WOMEN & GIRLS
POWERED BY DATA

A NEW WAY TO SEE, SOLVE AND SPEAK UP ABOUT OLD PROBLEMS
Aangan is an Indian non-profit organization that works on the interconnected issues of child marriage, child trafficking, child labor and exploitation - building systems to prevent child harm, as well as strengthen response and rehabilitation.

Aangan’s community-based model targets a State’s hotspot districts, defined as such for the high rates of child harm associated with them. In villages (rural) and bastis (urban informal settlements) across these hotspots, Aangan’s work brings women, adolescent girls and government officials together to form local community safety groups. Together they are building locally relevant safety systems from the ground up, that bring issues of girl safety to the forefront of community consciousness.

Aangan’s model of child harm prevention evolved out of a decade of work with child victims and survivors rescued from exploitative and harmful situations, and placed in state institutional care for rehabilitation.

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The village/basti names are abbreviated, and names of individuals changed in order to maintain confidentiality. Images of children are representative.
We thought how lucky those families were - to be getting such a great deal, not having to pay dowry for their daughters to marry. Today we know that this is in fact bridal trafficking.

This story is dedicated to all kinds of data-shy women, adolescent girls and community workers who might believe knowledge, data or action is not their domain. In 2014, more than 71% women surveyed told us they had little or no knowledge that could be valuable to government officials working on child safety; and only 21% had engaged with child protection or safety issues within the community. Only 8% adolescent girls interviewed believed they could possibly affect change in their own lives. Slowly but surely this changed. More recently there was a 60% increase in the number of girls who were confident in the fact that they could make decisions about their own lives in one way or another.

Much like thousands of women and girls who are part of this story, we hope readers too discover the wealth of unused knowledge that exists within the personal experiences of community members. We hope they recognize the value of such everyday information, especially when it is recorded and used effectively as data for action.

This data journey celebrates women and girls who moved from what they reported as a sense of powerlessness and inertia, into becoming sure-footed change-makers. They have been working with limited resources in some of the most marginalized communities across the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Odisha.

We believe this only happened when women and girls took back their stories, owned their experiences and understood the power of local community data.

* Aangan data survey with 200 community women across 40 locations.
AUTORIKshaw drivers pledged to be alert and active in preventing child trafficking from their district in Bihar.

Adolescent girls previously frightened of police felt confident to report risk or harm in Bastis, Odisha.

Children enrolled in schools across 3 Bastis in Varanasi district, Uttar Pradesh.

Children kept out-of-school and in home-based workshops were linked to scholarships in 2 villages in West Bengal.

Unsafe and unsupervised children at home, linked to government creches and schools in West Bengal.

Families linked to government programs in order to improve financial security and keep children safer from trafficking in Bihar.

Cases of early marriage reported to community women & volunteers were prevented in 85 locations across India.

Families opened bank accounts, are able to access government programs to reduce risk of children being married or sold in times of financial crisis in West Bengal.

Children freed from hazardous work and linked to education & vocational programs in Uttar Pradesh.

Women & girls made safer from assault and harassment on their way to community toilets, when families got government assistance to build toilets at home across 8 villages & Bastis in Rajasthan & Bihar.

Girls at high risk stay safe from trafficking, are able to recognize early warning signs and seek help in Village P, Uttar Pradesh.

Families became alert to trafficking in the guise of marriage in their neighborhoods in Uttar Pradesh and planned ways to keep adolescent girls safe.

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Between 2014-2017, thousands of changes were sparked off.

230 villages and Bastis across 6 Indian states.

Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan.
IT ALL BEGAN IN 2014, WHEN COMMUNITY WOMEN DECIDED TO MAKE HOTSPOTS SAFE.

