



CASA in Action

Sustainability

Act Now for

Tomorrow





church's auxiliary
for social action

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CASA in Action

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

As CASA commemorates its 75th anniversary, it is a time for reflection on the journey that has led to this milestone and the unwavering commitment to sustainability that has guided its actions. We have made significant progress over the years in addressing the humanitarian needs of communities across India, with a focus on sustainable development that has been the driving force behind its most notable interventions.

In Rupmari, West Bengal, CASA provided its beneficiaries with training on sustainable practices such as Bio-floc, Duck farming, and kitchen gardening. These practices not only promote sustainability but also provide a means to achieve self-sufficiency and economic stability. By imparting the knowledge and resources necessary for communities to cultivate their own food and raise livestock, we are empowering them to take ownership of their development and work towards building a sustainable future for themselves and their families.

In Kodaikanal, CASA's efforts to promote sustainability took the form of educational programmes. We have established one Bridge Course Centre and two Supplementary Education programmes for school dropouts, enabling them to catch up on the education they missed and stay on track for a brighter future. Additionally, CASA also initiated one skill training programme to provide villagers with marketable skills that would allow them to earn a livelihood and support their families.

These initiatives are just a few examples of CASA's ongoing commitment to sustainability and humanitarian action. As we continue to confront global challenges such as climate mitigation, poverty, and inequality, it is crucial that we prioritize sustainable solutions that will have a lasting impact. By working together and leveraging our collective knowledge and resources, we can create a more equitable and sustainable world for all.

As we look ahead to the next 75 years of CASA's work, we remain steadfast in our commitment to sustainability and the belief that, through collaboration, we can create a brighter future for all. We express our gratitude to all of our partners, supporters, and volunteers who have contributed to our efforts over the years, and we look forward to continuing this journey together.

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PLATINUM JUBILEE CELEBRATION: LEARNING AND LISTENING AS A LIVING ORGANIZATION



Over the years, civil societies in India have played an influential role in nation-building. They have contributed immensely to the development of society through education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and promoting human rights. From working on topics such as gender equality, and access to justice to a core involvement in advocacy, research, and policy formulation, Civil society has provided a platform for public discourse, debate, and dialogue to flow, form and alleviate the conditions of human society at large.

Civil societies continue to be instrumental in creating social awareness by organizing campaigns and workshops to spread knowledge and awareness about various issues. Considering the recent health challenge imposed by COVID-19, the work of civil societies in battling un-awareness, fear, social stigma, gender-based violence, health uncertainty and above all, the effort to retain the advancement put forth during the pre-COVID times was humongous. The beauty of the sector lies in its deep engagement in creating a sense of unity and national pride, helping people connect on building an inclusive society and promoting peace and harmony.

CASA's 75 years in the social development sector contributed a spectrum of work to the social sector, encompassing most of the above-mentioned works. Starting as a disaster management and relief agency that aimed to alleviate the predicament of the partition victims in 1947, CASA has evolved into an entity that emphasizes and facilitates the provision of rights-based assistance and relief support

to the marginalized communities of India. It has become a living body for rural India through a range of work towards livelihood support, education, gender-mainstreaming, leadership building and food security.

CASA has largely been associated with aiding the marginalized population in the country, that resides in the remotest of corners. The vastest initiative under CASA has been the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Where the rural provinces of 23 states were assisted. Whether it requires a rope trolley to access the remote or a petty boat through the flood-impacted lanes, CASA has never succumbed to challenges, especially when there is a call from society for help. In the work towards poverty alleviation and assisting the marginalized, CASA has received support and appreciation from state government agencies and officials.

The organization continues to play a key role in promoting economic development and empowering women and youth in areas where infrastructural advancement has not yet made its inception. The volunteers contribute effort to a wide range of activities that promote social and economic development, create social awareness, and enable people to participate in nation-building activities.

However, basking merely in the glory of the past doesn't lay the path to the future. For calculating and realizing the challenges that the civil societies in India are prone to, and, further, evaluate the scope of work that will help us advance the sector to the future, CASA leveraged the Platinum Jubilee occasion and conducted

stakeholder meetings in the headquarters and regional offices.

The topic of the conference was "Role of Civil Society in Nation Building: Contribution of the Sector, Challenges and Way Forward", hosting panellists from recognized grassroots organizations and civil society organizations.

The myriad of discussions, ranging from a sectoral perspective to women's lens and in view of the marginalized, brought to light the lack and abundance that dictate the course of work of civil societies. It was admitted that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a far-reaching impact on civil society organizations in India. Many have had to reduce their operations or close completely due to a lack of funds or resources. However, the post-pandemic period could be a time of new opportunities for civil societies in India.

CASA was hearing them all through the stakeholders' conference. Director Dr Sushant Agrawal highlighted,

“

A living organization is a learning organization, a learning organization is a listening organization and CASA is listening.

”



CELEBRATIONS HIGHLIGHT



India Habitat Centre
DELHI

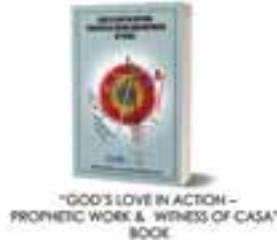
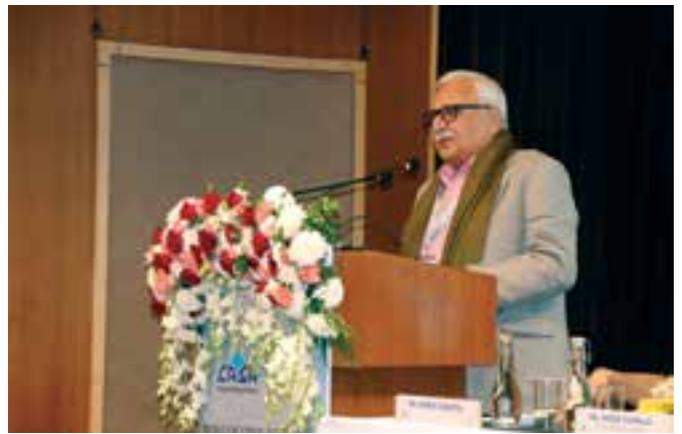
NOVEMBER | 19 | 2022
SATURDAY



As part of the celebration, a stakeholders consultation was organized prior to the Platinum Jubilee Event. The consultation panel hosted

- **Dr Rajesh Tandon** - Co-Chair, UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, since 2012
- **Harsh Jaitli**, CEO of VANI
- **Sanjay Patra**, Executive Director FMSF
- **Jagadananda**, Member Secretary, CYSD & Former State Information Commissioner, Odisha.
- **Annie Namala**, Executive Director CSEI
- **Mathew Cherian**, Chairperson- Care India
- The consultation was moderated by **Komal Ganotra**





In the evening event, CASA released five documents dedicated to our beloved India as the organization's 75th anniversary coincided with India's Azaadi ka Amrit Utsav in 2022.



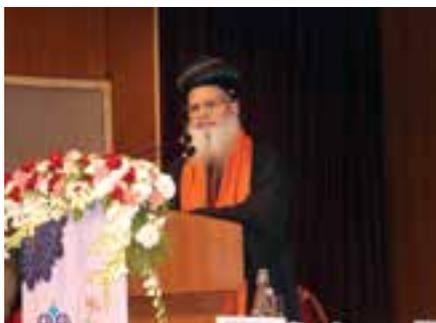
In the presence of Shri Faggan Singh Kulaste, Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Steel and Rural Development, Government of India, CASA released A Coffee Table Book - 'Celebrating 75 years - A Journey of Social Action'



Shri Faggan Singh Kulaste, Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Steel and Rural Development, Government of India, along with H.G. Yakob Mar Irenaios, Chairperson - CASA, Dr. Sushant Agrawal, Director - CASA lighting the lamp before the start of the Platinum Jubilee. Lighting the lamp is a traditional practice in many Indian ceremonies and is considered an auspicious way to begin an event.



Shri Faggan Singh Kulaste, addressing the gathering of people in Platinum Jubilee of CASA.



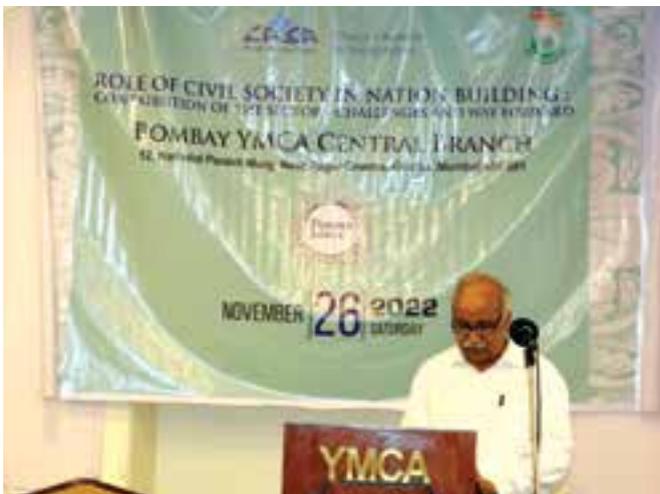


Bombay YMCA Central Branch
MUMBAI

NOVEMBER | **26** | 2022
SATURDAY

Dignified civil society and grassroots organization leaders such as:

- **Datta Patil**, CEO YUVA Rural Association
- **Kumar Kalanand Mani**, Founder President- Peaceful Society, Goa
- **Pushpa Aman Singh**, Founder/ COO, Guidestar India
- **Prabha Yadav**, Project Director, ASVSS
- **Lalit Babar**, Founder Member & President of Ambedkar Sheti Vikas Va Sanshodhan Sanstha



Shared insights related to the future network, governance, work with marginalized communities, challenges of social movement or voluntary action and consultation on navigating the issues.





The evening event took place in the World Trade Centre, where Chairperson CASA, His Grace Dr Yakob Mar Ireneaios honoured the event as the Chief Guest and Madhu Kamble, Assistant Editor of Loksatta Mumbai honoured the zonal celebration as the Guest of Honour.

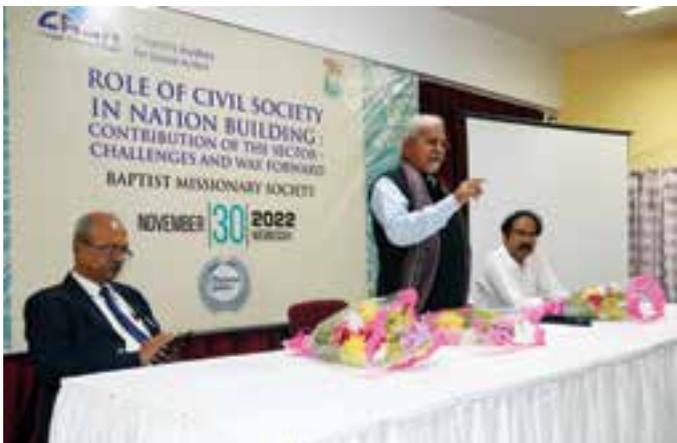




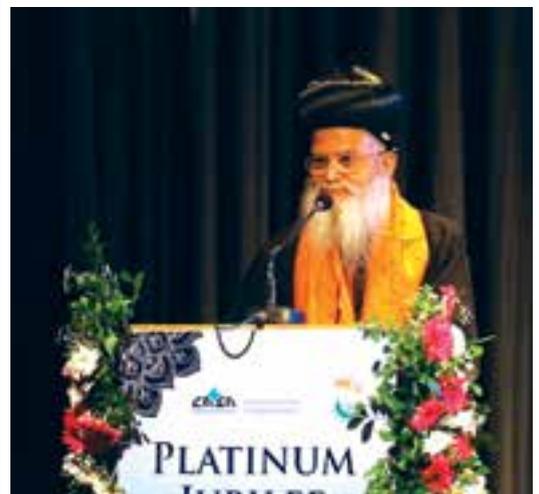
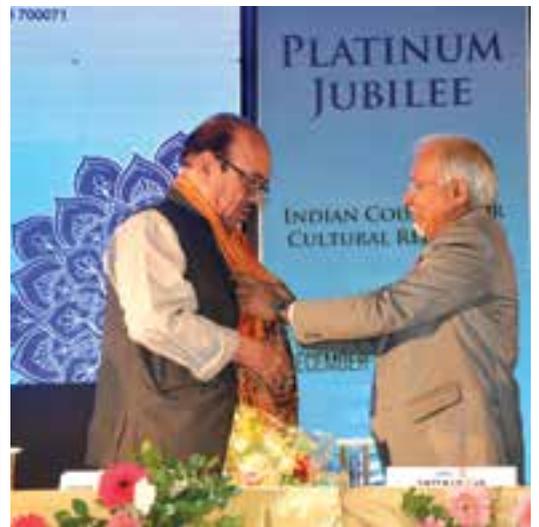
Baptist Missionary Society
KOLKATA

DECEMBER | 01 | 2022
THURSDAY

Anshuman Das, a development consultant attended the panel as the keynote speaker to raise discussions and chart the way forward for civil society organizations in realizing their humanitarian vision. Dr Sushant Agrawal and Satyajit Das were among the other panelists who also supplemented the discussion.



