



ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 21

RURAL AID

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From Secretary's Desk...

This Annual Report for 2020-21 is being prepared at that time when the entire world is struggling to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been a real difficult time to continue the field level activities as well as reaching out to the communities owing to countrywide lock down and subsequent restrictions from the government in combating the pandemic situation. The 31st year of Rural Aid has been a real challenge in continuing the field activities and keeping all staff members safe from the attack of corona virus.

The programme activities for this year had started in appropriate manner continuing with previous year interventions. The programmes continued to focus on the marginalized women and children in the tea gardens of Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri Districts of West Bengal. The participation of communities and other stakeholders associated with Rural Aid have enhanced the knowledge and capacities of all concerned in executing the programmes and building resilient communities. Rural Aid as an organization has gained learning experiences through different exposures – organizationally, financially and programmatically, which have enabled the organization to overcome several challenges and paving the path for further development. The organization has been adhering to the Sustainable Development Goals and meaningfully implementing the programmes in contributing to the Goals.

Apart from continuing with the existing programme activities on Health, Nutrition, Education, Child Protection, WASH, Livelihood and Women Empowerment, the organization has stressed significantly on the sensitization of targeted populations across the communities on COVID-19 and subsequent distribution of necessary relief support to the families in difficult circumstances. The outbreak of corona virus has put us additional responsibilities over all associated with Rural Aid to prevent the communities from COVID-19 and guide in the process of keeping safe from the situation.

The donors, supporters and well-wishers of Rural Aid have extended their cooperation to extent possible and helped the organization in reaching out to the communities even under the lock down situation with necessary relief materials.

The amendment in the FCRA norms of Govt. of India has also brought about significant changes in the operational framework of the organization and with all possible efforts, it has been possible to overcome the hurdles. The organization has continued its partnership with District and State administration towards implementation of development programmes.

The support and guidance from the Governing Board members have been effective in executing the programmes and other responsibilities. The participation and support from the staff members, volunteers and of course the donors and supporters have made it possible to execute programmes on ground and involving the communities in the entire process of development. The organization looks forward to overcome all challenges and ensure Rights and Entitlements for the people with all of your continued support and inspiration.

Sutapa Dutta
Secretary

Governing Board

The organization has been operating under the guidance of Governing Board, which is comprised of persons from different backgrounds. The governing board members include:

1. Dr. Sailen Halder, a Medical Practitioner, **President**
2. Mr. Saroj Bandopadhyay, Retd. AGM, State Bank of India, **Vice President**
3. Mrs. Sutapa Dutta, Social Work by profession, **Secretary**
4. Mr. Tapan Kumar Dey, Retired Bank Officer, **Assistant Secretary**
5. Mr. Basabi Rozario, Development Worker, **Treasurer**
6. Mrs. Kshama Sen, Retd. Teacher, **Member**
7. Mr. Musharraf Hussain, Advocate, Kolkata High Court, **Member**

There is a balanced and healthy composition of people from rural and urban locations. The Board members meet on regular basis as per Society's norms and also as per requirement. At the same time, the Board members contribute their time in the organization programme planning, financial tracking and monitoring of field activities. They also maintain necessary liaison with respective donors and supports.

The Organization

Rural Aid was formed in 1987 by a group of enthusiasts of Belpukur village in Kulpi Block of South Parganas. Sovon Dutt along with some likeminded youths of the village initiated the effort to work for the uplift of the area with inspiration from the local High School head teacher. Rural Aid is a registered voluntary organization involved in social action and economic development. It was formed in 1987 and later registered in 1989. It got registered under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) in 1995. The organization is also registered to be entitled to receive Tax Exemption for the donations received under section 12A and 80G of the I.T. Act, 1961. The work of Rural Aid focuses on ensuring the rights of the marginalized and vulnerable sections of the society through sustainable development.

Vision

Rural Aid aspires for a society where values like love, peace with justice, equality and equity will prevail. There will be equitable sharing of resources. People will live in keeping harmony with nature. Empowering the poor and marginalized for Improved Livelihood System and to ensure their equal right.

Mission

To promote self – reliance and sustainability among the reference community by strengthening their organization and promoting and supporting sustainable development initiatives which ensure their livelihood. The organization will work with special emphasis on tribal, women and children. The organization will keep faith on people's knowledge, skill and experience.

