations working within the space.

So...where do we begin?

The project explored what it takes for people and organisations with different experiences and approaches to work together toward lasting community change.
As part of the scoping phase, the JoyCorps Studio team travelled to Kolkata to better understand the neighbourhood, the community, and the realities of building a business within the district. The team began drawing a map of the neighbourhood and identifying the different businesses and services operating there. The goal was to better understand how the system works and how different people are connected to it.
The project then brought together local partner organisations through a two day workshop using a design thinking and systems practice approach. The workshops were designed to help bring organisations together onto the same page, help set them up for collaboration, and help organisations know their unique roles and importance within the system



In a room full of organisations all working in the same area - both in vision and physically, but having never worked together before, we needed a way to get them to understand that they were on the same page. Day 1 of the workshop focused on zooming out and looking at the commonalities that linked them all - the neighbourhood and the wicked problem. We set out to building a systems map that focused on the issue in the physical neighbourhood, the larger city and the wider state and nation; thereby allowing them to see that they have shared language and understanding of the larger issue and challenges, and ultimately that they are all equal members in the same fight. This led to a greater sense of trust and led them to develop a collective vision for collaboration. The systems map also helped them identify others that could be invited to join the collective.



After zooming out, we wanted to zoom back into that specific neighbourhood and community and their organisational purpose on Day 2. To understanding the role that each organisation present plays in the system, we invited them to think of the repercussion of them not existing. This involved organisations having to think of specific programs or activities they do regularly and think of the negative cascading effects their absence would create. Once done, all the participants went around the table and identified activities or areas from other organisations, or the absence of, that might affect the functioning of their own programs or organisation. This then created the space for organisations to think of areas of potential collaboration amongst each other. Day 2 focused on seeing their own individual roles in the system, and also their dependance on each other.



The two-day workshop ended with them dreaming and envisioning what transformation in the neighbourhood could look like because of their involvement and collaboration. Meant to be a little lighter, fun and to give people time to process the day, participants were intentional about words, pictures and areas of change they wanted to see on their collective dream board, that now has a special space in the building they share.

FINDINGS

A few of the key insights and learnings were:

Organisations began recognising their interdependence and the need for collaboration

The organisations began to see how connected their work is. Many had focused on their own areas. But the workshops helped people recognise how much they depend on and support one another within the wider ecosystem.

Community transformation is not only structural, but deeply relational

One key learning was that long term change in the neighbourhood cannot happen through programs, services, or infrastructure alone. Relationships, trust, and the way people relate to one another matter just as much.

The neighbourhood functions as a wider ecosystem, not as isolated individuals

The mapping exercises showed how connected the local economy and daily life are within Kolkata's red light district. Sex work and trafficking are linked not only to individuals, but also to landlords, small businesses, food stalls, repair shops, transport, families, and informal support systems within the neighbourhood.

Organisations carry deep experience, but also fatigue

Working within difficult realities over long periods of time can lead organisations to focus heavily on sustaining their own work and responding to immediate needs. While this comes from commitment and survival, it can also make collaboration, experimentation, and collective problem solving more difficult.

Moving Towards Collective Transformation

One of the four recommendations developed from the process is to continue creating regular spaces for relationship building with the organisations

Trust and collaboration will not grow through occasional meetings alone. Organisations need regular spaces to gather, reflect, and spend time together outside of operational discussions.

This could include shared learning sessions, storytelling gatherings, collaborative workshops, or informal community gatherings. These spaces can help strengthen relationships over time.

Join the journey

The project surfaced important questions around transformation, stewardship, mindset change, collaboration, and the role organisations can play within the wider neighbourhood ecosystem.We've compiled a full-length report of this process and we would love to share more on it with you.

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