The conference cum workshop reflected on CASA's commitment to social development and highlighted the key components to its continued success in future.





Janab Javed Ahmed Khan, Minister, Department of Disaster Management and Civil Defence, Government of West Bengal graced the panel as the chief guest.

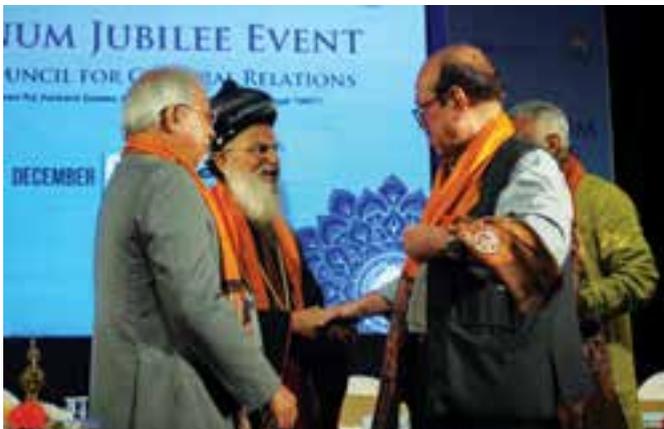
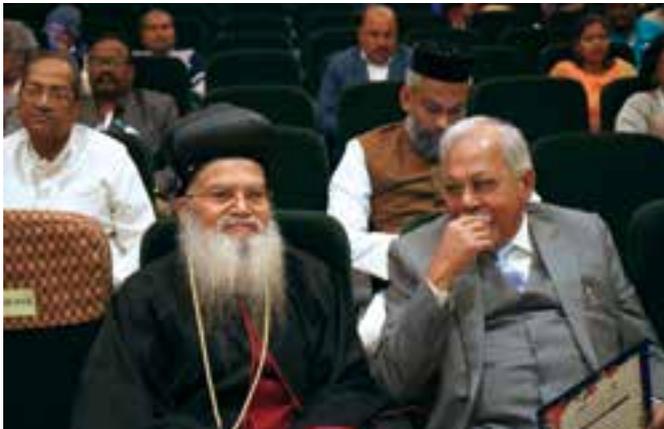
Other dignitaries on the panel included:

Debasish Kumar, MLA Government of West Bengal, **Alokananda Roy**, Classical Dancer, and Social Reformer.

Most Rev. Bajel Murmu, chairperson of CASA East Zone

Ambarish Nag Biswas, Secretary, HAM Radio, West Bengal Radio Club

CASA's Platinum Jubilee is a celebration dedicated to Amrit Mahotsav of India.





ISCA Programme Centre
CHENNAI

DECEMBER | **07** | 2022
WEDNESDAY

Through the stakeholder's meeting, CASA sought the insight and review of eminent persons from the field of social work for charting a path to the future.

The panel included:

- **Dr Ramesh Natham**, Executive Director, SASY
- **Dr Esther Maria Selvam**, Associate Manager, Action Aid
- **Dr Sara Karunakaran**, Professor, Madras School of Social Work
- **Dr Moses P Manohar**, Director ICOSA
- **Dr Gladston Xavier**, Professor, Loyola College

Director of CASA, **Dr Sushant Agrawal** and AEO **Mr Joseph P. Sahaym** also joined the workshop. **Dr Beulah Azaria**, Ecomwell, moderated the panel discussion.





The evening event was organized in P. T. Thyagaraja Mahal. Thiru Gingee K.S.Masthan, Honourable Minister For Minorities Welfare and Non-resident Tamils Welfare, Government of Tamil Nadu graced the occasion as the Chief guest.







CNI Church's All Saint's Cathedral Hall

MEGHALAYA

JANUARY | 10 | 2023 TUESDAY

Stakeholders gathered for a brainstorming session on the "Role of Civil Society and the Church in Nation Building, contributions of the sector, challenges and way forward" at the CNI Church's All Saints Cathedral Hall, Shillong, Meghalaya.



Maggie Katharpi, Asst. Professor at Government College Diphu moderated the session.



Phungreiso Varu extended the welcome address.

The keynote address was delivered by Allen Brook, Spokesperson at the United Christian Forum of NEI and Assam Christian Forum. He is also the former chairperson of the Assam State Commission for Minorities at the Government of Assam.

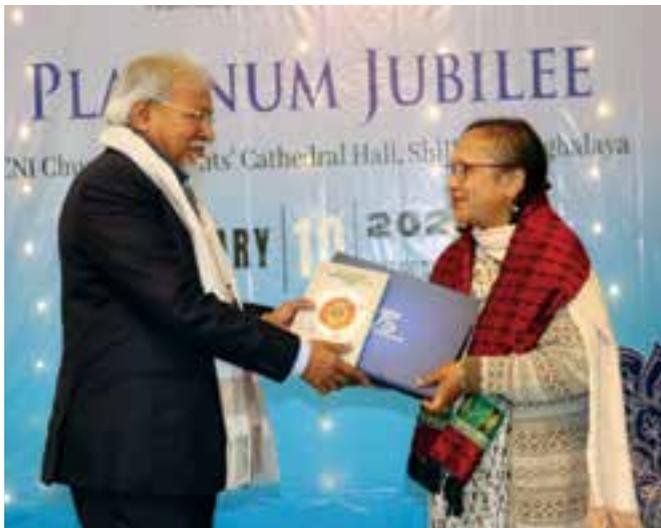


Panelist Hasina Kharbhoh from Impulse NGO Network raised the key discussion points to the agenda of brainstorming and Patricia Mukhim, Chief Editor of Shillong Times, discussed the topic from the gender-aware perspective. Sam Nongbr, Programme Associate, CUSA gave the vote of thanks and David Kujur consolidated and presented the concluding remarks as the way forward.



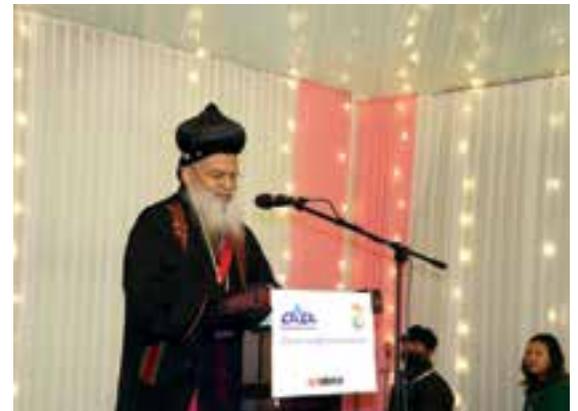


The evening event was conducted in the CNI Church's All Saints Cathedral Hall, Shillong, Meghalaya. Shri N Luikham, IFS, Chief conservator of forest, Govt of Meghalaya, Member secretary at Meghalaya biodiversity board and the CEO of Meghalaya Minor Minerals Reclamation Fund, honoured the event with his august presence.



Khasi Traditional Troupe, Kuki Students Organization Shillong, Garo Traditional Troupe, Jaintia Traditional Troupe, and Anderson and the Band presented cultural performances that highlighted the rich heritage of the North East's performing arts.





S P Rngikseh presented the welcome address. Dr Yakob Irenaios, Chairperson of CASA and Dr Sushant Agrawal, Director of CASA were among the dignitaries on the dias. Alice Chongloi extended the vote of thanks.

Women's Active Participation in Social Transformation- Story of Yasmin Sheikh



Story by: Arushi Narchal | Written by: Kajol Tanaya

The sun rises early in the village of India, and the smell of fresh breakfast fills the air. In the kitchen, a woman is bustling about, preparing for the day ahead. She is a mother, rushing through her morning chores so that she can start out on her work as a domestic helper to many households in the neighborhood. This is not the life she dreamed of, but she is grateful for the work she is doing because it allows sustaining her household. She knows that this is the life she must lead in order to keep her family fed, clothed and cared for.

This is the story of Yasmin Sheikh, a 40 years old resident of the Paithan District of Aurangabad. She has been a mother and a domestic helper, making a difference in the lives of not just her family but also the families that she serves.

Yasmin would spend her day cleaning, cooking and taking care of the household. She works tirelessly, but with a smile, oblivious to the world that exists outside the kitchen, children and her work. She had seen it all. Yasmin had seen her share of struggles and hardships. She had seen her family struggle to make ends meet and had seen them strive to make the most of their lives.

But one day, something unconventional was about to happen that will awaken her inner calling to work for something greater than just family or household.

Yasmin came across CASA at work, helping her community. The on-field staff was giving out information on government schemes, delivering support to vulnerable families, and focusing

on the importance of community-based organizations. It was a beacon of hope in a world that so often felt lost and forgotten. The sight of CASA's work inspired her. She realized that she too could make a difference in her community. She could help those in need, empower families with the knowledge and work with the community to create a brighter future. Yasmin's transformative journey of Yasmin.

She started to volunteer her time and effort. Yasmin understood the importance of women's active participation in working towards overcoming their ongoing economic, political and education-related issues. Yasmin no longer felt powerless and forgotten. Once she joined CASA, Yasmin began her journey of learning and empowerment with the help of her peers and mentors. She slowly began to understand the problems of her community, the effects of patriarchy and systemic issues of caste, class and gender. She started to recognize the importance of education and the need for access to better healthcare and nutrition.

Yasmin also learned the importance of collective action and the power of collective decision-making. She was able to provide valuable insights to her peers and mentors on the issues of her community, raising her voice against the oppression of women, and actively working to make justice a reality for many women.

Yasmin was elected as a member of a people's organization that focused on

rural development in Aurangabad. This gave her an opportunity to participate in integrated development processes. Yasmin's work was gaining recognition. She went on to get selected as a member of an active Maharashtra state-level forum, that actively focuses on development processes, keeping democracy and public interest in mind.

Without CASA's unabashed support, Yasmin believes she may not have been able to work on various issues, right from the village grassroots to the state level. Her involvement with CASA was not limited to on-field activities. Yasmin attended various seminars and workshops conducted by CASA, which enabled her to gain a better understanding of the issues confronting her community and how to work towards resolving them.

Currently, she is working with the Lokshahi Janhit Parishad and other forums and networks that are based in Maharashtra. As a volunteer in CASA, she is enabling the effective delivery of various benefits to the most vulnerable masses in Aurangabad through CASA's COVID-19 aid and response activities.

Yasmin's story is an inspiration for her community. She has been able to bring about positive change within her own community through her dedication, commitment and hard work. She is now a leader in her own right, advocating for the rights of women and minorities and creating awareness about the issues that confront her community. Yasmin is a proud example of how education, awareness and collective action can bring about positive social change.