Organization Objectives:

- To provide a platform to the community for leading an Equitable and Dignified Life
- To organize and strengthen vulnerable village groups, women, adolescent and children on their Rights and Entitlements through knowledge sharing and empowerment processes
- To sensitize, mobilize and build capacities of the community on Right to Food, Work & Livelihood and in increasing the skill, knowledge, experience, ability, of the common people, and liaison with the System upon the same
- To mobilize and strengthen small and marginal farmers on sustainable organic agricultural practices aiming at Sustainable and Healthy Environment while addressing issues of Climate Change, and Economic Growth and sustenance of these marginal farmers
- To ensure Right to Education with special emphasis on the Girl Child, School Dropouts and children from the Primitive Tribal Groups
- To develop community linkages with the Government for provision of services and entitlements
- To generate awareness and empower community upon personal health and hygiene through Behaviour Change and Communication
- To generate awareness and build capacity of the community, community-based Task Forces and related stakeholders with the Government System upon Climate Change, Sustainable Environment, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
- To generate awareness and capacity against exploitation, harassment, and Rights of the people and children among stakeholders within community and governance
- To create a conducive environment for women & Children for preventing abuse and trafficking/unsafe migration of children and addressing issues of Child Protection through formation and empowerment of responsive Community Based Groups

Operational Reach:



Rural Aid is presently operational in the two districts of North Bengal – Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar

The 3 Blocks being covered under

Blocks	Panchayats	Villages
Kalchini	11	36
Dhupguri	4	8
Madarihat	8	40

operations –

The Target Groups being engaged with and reached - Women, Children, Marginal & Small farmers, Forest Dwellers, Tea- Garden & landless laborers, Person with Disability, Victims of trafficking and disasters and so on belonging to Scheduled Castes /Scheduled Tribes /Other Backward Classes & Below Poverty Line

Programme Intervention

Intervention on Combating Human Trafficking

Project Supported by **Global Fund for Children**

West Bengal is one of the most vulnerable districts in India in terms of human trafficking. Among the 23 Districts, Alipurduar, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Coochbehar, Murshidabad and Nadia experience high instances of human trafficking not only because of their close proximity to Bangladesh & Bhutan, but also because of extreme poverty and lack of alternative livelihoods. All these districts also record the highest denial of rights to women and children. Illiteracy and lack of access to information are other factors that make people vulnerable to the trafficking nexus.

This project has evolved from the above context and Rural Aid has been implementing this project in Kalchini Block of Alipurduar District which is situated at the Indo-Bhutan border for the prevention of child trafficking. The intervention has been undertaken across the Panchayats under Kalchini Block focusing on raising community awareness on trafficking, child rights, gender equality through peer groups, women groups, mobilizing youths and adolescent, SHGs, elected members of local self-government for creating safety nets at community level.

Formation and Strengthening of Adolescent Groups

Formation and strengthening of Adolescent Groups has been done across 10 tea gardens of Kalchini Block, namely:

- Chinchula Teagarden
- Raimatang Teagarden
- Kalchini O/D Teagarden
- Gangutia Teagarden
- Dema Teagarden
- Bhatkawa Teagarden
- Athiabari Teagarden
- Rajabhat Teagarden
- Bhatpara A Teagarden
- Bhatpara B Teagarden



The main primary objective for formation of adolescent groups has been to generate awareness on child protection and particularly on child trafficking, child labour and child marriage issues to strengthen and empower with nurturing them on child rights, gender issue and build the capacity of peer leadership and advocacy among themselves in their own community and village. The formation of Child Protection (CP) Module has supported as guidance for facilitators and adolescent group on the issue of child protection.

Community Level Awareness Meetings

Community level awareness meeting has been organized in 20 villages and tea gardens on child trafficking issues with special focus on gender and human rights perspective. Sensitization events have been organized for the vulnerable communities and families to have an improved understanding on risk, consequences and protective mechanism to combat trafficking.



Apart from the families and community people, ASHA workers, ICDS workers, Panchayat members, teachers and the parents of children have taken part in these meetings.

