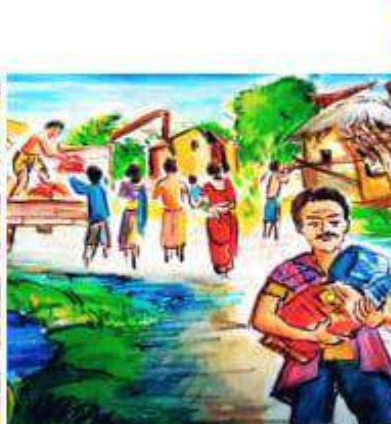


ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 21



"Art is a wound turned into light" - The children of Sundarbans has seen devastations and extreme poverty during this pandemic and cyclone Amphan. For some this has been a traumatic experience of losing their belongings, pausing education, struggling with scarcity of resources. We introduced art to help them to heal the trauma. These are few artwork came out from them.

RUPANTARAN FOUNDATION



SECRETARY'S NOTE

2020 -21 has been a year where the human race is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has led to a loss of human life worldwide, presented an unprecedented challenge to public health, and caused devastating socio-economic disruption. The World Health Organisation estimated tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, to increase by up to 132 million.

In the area where Rupantaran has its major direct grassroots intervention i.e. the Sunderbans people were coping-up with the pandemic when a super Cyclonic Storm Amphan caused widespread damage. The storm resulted in uprooting trees, damaging lives and livelihoods. Many homes were damaged and breached embankments led to the flooding of villages and swaths of cropland. In Sunderbans, saltwater inundation affected surrounding areas following damage of nearby embankments severely damaging rice paddies, vegetable and other crops.

The devastation was such that we could not stop ourselves from getting into relief and restoration work and jumped into the new domain for us i.e. disaster relief and livelihoods promotion. I am proud of the Rupantaran team to come forward in the unprecedented situation as warriors. The spirit to stand by the people in need is commendable, even when their houses, roofs and assets were damaged. Not just the team, the youths, the community people and even the village level child protection committees facilitated by us, showed true nature of active citizens. The efforts of the children were recognised and they were given Bravery Award by West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights (WBCPCR).

We are thankful to many individuals and organisations who wholeheartedly came forward to support the cause. I am sure the human race will fight it in united manner and will succeed in overcoming the difficult times.



Abhishek

Secretary, Rupantaran Foundation



VISION

A transformed society built on equity, dignity and peace.

MISSION

Enabling social justice in communities through active citizenship by promoting youth leadership, catalysing opportunities and access to rights & entitlements.

Rupantaran Foundation was formed in 2009 with an aim to promote responsive citizenship among communities focusing on engaging with youth and adolescents. At Rupantaran, we work on the issues of gender, education, child protection, livelihood promotion and nutrition. Rupantaran also works as a resource and capacity building organisation.

Our work at a glance



Child
protection



There has been series of studies, which shows that the vulnerabilities with respect to child protection and unsafe migration increase significantly post disaster / calamity. Sunderbans received the double blow of Covid as well as Amphan which made their lives difficult. Many a times, human traffickers and job agents use these opportunity to trap and exploit people. So, there was a need to make the community aware about the adverse effect of child marriage, trafficking and unsafe migration to make the community better informed and alert.

In each panchayat multiple stakeholders as well as community representatives were oriented on the issues of child protection so that they become better aware of the issue and act as a source of basic knowledge base regarding child protection in the community.



Along with that series of tools were used to create awareness in the community, 29 community meetings

were conducted and leaflets were distributed on prevention of child marriage and trafficking. Also, flex and hoarding were installed at different key locations of the villages to bring the issue into active mind of people.

A 16 years old youth leader at a remote village in South 24 Parganas helped a 14 years old to stop her marriage and continue her education. She was at shock when got to know that they would be moving to her relative's house where her family arranged her marriage. She wanted to study and somehow stop this marriage. She could only think about Subir, a 16 years old boy associated with our youth collective in her locality. She asked him to help her. Subir knew about Childline, BDO, VLCPC from our sessions. He called Childline and requested to come to that girl's place soon.



After getting the news a team from BDO office, local police station went to the girl's place and she shared very assertively her problem as well as her wish. The team was really impressed and talked to her family at length on child marriage. At the end her family members gave a written letter stating that they would not think about her marriage before 18 years and she will be allowed to study.

