

RURAL AID



ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

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From Secretary' Desk



After two struggling years of pandemic, activities have started taking its pace gradually and the hard work of the entire Rural Aid team has enabled us to overcome all the challenges. The entire team of Rural Aid has taken multiple initiatives to cater to the needs of the underprivileged communities at the programme intervention locations and their tireless efforts have yielded strong relationship with the communities and further strengthened the bonding as well. The field programme activities have been conducted to the extent possible following the COVID norms.

The communities have also extended necessary cooperation in organizing the field programmes and such support has enabled us to overcome the pandemic challenges. The programmes have been implemented among the marginalized women, adolescents 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.

Significant effort has been made to bring about convergence among the different programme interventions and also strengthening liaising with the concerned government departments. The donors, supporters and well-wishers of Rural Aid have extended their cooperation and helped in reaching out to the communities even under the lock down situation.

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. Alope Kumar Maji, Self Employed, Member

The Organisation

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.

V I S I O N

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.

M I S S I O N

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

Geographical Reach

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



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

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

Special Education Support Programme

FADV

In the process of ensuring access to quality education and subsequent continuation of school studies, special coaching support programme has been extended to 220 children in Lakhikanto, Huldibari and Gairkata Tea Garden areas under Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal covering 220 children and adolescents. Considering the COVID pandemic, classes were conducted mostly over online modes and subsequent to that constant follow up and home visits have been made by the field team to ensure their regular participation and mitigating any learning difficulties.

64 days of special classes on English and Mathematics and 96 days of normal tuition classes were provided to the children at four activity centres covering Basaline, Tinline, Huldibari and Lakhikanto areas.

Due to COVID-19 second wave coaching classes were of April to July, 2021. During these period of time children were facilitated through online classes and frequent house visit by the respective teachers. Monthly mock test of all the beneficiaries children were taken and kept to track their progress records. Children have been provided with required educational materials for continuation of their studies during the last year. This has helped the children to keep up their interest towards studies and attend the coaching classes regularly.



Programme Intervention

Community Support Programme

FADV

- 601 numbers of beneficiaries were provided with the food items, educational materials and hygiene materials in Lakhikanto, Huldibari and Gairkata tea garden areas.
- 1215 numbers of sanitary napkins were provided to targeted adolescent girls.
- 1100 masks have been distributed across the intervention communities.
- Children and adolescents were provided with the mental health supports through various recreational activities such as drawing, peers group meeting, poster making activities, masks making activities.
- More than 2500 community people have been sensitized regarding COVID-19 preventive behaviors as well as guided them regarding home based remedies to boost their immunity through community meetings, poster making by peer group, distribution of COVID-19 preventive materials and house visit.
- 3 community health camps were organized during this year at Gairkata Tea Garden, Lakhikanto Tea Garden and Huldibari Tea Garden respectively. More than 300 community people of these tea gardens benefitted by the health camps. Free medicines were distributed to all the beneficiaries as per the doctor's prescription.



Pursuing Studies and Growing up with Kitchen Garden

Shyam Bara studies in class X and he is preparing for his class X final board examination. He lives with his parents and his younger brother at Basaline, Gairkata Tea Garden. Both of his parents work as a temporary tea garden labour at Gairkata Tea Garden. Being an elder son of his household, he has many responsibilities over household work. There was unused land in the backyard of their house and Shyam was planning to utilize those land for a quite some time. He was in regular touch with our project team and receiving technical knowledge from the team member regarding how he can utilize those unused land. Recently, he decided to practice kitchen garden in his spare time at his backyard and the project team member supported him with the technical knowledge. Now, he is cultivating several vegetables at his Kitchen Garden such as Spinach, varieties of beans, Brinjal, Tomato, Chilly, Pumpkins, Garlic etc. He uses these vegetables for household consumption as well as he provides support to his neighbors by sharing his production. It helped his family to have some amount of money saving as they do not need to spend money on purchasing of vegetables. Shyam has demonstrated very good example of self-reliant and sustainability to us, to his friends and to neighbors as well. We wish him very best on his upcoming production.



