

ANNUAL REPORT 2023 – 2024



NEW ALIPORE PRAAJAK DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

As we reflect on the year 2023-2024, Praajak continues to stand firm in its mission to empower children adolescents and youth from historically disadvantaged communities, ensuring their voices are heard and their futures are safeguarded. Over the past year, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to creating a secure, enabling environment for children, adolescents, and young people, particularly those living in vulnerable situations and facing the challenges of marginalization.

Our work, rooted in child protection, gender equity, and social justice, has taken bold steps forward, engaging with government bodies, civil society, and local communities to create meaningful change. We have remained vigilant in addressing critical issues such as child trafficking, unsafe migration, child labour, child sexual abuse, and early and forced marriages and other issues that continue to demand urgent attention and action.

The year has also seen Praajak deepen its engagement with intersections of climate change and child protection, recognizing the disproportionate impact that environmental shifts have on the most vulnerable children. Our continued engagements around gender equality and focus on challenging harmful societal norms related to masculinity and patriarchy have empowered boys and young men to become allies in the fight for a more equitable and just society.

In all our efforts, the centrality of the child's agency remains the guiding principle. We believe that when children are empowered to make informed choices, they are able to protect themselves and more importantly become active agents of change and emerge as role models within their communities.

As we look beyond, Praajak remains resolute in its vision of a world where all children, regardless of their background or circumstances, have the opportunity to thrive, to be heard, and to become active agents in shaping a better tomorrow.

We are grateful to our partners, supporters, and communities who walk with us in this journey. Together, we continue to make strides towards a safer, more just world for children adolescents and youth

COVERAGE: NUMBERS

Activity areas	Details
Children and adolescents reached	3200 (1699 females, 1501 males)
Adolescents Underwent Leadership Training	145
Volunteer Animators (from amongst leaders)	74 (engaged in various activities across communities)
Children in Conflict with Law supported	18 CCLs provided with psychosocial support for community-based rehabilitation
Schools engaged in Climate Change to deal with impact on children and adolescents	16 schools in South 24 Parganas
Inclusion of Child Protection in GPDP Funds	1 Gram Panchayat (South 24 Parganas)
Prevention of Child Marriages along with Panchayat, ASHA and Anganwadi workers and district child protection authorities	61 cases prevented

LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES

Prevention of child marriage	22
Addressing cases of domestic violence	3
Prevention of child labour	3
Readmission of Drop-Out Children	11
Child Protection Committees activated	4 Gram Panchayat-level, 5 Ward-level
Leaders in Child Protection Committees	21 leaders in these committees



ACHIEVEMENTS AT A GLANCE

As we look back at 2023-2024, Praajak is proud to highlight a series of transformative interventions that have strengthened our efforts towards creating a safer, more equitable environment for children, adolescents, and youth. These achievements reflect Praajak's continued commitment to improving the lives of children, adolescents, and communities, especially those facing marginalization.

Working with adolescents and youth

Praajak continued its flagship program, *Antariksha*, focused on empowering adolescents and youth to transform their lives and their communities. This program enabled participants to cultivate leadership skills, deepen their understanding of gender, child rights and other social issues, develop the confidence to take proactive steps towards societal change.

Our efforts to build and strengthen community collectives have seen significant success. We worked with 83 boys' groups, 114 girls' groups, and 14 mixed groups, fostering leadership, collaboration, and peer support among adolescents and youth across 5 districts. These groups serve as the foundation for broader community engagement and child protection initiatives.

Engagement of leaders with local stakeholders for child safeguarding and gender equality

Leaders led several local-level engagements with stakeholders aimed at strengthening child protection mechanisms and promoting gender equality. These efforts included the active participation of collective members in Village Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPCs), resulting in increased awareness and action on issues such as child marriage, child labour and gender-based violence.