Working with
VLCPCs



Village level child protection committees are schematic body under ICPS established in each gram sansad for prevention, protection and responding on the issues of child protection. The VLCPC will be a community based organisation formed by the participation of community member, children, government functionaries and elected representatives. During 2020- 21, we have worked with 58 VLCPCs in South 24 Parganas. In some areas there were no VLCPCs while in some other areas even though the VLCPCs were formed but it was in a dormant state. In order to ensure that there is an active community based body in each sansad, we took special initiative to strengthen VLCPCs.

A series of advocacy was conducted with panchayat along with the probable members of Village level child protection committees to activate the Village level child protection committees and make them functional. It was challenging to bring different stakeholder at one platform as it consists of Panchayat Pradhan, elected member of that sansad, school teacher, ICDS supervisor, women SHG, ICDS worker, ANM, weaker section representatives, parents, and child representatives. Meetings were conducted with the each of these 58 sansads where the VLCPCs were made aware about the child protection issues, along with roles and responsibilities of the VLCPC.

Many VLCPCs took active role in stopping early marriage, spreading awareness, doing relief work. In Chatra village few members of youth collective, Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC) and community members have formed a COVID 19 Emergency Team in their village from which they have distributed 40 packets of rice and pulses to the very needy people at their locality. With the help of a local contractor, tuition teachers, other key persons of their village they are raising the resources for their fellow villagers who are in need of support. They have also arranged a quarantine centre in a nearby school for the migrant labours who are coming back to village.

Rubina, a 14 years old girl studying in Class VIII and living in Manirtat gram panchayat is continuing her education even the schools were shut down during pandemic. Her father is a daily labour. Her father was planning to marry Rubina but Rubina wanted to continue her education and was against the marriage. However, she was afraid to go against her father's will. Her father finally found a groom and finalized her marriage.

The VLCPC committee of the area came to know about the issue. The VLCPC consulted Rupantaran's volunteers who shared different steps which the VLCPCs can choose to act and even seek support of. The VLCPC then contacted the Childline and shared the incident with them. The Childline team went to Rubina's house and talked to her parents. Finally, her father agreed to stop the marriage plan of Rubina and continue her education.

Relief work during
Pandemic
and Amphan



Relief Camp - Rupantaran Foundation undertook the responsibility of running relief camp in Gopalnagar Gram Panchayat, Pathar Pratima in collaboration with the local panchayat. The relief camp served to nearly 200 families and provided with breakfast, lunch, tiffin and dinner. Along with that to ensure the hygiene we provided personal hygiene materials including sanitary napkins.

Dry Ration - In many areas of Sundarbans owing to Covid and Amphan, people were struggling to have two square meals. This is minimal for the survival of people. At this juncture, Rupantaran provided dry ration support to which included rice, potato, pulses, soya bean, beaten rice, puffed rice, powdered Bengal gram (*sattoo*) and milk powder to 1522 families.

Hygiene Kits - Covid pandemic and chances of water borne diseases after the flooding caused by Amphan made maintaining hygiene quite important. But, during this crisis time it was severely ignored. Rupantaran Foundation provided Hygiene Kits which include sanitary napkin, soap, detergent powder, hand wash, sanitizers and mask etc. to 8126 families to help them protect from the water borne diseases.

Tarpaulin Sheets - The roof of the houses were damaged or blown away by Amphan. In order to make it liveable and to safeguard from the sun and rains, the people required at least something to take shelter in. We provided Tarpaulin sheets (**Tripol**) to 518 families whose houses were damaged during Amphan.



Sanitisation Kit - After the flooding caused by Amphan, when the water receded there was very high chances of water borne diseases like diarrhoea, which need to be prevented and its damage to be minimised. The area was stinking because of dead animals and rotten materials. We provided bleaching Powder, lime stone powder (Chuna) to 1729 families for sanitising their houses, ponds and surrounding.

Creating Nutrition Gardens



Covid 19 pandemic and associated lockdown along with cyclone Amphan affected the lives of many. In Sunderbans, saltwater inundation affected surrounding areas following damage of nearby embankments severely damaged paddies, vegetable and other crops. There was a section in the community who struggled hard to have food during these difficult times. Through PDS support, they were getting the cereals but did not have money to purchase vegetables. Nutrition garden support was the critical support to ensure that the household can grow and have some leafy and other vegetable from where they can have vitamin, minerals as well as plant based protein.