Sensitization Meeting with PRI members in Kalchini and Garopara Gram Panchayats

Sensitization meetings have been organized with the Panchayat members to discuss and sensitize them on issues of child trafficking, child marriage and child labour. These issues have been identified from the community reflection processes and thus was placed before the Panchayat members for them to take necessary action. The Pradhan of the two Panchayats have agreed to strengthen the Child Protection Committees at the village level and make them functional. The Pradhans have also assured about providing all necessary support in combating human trafficking across the selected tea gardens.



Key Achievements

- a. **Adolescent Children Peers Leadership Building:** The peer leadership capacity building has played significant changes in the lives of adolescent children, where the children have learnt by interaction within their peers on cooperation, collaboration, communication skills and process of mitigating their problems. The process has also helped the adolescents on placing their demands to the Panchayats and other stakeholders.
- b. **Identification of Risk Factors:** The Child Protection module has helped the children to identify multiple risk factors that occur in their own villages and communities. The risk factors include child trafficking, unsafe environment within home and village/ community and abuse.
- c. **Adolescent Capacity Building on Advocacy and Ownership:** This is one of the significant achievements under the project among the adolescent groups. While one of the adolescent groups has collectively shared the issues of unsafe environment in their villages and placed the demand application to their Panchayat member for Street Solar Lights. As a result, the adolescent children group has received the street solar lights for their community.

Innovative Approach

Kiosk Help Desk Operation

The Kiosk Help Desk operation has been started during the month of October 2020 amid COVID-19 under the Kalchini and Garopara Gram Panchayat of Kalchini Block, Alipurdaur District. The kiosk has been set up for providing necessary information on COVID-19 as per government guidelines primarily to children, adolescents and women. At the same time the kiosk is providing necessary relief support to the families. The help-desk is also extending information and linkage about the different government schemes and generating awareness on child protection issues along with basic counselling support to vulnerable children and community people.



Awareness Programme on COVID-19

As we all know the whole world has hit with pandemic of corona virus and effect the livelihood of people in every corner of the countries. The mandatory imposed of



restrictions and lockdown to fought against the virus also impact the result of downfall of economy of every country and increase level of unemployment, failure of health management etc. has also affected the livelihood of common people. The tea gardens have also experienced similar and even much poor situation. The countrywide lockdown has disrupted the livelihood of the people in tea gardens. In this situation, the Rural Aid has taken initiative for awareness programme on COVID-19 following the government guidelines. It includes, health and hygiene, compulsory wearing of mask, process of washing hands following steps of SUMAN K, maintenance of social distance. Apart from awareness, the organization has also distributed masks, hand sanitizer, soaps etc. to communities and put-up awareness posters as well at different points of the communities.



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Practicing Yoga for Adolescent children during Covid:



The ultimate goal of yoga is to help the individual to transcend the self and attain enlightenment. In the core of pandemic situation, the Rural Aid adolescent children group has practiced



yoga to boost up their immunity, reducing stress and inflammations as well as to help fight depression. Regular practice of yoga has also increased feelings of wellbeing, happiness and overall contentment.

Advocacy With Government for The Rights & Entitlements, Through Sustainable Community Organisation Participation Process

Project Supported by **Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA)**

The outbreak of corona virus has affected the people from tea gardens same like other places in the world, however, the situation of lock down has been entirely a new experience for these people. People were compelled to stay back at home due to lock down and it gave rise to domestic violence, abuse & exploitations. A pandemic which impacted every aspect of life was not imagined before. The planning has been developed in pre-corona situation based on achieving the set goals. During this period the people in tea gardens have been acquainted with the system of using mask, sanitizer and keeping safe distances.

Major Activities

- During the reporting period 73 families have been supported with dry ration with help of block administrative, Panchayat & Community leaders. During the distribution all beneficiaries have received dry ration items of rice, cooking oil, salt, soya beans and spices.
- In the COVID period, it has been possible to conduct four meetings with the CBOs and staff members of Rural Aid. These meetings have been effective in orienting 80 members on the



process of resilience and coping up with the post disaster situation. The meetings have also been able to motivate the women for effective management of resources at home and preparation of handmade masks. Apart from this, 40 members have gained additional knowledge on child related issues.