Capacity building of NGOs and CBOs

As part of a resource consortium with seven other NGOs, Praajak has played a pivotal role in strengthening the capacity of community-based organizations (CBOs). We developed child safeguarding policies for CBOs working on livelihood, climate change, disaster risk reduction, organic farming etc. Through targeted training on child rights, gender equality, and child protection, Praajak helped these organizations integrate child protection principles into their broader community development work.

Praajak is also a part of consortium of organizations in North Bengal. As a resource organization in the tea gardens of North Bengal, Praajak has organized training for member organizations of the consortium on child rights, gender, and child protection laws. These trainings have empowered local organizations to better address issues affecting children and women in tea garden communities, while ensuring compliance with child safeguarding norms.

Preventing Child Marriage

Praajak extended its work in Paschim Bardhaman and Purba Bardhaman to prevent child marriage, engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including local authorities, community members, and youth leaders. These efforts have contributed to raising awareness about the harmful effects of child marriage where stakeholders have played leading roles in reporting and preventing cases of child marriage in their locations

Education and Empowerment in Urban Slum Areas

Praajak expanded its education and empowerment programs in the urban slums of Kolkata, covering three additional wards (81, 82, and 88). This initiative focuses on providing adolescent girls and boys with essential skills in English reading, writing, and speaking, while also conducting sessions on gender equality, gender-based violence, and empowering adolescents to challenge harmful gender norms. Events and community outreach programs have been organized to further raise awareness and foster positive change in these communities.

Sports for Empowerment: Kabaddi as a Tool for Challenging Gender Norms

In 2023, Praajak continued its groundbreaking work using sports, specifically Kabaddi, as a powerful tool for empowering girls and challenging deeply entrenched gender stereotypes. By engaging girls in competitive sports, Praajak has enabled them to break social norms and claim public spaces. This initiative has been instrumental in creating a generation of girls who are more confident and assertive in claiming their rights and fighting gender-based discrimination. Sports (Kabaddi), as a tool for empowerment, has proven to be an effective way to build both individual self-esteem and collective social change.

- **1000 Girls Participating in Kabaddi Leagues**
Praajak facilitated the inclusion of around **1000 girls** from various districts in West Bengal, who were part of district-level Kabaddi teams. These teams played in several leagues, where they not only honed their athletic skills but also built resilience, teamwork, and leadership capabilities.
- **District-Level Competitions Leading to State Championship**
The girls' Kabaddi teams participated in a series of district-level competitions, where they played in local leagues to qualify for the State Kabaddi Championship. This experience allowed the girls to compete at a higher level, build confidence, and challenge the social norms that often limit their opportunities in sports and public life.
- **Breaking Gender Stereotypes and Claiming Public Spaces**
The visibility of girls playing Kabaddi in public arenas not only challenged existing gender stereotypes but also empowered them to take ownership of spaces that are often considered as "male spaces."
- **Leadership and Community Impact**
Many of these girls, empowered by their participation in sports, became role models in their communities. They encouraged other girls to pursue sports, helped challenge regressive cultural attitudes, and led efforts to promote gender equality within their schools and communities.

Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Children

Praajak expanded its work on climate change and its impacts on children, particularly in the Sundarbans region. With support from Terre des Hommes (TDH), we worked closely with local organizations in Patharpratima Block to assess the effects of climate change on children and their communities. Additionally, we extended our reach to Gosaba Block, where we engaged with adolescents from 14 schools to raise awareness about climate change and promote adaptation strategies to safeguard children and youth.

Engagements with State and District Level Bodies

State-Level Initiatives on Alternatives to Detention for Children in Conflict with Law
Praajak was instrumental in organizing the first-ever consultation in West Bengal on alternatives to detention and diversion for children in conflict with the law in collaboration with the Juvenile Justice Committee of the High Court of Calcutta, Department of Women and Child, West Bengal Judicial Academy, West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights and UNICEF. The consultation was attended by Principal Magistrates and social worker members from Juvenile Justice Boards, District Child Protection Units and nodal officers from Special Juvenile Police Units discussing community-based rehabilitation of CCLs where the project implemented by Praajak with support from UNICEF served as a basis for discussion.

