



ANNUAL REPORT

2023-24

SECRETARY'S NOTE

In the year 2023-24 we became the nation which represents maximum number of human inhabitants on Earth. With India in demographic dividend opportunity window and more than a quarter of population falling the 10-24 age group, makes India one of the youngest countries globally. It is important that this age group as actor of development rather than mere object of development using whose potential we want to be a global superpower. This task is challenging and with require synergy of all the actors of development to converge their energy and resources to have a equitable and just society.

This year is also a significant milestone for Rupantaran Foundation and myself as I am honoured to share our fifteenth annual report of Rupantaran and be a part of its journey of fifteen years and gradually moving towards its mission and vision.

This year we conducted an impact assessment of our intervention with marginalised communities in Sundarbans through women. Food insecurities of the families reduced from 99.8% at the time of super-cyclone Yaas to 3.8%, while 83% of the women participants reported improvement in their position in the family.

I am thankful to the passionate and dedicated team and volunteers of Rupantaran, it's their hard work which results in a significant change in the lives of children and women of marginalised sections of society. We are thankful to many individuals and organisations who wholeheartedly came forward to support Rupantaran and have become a strong pillar and ambassadors of the cause.



Abhishek
Secretary, Rupantaran Foundation

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





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.

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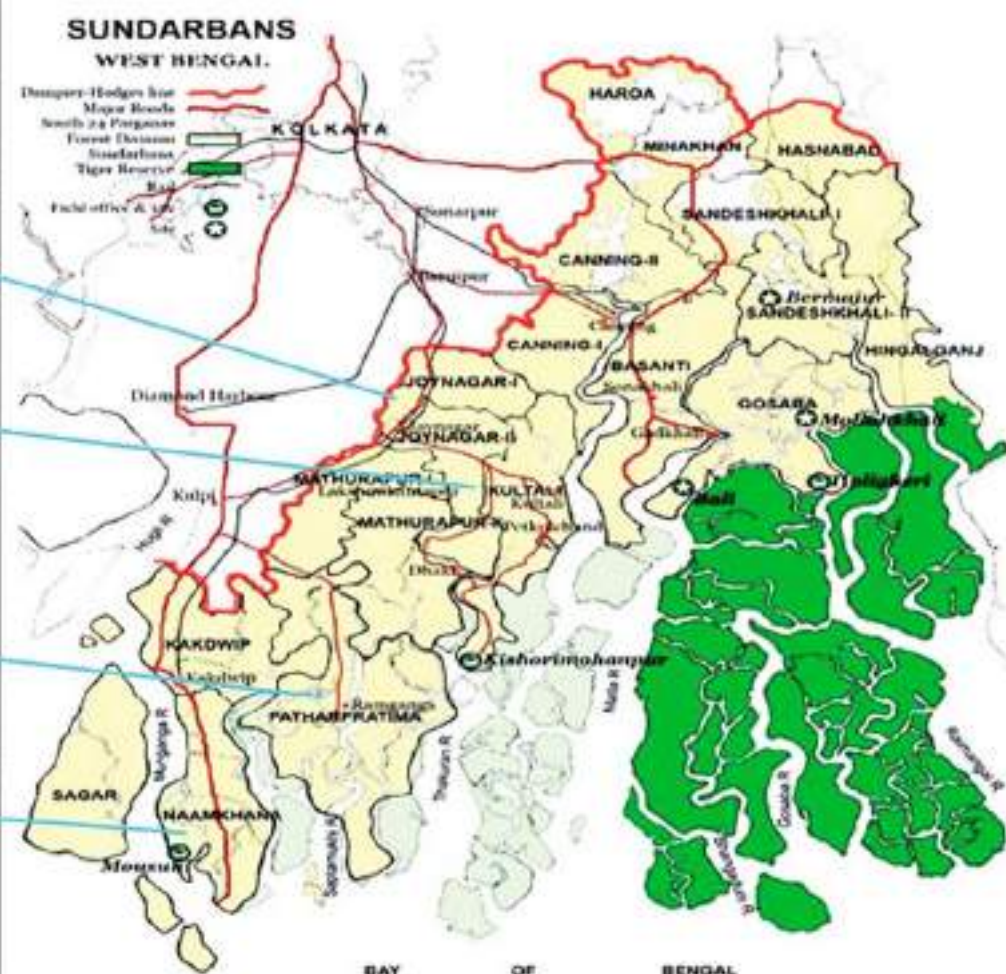
Our working area

Jaynagar - I

Jaynagar - II

Patharpratima

Namkhana



Glimpses of our work



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, health, education, child protection, livelihood promotion and disaster management. Rupantaran also works as a resource and capacity building organization.

