

Newsletter

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Through the eyes of the child

News From Our Partners

Greetings

The year 2021 has come to an end. Though we had a brief respite, the third wave of the pandemic is upon us. This means that children and their families, especially those with low resources, will continue to be highly vulnerable. It also means that they will continue to need economic and health support. Children will need help to remain in school, engaged with learning, and protection from being trafficked and pushed into labour.

This is the apt time, therefore, to take a look at child protection systems. HAQ's founder Enakshi Ganguly has done just that for us. She delves into how the Integrated Child Protection Scheme evolved in 2009, how much has worked, and the ways to strengthen the systems. Enakshi notes that children are not a homogeneous category, their challenges and needs are defined by age, gender, caste, religion, ethnicity, (dis)ability, and geographical location. Non-discrimination and best interest must be the guiding principles that determine all actions for them. She argues that our attitude towards children must be protective and not protectionist—the former is about safety and liberating, while the latter circumscribes and takes away agency.

Mamuni Das approaches the same subject, but from the lens of children who live and work at railway stations. She quotes from a nationwide study that advocates children be involved in the policy making process.

Usha Rai's focus is education during the pandemic and looks at some innovative initiatives where children with no means to study online were kept engaged through learning kits, book kiosks and learning walls. Preeti Mehra looks at the nutrition status of the country's children, while WNCB partner Save the Children's survey reveals how children view climate change and their wish to be included in climate action.

This issue is replete with inspiring news about our partners' activities. From tackling Covid 19 issues, learning communication strategies, holding anti-child labour campaigns to even forming a cricket team of adolescent workers—the WNCB Eleven.

As we welcome 2022, we look forward to the Regional Consultations for the Global Conference on Child Labour in South Africa, for which we have been laying the foundation.

Strengthening child protection systems

Our attitude to children must be protective, not protectionist.

Enakshi Ganguly



Allow me to cut to 2006. Razia Ismail and I were asked to write an approach paper on children's rights for the Eleventh Five Year Plan. (1) While examining all the programmes and schemes that existed for children at that time, we found that all of them were designed to address children after they had fallen out of the protective net. In effect, they only addressed children who were 'unprotected' and exploited. There was nothing that prevented them from becoming so.

Therefore we noted:

"This paper takes the approach of revisiting the definition of protection as it relates to the child, and advocates the creation of an overarching 'framework for protection' that would determine all child-related interventions by the government. It proposes the creation of a protective environment wherein all rights of all children are addressed in totality so that they are protected from becoming vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. In doing so, it ventures beyond the customary boundaries of what is conventionally considered to be the 'protection' sector".

What this called for was a complete paradigm shift. It required creating a protective environment for children wherever they were so that they could be identified and supported before they became 'unprotected'. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) had in the same year published a study on child abuse in India. (2) This had brought to light the extent of abuse and exploitation faced by children across the country.

Globally too, there was a recognition of the urgent need to protect children from violence following the submission of the report of the independent expert, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, for the United Nations on violence against children to the UN General Assembly (resolution 60/231) on 29 August, 2006. (3) In the same year, the MWCD published a document titled 'India-Creating Protective Environment for Children'. (4)

The non-governmental organisation, 'HAQ: Centre for Child Rights' since its first budget analysis report in 2001 had been highlighting how little was being allocated and spent on child protection. This was corroborated by the government's own findings once it started child budgeting in 2003. (5) In its own report to the Planning Commission, the MWCD stated:

[1] Ganguly Thukral, Enakshi and Abassi Ismail Razia, Ensuring child protection Approach to the Eleventh Plan. Paper prepared for the Planning Commission and Institute for Human Development. It was later published in SEMINAR 574: June 2007; CHILDREN FIRST; a symposium on planning for India's children.

[2] Study on Child Abuse in India: 2007 <http://www.indianet.nl/pdf/childabuseindia.pdf>

[3] <https://documents-dds-nyun.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/491/05/PDF/N0649105.pdf?OpenElement>

[4] Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. 22 July 2006.

[5] See Annual Report 2002-2003

“Unless adequate resources are given to child development and protection in the Eleventh Five Year Plan, children will continue to remain unhealthy, undernourished and vulnerable to all kinds of abuse and exploitations.” (6)

This was the first recognition for the need for attention to be paid to child protection as a sector. The MWCD report further said:

“In order to ensure that all rights of all children are respected and protected, the involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions is imperative in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all programmes for children.” (7)

What was clearly recognised was a need for localised protection systems or mechanisms for children where they were. This was also the philosophy behind the creation of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) in 2009, with village level child protection committees (VLCPC) as its backbone. The hope was that these committees would be formed organically with those who were in contact with children as part of it -- the anganwadi worker, the school teachers or head mistress, the ANM or ASHA worker, a panchayat member. The Mahila Samakhya Programme had shown that this was possible.

However, as the ICPS got rolled out, the VLCPCs were created in a top-down fashion, slowly becoming yet another power centre in some places, somewhat active in some, ineffectual in others. Each state developed its own guidelines for setting them up. (8) As Nicole Rangel of the child rights organisation, Leher says,

“The child protection system in India is characterised by an elaborate legal and policy framework, articulating sound intent, a thick population of structures and services concentrated at state governments and district headquarters which taper to nearly nothing at the block and village level including their urban equivalents where communities, families and children reside”. (9)

