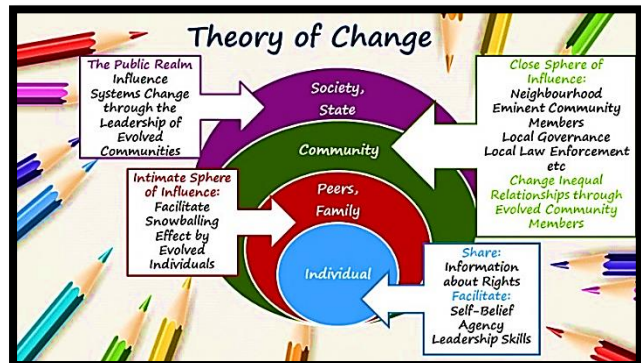


About DIKSHA

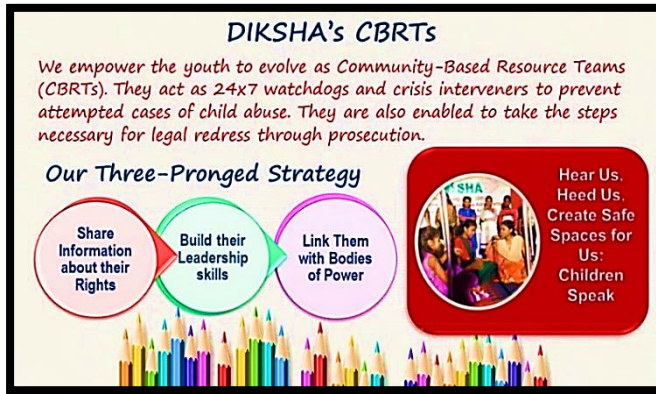
The genesis of DIKSHA lies in an experiment that Paramita Banerjee had started with a MacArthur Fellowship for Leadership Development. Located in the Kalighat and Wattganj Red-Light Areas of Kolkata, West Bengal, the initiative aimed at creating a non-intrusive and non-judgmental space for 10-19-year-old young people of all genders to voice, debate, discuss, and resolve issues around gender and sexuality. DIKSHA grew out of that experiment to work towards a gender-just world free from hierarchies and inequalities through engaging adolescents of all genders as equal partners in systems change.



DIKSHA invests in young individuals (6-25 years), creating safe spaces for them to build up their inner strength, make them aware of their rights, develop their leadership skills, and integrate individual development with community needs. The proven success of DIKSHA's Protection-through-Participation model in generating transformational change got Paramita elected as an Ashoka Fellow. In the social development sector, Paramita is known internationally as a gender-sexuality expert skilled in research, training, and participatory evaluation. Besides working as a consultant for national and international organisations of repute, Paramita has to her credit a number of publications in academic and semi-academic anthologies, as also translated poetry and prose. However, working with marginalised youth remains her priority.

DIKSHA's Urban Programmes

Direct action with young people living in Red Light Areas (RLAs) and Quasi-Red-Light Areas remains one of the core functions of DIKSHA to date. The basic strategy involves the creation of community-based youth volunteer groups empowered to prevent and intervene in crisis situations. These Community-Based Resource Team (CBRT) members act as 24x7 watchdogs, taking care of both prevention and protection. We build their leadership skills and establish direct linkages between them and the bodies of power, such as local self-government representatives (councillors), local law enforcement officials (police), school teachers, key community adults, etc.



The quantitative impact of DIKSHA's red-light area programmes is best captured through a Violence Mapping exercise conducted in 2019 with 200+ children from three different grassroots communities. The findings reveal that DIKSHA's intervention with children and their families could reduce the incidence of extreme verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse from 38% to 16% in the span of 12 months. Translated into figures, that implies about 50,000 cases of extreme abuse averted in a year. Taking extreme

and non-extreme forms of abuse of these four categories, DIKSHA could eliminate a total 250,000 incidences out of a total of 260,000 cases in a year – as reported by those on the receiving end.

One not-so obvious outcomes of DIKSHA's red-light area interventions relates to the prevention of in and out trafficking. Red-Light Areas usually feature as destinations in anti-trafficking programmes. However, DIKSHA's sustained RLA programmes have established that they are source areas as well. The most successful preventive strategies of both in and out-trafficking of underage girls into the sex trade consist of:

- ✓ Building the safety perception capacity of adolescent girls in romantic relationships.
- ✓ Sustained couple counselling to prevent elopement/underage marriage – both informal peer counselling by CBRT members, and formal counselling by professional psychosocial counsellors.
- ✓ Sustained family counselling to reduce any kind of pressure on the girls involved in romantic relationships, which very often leads to elopement/underage marriage – both informal peer counselling by DIKSHA's Women's Group (the Rakhi Teams) members, and formal counselling by professional psychosocial counsellors.
- ✓ The Rakhi Team members also play a critical role in preventing in-trafficking by acting as watchdogs to identify and report fresh forced/trafficked entries into the sex trade.

DIKSHA also functions as a technical resource organisation. Training of Trainers Manuals on Child Protection and Youth Leadership Development developed by DIKSHA are used by government child protection agencies in the entire state of West Bengal. DIKSHA Work Group members are also individually and collectively involved in a variety of trainings on child protection organised by relevant government authorities.

DIKSHA works with a focus on SDGs 3 (Good Health & Wellbeing), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities). As a [Catalyst 2030](#) member, at both the national and the global levels, DIKSHA is now amplifying its Protection-through-Participation approach of youth empowerment at international platforms through partnerships with globally active youth-focused agencies. DIKSHA has also played a major role in capturing grassroots voices for the People's SDG Report that Catalyst 2030 has generated for submission to the UN General Assembly in September 2021. Based on the lessons learnt, DIKSHA is now planning to generate its own Youth SDG Report in the state of West Bengal as a pilot.

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DIKSHA's COVID-19 Response

Never exposed to disaster management, the DIKSHA team rose to the occasion to ensure that:

- a. The communities we partner with did not have to starve.
- b. Children we work with did not get bypassed by the formal education system because of no online classes, or because they had no devices for attending online classes.
- c. No underage marriage happened because of COVID-19 woes.
- d. No below-14 child got forced into income earning because of adult income loss during COVID times.
- e. Children we work with had some entertainment options while they remained locked with adults in their 8x10 feet rooms.
- f. The situation faced by women and transwomen in the sex trade got national attention for appropriate governmental intervention.
- g. Address vaccine resistance and promote vaccination.
- h. Ensure that Municipal Health Workers can maintain COVID safety.

Below is a summarised report of all the activities undertaken by DIKSHA during April 2020 – February 2022. Please note that DIKSHA's COVID response included reaching out for individual donations, negotiating with donors to divert funds, and collaborating with larger NGOs to receive support in kind.

Food Security and COVID Protocol Promotion

SI No	Description	Number of Heads	Number of Times	Amount (in INR)
1	Cash donation collected for relief work			189,427.00
2	Dry Ration (staples + essential grocery items + onions & potatoes)	300 Families	16 times	
3	Cooked Lunch	1400 Heads	45 days	
4	Dry Snacks and Health Drinks	270 Children	12 times	

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SI No	Description	Number of Heads	Number of Times	Amount (in INR)
5	Soap, Sanitiser, Sanitary Napkins	200 Families	Thrice	
		1518 Families	Once	
6	Masks @ 5 masks per person	14,000 Heads (until February 2022)	Ongoing	
7	PPE Kits to 2 Municipal Health Centres	180 Health Workers	Twice	
8	Educational Kit	300 Children	Twice	
9	Infotainment Items	571 Families	Once	
10	Dress Materials and Blankets	50 Children and 150 Adults	Once	
11	Winter Kit	660 Families	Once	
12	Sweaters	300 Children	Once	
13	Smartphones	13 Youth Leaders	Once	

Vaccine Promotion

Adults: 1294, Young Adults (15-18 Years): 19 (until 28 February, 2022)

In Their Own Voices

DIKSHA had conducted three Workshops in Kolkata with Women and Transpersons in the sex trade on how they managed to cope with the complete loss of income during COVID times. Organised in collaboration with Goa-based ARZ: Anyay Rahit Zindagi, Delhi-based SPID: Society for Participatory Integrated Development, Mumbai-based Prayas, and the Centre for Criminology and Justice, School of Social Work, TISS: Tata Institute of Social Sciences – the findings from these workshops have been shared with the National Human Rights Commission for policy advice to the central and state governments.