ADOLESCENT GIRLS ARE IN DANGEROUS SITUATIONS ACROSS THE COUNTRY:
- 51% CHILD BRIDES
- 1 CHILD SEXUALLY ASSAULTED EVERY 15 MINUTES
- 84 MILLION CHILDREN OUT-OF-SCHOOL

IN HOTSPOTS, THE HARM IS EVEN MORE INTENSE:
- UNSAFE IN SCHOOL
- UNSAFE AT HOME
- UNSAFE IN PUBLIC SPACES
- NO ACCESS TO SOCIAL SECURITY
- NO TRUST IN PUBLIC OFFICIALS

TRAFFICKED?
WORKING IN BRUTAL CONDITIONS?
MOSTLY MARGINALIZED WOMEN?
- GIRLS FROM OUR CASTE ARE NOT ALLOWED INTO THE CLASSROOM?
- GIRLS ISOLATED, LOCKED AT HOME FOR THEIR OWN SAFETY?

CHILDREN UNSUPERVISED?
HOW DO WE FIGHT AGE-OLD CUSTOMS?

HOPELESSNESS, HELPLESSNESS?

EXPLOITED?

NO COMMUNITY DATA.
TRACING THE JOURNEY
MAKING SPACE FOR GIRLS

STARTING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HOW TO RESIST CHILD MARRIAGE, STAY SAFE FROM GENDER VIOLENCE, SPOT EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF TRAFFICKING OR SIMPLY TO NEGOTIATE CONTINUING IN SCHOOL WASN’T EASY.

IN ONE VILLAGE IT WENT AGAINST FAMILY RULES TO HAVE GIRLS GATHER IN PUBLIC. IN ANOTHER, BASTI MEN TOOK OVER PUBLIC SPACES, MAKING ADOLESCENT GIRLS FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE TO USE THEM. IN A THIRD LOCATION THERE WAS JUST NO PRIVACY TO TALK ABOUT PERSONAL ISSUES.

BUT GRADUALLY, COMMUNITY SAFETY GROUPS STARTED SPROUTING UP IN HOTSPOTS. 4,200 WOMEN AND 60,000 ADOLESCENT GIRLS FOUND A WAY TO GET TOGETHER IN 230 SMALL GROUPS ACROSS 6 INDIAN STATES.

AS THEY GOT OFF THE SIDELINES, AND MADE THEIR WAY TO THE CENTRE OF THE COMMUNITY, WOMEN AND GIRLS FOUND THEY WERE READY TO TAKE THE LEAD AND START BUILDING SAFETY SYSTEMS.
In our community, girls as young as 8 years are sold in the name of marriage. I was a child bride myself, like most of the women in my neighborhood. But we never thought it was worth talking about, or even trying to tackle. Here in community safety groups, we gather and talk about our lives as child brides. Each woman had her own story of pain and suffering. As each of us began to share these, as well as our fears and dreams, one thing became clear: We all wanted a different life for our daughters. We dream that our girls will be healthy, secure, able to stand on their own two feet, and live a life free from the violence and pain that so many of us have known.

Nine of us mothers got together. We built a place for women and children right in the centre of our neighborhood. We put it up with our own hands.

Every week we come here with more and more women and girls, sit in a circle and talk about what is happening around us. We think about how to keep our girls safe, how to delay marriage and resist offers that sound too good to be true, and how to recognize dangerous trafficking situations not uncommon in our neighborhood. For example, seeing a new adolescent girl with disabilities, roaming around unaccompanied set off alarm bells. Luckily we approached her and took her to the police station. Each time we hear each others’ stories we understand better how things work or what to be alert to.

But until we got together, we didn’t know, just how much we actually knew about the dangers and solutions in our own neighborhood!

Even our teenage daughters can read a dangerous situation now. When they find something suspicious they are able to connect it to a story they have heard from one of us and know how to report it. Recently, my daughter saw a girl all alone near the railway station. She had obviously run away from home. Luckily we made sure she stayed with us through the night and kept her safe.

– Neelam Devi, Community K, Bihar
At first it seemed that women and girls in 6 different states across the country were telling the same story about danger and harm.

When they took a closer look, it turned out that each group had different versions of the same problem.

The factors like group customs, traditions, social caste hierarchies or even seemingly unconnected factors like monsoon flooding – that were unique to each group – defined the risks and prevalence of a problem more specifically.
COMMUNITY WOMEN ESTIMATED THAT 45% GIRLS IN VILLAGE R ARE AT RISK OF CHILD MARRIAGE. PARENTS BELIEVE THAT TEENAGED UNMARRIED GIRLS ARE AT HIGHER RISK OF RUNNING AWAY FROM HOME AND OF BEING SEXUALLY EXPLOITED.

