



Praajak

Annual Report 2024–25

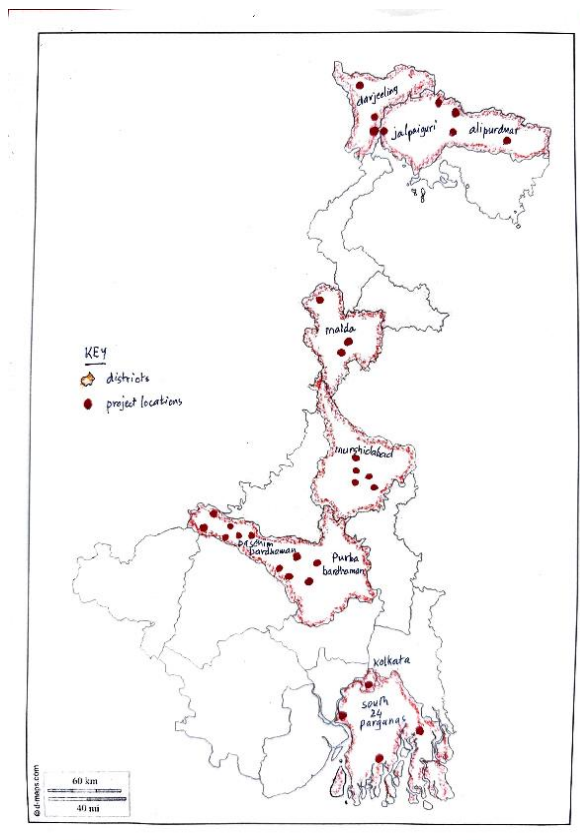


A year of growing voices, stronger communities, and shared accountability

Introduction

Across geographies, Praajak's achievements this year reflect a consistent pattern: children and adolescents stepping into leadership, communities and institutions embracing accountability, and protection systems becoming more responsive and inclusive. Whether through kabaddi matches in Sundarbans schools, Panchayat-led child marriage campaigns in Diamond Harbour, or youth leaders in Siliguri safeguarding their peers, Praajak's work demonstrates that when children are trusted with agency and supported with systems, they not only thrive but also transform their communities.

Map of Project Locations 2024-25





Praajak Impact Snapshot 2024–25

Children & Adolescents

- **2,288 girls** and **1,195 boys** engaged in life skills, gender circles, and sports.
- **716 girls** and **411 boys** attended education support classes.

Families Mobilised

- **1,367 mothers** and **50 fathers** reached through dialogue groups.
- **6 mothers' kabaddi groups** and **24 Basanta Utsav committees** formed — showing parents as leaders of change.

Youth Leadership

- **121 girls' collectives** and **93 boys' collectives** active.
- **98 young women** and **120 young men** leading as volunteer animators.

Geographical Reach

- **10+ districts, 26 urban wards, 24 blocks, 66 gram panchayats.**
- **122 schools** directly engaged.
- **22 activity centres** and **21 kabaddi fields** active across communities.

Community Protection

- **653 child marriages prevented** through Response Centres and community action.

Praajak is building safer, stronger futures by empowering children, supporting families, and mobilising communities.

Over the past year, Praajak has continued to stand alongside children, adolescents, and families across West Bengal and beyond — creating spaces of safety, learning, and leadership. Our work has reached thousands of young people and families, and this impact has only been possible with the support of committed donors, volunteers, and well-wishers like you.

Reaching Children and Adolescents

- **2,288 girls** were engaged in gender circles, life skills, and sports like karate — helping them to build confidence, resist early marriage, and pursue education.
- **1,195 boys** participated in boys' groups that encouraged positive masculinities, peer support, and awareness about gender-based violence.
- Education support classes reached **716 girls** and **411 boys**, ensuring they continue learning despite family or community challenges.

From national-level sports participation to new employment opportunities, children and young people associated with Praajak broke through systemic barriers. In Asansol and Kolkata, adolescent girls competed at district, state, and even national tournaments in kabaddi, athletics, and football—challenging gender norms that restrict girls' mobility. Meanwhile, through psychosocial and legal support, children in conflict with the law were rehabilitated into dignified livelihoods.

Families as Partners in Change

- **1,367 mothers** were mobilised through awareness sessions and collectives. From this, **6 kabaddi groups of mothers** have taken shape — showing how women are reclaiming public spaces and challenging gender roles.
- **24 Basanta Utsav committees** were formed with active participation of mothers — celebrating culture while spreading awareness about child rights and gender equality.
- **50 fathers** also stepped into dialogue groups, signalling small but significant progress in sharing responsibility for children's futures.