Praajak worked with Principal Magistrates and Child Welfare Police Officers (CWPOs) to explore diversion programs and alternatives to formal detention for CCLs from three districts of West Bengal, providing

them with hand holding support, marking a significant step towards ensuring rights of CCLs within the juvenile justice system.

Blue Umbrella Day with West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights Praajak is a member of the international network Family for Every Child. As a part of the network, Praajak participated in the campaign against child sexual abuse of boys on the Blue Umbrella Day. The campaign was organized in collaboration with West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights and was attended by senior government officials from Directorate of Child Rights and Trafficking, nodal officers of Special Juvenile Police Unit, officials from District Child Protection Units, District Inspectors of schools and teachers and students from a few schools. The programme initiated a discussion on reasons of non-reporting of cases of sexual abuse of boys, lack of knowledge and information on ways to deal with cases of child sexual abuse of boys and there was a consensus on the need for initiatives to highlight the issue at different levels of the child protection systems.

Supporting Nomadic Communities in Malda and Paschim Bardhaman Praajak has been actively working with nomadic communities in Malda and Paschim Bardhaman to ensure that children within these communities are included within the child protection mechanisms of the state. Through outreach and block level engagements with officials, Praajak facilitated interactions between nomadic families and Block Development Officers (BDOs), helping them access essential civic amenities and register for Aadhaar cards and other documents critical for accessing social security schemes.

Research Initiatives

Research on Child Sexual Abuse of Boys

Praajak, with the support of the international network *Family for Every Child*, has initiated a groundbreaking research study on child sexual abuse of boys. This pioneering effort focuses on understanding the complexities of disclosure—exploring what encourages or inhibits boys from reporting experiences of sexual abuse during childhood.

The research delves into the lived experiences of adults who faced sexual abuse and harassment as children, shedding light on the profound impact of disclosure (or lack thereof) on their lives. By capturing these nuanced perspectives, Praajak aims to deepen understanding of this under-researched issue and inform strategies that foster safe and supportive environments for boys to speak up and seek help.

Through this initiative, we reaffirm our commitment to breaking the silence and building systems that prioritize healing, protection, and justice for all children.

Amra Pari (We can)

Exploring the mosaic of motivations, emotions and strategies in adolescent agency

This study has been supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation. It is a qualitative study on adolescent agency conducted in the districts of Malda and Murshidabad in West Bengal with 31 participants drawn from a set of adolescents who had won an award in 2021 for successful actions of change within their families and communities. Individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted.

This research looked into the following issues

- Understanding adolescent's agency at multiple levels (individual, family, community, their collectives and in relation to local self-government bodies and administration)
- Agency exercised by adolescents presently in the context of their families and communities
- Limits experienced by adolescents in exercising agency in the context of the family, the community and as citizens
- Support received by adolescents from communities, local self-government bodies and administration in exercising their agency

We remain thankful to our donors for believing in us...

Governing Body Members

President	Ronita Chattopadhyay
Secretary	Savarni Purkayastha
Treasurer	Joydeep Sen
Member	Nandini Ghosh
Member	Veena Lakhumalani
Member	Ramaditya Ray
Member	Himalini Verma
Member	Ranjana Dasgupta

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Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives

Family for Every Child

Kailash Satyarthi Children Fund

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- Directorate of Child Rights and Trafficking
- West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights
- District and block administration, District Child Protection Units in districts of South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda, Paschim Bardhaman, Purba Bardhaman and Jalpaiguri
- Child Welfare Committee: South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda, Paschim Bardhaman, Purba Bardhaman and Jalpaiguri
- Swami Vivekananda State Police Academy
- Police Officials from various police stations in the districts of South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda, Paschim Bardhaman and Jalpaiguri
- West Bengal Judicial Academy
- Juvenile Justice Board, South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri, Purulia and Malda
- Collaborating NGOs and CBOs
- Adolescent and youth groups
- Basanta Utsab Committees
- Governing Body members
- Team members of Praajak