

VOICES4FREEDOM

# SCHOOLS4FREEDOM

## Typical Timeline for Transitional Schools

V4F founders have more than a decade of experience working with a respected frontline organization in northern India. MSEMVS' work has been lauded by the US State Department and serves as a template for other groups wanting to help entire villages to freedom.

V4F will partner with MSEMVS to create five to eight transitional schools in Uttar Pradesh. These schools will be the catalyst that bring between 100 and 300 villagers PER SCHOOL to freedom. Forever.

At the same time, frontline workers are leveraging the passion for education to organize and educate adults in the community so that they are empowered to join forces, demand their freedom and create a better life for themselves.

Some of the overlap in this work is evident in the timeline for the three-year project.

### Months 1 - 2:

**SELECT VILLAGE:** MSEMVS carries out visits in order to identify and select a village where there are 15 - 25 families in bonded labor slavery. Often this will be the low caste hamlet (small settlement) on the fringes of a larger village.

**HIRE TEACHERS FROM LOCAL AREA:** Two local teachers are hired and stay in the hamlet or in the wider village. Enrichment training for teachers continues to integrate them in the training and planning meetings in which all MSEMVS teachers participate. The continued enrichment program assures high quality teaching not only on basic education but supplies teachers with the materials they need to teach students how to exercise their civil rights within India's system of village self-government.

**HOT LUNCHESES FOR STUDENTS:** Identify the parents who will cook on-site warm, nutritious lunches for students. Funding for the food is included in the Schools4Freedom budget. Getting parents involved overseeing the meals allows

them to participate and feel ownership in their community as it mobilizes and moves forward.

**INSTALL SOLAR LIGHT IN VILLAGE:** There is no running water or electricity in most of the villages. The solar light is both a metaphorical symbol to the villagers that they are leaving the darkness of slavery behind them and literally lights the way for children to study at night as they create their future. The light also helps prevent snakebites and rapes.

**Ongoing efforts by frontline workers to leverage the work in schools:**

- Coordinating pressure from parents, children and the wider community to ensure investment in the mainstream (local government funded) village school, so it is ready to take in the formerly enslaved children. This is a slow process, in some cases requiring actual construction of a school by the local government, and more typically requiring appointment of additional teachers, ensuring that teachers are attending to their duties each day, and that proper mid-day meal is being provided at the school.
- Enable residents to use MSEMVS organizers to help them trace any children who have been trafficked from the village to other parts of India. If possible, MSEMVS will arrange rescue operations with the authorities in those places to secure release of the children and their safe return home.
- Coordinate pressure to address issues of corruption that currently deny many residents protection against vulnerability to slavery e.g. making the food ration system benefit the poorest, rather than those appointed to distribute that food; helping those without jobs to access paid work through the Indian government's Employment Guarantee scheme; if possible, helping them access any available land.
- Regular support for CVC [community vigilance committees] meetings, so that residents are gradually able to take responsibility for on-going action and protection of community members, even once MSEMVS has completed its work with the village. MSEMVS has a systematic curriculum on civil rights which it uses with each CVC.

**Months 3 - 4:**

**BUILD A SIMPLE OPEN-AIR SCHOOL:** Identify location to put up roof for open-air school that will also serve as a community meeting space. The tin roof protects children from the sun and rain and allows air to circulate. Four-walled buildings are not only more expensive, they are often stifling. Construct the roof.

**YEAR ROUND SCHOOL BEGINS:** The low-cost transitional school for approximately 50 children sits right at the heart of the settlement, and local activists/ fieldworkers build up support and awareness among the parents. The

school is the catalyst that convinces parents to risk a brighter future. Those parents will begin to refuse to let their children work for the slaveholder – whether in the fields, with the animals, in stone queries, brick kiln and illegal forest cutting or in domestic work – and start sending them to the school. MSEMVS helps them to have the confidence and mutual support to keep their children in school during this risky initial stage.

From the very beginning, the children themselves learn that they are individuals with human rights. The students see themselves as advocates and activists for children’s rights – at the same time as they first start to shape their letters and learn to read. The children form school committees to help keep up attendance and discipline, organize recreation and support health and cleanliness. The school belongs to the children and they know that education is their right.

**CURRICULA:** The lesson plans taught in the Schools4Freedom are aligned with the Indian Government schools to help former slave children catch up to their peers who were born in freedom. Within three years they will be able to transition to Indian Government schools at their age appropriate grade level. In the past, we have seen that many of the children in these transitional schools are often far ahead of their age group when they move into government schools.

#### **Months 6 - 12:**

**ADULTS LEARN SKILLS THAT HELP THEM STAY FREE:** Parents, especially mothers, select income-generating activities and learn a skill that will bring in cash for their families. At the same time as they earn income for themselves, they learn that they have a right to be paid in cash for any work they do for the landowners, and that debt bondage slavery is illegal. Within Self-Help Groups (SHG) they start to save money together and get loans on fair terms from local banks, both to expand their activities and to help in times of crisis. The length of the vocational training will depend on the skill that the women select. Up to now, women’s SHGs have typically selected glass bead production, embroidery, or incense stick production, and sometimes there will be two different kinds of skills being offered in the same village.

#### **One year:**

##### **PROGRESS IN ACTION:**

- Children will be progressing at the school. During each school year, nearly all the children will progress through three years of the Uttar Pradesh state curriculum, so that at the end of the third year of the intervention, they are able to sit the official exams for the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and then be admitted into the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class at the local village school.
- The women will be united and in position to undergo in skill training that takes three to six months depending on skills they choose to learn. When they complete the training, they begin selling goods in local markets.

- CVCs will be meeting regularly and enabling residents to address the root causes of slavery and trafficking in the community that they themselves will identify.
- Ensure residents are able to access legal protection in cases where slaveholders retaliate. The emergence of families out of slavery takes different patterns in different places, and some families quickly unite with others to come out of debt bondage slavery, while a few take almost a full 3 years to have the confidence in their own skills, support and resources to reject the control of the slaveholder. The response of the slaveholders (typically high caste powerful local landowners) is hard to predict. Some understand the need for change, while others resist and may resort to threats and actual violence. Where needed, MSEMVS will support prosecutions, and in all cases will ensure that violent incidents are followed by appropriate legal action.

**Month 12 onward:**

**VILLAGERS TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR OWN DESTINY:** In the community as a whole, MSEMVS helps them create a Community Vigilance Committee. This CVC unites the whole community to resist the slaveholders and access legal protections. It stops people slipping back into slavery through making government food distribution systems work properly for the poorest, ensuring access to health care and taking legal action in cases of violence against women or against low caste residents.

**FREEDOM IS CONTAGIOUS – VILLAGERS JOIN THE LARGER MOVEMENT:** Groups of slaves can't free themselves in isolation, each village is part of a wider network of Community Vigilance Committees that is making a pathway out of slavery. Through this network, they can get further legal training and can pressure together for rights to education and health. As they move toward lasting freedom, they can use their strength, their ideas, and their experience to liberate others.