CRISIS & COMMUNITY:
Child Protection in Covid-19 times
A pandemic, a brutal lockdown, joblessness, hunger, fear, isolation, school closure - this was the year where disruption and devastation reigned supreme. For the children of the poor it also brought heightened exposure to violence, the risk of child marriage, being preyed on by traffickers, becoming a child labourer, the end of hope for a different kind of life.

In addition, the State was preoccupied, and Civil Society had to become remote.

Meeting the Challenge

1. Tech-Enabled Women: a community crisis responder force

In 909 bastis and villages across 6 hotspot districts*, we equipped our already trained and mobilised cadre of 4,782 trained and mobilised community child protection volunteers with smartphones, and developed easy-to-use digital tools so they could be responsive despite the lockdown. Technology enabled communication, data collection, vulnerability assessments and planning, allowing our work of preventing child harm to continue.

The Impact They Created for Children’s Safety

- **481** child marriages were averted or delayed
- **270** child labourers were removed from labour in brick kilns, construction sites, beedi rolling, shops and farms.
- **423** working children had their working hours reduced
- **06** children were saved from being trafficked
- **05** child survivors of sexual assault were supported
- **10,534** children were brought into educational and vocational systems to ensure current and future security

* Mumbai (Maharashtra), Patna (Bihar), Bharatpur (Rajasthan), Pakur (Jharkhand), North 24 Parganas (West Bengal), Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)
Reducing Hunger through Emergency food relief: In the immediate aftermath of the lockdown, loss of income led to food scarcity and hunger. We were able to quickly identify 18,654 most vulnerable families who had no reserves and provide them with 16,32,500 meals before government relief distribution systems could come into effect.

Stopping or Disrupting Violence in the Home: The pandemic induced lockdown led to a massive surge in family violence globally. To combat this, 2307 of our trained volunteers mobilised networks of community women into “whisper circles”. Across 723 locations our whisper circles grew to comprise 7,724 women who used community-based practices to intervene in violent situations within the homes of their neighbours and community. They supported each other by:

- establishing code words to alert each other and sound an alarm
- identifying safe spaces where women and children could seek temporary refuge
- helping survivors make plans for themselves and their children for what to do when violence occurs
- forming alliances with influential men and other community stakeholders like mukhiyas, ward members, police, school principals who in turn rallied 4132 community men to take a stand against family violence

Finding Alternative Employment: 9,591 suddenly jobless people were linked to government livelihood schemes such as MGNREGA, PMKVY and micro industries leading to an average increase of Rs. 2000 in their monthly income.

Preventing Debt through Health Insurance Coverage: 34,169 uninsured families were linked to government-sponsored health insurance schemes reducing out-of-pocket medical spending, and increasing financial stability. Medical expenses constitute a key reason why 39% of families we worked with got into debt.

Expanding Access to Credit and Banking: 49,406 ‘unbanked’ families were connected to banking and/or micro-lending institutions resulting in increased income (access to social security benefits), savings and small business investments (access to affordable credit)

Safeguarding Adolescents through Peer Safety Networks: 46,732 adolescents joined peer safety networks that gave them safety information, emotional support and meaningful connection with a peer group they’ve been missing due to school closure.

Connecting Women to Peer Support Groups: 53,075 women were connected to formal (SHGs) and informal (mahila mandals, whisper circles) support networks during the lockdown to break their sense of aloneness and for help in emergencies.

Our data shows that children from resilient families are 2.7x more likely to be safe because their families are more adaptable and able to take protective actions.

2. Building Resilience: Strong Families have Safe Children

Vulnerable children come from vulnerable families - especially in times of crisis. This year, building the capacity of families to withstand hardship, adapt to changing circumstances and reduce risk became the critical work that needed doing.
3. Safety and Care for Invisible Children: Virtual Monitoring to Improve Safety Protocols in Child Care Institutions (CCIs)

With no one to monitor CCIs during the lockdown, the thousands of vulnerable children living in them faced unprecedented hardships in the form of isolation, abuse and neglect. We developed a virtual COVID Emergency Care Tool to identify gaps affecting children's safety and in the disaster preparedness of CCIs in 3 states - Punjab, Assam and Nagaland.

- 182 virtually trained inspection committee members went on to inspect 232 CCIs across these states to improve safety protocols

- 16,978 children will experience an improvement in living conditions over the next 2 years
Establishing Child and Women Oriented Police Services, Rajasthan & Bihar

Our partnership with the State Police has resulted in the establishment of ‘Women & Girl Safety Panels’ attached to every police station in Rajasthan and in the districts of Patna and Muzaffarpur in Bihar. Comprising community residents, these Safety Panels are a mechanism for regular engagement and dialogue between police and the women and girls they serve with the goal to build trust in the system. Aangan will partner with the State to train the Safety Panels & Police personnel.

Ensuring Safe Cities for Women and Girls, Varanasi

Expanding Aangan’s girl safety work through self-help groups (SHGs), the Municipal Commissioner of Varanasi has committed city-wide investment to ensure safe access to public space, opportunity, employment and recreation for women and girls. By incorporating this initiative into Varanasi’s ‘Safe City’ Plan - women and girls’ safety will become a focus area for the system in a sustainable way. Aangan will partner with the City to build the capacity of SHG women to be able to do this.

TQIC: A National Alliance to Improve Child Care Institutions

Aangan formed and launched a National Alliance - Together for Quality Institutional Care (TQIC) – with partners Pratham and Catalysts for Social Action (CSA) to improve standards of safety and care for children living in Child Care institutions. Using SaFca, Aangan’s app-based monitoring and progress tracking tool, a methodology for regular assessment has been started with State governments in Odisha and Nagaland.
Through this catastrophic year we kept 2,28,198 children safe by taking data-driven actions to prevent and respond to child harm in coordination with 993 government officials from police departments, school systems and urban local bodies.