51% GIRLS WERE MARRIED OFF AS CHILDREN IN VILLAGE D. ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS THIS IS LINKED TO TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES. MOST GIRLS ARE MARRIED AS TEENAGERS AND HAVE CHILDREN BY THE AGE OF ABOUT FOURTEEN.

55% GIRLS MARRIED AS CHILDREN IN VILLAGE M. GIRLS HAVE NO ACCESS TO SCHOOL, ARE FORCED TO WORK IN BRICK KILNS, AND PARENTS BELIEVE THAT MARRIAGE IS SEEN AS A BETTER OPTION TO FINANCIAL SECURITY FOR GIRLS.

COMMUNITY GROUPS DUG DEEP TO DISCOVER SPECIFIC CAUSES AND CONDITIONS OF THE PROBLEMS. LOCAL DATA VARIED ACROSS GROUPS, BUT ONCE IDENTIFIED, PROVIDED CLEAR DIRECTION TO PLAN ACTION.
PLANNING SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Armed with clearly defined problems, women volunteers and girls knew exactly what kind of data they needed to watch, share and track!

Simple pen and paper lists had accurate information to help plan action.

For instance:

- Lists of out-of-school adolescents > led to school enrollment drives.
- Lists of girls without parents > persuaded district officials to identify households that needed government assistance for single parents or guardians. Once the list was shared with them, they even helped guardians fill in forms to apply.
- Lists of adolescent girls likely to be left unsupervised when families migrate during harvest seasons > leads to safe migration campaign.
- Lists of families who lost all their belongings, including identity documents, in monsoon flooding > linked to government assistance programs.
- Lists of girls who went missing during the year > shared with police.

600 lists were created. Specific Data Demanded Results!
When local data indicated that large number of children were working in hazardous home-based industries, such as beedi (tobacco leaf) rolling, instead of being in school, community safety groups prioritized this for action. Their data also showed that more than half of these children’s families were unaware of government social protection programs for poorest groups, for which they could be eligible. Using a list of these children engaged in such work, women volunteers helped officials in identifying children and spread the word about a government scholarship program. 220 children were linked to scholarships and school.

In basti K in Bihar, child labor is a major concern. Community safety groups created a list of children who had dropped out or were not going to school and shared it with school officials. Through this effort, 45 children were enrolled in school. The defunct School Management Committee was made active and were encouraged to develop a list of likely dropouts so that dropping out could be prevented. All children on the list were re-enrolled in school. Drop out rate fell to 13%.

The data from bastis R and K in Varanasi showed a high incidence of child marriage for reasons like traditional practice and to “reduce the financial burden”. This became a priority issue and the community safety group compiled list of adolescent girls at risk of early marriage. These girls were linked to a local vocational training centre to learn tailoring which is seen as a lucrative skill for employment opportunities, that even their families would benefit from. 38 at risk girls were enrolled in the centre.
“There is information about 1,000 children in my community safety group neighborhood register. The names of these children are entered into lists based on all the risks we see in our basti. For instance, I have a list of child laborers, out-of-school children, adolescents who need vocational training, and even lists of families who are in desperate situations and debt. We know from our own experience how these issues put our children in danger of being pulled out of school, married early or sent to work. I regularly update and maintain this register so that we can be alert to the situations of the most vulnerable children.

I help women and girls in community safety groups from other bastis make their own registers as well. I tell them which columns to make and explain how they update it when there are changes. I WhatsApp pictures of my register to them so they can see and learn! I carry my file of registers for all meetings, because you never know when you might need your list!”

KIRAN
THE LISTKEEPER
FROM COMMUNITY K SAFETY GROUP IN UTTAR PRADESH
As data from lists arrived, so did change, women and girls felt a shift inside and out.
Changes in the community had an impact not only on the children but also on the adults around them. People who were once hesitant about sending their daughters for girl safety meetings started saying to us, “Make our daughters like you!”

