

SEPTEMBER 2015: STORIES FROM THE FIELD

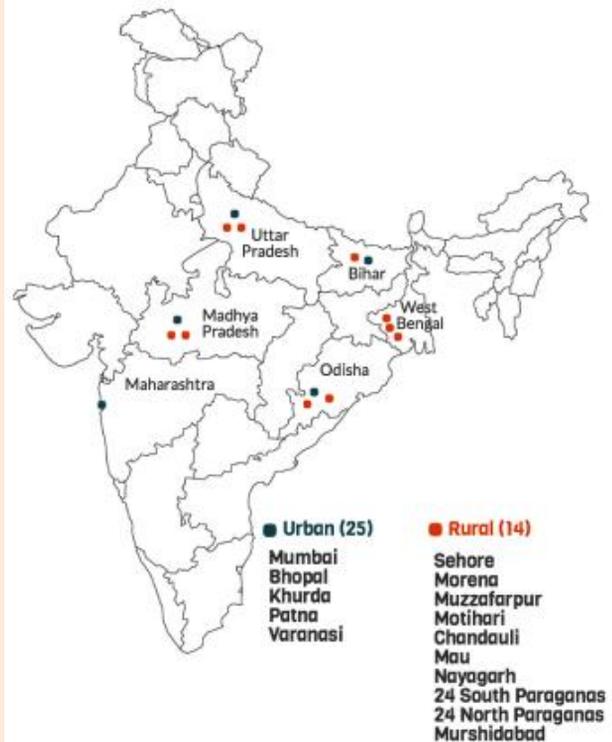
Aangan does prevention and response work in 6 states to promote safe communities for children. Across 300 households each in 39 communities, Aangan works with children who are vulnerable to hazardous or exploitative work, trafficking, early marriage, violence and abuse. They live in migrant communities, by garbage dumping grounds, railway tracks, and have little or no access to services like education and health. Aangan also works in 57 government shelter homes across these 6 states with children who have been rescued from serious harm.

Through its PACT program, Aangan trains volunteer barefoot community child protection workers to recognize, prevent and respond to harm. They work on issues such as early marriage, trafficking, violence and abuse, and hazardous work. They share information with adults in their community and mobilize support for action, and activate government systems and services to promote children's safety and protection.

Shakti is Aangan's program for adolescent girls. It aims to build resilience and knowledge, improve negotiation skills and link these girls to community and government.

Chauraha, Aangan's program for adolescent boys, aims to build their resilience, challenge perceptions of manhood, create and implement life plans, and strengthen their relationships with adults, community and government.

39 HOTSPOTS IN 6 STATES



WORK WITH PARENTS

Program: PACT

As primary caregivers, parents are best placed to support their children. If they are trained to be alert to the risks posed to children, and are able to access government schemes and services, communities become safer.

Moreover, because of their own experiences, they are highly motivated to work on child protection issues. Those who have faced early marriage, worked in hazardous conditions, or been through abuse and violence feel strongly about ensuring that their children don't have the same experiences.

Building ties with the police – Celebrating *Raksha Bandhan*

In September, PACT workers from three communities in Bihar – **Deegha, Lohanipur and Kaushal Nagar** – and from Mumbai's **Wadala** community celebrated *Raksha Bandhan* with their local police authorities to thank them for the indispensable protection work done in the communities.

The police are one of the main stakeholders with whom the PACT members interact during the course of their work, and they form a vital part of the child protection network. Therefore, developing and maintaining a strong and effective working relationship with the police is of utmost importance to the PACT women. However, owing to the traditionally antagonistic ties between community members and the police, and the fact that the police have been traditionally regarded with suspicion, most of these women have had to overcome

their deep-seated fear of interacting with the police.

By celebrating Raksha Bandhan with them, the PACT women wanted to show that they recognised and appreciated the cooperation of the police in the child protection work done in the community. As one of the PACT workers from Bihar said, “We work for child protection, and the police work to protect the community, so we wanted to acknowledge the work that they are doing.”

The police too were appreciative of the PACT workers’ gesture, and said they would continue their successful work with the communities. The PACT workers also took the opportunity to update the police and give them further information about the child protection work being done in the community.