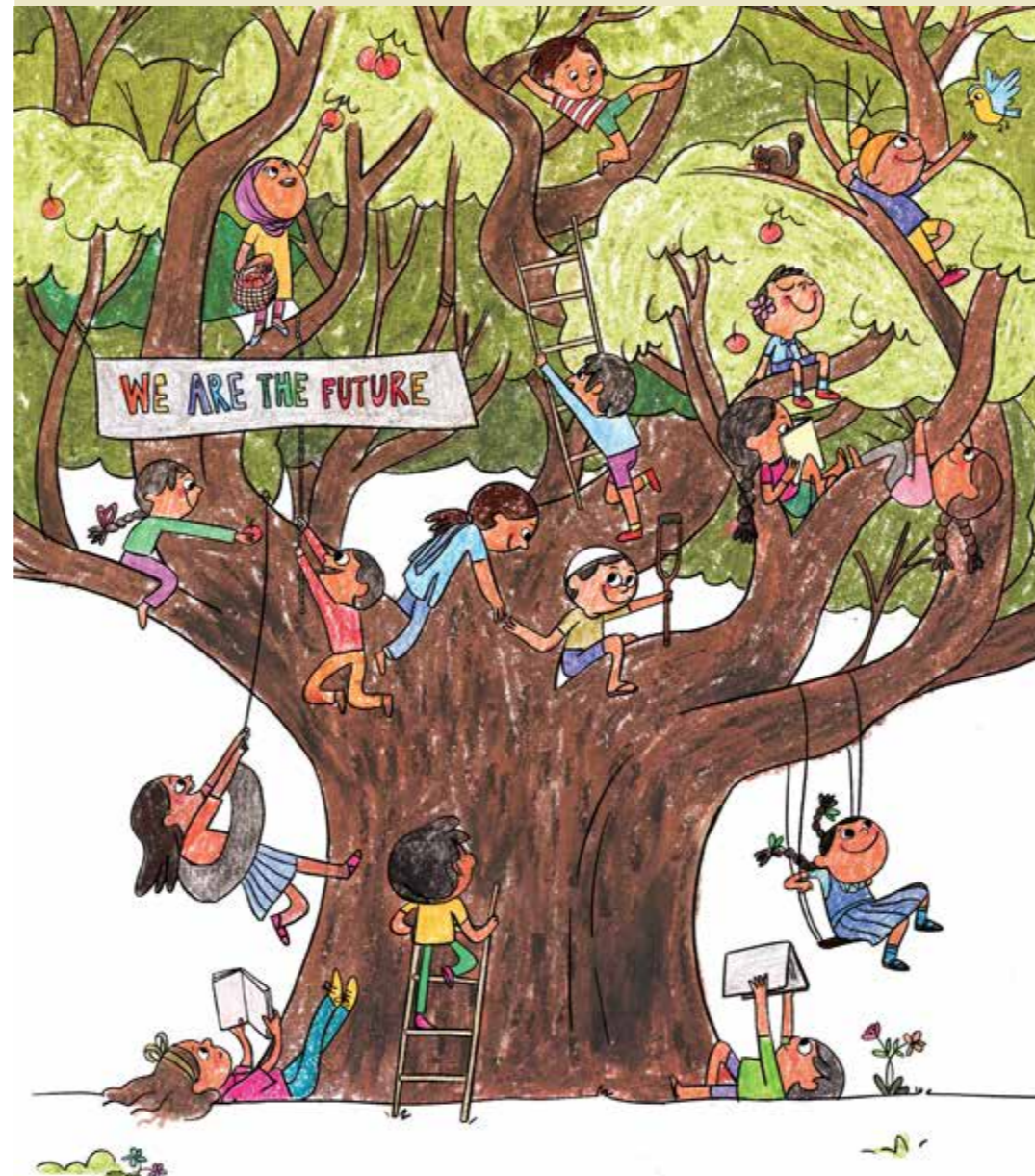
Our children live in communities. This is where they are either protected or become vulnerable. Village level structures are therefore our only hope. When capacitated and supported, they can best protect children. This can be seen from the sustained work that Leher (an NGO based in Delhi) has undertaken in Madhubani district of Bihar since 2014. It has found that with capacity building and support, the voluntary nature of community-led child protection mechanisms allows for them to be innovative, find their own means, set and move their own goalposts, and develop their own child protection narratives. They are able to provide the necessary protection that children need. (10)

Greater attention to child protection and the role of such voluntary community-led VLCPCs has become critical during the era of COVID 19 when almost every gain that was made in indicators for children's well-being has been reversed. There have been reports on how, due to the economic crisis within families, closure of schools, absence of the midday meal programme, and any protective measures, children -- boys and girls -- have been pushed into becoming child labour. (11) Reports tell us of

“*In order to ensure that all rights of all children are respected and protected, the involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions is imperative in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all programmes for children.*”



Enakshi Ganguly is a human rights activist and the Co-Founder of HAQ: Centre for Child Rights. She is currently the Executive Director of Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN).



underage girls being forced into marriage (12), an increase in sexual abuse and trafficking since the first nationwide lockdown last year. (13) Many children have lost one or both parents and need support and long-term care.

There are some important lessons that we have learnt over the years. Child protection is important. But the focus must be on empowering children. So while laws that protect them are important -- they alone cannot be the solution. Unfortunately, over the last few years, the solution to all crimes against children has been more and more penal laws. While these laws can appease the emotional demands for retribution, they in fact derail justice for children. What is needed is a robust justice system with guarantee of prosecution and rightful conviction and a change in attitude both towards child victims and children who offend. Both need care and protection. After all that is also why we have the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act (2015) which deals with both children in need of care and protection (CNCP) and children in conflict with the law (CICL).

Protective institutionalisation of children must indeed be the last resort, but complete shut down of all child care institutions is not the solution either. What is needed are safe and child friendly institutional care, with proper monitoring, for those who have no other support.

The twenty first century has thrown up diverse challenges in the form of the market and Internet and although this is a global challenge, in a globalised world,

our children are not untouched by them and the new forms of violence, abuse and exploitation that they have unleashed. Covid has only added to these challenges.

Most important of all, children are not a homogeneous category. Their challenges and needs are defined by age and gender, and also by caste, religion, ethnicity, (dis)ability, and geographical location. Non-discrimination and best interest must be the guiding principles that determine all actions for children.

Children are part of an ecosystem. They behave as they see. That is why we see children who are confused, depressed, with high levels of addiction and substance abuse. Also, not surprising that we find them behaving in manners that are discriminatory and even violent, because that is what they see around them. So unless the narrative around them changes, it will be hard to change the way they act. Children are after all a reflection of the environment they are in.

We need to 'listen' to them. Their aspirations and concerns are different from ours. They indeed can guide us to determine what would be the best way to protect them.

Most important of all, our attitude to children must be protective and not protectionist--protective is about safety and is liberating while a protectionist approach circumscribes and takes away agency. After all what we need are young citizens who will be responsible and accountable adults of tomorrow.