Total 5134 vulnerable families got the nutrition garden support from us. The choice of seeds and support for nutrition garden was decided based on the diversity of micronutrients like proteins, vitamins, magnesium, iron, manganese, zinc, potassium, fiber, phosphorous and those seeds which can cope up with the local saline environment. Along with that the customization of support was carried out based on geographical context.

- At Mousuni Island of Namkhana, which was salt-infested, along with variety of seeds we provided Mustard Cake (*Khol*) which acted as manure as well as countered salinity.
- At Gopalnagar Gram Panchayat of Pathar Pratima, along with seeds we provided sustainable agriculture kit which included neem oil, Trichoderma Viride, melon trap, fruit fly lure and yellow sticky trap.
- At Manirtat GP, a large number of families were identified as vulnerable, they were also provided with the seed kit.

An intensive follow up and handholding support were provided to these 5134 vulnerable families so that they can create their own nutrition garden. A widely circulated daily newspaper The Telegraph has covered this initiative.

BID TO PROMOTE NEW VEGETABLES THAT CAN WITHSTAND SALINITY OF SOIL IN SUNDERBANS

Social outfit sows seeds of alternative farming at Mousuni

SUBHASISH CHAUDHURI

Mousuni Island (South 24 Parganas): A social organisation has started an experiment in alternative farming at Kusumtala on the Mousuni Island by encouraging the farming community to use seeds that can withstand salinity of soil.

A large number of villages in the Patharpratima, Namkhana and Joy nagar 2 blocks of South 24 Parganas are regularly flooded by rivers that are linked to the sea and have high saline content. As water from these rivers keep flooding the villages, cultivators of rice and several varieties of vegetables have become difficult. Similarly, the increase of salinity in the ponds make farming sweet water fish species, such as rohu and katla, difficult.

The odds that farmers in the region face has been the trigger behind the experiment that Rupantarani Foun-

datation, a Calcutta-based organisation carrying out livelihood restoration programmes across the state, has taken up in the region.

Tapas Mandal, head (capacity building) of Development Research Communication and Services Centre, a resource and knowledge centre for sustainable agriculture and alternative livelihood, said they had recommended 12 vegetable seeds to Rupantarani based on the soil condition in the region.

"Vegetables will be cultivated on raised land, where salinity level has decreased because of rain. As saline water remains locked in low-lying paddy fields, the vegetables will be cultivated on raised land structures that border these fields. These raised stretches of land are ideal for alternative farming because rain has decreased the soil's salinity level. The use of mustard cake as an organic fertiliser will further reduce salinity in the soil,"

Mandal added.

According to him, this model will yield good results in areas affected by Cyclone Amphan that devastated large parts of the Sunderbans in May, affecting the livelihood of the people in the region. Amphan-induced surge in the rivers, tidal waves and breach in embankments had led to flooding of large tracts of agricultural land and ponds with saline water.

As cultivation of traditional crops has become a challenge in the three blocks following Amphan, Rupantarani took up the problem with agricultural experts who suggested introducing peasants to farming vegetables that can withstand salinity in the soil.

Earlier this week, Rupantarani distributed packets of freed amaranthus (*dal saak*), water spinach (*kalmi saak*), red spinach, bitter gourd, pumpkin, lady finger,



(Left) A farmer with seed packets and booklets on cultivation instructions on the Mousuni Island on Tuesday; (above) some of the seeds chosen for the distribution. Picture by Pashupati Das

cucumber, yardlong bean, French beans, radish, and coriander, all of which can survive salinity. In the coming days, 4,906 families will be given seeds, along with 5kg of mustard cakes for fertilisation.

Soma Ranjit, a widow in Kusumtala with two children who received the seed packets on Tuesday, said:

"Amphan has destroyed my livelihood. I cannot grow paddy this year because of high salinity in the soil. At present, I have no income and had to take a loan to run my family. I am banking on the seeds Rupantarani has given us to grow vegetables. We will be able to eat the vegetables and earn as well by selling the surplus produce."

As part of its livelihood support programme, Rupantarani Foundation has identified 6,389 marginal families in the Patharpratima, Namkhana and Joy nagar 2 blocks.

The Amphan victims without a pucca house, hotel or orchard, boat and land more than two bighas, have been identified for the project.

Speaking to The Telegraph, Rupantarani's founder-director Smita Sen said: "During distribution of relief materials among Amphan victims, we noticed the miserable condition of people in

Mousuni (Namkhana block), Gopalnagar (Patharpratima block) and Manirtat (Joy nagar 2 block). Those villagers were worst affected as their agricultural land and ponds had been inundated with saline water. This made agricultural activity a difficult proposition and many were beginning to migrate to earn a living. This made us take up a restorative support programme in these areas."

"We spoke to agricultural experts to find out alternative survival means and they suggested farming vegetables since these people were getting free rice from the government. The vegetables will help the families because of their nutritional values and they could earn by selling the surplus produce," Sen said.

Praabhu Hazra, a professor at Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya in Kalyani and an expert in horticulture, welcomed the initiative but expressed

doubts about the "salinity tolerance" of some vegetables. "Some of these vegetables can resist salinity to some extent. However, it is true that rainfall helps reduce the salinity level in the soil," Hazra said.

In several phases, these families will be given seeds of 12 types of vegetables that can grow in saline soil conditions. Those who do not have land but own ponds will be given fish like hybrid Tilapia that can be farmed in saline water. Those without land or ponds will be given chicks to start poultry farming. The organisation will also train the beneficiaries to grow fish and vegetables in a sustainable way to meet their nutritional needs and sell the surplus in the markets.

Hasna Bann Biwi, the chief of Mousuni gram panchayat, said: "I am hopeful the endeavour will benefit the poor families who have been hit hard by Amphan and lockdown."

Promoting
Livelihoods



Cyclone Amphan affected the agriculture field badly. In some areas of Mousuni in Namkhana Block and Gopalnagar Panchayat in Pathar Pratima Block, due to prolonged salt water staying in agricultural land were damaged severely. Also, there were families having no agricultural land and due to lockdown their income from working as daily labour are affected severely.

To promote the livelihoods of these vulnerable families of Sundarbans we have provided them poultry chicks with feed and fish lings for backyard poultry and fish cultivation respectively.

40 years old Manjura Bibi of Mousuni Island, Sunderbans lives with two daughters and a son. Her husband was a migrant labour and used to work in Kerala but during lockdown he came back home after lot of difficulty and hardly got any work as daily labour in the locality. Manjura run the family by selling fish, which she catches from the nearby river and manage to sell only handful of fishes locally because of lack of transportation to market. This pandemic forced them to be in debt to manage two square meals.

Manjura got the backyard poultry support from Rupantaran. With lots of care she has grown up the chicks. Now, she is running her family by selling eggs and chicken. She has also reinvested a part of the money to buy more chicks and ducklings to expand the poultry. She is now dreaming to build a poultry farm at the backyard of their mud house and run a successful poultry business one day.



Persons with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable population groups that suffer the most during pandemic situation. Poverty, food insecurity, more health care needs, stigma and lack of livelihood facilities etc. made the families having person with disability very vulnerable in Sundarbans especially during Pandemic.

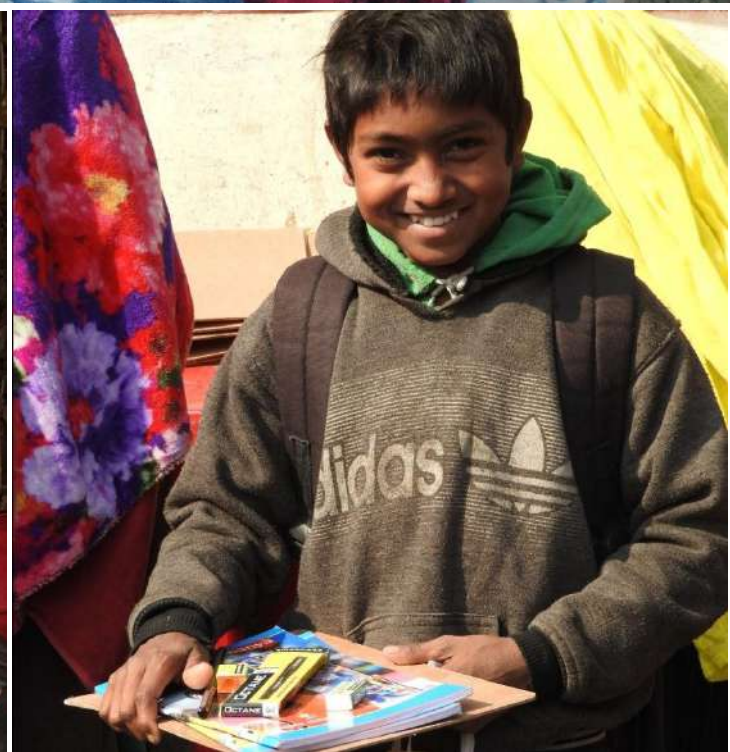
We have provided goat rearing support to these families in Jaynagar I block.