Power of Combined Effort in Shaping Community's Wellbeing: Gram Vikas Manch of Dariapur

Story by: Alakshendra Pratap Singh | Written by: Kajol Tanaya



Dariapur is a small village located in the Sadar block of Munger district in Bihar. The village is predominantly inhabited by the Dalit and Mahadalit caste community who worked as laborers. Despite having a paved road, there was no proper drainage system in place. The water from the houses flowed onto the road, making it difficult for people to move around. Moreover, the contaminated water caused by the lack of drainage resulted in the outbreak of diseases like cholera, diarrhea, and typhoid, especially among women and children. The villagers were desperate for a solution to this problem. Frustrated and helpless, a group of villagers decided to take matters into their own hands. They formed the Gram Vikas Manch, a community-based organization, with the aim of resolving the water logging issue.

Gram Vikas Manch members continued to brainstorm alternative solutions. After much discussion and deliberation, they came up with the idea of constructing soak pits for every household in the village. Soak pits are a simple yet effective solution for groundwater recharge and water conservation. They help in the percolation of the rainwater and prevent waterlogging.

The Gram Vikas Manch members worked tirelessly to get the villagers involved in the construction of the soak pits. They provided the necessary guidance and assistance to the villagers and organized workshops to teach them how to build the soak pits. The villagers, in turn, were eager to contribute to the project. They worked together, digging the pits and lining them with rocks and gravel. The women of the village came forward to plant trees around the pits to prevent soil erosion and add to the beauty of the village.

Despite the initial enthusiasm, there were still many hurdles to overcome, such as lack of funds and resources. The Gram Vikas Manch members, however, did not give up. They submitted an application to the Mukhya requesting the construction of a proper drainage system in the village to which the Mukhya also assured support.

It took several months of hard work, but eventually, the soak pits were constructed, and the water from every house in the village started going into the soakage. The results were immediate and remarkable. The waterlogging on the road was significantly reduced, and the outbreak of diseases caused by contaminated water came to a halt. The villagers were overjoyed and grateful to the Gram Vikas Manch for their efforts in resolving the water logging issue.

The successful outcome of the Gram Vikas Manch's efforts in resolving the water logging issue in Dariapur village is a testament to the power of hope, determination, and collective action. The active participation of the community-based organization played a crucial role in convincing the Mukhya to construct soak pits, which solved the problem of water logging in the village. It is a story that serves as an inspiration to other communities facing similar issues.

Parashmani Devi:

Empowering Rural Women and Preserving Traditional Culture

Story by: Alakshendra Pratap Singh | Written by: Kajol Tanaya



In the heart of rural India, women often find themselves trapped in domesticated life with no opportunities for growth or personal development. Their potential remains untapped, and their dreams are buried deep within them. This predicament doesn't only stifle the individual growth of these women but also holds back the prosperity of their entire community.

But hope shines bright when we witness the transformative power of empowerment programmes, similar to those conducted by CASA to reach out to these women and bring them out of the shadows, showing them a path to a brighter future.

One of the living examples of CASA's transformative initiatives is Parashmani Devi. Born and raised in Lalganj, Parashmani aged within the confines of her home, bearing responsibilities to cook, clean, and take care of her family.

Her husband, Jagdish Sardar, worked as a small grocery shop owner and a grain stockist at the village level, from which the whole family survived. She was never given an opportunity to learn and grow beyond her household chores.

Parashmani Devi was caregiver to her joint-family, consisting of three sons, two daughters-in-law, and one grandson. For years, Parashmani had no knowledge of the society and how women can contribute to community development. Her life took a significant turn when she participated in a programme run by CASA in her village that aimed to train women in leadership and community organization skills.

The programme encouraged Parashmani to learn more on how to organize and lead community meetings, raise awareness about social issues, and promote traditional culture among the villagers. With newfound confidence and skills, Parashmani took on the role of the secretary of the local community-based organization and worked tirelessly to empower other women in her village.

Parashmani Devi's leadership became instrumental in ensuring the members of the Community-Based Organization (CBO) benefit from various government schemes related to agriculture, animal husbandry, and welfare, including Chief Minister Old Age Pension, Public Distribution System, and MGNREGA. Her efforts have made a significant impact on the lives of the villagers.

Additionally, Parashmani has taken it upon herself to promote the awareness of traditional culture among the community. She is connecting the vanishing folk songs and dances, preserving the rich heritage of the society. Her dedication and hard work have made her an influential figure in the village, inspiring many to follow in her footsteps.

Parashmani's journey wasn't easy. She faced resistance from many in her village who were unwilling to accept a woman in a leadership role. But she persevered, and with the support of CASA and her fellow CBO members, she continued to make progress.

Over time, Parashmani's efforts paid off. She was elected as a member of the District Level PO "Lok Vikas Manch" and engaged in promoting economic development and traditional culture awareness among the village people.

Parashmani's impact on her village was immeasurable. Her tireless efforts had transformed the community, and she had become a source of inspiration for many. People looked up to her, and they saw in her the potential to make a difference in their own lives. Parashmani Devi's journey is just one example of how a programme like CASA can make a tremendous difference in the lives of women and their communities.



From Ordinary Resident to Youth Trainee to a Change-Maker:

Ratan's Inspiring Journey with CASA

Story by: Rajat Chowdhury | Written by: Kajal Tanaya

In rural India, the youth face a number of challenges ranging from the limited access to education, lack of employment opportunities, to vulnerability to social norms that restrict their role in society. Many of these young people struggle to find their place in the community and often lead unproductive lives, unable to contribute to their households or society at large.

One such person was Ratan Lakda, a 38 years old resident of Kumdakhhol village of the Pudu Panchayat in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. Ratan as a young contributor to the society was largely misled and deviated. His days were carefree in a troubling manner.

Hailing from a poor family, Ratan did not have the privilege of school or access to awareness of the consequences of his action. He used to spend his days with his village mates, taking livestock to graze in fields, and exhibiting unrestrained behavior towards others. He was barely contributing to his uncle's farm work, the only source of livelihood

for him and his family. However, in October 2008, Ratan's life took a significant turn after he attended a nine-day programme on youth training, which later made him a valuable volunteer to CASA. Although he struggled to grasp the purpose and direction of the training initially, three extra days of training helped him understand CASA's efforts and development work, which changed his thought process entirely. The training he received encompassed elements that reflected the questions he frequently asked himself and related to his then-current position in life.

Ratan became increasingly interested in CASA's mission and began discussing with his peers and fellow youth about the benefits of his learnings and how they could bring change at the local level. In 2010, he helped conduct a survey to identify eligible individuals for ration and pension cards and provided support by filling out the necessary documentation. Additionally, he helped map out resources from villages and submitted the information to Gram Panchayats to assist people in acquiring jobs under the MGNREGA scheme.

As he continued to participate in rallies and contribute to movements, Ratan gained recognition as a local leader and was welcomed by CASA as a volunteer to twelve villages and three Gram Panchayats in CASA Ratanpur in 2012. Today, he volunteers for CASA's

Coordination Hub in CASA Raipur, overseeing sixteen districts, thirty-two blocks, and twenty-seven people's organizations.

Ratan expanded his knowledge and skills through LCP training, understanding conflict resolution, communication skills, and the functioning and importance of Panchayati Raj Institutions, anganwadi facilities, the public distribution system, and rights and entitlements. He can now engage with the community and government employees, sharing information on schemes and initiatives that can benefit people in remote villages.

Ratan firmly believes that if CASA had not admitted him to the youth training programme, he would still be living his old life. With newfound confidence, he even went back to school to complete his Class 5 course. He is committed to using his strength, ability, and power to create positive changes in society and remains grateful to CASA for providing him with the opportunities to educate himself and serve as a change-maker.

The power of youth is immense when directed towards a common goal of positive social change. Through education, training, and active participation in community initiatives, young people can become agents of transformation in their societies. Their enthusiasm, idealism, and willingness to learn can inspire others and bring about lasting change. By investing in the development of youth and providing them with opportunities to contribute to their communities, we can create a brighter future for all. So let us nurture and empower our youth, for they are not just the leaders of tomorrow, but the changemakers of today.

The Importance of Early Childhood Education: Building a Foundation for Lifelong Learning

Story by: Sanjeev Singh | Arushi Narchal



Kodaikanal — rife with granite cliffs, grassy hills, waterfalls, and lakes — located in the Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu. Situated at an altitude of 2,133 meters above sea level, Kodaikanal is often referred to as the “Princess of Hill Stations”.

However, despite its beauty, Kodaikanal faces several challenges in terms of education. The lack of proper road and transport facilities in the villages also contributes to the high dropout rate among girls and children of primary and higher education.

The reasons for school dropout are varied, ranging from economic reasons to lack of interest in studies. Poverty, accessibility, and availability are major factors contributing to the high dropout rate in Kodaikanal. In some cases, children drop out due to the inability to pay the school fee.

In order to address these challenges, CASA can play a vital role in providing social protection, universal education, and recognising the needs and rights of children. By bridging the gap between schools and children, we help tackle the root causes of school dropout in Kodaikanal and other similar areas. It is crucial to provide a motivating and caring school environment to create interest among children, and to ensure that they do not abandon their academic life due to family or economic pressures. Education is the base of a person's life, and it is important to provide every child with the opportunity to access quality education and contribute to the nation's growth.

KODAIKANAL

The Child Welfare and Education Programme (CWEP) - Kodaikanal

The Child Welfare and Education Programme (CWEP) is a project that was implemented in 10 villages of Vilpatti, Adukkam, and Vadakaunji taluks in Kodaikanal block of Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu. This report provides an overview of the different components of the CWEP, namely Bridge Course, Vocational Skill Training, and Supplementary Education, along with their outcomes.

The specific objectives of the project were:

- To form and strengthen Peoples' organizations.
- To build the capacity of the staff and POs to implement and monitor programmes for ensuring child rights.
- To strengthen advocacy and lobbying efforts to bring about policy changes with like-minded NGOs and other related networks.
- To sensitize local democratic governance for promoting child-centric activities and envisioning justice for children.

BRIDGE COURSE:



The Bridge Course is a unique approach to education that involves children in fun activities and provides a curriculum similar to the school syllabus. The programme is designed for school dropouts, providing them with the option to enroll in non-formal education for a year before entering the normal school system. Our Bridge school centers provide the children with the opportunity to experience the school atmosphere, get nutritious food, and catch up with the school syllabus. Apart from regular curriculum, children also get the opportunity to participate in extra and co-curricular activities. The outcomes of the programme include the improvement of the children's health, enhancement of their interpersonal and communication abilities, and stimulation of their interest in school.

Two Bridge Course Centers (BCC) were set up in Kardamena

V and JJ Nagar, serving the educational needs of 24 school dropout children.

- **Khadamenrav:** 6 male, 9 female children enrolled for BCC and 1 volunteer identified
- **JJ Nagar:** 2 male, 7 female children enrolled for BCC and 1 volunteer identified

VOCATIONAL SKILL TRAINING:

The Vocational Skill Training programme is aimed at enhancing the skills of boys and girls who have dropped out of school and are above the age of 15. The programme has helped enhance the self-confidence of the girls & boys and the skills



transmitted would help them gain self-employment.

One vocational skill training center was started in Thamaraiikulam village with **16 adolescent girls** who have dropped out of school and are under the age of 18 and **1 volunteer trainer for tailoring.**

SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION:

The Supplementary Education programme provides additional educational support to school-going children in operational villages. The programme helps children succeed academically and also inculcate ethos and values in the children in their tender age. It offers extra after-school instruction and provides an opportunity for the children to take part in extra and co-curricular activities. The programme aims to keep children in school and offers direction to concentrate on their education, especially first-generation learners. The programme has helped children improve in studies, and special attention to weak students has paved notable results.