[6] https://niti.gov.in/planningcommission.gov.in/docs/aboutus/committee/wrkgrp11/wg11_rpchild.pdf

[7] https://niti.gov.in/planningcommission.gov.in/docs/aboutus/committee/wrkgrp11/wg11_rpchild.pdf

[8] Examples: <https://cdn.s3waas.gov.in/s3cd0d6e63aa8e41c89689f54970bb35f/uploads/2018/08/2018081071.pdf>; <https://scpsassam.org/organisation-structure/boardcommittees/district-child-protection-committee-2/ward-child-protection-committee/>; http://wbcsps.in/link/pdf/guideline/CPC_Modified_Guideline_070915_Final.pdf; <http://dishapolicecidcb.gov.in/sites/default/files/Formation%20of%20Block%20Panchayat%20village%20level%20child%20protection%20committee.pdf>

[9] Nicole Rangel Menezes. Child protection in India—A Status Report in Enakshi Ganguly (Ed). 2019. India's children continue to challenge our conscience. HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, New Delhi.

[10] Kajoi Menon and Nicole Rangel. Enabling Community-led Child Protection: The Journey of an Experimental Field Site in Madhubani Bihar, India. Child Welfare Over 95 Years of Excellence. Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program. Special Issue Global Perspectives on Child Protection and Neglect. VOL. 98, NO. 6, 2021

[11] <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/child-labour-on-the-rise-among-vulnerable-communities-in-tn-study/article33987590.ece>

[12] <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/rise-in-child-marriages-covid19-coronavirus-lockdown-pandemic-brides-rural-india-data>

[13] www.eastmojo.com/news/2020/11/18/human-trafficking-was-a-big-problem-in-the-northeast-covid-19-has-made-it-much-worse/; <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/over-9k-children-trafficked-during-pandemic-report-101627244144138.html>

POVERTY AND THE DRAW OF THE RAILWAY PLATFORM

Children who eke out a living on the tracks need better alternatives, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Mamuni Das

Puneet*, an 18-year-old adolescent looks purposeful but a little restless as he moves from one trash can to the next picking up empty plastic water bottles at New Delhi Railway Station. It is a sunny morning in October and his plans for the day are set. He will now proceed to the *raddi wali gali* (the trash buyers' lane) where he hopes to sell the plastic bottles to the recyclers. When he was younger, he begged for a living. He also worked as a *chana* (a chickpea-based snack) vendor, and in desperate times, stole a few mobile phones as well.

Tarun*, another 18-year-old, who collects empty bottles from another platform—one among the 16 platforms at the railway station—joins him as they make their way to the recyclers.

Puneet and Tarun are among hundreds of thousands of faceless children who work, live and sleep around railway stations in the country. They are commonly referred to as *Kangle* (destitute) by the cleaning staff and others around the railway platform.

Platforms and livelihoods

In 2017-2018, a detailed study was done on children living and working around railway platforms. The research was supervised by the All India Working Group (AIWG) on Rights of Children in



Contact with Railways (RCCR). It involved 40 organisations, covered 127 stations and 2,148 child respondents.

The study revealed that almost a third of the children surveyed made a living by collecting plastic bottles, nearly a quarter begged, a fifth took to selling and vending to make their ends meet. Only 9 per cent said they cleaned train coaches, and only two per cent of them indulged in theft.

Many of these children do more than one

of these activities. It was younger children who resorted to begging and as they grew older, they took to vending or collecting bottles like Puneet and Tarun. The study found that more children in North India preferred selling, while more children in the South resorted to begging for survival. In the East more children preferred cleaning trains and vending. Could their choices be related to the earning potential in different regions?

For Puneet and Tarun, the pandemic dried-up earning options around railway platforms because the Railways stopped operations during the lockdowns. Anju* had to shift from begging in train coaches to the streets after Covid-19 struck. While researching for the story, this writer found that children who vanished from railway platforms during the pandemic

found alternative livelihoods by begging or hawking at temples or on the street. Others went back to their homes in the slums.

Poverty, a key factor

The AIWG-RCCR study revealed that earning a living amidst poverty was the main reason why children resorted to begging and working around railway platforms. About 49 per cent of the children surveyed said they had to earn a living to survive, just over a fifth said they were working as they wished to live on their own terms. While both Tarun and Puneet came from broken homes, only 9 per cent in the survey said it was bad treatment that prompted them to leave their home.

About 71 per cent of those surveyed said that they were in touch with their families and 48 per cent said they visited home often. In fact, about 53 per cent of the children lived with their families. "Many a times families are aware of the work their children are engaged in and very often a part of what they earn actually goes back to their families," says a social worker, who works at a station in Odisha, but is not authorised to speak to the media.

The study indicates that many cases of children working at railway stations could be a fallout of rural-urban migration with children's earnings augmenting family incomes. The study found that overall children made anywhere between Rs 150 to Rs 400 day. As over half the children are not 'runaways', hence the simplistic model of rescuing and restoring them back to homes is unlikely to be effective. This basically means, even after being returned to their homes, the children are likely to come back looking for work, either on platforms or elsewhere.

However, there are still a sizable number of children like Puneet and Tarun who have fled from difficult situations at home, or do not have a home to return to. Some others like Preetam*, unable to cope with studies, dropped out from school and chose to live on their own.

Many of the 'railway' children dread being rescued and sent to institutions. Well over half of the children surveyed in the AIWG-RCCR report spoke of being harassed and cite the police as the biggest perpetrators of this injustice in and around railway system. "The stories the children relate (include) how wrongful charges, extortion of money and sex, unwarranted confinement, and beating without cause constitute the range of actions of the men (and women) in uniform," notes the report.

The children find it ironic that what are perceived as positive initiatives when taken by adults are seen as 'wrongful' acts when it involves children struggling to survive. Thus, the desire to be financially independent, the impulse to escape physical punishment and ill-treatment, to be free from the drudgery of farm work, the need to live their own lives and the perceived 'freedom' of the street and the station are all seen as negatives when it comes to children.

Both Tarun and Puneet see the liberty to sleep on the platform almost a luxury. "Because we were beaten out of the railway station many times during the night by the police, now we sleep close to the station, but not on the platform. The entry and exit to platforms has become very strict nowadays," says Puneet. Sushma, a girl interviewed by the researchers in the report wonders "why is it such a crime to work?" It is a sentiment that children like Puneet, and Tarun echo. "We are not allowed to work, and

“Because we were beaten out of the railway station many times during the night by the police, now we sleep close to the station, but not on the platform. The entry and exit to platforms has become very strict nowadays”

we will be beaten up if we are found stealing," says Puneet. "Ab hume kuchh toh karna hoga na? (Shouldn't we be allowed to do something at least?)" asks Tarun.