Total 1564 families got the support from us to promote their livelihoods in Pathar Pratima, Namkhana, Jaynagar II and Jaynagar I blocks

Quality Education



Susmita and Purnima are the first person in their respective families who are going to school. Studying in class IX may be an ordinary thing for many of us, but not for them. Rupantaran is happy to be a co-traveller in their journey since last two years. Struggling with poverty they are actually creating examples in the remote village of Manirtat.



Rupantaran Foundation is working with the economically and academically vulnerable children to support in their education through supplementary education classes for them. Education — ‘The Great Equaliser’, but only accessing school in rural area is not enough. In this trying time and digital divide, our local teachers visited their homes, engaged them through interesting conversation in and outside the learning space.

Being the first generation learner with less opportunity and aspirations with respect to education students of government schools in rural area are way behind from their counterpart in urban area. A counselling session was organised with the help of government Anwasha Counsellor to guide adolescents to cope



up with the present hardship. The adolescents were taken through participative processes where they identified and reflected on their aspiration, its opportunities and challenges for the same.

Many of the children at Sundarbans have witnessed extreme poverty in their family due to COVID and Amphan. Children are on a verge to drop out of schools and being forced to be child brides or end up as child labour to supplement the family income in this unprecedented times. Many even lost their education materials. We have distributed 7000 education kits to vulnerable students to help them to study. Children of government schools in rural areas are almost out of touch from formal education since Lockdown.

Anticipating many children still not get admitted in school, we did a “Campaign on Wheels” (a microphone was installed on an e-rickshaw and moved through the hamlets) in remote villages on importance of education with an appeal to ensure admission in school. It relayed the community awareness message and distributed leaflets containing message in the community.



Nurturing
Youth
Leadership



Our youth leaders Subir Purakait (16 years) and Moyajjem Laskar (17 years) got the Bravery Award, 2020 from West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights for their extraordinary community development work during pandemic.



At Rupantaran, we promote Youth Development where youth are treated as “Actor” of development. Each of our youth focused programs are having four elements i.e. building perspective on different issues, instigating passion with real world and personal connect, and taking the youth to a journey of facilitated actions. Rupantaran facilitates safe space for youth, a place in which youth feels confident that they are not be exposed to discrimination. Here the youth are imparted life skills ranging from understanding self, coping with emotion to effective communication and interpersonal skills. Along with that to promote the leadership skills series of sessions and workshops are conducted with the youth.

During this year, the youth showed that the seed of change sown into them has turned into a fruit bearing trees. The youth spontaneously took initiatives during the unprecedented time of Covid and Amphan, to aware the communities on safe behaviours, identify vulnerable households and even raising funds amongst them to help them with rations, preventing child marriages and trafficking.



17 years old Moyajjem Laskar of remote Chatra village of Jaynagar I block was concerned to protect his village from Corona outbreak. He identified village entry and tube well point as critical area.

He mobilised support from elders of the community. With that he installed this hand cleaning area at the entry point of his village where every incoming persons washes hand prior entering the village. Also the area depends on community tube well for water. He felt using tube well without proper sanitisation might become a potential contaminant.

Beside the drinking water points he placed soap so that people can wash hand and then use the tube well. As the lockdown is continuing over a month, Moyajjem and four of his friends are ensuring that it's being followed and continuously creating awareness on hand washing among the villagers.

Advocating
gender equity



Culture has immense influence in shaping our gender roles and identities. But it can be renewed and reshaped with a continuous and strategic effort within the community. In most of the houses, the boys are not allowed to do the basic and easy life lessons like making beds, washing clothes, washing dishes, sweeping the house, cooking and sewing. We are all inculcating in boys the teaching that "these are girls' jobs" and that girls are worthless.

