



ANNUAL REPORT 2016 – 17

New Alipore Praajak Development Society

Director's Note – 1

About Praajak – 2

Muktangan – 5

Supportive Interventions in government run CCIs –9

Antariksha – 15

Coalition for Child Rights to Protection – 17

Way Forward – 19

Our Governing Body members – 20

Acknowledgements – 21

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I was working with an HIV/AIDS Prevention program for two years before I formed Praajak. I soon realised that gender was the root cause of disempowerment for not just women but for men as well. Stigma and discrimination were merely the visible manifestations. I felt that intense work was required to be done with the boys and



young men in the society to change the prevailing patriarchal values in our society. Hence my conscious decision to work with the children especially boys to change their value system right from their early years. I also learnt that gender discrimination is not just discriminating men against women. We say that gender is a cultural social construct, then it is imperative to take gender away from just the biology and look at other gender constructions as well. Man, who does not conform to typical patriarchal construction of what a man should be, is also being discriminated in the society. In 1997, Praajak was established and was dedicated towards preventing the abuse and exploitation of children and young people, especially those who occupy marginalised social locations. We also embarked upon the plan of working with the state structures as they played a critical role in re-establishing gender equality in the society.

ABOUT PRAAJAK

At New Alipore Praajak Development Society, we work together with communities, government and non-government actors to provide an enabling and secure environment for vulnerable children and young people in West Bengal, India. We strive to address deep rooted social constructions and stereotypes, particularly those associated with gender, that perpetuate inequities and deprivation.



Since its inception in 1997 in Kolkata, (West Bengal, India) we are committed to secure a better present and future for children and youth living on the fringes, in historically disadvantaged communities and those who find themselves surviving on their own. Drawing from the rights-based approach, we support vulnerable children and youth in utilising their potential and agency.

We focus on child protection issues such as unsafe migration, child trafficking, child sexual abuse and early/child and forced marriages. We consistently engage with notions of masculinity and patriarchy. This has led to a growing body of work with boys and young men and supporting them in playing their part in creating a gender equitable society.

We prioritise processes of capacity building and participatory development. And, undertake direct implementation, systems strengthening and technical support, networking and advocacy.

Our major programmes are:

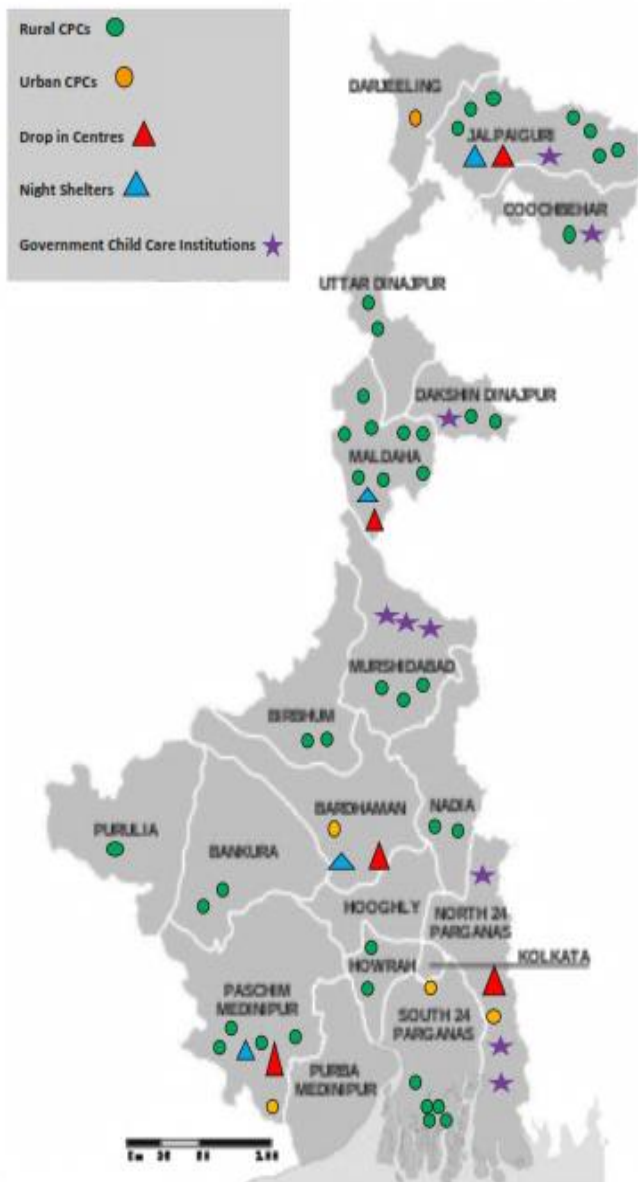
- ☀️ Muktangan
- ☀️ Antariksha
- ☀️ Supportive interventions in Government run Child Care Institutions (CCIs)