Our Current Engagement:

Direct engagements:

- Adolescents ~ 2000
(adolescent girls 1250)
- Women ~ 11000
- Geography –
78 villages of 4 Blocks of Sundarbans,
Kolkata





QUALITY EDUCATION



Quality education goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge; it should inspire a lifelong love for learning, promote basic literacy and numeracy, and foster an inclusive environment where every child feels safe and valued, irrespective of their background. The right to education is fundamentally the right to learn, but for many children living in poverty, conflict zones, or areas struck by natural disasters, this right remains elusive. The barriers are even more pronounced for girls, who often face additional challenges in accessing education. Without quality learning opportunities, these children are at a greater risk of negative life outcomes and are less likely to shape their futures or contribute meaningfully to their communities.

In response to these challenges, the Rupantaran Foundation has been providing supplementary education through six facilities, supporting children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Our dedicated community volunteers implement creative teaching strategies that captivate and inspire vulnerable children, sparking their interest in learning. To ensure consistent support, frequent home visits are conducted to maintain close communication with families of children at risk of dropping out, ensuring their education continues uninterrupted. The Udaan Centre, in particular, stands as a beacon of hope, offering these children the resources and motivation they need to complete their education and unlock their potential.

At just 14 years old, Mintu Ray found himself working on farms, doing odd jobs, and washing dishes at a tea shop after being left in the care of his grandmother. His mother had remarried and moved away, leaving him alone in the unfamiliar village of Baliara, where he knew no one. As he watched children his age go to school, a sense of longing grew within him. When social worker Shobha heard about Mintu's situation, she quickly met with his grandmother and convinced her to enroll him in school. Mintu joined the Udaan Study Centre, where he received extra support to catch up on his education. Mintu even though tries his best to maintain a good attendance at school but he takes great effort in ensuring to never attend his Udaan classes. He is making steady progress, and with each passing day, his dreams of securing a job at a big company grow stronger.





GENDER EQUITY



Gender equality is crucial for fostering an inclusive society where both women and men have equal opportunities to learn, grow, and contribute. Unfortunately, many girls and women still encounter significant barriers to education, leadership, and personal development, especially in economically disadvantaged or marginalized communities. The Rupantaran Foundation is actively addressing these challenges by providing girls with access to quality education and creating opportunities for women to enhance their skills and leadership abilities. These initiatives empower individuals while also working to dismantle entrenched gender norms that restrict opportunities for women and girls.

Through its impactful programs, Rupantaran has reached thousands of children and women via over 500 collectives, generating ripple effects that benefit entire communities. By promoting education, leadership, and livelihood opportunities for women and girls, the foundation is fostering a cultural shift toward greater gender equity. Furthermore, Rupantaran collaborates with other organizations in the Sundarbans through the Gender Study Circle, enhancing their capacity to create a gender-violence-free environment where everyone can pursue education. This collective effort has strengthened community-wide initiatives to promote respect and inclusivity, making gender equality a shared responsibility and resulting in long-term positive changes for individuals and the broader community.

Pranati Bera, while walking home from the market saw a man named Dipak Maiti openly beating his wife on the roadside, surrounded by onlookers who did nothing to intervene. Pranati being a member of Rupantaran's Agragami Group, refused to be a passerby, she boldly stepped forward, confronting Dipak, challenging his right to treat his wife as if she were his property. Calm yet firm, she urged him to address any issues within their marriage through conversation, warning that violence could have irreversible consequences. Pranati firmly reminded him that being a woman does not mean being silent or powerless. She asked Dipak to imagine the situation reversed, with his wife defending herself against his aggression. She also highlighted the long-term harm such behavior could inflict on their children, who would grow up hearing stories of their father's abuse. Pranati's warning was clear: if the violence continues, she would rally the women of her group and seek intervention from the local Panchayat. Thanks to her courageous stand, the abuse lessened significantly after that day.





LIVELIHOOD PROMOTION



The Sundarbans, prone to natural calamities and the effects of climate change, has faced widespread devastation. Frequent cyclones have caused saltwater flooding due to breached embankments, destroying mud houses, contaminating drinking water, and severely damaging agricultural fields—the primary livelihood for many. The intrusion of saltwater has rendered the land infertile, leaving farmers with little hope of growing fresh crops, especially given their past struggles with similar disasters.