The children value their 'freedom' and consider the platform their home. Many save a bit and hope to achieve something in the future. About 41 per cent of children surveyed for the report said they managed to save something. Over 58 per cent had a plan for the future and dreams too. Some wished to do tailoring, one of them wanted to help children, some wanted to run little shops, get married and settle down. Tarun, who has savings of few hundred rupees, dreams of becoming an electrician or truck driver one day.

Reach out to children

To turn their small dreams into reality, the first realisation among policymakers, and all other stakeholders associated with

child-rights should be that children who work at railway stations are not a homogenous group, and hence shouldn't be treated with a 'one size fits all' response. The RCCR asks all stakeholders including Indian Railways, Ministry of Women and Child Development, and others to set up Bal Pachayats or working children associations. These and other public forums must listen to the children's voices before formulating policies for them. These should help them with their educational, vocational, skilling needs and provide financial assistance.

The report urges the Ministry of Women and Child Development to transform its one-dimensional 'rescue-restore' approach to a holistic programme that includes elements of 'rehabilitate' and 'reintegrate' and include the child's right to be heard, in the policies made for them. "Paradoxically, the very institutions set up for their care and

protection, such as shelter homes, have become the instruments for their further exploitation," says the report. It asks these homes, and 'Childlines' to reflect on why so many children dread being rescued by 'rescuers?' Shouldn't they be the care givers to whom children should be able to walk up to without fear, ask for assistance and feel protected with? In short, they want adults to make friends with children on the railways and listen to them before deciding what's better for them, and before designing policies that determine the children's future. **Names of all children have been changed to maintain anonymity*



Mamuni Das has been a journalist for over a decade. She is a winner of the WNCB Untold Stories Award and is working on a series of articles on the lives of children who live and work around India's vast network of railway stations.

LEARNING IN TIME OF THE PANDEMIC

How fun kits and book kiosks are bringing education alive in rural Uttar Pradesh and Bihar

Usha Rai



Despite all the bravado and cheering about digital education being imparted to children with smart phones, good internet connectivity and parental guidance, digital education in rural areas and small towns is just not happening and may not happen in the immediate future. This was clearly evidenced during the Covid 19 pandemic over the last two years.

In fact, a study released in December 2021 by the National Independent Schools Alliance states that children in primary classes are falling behind in language and mathematical ability. Based on a survey, the study states that children have suffered massively in the last two

years of the pandemic with classes being shifted online. Shifting physical classes to virtual was not the only obstruction for students, the quality of education was also compromised. This became evident when students of Classes III, V and VIII of urban and semi-urban private schools of 17 states and union territories were assessed in September and October this year. If this is the situation in urban and semi urban areas, one can well understand how dismal it is in the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The Aga Khan Foundation, which has been working in both states for some years now and is known for its innovative, people-centred approach in

the development sector, has found a way of involving parents, children, and the community in primary education. It has found a low-tech solution that provides access to quality learning opportunities for all. After brain storming, a 'learning at home kit' or the 'big box of bold ideas' was developed. It had colours, word cards, puzzles, simple, pictorial, illustrated activity ideas that enabled families without internet to engage with children so that they learn at home. Every month or two, new items and activities supplement available resources and inspire parents to think of other learning activities they can do at home. The cost of the kits is US \$ 2, currently provided by AKF, and the materials are



linked to the school curriculum. The kit included masks and soaps with messages on Covid-19 norms.

AKF is trying to source and produce materials locally, exploring up-cycling to reduce cost, and engaging women's self-help groups in providing the 'learning is fun' material.

To add to the inputs from the big box, there has been community engagement by setting up book kiosks in community spaces that children as well as parents can access. Young volunteers facilitate learning in community spaces and teachers follow up over phone and with home visits. For parents who have regular phones without internet, there are automated voice calls with messages related to the activities, audio stories and songs. For parents who have smartphones and good internet, the boxes, activity sheets will be fixed with QR codes or linked to online resources, curated for those activities.

The first box was piloted with 500 children in Bihar and received positive feedback from caregivers / parents. They liked the craft material in the box and related to the illustrated content. Ninety-two per cent of respondents (caregivers and children) shared an increase in engagement in learning activities after receiving the kit. Sixty-seven per cent of caregivers gave a score of 8+ (on a scale of 10), for effectiveness / usefulness. Responses varied from "we will learn with them" to "this gives us ideas" and "it is easy."

AKF is making these education interventions in Bahraich district, UP and in the districts of Patna, Samastipur and Muzaffarpur in Bihar. Boxes have been developed for different age groups and more are being developed and shared with parents and caregivers. The books, *Jugnu*, *Gauraiya* and *Gilhairs* are for children in the three to five, six to eight and nine to 10 age groups respectively. Some 20,000 boxes have been shared across these age groups already and 12,000 more children are waiting for them.

"During school closure the 'Learning at home kit' is the most effective way to support a child's education," says Kavita Bajeta, Child Development Officer, Bahraich. "They should be provided remote support and guidance to take the maximum benefit of the kits. Online classes and education are not feasible for rural areas."

Her comment is supported by the reality of village life. Sarita Devi and Manoj Rajak, parents of eight-year-old, Aanchal Kumari of Nargada village, are as thrilled as she is about getting a learning kit. "It's not academic or bookish, so Aanchal feels extremely motivated as she dabbles with colours, pictures, story books and puzzles". Aanchal, who studies in class IV, would have gone into depression during the Covid-19 lockdown because her family does not have a smart phone and she doesn't want any break in her learning as she wants to be a doctor. "If the distribution of these kits continues even after schools reopen, it will help children stay excited about learning and enhance their skills," says Manoj.

Radheyshyam Verma, a daily wage labourer from Laxmanpur-Salarpur village, Nawabganj block of Bahraich District in UP, fears his children would have receded into illiteracy in the long lockdown period and may have found it difficult to catch up with their classes when school reopens. Ajay and Satyaprakash, studying in class IV and V of Laxmanpur Primary School, were not particularly good students but during the lockdown they fell into depression.



Sometimes there was no electricity too though a solar light provided by AKF came in handy. The learning kits, introduced by the NGO, however, gave them new energy. Using colour and pictures they learnt to tell stories. They even learnt to complete sentences thanks to the picture story books provided. Today, both the children can read and write well and are better in addition and subtraction than they were while attending school. Their grandfather, who is educated, supported their worksheet learning. The learning kits were not just fun but a boon to these children and others like them, stuck at home with no smartphones.

