



**ANNUAL REPORT 2019 – 2020**

**NEW ALIPORE PRAAJAK DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY**

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# CONTENTS

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Note from the Director	Page 3
Our Work	Page 4
Empowering children & youth with agency to transform their worlds by transforming themselves	
Empowerment through sports	
Efforts towards Collectivisation	
Strengthening Community Ecosystems	
Non custodial approaches to child protection based on principles of Diversion and Restorative Justice	
Railway Childline	
Achievements	Page 13
Way Forward	Page 16
Governing Body	Page 17
Acknowledgement	Page 18

# Notes from the Director

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The word Praajak means charioteer, the one who guides and mentors. Praajak began its journey in 1997 with a commitment to securing a better present and future for children and youth living in historically disadvantaged communities, in confined custodial milieus and those who find themselves surviving on their own. It works collectively with children and youth, the communities they live in, government and non- government actors to create a caring and protective environment for them. Drawing from the rights-based approach, the organisation supports vulnerable children and youth in utilising their potential and agency. Praajak believes that adolescent and youth are best positioned to shape a world of empathy, esteem and acceptance and hence works towards developing their agency across programmes.

Praajak has consistently engaged with and challenged traditional notions of masculinity and patriarchy which have 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. The issues that Praajak has focussed over the last year are child protection issues such as unsafe migration, child trafficking, child sexual abuse, early/child and forced marriages and child work and labour.

The current reporting period April 2019 to March 2020 saw developing further on the projects that has been successfully using Sports as an empowering process to break gender stereotypes and facilitating empowerment of young women and girls. The first Annual *Kabaddi* Competition for girls was organized in Kolkata in January 2020, with teams from the districts of Jalpaiguri, Malda and Baharampur. Praajak has embarked on a programme aimed at Diversion and Restorative Justice for Children in Conflict with Law (CCL). The last year saw capacity building of team members and working with the police, Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) and civil society to further the objective of community-based rehabilitation of CCLs.

The period April 2019 to March 2020 saw the organisation focus on empowering children a youth with agency through the collectives, creating youth led community spaces that in turn would strengthen community ecosystems, developing mental health support services in the communities and working on non custodial approach to child protection.

Collectivisation of young people and creating safe spaces in the community remained a major programming strategy. Additionally, systems strengthening and developing a network of young leaders to actively engage with communities has begun and will remain a strong strategy in the future. Promoting well-being and agency of children, adolescent and youth and adopting a psycho social approach across our projects remains a benchmark for future programming.

## Our Work

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### Empowering Children and Youth with Agency to Transform their Worlds by transforming themselves

The programme titled *Antariksha (Space in Between)*, an unique multifaceted programme is operational in six (6) districts of West Bengal and focuses that aims to address gender equity and promote a gender discrimination free society.

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*The programme approaches the rehabilitation of children in street or slum situation through applying an integrated framework while upholding the agency of the child. The programme works on various aspects of development of children – physical and mental while facilitating/enabling violence-free social structures and environments around them. The programme finally seeks to build “child friendly model wards” in the targeted municipalities.*

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In the three **municipal wards of Dumdum, near Kolkata**, the programme works with children and youth (6-18 years) living in street or slum situations. By reducing vulnerabilities, the programme seeks to create a safer environment for the children in street or slum situations – focusing on physical environment, health and hygiene (hygiene and cleanliness, water sanitation), school and family environment. One of the strategies applied to accomplish the above objective is networking and convergence with other stakeholders including ward counsellors, school teachers, and officials of Municipal Corporation and community spaces.

Through outreach activities in the areas drop out children have been identified and enrolled in schools with support from guardians and schools. To ensure retention in school these children have been offered remedial support in specific subjects like Math, Bangla and English so that they can cope up with the school curriculum. Remedial programme reached out to *195 girls* from all three wards of South Dumdum. Many of these girls have also attended *Summer Camps* that focussed on acquiring advanced Math and Language skills. Learning levels of *184 children* have been tracked through the Summer Camps. We are also working with schools in the area to make schooling interesting through co-curricular activities like Library programme, painting competition, issue-based debate child parliament and suggestion box



The programme has reached out to 700 adolescents (300 through centres and 400 through schools) in the slum. 80% of these adolescents are girls and 20% are boys. Adolescents have been trained on gender and sexuality and life skills. These sessions have created a safe space where girls have been able to speak up. Along with training, these children have undergone exposure visits to the Municipal Office, WLCPC, CWC, police station, health centres and had opportunities of interaction

with stakeholders. Besides, the programme has also promoted access of girls to public spaces like banks, post office and market. The programme has also reached out to approximately 300 adults (60% women and 40% men) from the slums. Parenting sessions have been organized with some of them with the objective of developing inter personal skills that would in a way help them to understand the needs and emotions of the children better.