- 3 supplementary education centers were established in Savakkattupalayam, Attuvampatti colony, and Bharathiannanagar, with a **total of 71 children attending and 3 volunteer teachers.**

CONCLUSION:

The Child Welfare and Education Programme has been successful in achieving its specific objectives. The Bridge Course, Vocational Skill Training, and Supplementary Education programmes have provided children with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed academically and also helped them gain self-confidence. The programmes have also helped keep children in school and stimulated their interest in studies. The programme has had a positive impact on the lives of children and their families, and it is essential to continue such programmes to provide education and welfare to vulnerable children.





Building Bridges to a Brighter Future: CASA's Supplementary Teachers



The education crisis in rural India is a sobering reality that affects millions of children, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and deprivation that stunts the growth of entire communities. Children in rural areas face numerous obstacles in pursuing their education, including poverty, and social norms that prioritize boys' education over girls'. Illiteracy continues to be a significant impediment to the development and progress of these regions.

Against this backdrop, CASA's Bridge School Centre initiative under the Child Welfare project provides a safe and non-judgmental space for rural children to learn and get back on track with academics. The initiative not only educates children but also provides them with nutritious food, counseling, and a supportive environment. Such initiatives help to break the barriers that limit access to education and empower children to take control of their futures.

Jansi Sharmila, a young woman from Kodaikanal, understands the challenges that rural students face in pursuing their education. Jansi has a B.A in English and a B.Ed and is

working as a temporary teacher in a private school to gain more experience and exposure to working with children who have unique challenges. She now works as a supplementary educator at CASA's Bridge School Initiative, where she is making a difference in the lives of rural children.

Jansi explains, "In the village, literacy rates are very poor. I believe that education is the key to unlocking a better future for these children and their families. That's why I decided to become a teacher and work at CASA's Bridge School Initiative. Through this project, I can clarify all kinds of doubts and insecurities that children develop under deprivation. These students attend school from morning to evening and are provided with snacks and nutritious food to keep them relaxed and energized throughout the day."

Teaching at the Bridge School Centre has been a fulfilling experience for Jansi. The class comprises 33 students from LKG to standard 8, and they come to class with great enthusiasm. Despite their challenging circumstances, they enjoy learning and the time they share together during snack breaks.

"I believe that our work at the Bridge School Initiative is making a tangible difference in the lives of these children. We are not just providing them with an education, but also helping them develop into well-rounded individuals who can contribute to their families and society. It is heartening to see how much progress they have made in such a short time, and I feel proud to be a part of this journey," says Jansi with a bright smile.

CASA is committed to fulfilling the needs of these children and their families. Every child has the right to education, regardless of their background or circumstances. CASA's Bridge School Initiative provides a beacon of hope for rural children who would otherwise be left behind. We hope that our work inspires more people to take up the cause of education in rural India and helps break the cycle of illiteracy and poverty that holds back so many of our children.

THE Inspiring Journey OF NALINI

Story by: Arushi Narchal | Written by: Kajol Tanaya

Nalini, an 11-year-old girl from Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu, whose educational journey has been interrupted by the harsh reality of her family's financial struggles. Despite successfully completing the fifth grade, Nalini had no choice but to drop out of school due to their weak financial condition. As she watches her friends continue their education, Nalini feels a deep longing to be back in the classroom, yearning for the learning experiences and the companionship she left behind. At her young age, Nalini may not fully comprehend the complexities of her family's financial crisis, but her sister Geetha has shed light on the challenging aftermath of the pandemic, which has pushed their resources to the limit.

Her sister, Geetha turned 24 this year. She also had to drop out of school after the fifth standard. Geetha lost her interest in education and could never emerge out of the work trap and lack of education captured her in. She mostly stayed at home, looking after the household chores. But Geetha knew the value of education and wanted her sister to have a chance to study, and so did Nalini's destiny.

Nalini's life took a turn for the good when she heard about the CASA Bridge Course Centre. This initiative of CASA has been designed to help children, who have dropped out of school, continue their education. These centres provide a bridge between the child's current level of education and their age-appropriate grade level. The importance of the BCC cannot be overstated. In rural areas, schools are often few and far between, and even when they exist, they may not be accessible due to the distance, lack of transportation or social norms that restrict girls' mobility. In the case of Nalini, the nearest school is in Palani which is 2 hrs away.

When BCC opened in their village, Nalini enrolled herself on the programme and started going to school regularly, excited to learn new things and make new friends. Her teacher, Pavitra, was her distant relative, and Nalini felt comfortable talking to her.

At school, Nalini had a daily routine that she followed with discipline. She would reach class at 9 am, on time, and sit for attendance. Then, she would be given an object about which she had to write an essay. After this activity, they would get snacks - biscuits and peanut chikki.

She would freshen up and sit for the next class, where they would learn about plantations. They had even planted seeds of mustard, pulses, and beans.

Nalini loves going to school and learning new things. She knew that education was the key to a better future, and she was determined to make the most of it. After completing her studies in the CASA BCC programme, she wanted to join a regular school where her friend studied. She had big dreams of becoming a teacher one day and helping other children like her get an education.



Pic : Nalini and her sister Geetha at their home.



Story by: Arushi Narchal | Written by: Kajol Tanaya

From Poverty to Possibilities: Lakshmi's Journey of Education and Hope

Lakshmi's story is one of resilience and hope. She was born in a small village in JJ Nagar, Kodaikandal, Tamil Nadu, where poverty and lack of resources meant that education was often out of reach for many children.

From a young age, Lakshmi, 7 year old, showed a keen interest in learning. She would watch with fascination as the older children in her village went off to school with their books and backpacks, dreaming of the day when she too would be able to join them.

However, her parents were reluctant to send her to school. They feared for her safety, as the nearest school was located 5 kilometers away from their village, and they could not afford the cost of transportation. Despite their concerns, Lakshmi remained determined to pursue her education.

One day, a kind-hearted volunteer from CASA's Bridge Course Centre visited Lakshmi's village. The Centre was established to provide education and support to children like Lakshmi who had

never attended school or had dropped out. The volunteer spoke to Lakshmi's parents, explaining the importance of education and the benefits it could bring to their daughter's life.

After much deliberation, Lakshmi's parents agreed to enroll her in the Bridge Course Centre. Lakshmi was overjoyed at the prospect of finally being able to learn and grow like the other children in her village.

At the Centre, Lakshmi was provided with the tools and support she needed to pursue her education. She was given books, pencils, and other supplies, and she was taught by dedicated teachers and volunteers who were passionate about helping children reach their full potential.

Lakshmi's first experience with a pencil was a symbol of her eagerness to learn and her potential for growth and development. She worked hard every day, soaking up knowledge like a sponge and making steady progress in her studies.



The Bridge Course Centre has made a significant impact on the lives of children like Lakshmi. It provides them with a safe and supportive environment where they can learn and grow. With the help of dedicated teachers and volunteers, children receive the necessary materials for education and the encouragement to pursue their dreams.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME: Thamaraikulam, Kodaikanal - Tamil Nadu



Empowering Women Through Skill Training in Kodaikanal



Prathiba, who is excited to teach new skills to women and girls at the CASA skill training center in Kodaikanal, said, "I am very happy to get this opportunity to teach new skills to girls and women from humble backgrounds. Most of the trainees come from families where they have to work as laborers. The vocational training which I will provide will help them to earn a livelihood. It is a great feeling to be able to empower these women with new skills and provide them with the opportunity to be financially independent." Prathiba's passion for teaching and dedication to helping others improve their lives is truly inspiring.



Pic (left) : Prathiba, skill training teacher, demonstrates stitching tools and materials to trainees at the Kodaikanal skill training center

Pic (right) : Prathiba standing proudly outside the Kodaikanal skill training center

Determination to Learn Tailoring and Support Her Family



Shashikala, aged 32, is eagerly looking forward to the skill training programme in tailoring. She currently works as a daily wage laborer and is excited about the prospect of learning a new skill that could increase her earning potential. One of the main reasons she is interested in the training is that there is no fee to participate, which makes it more accessible to people like her who may not have the financial means to pay for education.

Shashikala is tired of the daily grind of manual labor and feels that learning tailoring could be a way to provide a better life for herself and her family. She hopes that by increasing her earning potential, she can give her children a better education and a brighter future. Shashikala's determination to learn and improve her life through skill training is truly inspiring and showcases the power of education in transforming lives.

*Pic (right) : Shashikala expresses joy as she receives the stitching kit provided by CASA
(bottom) : Shashikala joins fellow trainees in the skill training center, surrounded by sewing machines*





Overcoming Obstacles to Pursue Tailoring and Support Her Family

Komika is a 21-year-old woman who got married at the age of 18 and left her studies after completing the 9th grade. However, she has not let her lack of formal education hold her back from pursuing her dreams. Komika has a strong desire to learn tailoring so that she can create her own clothes and also earn a livelihood.

Komika first heard about CASA's work through a volunteer and was eager to enroll in their skill training programme. As

she does not possess any particular skill, she hopes to gain expertise in tailoring and use her new abilities to support her family financially. Komika is determined to make the most of this opportunity to learn and improve her life and the lives of her loved ones.

Despite facing numerous obstacles, Komika is determined to succeed and is an inspiration to many others who are trying to make the best of their circumstances.





Malar:

A story of emerging confidence and self-respect

Story by: Sanjeev Singh | Written by: Kajol Tanaya

In rural India, many women struggle due to the lack of financial independence. They are burdened with domestic responsibilities and face social and community challenges that limit their access to education, healthcare, and representation in leadership position. They are unable to provide for their families and are largely dependent on their male counterparts.

This dependence can result in rural women's subjection to abuse, violence, and discrimination. They fear rejection and stay under constant fear of abandonment. Moreover, without education or financial independence, they are unable to pursue their own careers and are often fail to provide the same to their children.

But imagine for a moment, the transformative power of income generation support. How it can elevate the lives of these women, bringing about a positive change in their domestic, social, and community life.

Picture this: a middle-aged woman in a small village, waking up before dawn to go to work at the railway station. Working as a coolie, her hand loads and unloads heavy bags of luggages and grains only to earn a meager Rs. 200 a day. She faces physical exhaustion and verbal abuse from male coolies, but endures

the hardships to provide for her family. Her husband had abandoned her with four children, three girls and one boy to take care of all by herself. Two of her daughters were raised in sheer poverty with no education. They were married off soon.

This is the story of Malar, a woman in her early 40s who was toiling hard day and night to earn a wage that barely covered the family's basic needs. She yearned to contribute more, but societal norms and financial constraints had kept her confined. Nor could her children go to school like other children, nor could they live as comfortably as most families around them could.

But one day, Malar comes across CASA's Bridge school initiative through grassroot volunteers. Malar recalls, "CASA volunteers had come to ask if my children were interested to study. Their programme aimed to provide education to children who could not afford it owing to poor circumstances. I was convinced to enroll my younger son and daughter into the programme"

Under the initiative, team CASA was providing an Income generation support to the marginalized parents so that they can sustain the family and ensure that the children continue their education. Malar was provided with a cow to

domesticate and market dairy products. She was trained and supported with the resources to sustain the income generation.

With renewed hope, Malar signed up, determined to make a change.

Fast forward a few months, and the once-underconfident and reserved woman transformed into a confident entrepreneur. Her income has quadrupled, allowing her to provide better nutrition for her family and even invest in her children's education. Her children were able to study and even appeared for 10 th std examinations.

As she walks through the village, heads turn in admiration. The once-dismissive men now seek her advice, and the women look up to her as a role model. She has gained respect and dignity, no longer bound by the shackles of financial dependency.

The benefits of income generation support go beyond just financial empowerment. It unlocks a world of possibilities, providing rural women with the means to access education, healthcare, and social services. They can now participate in decision-making, leading to more gender-equal communities.