In response, Rupantaran has identified over 10,000 vulnerable families in the region who are struggling to survive in these harsh conditions. To support them, we are organizing women from these families into collectives, providing them with essential resources and training to cultivate crops on saline soil. Encouraged by Rupantaran’s assistance, many women have started farming independently, with some now proudly claiming self-sufficiency. This season, we distributed various vegetable seeds to reduce soil salinity and enable crop growth. For families whose lands were too damaged for cultivation, we introduced backyard poultry farming by providing poultry chicks and feed, offering them an alternative livelihood and a path toward self-reliance.

Kavita Das, a 45-year-old from Namkhana village, faced immense challenges after repeated natural disasters ruined their small piece of cultivable land. The devastation of Cyclone Yaas forced her family to seek refuge in a local school, relying on donations for survival. With support from the Rupantaran Foundation, Kavita received seeds, lime, and green manure to restart farming. Initially doubtful, she learned techniques for saline soil and successfully harvested enough to feed her family. Renting additional land, she produced 21 sacks of rice and shifted to selling rice, which boosted her income. Kavita diversified her business by selling vegetables and food at local fairs. Now, with savings over one lakh rupees, she has married off her daughter, is covering her husband’s medical expenses, and dreams of building a new house. Kavita credits her transformation to Rupantaran’s support, which empowered her to achieve self-sufficiency and a brighter future for her family.





CHILD PROTECTION



Child protection is essential for creating a safe and nurturing environment where children can thrive without fear of exploitation or abuse. In vulnerable regions like the Sundarbans, children are at heightened risk of child marriage, trafficking, and child labour, exacerbated by poverty, lack of education, and the impact of natural disasters. The Rupantaran Foundation has proactively addressed these critical issues by engaging around 2000 adolescents through structured sessions focused on various child protection challenges.

Through community meetings, Rupantaran has raised awareness about the dangers of child marriage, trafficking, child labour, and abuse. They have distributed informative leaflets and installed awareness materials in key village locations to keep these issues at the forefront of community discussions. Additionally, Rupantaran has worked closely with local authorities to activate and strengthen 59 Village Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPCs), empowering them as local institutions that ensure a protective environment for children. This year, the foundation has intensified efforts to capacitate VLCPCs, providing orientation to new members on their roles and responsibilities while educating them about the harmful effects of child marriage, trafficking, and exploitation. By building community capacity and fostering awareness, Rupantaran is committed to safeguarding children's rights and creating pathways for a brighter future.

Uma Naskar, a dedicated VLCPC Member from Kripatala, Bamangachi, has been instrumental in fostering positive change within her community. Her impactful contributions include successfully preventing a child from dropping out of school by providing home schooling and facilitating their reintegration into the educational system. Uma's proactive efforts led to the prevention of three more children from dropping out of school, as she provided essential support to assist them in returning to their education. Through her tireless advocacy and actions, Uma Naskar exemplifies leadership and dedication to creating a better future for the children and community members of Kripa Tala, Bamangachi.





ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH



In rural West Bengal, adolescents face significant health and social challenges, including early marriage, childbearing, and teenage pregnancies, all of which increase the risk of anaemia, sexually transmitted infections, unsafe abortions, postpartum complications, and mental health issues. According to the National Family Health Survey 5, nearly one in five girls (19.6%) aged 15-19 are already mothers or pregnant. Furthermore, 25% of young women aged 15-24 do not have access to hygienic methods of menstrual protection, amplifying health risks. Recognising that menstrual hygiene education is just as important for young boys, the organisation organised separate sessions for both girls and boys to promote a thorough understanding of menstrual health. The organisation aims to break down taboos surrounding menstruation and advocate for better menstrual hygiene practices by engaging adolescents and their parents in open discussions about adolescence, reproductive health, and sexual health.

Sensitization sessions have been conducted to help families understand these needs and adopt healthier practices. Recognizing the pressing need for support during this period, Rupantaran initiated a program to distribute sanitary napkins to adolescent girls and women in the Sundarbans. This intervention, often overlooked in times of crisis, was a significant relief for the community and was deeply appreciated by the recipients. It underscored the importance of menstrual hygiene and its critical role in safeguarding the health of women and girls, particularly during times of crisis.

X is a member of an adolescent girls' collective in the village of Patharpratima. During one of the sessions on menstrual health and hygiene, X and her peers opened up about the deep-rooted taboos surrounding menstruation in their community. One common practice they mentioned was the isolation of girls during their periods, where they are made to stay in a separate room and avoid contact with anyone, especially men. They also shared that girls are forbidden from cooking or touching food during menstruation due to the belief that they are "impure."

Among the many myths discussed, X spoke about how girls are not allowed to attend school during their periods, as it is considered bad luck for the family. This was impacting her education significantly, as missing school frequently made it hard for her to keep up with lessons.

After the session, armed with the knowledge that menstruation is a natural biological process, X returned home and initiated a conversation with her mother. She explained how the restrictions around menstruation were unnecessary and were negatively affecting her education. After much discussion, X's mother began to understand the importance of allowing her daughter to continue her studies, even during her periods. Now, X is free to attend school throughout the month, and her family is working to shed the outdated beliefs that once held her back.



SPORTS FOR GENDER ADVANCEMENT



In the remote Sundarbans, where girls have historically been married off at ages as young as 15 or 16, the idea of them participating in sports was once unfathomable. Playgrounds were considered male territory, and girls were expected to engage in play only indoors, away from prying eyes. However, the launch of "Hok Kabaddi" has empowered the daughters of farmers and daily laborers to challenge these entrenched societal norms. Despite their daily responsibilities—such as household chores, caring for younger siblings, fetching water, and assisting their mothers—these girls have taken up Kabaddi, a contact sport traditionally dominated by men.

"Hok Kabaddi" has evolved from a simple sports initiative into a powerful movement advocating for girls' rights to play and occupy public spaces. Initially, few girls were willing to participate in such a physically demanding sport, especially in public. Yet, with determination, they raised awareness about gender discrimination, the right to play, and the necessity for girls to claim their space on the playground. This collective effort culminated in an inter-panchayat Kabaddi tournament, promoting not only physical activity but also challenging rigid gender norms. Today, nearly 100 girls from six panchayats proudly step onto the field, gradually transforming community perceptions. Villagers who once scoffed at the idea now watch these girls compete with confidence in their bright jerseys, with some even swapping traditional salwar kameez for shorts or leggings. This change symbolizes their growing empowerment and self-assurance, as these girls go beyond merely playing a game—they are negotiating their rights, challenging deep-rooted cultural norms, and paving the way for a future where girls can freely access public spaces and play without limitations.



■ লিঙ্গবৈষম্য রুখতে বেশ কয়েক বছর ধরে জয়নগরের গ্রামীণ এলাকার স্কুলের ছাত্রীদের নিয়ে কবাডি প্রতিযোগিতার আয়োজন করে আসছে একটি স্বেচ্ছাসেবী সংগঠন। সম্প্রতি জয়নগর ১ ব্লকের ছ’টি পঞ্চায়েতকে নিয়ে ‘হোক কবাডি’ নামে পঞ্চায়েতভিত্তিক এই প্রতিযোগিতা শুরু হয়েছিল। সোমবার বহু হাই স্কুলের মাঠে ফাইনালে চালতাবেড়িয়া পঞ্চায়েতকে হারিয়ে জয়ী হয়েছে হরিনারায়ণপুর পঞ্চায়েতের মেয়েরা। —সমীরণ দাস



PARTICIPATORY PLANNING, MONITORING AND LEADERSHIP BUILDING



In the Sundarbans, over 2,658 individuals took part in the Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (PVCA), a collaborative effort to identify and address core community challenges such as economic poverty, substance abuse, school dropouts, early marriage, and domestic violence. This inclusive process fostered a strong sense of ownership, empowering community members to lead initiatives like building temporary shelters and mapping social structures. Through these efforts, the community has come together to take charge of solutions, showcasing their resilience and resourcefulness.

To address rising concerns around online safety, the project provided education on cyberbullying and digital risks, equipping young people with tools to navigate online spaces securely. Workshops on storytelling empowered youth to use sound and visuals to raise awareness about key issues, while critical insights into sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) enabled more open and healthy discussions within their communities. This community-driven approach, grounded in skill-building and self-empowerment, has strengthened resilience and inspired meaningful change across the Sundarbans. Through skill-building in various areas—from leadership to online safety and storytelling—the youth and broader community members have gained tools to voice their concerns, address pressing challenges, and contribute to a future marked by positive transformation and strengthened community bonds.





CLIMATE CHANGE SUPPORT



Rupantaran Foundation's relief support activities have been integral in fostering a deep connection between communities and their environment, as well as building resilience against natural disasters. The Environment Day celebration in June 2024 was not just an event, but a call to action. Through tree planting, clean-up drives, and educational sessions, the day emphasized the urgent need for environmental conservation. These activities were designed to inspire community members to adopt sustainable practices, recognizing that the health of our planet directly impacts the well-being of future generations.

Earth Day in April 2024 further deepened this commitment to environmental stewardship. The day's events went beyond mere awareness, involving hands-on workshops on waste management, recycling, and reducing carbon footprints. These sessions empowered participants to take tangible steps in protecting their local ecosystems, transforming awareness into action and cultivating a sense of responsibility toward the environment.

In the face of growing environmental threats, the Disaster Preparedness Meeting & Workshop was a vital initiative. This workshop was not just a theoretical exercise but a practical guide to survival. It equipped community members with critical knowledge on early warning systems, evacuation procedures, and first aid, ensuring they are prepared to protect themselves and their families in the event of a disaster. Through these efforts, the foundation reinforced the idea that preparedness is key to resilience, enabling communities to face natural disasters with confidence and capability.

Sanchita Debnath, a member of the Rupantaran Youth Collective, was selected as a youth representative for a panel discussion on child-centered climate change adaptation in the Sundarbans, West Bengal, organized by the West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights (WBCPCR). During the discussion, Sanchita emphasized the importance of integrating climate change education into the school curriculum. She highlighted how learning about the adverse effects of climate change can help young people understand its broader impact on various social issues.





RELIEF SUPPORT



Rupantaran Foundation has been actively responding to cyclone-related damage across several panchayats. In Narayanpur, where four houses were destroyed, people took shelter briefly in relief camps or nearby brick houses. Women, playing a crucial role in safety efforts, guarded the Ayla embankment during the night to alert others of potential danger. Similarly, in Namkhana, 14 houses were damaged, and relief efforts were organized for over 300 people. Despite challenges like holes in embankments and fallen trees, villagers, both men and women, worked together to block water and clear debris. These collective efforts significantly minimized damage and ensured quick recovery.

The cyclone that hit the Sundarbans during the project period caused severe damage, particularly in Mousuni Island, where over 2,500 houses were destroyed and 27,000 more were partially damaged. Tragically, a member of a women's collective lost an elderly family member during the storm. In response, the project team mobilized to distribute relief supplies, including 50 tarpaulins and 3,498 seeds, to help affected families recover. In Namkhana, the community collaborated with the project participants to repair river dams and prevent saltwater intrusion that could damage crops and fish ponds. The emergency response highlighted the importance of community resilience in the face of natural disasters.



During a field visit after Cyclone Remal, a field facilitator came across a house that had been severely damaged. The roof had almost collapsed, and plastic sheets and cloth coverings that once protected the house were blown away. Inside, the house was filled with mud and water due to the cyclone. The family living there had been forced to leave because they couldn't live or cook in such conditions. Neighbours told the facilitator that the family had taken shelter elsewhere as they waited for help.

The cyclone had not only damaged their home but also destroyed the vegetables they had planted. The heavy rains had ruined their garden, which was a major source of food for them. Understanding the difficult situation, the facilitator spoke with the family and quickly arranged for emergency assistance. The family received a tarpaulin to cover their roof and seeds to start farming again. They used the tarpaulin to repair their home, giving them shelter once more. With the seeds, they replanted their vegetable garden. In time, the family returned to their home, and the new crops began to grow. They slowly got back to their normal routine, living in their house and eating vegetables from their garden. Thanks to the timely support, they were able to recover from the cyclone's destruction and regain a sense of stability in their lives.