- Orientation about Govt. schemes and programmes including basic minimum services and entitlements, have been organized across 6 villages covering more than 389 participants. These participants have been reached out through 55 meetings organized during this period.



- Nutrition Gardens have been developed and appropriately maintained by 15 households as per the guidance from CASA. Apart from this, the CBO leaders have taken initiative for the same and created 4 nutrition gardens in their respective areas. The orientation process was

organized from CASA and CBO leaders along with project staff members have received the training.

- 120 households across 6 tea gardens have been mobilized and facilitated for home based organic farming and kitchen gardening.
- Awareness generation initiative has been taken for 15 days started from Gangutia Tea Garden in presence of the Panchayat Pradhan of Garopara Gram Panchayat. Two Panchayat members along with other community people did miking along the communities and also took initiative in cleaning the garbage near the Tea Garden, Hospital, Primary School and ration shop. Bleaching powder has been sprayed by the people engaged in NREGA. The initiated has been carried out in 5 tea gardens where at least 10 to 12 people were present in each village for awareness generation.
- Hygiene kits comprised of Soap, Hand Towel, Tooth Brush, Paste, Cotton Roll, Sanitary Napkin, Mirror, Detergent Powder and Phenyl have been distributed among 105 families across 6 villages. Apart from this, Buckets, Mosquito Nets and Torches have been distributed among 130 families. In addition to this, 40 families have been provided with strings, community kitchen items, utensils, and plastic sheets for setting up separate tent for COVID patients.
- Community Help Desk has been started across all the intervention villages with support from the respective Panchayats and local stakeholders. People have been accessing these help desks to know about COVID and related issues of preventive health care aspects. The help desks are being facilitated by the staff members of Rural Aid.
- Community demands for disaster risk reduction have been placed from 5 villages under the Gram Panchayat Development Plan to the respective Gram Panchayats.

Education, Health and Hygiene of the Beneficiaries and Climate Change

Project Supported by **Fondazione L'Albero della Vita (FADV)**

The project is taken up by the Rural Aid in 2015. The project intervenes in the 6 tea gardens and focuses on two thematic areas, Education, Health and Hygiene of the beneficiaries and Climate Change. The children covered under this project belong to the families whose daily income is less than Rs.200 per day. The parents of the beneficiaries are the workers of the unorganized sector, who work as tea garden laborers, daily laborers, rickshaw pullers and construction workers. The families of the beneficiaries reside in one room shelters made of mud and bamboo, which has neither electricity nor running water, the shelters are exposed to humidity and hard

rains in the monsoon season. These environmental conditions lead to infectious diseases due to the consumption of unsafe drinking water, lack of toilets, health and hygiene services, and to malnutrition. Children are the ones who suffer the most. Yet, most of these families are not covered under the BPL list (Below Poverty Line), and hence, cannot access most of the government schemes and facilities meant to secure livelihood and housing. Hence, it is very difficult to convince the families to send their children to school, instead of sending them to work. Even after enrolment of the children in school, it is difficult to retain them.

So far, Rural Aid has provided free tuition classes to more than 800 numbers of children from the project intervention location. In the year 2020, the project supported 270 children at the beginning however, again from the month of January, the project started supporting 50 new children. Hence, in the year 2020-2021 Rural Aid supported 220 children in 2021 from 6 Tea Gardens under the Blocks of Dhupguri, Chalsa from Jalpaiguri District and Madarihat and Nagarkata Blocks from Alipurduar District. In the year 2021, 49 children are being preparing to give their Class X board examination and 17 numbers of children are preparing for their Higher Secondary board examination.

Major Activities

Remedial Tuition Classes

Due to lack of quality education in and around the government schools of tea garden, it is



realized that the children have been encountering many challenges regarding their school subjects matter especially in Mathematics and English. Hence, Rural Aid with the support of FADV started 4 remedial tuition classes for the children with special emphasis on Mathematics and English at Lakhikanto Tea Garden, Huldibari Tea Garden and Gairkata Tea Garden. There are 3 specialized Mathematics teacher, 1 English teacher and 1 special teacher for

toddlers who had been recently joined the project. Presently, there are 147 numbers of children who are availing these remedial tuition classes on English and Mathematics, and 50 numbers of children are attending the classes of our special toddlers' teachers. However due to the

pandemic, the situation compelled to suspend the tuition classes in the March, 2020 and from the Month of May, 2020, the tuition classes resumed through online mode and for those who did have smart phones the teachers paid home visit to those children and provided classes of 30 mins or one hour to each child as per their convenience.