Breaking the Cycle of Financial Struggles and Providing Education in Rural India



Story by: Sanjeev Singh | Written by: Priyank Samuel

Financial constraints have been one of the struggles many marginalised people in rural India are facing. Often, they are faced with the uncertainty of providing enough for their families. In most cases, many families depend on a single breadwinner due to reasons like health issues or being burdened with domestic responsibilities.

In rural India, many people have limited access to education. Failing to pursue their own careers due to financial instability, families also need help to provide the required education for their children. Adding to that, the lack of basic health necessities too takes a toll on families.

One such case is the life of Radha, a resident of Alvachampatti village, Tamil Nadu. Her husband works as a wage worker (coolie) on farms and earns about Rs. 300-400 per day. Radha on the other hand is unable to help her husband with financial support due to her health condition. She visited the government hospitals for a consultation where she learned that she was diagnosed with severe anemic issues and was advised to not exert herself in physical work and to remain indoors as possible.

With Radha's health condition and the family's financial condition, her two children were forced to drop out of school. Her son started doing some petty jobs such as house paintings or any other meager work he could get to support the family. She yearns to provide for the family so her children could continue with their studies but remains incompetent.

Like in many places, CASA volunteers conducted surveys enquiring about children who dropped out of schools in rural areas. They met many villagers who are in need including Radha and learned about their problems. CASA then provide educational needs to the children through its Bridge Course Center while ensuring that the families can improve their financial health during this period by providing them a source to generate income.

Radha said, "CASA volunteers came to our village and asked about children who are not attending schools. I informed them that my son had discontinued school after 9th standard due to financial issues. CASA then enrolled Radha's son for the 10th standard and her daughter as well at its Bridge Course Center." Apart from



assisting her children to continue with their education, CASA also provided goats to help with their financial stability.

Radha is thankful for CASA's intervention and helps in her dire time. Even though she is unwell and home-ridden, she is able to breed the goats and help her husband in bringing financial income to the family and if need be they could sell the goat's offspring. She is happy to see her family's financial condition improve. She said, "I wish my children will be able to study further in the future and get good jobs in companies in the cities."

CASA's support towards ensuring financial and educational stability for the marginalised families unlocks a world of possibilities for all women in rural communities. It empowers women to stand along with their male counterparts to support their families, provide good education, healthcare and also partake in social services within the communities.

Transforming **LIVES** by upskilling **KNOWLEDGE**

Story by: Arushi Narchal | Written by: Priyank Samuel



India is a country with 1.38 billion population. Around 65% of the total population is from rural India. Each year the population increases in the country. In rural India, education has been a serious issue for decades. According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate in rural India is only 68.9% compared to 84.7% in urban areas. This significant disparity highlights the urgent need for targeted efforts to provide education to marginalized communities.

A few of the biggest challenges are the lack of resources, the right infrastructure, financial constraints, and even gender biases. In many cases, socio-economic factors also play a significant role in the education crisis in rural India. Poverty, lack of transportation, and lack of basic amenities in schools in rural areas make it difficult for children to attend school regularly.

To address the education crisis in rural India, CASA introduced various educational programmes such as the Bridge Course Center which helps young children reconnect with their academic education without having to worry about their family's financial issues and Vocational Skill Training like computer courses, tailoring classes, etc.

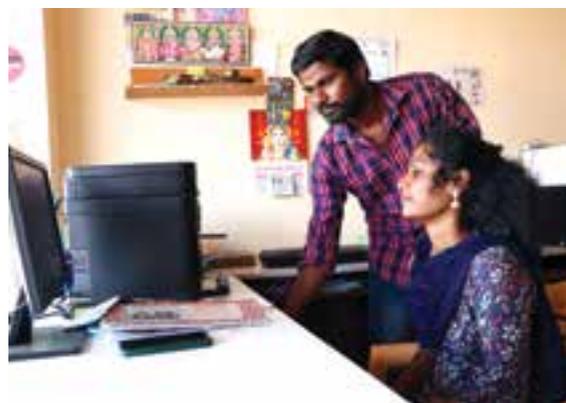
Anand Raj, a computer instructor at one of CASA's Vocational Skill Training (VST) Centers, shared his experience as a teacher and how CASA's VST has reached out to many underprivileged children who were unable to continue their studies due to financial issues and have helped many fulfill their dreams. He shared that he joined CASA's VST as a computer instructor to 60 students where 45 students were girls and the remaining boys.

Having got the opportunity to pursue education again, makes the students even keener on learning new things. Anand proudly conveyed, "these students were very cooperative throughout their course, out of 60 students who had joined the computer course, 8 of them cleared the required assessment tests and are now enrolled in colleges, 5 boys have started working in different organizations and 2 others are now working in Coimbatore."

Some of the students who joined CASA's VST programmes also pursued dual or multiple courses. Anand further shared, "Maheshwari, among the students, joined the computer course and tailoring classes." The courses that she undertook gave her the knowledge and skills that enabled her to generate income to help her family from financial trouble. Maheshwari joined CASA's VST programmes to escape the family pressure to get married.

Many students enlisted for the VST programmes for various reasons. Some got themselves enrolled in these courses due to their inability to pursue regular academics, some do to avoid early marriage by their families and many to upskill themselves to find suitable jobs.

Anand also shared about another student, Saradha who joined the VST programme. She came from a very poor family with many financial challenges. Saradha lost her father at a very young age and her mother is the only one who provides for the family. He said, "Saradha's education was taken care of by her mother until her 12th. Due to



financial restrictions, her mother was unable to enroll her in any college for higher studies. After knowing that CASA provides free education to the underprivileged children, Saradha got herself enrolled in the computer center to upskill herself. We had also helped her get admission to a college for further studies."

Once again he said, "In my experience, students were very cooperative and good and all the children learned very well in their classes. Being called their teacher gives me immense happiness and pride."

The initiation of these programmes brings joy and bright smiles to the faces of these students who once lost their hopes of continuing their education. Apart from helping young students from marginalised families in the Bridge Course centers or VST programmes, CASA has also assisted them to enroll in colleges in correspondence, to continue with their studies. The students are grateful for CASA's support, which brought hope and gave them a meaningful life.



Enabling Success in Landscape of Despair: Educators at CASA's BCC

Rural children face numerous challenges in accessing education, and these challenges can vary from region to region.

Education is a fundamental right that every child deserves to have access to, yet in many parts of rural India, children face insurmountable barriers to accessing it. The obstacles that impede access to education are multifaceted and complex. In some regions, children must travel long distances to reach the nearest school, while in others, the schools themselves may be poorly equipped, lacking in resources, technology, and qualified teachers.

Poverty is a significant factor that can impact a child's ability to access education. Many families in rural areas may not have the financial means to pay for basic school supplies or even food. Moreover, cultural attitudes can also play a role, particularly towards girls, who may be discouraged from pursuing an education.

Inadequate healthcare facilities and extreme weather conditions can also prevent children from attending school. Children may not have access to proper medical care, and during times of inclement weather, they may not have transportation to attend school. Furthermore, the lack of basic facilities such as clean water, functioning toilets, and proper heating or cooling systems can also impede children's ability to learn in a safe and comfortable environment.

In this landscape of despair, CASA's Bridge Course Centre is operating with a tireless motivation to educate rural children and reintegrate them into mainstream education. This initiative has brought about a significant change in the lives of many children. It has also given new motivation to educators in rural India, and Vinothini's story is a testament to its success. Vinothini, a young woman of 28, had to discontinue her teaching profession due to health issues. However, she found a new purpose in life when she joined CASA's Bridge Course Centre in 2020. She became a part of the team that ventured into rural areas to educate children who were unable to attend school.

Vinothini's first assignment was in Amrithpatti village, where the people were in dire straits. The parents of these children were working in menial jobs, and financial difficulties forced them to keep their children out of school. Additionally, the lack of schools in the area made it even more challenging for children to access education. However, Vinothini and her team persisted. They convinced the villagers about the importance of education and how it could improve the future prospects of their children. They began teaching the children who had been deprived of an education, and slowly but surely, they started to see the fruits of their labor. They were able to enroll the bright and keen children in school and provided them with the tools to succeed.

The benefits of initiatives like CASA's Bridge Course Centre are manifold. Children who were once denied an education now have access to it, and this has opened up a world of opportunities for them. They are better equipped to navigate life and make informed decisions. Moreover, the economic benefits of education cannot be overstated. Educated individuals are more likely to secure stable jobs, and this can have a ripple effect on the community.

This initiative has become even more critical in the post-pandemic world. The pandemic has hit education in rural India hard. Lack of access to digital education has left many children struggling. However, the Bridge Course Centre has stepped up to the plate. They have continued to educate children through other means like in-person teaching and distribution of study materials.

Vinothini is happy to be a part of this initiative. She believes that through this intervention by CASA, many lives have been benefitted. Keeping the charitable and dedicated work up, she has also participated in other interventions like food and ration distribution, plant sapling distribution, and providing tuition in the evenings to children below 8th standard.

CASA's Bridge Course Centre is essential for the betterment of rural India. It provides a glimmer of hope in a situation that seems bleak. With more people like Vinothini, we can create a brighter future for rural children and ensure that they too have a fair chance at success.



Story by: Arushi Narchal | Written by: Priyank Samuel

Rebuilding Hope and Reconnecting young children to Education

Access to education is a basic fundamental right of every child but in many parts of India, education remains a concern to many. In rural India, children face a massive barrier to accessing education due to a lack of educational institutions, the schools are either poorly equipped or lack qualified teachers.

In some regions, although there are primary schools in the villages, children have to commute a long distance to reach the village that provides the required education for attending secondary schools. This became a hindrance for young children to fulfill their educational needs. Especially for the girl child, commuting to another village becomes a societal concern due to the social stigma of a girl attaining puberty, and parental concerns arise.

One of CASAs Bridge Course Centers' teachers, Amutha a private school teacher from Sendhurai village, shared "In this area, most of the children are dropouts mainly because of the distance of schools, also family financial situations, most parents are farmers or coolie so they do not have a regular source of income."

COVID-19 Pandemic imposed one of the greatest effects on everyone's lives. From health issues, to change the lifestyles of the people and undoubtedly had a huge impact on the marginalized people. During the time when COVID-19 was at its peak, a worldwide lockdown was imposed, including in the rural parts of India. The untold challenges faced by the marginalised people affect their day-to-day lives this includes lacking healthcare resources, to lack of basic necessities, and education which immensely impacts young children.

Education during the pandemic came to a halt, and children faced the actual educational gap and were left helpless during this point in time. After learning about the educational challenges faced by these young children in the rural area, CASA took the initiative to open the Bridge Course Centers and other educational programmes in the village and encouraged villagers to send children to bridge their gap in education so that they can rejoin their regular curriculum.

It took a while for CASA to convince the parents as it had to detail the parents from scratch about the importance of

BCC. Amutha joined CASA as one of the educational instructor teachers amidst the pandemic. She shared "It was a struggle to open BCC in the village as we had to make all the parents aware of the objective of the programme and especially during the COVID-19, we were not welcome in the village as they were afraid of getting infected by COVID-19." Amutha along with other volunteers of CASA then made the parents aware of the project and convinced them to enroll their children at the BCCs especially after the COVID-19 period, to help them fill the gap in their regular schools.

CASA opened 5 BCCs, 2 Vocational Skill Training, and 4 Supplementary Education Centers in the village. She further conveyed, "Once the BCC started it went along smoothly, we used to provide good food and nutritious snacks for the children and the model of teaching was very friendly and playful so that the children will be engaged nicely. This made us help the children to value the importance of education and then we educated them with their subjects and other courses."

About 100+ children were enrolled in all 5 Bridge Course Centers, helping children resume their education and guiding them to their regular school programmes. Around 70-80% of the children from the Bridge School Center were then mainstreamed back to regular schools once the lockdown was lifted and schools reopened for the children.