Together, these numbers show that mothers and fathers are not only supporting their children — they are becoming **gender-aware community leaders**.

Youth Leadership

- **121 girls' collectives** and **93 boys' collectives** are now active across program areas. These groups are the backbone of Praajak's work, nurturing young leaders who question harmful norms and mobilise their peers.
- **98 young women** and **120 young men** stepped up as *volunteer animators*, leading awareness drives, running gender and Kabaddi sessions for children, mobilising communities through events and campaigns and participating directly in responding to reports of gender-based violence in their communities.

Praajak's approach emphasizes youth leadership as a cornerstone of sustainable change. Whether in rural panchayats or urban schools, young leaders demonstrated courage in addressing harmful practices. In Siliguri, youth leaders directly confronted substance abuse within their school, prompting authorities and police to ban the sale of intoxicants near the campus and enforce disciplinary measures. Their advocacy not only ensured a safer environment but also inspired a rally on de-addiction in their community. In Asansol, their initiative in formation of a local festival celebration committee comprising community

elders especially women gave adolescents direct roles in organizing cultural events, while elsewhere, youth groups successfully intervened to prevent child marriages in their communities.

Geographical Spread & Community Spaces

Praajak's work now spans **over 10 districts of West Bengal**, reaching from Kolkata and South 24 Parganas to Paschim and Purba Bardhaman in the west and Malda, Murshidabad, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri in the north.

- Our programmes covered **26 urban wards in 6 cities and 66 gram panchayats in 24 rural blocks** giving the work both **urban and rural depth**.
- **122 schools** were directly engaged — embedding life skills, gender awareness, and sports into everyday education.
- **134 activity/drop-in centres** provided safe spaces for gender and education sessions, creating a second home for many children.
- **101 kabaddi fields** are now active — where girls and mothers play regularly, shifting local norms about who belongs in public spaces.

Praajak's reach continues to be wide but also deeply rooted in everyday community life. It has successfully created and expanded spaces where children—particularly girls—can learn, play, and lead. In Kolkata, youth collectives accessed new playgrounds free of cost through negotiations with local authorities and schools. In the Sundarbans, 13 schools initiated kabaddi practice sessions and reflection circles, empowering 359 children with resilience, teamwork, and self-confidence. Across Malda and Murshidabad, over 900 girls participated in kabaddi-based life skills sessions, forming 55 teams and discovering new pathways for leadership.

Community Strengthening

- Campaigns against child marriage, child sexual abuse especially sexual abuse of boys and gender violence were carried out across districts by youth leaders, mothers' groups, and local committees associated with Praajak.
- Mothers' kabaddi groups and youth-led collectives have shown that **sports, culture, and dialogue** can become powerful tools for building solidarity and raising awareness.

A hallmark achievement has been influencing local governance and institutions to embed child protection into their systems. In Basuldanga Gram Panchayat, sustained engagement led to the Panchayat declaring itself child-friendly and earmarking ₹100,000 in its development plan for child protection. This investment enabled Panchayat-wide campaigns on preventing child marriage, with adolescents and mothers actively leading cultural programs and awareness drives. The Panchayat Secretary proudly acknowledged that prioritizing children gave the Panchayat a distinctive identity at the block level — demonstrating how institutional will can be galvanized from within the community.

Response Centre Interventions

Our *Response Centres* provided urgent, frontline support to children at risk.

- This year alone, Praajak **prevented 653 cases of child marriage** through timely intervention, counselling, and collaboration with local authorities.
- Families were supported to prioritise education and safety over harmful practices.
- These interventions underline our belief that prevention and response must go hand in hand.

Praajak's response centres in Malda and Murshidabad emerged as hubs of trust and accountability, handling 220 cases of child marriage, violence, and exploitation through structured case management. The "Suraksha Bandhan" campaign expanded community reporting from just 9 to 98 cases of early child marriage in a year. Shakti Sanjog, a state-level federation of youth and community groups, was launched to prevent gender-based violence and mobilized its own resources—over ₹76,000 from 108 local donors—to sustain activities like the Vasant Utsav. These efforts signal a critical shift: protection is no longer seen as the sole responsibility of external agencies but as a shared community mandate. Additionally 650 child marriages were additionally prevented in Purba and Paschim Bardhaman by creating a collaborative network of auxiliary health workers, schools and panchayat officials.