☀ Networking and advocacy through Coalition for Child Right to Protection (CCRP)

Through these components, Praajak works with children in need of care and protection (CNCP), Children in Conflict with Law (CCL) and other vulnerable children as considered by The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act 2006 (hereafter referred as the JJ Act) and Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS, 2009). It partners with government and civil society actors to strengthen implementation of legislations, schemes and other instruments for upholding child rights in the country. It also seeks to bring emerging issues and concerns related to child protection to the public agenda and mobilize actions that can aid the transition to a more child friendly and gender equitable society.



Locations of Child Protection Components in West Bengal



MUKTANGAN

Muktangan means an 'open courtyard' and evokes images of a familiar and supportive physical space within homes. Initiated in 2003 in collaboration with the Railway Protection Force (RPF), it has been one of our pioneering programmes. We initiated it in Malda and expanded to New Jalpaiguri, Kharakpur and



Asansol. It aims to provide an alternative environment for the children and youths who access the railway stations for their livelihood or are separated from their families. (Not sure about this line)

The programme incorporates two components.

A. Railway Station based intervention:

- Drop in Centres (DIC) are set up for children near the stations. 527 children accessed DIC from July to December, 2016.
- 113 boys accessed night shelter services under Mukhtangan programme. From January, 2017, we have withdrawn the night shelter services due to decrease in single working children in stations.
- Children receive educational inputs and access opportunities for recreational activities. 347 children received non-



formal education support from DIC. 39 of them were enrolled in formal schools.

- 150 children benefitted from Mid-day meal scheme in Asansol. Due to this, they get proper nutrition leading to better health.
- 179 children reunified with their families in 2016-2017.
- Manorath- The on the move mobile library programme was made available for children accessing centres in Asansol and Malda to promote functional literacy and develop reading skills.

B. Source area/community-based intervention: The emphasis is on strengthening the local safety net for children and, thereby, preventing situations where children move towards railway stations. This includes promoting school enrolment and retention of children, linking families



with relevant government schemes as well as other family and community strengthening actions. It incorporates working with the Child Protection Committees at village and ward levels (VLCPCs and WLCPCs). The other elements are helping youth access livelihood training and sensitizing them on gender and sexuality.

Significant achievements:

- We have initiated 14 hours of outreach at the railway station to reach out to children for seven days.
- Our programme has extended to the source areas to prevent children from accessing the stations. We link their families with different government schemes, alternative livelihood trainings so that children can stay within their own community.

Mithun Kumar also known as Noor Alam, is all of 15 years. He has been with us since he was 12 years. In the beginning he was irregular at the Drop-In Centre (DIC) and did not show much interest in either studies or other activities. However, he would take special care with regards to his personal hygiene. He would be very neat and clean and often tried to impress senior project staff by sharing with them that he wanted to study but he was never given an opportunity.

After repeated attempts of facilitating interactions within the DIC, he was referred for a Self-Book session as he remained irregular at both the DIC and the Night Shelter.

Post the session on Self Book, he was referred to Play Therapy. After few session of Play therapy he spoke about himself like his real name was Noor Alam. He spoke about his family and also opened up regarding his confusion about his gender in his life.

He decided to continue his studies and he was admitted in class III. He is now promoted to class IV. He also joined dance class in Malda. He regularly attends school and religiously goes for his Dance sessions.

ShephaliKhatoon is a resident of a small village in old Malda, West Bengal. The village residents survive on farming for three months and migrate for work later. Women, typically, take care of the cattle and also earn by making bidis. Educational attainment, particularly for girls, is rarely prioritised. Early marriage remains a common phenomenon.

Shephali's life followed a different trajectory. After her father's death, she took care of her ailing mother and ran the household. She visited government offices regarding her mother's widow pension and other official work. Drawing from what she had

SUPPORTIVE INTERVENTIONS IN GOVERNMENT RUN CCIs



The underlying emphasis has been on helping the CCIs and other related stakeholders in enhancing the standards of care at the institutions. This

includes supporting measures for building a child friendly environment at CClS with comprehensive and integrated programming which would, ultimately, facilitate appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration for CNCP and CCL entrusted to their care. The intervention aims at supporting 10 government run CClS in West Bengal in enhancing the child friendly environment including care services. Praajak focuses on promoting integrated case management of the children for their holistic development.

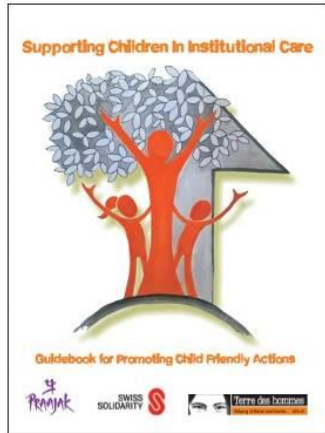
- We covered 1515 children in ten CClS during April 16 to March 17.
- We worked towards contributing to the overall effort of the Government of West Bengal to effectively deliver its child protection services in the State.
- Due to our consistent advocacy with the Government of West Bengal, there has been increased monitoring of the CClS by the Government.
- Linkages between CClS to external resources and other Government supported services for children were made such as Health and Education services.
- The CClS are adopting a more ‘open door policy’ of letting in volunteers and NGOs to work within their premises, resulting in increased accountability of the CClS to maintain minimum standards of care.

Integrated package of care and protection services are introduced and implemented in the ten CClS.

The term ‘integrated package of care and protection services’ was decoded to specific indicators covering ten domain areas related to rehabilitation and reintegration as provisioned under the laws and policies of the country. It includes, Staffing and Management, Physical Facilities and Safety, Protection and Safeguarding, Health and Sanitation, Nutrition, Education and Recreation, Psychosocial

Support, Life Skills, Vocational Training and Placement, Case Management, Exit Preparation and Follow-up.

“Supporting Children in Institutional Care: Guidebook for Promoting Child-Friendly Actions” was developed, which helps the CCIs to standardise their practices and ensure that every child is served better and in accordance to their



rights. This document was endorsed by the State. Also, a Code of Conduct for CCI staff was developed and shared with the Department of Social Welfare to be endorsed and disseminated in the State. The Project Team is maintaining contact at present to see the status of the Code of Conduct.

- An “*Emergency Protocol Development for CCIs*” exercise was held through participatory workshops with children and meetings with CCI staff.

- *Suggestion Box and Complaints Mechanism put in place:* The JJ Act, 2015 prescribes certain mechanism like ‘suggestion boxes’ for children to raise their voices on issues within the CCIs. Child friendly suggestion boxes



were put up in consultation with children. The project team members along with representatives of children’s committees and CCI staff opens the boxes and works on resolving issues from the suggestion boxes.

- In order to provide psychosocial support to the children in the CClIs and Muktangancentres, a tool called Self Book has been devised and used extensively. Children, youth and parents paste pictures/photographs from magazines that they feel connected to in some way. This activity is then used to trigger conversations and gain insights. The tool has helped us in gaining a better understanding of the children and contributed in developing individual case management plans.

