



For Caritas India, children are the rights holders, having their own agency, which needs to be facilitated and enabled to participate in decisions affecting them. Empowering the children by creating opportunities where they interact with elders, grow as responsible and sensitive people, and lead the change they wish for themselves, is where Caritas India comes in. Caritas works with most excluded and marginalised children by strengthening the public institutions and mechanisms responsible for their holistic development, addressing risks and vulnerabilities, creating awareness and enabling child and youth volunteers. Caritas India upholds constitutional rights of children, and the United Nations Convention in the Rights of Child (UNCRC), ratified by India in 1992.

Child Rights, My Responsibility, West Bengal

One such child rights intervention is this programme initiated in 2013, addressing the issue of child rights violations in the hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts, covering 46,000 plus population, across 10 Panchayats and 86 villages in West Bengal. The programme has contributed immensely to safeguarding children from abuse,

exploitation, labour and trafficking. Over a thousand Children are actively engaged as Child Rights Crusaders, with their peer and duty bearers as members of several community based Children's Clubs. This programme is being implemented with Anugyalaya Darjeeling Diocese Social Service Society and Bal Suraksha Abhiyan.



ABOUT CARITAS INDIA

Founded in 1962, as social development wing of Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), Caritas India works through 350 NGOs across India. It partners the Government, CSR, educational and healthcare institutions and experts towards a sustainable development. It works through people's empowerment approach in the domains of Climate Adaptive Agriculture and Sustainable Livelihood, Agriculture Sovereignty and Food Security, Disaster Response, Child rights, Anti-human trafficking, and community health (focusing Cancer Prevention and Care, HIV/AIDS Rehabilitation and Malaria control).

MILESTONES ACHIEVED

CHILDREN'S CLUBS

56 Children's Clubs consisting of about 1000 volunteers aged 6-18 years are trained on their rights. Members conduct street plays and campaigns in villages and schools. Children's clubs provide a forum for children to express their opinions about issues or concerns affecting them, towards collective solution seeking. The children members have been instrumental in re-enrolling school drop-outs, collectively addressing the challenges to regular schooling by underprivileged children and reporting cases of abuse and suspicious movement of children to Vigilance Committees, thereby preventing unsafe migration and trafficking. Their interventions discouraged the shopkeepers, hotels and tea stalls from employing child labourers.

VILLAGE VIGILANCE COMMITTEES

50 Vigilance Committees comprising teachers, Anganwadi members, Panchayat members, Block Office staff and Community Based Organisations have demonstrated their ownership and commitment to child protection and development by reporting cases endangering child's wellbeing or undermining their development. This has been the outcome of regular training and interactive sessions accompanied with children's campaigns to sensitise local leaderships, make the community systems, including families, school administration, Teachers' Forums and Panchayat members, vigilant and aware about the risk situations. Caritas India strengthened and activated the Village Child Protection Committees provisioned under the Integrated Child Protection Service of the Government.

DARJEELING DISTRICT CHILD RIGHTS NETWORK

This is one such network of the hill children and organisations working for them in the region, comprising civil society groups, child rights experts, media and academicians. This network comes together to respond and advocate for child friendly policy and actions in the state, while members sensitise and train the public stakeholders, especially the police personnel, Child Protection Officers on the UNCRC and child protection and development laws.

CHILD LABOUR FREE ZONES

'Zone' refers to a well-defined geographical or administrative area, which can be a village, municipal ward, district or state that has riden itself of child labour. Those withdrawn from labour are engaged in education or vocational training. It was with the sustained community engagements through vigilance committees and children's clubs who dialogue with officials on making child labour a common pressing concern, that Municipal Wards I-XV under Kalimpong Municipality; Upper Fagu Tea Estate, and 04 Gram Panchayats of Pedong, Pudung, Sakyong and Sindebong were declared Child Labour Free Zones by the competent authorities of Kalimpong district.

CHILD FRIENDLY POLICE STATIONS

Children and youth volunteers are flagbearers of this programme. While convergence and trainings happen with duty bearers, these crusaders of child rights interact with senior police officials, NGO and media members to learn about their roles and share their vision of a safe world. The sustained dialogue has resulted in the districts securing four Child Friendly Police Station at Gorubathan, Birpara, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling Sadar blocks. This means, that dedicated people at police station are sensitised and equipped with information and assistance to deal with children in need of care and protection with empathy.

"Child labour has been reducing, and the cases of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) being reported progressively. More of such awareness building in the community, for which children's clubs can play an effective role, is the need of the hour", acknowledged the Superintendent of Police, Darjeeling (Exposure-cum-Education visit of the children to Darjeeling police station, January 30-31, 2018).



Reach us

-  www.caritasindia.org
-  director@caritasindia.org
-  +91 11 23363390/ 23362735
-  CBCI Centre, 1 Ashok Place
Near Gole Dak Khana, New Delhi 110001