Additionally, in Bihar’s **Shakra** community, PACT women held their first meetings with their local police authorities. Despite having been active in their community for a year, no proper interaction with the police had been possible so far. So the PACT members decided to take the initiative and met the station inspector and the DSP, and spoke to them about the work they are doing on child protection in their community. The police were very interested in their work and gave them their phone numbers and asked the PACT workers to contact them if needed. They also agreed to attend a parent circle in Shakra community after the elections were done.

Fostering safe families



In urban *bastis*, straitened financial circumstances can force vulnerable families to make decisions that adversely impact their children's safety and security, such as leaving their children unsupervised at home while the parents work, forcing children to drop out of school so that they too can work and contribute to the family's earnings, or abandoning the children so they end up in an institution. Children from single parent families, from destitute families, those whose parents are disabled, and orphans in the care of their relatives are especially vulnerable to the risks of trafficking, harm and

abuse. In such cases, monetary support ensures that these children remain in the care of their family.

Recognizing this, PACT members in Mumbai’s **Reay Road** community invited the Indian Association for Promotion of Adoption and Child Welfare (IAPA), the implementing partner of the Maharashtra government’s Foster Care Scheme or Bal Sangopan Yojana, for a parent circle (a monthly meeting where PACT workers share information and spread awareness on community issues with community adults). Under this scheme, every child enrolled receives Rs. 425 per month until they turn 18 years old. This money can be used to support the child’s educational and nutritional needs.

The PACT workers identified and shortlisted 20 children from the community, who were enrolled in the scheme. After IAPA's home visits and verification procedure, eight children have already begun receiving the funds. The verification process for the remaining 12 children is ongoing, after which they too will begin to receive the benefits.

When vulnerable families are linked to government social protection schemes, their children become safer.

PACT workers conducted 31 parent circles across 6 states in September, which were attended by 1,285 community adults

WORK WITH CHILDREN

Programs: Shakti and Chauraha

Promoting children's health through immunization

Through the Shakti program, adolescent girls are connected to girl safety networks, and are encouraged to articulate their aspirations, supported to recognise risk, empowered to negotiate for their rights and entitlements, and chart steps for a secure future.

As part of their Shakti journey, girls take up community projects to tackle issues that affect their safety or their community. They engage and negotiate with local government authorities, such as the police and ward officers, to access the services that can address the problem. This not only helps them develop the confidence to reach out to authorities, but also allows them to mobilise the community and bring about positive change.

In the **Bharlai** community in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, Shakti girls learnt about the importance of immunization as an effective preventive measure against various diseases and other medical conditions. Realising that many families in their *basti* had not had their children vaccinated, they decide to take up this issue as their community project.

With the support of the PACT workers, the Shakti girls spoke to community adults at a parents meeting about the health benefits by getting their children vaccinated. They approached the community's aanganwadi worker, with whose help they identified and prepared a list of 60 children in their community who had not received any inoculations. They then coordinated with the NM (nurse/midwife) from the government's health department to fix a date to get these children vaccinated against diseases like tetanus and measles. By identifying a critical child protection issue in the community, these Shakti girls helped make the children in their community safer.



Empowered children, better communities

Chauraha aims to build resilience in adolescent boys, connect them to mentors and a positive peer group, help them challenge traditional notions of masculinity, and support them to identify protection risks such as violence, abuse and hazardous work.



Chauraha activator Raja (extreme left) with his two brothers

Nineteen-year-old Raja is one of the new activators for the Chauraha program for adolescent boys in a community in Mumbai. Despite not having formally been part of the Chauraha program, he is aware of the challenges faced by adolescent boys in *bastis*, having grown up in one.

Prior to becoming an activator, Raja was part of a “Suraksha group” which was started by the

children of the community and aims to help boys and girls stay safe. Apart from being a trafficking hotspot, the presence of local gangs and mafia groups in Raja's community means there is a high rate of criminal activity and violence. Often, young boys are absorbed into these gangs and used to peddle drugs, increasing their susceptibility to addiction and making them highly vulnerable to other protection risks.