To challenge the idea different interesting competitions were organized by the youth leaders, who are part of our transformative journey of being more gender sensitive. For example - putting thread into needle competition for boys, kicking football competition for women. A counter narrative was built among the villagers through these games and conversations.



We believe that Gender Equity should be a part of our curriculum to change the status quo. On the occasion of International Working Women's Day we discussed about 'work and gender equity' through some interesting activities with the kids we are providing supplementary education.



Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis



Participatory Vulnerabilities and Capacities Analysis is a blend of participatory processes for democratising development processes to make them more inclusive, relevant and responsive vis-à-vis marginalised communities and creating a platform where voices of excluded groups can be heard and acted upon in the quest for equity.

We used Participatory Vulnerabilities and Capacities Analysis to identify the vulnerability criteria as per the local people and which communities as per them are most vulnerable in the area based on those criteria, map in the households in the village having these vulnerable communities and to identify the vulnerabilities of each of the identified communities.



A total of 641 participants took part in the participatory vulnerabilities and capacities analysis. They belong to different vulnerable sections identified by the villagers and took active part in an intensive process which spread over months. Various interesting participatory tools were used to conduct these activities. From making maps of their area to identifying vulnerable people in their area to analyse their issues – the activities were full of deep conversations, thoughtful insights and vision for change.

Technical Support to other Organisation



Rupantaran Foundation also serves as a technical support partner to different organisation and even government agencies. Over the period of time, we have gain experiences of child protection including child early forced marriage or union, trafficking etc., gender equity, working with adolescents and youth, participatory vulnerabilities and capacities analysis, communication and stakeholder & community engagement strategies.

- **Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha (BTS)** is a grassroots-level Community Based Organisation (CBO) working in the riverine Coastal areas of Sunderbans. Rupantaran team provided training to their Amplifying Community Voices as well as team member of other projects of BTS on understanding of stakeholders analysis techniques, stakeholders and community engagement strategies and Communication Skills.



- **Indraprastha Srijan Welfare Society (ISWS)** is working to enhance the quality of life of the small, marginal, poor and landless farmers through the proper management of natural resources and to help them to cope up with the natural disasters through the alternative livelihood measures. Rupantaran team provided training to their project team as well as self help group members, ASHAs and ICDS worker of their areas to gain basic understanding of Concept of gender, the issue of child marriage and trafficking, push and pull factors and preventive strategies.
- The socio-economic development organisation **Mukti (Liberation)** was setup in the year 2003 by a group of young and energetic people for human development. Rupantaran team provided training to their Amplifying Community Voices as well as team member of other projects to gain basic understanding of stakeholders and its relation analysis techniques and stakeholders and community engagement strategies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- Australian Consulate General, Kolkata
- Coldsmiths Retail Services Private Limited, New Delhi
- ComMutiny the Youth Collective, New Delhi
- DMET 2005 Alumni group
- DMET Kolkata Group
- Freenet Marketing Private Limited, Kolkata
- Garbage Free India, Mumbai
- Good Universe, Hyderabad
- Goonj
- Impact Guru
- Isan and Kusum Paul Foundation, USA
- Office of Block Development Officer, Joynagar – I & II Block, West Bengal
- Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices, New Delhi
- Royal Berkshire Bengali Association, UK
- The Hummingbird Foundation, UK
- The Oak Foundation, Switzerland
- The YP Foundation, New Delhi
- West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights
- Late Mr Anindo Banerjee, Patna
- Mr Ankur Rastogi, Mumbai
- Mr Tajinder Singh, Singapore
- Mr Buddha Paul, USA
- Mr Navneet Jain, New Delhi
- Mr Partha Das, Kolkata
- Mrs Shikha Paul, USA
- Ms Angana Dutta, Kolkata
- Ms Nilanjana Sharma, Kolkata
- Ms Priyanka Dey, Kolkata
- The Mathias family, UK

And many individuals who wholeheartedly supported us to continue our mission.



RUPANTARAN FOUNDATION

Registration number - S/1L/60699 (under West Bengal Societies Registration Act)

FCRA Registration number - 147111167

Tax exempted under section 12AA (1) (b) & 80G (5) (VI) of Income Tax Act 1961

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