

A PROPOSAL FOR EDUCATION REHABILITATION OF AMPHAN-IMPACTED VULNERABLE GIRLS “Sikkha Sathi”

BACKGROUND

NISHTHA, a community based women’s organization was born in the mid-seventies with the aim to empower women through awareness building on rights and strengthening them to demand for their rights. Nishtha’s mission is empowerment of women to fight for equal opportunities, equal rights and equal dignity. Nishtha presently works in more than 300 villages in 5 blocks in the District of South 24 Parganas. The programs of Nishtha are a reflection of continuous self analysis & subsequent proactive revisions that made us a participatory resource centre for community women, youths and elderly women.

Over the years, Nishtha has been working through the leaders of Mahila Mandals who have been the back bone of Nishtha. These leaders are from among the village women who are sufferers of violence and injustice. They are committed to work for women and girls. They protest against violence, protect the girls and women, take action to improve their environment, speak up against violence, and advocate for their rights. They have mounted successful campaign against discrimination and humiliation. These grassroots groups have broadened the social network, developed new ideas, and facilitate changes in village attitudes and behaviors.

The biggest obstacle comes here in the way while presenting girls and women with education. It may be because if Girls or Women get educated, they might demand their rights from which they have been deprived till now. Until now this has been so because of the patriarchal society which has always kept them away from getting education as education and knowledge strengthens the process of total development.

In regard to this Nishtha's first emphasis is to provide girls Education. It is ensured that each girl go to school and besides seeking formal education, they also receive other information and knowledge in order to equip them in such a way; that they can lead a very dignified life and fight for the equal rights and equal opportunities for themselves.

After giving emphasis on education, Nishtha's next focuses on to build a group for girls and women and bring out their leadership abilities. We also generate strong awareness and create public opinion in favor of women.

In our struggle we have always got Asha for Education (Atlanta Chapter) who has been holding Nishtha's hand strongly since many years through two of our Flagship Projects, Jagaran and Night Shelter. Now we have more than 250 girls in Jagaran and Usha , whom we are sending school to gain Secondary education, followed by the higher Secondary education and later complete their Graduation. Till now almost 40 girls who have completed their graduation, are working in different sectors and are also contributing in running the group of their villages. We consider them as one of our biggest strength. With our overall success stories we can proudly say that the model that we had started in the name of Jagaran, is indeed successful.

As like Jagaran, Night Shelter too is a dynamic programme which came into existence to provide safe shelter to the most vulnerable children of our society. Here too we have seen the ray of good hope which is enhancing its brightness steadily. Two of the girls who were reared in Night shelter, have turned out to be a magnificent example. Both of these girls are now doing Government jobs. These girls now will never look back at the dark days of their life where their Mothers and grandmothers used to be professional sex-workers. What they have achieved is something beyond imagination. They have changed their life into a very dignified life. There are also more examples where many children are seeking higher education; whereas few have also been sent to the hostel. Every year when these kids complete their 13/14 years of age, we send them to the residential schools and it is also done with the support of Asha for education (Atlanta Chapter).

Their life from hell to brightness has been a gift from Asha for Education (Atlanta Chapter). It is Asha for education that is enlightening a hope inside them by bringing them in lights. These children who could have lost in the depth of darkness but Asha for education is nurturing them slowly and steadily just like divine blessings.

RATIONALE OF THIS PROJECT

The area where we have been working is one of the most severely affected areas. When the entire country was striving hard to survive from the menace of Lockdown due to Covid-19; the people here were struggling hard with an additional disaster of Super Cyclone, Amphan. This

was for the first time in 90 years that people have seen such destruction. It was so horrific that it had tossed up gigantic trees, electric poles, houses, agricultural lands, cattle, water bodies, belongings; almost everything. The destructions here was to such an extent that the traces of it can be still seen in almost every place; besides this Covid had already left a massive impact in people's life by taking their job, food, health, peace of mind etc. Every individual went penniless which probably rose to another problem, i.e. of Violence, conflicts and atrocities; especially against the girls and women. Still now nothing has normalized and only the creator knows when the situation might turn around like before.

Just when people were seeing some ray of hope since the beginning of the unlock phase; the cases of SarsCov-19 started to raise its head once again for which people have started fearing of the possibility of Second lockdown. Right now in West Bengal, legislative elections are being held and it is speculated that just after the results of the Legislative election is out on 2nd May 2021, there might be an implementation of strict lockdown; therefore if all the speculations come true, it will definitely come as the final nail in the coffin for the people.

During the lockdown and post Amphan, when people did not have any food to eat, roof over their head and they were getting mad in the darkness of depression; Asha for education (Atlanta Chapter) came like a gentle breeze from heaven. They provided a big support to save the lives of the people living in this part of the world. They provided dry foods, toiletries, etc. to more than 5000 families. This support was not only about providing food; in fact it presented an opportunity to the leaders of Jagaran to show their leadership abilities in adverse situation. Only with the help of a bicycle these leaders went to the nooks and corners of every village to ensure that there is proper distribution of ration materials from the Govt. sponsored Ration Shops and relief distribution that had come from Asha for education. Beside this they also worked in an attempt to reduce violence against girls and women that had surged high during this time; they also made a bank with the tossed out materials during Cyclone and gave it to the people to reconstruct their houses, these were the people who didn't get any help from the government. They also negotiated with the Panchayat in order to provide some alternative livelihood under MGNREGA to the migrant laborers who had come back to their native during lockdown, they arranged tokens for the people who had no ration card so that they too get equal ration materials. Thus; besides providing them food stuffs, they had done many work so that people can dwell amicably. It was only because of them all the work was been able to be done in a constructive way and peace could have been brought in the village. Their initiative has also reduced the cases of child marriage, trafficking, violence against girls and women to a great extent. The entire Nishtha family, along with the people residing here is grateful to Asha for Education, Atlanta Chapter as all this could have never been possible without their whole hearted support.