Book kiosks add a new dimension to learning

Mini libraries in public spaces too proved useful. In 2019-20, as part of a pilot on responsive caregiving and early learning for 0-6 years children in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, the AKF team identified storytelling as a key caregiving practice to

promote cognitive, language and socio-emotional development of children.

While the team facilitated sessions with groups of parents to build their skills and confidence, the need to increase access to good reading materials, especially picture stories was felt. So, two community kiosks were set up in the villages in Risia and Chittaura blocks of Bahraich. Gradually the number of kiosks increased to six. Though the initial purpose was to increase caregiver engagement with young children, during the pandemic older children too began turning to the kiosks for story books.

The BEEO (Block Education Extension Officer) of Risia says, "in villages, magazines and story books are not available. Children are deprived of the opportunity to read interesting books and stories. The AKF is actually exposing children to the world of books through these kiosks." The CDPO of Chittaura says, "books are a true friend of children. Take a book and tell new stories to children to enhance their linguistic skills as well as their mental and creative abilities."

The kiosks are small, front open huts or

cubicles located in a village's open space, or outside the home of a community volunteer. It is open for all, has no specific timings and has picture story books, picture cards and some even have low-cost toys, puppets etc. Caregivers and parents are free to borrow books. Story telling became a daily routine and children loved it. All these are wonderful examples of promoting hands on learning, involving parents and caregivers, in areas where the digital world is still a spec on the horizon. Some 364 more book kiosks were established in Bihar and UP in the last one year.

The story of seven-year-old Anushka of Takiabaldipur village, Chittaura block of Bahraich District, is a wonderful example of how books are kindling interest in reading and learning. Though Anushka's parents, Suman and Ayodhya Prasad are educated, and their four older children go to school, Anushka would play the whole day and refuse to go to school. Once the book kiosk was set up in the village and her parents began bringing books home, Anushka joined in. Now she goes with her parents to pick up the book she wants them to read to her. Slowly, she has learnt

to read the books and even attempts to read them to other kids in her neighbourhood. She now wants to go to school, and her parents are ecstatic!

The learning wall

Exploring new ways to expand learning opportunities and with the strong belief that children can learn from their eco-system, AKF has also started 'learning walls' in some blocks of Bihar. Learning walls are open spaces in the community, typically the outer wall of any community space or the house of a young volunteer. The volunteer hangs a foldable whiteboard every day on the wall and writes a puzzle or question on it. These questions are related to student's subject areas and the nearby environment. The idea is to enhance skills like problem solving among children. Children and young people come to the wall to try and solve the puzzles or questions. Local communities, including village elders, have also shown interest in solving them. Thirty-seven learning walls are currently engaging children and village elders.



Usha Rai is a senior Delhi-based journalist with over five decades of experience in mainstream newspapers like *The Times of India*, *Indian Express* and the *Hindustan Times*. She writes on development issues and has covered child rights issues extensively.

During school closure the 'Learning at home kit' is the most effective way to support a child's education

HOW HEALTHY ARE INDIA'S CHILDREN?

The recent NFHS-5 survey results present a mixed bag. A further push requires enhanced budgetary allocation

Preeti Mehra

November 2021 saw the release of data of the country's fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), which serves as a health and nutrition indicator for the population—men, women, and children. The survey was conducted between 2019 and 2021 and was a precursor to the previous survey NFHS-4 released in 2015.

Let's take a look at what it revealed about the health and nutrition status of the country's children in the backdrop of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2.2 that calls for ending all forms of malnutrition for children under five years of age by 2030. The government's own programme, POSHAN Abhiyaan, has the much closer target of 2022 to make India malnutrition-free, bring down stunting in children (0-6 years), from 38.4 per cent in 2016 to 25 per cent. It also aims to reduce anaemia among women and adolescent girls (15-49 years) and improve birth weight. NFHS-5 was a mixed bag. Though it did provide a few positive indicators, it also provided a warning that as a nation we need to speed up our interventions to achieve stated goals.

The survey revealed that infant and child mortality rates have improved since the previous round. It found that the steepest fall in mortality rates was in the under five age group. It had gone down from 49.7 to 41.9 deaths per 1,000 live births. In the sphere of children protected

by vaccination, the rate for those between 12 and 23 months had gone up from 62 per cent to 76 per cent. Exclusive breastfeeding of children had also improved for children under six months --- from 55 per cent in the previous survey to 64 per cent in this one.

As economic researcher, Payal Seth, from the Tata-Cornell Institute, Cornell University pointed out in *The Wire Science*, childhood diseases presented a more mixed picture. "While the prevalence of diarrhoea in the two weeks preceding the survey dipped slightly in NFHS-5, the fraction of children

receiving oral rehydration solution (ORS) and zinc for diarrhoea has gone up substantially. Children's access to healthcare services - when suffering from diarrhoea and symptoms of acute respiratory infection (ARI) - has remained almost the same since the previous survey. The latter is an important finding: despite COVID-19, the percentage of children suffering from ARI has not gone up," she wrote.

Children's nutrition status in the survey showed the percentage of stunted (low height-for-age) at 36, wasted (low weight-for-height) at 19, underweight

(low weight-for-age) at 32 and anaemic at 67 per cent, the last being the most worrying indicator. While the first three had reduced marginally, the fourth showed an eight percentage points rise --- from 59 per cent to 67 per cent.

Puja Marwaha, the CEO at CRY (Child Rights and You) who followed up with a comprehensive analysis of the data said, "While according to the recent NFHS numbers India has made good progress in child immunisation indicators (76.4 per cent of children within the age-group of 12-23 months are reported to be vaccinated with BCG/Measles and three doses each of Polio and DPT in 2020, as compared to 62 per cent in 2015 - thus showing a growth of 23.23 per cent in the last lustrum), the point to be noted is that child immunisation programmes clearly fall short of reaching the last mile child."

While Marwaha noted the

improvements made, she highlighted some of the worrying trends in children's nutrition status. She said, "Though the percentage of wasted children below 5 years has decreased over the last 5 years (NFHS-5 - 19.3 per cent and NFHS-4 - 21 per cent), the percentage of under-5 children who were severely wasted has actually increased (NFHS-5 - 7.7 per cent and NFHS-4 - 7.5 per cent)

Anaemia was the biggest worry, she felt, "A close look at the numbers reveal that



anaemia among children has increased considerably from the previous round. In NFHS-4, 58.6 per cent children within the age-group of 6-59 months had been reported to be anaemic, while in NFHS-5 it is 67.1 per cent, showing an alarming growth of 14.51 per cent." She pointed out that the target set in the National Nutrition Strategy (NITI Aayog, GoI) was a reduction in prevalence of anemia in children (6-59 months) from 58.4 to 19.7 by the year 2022.