### Empowerment through Sports

The programme works with children and adolescents in **South and North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda and Jalpaiguri** in West Bengal to prevent early and child marriage, trafficking, sexual abuse and school drop-outs. The programme works both with boys and girls to empower them against the deep-rooted patriarchal system to ensure their rights. It works towards enhancing capacities of boys and girls aged 12 to 21 years on issues of gender and sexuality through a series of sessions (Study Circles) and breaking gender stereotypes through Sports like *Kabaddi* for girls and young women and facilitating *Collectives* of young people to drive change in their families and communities. *In the last one year, focus was given to form the 26 Kabaddi groups and 26 study circles with 540 girls.*

The programme has been an affirmation of Praajak's belief in the power of Sports as one of the tools to empower and amplify women's voices and tear down gender barriers and discrimination. Playing Kabaddi along with development of life skills and gender sensitisation activities has helped to improve self-efficacy of girls and women and contribute to the development of leadership skills. These enable girls and young women to make better life choices where the probability of abuse and exploitation can be reduced.

#### Significant Outcomes

Kabaddi league matches are being played in fields belonging to local mosques with final matches being attended by more than 1000 people including male family members of the participants.

The teams formed in Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas, Malda and Siliguri contain participants from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds such as Adivasis, Dalits and Muslims.

156 women participated in the Block and Ward level Kabaddi League matches for women in **Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas**

Sports tournaments have been organized for male and female children and adolescents to enhance their participation in public spaces.

*The project has resulted in improved life skills and self-efficacy of girls at risk to exercise their choice, consent and agency and has examples where girls have been able to demonstrate their agency, negotiation skills and decision-making capacities within their families, resulting in calling of early marriages of 2 girls by their family members. They have increased knowledge of, and access to, local schemes, services and livelihoods for girls at risk/ affected by unsafe migration.*

The girls playing Kabaddi are being helped by trained Animators who act as their mentors and coaches. The Animators ensure that the girls do not drop-



out of schools, receive effective counselling and psychosocial support for their emotional wellbeing and access vocational skills and placement/business opportunities. The First Annual Kabaddi League was organized on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2020 in Kolkata with six teams from the three districts. It was attended by key stakeholders including Minister, Department of Women and Child, and Chair Person of WBSCPCR [West Bengal State Commission for Protection of Child Rights]. It was a moment of pride for the girls to play in front of guests and be awarded by the Minister in presence of their family members.



### Efforts towards Collectivization

Praajak has always believed in youth led social change and believed in the power of collectives to engage, learn and have their voices heard. Working towards that, Praajak has organized Study Circles to address issues of gender and masculinity at village or ward level and Muktangans within institutions to protect the rights of children, enabling them to make positive choices, challenge gender norms and freely assert their identities.

In the *Muktadhara* programme participatory exercises/activities undertaken to develop demands for child friendly ward with emphasis on street lighting, open drain, unfenced pond, community toilet, skills building and livelihood, options of youth and adults, space for park and recreation of children, adult education, and soft skills for adolescents and youth through clubs. Following up on the publication "*Amader Swapner Jogot*", the programme has been able to mobilize the youth collectives to organize signature campaigns and finally hand over the demands of the children and community to the Councillor and Chairman of the Municipality. The publication *Amader Swapner Jogot* was released on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2019 that was attended by members of youth collectives from Dumdum, Murshidabad and Mograhat. Members



of youth collectives took part in panel discussions where they shared about works of their collectives, their journey, and challenges and how they crossed the hurdles. Collective members from Mograhat shared their experiences of working together to deal with cases of child marriage within their communities and how they succeeded in stopping a case of trafficking in their area. Members from the collectives of Murshidabad spoke about their collective journey in organizing the Vasanta Utsav where nearly 150 girls came out and reclaiming the public spaces in the villages to celebrate the festival in their ways. The sharing of the panel discussions helped built a feminist solidarity among the collectives working across districts.

