



Annual report 2021 – 22

Rupantaran Foundation

SECRETARY'S NOTE

The year 2021 -22 is the year where the COVID-19 pandemic entered its second year and we were hit by deadly second wave and wide spreading third wave. There is rarely anyone in India who have not lost any known person in the fight against COVID.

The Sundarbans which was severely affected by super cyclone Amphan and was still recuperating from the damage caused, was hit by another super cyclone Yaas. The super cyclone resulted in damaging of houses, lives, and livelihoods. The saltwater inundation affected surrounding areas following damage of nearby embankments severely damaging rice paddies, vegetable and other crops. The damage was even more severe than previous year. We are really thankful to many individuals and organisations who like previous year, this year also wholeheartedly came forward to support the vulnerable people of Sundarbans.

At the time of such distress, people need to be together and I am happy to share that Rupantaran Foundation facilitated the process of collectivisation to collectivise 8370 community people into 338 collectives. Another focus of this year's intervention was on livelihoods promotion in Sundarbans so that those families who were affected by Covid and back-to-back super cyclones and recover from the shock of disasters. This component of Rupantaran's work even though is quite new, but is well appreciated by the community members and other stakeholders.

I am pleased to present you the annual report of Rupantaran Foundation for the year 2021- 22 and I am hopeful that with every passing year we shall be able to enhance the depth and scale of intervention.



Abhishek

Secretary, Rupantaran Foundation

Rupantaran Foundation works on the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)





992 children have been supported for continuing education during this year. **6 educational support centres** are operated in collaboration with local self-government.



QUALITY EDUCATION

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



A child's right to education entails the right to learn. Yet, in rural West Bengal, as per the National Family Health Survey 5, nearly three out of four persons don't have 10 or more years of schooling. Children living through economic fragility, conflict or natural disaster are more likely to be cut off from schooling. Also, the education opportunities for girls remain severely limited. This learning crisis – the rift between the levels of learning children receives and the need of the children – hit a global scale even before the COVID-19 pandemic brought education systems to a halt. In rural areas, most of the school-aged children do not have internet connection in their homes, which restricted their opportunities to learn during the online education system. Without quality education, children are more likely to suffer adverse outcomes and less likely to participate in decisions that affect them – threatening their ability to shape a better future for themselves and their societies.

In this context, Rupantaran Foundation has been working with economically and academically underprivileged children to support the supplementary education classes, through six education centres. Our local volunteers are capacitated to develop interesting teaching and learning methods for vulnerable children, so that, the children can gain interest in education. To ensure enabling environment for them, the capacity of parents is also built on parenting skills, understanding adolescence and rights. Besides, regular home visits are conducted to always stay connected with the family of vulnerable children and ensuring that their children continue education. Sundarbans was severely devastated by two back-to-back super cyclones and the flooding due to cyclones, washed away educational materials. In order to safeguard the vulnerable children to continue education, Rupantaran Foundation has supported 992 children by providing education materials.

13 years old Nurani Khatun is daughter of Seikh Nazrul Islam, living in Baliara village, Mousuni GP, Namkhana. South 24 Parganas. She studies in class VII of Baliara High School but after the lockdown her education was discontinued. Nurani's father was not able to do any job due his chronic illness. Her mother Asmuda Bibi tried to run the family as daily labour. Nurani did not like to study at all, she even said "What will I do after studying? And who will support me to study? My father is ill, we don't get to eat twice as a day, I don't want to study." But our teacher got in touch with her family through home visits. Special attention in her study and supporting her family helped Nurani Khatun to continue her study.





333 collectives of women and adolescents are formed as support system where **8348 collective members** are regularly meeting and discussing about gender-based discriminations and violence.



GENDER EQUITY



Gender-based discrimination is one of the main root causes, which plays a crucial role for girls towards the dropout from school, child marriage, and trafficking, especially in the rural areas, where men and women have been playing different gender stereotyping roles.