During our interventions in one of the CClIs, we met a 16-year-old girl who was mentally challenged. She was unable to share the details of her place of origin due to speech limitations. With the help of the Self Book, she started to share about her village through pictures and eventually could recollect her village name. Her case was put forward to the Home management committee by the Social Worker and was restored back to her family after 2 years.

“I have learnt how to use my own body and mind as Personal Safety Tools that I can use when my life or sanctity is in danger”.

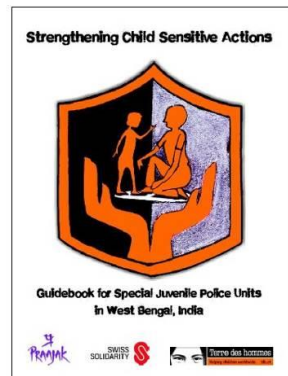
“People advise to be careful as we are girls. But how? This is the first time that the training opened our eyes to what safety really means. We feel more confident and believe that repeated practice will enable us to really take care of ourselves”



Shared by Nilima, 16 years (name changed to protect identity) from Vidyasagar BalikaBhavan, after going through the Self Book process

Some other significant achievements:

- Exposure Visit of Government Officials and Terre Des Hommes Team to Foster Care Programme in Udaipur, Rajasthan in November 2016. As the West Bengal Government was framing the State Rules for Alternative Care (adoption, foster care and sponsorship), it was an opportunity for cross learning and a starting point for the Government to draft the guidelines on foster care.
- Resource Tool for Special Juvenile Police Unit (SJPU) was developed titled “Strengthening Child Sensitive Actions-



Guidebook for Special Juvenile Police Units in West Bengal, India”, to contribute towards ongoing efforts of strengthening the capacities of SJPU units. The SJPU officers are mandated under law handle matters related to children.

- State Consultation on Institutional Care Standards in West Bengal: The Consultation was attended by CWC members and Superintendents of Government-run CCIs from 22 districts of West Bengal. Two Resource Documents by the State Government – “Guidebook on Child Friendly Actions” and “Resource Directory of Government Schemes in West Bengal” were endorsed and launched by the State Government.



No	Name of the CCI	District	Children covered
1	Sahid Bandana Smriti Mahila Abas	Cooch Behar	Girls (CNCP)
2	Shilayan Home for Girls	Murshidabad	Girls (CNCP)
3	Ananda Ashram	Murshidabad	Boys (CCL)
4	KajiNajrul Islam Shishu Abas	Murshidabad	Boys (CNCP)
5	Kishalaya Home for Boys	North 24 Parganas	Boys (CNCP and CCL)
6	Dhrubashram	North 24 Parganas	Boys (CCL)

7	Korok	Jalpaiguri	Boys (CNCP and CCL)
8	Shubhayan	Dakshin Dinajpur	Boys (CNCP and CCL)
9	Sukanya	North 24 Parganas	Girls (CNCP)
10	Vidya SagarBalikaBhavan	Paschim Midnapore	Girls (CNCP)

ANTARIKSHA

Praajak is working towards making a gender discrimination free society where both male and female can work against the deep rooted patriarchal system to ensure their rights. With this objective, we organised gender and sexuality workshop with 280 volunteers from different districts of West Bengal so that they can intervene in the family and community to ensure gender equity.



Some achievements:

We reached and worked with 146 boys in Murshidabad, where interactive gender-based sessions were conducted in eight communities.

- The members of SantanSurakha Samiti (SSS), a Youth Collective in South 24 Parganas initiated regular collective meetings/ study circles on gender and sexuality. Followed by regular weekend study circles, the collective worked on the issue of child marriage, supported by Praajak.
- The collectives started intimate theatre on gender and sexuality, focusing on marriage. This process led to open conversations and dialogues among the residents, initiated by the youths regarding pressing community issues.
- They initiated awareness campaigns and Street Plays on Child Sexual Abuse and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) Act.
- SubujSanghya', a youth organization in Murshidabad sends their volunteers to participate in the gender-based workshops. Five members of SabujSanghya, initiated Self Defence training for their community girls. They organized a rally demanding women safety in public place in Beldanga, Murshidabad district.