A core group has been formed comprising of youths and women of the area to address issues of violence. The group has been oriented on drafting complaints, on who are the stakeholders to be reached for redress (Councillor, WLCPC, CWC, Police, etc.) and the existing legal provisions. The members of the collectives through sustained the advocacy with the ward councillors have been able to achieve some of the demands raised by them in the publication *Amader Swapner Jogot*. They got their areas being lit up with significant number of street lights, the open drains were covered, footpaths were repaired and arrangement was made to clear garbage dumped in certain locations of Ward 3 in Dumdum, which is near to their residential area. Besides they also managed to get a park for themselves in Ward 3/3 of the area.

The sustained efforts of the Study Circles under the *Antariksha* programme have resulted in six young men and women volunteers to mobilise adolescents and young people in their own communities to strengthen the *feminist network* among young people in their own communities. Following their lead another 26 volunteers (including 12 girls) in Murshidabad and three volunteers (including one girl) in Dumdum have come forward to start similar kinds of work from January 2020. The volunteers from Murshidabad initiated processes of mobilizing adolescents in their areas, forming collectives and training them on different issues of gender. They started these activities after they received training from Praajak through the different study circles. The study circles not only provided them with perspective, knowledge and skills; they also motivated them to further the

work on their own initiatives. In another instance one of the volunteers from Dumdum would run Praajak's mobile library from her house.

### ***Mobilising Chhokra Networks***

Over the last couple of years, it has been noted that many of the boys who have enthusiastically participated in the Study Circles and have become core members of the Collectives emerged as gender queer. Many of them succeeded in bringing in other queer youth to be part of the Collective's activities or the Study Circles. This process brought the project in close touch with 'chhokras', popular name used for those young boys who impersonated female characters in traditional folk theatre, especially in a genre called the "Manasa'r Gan", widely prevalent in the Dalit communities of North-Central Bengal. Volunteers from Murshidabad contacted the 'chhokra' networks and Praajak met around 99 chhokras from Murshidabad and the adjoining areas of Malda and Birbhum.



About 11 'chhokras' have volunteered to reach out to more young chhokras, through a structured consciousness-raising process which will help them to express their views and form a large collective that can interface with State agencies on their behalf. The volunteers plan to explore the Transgendered Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 to see what can be done within and without the aegis of the Act and formulate a charter of demands for a campaign.

### ***Mobilising support from Women's Groups***

Many collective members had opined that youth collectives can effectively intervene in cases of rights violations of women and other adolescents if supported by the local women's groups. In the *Muktadhara* programme, Praajak was able to contact and receive support from 174 women in the areas that the collectives were operating in. This included 57 women from three wards of South Dumdum and 117 women from five blocks of Murshidabad district. The collectives formed with the women would collaborate with youth collectives in the areas to address issues of violence and discrimination against children. The women actively participated in detailed discussions on gender issues and in various other creative activities. Three of these women were linked to an open school so that they could continue their studies.

### ***Vasantotsav Udjapan Samiti, Beldanga, Murshidabad***

Holi is a popular celebration in Bengal. However over the last few decades, the festival in many places has become known more for drunken and violent behaviour of men making the streets of towns and villages somewhat unsafe for women. Thus women and girls rarely venture out of their homes to celebrate the festival along with other members of the community.



In this context, young girls from some of the *collectives in Pilkhana village of Beldanga* decided



to change the script and transform the public spaces in Pilkhana and 13 adjoining villages into areas where women and girls can venture without fear and celebrate Holi. A Vasantotsav Celebration Committee was formed for this purpose. The girls decided to celebrate Holi in the lines of the *Vasantotsav* celebrations of Shantiniketan, instituted by Tagore. Thus, they organized a morning processions, or 'baitalik' of girls and boys who danced to songs of spring across the villages and finally gathered at a central place to

conclude with a cultural medley and smearing colours on each other irrespective of sex and age. Members of the collectives, young children and youth who are not part of the collectives participated in the rehearsals, mobilized funds for some of the expenses incurred for the programme. Almost *100 young men and women from six collectives and 50 women from local SHGs and the community* participated in the procession through ten villages covering a stretch of three kilometres, *thereby reaching out to 6000 people*. This was the first time in years that women and girls, including Muslim girls and women, were out in strength on the streets till about 2 PM. The celebration energized collective members, strengthened their bonds and they are currently in the process of advocating with Panchayat on various demands to develop safe spaces within their communities.

### **Strengthening community ecosystems**

Over the years Praajak realized the importance of strengthening the communities in order to have a sustained impact of the programmes. Thus, along with empowering the boys and girls through different efforts of collectivization, Praajak worked with relevant stakeholders from the administration and at the level of the Panchayat and the Municipal wards, to build a strong network of support system within the communities. In almost all the programmes Praajak focussed on working with parents with the objective of improving inter personal communication with their children to understand their needs and feelings. A module on *Parenting* has also been developed in the last year to work with them parents and guardians on issues of positive disciplining to help them deal with their children more effectively in order to ensure family and community child protection for every child of the community.

In order to strengthen families Praajak has also been linking families to different government schemes and entitlements like opening bank accounts under *Jan Dhan Yojana*, assisting them in becoming part of *Swastha Sathi*, getting job cards for MGNREGA, *Manabik Bhata*, *Bidhaba Bhata*, *Shramik Vavishyanidhi* etc.

Continuous engagement with families of girls playing *Kabaddi* has helped influence parents to allow their daughters play the game along with changing their perceptions on child marriage and other harmful practices. Fathers are seen to play positive and many of them who were initially resistant to the project have now become keen advocates. There have been two instances where fathers have called off pre-arranged marriages of their daughters as a result of their engagement with the project and the relationship of trust that they have built with the project team.

*33 collective members, including boys and girls attended the Yuva Aarohan Programme, yearly gathering of youth collectives held in Dumdum.* This was the first time most of the girls were setting foot outside of their areas with parental permissions. Praajak has initiated discussions on Gender Norms, Education, Human Rights, and Menstruation with various women's groups and this has resulted in changing of gendered relations within families.

The programmes also focussed on regular meetings with opinion leaders of the community, mostly male members to discuss different issues of violence faced by children and seeking probable solutions to address them with the involvement of different stakeholders. Intergenerational dialogues between community members (parents, teachers, VLCPC members, Police, Councillor, local club members) and adolescent children has also resulted in building safer communities where different issues of child rights and child protection can be discussed.

Praajak is also working effectively with the Village Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPCs) in Mograhat II block in the district of South 24 Parganas. We have been involved in training members of VLCPC and providing them with hand holding support to deal with issues of child protection. As a result of these initiatives VLCPC members along with Praajak has been instrumental in



stopping incidents of child marriage in their areas and also focus of issues of safe migration in order to prevent trafficking. We assisted the VLCPCs to make their plan and budget for the year 2019-2020. Based on the plans the VLCPC undertook various awareness activities in their areas. They organized rally to raise awareness on human trafficking and through posterage in each of the 11 Samsads that Praajak works in. The VLCPC from these Samsads were instrumental in identifying 13 children in their areas who were at high risk of dropping out of schools, child marriage and trafficking. VLCPC members along with team members of Praajak have successfully resisted incidents of child marriage in the area.

There was a case of romantic relationship between a girl and a boy in the area who had eloped to marry because they had developed a physical proximity. As the incident got known members from the VLCPC, the Upa Pradhan along with members of collectives formed by Praajak traced the girl and

boy. They spoke to them at length, up to the extent of telling them physical proximity cannot be a reason of marriage. They were able to dissuade them from marriage and also convince the families such that the adolescent girl and boy could return to their respective families and continue with their education. In another instance, VLCPC members and members of collectives intervened in a case where a certain school in the area was taking money from students who were being admitted under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. They succeeded in convincing the school and the money collected was returned to the concerned students.

The **Eastern Regional Meeting on ‘Adolescent Sexuality and Law’** was organized on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 by Praajak, Swayam, and Partners for Law in Development. This meeting is a continuation of national level consultations held by PLD with CEHAT and RCI-VAW (TISS) in Mumbai(August 2017), PLD with AJWS in New Delhi (December 2018) and PLD with TULIR in Chennai (September 2019), to document grassroots experiences of working with the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) to help girls prevent/exit forced marriages. Resource persons from sectors such as sexual and reproductive health, law, child abuse, and sexuality education participated in the consultation and shared their experiences and challenges faced while working with adolescents. The four broad themes identified for discussion related to different aspects of adolescence were Health, Education, Crisis Intervention and Child Marriage. The law and policy on these concerns was at the centre of the discussion. There were 45 participants drawn from at least 9 states namely Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Manipur, Meghalaya Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, and West Bengal working on thematic concerns ranging from adolescent capacity building, disability rights, adolescent health, advocacy on strengthening existing child protection mechanism etc.