Collectivisation is the key of our work to ensure gender justice in the community. We have formed 333 collectives of women and adolescents as support system where 8348 collective members are regularly meeting and discussing about gender-based discriminations and violence. Rupantaran conducted structured perspective building sessions on gender-based discrimination and violence, basic understanding of patriarchy with the collective members. These collectives of girls and women are initiating dialogs among them to share oppressions in the family, agricultural field and other spaces to support each other and take steps for changing the status quo.

To stop violence against women, working with the girls and women is not enough. We believe working with boys and men on gender, masculinities, equity are critical. Our society desperately needs more and more sensitive and sensible boys and men as local role models. We have formed collectives of young boys to work on the gender issues with them.

Samresh Sahu, 14 years, is members of boy's collective at Durgagobindapur village in Pathar Pratima, Sundarbans. After attending the session on gender discrimination, when he went home, he observed that his father who has returned from Kerala after migration, doesn't do any household work. Since morning he sits near the tea shop and play cards. While her mother starts working from early in the morning. After completing the household works, she takes care of livestock and cultivates vegetable. He felt that he never saw all these in this perspective, as the household work is neither of men or women, it's for all of us to do. So, he decided to take up the responsibility of some of the household work. Now, he fetches water, sweeps the house and even occasionally take the livestock for grazing. Samresh has moved one step forward towards gender equity and challenging the patriarchal norms.





7970 vulnerable families at Sundarbans got seed, manure and technical support to cultivate vegetables. **1750 vulnerable families** at Sundarbans got backyard poultry support.



LIVELIHOOD PROMOTION



Apart from the Covid-19 pandemic, Sundarbans have been hit by two super cyclones in last one and half years. Saltwater inundation due to breached embankments led to the flooding of villages, collapsing mud houses, damaging drinking water sources and agricultural fields. A large section of the population of the Sundarbans are dependent on agriculture, which has been badly affected as the cyclone brought salt water from the sea and made the lands unproductive. Based on earlier experiences of cyclones, many farmers across the region had given up hope for fresh crop this season.

Rupantaran has identified 7970 such vulnerable families in Sundarbans who have been struggling hard to survive in this difficult time. We are collectivising women of these vulnerable families, supporting with key ingredients for cultivating in the salty land and the necessary trainings. In this season, we have given them different types of vegetable seeds, lime powders and manures so that the saltiness of the land reduces and they can cultivate vegetables at least to some extent.

There were families in Sundarbans having no agricultural land or salt water infestation was so high that vegetable cultivation for this season was not feasible. To promote the livelihoods of 1750 such vulnerable families we provided them poultry chicks with feed for backyard poultry.

58 years old, Subhadra Das lives in Mousuni Island, Sundarbans with her 17 years old disabled daughter. Lightning strike killed her husband few years ago when he was working in the field. Her three sons migrated to different location within or outside the state for work, settled there and hardly contact Subhadra to avoid taking responsibility of their disabled sister & old mother. Subhadra's work as daily labour in the nearby area and her daughter's disability allowance keeps them alive. Flood during Yaas has made their life miserable. She got some immediate relief support during those struggling days but after that, she did not get any work or support. Rupantaran Foundation is supporting this family with 12 types of seeds, manure, lime powders and technical support. Subhadra has taken some Aal (borders of a land) as lease to grow vegetables. She has been growing her own food and sold some of the produce. Now after spending money to run the family she has repaid her loans.





808 adolescent girls and boys are being engaged to aware them about the child protection issues including prevention of child marriage, trafficking, child labour, child abuse & exploitations. We have been working with **58 VLCPCs** to create a community-based child protection safety net.



National Family Health Survey – 5 shows that rate of child marriage in rural area of West Bengal is 48.1%, that means almost one of every two marriages are child marriage in rural Bengal. These child brides are exposed to life-threatening health consequences ranging from repeated pregnancies to childbirth before she is physically and psychologically mature. Their children are often malnourished, health always remain an issue of concern. Thus, they suffer throughout their life and transfer it to their next generation. Covid-19 and back-to-back cyclones has brought great difficulties for many families in Sundarbans. Children especially girls 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 these unprecedented times.

Rupantaran Foundation engaged the 808 adolescents through the structured sessions on different child protection issues. Through community meetings, we discussed on prevention of child marriage, trafficking, child labour, child abuse & exploitations. During these awareness meeting leaflets were distributed, along with flex and hoarding were installed at different key locations of the villages to bring the issue into active mind of people. A series of advocacy was conducted with panchayat authorities and block officials to activate the Village level child protection committees and make them functional. Rupantaran is facilitating the process of formation and strengthening of VLCPC in collaboration with the block authorities so that the VLCPC can act as a local institution working proactively to ensure protective environment for children. During this year, Rupantaran has worked intensively to capacitate VLCPCs which includes orientation of new members on role and responsibility of VLCPCs. Apart from that, they have orientated about the issues ill-effects of child marriage, child trafficking, child labour, child abuse & exploitations.

X, a 16-year-old girl from a remote area of South 24 parganas was going outside the village with a middle-aged person who was a relative of her. On the way, hearing a strange discussion between them the people from nearby Chatra village detained them into a club and informed the Chatra VLCPC (Village Level Child Protection Committee). The VLCPC members Rosanwara Bibi Molla, Sabera Laskar, Hasem Molla, and Kasem Molla called her family immediately.

According to X's father, "I am sending my daughter to Delhi with my relative, where he will take care of her and will arrange to get the marriage of my daughter", which was inconsistent with the person's statement accompanying X. While discussing with the VLCPC members her father realised that her daughter may be at risk of trafficking and he was not taking a right step for her daughter. He took back X to home and promised to not do such thing, whatever difficulties the time may bring. X is now staying with her family in the village.



250 adolescent girls are engaged in deeper conversation on the reproductive health and menstruation issues. **998 adolescent girls and women** in Sundarbans were provided with sanitary napkin.



ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH



Adolescents face a spectrum of health and social challenges ranging from unwanted pregnancy, early marriage and childbearing, which is associated with higher risk of health problems like anaemia, sexually transmitted infections, unsafe abortion, postpartum haemorrhage, and mental disorders. In rural West Bengal, as per the National Family Health Survey 5, 19.6% of girls aged 15-19 years are already mothers or pregnant i.e., nearly one out of five girls of age 15-19 years are facing teenage pregnancy. One out of four women aged 15-24 years don't use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual period.

Rupantaran works with adolescents and their parents on adolescence, reproductive and sexual health, breaking the taboos around menstruation and promoting menstrual hygiene. Series of sensitising sessions are conducted with them to help them understand the need and promote the practices. Covid pandemic followed by two back-to-back super cyclone Amphan and Yaas, affected the community severely. There was severe loss of livelihoods and houses assets. The water sources were polluted with dead animals and plant wastes, resulting in severe hygiene issues. With a culture to bath in pond, the community members especially women were particularly vulnerable to the reproductive tract infections. Also, expenses for sanitary napkin during this time of economic crisis was considered luxury. During this period, Rupantaran took initiative to provide sanitary napkins to adolescent girls and women. The support which is often neglected, was highly appreciated by the adolescent girls and women in the Sundarbans.

Labani Guchait is members of adolescent girls' collective at Dakshin Gopalnagar village in Pathar Pratima. During the sessions on menstruation health and hygiene, she along with her collective members shared lots of taboo associated with it in their village like, they shared that the cloth which they use for menstrual period is kept in the darkest corner of house where no male members of house go. They shared lots of myths associated with menstruation in their village like a girl during her menstrual period is not allowed to take part in religious activities and even not allowed to go out especially in the evening. The myths were clarified and she shared that not allowing to go out is resulting in missing tuitions and she finds it difficult to follow the education afterwards. After the session, Labani went to her house and talked to her mother regarding the misconceptions and the loss of educational opportunity because of this. Her mother realised and now she has allowed Labani to go out for tuitions during her periods without any hurdle from the family.



Dry Ration and Hygiene Materials Distribution

In response to COVID 19 Crisis

Implemented by: Rupantaran Foundation

Supported by: Tech Mahindra Foundation

Place: Mousuni Island, South 24 Parganas
Date: 23.06.2021



1871 vulnerable families at Sundarbans got food ration support to survive after the devastation caused by Super cyclone Yaas & Covid. **2382 vulnerable families** at Sundarbans got support of sanitisation kit to sanitise their houses, ponds and surrounding after devastation caused by Super cyclone Yaas.