As an activator, Raja helps organize and conduct weekly Chauraha circles where young boys come together to identify and be alert to child protection risks, and make plans for a safer future. Having lived in the community, he personally knows many of the boys he mentors and is aware of their backgrounds, and can thus connect with them. With three younger siblings – two brothers and a sister – mentoring comes naturally to Raja.

“Before I began working with Aangan and Chauraha, I did not know what my goals were, or how to identify them,” Raja says. Now, he is studying science in his first year of college, and is also receiving vocational training as part of Antarang’s employability program.

Apart from conducting weekly sessions, Raja supports and participates in the community projects undertaken by Shakti girls and Chauraha boys in the *basti*, mobilizing community members and engaging with local authorities to avail of essential services for the community. He is also a part of the parent circles and community help desks organized by the PACT workers, where issues pertaining to the community are identified and discussed.

Raja’s two younger brothers – Sunil*, 17, and Vijay*, 15 – are also part of the Chauraha program, and as involved in the community as their older brother. While Sunil is in Class 10, Vijay studies in Class 9. Through Chauraha sessions, these boys are aware of the four major risk factors affecting children’s safety in the communities: early marriage, child labour, trafficking, and violence and harm, and both boys are as motivated and committed as their older brother in bettering the lives of children in their community.

In September, 642 girls aged between 12 and 18 years joined the Shakti program in communities and schools across 6 states. 295 hours were spent in training 165 Shakti activators to support them in their work with young and adolescent girls. 187 Shakti circles were conducted, and 214 girls completed their safety plan books. 12 community projects were initiated in September, in which 192 girls were involved.

Across 6 states, 301 boys joined the Chauraha program in September. 47 Chauraha circles were conducted, and 118 boys completed the Chauraha Go books. 6 community projects were initiated, in which 85 boys participated. 68 boys also graduated from the Chauraha program in September.

WORK WITH GOVERNMENT

Programs: PACT, Shakti and Chauraha

Linking communities to health services

Through monthly community help desks, PACT works to support families by helping them access government social protection schemes and services.

In **Hasnabad**, a rural community in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, beedi-rolling is a major occupation. Nearly the entire community, including the children, are involved in this hazardous work, and beedi workers are prone to several health risks, such as lung infections and other respiratory problems. Additionally, it is seasonal work, and coupled with the community's location at the international border with Bangladesh, puts the women and children of the community at high risk of violence, drug abuse and trafficking.



In September 2015, PACT workers in Hasnabad organized a community help desk (held once a month so that community members can directly interface with government authorities to facilitate access to services) to aid 100 adults and children from the community register for beedi binders' identity cards. With these cards, community members involved in this occupation will be able to access services such as free medicines, health check-ups, etc.

In **Kaushal Nagar** in Patna, Bihar, PACT mothers worked with the district health department to organize a three-day camp to support community members to register for a health card under the national health insurance scheme. Each electronic health card provides benefits to a family of a man, his wife and three dependants. They are entitled to free health check-ups, and Rs. 30,000 in medical support for operations or treatments. A total of 150 health cards were issued, benefitting around 600 children.

In Telugu Basti in Odisha, PACT workers organized a community help desk where they invited a local doctor and an assistant NM (nurse/midwife) to interact with the community members and speak to them about the importance of health and hygiene. The doctor and the ANM discussed several health issues relevant to the community and also advocated regular check-ups and immunization for the children to prevent them from contracting severe diseases. PACT workers also requested the ANM to make regular visits to the community.

Similarly, in Odisha's Chunokoli community, PACT workers coordinated with the Rotary Club to organize a hand-wash campaign to promote awareness of health and hygiene among the children.

In communities such as Hasnabad, Kaushal Nagar, Telugu Basti and Chunokoli, families have little or no access to basic health services. When these families are made aware of the importance of hygiene and are linked to government social protection schemes, their children become safer.

In September, 167 PACT core group meetings were held across 6 states. PACT workers also organised 16 community help desks, which were attended by 660 community adults. 1,494 children either registered for or accessed benefits from government social protection schemes.

**The names of these children have been changed to protect their identity.*