## Non custodial approaches to child protection based on principles of Diversion and Restorative Justice

The programme is an approach in identifying and managing cases of children in conflict with law “without resorting to formal trial,” where it so warrants. It is an approach to justice that personalizes the crime by having the victims and the offenders mediate a restitution agreement to the satisfaction of each, as well as involving the community. Restorative Justice is an alternative paradigm to build community, address violence and repair harm that is rooted in community solutions and relationships. It is based on a theory of justice that considers crime and wrong doing to be an offense against an individual or community, rather than the State.

*The programme envisages implementation of the spirit and tenets of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act, 2015 with regard to diversion and measures for dealing with children in conflict with law without resorting to judicial proceedings unless it is in the best interest of the child or the society as a whole. This programme is unique to firstly, employ “positive measures” of mobilizing resources of those of family and community, for promoting the well-being, providing an inclusive and enabling environment to reduce vulnerabilities of children secondly, to support structures like Juvenile Justice Boards (JJB) to follow the “Principle of Diversion” and build capacities of concerned stakeholders.*

*Over the last year Praajak has worked with seven such children in conflict with law and has been successful in working towards their community based rehabilitation with necessary psycho social support and thereby avoid incarceration and recidivism.*

Over the last year, this has been a growing area of engagement for Praajak that is aligned to our organisational philosophy. Praajak’s programme aims for effective inter-agency cooperation and collaboration between the JJB, the Police, Child Care Institutions (CCI) and District Child Protection Units (DCPU) with a special focus on South 24 Parganas. Through handholding support and trainings the programme will help to create ‘Restorative Circles’ with the stakeholders, promoting a Case Management approach to address the socio-psychological needs of children and link them to various appropriate services.



Additionally, Praajak is working in six communities in Basuldanga, Magrahat, South 24 Parganas to mobilize vulnerable children and young boys between the age of 12 and 18 years. The objective is to address the patriarchal socialization where toxic masculinity is considered to be acceptable which leads to increased vulnerability and risk taking behaviours. These children and young boys are also



being organized into collectives who are undergoing sessions on gender and masculinity issues to address offending behaviour and substance abuse among vulnerable youth. Thus we are addressing the issue of toxic masculinity which are masculine forms of behaviour imbibed by boys from existing social values and is seen to be one of the root causes of offending behaviour.

## **RAILWAY CHILDLINE**

The Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Railways have jointly taken an initiative to ensure the care and protection, security and well-being of run-away, unaccompanied and trafficked children who come in contact with the railways. Praajak is collaborating with CHILDLINE India Foundation in Malda Railway Station (Malda district) since November 2016 and in Asansol Railway Station (Paschim Bardhaman district) since September 2019 to run the Railway Childline on the station premises.

**Outreach Activities:** Apart from the main railway station of Malda and Asansol, outreach activities are conducted in adjoining stations as well. In Malda outreach is conducted in 9 other stations (like Gour Malda, Harishchandrapur, Malda Court Station, Khaltipur) and in Asansol outreach activities are conducted in 6 adjoining stations covering the stretch from Durgapur to Chittaranjan. The purpose of the outreach activities is to create awareness on child protection issues and safety of children in contact with the railways with passengers, vendors/shop keepers, railway staffs, cleaners, Railway Police Force (RPF), Government Railway Police (GRP), Train Ticket Examiner (TTE), rickshaw, totos, and taxi drivers. Through these outreach programs stakeholders are made aware of CHILDLINE (1098 number) and its services for children in need of aid and assistance. Praajak also conducts trainings of concerned stakeholders such as RPF, GRP on issues of child protection and legal implications. In collaboration with the agencies working in the stations, the Praajak Team identifies vulnerable children living or coming to the stations. The stakeholders then work with the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) of respective district for effective restoration or reintegration where appropriate concerning those children.

In the period April 2019 to March 2020, 349 children were rescued from Malda station and adjoining areas, of them 286 children were restored back to their families and 63 children were kept in the different shelter homes. The team also assisted 34 children during the outreach programme to get admission in schools and to access government medical facilities.

In the period September 2019 to March 2020, 42 children rescued were from Asansol station and adjoining areas, of them 40 children were restored back to their families and 63 children were kept in the different shelter homes. The team also assisted 30 children to get admission in schools and to access government medical facilities during outreach activities.

# Achievements

## ***Changes in Perspectives and Attitude and Challenging Gender Roles***

Across the different project areas of Praajak we have been able to bring about changes in the behaviour of majority of the boys who are collective members. They speak respectfully to female members of their family. They were increasingly trying to be empathetic with their sisters and engaging themselves in household chores to reduce the work load from their mothers. They were also spending quality time with other members of the family. Many parents also reported that those attending the Study Circles were also showing increased interest in their studies.

As collective members continue to organize various action projects, like Kabaddi tournaments for women, game and activity - based gender awareness *melas* in their communities focusing on gender and child marriage, there has been an increased clarity among community members about the need of Study Circles and how they contributed to enhancing quality of community life. Women from Murshidabad and Dum Dum areas have started becoming more comfortable performing cultural programmes and playing kabaddi in public spaces and have become a support group for the collectives in the area whenever they hold events or undertake action.

A 19 years old resident of Anandanagar village, Beldanga I block of Murshidabad district is one of the collective members of Praajak. Attending regular sessions with Praajak helped him understand the gendered socialization of girls and boys, privileges enjoyed by boys and this helped him to improve his relationship with his sister. They started interacting on different issues and also started sharing their thoughts, feelings and concerns. His sister was a volley ball player and played exceptionally well, for which she got selected at the district level. His parents were opposed to the idea of sending their daughter out of the village for pursuing the game; they felt it was not something that a girl should do. But he stood by his sister, encouraged her to continue the sport and initiated a dialogue with his parents. After consistent persuasion, he was able to convince them about permitting his sister to play at the district level.

They are encouraging girls from their communities to attend the Study Circles. Many have initiated conversations around menstruation and menstrual hygiene with younger girls and are seen publicly exhorting girls to opt for higher education rather than marriage. Many girls negotiated with their families to drop their plans for marriage and enable them to continue their education. *Shabnam Khatun, Rojina Khatun, Priya Mandal, Puja Pramanik, Durba Bhowmik from Beldanga I, Hariharpara and Naoda Blocks, were among many who could prevent their marriages and established their right to choose the person and age of marriage as important factors while negotiating with their families.*



## ***Praajak's attempt to empower girls through sports receive recognition***

As a result of continuous advocacy with the West Bengal Chapter of the Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India, 24 girls from the Kabaddi

teams formed by Praajak were selected as district level players and 1 of them, Hasina Khatun from Malda has been selected as a state level player. These girls will receive free coaching, government benefits and participate in state level sports tournaments. This is an incredible achievement for the girls and was not anticipated to be achieved so early on in the project. The secretariat bench of Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India (AKFI), West Bengal State Unit responded to the project team by providing referees to facilitate the Annual League and arrange for supply of essential materials for the match, at nominal costs. The active support and engagement of the AKFI is an example of effective networking and support from a key stakeholder which can lead to further scalability of the project.

### ***The Story of Hasina Khatun***

Hasina Khatun, 17 years old girl of Koltapara, Malda, selected as a state level player beams with joy as she shares her story. *'Before playing Kabaddi, I had no value. I was like any other girl of the village doing household chores to support my family and attend school. When I was approached by Praajak for becoming part of the Kabaddi team my parents reacted negatively. They were apprehensive about my marriage once I go to the field in sports dress during training sessions and games. I was determined to be a part of it and stopped eating at home to create pressure on my father and other family members. Somehow with time I managed to convince my family and now when I am selected as a state level player I have made my entire family and community proud. My dream is to be a successful player and I dream of a day when people will approach me for my signature'*

### **Capacity Building of Praajak Staffs**

Several workshops on gender and sexuality have been organized over the last year for the staff members and volunteers of Praajak to work on gender issues with collective members. The trainings have helped them explore their own sexualities and have over time been able to understand and accept diversity in terms of sexual orientation.

Participants also said that they were able to clarify various confusions in relation to understanding patriarchy and how it relates to their work with children. This has improved the quality of their interactions with children leading to children trusting them more with confidential information, sharing their thoughts and feelings. There has been an increase in their knowledge and improvement of facilitation skills. We conducted an evaluation with the staff in end December 2019 which included field visits and observation. Around 80% of those who underwent the training showed significant improvement in animation capacity. Evaluators also interviewed the children of their collectives to confirm their impressions about the quality of their facilitation.

## Way Forward

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Praajak as an organisation looks forward to creating a culture, behaviour and practise of gender inclusion and gender safety within communities with which it works. We will continue working for youth-led change within communities towards gender equity and enabling ecosystems. The issues that remain central to all our programmes are that of gender, masculinity, raising a feminist consciousness, addressing mental health and wellbeing of children, adolescents and youth along with facilitating processes to build their agencies. Praajak will, through all its programmes, continue to create free, joyful and brave spaces for mental wellbeing, critical thinking, dialogue, collectivization and building agency of youth and children.

We intend to continue exploring sports as a means to break gender barriers and develop self efficacy that will help ensure youths ascertain their rights. In this context we plan to continue organizing the Annual Kabaddi League that in Kolkata that has started in 2019.

Praajak is also initiating its work with different caste communities, nomadic tribes like the Baidis, itinerant castes like the Bahurupis, de-notified tribes and marginalized Muslim communities like Faqirs and Bedias. Children of these communities remain outside of all state safety net mechanism and hence live in extreme vulnerable situations. We plan to work with children of these communities in the coming year.

Praajak also intends to carry on its work to promote *Diversion and Restorative Justice*, possibly in South 24 Parganas involving a range of relevant stakeholders. This is in response to the increase in 25% in child offending according to NCRB data of 2016 over the previous year. 75% of these children are adolescent boys in Bengal. The 10,581 cases pending in JJBs (West Bengal State Child Protection Society (SCPS data as on 2017) poses additional risk of recidivism. Hence, Praajak in the coming time will work with young boys to address school drop-outs and inappropriate behaviour with focus on gender norms and masculinity to promote justice for children through alternative care models like diversion and restorative justice. This is a new concept to the state with no practice so far involving multiple stakeholders like Directorate of Child Rights and Trafficking, District Child Protection Unit and the Juvenile Justice Board

Praajak will continue contributing to the body of work around non-custodial approach to child protection and promote community based rehabilitation for children. Diversion is an effective method in that regard. We will also work with Restorative Circles for organizing effective communication, relationship building, decision making, and conflict resolution and in building communities. The circle process is to support participants bring forward their core selves, make visible the inter-connectedness even in face of hostility and severe differences and to help practice value based behaviour.

We will increasingly adopt a Mental Health Psycho Social Support (MHPSS) based approach across our programmes. We are in the process of capacity building of team members to create a larger team of Mental Health Psycho Social Support workers. This will enhance the organization's capacity to address issues of mental health and offer psycho-social support.



## Governing Body Members

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Name	Occupation	Office held in the association	Address and email id
Dr.Nandini Ghosh	Academician and Activist	President	Flat B, 403, Benubon Coop Housing Society, 93/2 Kankulia Road, Kolkata-700029 Email:- <a href="mailto:nandinighosh@gmail.com">nandinighosh@gmail.com</a>
Mr. Jerome D'Souza	Development Professional	Secretary	P 106, CIT Road, Kolkata-700014 <a href="mailto:jeromedsouza@yahoo.com">jeromedsouza@yahoo.com</a>
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# Acknowledgements

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Directorate of Child Rights and Trafficking

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Juvenile Justice Board, South 24 Parganas

Child Welfare Committee, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda, Paschim and Purba Bardhaman, Siliguri, Jalpaiguri

Municipal Corporation and Panchayat Members of different blocks in the districts of South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda, Paschim and Purba Bardhaman, Siliguri, Jalpaiguri

Police Officials from South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda, Paschim and Purba Bardhaman, Siliguri, Jalpaiguri

Special Juvenile Police Unit, Diamond Harbour Police District

American Jewish World Service (AJWS)

Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF)

Terre Des Hommes (TDH)

UNICEF

CRY

Childline India Foundation

Humming Bird Foundation