RELIEF SUPPORT



This year the people of Sundarbans were not just affected by Covid Pandemic, but also a super cyclone Yaas caused severe devastation. The cyclone impacted on uprooting trees, damaging homes, lives and livelihoods. Many homes especially mud houses were damaged in South 24 Parganas and breached embankments led to the flooding of villages and swaths of cropland. Rupantaran team tirelessly worked to reach out to the needy with the following relief support.

In many areas of Sundarbans owing to Covid and Yaas, most of the people were struggling to have two square meals. In this context, Rupantaran Foundation have been supported the dry ration to 1871 families. The chances waterborne diseases increased after flooding by Yaas in the affected areas. So, it was highly important to maintained proper hygiene. Rupantaran Foundation have provided Hygiene Kits to 850 families. We also provided sanitisation kit (lime stone and even bleaching Powder) to 2382 families for sanitising their houses, ponds and surrounding.

During the second wave of Covid, tracking of Oxygen level was becoming quite critical. Yet most of the villages of Sundarbans don't have essential pulse oximeter. Rupantaran provided pulse oximeters in 20 villages of Sundarbans. They will be kept in village health sub-centres and can be access by the people of the area.

Most of the people in Mousuni island took shelter in one of the 23 relief camps run by government or in the pucca house in their neighbourhood when the water started flooding during Yaas. Realizing the damage that would be done to his mud house, Ananta Das took refuge with his family in a nearby pucca house. When water entered inside that pucca house, the owner of that pucca house said that if there were so many people on the roof of the house, the roof might collapse. Carrying children on the shoulder, when they were going to a relief camp in nearby school, Ananta saw the one-storied school building was almost sinking. Many people are standing on the roof and there was no space left. He saw few more helpless families like his. Ananta thought that in order to survive they have to stay above the water level. Thereafter, 20 people took shelter on a boat for next five days. Somehow the boat survived the rough seas. Ananta told us “You know, in this year I produced 4 quintals of paddy and had some from the previous year. All lost. Somehow, I managed to save 4 kg of rice from that.” Ananta sent his children to his relative’s house to keep them safe. In that condition they were cooking rice for eating once in a day and rest they are managing with puffed rice, both received from the relief provided by us which helped them to survive during that difficult time.





150 adolescent girls from **10 villages** at Jaynagar I block took part in **Sports for gender advancement programme.**



SPORTS FOR GENDER ADVANCEMENT



Society continues to scoff: 'Girls don't play'. In rural area of remote Sundarbans, where girls are getting married at the age of 15-16 years, they can't even imagine to play. Playgrounds are always men's space. Girls' sports should be an indoor one. Through the initiative Hokkabaddi (Sports for gender advancement) the daughters of farmers, daily labourers from these villages beside of their routines of household chores and caring for younger siblings, fetching water and helping mothers, they started playing Kabaddi.

Hok Kabaddi is gradually taking shape of a campaign on girls' right to play and accessing playground. When we (Rupantaran Foundation) started this there were hardly any girls agreeing to play any contact game, in front of others. The journey was neither easy for them, nor easy for us. We tried to build perspective with the girls on gender discrimination, right to play, accessing the playground in their area.

As 150 girls from 10 different villages have been slowly out on the field, the villagers started seeing these girls playing in bright-coloured jerseys over a faded salwar-kameez . Over the period, for a section of girls the salwar-kameez has even turned into shorts or tight leggings with jersey on top, they are coming out as negotiators with the villagers on playing games and advocating for their rights.

Suparna Mandal is born and raised in a poor family of Harinarayanpur Panchayat. From the very beginning of Kabaddi practice, their team had some heated arguments with the boys of the neighbourhood. The boys assumed that only they would play on the field. It was difficult for girls to start kabaddi practice there. Running in the early morning and kabaddi practice in the evening - that's how they started preparing themselves.

Suparna was injured badly while practicing. Still, she played all the league matches thinking that it would be difficult for her team to win without her. The whole community including the boys cheered for them when her team got selected among the four final teams. An intense attacking game was played by the girls in the final matches. We observed that fierce Suparna was turning red in pain. The spray bottle was almost finished, but Suparna refused to leave the field. We all realized that it was just not a game for her, it was a platform to show others what a girl can do.





641 persons from 4 villages of Patharpratima, Sundarbans did Participatory vulnerability and capacity analysis of their area and made long term social development plans for their community. **80 community leaders got leadership coaching** and these leaders are reaching out to **7680 people** in the community by taking awareness and perspective building sessions and conducting participatory monitoring.



PARTICIPATORY PLANNING, MONITORING AND LEADERSHIP BUILDING

A total of 641 vulnerable persons in Pathar Pratima, Sundarbans have participated in Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis. A series of community led, participatory processes were done to diagnose their vulnerabilities, articulate aspirations and avenues of change. The activities were full of interesting steps, deep conversations, thoughtful insights and vision for change. After that they have made plans for social change in their community.

80 community leaders were elected or selected by their peers this year and have been getting leadership coaching. Leadership Coaching is the process of developing leadership abilities and thinking so that they can be effective leaders in their communities. These community leaders are conducting sessions with their peers, reaching out to community members with their messages and conducting other social development work in their respective communities. The community leaders we engaged with this year, reached to total of 7960 people in their area.

This year we have also introduced community led monitoring system where the participants monitor their own work through participatory rural appraisal tools and techniques.

Mitali Mandal comes from a very poor family of Bagdanga village of Mousuni Island. In a 10 members family Mitali has been taking various roles of mother, wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law. With lots of pressure of doing household chores, she never imagined any other identity for her. As a member of women's collective in her area, she has been chosen as peer leader. As peer leader, she learned facilitation and team management skills. Now she is facilitating conversations around economic and environmental justice with 250 women of her area and conducting participatory monitoring with them to ensure quality of the programme. People of her area now recognised her as community leader and she is very happy with her new role. As per her words, "I never get such a joy in my whole life. I got new friends and new identity. I can empathise with the pain of a caged bird after experiencing the freedom with this type of work. I would like to thanks Rupantaran for giving me this opportunity."





In five scale ranking (Very good, Good, Average, Bad, Very bad), **72% participants** rated the capacity building processes as very good and **28% participants** rated the process as good.



TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Rupantaran Foundation also serves as a technical support partner to different organisations and even government agencies.

- Rupantaran Foundation provided perspective building training to different partner organisations of Oak Foundation implementing Amplifying Community Voices project on working with adolescents and youth for building their agency and on gender issues which included understanding the socialisation process of Gender, the marginalisation of girls and women within the family, the gender-based violence and how gender norms affect men.
- Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha (BTS) is a grassroots-level Community Based Organisation (CBO) working in the riverine Coastal areas of Sundarbans. Rupantaran team provided training to the team member as well as community leaders of their Amplifying Community Voices project on gender-based violence.
- 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 on participatory engagement with community and facilitation skill.

“I think, this workshop was indeed very important for all the participants as it started working within self. This is a process of transformation of mind, attitude, body language and personality. The learning I got will help not only in working for this specific project but also my working for whole life to bring changes in our areas.”

- Narugopal Hazra, A participant of one of the perspective building workshops facilitated by Rupantaran for the partner organisations



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- Praxis India
- Isan & Kusum Foundation, USA
- Women Win
- The Australian High Commission, Kolkata
- The Hummingbird Foundation, UK
- Tech Mahindra Foundation
- Royal Berkshire Bengali Association, UK
- DMET Alumni Association Singapore
- DMET Kolkata Group
- Executive Ship Management
- The DevNext Foundation, New Delhi
- The Office of Block Development Officer, Namkhana, Patherpratima, Joynagar – I & II Block, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal
- Mr Mahesh Kumar
- Mr Ankur Rastogi
- Mrs Priya Jain
- Dr Arvind Mohan
- Mr Partha Das
- Different kind hearted individuals

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