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The Natural Prominence of Sundarbans

The Sundarbans is a mangrove forest located in the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna Rivers, along the Bay of Bengal in West Bengal, India. This enchanting tropical paradise is home to one of the world's most diverse ecosystems and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The natural bliss of Sundarbans is unparalleled. It is home to the Bengal tiger, an endangered species and several other wildlife species, including the Ganges river dolphin, estuarine crocodiles, and water monitors. Sundarbans is the only mangrove forest in the world where tigers are found. The Sundarbans is also home to a unique and diverse array of flora and fauna which includes over 300 species of birds, hundreds of species of plants, and a variety of freshwater and saltwater fish. It is a haven for birdwatchers, with many rare and endangered species being found here.

The Sundarbans act as a shield, protecting human settlements from the effects of cyclones such as storm surges and gusty winds. This has made the mangrove forests a valuable source of diverse services (known as ecosystem services) for people for centuries. The Sundarbans is of great importance for its brackish water environment and for its ability to provide economic support to local and distant communities. It is also dependent on the physical functions and processes of larger regions, such as the supply of fresh water and sediment from Himalayan watershed areas.

The importance of Sundarbans biodiversity cannot be overstated. It is essential to the continued health of the region's ecosystems and the local economy. It is a key source of livelihood for the people living in the area, providing them with food, fuel, timber, and medicinal plants.

Not Immune to Extreme Climatic Events

The Sundarbans is a unique and fragile ecosystem, made up of a complex network of rivers, creeks, and swamps. The region is already facing the impacts of more frequent and intense storms and floods, along with sea level rise and increased salinity reducing the availability of freshwater. This is leading to more disasters in the Sundarbans, with the most recent being a devastating cyclone that caused widespread damage in the area in 2020.

The main culprit to catalyze the exploitation of Sundarbans is human interference. This includes fishing, logging, and tourism. Overfishing has led to a decrease in the population of fish and other aquatic species, while logging has caused deforestation and destruction of habitats. Tourism, while bringing in much-needed revenue, has also had an adverse effect on the environment. In addition, industrial pollution has contaminated the water and air in the region, making it difficult for the flora and fauna to survive.

Furthermore, as human interaction with the forest increased from subsistence to commercial levels, it has posed a range of threats to its ecological integrity. These threats include the unplanned use of land, the establishment of industries, urban centres, and unmanaged tourism activities, which have resulted in the loss of biodiversity, environmental pollution,

and the discharge of hazardous materials.

The people living in the Sundarbans are mainly fishermen, farmers and small-scale entrepreneurs. Many of them are from marginalized communities that suffer from economic and social exclusion. They are highly vulnerable to any environmental changes, and the increasing climatic uncertainty is making life even more difficult for them.

The Socio-Economic Misery of Depleting Sundarbans

The natural resources of the Sundarbans are abundant, yet the region is not suitable for human habitation and is highly vulnerable to human interference and climate change.

The depletion of Sundarbans' natural abundance has caused a multitude of issues concerning the ecosystem. Poverty, overpopulation, a lack of environmental awareness and limited sustainable income opportunities keep the cycle of ecological exploitation running in the Sundarbans. Consequently, the region is threatened as both a habitat for humans and an ecosystem. Those living in the region are particularly susceptible to the effects of climate change, yet they are also contributing to the destruction of the ecosystem through negative coping strategies. This has caused people to migrate to larger cities such as Kolkata, a rise in human trafficking, social conflicts,

seasonal food insecurity, and illegal hunting, fishing and logging in protected areas, which has resulted in animal-human conflicts.

Negative impact on livelihoods- majorly agriculture

Agriculture is the main economic activity in Sundarban and provides a basic livelihood for rural people. Over the past few decades, changes in cropping patterns, crop productivity, and land use have been caused by both natural and human-induced factors. The region has been especially vulnerable to extreme weather events over the Bay of Bengal, such as the damage caused by cyclone Aila in 2009, which drastically decreased crop production in Gosaba due to the high salinity and low pH of the soil.

During the dry season, many agricultural areas lie fallow due to the lack of fresh water. Unsystematic embankment and haphazard closure construction in river channels have diverted the surface slope, resulting in a saucer-shaped topography that causes serious waterlogging in agricultural fields and resulting in crop damage and low productivity. This has caused tremendous financial losses to farmers, trapping them in poverty.

To address these issues, climate-resilient cropping strategies, proper drainage system maintenance, and the adaptation of modern land-reshaping techniques for diversified agricultural systems are urgently needed to ensure the economic future of the region.



Study done by CASA

By: Anthony Das

Hingalganj Block, and in particular Rupmari Gram Panchayat, is a vulnerable area in North 24 Parganas District, consisting of cyclone-prone Gram Sansads such as Bainara, Kumirmari, and Rupmari. The community is heavily reliant on river and forest resources, with 10% of the population engaging in fishing and 20% working as small and marginal farmers. 70% of the community migrate to other states, towns, and cities in search of livelihood opportunities.

Women often collect prawn seedlings to provide additional income to their families. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns, many migrant laborers have returned home and have been left jobless, while the devastation caused by Cyclone Amphan has damaged agricultural fields. This has resulted in a loss of livelihood, leading to socio-economic and political instability.

The affected communities are mostly daily wage earners, agricultural practitioners, and fishermen/women who have had to discontinue their activities due to embankment breaches. They have also lost their standing crops, stored grains, and rice and pulses. With livelihoods threatened, people are more inclined to seek unsafe migration. As the male members of the family are commonly the ones to migrate in search of work, the women take on the responsibility of caring for the family and providing for their immediate needs.

The study thus focuses on ways to sustain livelihoods through skill and knowledge building, as well as providing access to livelihood opportunities under Government support systems and livelihood schemes.

The study was cross-sectional in design, conducted in 200 households in Hingalganj under North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, where the target groups of migrant labour families, single women headed families and children, all aged 15 years and above were focused. The objectives of the study were to ensure that the target groups have access to resources to secure their livelihood and that people's organisations, with the active participation of women, carry out collective actions to implement local government programmes.

96.5% participants were males and 3.5% females and with a mean age of 49.5 years. Primary data was collected from original research articles, census reports, and Government survey reports, and a structured interview schedule was prepared to record detailed demographic data. Under univariate analysis, descriptive statistics like frequency and percentage distribution were computed for each category, and cross tabulations were also performed.

The geographical distribution was more from Bainara block (32.5%) followed by South Rupamari (19.5%), North Kumirmari (18%), and South Kumirmari (15%). The

religion was 100% Hindu, and 62.5% of the respondents were found to be head of the family. The educational status revealed that 91% of them were literate and 94% were working.

The data collected for family income indicated that the majority of respondents (83.3%) from South Rupamari had an income of more than 100,000. There were 42.9% of respondents from Bainara with an income between 50,000-99,000, and 37% with an income of 1,000-49,000. 81% of the participants had migrated in the last year, with the highest number coming from South Rupamari (25.6%). All participants had an Aadhaar card, and 57% of them had an SPHH card, 27.5% PHH, 13% RKSYS, and 2% AAY card.

In terms of crop production, 43.8% of respondents from Bainara changed their crop production to fish farming, while none of the respondents from South Kumirmari and North Rupamari did the same. 49.3% of respondents from Bainara practiced sustainable agriculture, compared to less than 20% in other regions. 81.2% of the participants from Bainara had ever tilled their land, followed by 12.5% in North Kumirmari, and 6.2% in South Kumirmari (0% in South and North Rupamari).

The bi-variate analysis between demographic variables and gender of head of the family revealed that most of them were male-led households.



FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

Introduction:

In 2021, CASA initiated a capacity-building project in Hingalganj block of Sundarbanas aimed at empowering villagers to lead self-sustainable lives. The project was divided into three groups which included four members in each group from three villages i.e Rupamari, Kumirmari, and Bainara. The purpose of this project is to form People's Organisation, Leadership/Cadre Building, Perspective & Capacity Building and to provide them a source of alternate livelihood.

Several programmes were conducted under this project to develop the community's skills and knowledge. Gender mainstreaming was also an essential aspect of the project.

1 >>

Community Organization, Leadership/ cadre building and their perspective & capacity building

- ▶ One Programme conducted on issue identification and prioritization with target community
- ▶ Two trainings of People Organisation members on Search and Rescue operation and basic First Aid as part of leadership development
- ▶ One Mock Drill conducted on Cyclone Preparedness with targeted groups
- ▶ Fifteen Farm Based training programmes conducted with 75 HHs on Organic vegetable cultivation (Capsicum/Broccoli/Turmeric/Mushroom), Dragon Fruit and Baby Corn (based on soil texture & community need)
- ▶ Preparation of Skill development manual on Farm Based and off Farm to strengthen capacity of leaders and CBOs
- ▶ Forty training programmes conducted impacting 25 women leaders, 30 youth on Alternative livelihood promotion, Mobile Repairing, TOTO repairing, Home-based Sanitary Napkin making and traditional hand-craft making
- ▶ Two training programmes arranged on bio-floc pisciculture with 15 leaders from Women Groups, Farmers Group, DMTF Members
- ▶ Three training on Mixed farming/Integrated Model (livestock & Nutrition garden) with 150 HHs
- ▶ Four Community Based Awareness on Flood/Cyclone/Lighting/ Snake-bite and IEC development

2 >>

Institution Building for Collective Action

- ▶ Formation of one People's Organization from 3 targeted areas for collective action
- ▶ One Training Need Assessment conducted at meso level with different stakeholders (CSOs) on Flood/Cyclone/Lighting/ Snake-bite
- ▶ Three PVCA developments (seasonal mapping/hazard mapping/resource mapping) developed in 3 working areas.
- ▶ One Bio Flock model demonstration established by PO & development of IEC
- ▶ One workshop conducted with People's Organization on Cyclone preparedness camp management

3 >>

Policy Analysis & Advocacy on Livelihood, Justice and Entitlement Issues

- ▶ 300 HHs accessed by the government, schemes specifically (MGNREGA / PDS/ KCC/ FSSM/ Old age Pension/Disability Pension / Widow pension)
- ▶ Developed IEC on GOVT. Scheme and sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- ▶ Established linkage with Government Line Department
- ▶ Three Village Level Disaster Management Plan developed in 3 working areas
- ▶ One programme conducted on Exchange of Knowledge among beneficiaries.

4 >>

Gender mainstreaming

- ▶ One training of PO on Gender Sensitive Planning (Practical Gender Needs & Strategic Gender Needs) focusing on Re Usable Home-based Sanitary Napkin making conducted

5 >>

PME Organizational Level

- ▶ Conducted one Base-line survey by targeting 450 HH's in 3 villages (achieved 200 HH's) and one endline survey targeting 300 HH's
- ▶ Conducted Two training programmes on OIO with CSOs
- ▶ Conducted One review planning meeting with targeted groups

Empowering Women through Capacity Building and Disaster Preparedness Training

Disasters can strike anytime, anywhere, and affect people from all walks of life. However, people living in areas prone to natural disasters are at higher risk of losing their homes, livelihoods, and even their lives. The Sundarbans area in West Bengal, India, is one such area that is frequently hit by cyclones and floods. In such areas, it is essential to empower the local community to mitigate the impact of disasters and lead a self-sustainable life.

The case of Shamoli Ari, a 39-year-old woman from Sundarbans, is a prime example of how capacity building and disaster preparedness training can empower women and enable them to lead a sustainable life. Shamoli's village was severely affected by cyclones Amphan and Yaas, causing the loss of agriculture crops, preserved seeds, and livestock, which were a significant source of livelihood for the villagers.

Shamoli shared, "The training provided by CASA enabled us to save ourselves and others during disasters. We learned to make rescue materials from household waste like plastic bottles, old tyres and dry coconut shells etc, which could help us lower the impact of cyclones or floods. Also, The vegetable seeds and livestock provided by the CASA helped us earn a decent livelihood".