Programme Intervention

Pursuing Studies and Evolving as Fine Arts Artist

FADV

Mukul Rajak is a student of class XII. He studies in Kendriya Vidyalaya, Binnaguri. His father runs a small shop for laundry at Dhugguri. His mother is a homemaker. He has 2 younger sister who are also studying in class IX and X respectively. His older sister has got married.

Mukul Rajak is a very good "fine artist". He started doing Art from the very young age. While he was studying in class VI at Mount Carmel School, he participated in Art competition for the first time however he could not manage to be in any position. However, he kept his passion for Art intact. He was struggling to showcase his talent due to lack of opportunity to provide him with the platform. As he is a self-taught Artist and all the Art competition organized outside has to go through some Art Teachers' recommendation however while he was studying in class VIII, the local club of his region organized an Open Art Competition and he grab the opportunity to showcase his talent and He managed to achieve the 3rd position in that Open Art Competition. From there on he has never given up its passion for Art.



These days, he has started his own YouTube channel to showcase his talents where he posts the videos of his work. So far, he has 130 subscribers to his channel and the highest numbers of views in his video is 350 views in the video entitled "Forest Scenery Mountain". He is planning to dedicate more time in making Art and Videos for his YouTube channel in future. He is also thinking of study "Art" as his bachelor and master degree.

He had also secured 2nd position in District Level Yoga Competition while he was in class VII. His other hobbies are playing Chess and Football.

Link to his YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI3FLroDm69Q9ldIgeIDsKg/videos>

Programme Intervention

Community Support Programme

The planned activities of this intervention were modified considering the outbreak of COVID-19 and continuing pandemic. During this period, several people have lost their livelihood. The contractual labourers and daily wage earners suffered the most. The people in the tea gardens have been impacted out of this situation in a greater way. Large number of migrant labourers returned to native places at the tea gardens.

Subsequent to this, all the educational institutes remained closed and some of the school buildings were converted into quarantine centres for the COVID affected persons. The government had started E-Classes but majority of the children could not access such online class facilities due to non-accessibility of the smartphones.



Access of basic services in the tea garden areas of Kalchini Block

Communities in this Block has been sensitized on their entitlements and basic rights due from the government. They were not aware about their basic rights and accordingly were missing their access to the services from the government. In this context, Rural Aid team has sensitized people and facilitated them to get access to services under different schemes and programmes of the government.

- 12 sensitization activities have been conducted of public distribution services and it has helped 24 families to get their ration card and services from the government.
- 239 households have been facilitated to access their right under the MGNREGA programme.
- 176 women have applied for 'Laxmi Bhandar' scheme and till last year 53 women have been able to receive monthly cash transfer of one thousand rupees per month.
- 60 households have been facilitated to start kitchen garden in their respective areas using organic manure and improved cultivation practices.

People's organisations with active participation of women carried out collective actions to implement livelihood programs

- More than 5 community based organizations of which at least 60% are women got engaged to address critical livelihood issues at Block and District level.
- The Help Desk set up for the communities, have registered 123 cases where community people have faced with challenges in accessing the services under different schemes and programmes of the government.
- Help Desk started in 3 villages namely Dalshingpara, Subhasini & Gangutia with the help of PRI, Local level stakeholder at respective village. This is functional properly and people are coming and reporting their problems and also known to community about the COVID health guidelines by the community leaders and organisation staff.

Programme Intervention

Railway CHILDLINE is a project of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. CHILDLINE India Foundation is a non-government organization (NGO) in India that operates a telephone helpline called Childline, for children in distress. It is India's first 24-hour; toll free, phone outreach service for children.

CHILDLINE

CHILD LINE 1098 is National 24x7 emergency outreach service for children in need of care and protection linking them for services for their long-term care and rehabilitation of any child or concerned adult on behalf of the child. The Railway CHILDLINE tackles issues related to trafficking, begging, child labor and child abuse, and more such issues related to runaway children. When a case of a child received from CHILDLINE call centers immediate action is taken to rescue a child take his/her details, medical checkup of the child and guide the child to appropriate welfare center on the case by case basis Alipurduar Child Welfare Committee (CWC), and Shelter Homes at for shelter of children.

Rural Aid has been functioning as the CHILDLINE Collaborative Organization from October 2018 in Alipurduar Junction Railway station to provide 24 hours emergency services for children in need of care and protection. The twelve member team has been working in the Alipurduar Junction Railway station premises and take care of three Railway stations New Alipurduar Station, Court Station, Alipur station with support from 3 police stations to deal with Child in Need of Care and Protection cases in Alipurduar.

- **Street children and youth living alone on the streets.**
- **Child labourers working in the unorganized and organized sectors.**
- **Domestic help, especially girl domestics.**
- **Children affected by physical / sexual / emotional abuse in family, schools or institutions.**
- **Children who need emotional support and guidance.**
- **Children of commercial sex workers.**
- **Child victims of the flesh trade**
- **Victims of child trafficking.**
- **Children abandoned by parents or guardians.**
- **Missing children.**
- **Run away children.**
- **Children who are victims of substance abuse.**
- **Differently-abled children.**
- **Children in conflict with the law.**
- **Children in institutions.**
- **Mentally challenged children.**
- **HIV/ AIDS infected children.**
- **Children affected by conflict and disaster.**
- **Child political refugees.**
- **Children whose families are in crisis.**



Programme Intervention

Awareness and Sensitization Programme

CHILDLINE

Rural Aid is committed to and priorities Child Protection as a critical area of concern and works towards creating a protective environment for children. There is a dire need to ensure that Child Protection is understood and practiced by all who are stakeholders in



ensuring the rights of a child. Catalyzing allied systems including the Police, Health Care Organizations, Education Institutions, Transport Undertakings, Telecom Media, NGOs who have a large stake in Child Protection is vital to a more sensitive and proactive society. The NICP (National Initiative for Child Protection) is one such need based initiative implemented at a country wide scale. These sensitization and awareness workshops are carried out with Police, RPF, GRPs, Vendors, Parents, Teachers, Schools, Students and children. Awareness in CHILDLINE is part of our 'work'. The success of CHILDLINE is measured not just by the number of calls in a city but also by the levels of awareness. CHILDLINE awareness strategies aim at empowering children to dial 1098 when in crisis, building partnerships across society where each one has a role to play in protecting children, and advocating for children. A summary The CHILDLINE awareness and brand strategy is uniform and solidly built on principles of social marketing. It reaches out to children, the Allied Systems, the corporate sector, concerned individuals and thereby the community at large. The aim of creating awareness about CHILDLINE is to ensure CHILDLINE 1098 is the service across the country associated with quality services for child protection through meetings, displays, sensitization, posters, stickers etc.

Open House

This is being arranged every month in different locations and on different dates to reach out to children and for that the venue is being kept easily accessible to all children. The open house sensitization camp is also being attended by the adults in & around the event locations. It helps breaking the ice makes the children more comfortable. The focus is issues raised by children and it is CHILDLINE's responsibility to give children the space to raise voice regarding the problems they are facing. It allows space or platform for the CHILDLINE team along with the children to identify solutions to problems.

Childline Outreach - 51
Govt. Railway Police - 02
Railway Protection Force - 18
Referred by other NGO - 05

**Cases Managed
in Last Year**

Referred by Passenger - 01
CWC Production - 01
Medical Support - 01
Total Cases - 79

Programme Intervention

GFC

Trafficking in persons for labor and sexual exploitation is widespread and serious problem in India. According to the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) Report, West Bengal is the state most vulnerable to human trafficking. Among the 2500 child trafficking cases reported during 2006 to 2010, 900 were from West Bengal. The districts like Alipurduar, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling Coochbehar, Murshidabad and Nadia experiences high instances of 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. In the wake of this critical context, Rural Aid has therefore decided to implement a project in the Alipurduar and the Block is situated at the Indo Bhutan border for the prevention of child trafficking. For project implementation the Kalchini Block has been targeted at the Gram Panchayat areas for raising community awareness on trafficking, child rights gender equality etc through peer groups, women groups, mobilizing youths and adolescent, SHGs, elected members of local self-government for creating safety nets at community level. Rural Aid intends to help the communities and vulnerable families and children for legal assistance.



Strengthening the capacity of Adolescent Children's group at Community level

The Strengthening the capacity of adolescent children's group at community level of 10 Teagarden of Kalchini Block, covering i) Chinchula Teagarden, ii) Raimatang Teagarden, iii) Kalchini O/D Teagarden, iv) Gangutia Teagarden, v) Dema Teagarden, vi) Bhatkawa Teagarden, vii) Athiabari Teagarden, viii) Rajabhat Teagarden, ix) Bhatpara A Teagarden and x) Bhatpara B Teagarden.

The primary objective for formation of children group is to generate the awareness of child protection on child trafficking, child labour and child marriage to strengthen and empowerment 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. About 20 meetings in each month has been organised with the children across the 10 tea gartetns

Child Newsletter

Child Newsletters has been an initiative taken up by adolescent children group of Rural Aid to explore and widen their good thoughts and develop their self-empowerment and self-confidence. In these newsletters of children, adolescent has explored and expressed their experience during COVID-19 pandemic in their teagardens, their skills, hobbies and ambition etc.



Community Level Awareness Meeting: Community level awareness meeting was organized in 20 villages/teagarden on child trafficking issues with special focus on gender and human rights perspective and also aware and sensitization the vulnerable communities and families to have an improved and identify the knowledge on risk, consequences and protective mechanism against trafficking. In every community level meeting the participants of Asha workers, ANM workers, ICDS workers, Panchayat members, teachers and the parents of children were participated in meeting.

Programme Intervention

Rural Aid organisation had organised the “Child Interface Program” with the theme based on Learning and Sharing among the adolescent children on good thoughts on about their village, good habits practices, achievement of group and resources etc and activities of the 10 tea gardens of Kalchini Block, Alipurduar District. The participants on this programme were with adolescents and facilitators of Rural Aid. During the programme the adolescents have effectively learnt and shared among each other on different success stories, work done in children group, the cases of child protection, awareness and effective messages of social media through video clips etc. The work of group division discussion of problem and solution finding by themselves, the presentation of sharing also played the vital role in learning and experience in children.



GFC

Child Interface Programme



Exposure Visit



Rural Aid organisation has organised the “Exposure Visit at Kalchini Police Station and Garopara Gram Panchayat (GP) at Kalchini Police Station, Kalchini Block, Alipurduar district in the presents of Police and Pradhan of Gram Panchayat, adolescent children of 10 tea gardens and the staffs of Rural Aid organisation. The main motive was to organise two exposure visits and build the bridge of interaction and communication with different stakeholders officials of government to adolescent children so that it enhance the children towards leadership and advocacy for issue of Child Protection such child trafficking, child labour and child marriage and issue of their villages and as well as children can come directly and report the issue of child protection and village related issues which lead to sustainable community among children.

Programme Intervention

Child Counselling Program was organised at Sunganda Community Hall, Kalchini Block adolescent children of ten (10) tea gardens, the counsellors and staff members of Rural Aid.

The main purpose of organising the events were to cater to the young children, teens, adolescents and youth members of the communities to provide counselling support to those who have been experiencing trauma, anxiety and or stressful situation at home environment during COVID-19 pandemic due to closure of schools in tea gardens. The discussion topics covered by Counsellors include, effective management of Covid-19 situation, stress management, depression, violence at home, personal health & hygiene and mental health.



Counselling Session

Children Day Observation



Children Day has been observed with the theme of addressing "Child Trafficking". The event was organised with five Shishu Shiksha Kendra (SSK) across five tea gardens in Dhura Raimataing Tea Gardens of Kalchini Block. Children, adolescents and youth from 10 tea gardens had attended the event and performed cultural activities. The event was graced by the government stakeholder BLO (Block Level Officer), School Teachers (Headmistress), Panchayat member, Village Social Youth members and the staff of Rural Aid.

Orientation on Child Trafficking Issue

Two Days Capacity Building training on Child Trafficking was organised in presence of Mrs. Indrani Chakraborty, Program Officer from GFC as the resource person and the entire team of Rural Aid from different projects attended the workshop. The workshop mainly focused on creating a clear understanding on child trafficking issue among the team members of Rural Aid. This is one of the important areas of programme aspect of the organisation and much required to work in the tea garden areas.

Programme Intervention

SALT approach is a process for building community ownership with practices. It helps build the bond with community and facilitators to work together. It understands and values the emotions and help to identify the strengths of community either individual or groups. While as a nutshell, it builds a bridge towards the sustainability of particular community.



S - Share, Stimulate

A - Appreciate

L - Listen

T - Team, Transfer

The objective of SALT is that how can they understand their qualities and strengths. When the community realises their strengths, it would ignite in them the feeling that they can solve their problems of their own, whether individual or as communities. Meaning of SALT is to know the pulse of the community, what is their inner strength and what is their dream; this would bring ownership to the community.

Developing level of confidence, increasing knowledge & sharing:

The children have developed their vocabulary power and have started sharing their issues of concerns to the Panchayat members and other stakeholders. This has become one of the significant changes among them. Their level of confidence has also improved to a greater extent.

Improving Leadership Role:

The children have started sharing various information to their peer groups and the communities about the group and community meetings. They have also started using smartphones to share the information and also following up with the same. Information on incidents happened in the localities are also communicated by the children group members.

Building Consensus for issues of Common Interest:

Adolescent children group has taken up the role of building consensus towards mitigating community issues together with the government functionaries and also holding meetings with them for resolving matters like lock for ICDS centre and stop gambling at the centre, prevention of child marriage and enrolment of out of school children in schools with support from Childline.

Significant Achievements

Handholding Support to Dropout Children:

After post pandemic reopening of the school, the children group members found that several of their friend were busy with mobile games than attending schools. Slowly, they could motivate their friends to leave the mobile games and attend schools. Tough it took some time but consistent effort by the children group members could ensure rejoining schools for their friends.

Programme Intervention

The project is providing education support to most vulnerable children for preventing school dropout especially during the pandemic of COVID 19. Through this project, community based child protection mechanisms are being strengthened to protect children from joining labour force, early marriage and trafficking particularly during the pandemic of COVID-19. Rural Aid has established Partnership with TdH Suisse in 2021 and started implementing pilot phase of this project in 05 tea gardens of Alipurduar. The project is designed for the promotion of Child Rights and environment protection, ensuring access to quality education for children, enabling vulnerable children, youth and families to develop coping mechanism during pandemic and increasing children's access to existing child protection mechanisms.



To protect children from dropping out of school, community-based Support Education Centres (SEC) have started functioning with a total of 350 children. Project team has created awareness among parents and community members about the importance of children's education. In SEC, trained Teachers are implementing interactive and participatory teaching learning methods. Due to second wave of COVID 19, SECs were closed for few months and Teachers have adopted distance learning methodologies to ensure continuation of children's education during lock down.

Youth representatives have taken the responsibility of monitoring child protection issues. During lock down, they have maintained regular contact with children through telephonic conversation for the identification on cases of child abuse / violation of child rights and redressal of the same. They have provided counselling support for the improvement of mental health of children during their confinement at home.

- Due to the pandemic of COVID 19, all schools were closed and children's education was disrupted. But the beneficiaries of this project could continue education during their confinement at home with support of the Teachers of Support Education Centres.
- Sessions on Dance and Art Therapy helped in reducing stress among children and youth
- Beneficiaries and community people could access different government services, i.e. Kanyashree, Caste Certificate, Widow and Old age Pension, Disability Certificate and information about Vaccination through COVID Emergency Help Desk opened by Rural Aid
- Awareness has been generated among the beneficiaries and community members on Covid-19, safety measures and Vaccination.
- Psycho-social Counseling support was provided to children for the improvement of their mental health during this pandemic situation



Programme Intervention

Children, youth and adults are active in their community and in partner organisation for the promotion of child rights, protection of environment and COVID prevention.

TdH

- 60% of 440 children (60% girls) and 150 youth (50% Girls) have been sensitized on Child Rights and environment protection issues.
- Parents of the identified vulnerable children and youth and community members were sensitized on child rights with a special focus on different issues of child protection, namely child marriage, child abuse, protection from the risk of domestic violence; and importance of environment protection. They have started supporting children and youth to initiate actions for the promotion of child rights and protection of environment.
- 80% of 940 beneficiaries (440 children, 150 youth and 350 adults) have increased their awareness on COVID related protection issues.



- Capacity building sessions were organised for the beneficiaries to make them aware of Covid related protection issues and due to the confinement at home during lockdown, mental health issues increased among children. Youth members were capacitated on Dance Therapy and they supported children to counter stress and anxiety.
- Children and youth have taken initiative to sensitize community members on COVID safety measures by organizing rallies, developing Posters and displaying in their community and presenting drama

Capacity building sessions were organised for children and youth on child participation and identification of local issues of violation of child rights. Trained children and youth have identified the issues related with child trafficking, child labour and nonfunctional Village Level Child Protection Committees. For the resolution of these issues, they have submitted demands to local authorities.

- 80% of 500 children (60% girls) are benefiting from distance learning and education support to continue their education. Project team has oriented parents of identified vulnerable children and community members on importance of children's right to education with a special focus on girls' education. Parents have started supporting their children's education by regularly sending them to Support Education Centre and monitoring of children's education during their confinement at home due to second wave of COVID 19.
- To ensure continuation of children's education during lockdown, distance learning methodologies were adopted by the Teachers of Support Education Centres. They have developed and distributed subject wise worksheets, notes and question papers for children. Suggestion Books were distributed among 73 children who will appear in the 10th standard Board Examination.
- 350 children (Girls: 220) are continuing education. 5 Teachers of Support Education Centres were capacitated on innovative teaching methodologies to enable them to facilitate interactive subject wise sessions. Due to the second wave of COVID 19, Education Centres were closed for few months and Teachers have adopted and implemented new teaching methodologies to support children in continuing education through distance learning.

Programme Intervention

Vulnerable / at risk children, youth and families have access to COVID coping measures on livelihood and children have access to child protection mechanisms reducing COVID Impact

TdH

- 440 children (60% girls) and 150 youth (50% girls) are actively participating in community based child protection committees / mechanisms during COVID awareness and started applying COVID 19 preventive behaviours.
- To protect children from various forms of violence and exploitation during the pandemic of COVID 19, child protection mechanisms (Village Level Child Protection Committees - VLPCs) are functioning in the project intervention area. Project Team has facilitated periodical sensitization meeting of the members of VLPCs on child rights, child protection including protection mechanisms. Youth representatives have started functioning as a watch group to protect children from different forms of abuse. They have conducted home visits and maintained regular contact with children through telephonic conversation.
- 318 persons from vulnerable household /families (300) affected by loss of incomes have increased capacity to respect COVID restrictions in place in Alipurduar. Project team has distributed nutritious food, health kit, tarpaulin and other materials among the identified vulnerable families
- 80% of 5000 targeted population (children, youth and adult) have increased their awareness on COVID related protection issues. Children, youth and adults were sensitized on COVID related protection issues through community-based Campaigns.



Programme Intervention

WIPRO

An initiative to provide education input to the children of the tea estates of Kalchini Block of Alipurduar District of West Bengal. This process has been taken up at times of pandemic when all schools were closed and children had no means to access any educational support. This support has opened the window of opportunity for the children to study and access guidance on effective coping up with COVID related issues. The parents and larger communities have also been sensitized on effective coping up skills on COVID and related matters.

Parents Teachers Meeting

Meetings have been held with the teachers, guardians and the core team members of Rural Aid on teaching process of children. Parents have been advised to use TLMs and the process of using the same, like making sentences about any subject, making up stories, pronouncing by voice modulation, adding, subtracting, multiplication, division, geometric figures, fractions, through various activities and games, then introducing the outside world through natural pictures, sitting in a closed room and listening to outside sounds.



Child Club Meeting

The core team member has regularly organized the Child Club Meeting. Children have been provided with information about child protection, child rights, child marriage, and trafficking, as well as information on how to stay safe from COVID, as well as information about health, hygiene and safety. Some children have been provided with counselling input to overcome the depression caused out of long closure of schools.



Engaging and Advocating with Teachers

Emphasis has been given on improving the learning outcomes of the children and such matter has been discussed with the teachers. Several games based activity and teaching learning materials have been developed to enhance the learning process of the children that would increase the interest of children in language and mathematics in easier way. This process has been followed in Children's Activity Center, which made it easier for the children to learn, towards mathematics & language in subjects. Children are able to solve language and maths, along with the teachers also attended the Children's Activity Center to learn the method and joined in the learning process of the child.



Help Desk

The project team has maintained the help desk to solve various types of problems of the community like ration card contact information, old age pension, Kanyashree, Bangla Aawas Yojana, process of filling up KYC regarding banking process, Aadhar enrolment center, information about accessing mid-day meal from school, worksheet information, information about widow allowance along with COVID related information. This has helped in strengthening the relationship with the communities.

Programme Intervention

Process of Learning in Nature

The project team has involved the children to learn with nature, close to nature and knowing the nature. Through this process, children have been taught to identify and learn about some of the plants in their neighbourhood which include This quarter our core team performed the learning marmelos tree, jackfruit tree, peach tree, guava tree, fig tree, neem tree, tea plant, vasaka leaf plant and basil plant. This process has also helped the children on use and medicinal values of the plants. Children have been facilitated to use the benefits of the plants and this has helped them in a wider way.



WIPRO

Significant Impact

- In the child learning process, teachers joined with Rural Aid team and shared their opinion on improved learning process.
- Relationship with the teachers has improved to a greater extent and it has helped in appropriate use of the Teaching Learning Materials to ease the learning process of the children. The TLMs have been explained with the parents for easy understanding.
- Through the Child Club information have been shared with the children on issues of child rights, child protection, trafficking, child marriage and COVID pandemic. Children are well versed with the concept and also discuss among them.
- Children group members have taken initiative to inform their peers for to attend regular classes after reopening of schools.
- The guidance and information from the Help Desk has guided and facilitated the community people to opt for COVID vaccine.
- The information from the Help Desk has also facilitated the communities to understand about the vulnerabilities for their children and this process has strengthened relationship with the communities.

Looking at the enthusiasm and interest of parents it is being observed that the parents have captured the methods of teaching for their children. Parents have started utilising the learning guided conversation, operative conversation, story making etc. Through this process children have become sensitized on protecting the nature.



Change Stories

Saved Friend From Abusive Situation

Ram Lama (name changed), a 9 years old boy stays with his grandparents as he has lost his father in a very early age and his mother married again and left the home.

Sometime during July 2021, Ram was playing with his friend Sham Lama (named changed) a 9 year old boy in his house at Dhura, Raimatang Teagarden. When Sham's parents went out for their work leaving these children alone, then Kalo Mangar (Name Changed) a 14 years old child suddenly entered their house and tried to abuse sexually to Ram in front of Sham. Initially Sham couldn't realise what was going to happen and both of them got very scared because Kalo was older than them.

Somehow Sham could manage to escape from the situation and reached Ram's grandparents and shared everything. They came along with the members of Panchayat and a few other key community persons, informed Kalo's parents and protested against the incident. As Kalo is minor, so Ram's grandparents warned him and his family members to restrain from such incident again. If Sham couldn't raise his voice against this and stop Kalo from doing this crime, Ram would have been abused which would shatter him physically as well as emotionally.