- One of the collective members started his own study circle in his village with technical support from Prajaak.

Seventeen-year-old Sourav Middy lives with his parents and a younger sister in Mograhat, South 24 Paraganas, West Bengal. He participated in the 15-week training on issues of gender equity and sexuality under the Antariksha programme. The training left a deep impact on him.

He shared, "I think work has no gender. Girls and boys should be respected equally. What a girl can do, a boy can as well." He further added women washed everyone's clothes, cooked and served food in his house. No one questioned that. However, Sourav felt that such gendered conceptions and biases needed to be challenged. He shared that he had explained this to his family members logically - "Do I wash my mother's and sister's clothes? Then, why should they wash mine?"

Sourav was also disturbed when his mother stopped his younger sister from going to the temple while she was menstruating. He knew it was a sensitive topic. But it did not deter him from reasoning it out with his mother. "I feel we are trapped in superstitions. Menstruation is not a disease, it is a natural process," he pointed out.

Sourav's mother, Shibani, had found it difficult to accept these changes in her son's views and behaviours. "I wanted him to be out of this programme immediately, but, we were amazed to see how Sourav made repeated attempts to explain things to us in a logical way", recalled Shibani. And now, they are thankful that their son is part of this programme. "I feel it is important that this programme should be done with the girls and parents as well", shared Shibani with a smile.

COALITION FOR CHILD'S RIGHT TOPROTECTION (CCRP)

The coalition is a unique attempt to mobilise support of likeminded groups and individuals for protecting rights of children living under vulnerable conditions in urban slums and remote rural areas in the state. It provides a platform for bringing together youth groups, women's groups and other civil society organisations for collective action.

The networking initiative helped to rope in 30 cultural groups and 370 volunteers from colleges to fight violence against children and protect their rights. Moreover, the coalition played in an instrumental role in the following activities in 2016-2017.

- Praajak has been taking initiative to guide and hand hold District Child Protection Officers (DCPOs), Probation Officers (PO)- Institutional Care (IC), PO-Non-InstitutionalCare (NIC) and other officials regarding their



responsibilities with special focus on inter-sectoral linkages through the organisation of Home Management Committee meetings at Sukanya and Kishalaya Homes, the two CCIs in North 24 Parganas district. Here the different stakeholders- DCPO, PO-IC, Child Welfare Committee (CWC), Juvenile Justice Board member (JJB), Children’s representatives and other NGOs who work in the same CCI participated in the process.

- Six children under Praajak (Dumdum area) were admitted at The Calcutta Orphanage (Cottage Home) in March 2017.
- Praajak formed Ward Level Child Protection Committee (WLCPC) in Ward no. 81 and 89 respectively.
- Under School Legal Awareness programme of UNICEF, Praajak trained twenty schools in Kolkata and 20 in Purulia. The children learned about Constitution, Child Rights, JJ Act, POCSO, Child Marriage, Prohibition of trafficking Act, Right to Education, CRPC.
- In 2016-2017, UNICEF collaborated with the Home Dept., along with technical support from Praajak,



formulated Child Friendly Police Station programme with certain measurable and rational indicators. Prajak played a critical role in conducting training to the police personnel in 37 police stations in West Bengal under six Commissionerates, including Kolkata Police.

WAY FORWARD

Building on the learnings from the past two decades, we stepped up focus on two critical areas – (i) working with local communities (particularly migrants) to reduce children’s vulnerabilities and developing a local safety net for them and (ii) working with youth on gender and sexuality to create



catalysts of change. These elements became the foundation of the Antariksha programme initiated in four districts in West Bengal.

We also stepped up focus on the intersections between mental health, child rights and education. Praajak intends to grow as a resource agency in this domain.



We plan to continue to strengthen the institutional actors in the Juvenile Justice system particularly police on community policing, Juvenile Justice Boards and CCIs.