The dedication, strong leadership and immense hard work of the leaders of the girls group has brought in a remarkable ray of light in this dreadful period of destruction but there still remains many challenges, among which the most significant is of the obstacles in the way of girls education as the parents are busier to repair their house, collect food and generate some income so they don't have any time to give in regards to their daughters education and protection. The situation has not yet normalized as these people have left with absolutely nothing. They have lost their educational materials, clothing, bedding, kitchen utensils; almost everything and nobody knows where the wind has blown it away. This has led to a disturbance for the girls while studying; moreover their parents too are not in the position to provide them these things as they too are running penniless. These unfortunate parents think reviving their agricultural land is more necessary than providing education to their daughters. Though the online classes have begun, these girls don't have any smart phones to engage themselves in taking these classes; moreover the connectivity of internet is also very pathetic in such remote areas. To add to their misfortune these girls had lost their educational materials during the cyclonic disaster; whereas their parents too are not in the position to afford to buy education materials for them; hence their education has become a burden for these parents. The change that Nishtha has brought over the years in favor of girls education has seen a massive downfall in this one year; with this has come the problems of child marriage, trafficking in the name of fake marriage.

The only way to bring these girls from this destruction is to provide them with necessary help to continue their formal education and side by side sensitize the parents to bring them in favor of girls' education. This is the only way out to protect this girls from the menace of school dropouts, child marriage and trafficking.

So in order to provide them with some essential materials we have come with an hope from Asha for education, Atlanta Chapter that once again they will give their helping hand to the project supported girls and some vulnerable girls of the neighboring village so that they can continue their studies without any disturbance.

PROPOSED PROJECT:

NAME OF THE PROJECT: SIKKHA SATHI (EDUCATION REHABILITATION PROJECT FOR 430* GIRLS)

OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECT:

- Ensuring retention in formal education to 430 most vulnerable and Amphan affected girl children with educational and other supportive materials.
- Protecting 90% of supported girl children from child marriage and trafficking.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN:

Ensuring retention in formal education to 430 most vulnerable and Amphan affected girl children with educational and other supportive materials.

- Selection of the most vulnerable girl children from Jagaran Project & Surrounding villages
- Organizing 5 campaigns on importance of girls education and ill effects of child marriage
- Organizing two meetings with stakeholders for orientation of the objective of this programme.
- Organizing 5 meetings with the mothers of the direct beneficiaries to create a conducive environment which supports the girl's education unhindered.
- Distribute educational materials, including school bags to 430 girls
- Distribute trunks to the 430 girls to preserve the educational materials and other important documents safely as they don't have proper place to keep it safely.

Protecting 90% of supported girl children from child marriage and trafficking.

- Conducting 1500 Home Visits to sensitize the decision makers of families to make them pro-active to stop child-marriage.
- Conducting 2 meetings with stake holders and community elders to make them responsive to stop child marriages and school dropouts of girl children.
- Organizing 3 BCC activities by the groups to involve the community in group activities and actions.
- Organizing one big community meetings and one get together during the project period to create awareness on ill-effects of child marriage and school- dropouts of girl children.
- All the BCC activities get together, big community meetings will be conducted jointly by girls and women groups so that the visibility of the joint force of the already formed girls and women's

group in the community strengthens and their concerted efforts and voice can be heard by the community and the decision makers.

- The process of all the levels of the distribution will be conducted and decided by the leaders of the girls group.
- Stake holders will be involved by the leaders in all the activities of the project.

AREA OF THE PROJECT:

10 villages of Bishnupur-I & Magrahat – II blocks, under South 24 Parganas, West Bengal

PROJECT DURATION: June to December 2021

PROJECT BUDGET: INR 6,91,500 (for 430 girls)

Name of Project : Sikkha Sathi (Education Rehabilitation Project)
Budget for the Period: 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022

S.L	Particulars	Budget Amount Rs.
1	Programme Cost	
A	Education Materials for 430 Girls (Rs 300 X 430 Girls X 1 time)	129,000.00
B	Bags Rs.400 x 430 Girls x 01 time	172,000.00
C	Trank & Lock Rs.850 x 430 Girls x 01 time	365,500.00
2	Administration	
A	Audit & legal expenses	2,500.00
B	Printing, Postage & Stationery etc.	5,000.00
C	Travel cost Rs 500 X 12 months	6,000.00
D	Misc. & Maintenance	5,000.00
E	Transport (carriage) cost of Materials	6,500.00
	SUB TOTAL	691,500.00

* Nishtha can reach thousands of girls in impacted regions through this program. However, considering the budget constraints, 430 girls are included in this educational rehab. proposal.