Though Sham is a very young child, but Rural Aid's continuous training on the issues related to child protection and child rights has made him a responsible citizen and role model for other children in the community.



Access to Castes Certificate & Scholarship

It was during September 2021 when 12 adolescents applied for SC /ST Castes certificates through the 'Duare Sarkar' camp and also received their certificates within one month.

Further to this, the adolescents opted for applying to academic scholarship from their schools. But during the application process they came to know that names of 10 out of their caste certificate status has not been available at the application website. The adolescents went to the BDO and then to the SDO but the issued was not taken care of by the respective authorities even after several follow ups.

The matter was then placed in the social media platforms and local newspaper, which had created a hype to the agenda. The matter was then taken into consideration by the respective authorities and resolved within a month. Subsequent to that, all those 12 adolescents could apply for the school scholarship.

Ensured Enrolment of Two Vulnerable Children

This is an incident of two children who could not get enrolled in schools due to non availability of birth certificate. The matter came to surface during a community visit by the adolescent children group members at the Ganguatia Tea Estate of Kalchini Block. It was revealed that there are three children in the family and unfortunately they have lost their father out of an accident, while he was engaged as labour in Kashmir. Post to that incident, the family has not been able to obtain the death certificate of the father due to certain administrative issues.

While getting to know about the educational status of the children it came out that two children could not get admission in schools for not having birth certificate and Aadhar card. The matter was placed with the Panchayat Pradhan and provisional birth certificates has been issued from the Panchayat which has helped both the children to get admitted in local formal schools. This has not only helped the children to get into mainstream education but also saved them from being victims of child labourers and child trafficking. The initiative of the adolescent children group again proved their importance in ensuring the rights of the children in their respective intervention locations.

Way Forward

in the journey of Rural Aid and continuing socio-economic changes in the global context, it has become important for the organisations to work towards creating sustainable community led models of development. The modifications in government policies and subsequent control mechanism over the development sector has become important in designing the future programmes for the NGOs.

Rural Aid as an organisation would like to bring in convergence of programme approach in the tea garden areas of Alipuduar. More focus would be put on knowledge and capacity building of the communities on access to services and social security aspects. Building resilient communities to cope up with changing social, economic and cultural scenario across the tea garden areas. It has become important to prepare the communities to cope up with emergencies and uncertain natural calamities. The organisation also intends to involve youth members in the development process of the communities through their active participation in the planning and implementation of development programmes and also to impart knowledge to them on government schemes, legislations and programmes through which they can build their future as well.

Exploring with corporate partners to participate in the development process being taken forward by Rural Aid would be another important areas of focus in the future course of intervention. Bringing in CSR partners to the tea garden areas would certainly enhance the programme interventions and Rural Aid as an organisation would look into the possibilities of partnership with like minded CSR groups.

Collaboration and convergent movement together with the local administration in the development process would also be prioritized. Participation in the planning, implementation and capacity building process of the government has always been a priority focus of Rural Aid and it would be further strengthened during the future course of intervention. At the same time, the organisation would also participate in collective approach of the civil society organisations on common issues of concern.

Resource mobilization from all possible sources would be taken into consideration in accelerating the activities of the Rural Aid and partnership building at National and International platforms on research based activities would also be explored.

The organisation believes that the team of Rural Aid would continue to excel in their respective areas of expertise. The organisation expects that students, academician and research scholars would also come forward to contribute with knowledge and technical expertise to enhance the activities of the organisation in spirit with the sustainable development goals.

Partners in Solidarity

- West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights (WBCPCR)
- District Magistrate, Alipurduar District
- District Social Welfare Officer, Alipurduar District
- Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Alipurduar District
- District Health and Family Welfare Department
- Alipurduar District Police
- Panchayats of All Intervention Locations
- Tear Garden Management
- Fondazione L'Albero della Vita (FADV)
- Bread for the World (BftW)
- Global Fund for Children (GFC)
- Terre des Hommes Suisse (TdH)
- CHILDLINE India Foundation
- West Bengal Right to Education Forum

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