Awards & Recognitions

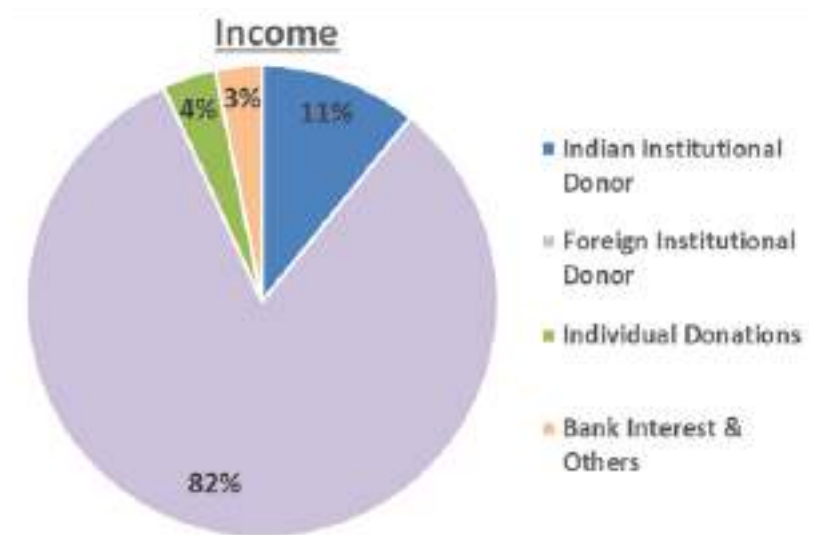


In 2023, two of our child leaders, Anushree Pradhan (left) and Arjun Majhi (right), from Mousuni Island, were honoured with the **Bravery Award** by the **West Bengal Commission for the Protection of Child Rights**. This prestigious award recognised their outstanding work in **combating child marriage within their community**, showcasing their courage and commitment to creating a safer environment for children.

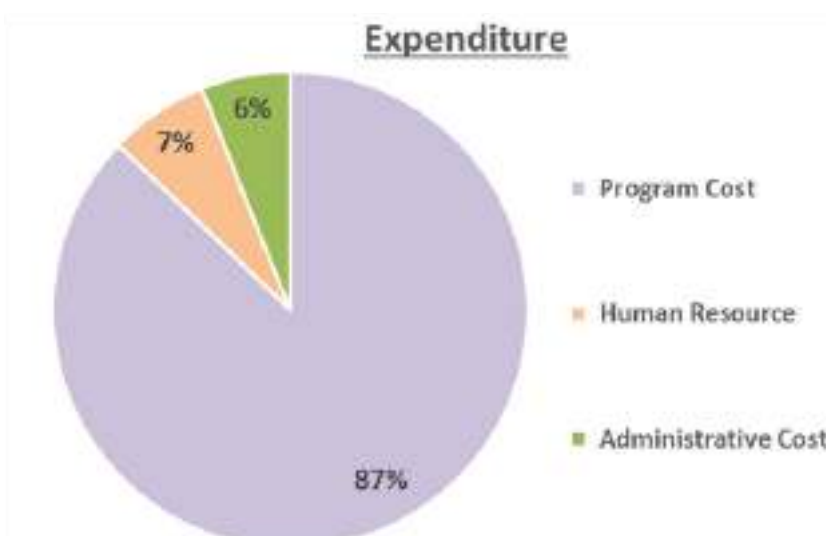


Rupantaran Foundation was also privileged to receive the **Annual Award for 2023** from the **Ladies Study Group Charitable Trust**. This award was presented in recognition of our significant contributions to **providing education to socio-economically disadvantaged girls**. This recognition underscores our dedication to fostering educational opportunities and empowering marginalized communities.

FINANCE



The **total income** for the financial year amounted to INR 2,38,76,029. About 82% has been sourced from foreign institutional donors, reflecting the primary financial support structure for the organization. Contributions from Indian institutional donors constituted 11% of the total income, while individual donations made up 4%. Bank interest and other miscellaneous sources accounted for 3% of the total funds.



The **total expenditure** for the financial year was INR 2,23,20,638. About 87% was allocated towards programmatic costs, reflecting the organization's commitment to its core activities and initiatives, 7% on human resources, and 6% on administrative expenses, reflecting the organization's focus on program delivery while maintaining efficient operations and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We extend our sincere gratitude to the individuals, organizations, and institutions that have played a pivotal role in ensuring the quality and scale of our work. Your support and warm wishes have been instrumental in driving our mission forward.

- Azim Premji Philanthropic Institute
- Community Jameel
- Headways, New Delhi
- Mr. Partha Das, Kolkata
- Office of Block Development Officer, Namkhana, Patharpratima, Joynagar I & II Blocks, West Bengal
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices, New Delhi
- Southern Voices for Global Development, UK
- The Oak Foundation
- West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights
- Women Win

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the many individuals who have wholeheartedly supported us, enabling us to continue our mission. Your contributions have made a meaningful impact on the communities we serve.



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