The survey also revealed that the percentage of anaemic women aged 15-19 years had increased from the last round (NFHS-5 - 59.1 per cent and NFHS-4 - 54.1 per cent). This is despite the fact that the target set in the National Nutrition Strategy (NITI Aayog, GoI) was a reduction in prevalence of anaemia in

women and girls (15-49 years) from 53.1 to 17.7 by the year 2022. "Therefore, reducing the prevalence of anaemia in women and children is important as it is also often associated with chronic malnutrition, spontaneous abortions, low birth weight, neonatal and infant mortality," Marwaha pointed out.

But the CRY assessment noted an interesting point (or, an apparent contradiction?) that while maternal anaemia is on the rise, intake of Iron-Folic supplements by expecting mothers during their first and second trimester showed improvement. NFHS-5 shows that 44.1 per cent of mothers consumed IFA supplements for 100 days or more during pregnancy, while the figure was 30.3 in NFHS-4.

However, analysis by the experts point in one direction --- if India wants to achieve the goals it has committed to internationally and domestically, it needs to enhance its public provisioning on child health and nutrition. And the only way it can do that is by making adequate allocation in the coming budget and following it up closely to see that the measures impact each and every child and woman positively.



Preeti Mehra is a senior journalist based in New Delhi who writes on development, gender and environmental issues.



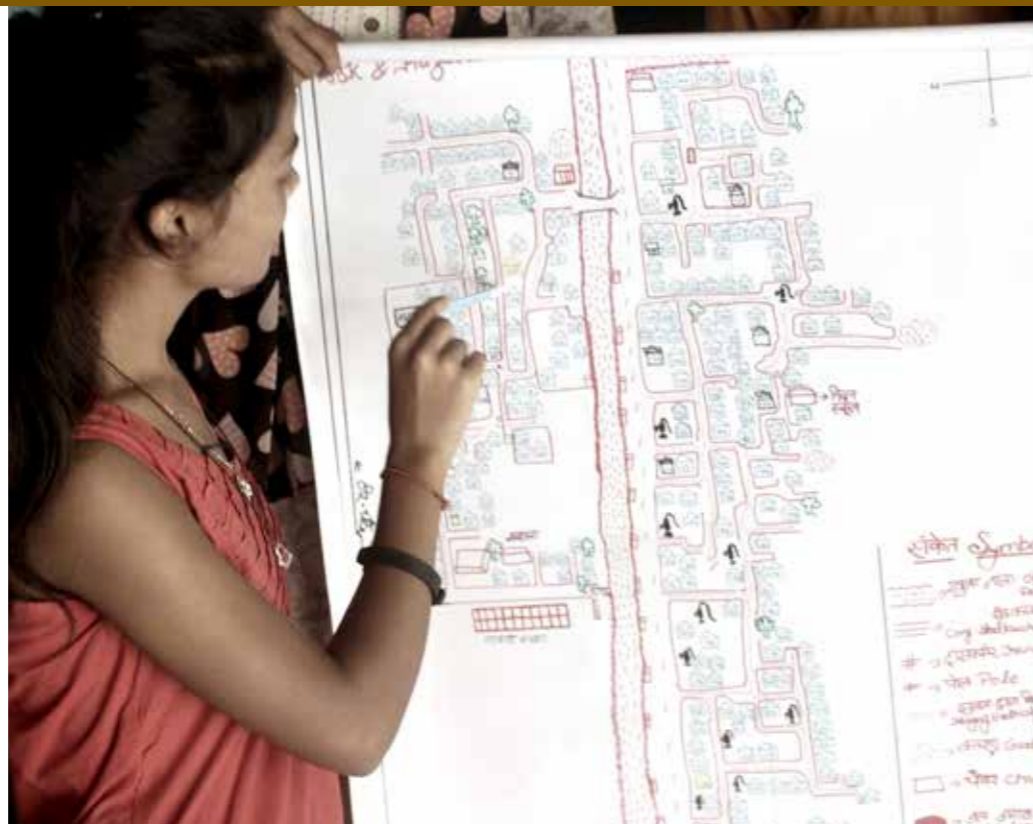
THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CHILD

A three-state survey revealed that children were concerned about climate change and would like to participate in corrective action.

How do children perceive climate change? To answer this and other questions, Save the Children India conducted a survey among children to explore their perspective to help promote meaningful participation by them. The specific objectives of the study were to understand the level of awareness children have of climate change, its perceived impact on their rights and well-being, their barriers to participation on climate related interventions, and what they feel should be their role in climate action.

Conducted in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, the survey covered responses from 2,932 children (both online and offline modes) in the age group of 10-18 years. About 52 per cent of the children were 10-14 years, while the remaining were between 15 to 18 years of age. The gender ratio was 50:50.

The study threw up some interesting findings. Regarding children's experience of extreme climatic events, it was found that almost 45 per cent were witness to non-stop rains, 32 per cent had been in flood situations and one in four (27 per cent) in cyclonic events. Of the children witness to climate extremes two in five (40 per cent) recalled the unavailability of clean drinking water at that time and one in three (35 per cent) said they were not able to attend school during that period.



Climate Action: Children draw a risk map for each village along with an evacuation plan.

The children also shared how climatic events impacted the lives of their family members. More than half of the children (54 per cent) remembered the damage that was caused to agricultural produce. About 47 per cent children recalled that their family members could not reach their workplace, and 37 per cent said their family members found it difficult to find work during that time.

In trying to gauge awareness levels among children about climate change, the survey revealed that three in four children (72 per cent) had heard about 'climate change' or related terms at least once in a while. However, only one in

seven children (14 per cent) had heard about it frequently. While two in three children (67 per cent) had heard about climate change in school, a majority of them felt that the information they received was inadequate. About 36 per cent were able to identify that the combination of human activities and natural variations in the environment to be the key reason for climate change. The study revealed that children (55 per cent) were concerned about extreme weather events, with a little less than half (48 per cent) expressing concern over the forms it takes in terms of food insecurity, lack of clean water and needs such as clothes and other essential hygiene products.

What was interesting is that three in four children (76 per cent) children understood that the use of polythene bags increases the intensity of climate change. One in three (34 per cent) were able to identify sustainable alternatives in form of cloth/ paper bags. However, only 14 per cent of children have never used the polythene bags and one in five children (21 per cent) always use paper/cloth bags. But it was important to note that more than 50 per cent of the children who understand that use of polythene bags increases the intensity of climate change were using paper/cloth bags often or always.

Where transport is concerned, two in three children (66 per cent) understood that vehicles driven by fossil fuels (petrol and diesel) were bad for the environment, though less than one in three children

was aware about the role of emission-free sources like bicycle and electric cars in reducing the intensity of pollution. However, 64 per cent of the children used bicycles and 54 per cent public transport.

Importantly, over 70 per cent of the children understood the importance of trees in protecting planet earth. And three in five children (60 per cent) said they were trying to reduce water wastage, and one in two (50 per cent) were trying to reduce electricity consumption. Among the children who were aware of climate change, less than half (48 per cent) had participated in campaigns on climate change at least once. The proportion of children who participated more than five times was a mere 5 per cent. However, one in every three children showed strong willingness to participate.

In a nutshell, the report recommended that children must be provided opportunities to access and exercise their right to share and contribute, mobilise, campaign, advocate, demand, and participate fully in discussions related to climate change issues. Also, that they must be given access to information and education on the climate crisis. This would enable them to acquire necessary skills and knowledge to build resilience and adaptive capacity and empower them to engage in creating a sustainable future. At the local level there must be a decentralized decision-making process around issues of climate action, and this must include the participation of children in village Gram Sabhas and urban local bodies, making them the true harbingers of change.

Save the Children, India

Learning to weather climate change

How adolescents prepared an urban slum in Patna to face the challenges

The COVID generation of children now face a dual challenge: The connected threats of exacerbating inequalities caused by pandemic and the impact of climate change. Children are vulnerable to the adverse outcomes of climate change. However, at the same time, it is extremely important to also recognize the potential role of their agency in addressing the challenges posed by it. Child participation is one of the core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and there is a need to ensure meaningful participation of children in addressing the issue of climate change.

Here's how, with children's participation, a community driven model in Bihar is changing mindsets.

Every year, heavy rainfall floods a slum in Patna's Adalatganj area disrupting life. Bihar is one of India's states most vulnerable to extreme climate change events. The northern part faces annual floods, while the southern parts are prone to droughts. To prepare the community for extreme climate events, Save the Children India started its urban disaster risk reduction programme in July 2018 and is continuing it, keeping children at the core of the programme. As part of the resilience programme, adolescents and young adults are taught to draw three kinds of maps. The first is the social map that shows all the houses, both kutcha and pakka ones (concrete and makeshift houses), schools, water resources and the general layout of the area. The asset map

highlights the cyclone shelters, schools, temples and other buildings that can double up as shelters and the third one is a risk map which shows all the pathways through which water can enter the neighbourhood and houses that are vulnerable. There's an evacuation map in case of any hazard like fire in urban slums.

Now, the young adults are not only safeguarding their own neighbourhoods they are going to other areas and training people on risk reduction, evacuation, and asset management in case of a natural disaster or an extreme climate event. Even the younger children, growing up amid a constant state of uncertainty of climate change events, are educating themselves in disaster risk reduction. They are devising their own ways and educating the community. Their development process has now become a way of life.

Team Save the Children

NEWS FROM OUR PARTNERS



WNCB / Bihar: Partners' Advocacy Meeting

In the run up to the Global Child Labour Conference (GCLC) scheduled in May 2022, the WNCB Bihar cohort got together to chart out a collective advocacy agenda to work collectively as an alliance. In the fruitful one-and-a-half-day advocacy meeting partners came up with a common advocacy agenda that each of them intended to take up and a joint strategy as well. Strengthening of the existing child protection mechanisms, formation and strengthening of the task force on child labour and child marriage and advocating with government both at the state and national level for education of children were mutually decided on. Additionally, through the Civil Society Consultation on Child Labour for Asia and the Pacific, a preparatory event for the GCLC was planned. Inputs were also provided by some of the WNCB representatives.



ICCo / Bihar: Exposure visit to Purnea

With the intent to strengthen the ongoing livelihoods interventions of our partners in Bihar, a two-day long capacity building cum exposure visit was undertaken. This was to witness goat rearing (livestock rearing) as a livelihood model. Facilitated by ICCo in December, the aim was to build conditions for village livelihoods from a gender and business lens. The partners got an opportunity to interact with different stakeholders, including the *pashu-sakhis* (trained livestock nurses), goat producers' groups and village organisations of the Rakhi Cluster Level Federation in Ranipatra. Following a visit to several households, the partners also gained an insight by interacting with the Board members of the Seemanchal Goat Producer Company Ltd.

Navjagriti / Bihar: Covid 19 interventions

Navjagriti, through its work in Bihar, has been enhancing the coping mechanism among children to reduce child labour during the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns resulted in rural families facing enormous hardships. Adults in families had to deal with a combination of debilitating issues including lack of livelihood, very meagre earnings, fear of bad health, and in many cases fear of theft and domestic violence. In addition, the fact that schools for their children were closed for long periods added to their woes. They were worried about the future of their children and fears of them being picked up for trafficking loomed large.

The out-of-school children too had several issues to deal with at a tender age. Due to their parents' joblessness, they were unable to get nutritious food. Staying at home, unable to play outside or meet their friends added to their stress.

To enhance the coping mechanism of children and reduce child exploitation, Navjagriti undertook a host of activities and training sessions for girls, boys, their parents, and the community at large. Using tools for communication, personality development and confidence building, they imparted information on trafficking and its ills, child rights, women's rights and gender equity.

Fakirana Sisters Society / Bihar: Community engagement



The Fakirana Sisters Society (FSS) undertook a string of activities from October to December in Bihar. They celebrated International Day of the Girl Child on October 11 by involving around 132 adolescents in a rally and painting activity to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Over the months, 55 boys and girls participated in storytelling workshops where art and drama were used to enhance their understanding of the meaning of 'inner strength' and develop within them a sense of identity. The children attending tailoring and computer classes were oriented in gender equity. Girls' peer groups helped them to comprehend how to keep themselves safe while pursuing their school education.

FSS carried out a signature campaign to stop child labour with the pledge, "I will not employ child labour" among parents, private hotel owners and other stakeholders. Around 110 Panchayati Raj members were also involved in orienting new PRI members from three panchayats on their role and responsibilities towards children under the PRI Act.