Praajak's work with children in conflict with the law during the year has addressed the cases of 16 boys and girls, ensuring that each child received legal aid, counselling, family engagement, and pathways for education or livelihood. This support system has been built through intensive stakeholder engagement, within the Juvenile Justice system. Key initiatives included training over 500 Principal Magistrates of Juvenile Justice Boards in collaboration with the West Bengal Judicial Academy, and capacity-building of Child Welfare Police Officers and Nodal Officers of Special Juvenile Police Units in collaboration with the Swami Vivekananda State Police Academy. Together, these efforts have strengthened a responsive ecosystem that upholds children's rights and prioritises community-based rehabilitation over detention. The impact of this approach is illustrated through the case of Jarul, whose journey from wrongful imprisonment to stable employment demonstrates how integrated support can transform the trajectory of a young life.

Case Spotlight: Jarul's Journey – From Detention to Dignity

Jarul (name changed), a minor girl, was wrongly placed in an adult prison in Bihar due to errors in age determination. After a year in jail, she was recognised as a juvenile, but her case continued simultaneously in Bihar and West Bengal — leaving her trapped in a complex legal battle.

In 2023, Praajak stepped in. Our team provided **legal aid**, coordinating with lawyers in both states until the Bihar case was dropped. At the same time, we offered **psychosocial counselling** to help J cope with trauma and supported her aunt in creating a stable, caring home.

With guidance, Jarul enrolled in a **Tech Mahindra CSR training programme**, developed new skills, and secured employment. Today she earns around ₹12,000 a month, supports her grandparents' medical needs, and contributes to her household — a powerful step toward independence.

Jarul's story shows why **community-based rehabilitation is a better alternative to detention**. With the right mix of legal support, counselling, family care, and livelihood opportunities, children in conflict with the law can reintegrate with dignity and responsibility.

Integrating Child Rights into Climate Resilience

Praajak also innovated by linking climate change adaptation with child protection and gender equality. Through *Project Sankalpa* in the Sundarbans, over 500 students were trained on gender, disaster risk reduction, and climate resilience, with child cabinets leading initiatives such as World Water Day events, plays on child marriage, and cleanliness drives. Safeguarding and sports-for-protection trainings equipped 237 teachers and ICDS workers with tools to create safer, gender-sensitive schools, while new digital tools like the Empower Plus app connected children to protection services. A key breakthrough was the recognition of menstrual hygiene as central to disaster preparedness, leading schools that serve as relief shelters to stock sanitary pads—an example of how child-led dialogues can inform institutional practices.

Why This Matters for Donors & Partners

- **Adolescent girls are safer and stronger**, with the skills and confidence to take charge of their futures.
- **Boys grow into allies**, challenging harmful gender norms and standing up for equality.
- **Families and communities are engaged**, making change sustainable beyond individual children.
- **Youth leadership is nurtured**, multiplying the impact far beyond what one organisation could achieve alone.
- **Response systems are strengthened**, protecting children in real time from marriage, trafficking, and violence.

Looking Ahead



In the coming year, Praajak will build on what we've achieved and step into new, urgent areas of work:

- **Reaching more boys and young men:** Deepening engagement with boys and male youth to open honest conversations on gender, masculinity, and issues like sexual violence against boys, family violence, suicides, and mental health among boys and men.
- **Responding to climate change:** Recognising how climate crisis is reshaping childhoods, especially in the Sundarbans, we will develop a dedicated programme that also addresses the flow of climate refugees into Kolkata. This will link education, safety, and resilience for children and youth in both rural and urban spaces.
- **Strengthening collective impact:** Expanding consortiums and partnerships with organisations within and outside West Bengal. The *Kabaddi for Empowerment* programme will grow through these alliances, creating more inclusive play and leadership spaces for girls, boys, and mothers.
- **Advocacy and thought leadership:** Raising our voice to influence how children are seen and supported in India by:
 - Promoting **kinship care** as a community-based alternative to institutionalisation.
 - Affirming **adolescent agency**, recognising young people as decision-makers in their own lives.
 - **Decolonising concepts of childhood**, challenging imported narratives that don't match the realities of Indian children.
- **Expanding our reach and leadership:**
 - Mentoring youth leaders to expand gender and sports programmes into remote areas, reaching more girls.
 - Involving more fathers and male caregivers to deepen accountability at home.
 - Strengthening federations of youth and community collectives for long-term sustainability.
 - Partnering with schools, panchayats, and state agencies to scale up the impact of our *Response Centre Programme*.

A Collective Effort

Change at this scale doesn't happen alone. It happens when donors, institutions, and individuals believe in the power of children and youth. Together, we are not just preventing violence or injustice — we are building safer, more equal futures.