Providing Quarterly Supplementary Education Materials, Nutrition and Hygiene Kits

Every year the children supported by the project being provided with the supplementary education materials to cover up the burden of hidden cost of education from their parents, supplementary nutritional packs to prevent malnourishment and other health hazards



along with toiletries kits to promote hygienic life



style to prevent communicable diseases. In the year 2020-2021, 220 children were provided with the said supplementary materials.

COVID-19 Relief Materials Distribution at the Project Location by Rural Aid

COVID-19 and nationwide lockdown had crippled the lives of people all over the world. In our country we saw the worst scenario, we saw people dying and losing their jobs. In all these chaos marginalized people were the one who suffered the most. Community people of our project location were hit in the same way, Tea Gardens were closed and all other means of livelihood were ceased by the nationwide lockdown, most of the people from the project intervention locations are the dependent of daily wages. Hence, in the month of July, the



project distributed Nutrition and hygiene kits to most vulnerable 400 families of the locality. The following are the materials provided to these 400 families.

Awareness on COVID-19

Although it was not possible to gather community people for the awareness campaign during the time of pandemic however our peers' group initiated the poster making campaigns. Many of our children drew the pictures that convey the messages of COVID-19 awareness and they shared those pictures with their friends and community people through online mode. Our team members paid home visit to our beneficiaries and their locality to spread the awareness



regarding COVID-19 precaution measure as well as to educate them with the local remedies to boost their immunity. This year we were able provide awareness to more than 600 beneficiaries directly and more than 2000 people had been educated regarding COVID-19 indirectly.



Adolescent Peers Groups

It is a vital part of the project through which the organisation carried out all the above-mentioned activities. There are 4 adolescent peer groups in the project and they have strong cabinet which they elect democratically in every 6 months. They take active part in the activities of the projects. They have an important role to play during the events that are being organized and they take active participation in the decision-making process as well. Apart from that, they are actively spreading awareness on Child Marriage, Child Labour, Climate Change in their communities at Lakhikanto Tea Garden, Huldbari Tea Garden and Gairkata Tea Garden.



However, during this year they did not get enough opportunities to organize programmes due to the pandemic and the nationwide lockdown. This year they played an active role in spreading awareness regarding COVID-19 by poster making and circulating those posters through online mode.

Health Camps

As the tea gardens are over populated and with the existence poor hygiene practices, lack of safe drinking water, toilets and existing malnourished children, the tea garden community are vulnerable to infectious diseases. To counter these problems, the project has conducted community health camps with the help of professional medical practitioners and the health camps particularly for the children on a quarterly basis. Unfortunately, during this year due to pandemic it was only possible to conduct one health camp as there were imposition of nationwide lockdown as well as restriction for gathering people. The health camp was organized at Baseline, Gairkata and 268 community people benefitted by the said health camp. Free medicines were distributed to the patients.



Mindfulness Practice Through Meditation and Other Extra-Curriculum Activities



Mindfulness has become a critical part of the child development. Hence, to encourage mindfulness and critical thinking among children, every week they practice meditation and debates among themselves across all the activity centres which are located in Lakhikanto Tea Garden, Huldibari Tea Garden and Gairkata Tea Garden. Counselling is another essential part of the project. Counselling support is being provided to parents and children as need based support.

During the pandemic and restrictions this year several art therapy sessions with the children have been conducted to keep track of their emotional hygiene.

Protection of Rights of Children and Youth Through Education and Active Participation of Children and Youth

Project Supported by **Terre des Hommes(TdH)**

This project has been started from January 2021 with the purpose to provide education support to most vulnerable children for preventing them from being school dropout and at the same time community-based protection mechanisms has been strengthened to protect children from joining labour force, early marriage and trafficking particularly during the pandemic of COVID-19. The project is being implemented across Kalchini Block of Alipurduar Distirt.