School principals who once shooed us away from the door because of our caste, now invited us in. “Sit and have a glass of water,” they say. Now they wanted our data and lists so they can get more children enrolled into once empty schools.

Friends, neighbors, family (women AND men) began to ask us to add their child’s name to lists of those who didn’t have identity documents or birth certificates. Or they asked for help with filling a form to submit to a ward official.

We were surprised ourselves about the knowledge we had gained, and about how valuable we had become to the community. They began to approach us themselves to discuss their child-related problems.

Our data was bringing about small changes...

This gave us huge confidence and the courage to ask questions and to dig deeper.
STEP 05

WIDENING THE PICTURE

A CHILD SAFETY APP

AANGAN'S CHILD SAFETY APP HELPED WOMEN AND GIRLS COLLECT AND CONVERT LOCAL KNOWLEDGE INTO DATA. NOW THEY COULD SPOT COMMON TRENDS AND PRIORITIES TO UNDERSTAND THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEMS ACROSS DISTRICTS.

375 WOMEN VOLUNTEERS USED APP

75 VILLAGES & BASTIS COVERED

19K FAMILIES PARTICIPATED

40K CHILDREN’S NEEDS UNDERSTOOD
In our village there was just one place to charge the phone, so at first the phone just lay in the box all day long. I would take it out, look at it and put it away. Then we started collecting data. We were finding out things like how many families left their children unsupervised, and worried about the fact that many families had no identity documents and could not get any government assistance. We identified which areas of our village were most unsafe. Now we wanted to know more and more. All of us in the group pooled in money and bought a solar panel to charge our phones.

– Phoolwati, Village P, Uttar Pradesh

I was excited, but at the training, I kept doubting myself: How can I do this? I have only studied till Grade 4! But we practiced and all the younger girls helped. They would say ‘You can’t be afraid of a phone! Look it’s so simple.’ Young children would laugh at us adults, and then we would relax and try to use it!

– Kamlavati, Community PK
USING THE CHILD SAFETY APP WIDENED THE UNDERSTANDING OF GIRL SAFETY... LEADING TO QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEXT AND SEEMINGLY UNRELATED ISSUES...

DO YOU FEEL THE POLICE AROUND HERE IS HELPFUL?

WHAT ID AND DOCUMENTS DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE?

DID YOU GET MARRIED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18?

IS YOUR CHILD EVER AT HOME WITHOUT ADULT SUPERVISION?

DOES YOUR COMMUNITY OR VILLAGE HAVE A GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL?

DO ANY OF YOUR CHILDREN ADD TO THE FAMILY’S INCOME?

WHAT IS THE REASON FOR FINANCIAL DEBT?

WHAT ARE THE TOP 3 UNSAFE SPACES FOR BOYS AND GIRLS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?
TRENDS EMERGED

34% GIRLS DO NOT ATTEND SCHOOL

48% FAMILIES HAVE NO STABLE INCOME AND ARE DAILY WAGE WORKERS

66% WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY WERE MARRIED AS CHILDREN

18% CHILDREN AGED 0-6 YEARS WERE LEFT UNSUPERVISED

26% GIRL CHILDREN ARE UNSUPERVISED WHEN PARENTS ARE WORKING

60% CHILDREN WITHOUT BIRTH CERTIFICATES OR ANY IDENTITY PROOF

31% DID NOT KNOW ABOUT GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS DESIGNED FOR MARGINALIZED GROUPS LIKE THEMSELVES IN COMMUNITY D, BIHAR

67% FAMILIES ARE IN FINANCIAL DEBT IN COMMUNITY B, BIHAR
**STEP 06**

**SPEAKING OUT WITH DATA**

**DISTRICT CHILD PROTECTION OFFICIALS RESPOND TO THE TREND OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS THAT PUT CHILDREN AT RISK OF TRAFFICKING, HAZARDOUS WORK.**

*Basti R, Mumbai, Maharashtra:* 40 children were linked to a Foster Care Scheme and officials ensured they went back to school.