Adapting to the New Normal

It was a tremendous challenge for the Team DIKSHA initially to even accept that the on-field focus needed to change to online activities. However, from June to mid-November 2020, and again from end-March 2021 to July 2021 – the DIKSHA team adapted itself to the new normal. Online education sessions and rights skills building sessions were conducted regularly during the first phase of lockdown. During the second phase, on-field activities were maintained through community mobilisers and young leaders – with Team DIKSHA members joining online, following a hybrid mode. Throughout COVID times – including the phases of complete and partial lockdown, immediate crisis intervention to prevent any form of abuse was maintained through the continuous monitoring by 15 exceptional community leaders: 2 children (below 15) – one girl and one boy, 8 young adults (18-25 years) – 5 females and 3 males, and 5 adults (25+) – 3 females and 2 males.

Ensuring Engagement and Resilience

Deprived of their time in schools, of their regular activities at the DIKSHA Drop-in-Centres, hemmed in with adults in their cramped single-room residents – our children were suffering from tremendous restlessness. Team DIKSHA was also going through a lot of stress, both because of personal losses in the form of COVID-19 deaths, and work-related challenges. Sustained telephonic counselling sessions were offered throughout 2020, but that proved to be inadequate. So, in 2021 – DIKSHA upped its online presence quotient through a series of activities, including an online Community Programme. (Community programmes are cultural programmes planned and executed entirely by children and young adults which contribute a lot to their confidence boosting and agency building.)

The black cloud of COVID-19 challenged all of us at DIKSHA – the team, and the communities we work with, but it did not miss the silver lining. DIKSHA Dosts (Friends of DIKSHA who help us with donations in cash and kind) stepped in to help us help the young and adult populations of Kalighat and Munsiganj in Kolkata deal with the double disaster of COVID-19 and Amphan, the super cyclone that left 157 of these families literally without a roof on their heads. Their generous donations helped us deal with that crisis. We remain grateful to them for daring to care!

We also made many new contacts: With larger national organisations, as also with women from quasi-red-light areas, who are in the sex trade – but do not entertain customers where they live. And, the crisis helped us realise the need to address income generation issues for the women we work with, and other resource-poor women. The result has been: A number of new initiatives in the post-COVID-19 period. We were present in two red-light areas in Kolkata prior to the pandemic – now, we work in an additional red-light area, and two quasi-red-light areas. Other new initiatives are detailed below.

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DIKSHA's Other Programmes



DIKSHA is implementing the Padded with Love initiative in collaboration with three organisations in five districts: three rural, and two urban. The three rural districts are: Birbhum, Murshidabad, and Nadia. Kolkata and North 24 Parganas constitute the urban locations. In Birbhum district, the collaboration is with Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE) for Labpur block. For Lalgola block in Murshidabad district, and Phulia block in Nadia district, the collaboration is with SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) Bharat. For Kolkata and Dakshineswar in North 24 Parganas, the partnership is with Calcutta Rescue.

Kaam-Kaaj has two prongs: DIKSHA engages resource-poor women in urban and rural areas in an eco-conscious income generation programme. Participating women have been trained to make bags, junk jewellery, and other household items mostly from recycled cloth. This initiative is being implemented with women in two of DIKSHA's work areas in Kolkata: Munsiganj, Ward 75, Kolkata Municipal Corporation, and Lakar Math, Ward 84, Kolkata Municipal Corporation. Its rural implementation is in Kamarpara village, Illambazar block, Birbhum district. Please [connect](#) with us to help this endeavour thrive.



The other prong of this programme relates to giving POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace) to job-ready youth (18-25 years old) from marginalised rural and urban communities. DIKSHA implements this in collaboration with [LP4Y](#). We offer training to both young women and men: To job-ready young women to enable them to identify and redress any situation of sexual harassment at their workplaces. To job-ready young men so that they become alert about how not to behave in workplaces, especially with reference to 'normalised' practices like sexist jokes, etc.



DIKSHA's Life Unlimited: Sports for Change is an initiative to engage girls in sports to challenge predominant gender norms that prevent them from chasing their dreams for specific sports. We currently support a teenage girls' football team in rural Birbhum, who were initially prevented from playing because it is a 'male' game. A generous DIKSHA Dost helps us run this effort. The other endeavour is currently suspended for want of funds. It involved getting marginalised girls to play badminton, including girls from conservative Muslim families who never dreamt of being able to chase their dream. We need support for resuming this much needed initiative, and for the football girls to strengthen it.