Some of the FSS staff participated in a meeting to build their understanding of the concept of Child Labour Free Zones. The staff also involved themselves with tracking children for their safety. The staff learnt livelihood activities such as goat farming and vegetable farming to help the community in its endeavours.



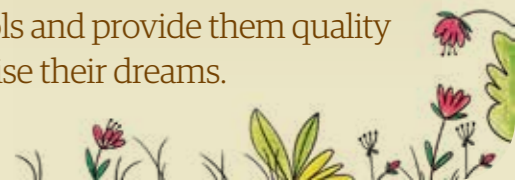
All India Primary Teachers' Federation / All India: Making schools safe

Providing children a safe space to learn is essential. This includes safe transportation to and from schools, healthy relationships with teachers, and a positive climate in schools free of fear, violence, and exclusion. Within a safe space, boys and girls can learn to relate to one another in healthy and complementary ways. Children can also learn basic life skills such as enhanced communication, conflict management, and problem-solving skills. The theme of AIPTF's activity in December was sensitizing teachers and union leaders about their role in creating safe schools for children – schools that would help youngsters to complete their elementary education in an enabling environment.

Under the WNCB platform in the last quarter of the year, AIPTF, in collaboration with its

partners in Rajasthan, organised an interactive session with 130 community members, children and teachers in Jaipur. The idea was to convince parents on the importance of education.

In the month of November, which celebrates Children's Week globally, the AIPTF released campaign material to create awareness about their programmes in intervention areas and to attract children towards schools. The material was released by a Member of Parliament and union leaders and teachers from all parts of the country were present. A group of 30 schoolgirls from Khijarsarai, Gaya were presented the material with a pledge to spread the word. The federation is committed to joining hands with its partners to retain children in schools and provide them quality education to realise their dreams.



Save the Children/ Rajasthan: Forty-two days anti-child labour campaign

Save the Children has been working in close coordination with the Rajasthan government's department of labour and advocating on child labour issues, policy gaps and institutional strengthening like the proper functioning of district level task force members, revision of the standard operating procedures for child labour and advocating a joint anti-child labour campaign. After a series of meetings with the department of labour, Save the Children received official sanction from the Secretary (labour), Neeraj Kumar Pawan for a joint campaign. While flagging off the anti-child labour campaign, Mr Pawan said the campaign would help in reaching communities, unorganized business owners and sensitize them on child labour issues.

This campaign covered over 100 locations in urban and slum areas of Jaipur city and reached out to about 20,000 people. Four mobile vans with a GPS tracking system were engaged and equipped with information, education and communication material that had been developed by Save the Children. The campaign was closely monitored and covered busy markets, including major begging spots in Jaipur like Chand pool,

JLN Marg, Shastri Nagar, GT Mall area. Urban slums in Ramganj, Bhatta basti, Kacchi basti, Jahalana dongri kacchi basti, Jagatpura kacchi basti, Javaharnagar kacchi basti, Eid Gha and Brahmapuree, among others. The campaign vehicles ran around 60 kilometres every day from 9 am to 8 pm.

The vehicles belted out an anti-child labour song. Music was used as a tool for raising awareness about child labour, child rights and child protection among the community, parents, and unorganized business owners. The campaign was a collaborative effort of the government and civil society organizations to curb child labour and child begging in Jaipur city. While speaking to the media, Chairperson of the Rajasthan

State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Sangeeta Beniwal said, child labour and child begging is a serious concern, and the honourable CM of Rajasthan has taken strong notice of it and has directed that a coordinated effort must be initiated to end child labour and child begging across Rajasthan. She further added that after such awareness campaigns, there will be an endeavour to plan for rehabilitation of children who are engaged in labour and begging.



ARAVALI and Manjari Sansthan / Rajasthan: Communication is the key

December saw a communication workshop in Jaipur conducted for some of WNCB's grassroots partners. It was led by Tanja Brok, Communications expert, and Coordinator for WNCB. The session was facilitated by Varun Sharma, Programmes Director, ARAVALI and Manish Singh, Director, Manjari Sansthan.

It was kicked off by Varun Sharma who oriented the 18 participants on the objectives of the workshop. He said that organisations whose mandate is to carry out social development work need to ensure that they are proactive in their communication. The role of communication vis-a-vis NGOs involves sharing information, telling stories and engaging in conversations that inspire people to join their organisation in fulfilling its mission.

After a brief introduction of the participants, the proceedings were handed over to Tanja Brok who joined online from The Netherlands. Tanja started the session with a brief presentation. She highlighted that to achieve changes at all levels it is important

to link local level fieldwork with global work and policies. In the context of the WNCB programme this meant to influence global actors and call on them to take responsibility. She emphasised that field level data was crucial to understand the local context and to give the local actors a voice. The communication messages that come from the field level assume critical importance and hence the focus on effective communication is important.

Tanja underlined that communication is a primary process for any organisation, and everyone is responsible for the communication output. It must incorporate stories, images, videos and conveying messages through words. It is through these stories that one can advance the organisation's work, mission, and vision. Storytelling, she stressed, is the most powerful way to put ideas across in today's world. The communication therefore should be presented in a manner that effectively delivers to the stakeholder what one wants them to know, feel and do.

Manjari Sansthan / Rajasthan: The WNCB Eleven

From mines to the playing field!

Presenting the first generation cricket players of Budhpura..!!

The idea of forming a cricket team was a unique innovation. The "WNCB Eleven" comprised of boys either working in the mines or cobble yards, making boxes or operating machines. Most of them were early school dropouts. With the backing of WNCB, Manjari Sansthan has been engaging with these young people and the purpose of their engagement has been to strengthen work in thematic areas of alternative livelihoods, decent work, and continuing education. Manjari used sports as an activity to mobilise and organise the young boys.

The good news is that the WNCB Eleven recently qualified for a local cricket tournament. In its first league match, the team defeated its rivals, the Bijoliya Club by fifty runs. Three cheers to that!



About the Alliance:

Work: No Child's Business aims to contribute towards the concentrated global efforts in ending all forms of child labour by 2025. The WNCB alliance, envisions a world where children and youth are free from child labour and enjoy their rights to quality education and (future) decent work, thereby contributing to SDG 8.7 in six countries- Côte d'Ivoire, Jordan, Mali, Uganda, Viet Nam, and India.

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