**CRECHE WORKERS HEAR ABOUT THE TREND OF UNSAFE, UNSUPERVISED GIRLS AND RESPONDED.**

*Basti RG, Rajghat:* 95% of the children did not attend the local community creche and were left with inadequate care. This was until *anganwadi* officials stepped in and enrolled close to 90% of them.

**SCHOOL OFFICIALS LEARN ABOUT THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN OF BONDED BRICK KILN LABORERS.**

*Basti S, Bihar:* The Education Department and school officials enrolled 90 extremely vulnerable children living and working with their families in a brick kiln in Bihar. When the women volunteers brought them the data, they were enrolled back into school with help of school officials.

**GRAM PANCHAYATS GET IDENTITY DOCUMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN TRAFFICKING-PRONE AREAS, UNDERSTANDING THEIR IMPORTANCE IN ENSURING CHILD SAFETY.**

4 villages, Bihar: *Gram Panchayats* in 4 villages in Bihar associated with child trafficking helped 807 children get identity documents, ensuring an easier way to track and identify missing, runaway or trafficked children; and to help them get access to State services, to file police complaints and to make sure that children at risk of trafficking are kept safe.

*Basti R, Mumbai, Maharashtra:* 40 children were linked to a Foster Care Scheme and officials ensured they went back to school.
STEP 07
AMPLIFYING GIRL VOICES

IT WASN’T LONG BEFORE ADOLESCENT GIRLS HAD THEIR OWN IDEAS ABOUT USING DATA FOR CHANGE!

60,000 GIRLS IN

230 GIRL SAFETY NETWORKS ACROSS VILLAGES & BASTIS

WATCHING    LISTENING    LEARNING
Maps to Adolescent Girls: New Perspective, Clear, Compelling, Hard to Ignore
58% girls were afraid to approach the police in their communities even when they felt unsafe. But using safety audit maps to collect data helped them talk about risky situations. The maps soon became a way to speak to the police about their worries and fears.
ROUTES TO PUBLIC TOILETS ARE DARK AND UNSAFE.

BRICK KILNS WHERE CHILDREN ARE IN HAZARDOUS WORK & FAMILIES EXPLOITED AS BONDED LABOR.

THE VILLAGE POND UNSAFE, NO PRIVACY WHILE BATHING.

SCHOOL ROUTES ARE UNSAFE & GIRLS ARE AFRAID OF ATTACKS AND HARASSMENT.

MORE CHILDREN ARE MARRIED IN LATE JANUARY OR FEBRUARY AS IT IS CONSIDERED AN AUSPICIOUS TIME OF THE YEAR.

Mapping Risks in Space & Time
WHEN GIRLS ARE HEARD...

POLICE PATROLLING INCREASED IN 28 LOCATIONS IDENTIFIED AS THREATENING IN UTTAR PRADESH.

GAMBLING AND LIQUOR DENS REMOVED FROM SCHOOL ROUTES IN UTTAR PRADESH.

FAMILIES FORMED INFORMAL WALKING GROUPS TO ESCORT GIRLS SAFELY TO SCHOOLS IN MUMBAI.

WARD OFFICIALS INSTALLED 22 STREET LIGHTS IN COMMUNITY N, ODISHA TO MAKE STREETS SAFER.

MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS BUILD SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY TOILETS FOR GIRLS.

POLICE DISTRIBUTED THEIR PHONE NUMBERS FOR COMPLAINTS, AS WELL AS FLASHLIGHTS TO MAKE GIRLS SAFER IN PUBLIC SPACES IN COMMUNITY S, BIHAR.
IMAGINE IF COMMUNITIES EVERYWHERE MADE THE SAME DISCOVERY.

IMAGINE IF WE TRUSTED THAT IT CAN BE A STARTING POINT FOR HOW WE PLAN TO KEEP OUR CHILDREN SAFE.

NOT KNOWING ENOUGH IS AN EXCUSE THAT NO LONGER WORKS.

THE WOMEN & GIRLS HAVE SHOWN US THAT.
I studied only till the fifth grade and everyone told me I could do nothing. Now I see data everywhere, it’s all around. I find that my everyday actions count. I am seeing things change right in front of my eyes!