Shamoli expressed her satisfaction with the project, stating that the training she received had empowered her to sustain herself and her family. She and her fellow villagers were now growing their vegetables and were able to sell them as well. The project had given them the skills to save themselves during disasters and made them self-capable, enabling them to lead a sustainable life.

The success of this project highlights the importance of empowering women in disaster-prone areas by providing them with skills and resources to lead a self-sustainable life. The project created a sense of community and collaboration among the villagers, enabling them to resolve village issues collectively. Such projects should be replicated in other disaster-prone areas to empower women and enable them to lead a self-sustainable life.



Pic: Shamoli from Rupmari Village in Sundarbans, West Bengal demonstrating disaster safety preparedness with a first aid kit and essential tools provided by CASA



Reena Mondal, a passionate social worker, finds purpose and fulfillment through volunteer work with CASA

Reena Mondal is a 40-year-old woman who had always been passionate about social work and helping those in need. She had been a volunteer with the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) for over 3 years, and it had become a vital part of her life.

As a volunteer with CASA, Reena spent her time visiting villages, meeting with communities and community events.

For Reena, volunteering was more than just a way to give back to her community. It was also a way to find purpose and meaning in her own life. She loved the sense of fulfillment that came with helping others and the way that it connected her with people from different backgrounds.

Through her work with CASA, Reena had gained valuable skills and experiences that had helped her in her professional life. She encouraged young people to volunteer with organisations like CASA because it was a way to gain real-world experience and develop important skills like leadership, communication, and empathy.



Composting: Enhancing Soil Fertility and Reducing Waste

Composting is a natural process of recycling organic matter that transforms waste materials into a valuable resource for soil improvement. Composts play a key role in enhancing soil fertility and structure, resulting in the growth of nutrient-rich crops. Organic composts are considered climate-friendly fertilizers that do not use any chemical pesticides. Instead, they are prepared from organic residues, such as kitchen scraps, yard waste, and other organic materials, where soil-friendly microorganisms help the decomposition process. The composting process breaks down complex organic matter into simple forms that are easily absorbed by plants, increasing soil fertility.

Adequate moisture and oxygen levels are critical factors that help to maintain the composting process, which further increases soil fertility. The decomposition process of composting releases essential nutrients, such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, into the soil, promoting healthy plant growth. Composts also improve soil structure by enhancing soil

porosity, reducing soil compaction, and increasing water retention capacity, creating a healthier environment for plants.

The use of organic composts also reduces the issues of waste disposal, which can have negative environmental impacts, including the release of harmful greenhouse gases. Instead of sending organic waste to landfills, which contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, composting can recycle these materials into a valuable resource for soil improvement. Composting is a sustainable method of waste management that is climate-adaptive and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

Overall, the benefits of composting are numerous, including increased soil fertility and structure, the growth of nutrient-rich crops, waste reduction, climate adaptation, and the creation of a healthy environment for plants. Composting is a simple and effective method of producing a valuable resource for soil improvement, promoting

and sustainable agriculture practices.

Also, CASA has taken a proactive approach in disseminating high-quality organic seeds to the villagers, along with providing proper awareness to 75 households on the uses and benefits of in-demand exotic fruits and vegetables. This training programme has been instrumental in introducing the villagers to new crops such as dragon fruits and broccoli, which they were not previously familiar with. Many of the villagers were surprised to learn about the market value and demand for these crops. By educating them about the benefits of growing these crops, CASA has helped to diversify the agricultural practices of the villagers, which can lead to increased income and improved nutrition. Overall, CASA's efforts in promoting the use of high-quality organic seeds and introducing new crops have had a positive impact on the villagers, and can contribute to sustainable and profitable farming practices in the region.

Building Resilience in Cyclone-Prone Regions: The Role of Biofloc Pisciculture

Written by: Priyank Samuel

Sundarbans in West Bengal is a delta region that is highly susceptible to tropical cyclones impacted by storm surge-induced floods, embankment breaching, and so on. Thus this affects the life and livelihood in this region in severe ways. Tropical cyclones is one of the most deadly natural disasters causing damage to properties and countless deaths. In the Sundarbans, the coastal people suffer a significant amount of loss due to cyclones and their aftermath effects such as flood inundation, water logging in the agricultural land, etc.

South 24 - Parganas District encompasses a major part of the Sundarbans region, and is one of the most frequently cyclone-affected areas in West Bengal. When it comes to severe cyclones, the regions including the South 24 Paraganas are one of the most vulnerable areas in the country. Their livestock gets destroyed during the calamities and leaving the people with no other option but to wait till they can restart their farming to earn wages for survival.

CASA learned about the situation in the Sundarbans area and initiated its project to help the people, especially in times of natural destruction caused by cyclones and floods. To address the underlying issues of climate change, CASA took the initiative to introduce Biofloc to the farmers in the Sundarbans region to help them save their livestock.

Biofloc is a practical methodology and the latest technology in aquaculture which can provide twice the investment in return over 3 months. The concept of fish farming in artificial tanks, infusing biosecurity, and raising organic hormone-free fish can be a blessing for cyclone or flood-prone coastal areas

and regions with water scarcity, where fish farming has been disturbed by natural calamities.

The main reason India became one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world is its diverse landscape and specific climate sensitivity. The Sundarbans region, in particular, is one of the most highly vulnerable parts of the country. In an attempt to provide versatile livelihood options and food security to the residents of climate-uncertain regions, CASA has decided to provide 3 Demo Biofloc pisciculture (Fish farming) installations in three villages of Sundarbans.

The installation of the Biofloc pisciculture system is supervised by four People's Organizations in the villages of the Sundarbans region. These members have also signed a five-year agreement to invest their land and allow infrastructural facilities for Biofloc setup. A marginal farmer with small land holdings can also opt for this opportunity, making it a robust livelihood option for people living in disaster or minor-drought-prone areas.

Initially, fish farming was through conventional open pond fish farming, and during cyclones and floods, all the fishes that are bred in the ponds are washed away along with the overflowing waterbodies. This makes the farmers lose their livestock when such calamities happen.



“During the time of Cyclone Amphan, the local ponds, and waterbodies flows away with all the fishes.”

- shared Jayanti

Among the four members team in Bainada Village is Jayanti Chowkidar, a 41-year-old woman. She attended the training conducted by CASA regarding sustainable fish farming and learned about the ways and means of the Biofloc farming system. Although it is a new concept, she was eager to learn more. She said, “Biofloc is a completely new concept for me and I learned



about it in CASA training, in this region, consumption of fish is more and that's why such concepts are important for us." She understood the importance and benefits of Biofloc, especially in the Sundarbans where cyclones and floods often occur and affect the region.

After understanding the importance of Biofloc pisciculture in Sundarbans, in the month of August 2022, it was installed on her premises with the help of CASA. She said, "Biofloc is a secure way to breed fishes and to keep them safe during calamities. I was trained by CASA in order to maintain and take care of the necessary processes involved in this pisciculture breeding. The material uses to make this Biofloc is waterproof and strong enough to withstand heavy wind and we understood that we need to have such measures to help ourselves to save livestock."

For the sustainable day-to-day performance of Biofloc, CASA provided solar panels, an oxygen motor and a battery to run the oxygen motor 24x7 and to purify the water for the breeding of fishes.

The Process of Biofloc System:

Daily processes involved in maintaining the Biofloc setup include keeping the motor on to regulate the oxygen in the water, regular water tests to maintain water quality, and adding ammonia and nitrate to balance the pH level of the water. The solar panel charges the battery that runs the motor, in cloudy days with less sunlight, electricity is used to switch on the motor.

Jayanti took responsibility to take care of the Biofloc setup installed at her premises. During our conversation with her, she said, "I follow a chart timetable to feed the fish on time, and keep check of the water quality, in times of severe heat I cover the lid of the tank to protect the fishes, and when it's too cold we switch on the heating lights to regulate the temperature of the water."

A regular water Test is needed to maintain the quality of the water, to do so, its Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) and pH level need to be checked. Jayanti

further shared, "I was trained to check and maintain the pH level of the water. My regular activities include the addition of ammonia and nitrate to balance the pH level to around 7 - 7.2 on the pH scale. I also ensure that the TDS level is maintained under 1000 PPM. For the efficient growth of the fish, we were advised to grind Liv52 (1 spoon), Limcee (5gm) and vitamins (1 gm) to the fish food, this enables the healthy growth of the fish.

Since Jayanti is taking care of the daily requirements at the Biofloc setup, the other 3 partners do pay often visits to check on the progress and help in providing the other necessities.

Once all the fishes are fully grown and start reproducing, the fully grown fishes are then taken to the market for selling. The profit from selling the fishes is shared among the four partners. However, as Jayanti is the one who invested the land and main labour in the Biofloc system, her share of the profit is more than the other three partners. She conveyed, " Since I am taking care of the entire Biofloc setup, my share from the profit is 40% and the others 20% each." Apart from that, each member has to separate 5% of their share in savings in case of any emergency maintenance or expense needed for the Biofloc setup.

During any sudden incident of the cyclone, when the warning is announced. The Biofloc is covered up with a tarpaulin sheet, and all sides are tightly tied with rope. Wood logs are placed on top of the tank to strongly fold the tarpaulin sheet tightly to keep the inside water and fishes intact till the cyclone impact is subsided.



From Disaster to Sustainability:

How CASA Helped a Sundarbans Community Build a Resilient Livelihood

Vibash Mondal, a 47-year-old member of the People's organization formed by CASA, stood proudly in front of his kitchen garden and duck farm, which he had established with the help of CASA. He gestured towards the lush greenery and the healthy ducks waddling around, quacking contentedly.

He explained that he lived near the riverbank, and the problem of saline water in the Sundarbans area was a common issue. As we walked towards his home, he showed us the river and the breached embankments that were a result of cyclone Amphan and Yaas. He recounted how he had lost so many of his belongings as he lived near the river, but with the help of CASA, they established a people's organization in their village, and they were now much better equipped to handle such disasters.

He expressed his gratitude to CASA for providing them with training related to sustaining their livelihood and capacity building. He talked about how they had given him ducks and vegetable seeds that were now fully grown and producing yields. He was thrilled to report that they now had enough to eat and even sell in the market.

He went on to explain how the survival of the ducks was much better than the local ducks they used to have. They produced more eggs, and he was getting a good market value for them. He seemed genuinely happy and proud of what he had achieved.



As we continued talking, Vibash's demeanor changed. He revealed that since the pandemic began, they had lost their work and then suffered from back-to-back cyclones, which had completely devastated them. Even their children's education had suffered a lot, and they were struggling to make ends meet.

Despite the challenges they had faced, Vibash remained hopeful. He was grateful for the support that CASA had provided, and he knew that with hard work and perseverance, they would be able to overcome these difficulties. He ended our conversation with a smile, inviting us to come back and visit anytime.

Photo (above): Vibash Mondal, a farmer at his duck farm provided by CASA, enjoys feeding his flock of ducks.

(below): Vibash Mondal and his family stand proudly in their flourishing kitchen garden, which was established with the support of CASA





Poultry and Organic Farming in Cyclone-Prone Areas:

Challenges and Interventions for a Sustainable Livelihood

Poultry farming in cyclone-prone areas presents a variety of challenges due to the potential damage that can be caused by cyclones such as strong winds, heavy rainfall, and flooding. Cyclones can cause extensive damage to poultry housing, particularly if the structures are not built to withstand high winds. This can result in significant losses for farmers, as well as reduced production capacity.

In cyclone and flood-prone areas such as Sundarbans, poultry farming becomes an obstacle for farmers, as floods can cause significant mortality in poultry, particularly if they are not able to access high ground or dry areas. Cyclones can create conditions that are conducive to the spread of diseases among poultry populations. The saline water that inundated during floods affects the survival of poultry like ducks and destroys the farm yield as it impairs the soil fertility.