Looking back, we are glad that we started working with boys and young men. The emphasis is on supporting them to

logically challenge age old social norms, respect women, supporting them to make informed choices and constantly strive to create a gender discrimination free society.

Our Governing Body Members

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DONOR AGENCIES

- CRY
- Railway Children UK
- Food for Hungry Foundation
- Terre des hommes Foundation

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

- Department of Women and Child Development, Government of West Bengal
- Department of Home and F&NRI, Government of West Bengal
- Department of Health, Government of West Bengal

- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- UNICEF, Assam
- UNICEF, West Bengal

STATUTORY BODIES

- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
- State Commission for Protection of Child Rights
- Child Welfare Committees of West Bengal
- Juvenile Justice Boards of West Bengal
- District Legal Aid Service Authority
- Indian Railways
- Railway Protection Force
- Government Railway Police Force
- Kolkata Police
- Siliguri City Police
- Asansol- Durgapur City Police
- West Bengal Police
- Sarva Shiksha Mission, West Bengal
- Eastern Railway Women's Welfare Organisation- Malda, Asansol, Kharagpur
- Siliguri Municipal Corporation
- Asansol Municipal Corporation
- South DumDum Municipality
- English Bazar Municipality
- Kharagpur Municipality
- Gram Panchayats across 10 districts of West Bengal

ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

- National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata
- Jaya Prakash Institute of Social Change, Kolkata
- Global Institute of Social Science, Kolkata
- Durgapur Law College, Rajbandh
- Malda Women's College

NETWORKS

- Disability Activists Forum
- West Bengal Education Network
- SanyuktaSantanSeva Samity

NGOs

- Kolkata Sanved, Kolkata
- Sanchar, Kolkata
- Human Rights Law Network, West Bengal
- Goonj, Delhi
- Samiksani, Kolkata
- Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers Association, Dhaka
- CHILDLINE India Foundation, Kolkata

MEDIA

- 24 Ghanta
- Akash Bangla
- Tara Bangla
- Aajkal
- Protidin
- Bartaman
- DainikJagaran
- UttarbangaSanbad, North Bengal
- Amar Kagoj, Kharagpur
- Din Khon, Asansol
- AajSandha, Asansol
- Industrial Organ, Asansol
- Amar Cable, New Jalpaiguri
- Sabar Cable, Malda
- Malda Cable, Malda
- Balurghat Cable Network

CPU Members and Volunteers

- Ms Srabani Sen, Kolkata
- Ms Arna Seal, Kolkata
- Mr Srikanto Acharya, Kolkata
- Ms Jayanti Purkayastha, Kolkata
- Ms DipikaHaldar, Kolkata
- Ms Bratati Bandyopadhyay, Kolkata
- Mr Monomoy Mukherjee, Kolkata
- Ms Jayati Chakraborty, Kolkata
- Mr Debamalya Chattopadhyay, Kolkata
- Ms Sreyashi Sen, Singapore

- Sikshamitra, Kolkata
- Institute of Quality Skill Training, Kolkata
- Sanchari Kala Kendra, Kolkata
- Satya Bharati, Hooghly
- Sundarban Social Development Center, South 24 Parganas
- SPAR, Balurghat
- Talaash, Kolkata
- Shreyasi, Durgapur
- Diksha, Kolkata
- Swayam, Kolkata
- Shelter of Malda, English Bazar
- JalpaiguriMahila Kalyan Samity, Jalpaiguri
- BeldangaSabujayan Sangha, Beldanga
- Thoughtshop Foundation, Kolkata
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- Ashoka India
- SabujSathi Sangha, Malda
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- Dr Arunabha Sengupta, Asansol
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- Mr Sabyasachi Dutta, Srishti Mime, Jalpaiguri
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- Mr Sukrit Nath, Berhampore
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- Mr Sumit Bandyopadhyay, Udan, Asansol

- Mr Aroop Ray, Art of Living, Asansol
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- Mr Kaushik Biswas, Lion's Club, Asansol
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