The intervention is reaching directly to 400 children, 150 youth and 350 adults across the 5 tea gardens.

Major Activities

Children and youth are active in their community and in partner organization for the promotion of child rights and protection of environment.

Mass Awareness / Sensitization of parents and community members on Child Rights and environment protection:

Sensitization of parents of children and youth and community members on Child Rights and environment protection have been started. Through these activities they are also been oriented on child rights, violations of the rights of the children and mechanism available to address the same. Additionally, parents and community members are also sensitized on environment protection, importance of environment protection and its relation to

child rights. In this context, 5 Children Clubs have been formed in five tea gardens of Kalchini Block and training on child rights and environment protection 'Child Clubs' – a community-based space for children has been formed in 5 tea gardens. Children come together and learn about Child Rights with a special focus on Child Protection during the pandemic of COVID-19. Through participating in different activities, children would become active and collectively raise their voices for the protection of their rights. Children will be trained on various facets of child rights and protection of environment.

Formation and Capacity Building of Youth Groups for Effective Collaboration with National Youth Council:

We have formed four youth groups at the teagarden and are encouraged to form groups and strengthening of these groups will be done on a periodical basis. Focus will be given on the capacity building of youth on child rights, protection of environment and available Government schemes and entitlements. So that youth members can spread awareness on child rights, importance of environment protection and about availability of different government schemes in their community. The members of youth group will also actively collaborate with the national youth council.

Ensuring access to and continuation of essential education for children: Ensure continuity of education in COVID Pandemic

Formation and Operating Five Education Centres

Education centres are functional in 5 tea gardens with average 30 - 40 students in each centre. Children studying in the Grade of VI to VII has been selected from the most vulnerable families. Educational inputs have been provided according to the school curriculum. In most of the cases these children are first generation learners therefore it is difficult for them to avail support at home for their studies. Hence, this support has opened up the window for

them to sustain their interest in studies.

Distance Learning During School Closure

To ensure continuity in education along with to reduce financial burden of providing educational materials for parents, educational materials (Exercise Books, Pen, Pencil and Chart Papers) has been provided to 400 identified vulnerable children for the continuation of School and Education Centre.

Individual Follow up during closure of schools and periodical Assessment of students

Periodic assessment would be done for all the children enrolled in the SECs. This process would help to understand the level of improvement of the children and make necessary modifications in the transaction of the curriculum etc.

Development of Teaching Learning Materials:

Child friendly or activity-based Teaching Learning Materials has been developed in local language for the children of tea gardens so that they can continue their education in their local language without any hindrance.

Vulnerable / at risk children and youth are able to access community-based child protection mechanisms: Prevention from COVID Impact

Tracking of Children during lockdown situation to ensure their safety

Regular home visits or keeping contacts over phone with all the children supported through Child Club and Education Centre by the project team members or by the youth members to ensure safety of the children.

Sensitization among parents, children and youth on available protection mechanisms

After the closing of tea gardens, workers have lost their income and started migrating to other states for employment. Parents of children and youth are made aware of

available Government Livelihood Schemes and Safe Migration to stop violation of child rights.

Awareness of children, youth and community on COVID prevention measures

Considering the low level of awareness among most members of the targeted beneficiaries regarding COVID-19, various awareness generation initiatives have been organized regarding wearing masks, vaccination, and sharing numbers of Block and District toll free numbers for necessary help.

Extension of nutritious food support to most vulnerable families:

School closure has brought the entire Mid-Day-Meal Scheme into a difficult situation and children were deprived of nutritious food. Through this project, nutritious food support has been provided to the 400 children.

Extension of support with Health Kit for COVID prevention to children and youth:

To protect children and their families from COVID-19, a Health Kit containing Sanitizer, Mask, Disinfectant, Soap, etc. has been provided to 300 children.

Psycho-social Support for the youths, teachers and facilitators:

During pandemic situation youths, teachers and facilitators have taken up an important role in keeping children safe and ensuring continuation of their basic education. Teaching students through distance learning and taking up different sessions remotely teachers and facilitators are facing different sorts of difficulties and challenges in this critical situation along with youth members. Apart from those 3 days online psychological support has also been provided to the children for better coping up with family members during pandemic.

Interventions towards the Quality of Education for 6-11 years Children in 6 villages

Project Supported by **WIPRO**

COVID-19 has badly affected the life of people in every corner of the world and it has also impacted the life in the region of Kalchini Block, Alipurduar District. The children in the tea gardens have suffered the most and long closure of schools has also affected their lives as they have no connection with regular studies, which has also affected their mental health as well. The risks of exploitation and abuse have become higher than ever for all children. Children in the tea gardens could not access online education facilities due to poor economic situation and not having smartphones. Those who could arrange for smartphones, do not have adequate resources for recharging the internet facility for the phone. At the same time, the learning centres of Rural Aid had to be suspended considering the pandemic situation and following government restrictions. Although, there was much need for continuous educational support for the children to be within the sphere of education and ensure that they rejoin schools when it reopens after the pandemic.

The organization took the initiative to provide remedial education support in open air location from July 2020, maintaining all COVID protocols. The organization took general initiative and organized awareness on prevention of COVID-19, since initial stage of pandemic at the interior part of all tea gardens, Indo-Bhutan Gate (International Boarder) and Railway stations. Rural Aid also created awareness especially to the children, youth and community in all the tea gardens of

Kalchini block following the guide line of government for covid-19, such as maintaining social distance, wearing of mask, using of sanitizer, awareness on health and hygiene etc. to ensure safety of whole community during this pandemic period.

A core resource team has been formed for imparting quality education to children of Class I to V grades across 6 villages. Activity based classroom transaction process has been followed including interactive learning inputs for the children in 6 government schools.

- **Learning Outcome**

Considering the challenges owing to pandemic, it was difficult to set the learning outcomes for the children. In doing so, the school teachers and education team members of Rural Aid have been consulted and a revised plan of action for classroom transaction has been prepared in terms of learning outcomes and syllabus dividing the students in three learning levels for language, mathematic and EVS. All the primary schools remained closed thus the learning centres have been operational at open spaces and ICDS centres.



The Rural Aid team has been working with the school teachers on preparations of TLMs. All the



question papers and worksheets have been shared with the children. Follow up of the children have been done at their doorstep to understand about how they have been doing with the worksheets. At three levels Rural Aid team members have developed the activities to make all the children Independent Reader and Writer and Basic Numeracy as per their levels on redesigning the activities on oral work, reading, Phonics and writing. This

would be based on continuation and keeping in mind the last year activities. Door to door visits were done how children were doing their worksheets. Mid-day meals were also distributed to the children.

- **Awareness and IEC:**

Parents and Community meetings (maintaining social distancing) door to door visits, meeting with shopkeepers and street vendors on preventive measures of COVID 19 as well as have been conducted for spreading of awareness on



COVID-19 through health camps and using government provided IEC materials and tools, the awareness on social distancing and hygiene practices in close liaison with health care workers, Gram Panchayat, Tea Garden Management and other stake holders.

- **Psychosocial Support to Children**

Psychosocial counseling support has been provided to the children of tea gardens for better coping up with their mental health related issues namely anxiety, panic attack, fear, including spanking of beating children or using harsh language to children by parents etc. due to social isolation, economic hardship, loss of livelihood and limited scope of job opportunity.



- **Child Club**



Child Clubs have been formed in the tea gardens to create a child safe environment in their respective communities. During the pandemic situation, the risk of child vulnerabilities has increased and children have been facing violence, abuse & exploitations at home. Since the tea gardens are located at the Indo-Bhutan border thus the chance of trafficking and related vulnerabilities have increased to a great extent. The situation has become

more difficult as several families have lost their occupations during the pandemic and risk of vulnerabilities have increased to a greater extent. The organization has taken initiative to strengthen the Child Clubs so that the children can prevent themselves and also prevent their peers from such vulnerabilities and also report back to the team members of Rural Aid. Child Club members have been involved for awareness generation and following up with other children.

Success Stories

Saved Life of an Adolescent Girl

A 12-year-old girl was saved and placed in safe custody of the government by the Rural Aid team during the month of February – March, this year. The girl was trafficked to Gangtok from Alipurduar almost 3 years back. She belongs to Bharnobari, Somraline, Hasimari and was engaged as domestic child labour. She was sent for work by her mother against monetary transaction. The agent also belongs from her own community and had been able to convince the parents. The parents work in tea gardens and are alcoholic. The agent took the advantage of the poor economic condition of the family and took her for work. The parents also sent their 3 sons and one daughter for work outside their locality. This girl tried to escape from her work location and could manage to reach Siliguri. The

Rural Aid team members could trace her at Hasimara bus stand.

The girl was handed over to her parents in presence of the Panchayat member and police. Counselling sessions could reveal that the parents were involved in the trafficking process of their children.

The Rural Aid staff thus submitted the information letter to Additional Chairperson of Child Welfare Committee, Coochbehar and after necessary investigation, the girl has been placed with child care institute under safe environment. Timely identification and subsequent action from Rural Aid team members could save the girl from re-trafficking.

Reunited an Adolescent Girl from being Trafficked

This is an incident of a 12-year-old girl Sita (name changed) who was missing from her locality and later on found through Rural Aid team members with support from their Adolescent Children Group members. The incident took place during end of August 2021 at the Bhatkhawa Teagarden, Kalchini Block. The girl was found 3 days after her missing from the locality at the Hamiltonganj Bus Stand in Kalchini.

It was on the last day of August, the mother of Sita informed the adolescent children group members of Rural Aid about missing of her daughter. She had scolded her daughter for playing game and talking with a boy for over 20 minutes as a result her daughter felt hurt and left home on same day afternoon and didn't return back home in the evening. The adolescent girls group members facilitated the lady to lodge FIR at the local police station and subsequently informed the staff member of Rural Aid.

With the support and follow up of Police, Parents, Relatives, Rural Aid Adolescent Children group and Rural Aid staff, the missing girl Sita was found with her own aunt on 2nd Sept'21 at the bus stand of Hamiltonganj along with another unknown person (whom so called 'uncle'). Sita's aunt wanted her to go back home while the unknown person denied handing over the girl to her. Looking at the situation, the aunt clicked the photo of the unknown person and warned him that, if he doesn't send the girl back to her home, she will send the photo to the Police Station and with the fear of Police, the unknown person sent the girl near to her home.

After returning to home, Sita mentioned that the unknown person had taken her to his house was planning to traffic her to Kathmandu but due to lack of documentation, the initial purpose could

not be served. She was then taken to Hamiltoganj for preparation of documents, where she was identified by her aunt and subsequently been rescued. With the help of

police and Rural Aid adolescent group members & staff, she could be reunited with her family.

Aryan's Initiative to Support Family Economy

A student of Class – X, preparing for board examination, Aryan could realize the fact of economic challenges of his family, comprised of both parents along with 2 younger brothers and 2 younger sisters. His parents are casual worker at the local Garikata Tea Garden with inconsistency of income. The family runs through an extreme economic crisis. The situation became more difficult during the nationwide lockdown and at that time Aryan decided to start something of his own through which he can support his parents. He first tried to start during the first phase of the lockdown but due to some other reasons, it was not possible for him to move ahead.

He along with his 2 friends have managed to collect Rs. 3000/- and with that they have bought 3 pigs and also built-up piggery farm. They were planning for increasing the number of pigs but some unprecedented animal flu around the region attacked the pigs in their location. They could hardly save their pigs and trying to reviving back with the existing 3 pigs. They are expecting to sell the 3 pigs at least at price of Rs. 50,000/- and also planning to expand their business by procurement of more pigs in the second turn.

This is how Aryan along with his friends have been planning for supporting their families and also continuing their studies. Rural Aid is encouraging these youth members to come forward and take up entrepreneurship in their localities and set example for others to start some businesses.



Partners in Solidarity

1. West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights (WBCPCR)
2. District Magistrate, Alipurduar District
3. District Social Welfare Officer, Alipurduar District
4. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Alipurduar District
5. District Health and Family Welfare Department
6. Alipurduar District Police
7. Panchayats of All Intervention Locations
8. Tear Garden Management
9. Global Fund for Children
10. WIPRO Foundation
11. Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA)
12. Fondazione L'Albero della Vita (FADV)
13. Childline India Foundation
14. Terre des Hommes (TdH)
15. West Bengal Right to Education Forum



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