This situation takes a toll on the people living in a cyclone and flood-prone areas. It creates a financial issue when they try to recoup, after such disasters.

Gour Chandra Mondal, one of CASA's beneficiaries in Bainara village, Sundarbans shared "Post cyclone Amphan, CASA came to Rupmari village for disaster relief. That is when I came to know about CASA and its projects. CASA supported more than 400 families from Rupamari, Kumirmari and Bainara villages."

CASA intervened in these areas with the objective of reaching out to help these people to sustain their livelihood swiftly. In order to support their poultry and agricultural farming, CASA raised awareness and trained them about poultry farming such as Duck breeding, and also agricultural farming including exotic vegetable farming such as

Broccoli, Dragon fruits, Karela, Bringal, etc. Gour shared, "To around 300 families, CASA provided 3 ducks each with appropriate training on duck breeding."



CASA provided Khaki Cambell ducks to its beneficiaries in all 3 villages of Sundarbans. This breed - Khaki Campbell is best known for its increased organic egg production. A regular local duck produces 10-12 eggs and stops production for the next 3 months, whereas the Campbell lays 30-35 eggs in a span of every 2-3 months. "The Campbell organic eggs are bigger in size and we get Rs. 10-12 per egg, but a regular duck egg is sold for only Rs. 8. On

a yearly average we see that we make more than 2 times what we earlier used to" added Gour.

CASA also disseminated high-quality organic seeds to the villagers and proper awareness and uses of in-demand exotic fruits and vegetables. "The villagers never had an idea about dragon fruits and broccoli. In the CASA training programme we came to realise its market value and its demand." shared Gour. The villagers used to cultivate Cauliflower which yields money from selling a bulk load, whereas a farmer earns Rs. 20-25 per piece of Broccoli which is a hybrid version of Cauliflower.

To mitigate the financial challenges of farmers in cyclone-prone areas, CASA has assisted villagers in obtaining various forms of training to prepare for and respond to weather-related events. This has involved supporting the development of effective poultry farming and productive exotic agricultural farming practices, enabling individuals in disaster-prone regions to sustain their livelihoods.



CASA Provides Short-term Livelihood Training for Youth in Rupamari, Sundarbans

Story by: Anthony Das

The CASA emphasis on short-term livelihood training for the youth of Rupamari areas is a commendable step towards addressing the issue of unemployment in the region. By providing access to relevant and in-demand skills training, the project is helping to build a more sustainable future for the community.

Diesel engine repair and Assistant Electrician training are both practical and employable skills, particularly in rural areas with limited access to basic services. The short-term courses offered by The IMC of ITI Tollygunge are tailored to meet the specific needs of the region and equip trainees with the knowledge and expertise necessary to work in related fields.

One of the significant advantages of the short-term training programmes is that they can be completed within a relatively short period. This means that the trainees can start earning sooner and

put their newly acquired skills to work almost immediately. Additionally, by providing training in the local area, the project is making education accessible and affordable for young people who may not have had the means to pursue higher education otherwise.

The CASA project's focus on equipping young people with vocational skills is a critical step towards reducing poverty and creating sustainable livelihoods in the region. This project can serve as an example for other communities and organizations looking to address similar challenges. By investing in short-term livelihood training, the project is not only helping the youth of Rupamari areas to build a better future but also contributing to the economic development of the region as a whole.

In conclusion, the CASA project's initiative to provide short-term livelihood training for the youth of Rupamari areas is a commendable effort to address the

issue of unemployment and poverty in the region. By providing access to relevant and in-demand skills training, the project is helping to build a more sustainable future for the community. The project's success can be attributed to its focus on practical skills training that is tailored to meet the specific needs of the region. This project can serve as a model for other communities and organizations looking to address similar challenges.



18
STUDENTS

Enrolled for Diesel Engine Repair

10
STUDENTS

Enrolled for Assistant Electrician Training



ITI Training Empowers Young Dreamer to Build Skills and Increase Employability



Abhinandan Mondal, a 20-year-old resident of Rupamari Panchayat in West Bengal, has a dream to serve the nation by joining the Indian Army. But he knows that he needs a strong educational and professional foundation to achieve this goal. He is currently pursuing a BA degree, but he realized that he needed to develop a skill that would help him

stand out in the competitive job market. So when the opportunity to join a three-month residential training course at the Government Industrial Training Institute (ITI) came up, he jumped at it.

Abhinandan was one of 28 young boys from Rupamari Panchayat who enrolled in the course, which teaches diesel engine repair. All expenses related to the course were covered by the project Ensuring Life with Dignity Through Community-Based Adaptations and Integrated Development towards Justice, implemented by the CASA.

Reflecting on his experience at the ITI, Abhinandan said, "This is a good course for me. There are not many skilled people in our area who can do diesel machine repair works. So once I complete the training, it's going to be helpful." He added that he would like to work as a skilled professional, not as unskilled labor.

Abhinandan's mother, Anita, expressed her pride in her son's decision to pursue

the ITI course. "I told him to learn something that will be useful," she said. "Rina Mondal, a CASA volunteer, guided and counseled him on the course and the benefits it will offer in the future."

Abhinandan's father works in agriculture and manages a fish farm. His sisters are all married, and many of his friends have migrated to other parts of the country in search of work. But Abhinandan chose to stay in his hometown and continue his education. He is grateful for the opportunity to develop a new skill that will increase his employability and help him achieve his goals.

Abhinandan's success story is a testament to the importance of vocational training programmes in rural areas. Such programmes not only equip young people with valuable skills but also instill in them the confidence to pursue their dreams. As Abhinandan put it, "Developing a new skill brings new confidence."



EVENTS



To help the marginalized population in the ward number 66 of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, in their battle against dengue, CASA distributed Hygiene and Dignity kits to 1185 families. The kits, which included essential items like soap, hand sanitizer, masks, mosquito nets, and sanitary pads, were distributed to help families in their battle against dengue. CASA believes that access to health and hygiene is a basic right, and their initiatives also include education and vocational training programmes, access to healthcare and legal services, and assistance with basic needs such as food and shelter. Their recent distribution of hygiene and dignity kits aims to raise awareness about the importance of health and hygiene and encourage others to support their communities.



Joining efforts with the District Disaster Management Cell of Alipurduar, West Bengal, CASA conducted a joint Training Programme on "Hospital Disaster Management with practical orientation on Hazard Hunt" at Falakata Super Speciality Hospital on 11th January, 2023.

30 Health Staff and Doctors oriented on Basic aspects of Hospital Safety and steps towards preparing the Hospital Disaster Management Plan. Practical sessions were conducted on identifying potential hazards within the Super Speciality Hospital and minimizing those risks through Non Structural Mitigation Measures.

The training is one of CASA's most critical and sensitive engagements with the Department of Health and Family Welfare in Neo-Normal Scenario.



CASA conducted an informative workshop for the youth in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh on 9th February 2023.

THE WORKSHOP AIMED AT EDUCATING THE YOUTH ON



Gender roles and dynamics



Indian political system



Forest rights



Knowledge of third gender



Understanding of LCP tools



Panchayati Raj

The workshop provided the youth with better awareness on the sociopolitical realities around them besides equipping them with the capacity to resolve conflicts in their community and beyond.

CASA's 5-day Youth Camp in Sarguja, Chhattisgarh was a huge success! With over 60 participants, we covered some very important topics such as gender, Transgender, forest rights act, Indian constitution and fundamental rights and duties, LCP tools, Panchayati Raj Act, and exposure visits to people organizations.

This training is crucial for the development and empowerment of youth, providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate complex societal issues. Our goal is to equip the next generation of leaders with the tools they need to make a positive impact in their communities.

We're so proud of all the participants who attended this training and we can't wait to see the positive impact they will make in their communities. Stay tuned for more events and opportunities to get involved with CASA!



CASA's alternate livelihood programme beneficiaries in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh, have started to reap the results. Under the programme, the women's group, including 20 participants, was trained to cultivate mushrooms at an economical cost with an eco-friendly approach. They have raised 8 kilograms of mushroom which was sold at INR 2000 per kilogram, providing the practitioners with support for sustenance.



23 women from Kangching village, Nagaland, participated in CASA's recent training programme on equipping rural women with local livelihood opportunities and entrepreneurship skills.

The women were trained on cultivating oyster mushrooms using locally available resources. They were also supported with mushroom seeds after the training, which will enable them to start their own mushroom cultivation at home.



This programme is part of CASA's efforts to empower women through self-help groups. We believe that by providing women with the tools and knowledge to become self-sufficient, we can create a better future for everyone.



With the Directorate of Family Welfare Services, we conducted a felicitation event for the COVID-19 Vaccination Champions, identifying them as "WONDER WOMEN: Bringing the Change". Held at the Conference Hall of Family Welfare Directorate, Manipur on 17th March 2023, the 2 hours long programme celebrated the achievements of women from the health department for their contribution towards COVID-19 vaccination. They have gone out of their way to convince people or make sure that the vaccine is easily accessible to everyone.

CASA salutes the commitment and dedication women health professionals have towards their role in society and medicine.

International Women's Day



Empowering Communities through Education: CASA Raipur's 3-Day Training on Toxic Masculinity and Gender for Male Leaders and Youth



"Empowering Women through Education: CASA's Training on Women's Safety and Rights in Rural Madhya Pradesh". 79 women and adolescent girls from 20 villages attended the programme and learned how to utilize legal and juridical devices for safeguarding their interests.



CASA conducted a panel discussion, on 10th March, from 10 am to 1 pm, as a part of the 67th UNCSW (Commission on the Status of Women in Action). The topic of discussion was "Innovation and Technological Change, and Education in the Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls."

Our esteemed speaker for this session was Meena Gopal from TISS Mumbai, who shared her insights and expertise on this important topic. The panel discussion is an excellent opportunity to engage with experts and advocates in the field.

Dr Sushant Agrawal, Director CASA, introduced the discussion on a note that "There is a difference between gender equality and gender equity. Without justice, equality is nothing. CASA is seeking justice for women. Women's rights are Human Rights. Women are sidelined because of power differences. Despite progress, urban India only includes 30% of the population. There is rampant injustice in rural India. Activists



must stand in solidarity with justice for women".

Prof. Dr. Meena Gopal, a key speaker at CASA's event parallel to the UN CSW, emphasized the need for activism in our personal lives and society-building, focusing on three issues: social reproduction, social science embodiment, and sexuality. She highlighted the importance of recognizing and valuing reproductive labor, particularly in the informal sector, which is often unpaid and unseen. She also advocated for the recognition of domestic work as decent work and called for policy implementation for the welfare of domestic workers.

The speaker raises concerns about the lack of inclusion of the feminist perspective in the uniform civil code, which fails to evaluate women's domestic contributions and their right to social security. Additionally, she informed the panel of the importance of embodiment and the need to liberate women from heteronormativity.



Photos: International Women's Day was celebrated in all CASA's programme areas across India

Opening Doors to Learning: Empowering Rural Children through Education

10th February 2023, We inaugurated a new Children's Library in the Kalthu Patty region of Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu. This library is an essential resource for children in rural areas who may not have access to quality educational resources.

The library will serve children from five villages, providing books and other materials to help them learn, explore, and develop their skills. In addition, the library will provide a safe and comfortable learning environment that can foster a love of reading and learning.

The establishment of this library is a significant step towards promoting education and literacy in the area. The availability of such resources can help children to acquire knowledge and skills that can support their personal and academic growth. Moreover, the library can also encourage children to develop a passion for reading, which can have a positive impact on their prospects.

This initiative can contribute to the holistic development of children in the Kalthu Patty region and beyond.

Photos: Mr. Poul Luther - CZO, South Zone inaugurated the Children's Library in Kalthu Patty region of Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu





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Dessert Photography winner
of Women's Day photography
contest #EmbraceEquity:
Kheta Ram, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan