KOSHISH

An initiative on Homelessness and Destitution

FIELD ACTION PROJECT

TATA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, MUMBAI
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FOREWORD

With our rich experience from the Beggar Homes in Bombay, KOSHISH began its work in Delhi in the year 2010. The work was primarily based in the Receipt cum classification centre, Lampur Beggars home and female Beggars’ home in Nirmal Chaya complex, and was limited to interaction with clients in the homes, welfare officers, Magistrates of Mobile Courts and few Shelter homes for the homeless. Maturing, from that beginning stage the work of KOSHISH has transformed into a stable, sustainable, optimally spread out program with the rich experience of working with different categories of clients, and a sizeable network of people for our support.

We are now active participants in collectives like Pension Parishad and Shahari Adhikar Manch. Our network has broadened to include volunteers, interns from academic institutions, Shelter homes, Hospitals, old age homes and other organizations working on the issue of homelessness and destitution. Our work has expanded outside to include persons who are homeless and are not residents of Beggar homes. The intervention of vocational training has developed into a stable programme with an increased stipend amount for the trainees. Our understanding of issues and our clients has increased; as a result our interventions have become more refined with time.

After months of advocacy with the Social Welfare department, we have now ventured out in a big way and have initiated a Pilot Project in Indira Vikaas Colony. The idea is to work on the issue of Beggary at a preventive level. The Snake Charmers community has been most often at the receiving end of the implementation of the Bombay Prevention of Begging act, due to the fact that they have historically been into street Performance. This ‘Stepping Out’ of the team has posed several challenges and has made us question ourselves in terms of our level of Preparedness, skills and capacities but it also excites us to venture into a new area of work with fresh expectations and possibility of new and unique interventions.

After several months of working together as a team we are in a position to Zero Down on a value base, which emanates from the KOSHISH culture.
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Department of Social Welfare Department

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4. Mr. P.C. Sharma, Deputy Director, Disability.
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**Organizations**

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Our Value Base

1. **Individual and collective Ownership of our work:** - We firmly believe that we own our individual areas of work if any and the work of the organization as a whole. This gives us a sense of greater authority in the broader and finer nuances of our work, and also helps us realize the dictum ‘With Great Power comes Great Responsibility’.

2. **Participatory Decision Making:** - We believe that a decision that will eventually be implemented by the team must take shape from the understanding that the team members have of a situation. Thus all decisions are taken after participatory discussions.

3. **Eudemonism:** - Eudemonia is a Greek word commonly translated as Happiness or welfare. Eudemonism thus means creating Happiness and welfare through the Spirit. As a team we believe in creating happiness within the organization amongst the team members and with the client group with the firm belief that happier teams are more productive.

4. **Gender Sensitivity:** - The team is aware of the ways people think about gender and thus stays away from the traditional and outdated views on the roles of men and women. KOSHISH team has a fair understanding of the issues affecting women, the stereotypes associated with them and the discrimination they face in society in general and at workplace in particular. The sensitive attitude of the team members emanates from this deep understanding of gender and related issues.

5. **Honest communication:** - We believe in communicating our ideas and opinions openly amongst the team members with the assurance that they will be heard and analyzed with a sense of fairness in mind.
6. **Integrity:** - It means being truthful, honest and reliable. The team inherently encourages authenticity - Being the same you whether people are watching or not. It involves stepping up and taking responsibility for our actions.

7. **Creativity and Innovation:** - Creativity literally means ‘The use of Imagination or original ideas especially in the production of an artistic work’. The team believes in fostering an atmosphere where new and innovative ideas can take birth and grow to deal with everyday issues of the client group.

8. **Diversity:** - We believe that diversity of views, opinions; skills and talents contribute to the richness of the team. It increases the ability of the team to think critically. Thus the team’s effort always is to encourage diversity.

**Key Interventions**

**Rehabilitation of Persons in Beggar Homes**

Rehabilitation is a broad term used to describe the process that a client undergoes in the beggars home so as to bring his life back to normalcy and ensure that he no more has to lead a life of destitution. It can mean different things to different individuals and has to be customized as per the persons’ life circumstances. The process includes these steps:
Legal Advocacy (Social Investigation Report):

From the beginning of our work Social Investigation Report has been our major method of intervention for people on remand. When a person is arrested to be kept in custody for a short period of remand, we get an opportunity to prevent the detention of the client by finding out more about the client’s family and his life’s antecedents. Many a times we are also able to make a visit to the family of the client to explore further the possibility of repatriation to the family. Along with the Social Investigation Report of the probation officer the report written by KOSHISH team is also submitted to the Metropolitan Magistrate. It is through this simple method that we are able to influence the decision of the magistrate after acquiring complete information about the client and with due analysis of his/her life’s situation. But the access to this has been achieved by tireless advocacy with Magistrates of Mobile Courts. Writing of an SIR is possible only in situations when clients are sent on remand. In cases of on the spot detention, the right of a client to be heard was being completely violated. She/he would not have recourse to legal Aid, or the option of meeting his/her family.
Major Breakthrough:- From Regular Detentions to Negligible Detentions

Recently another breakthrough happened in the arena of Legal Aid. Appeals were filed for three of our clients. Till before these cases, most of the clients were released on grounds of mercy. While in these cases we were able to challenge the judgment itself on the grounds that the trial that happened at Mobile court was largely unfair.

The clients were unaware of the legal terminology that so adversely impacts them. Earlier at the mobile court they were asked to ‘Plead Guilty’ in which the accused admits to having done the crime, without knowing what such a confession could lead to.

In such cases, whenever an appeal was filed in the session’s court, only mercy grounds could be used to get a client released. Because going back on one’s confession in front of the magistrate was impossible. However in these three cases the judgment of the Mobile Court itself was challenged on the grounds that an accused not having access to his family and to free Legal aid, which is his/her constitutional right, is being treated very unfairly by the court. On top of that the accused is almost brought to the point when he confesses his crime. The sessions court thus sent the case back to the lower court for a retrial. This action of a session’s court is a serious comment by the judge of this court on the ability and decision of the Metropolitan Magistrate. As a result the Mobile courts have become very careful, and have reduced on the spot detentions to a negligible number. This helps our clients to avail the services of a lawyer if they wish to. Meantime we are also able to trace and meet the family of our clients, to explore the possibility of rehabilitation. It gives us a better chance at getting the client released, even through Social Investigation Report.

Family Tracing and Home Visits

Through our experience we have found that many people living in destitution are separated from their families either because of the exclusion caused by the family or due to some other problems associated with the demeanor of the client. A lot of times some contact with the family gives us some information about the background of the client. It also helps us to provide reliable information to the metropolitan magistrate in case a person is on remand.

Many a times the family is unaware of the whereabouts of the client and is looking for him/her. In such cases our contact with the family either through phone or a visit can be a huge source of relief for them.

After discussions with the family members the cause of separation is ascertained and dealt with through counseling if possible. This gives us a good chance of exploring the possibility of reuniting the client with his/her family.
Appearance of family during a hearing becomes a proof of the fact that the client is not a vagabond with no means of subsistence and with no one to take care of him. In certain specific cases instead of the biological family the team visits the new chosen family of the client. This could mean a larger group of transgender for a homosexual, a single friend or a group of friends for a migrant labourer living alone in Delhi, with his native family in the village.

**Vocational training**

As we slowly progressed in our work in the Beggars home we figured that most of the people living a life of destitution have never received a fair opportunity of educating themselves and developing/ acquiring the skills that are necessary to be able to earn a livelihood. Most of these men and women were an involuntary part of the vicious cycle of poverty. This, as we observed was one of the reasons why a person fell into a life of destitution. As a result vocational training (Electrical) was initiated in the male beggars’ home in Delhi. From being a very basic ‘need of the hour’ element of the Project vocational training has evolved into a very mature, stable, sustainable program in itself.

One of the major changes that have occurred over a period of time as part of the program is the streamlining of the selection process. A month prior to the beginning of the new batch a discussion about the training program is done with the clients. They are explained what the training entails. What all things they will be required to do if and when they become a part of it. The inmates are also explained about the benefits that accrue after they undergo the training. After this session with the entire group a separate assessment is done for each individual who intends to become a part of the training. The factors that are kept in mind while selecting a candidate include age, time of release,
family ties etc. A person who intends to unite with his family on an immediate basis and is likely to get released through bail will most probably not finish his training thus he is not selected to be a part of the new batch of trainees.

An effort has been made to make the selection process more inclusive, by involving inmates who are differently-abled. This initiative can be seen as a baby step towards ensuring equality and sensitivity towards the differently abled within the institution. Initially the differently abled inmates themselves were quite apprehensive about participating in the training as they highlighted how they have been regularly kept away from the mainstream system of employment especially in the informal sector which is away from any kind of monitoring and inclusivity. We realized most people had internalized this attitude of the society towards differently abled and have consequently been compelled to live the life of a destitute of which begging is an inevitable part.

Through regular interaction with the inmates they were encouraged to participate so that they can experience a sense of dignity by anticipating a situation in which they could be independent and support themselves once they are released.

To ensure further facilitation of the rehabilitation of those differently abled inmates whose limbs have been amputated an effort has been made to network with an organization which specializes in making prosthetic limbs. The organization Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti has agreed to work with us for making of prosthetic limbs for our clients, seven in number. We will also be receiving support from the staff of Beggars home for the same.
Through slow but steady and tireless advocacy with the department of social welfare another crucial milestone has been reached which is the increase in the stipend amount paid to the inmates who participate in training. From nominal amount of Rs 8-10-12 the stipend has now increased to Rs 30-40-50 for a training period of six months. This small amount of money has proved to be a very important motivating factor for a lot of people to participate in the training. It makes them feel they are able to make use of their time effectively and fruitfully while they are within the custodial institution. This money that the inmates earn during their training has helped many of them to start rebuilding their lives after release. Although a small amount it is something to start with.

With the inclusion of some literate people in the vocational training, there has been a start of theory classes. This involves helping the trainees to support their practical training with theory supplements. Due to the inception of theory classes, there has also been a change in the
final assessment of the trainees. In case only the practical training of the inmates has been done, the instructor himself makes the final assessment at the end of the training. With theory classes having been started the final assessment is being done by a third party who is independent of the training process in general. Another important evolution in this program has been the constant upgradation of the course content to bring it as close as possible to the needs of the employment market. There have also been changes in the way the classes are being conducted. One day during the week has been designated for sharing what the trainees have learnt during the week. This works both as a revision and a confidence building exercise for the trainees. During the classes the trainees are also encouraged to share the issues they face within the institution and solutions are brainstormed collectively in the group. The discussion also includes talks of personal hygiene, parts of a good personality and starting life afresh. The class is thus being used as a platform for enhancing the life skills and soft skills of the trainees.

An important and pleasant occurrence has been the volunteering by the trainees of the previous batch to help the current batch of trainees to learn the skills of the trade. This has helped in motivating the new trainees to learn in a more involved manner. These enhancements have resulted in more seriousness and regularity on behalf of the trainees, and there has also been a reduction in the number of drop outs.

At the time of release the trainees are also guided about how they can plan ahead about their lives and what will be expected from them if they start working. A structured method is now being followed to seek employment opportunities for those trainees who are willing to work, after the training. Don Bosco is an organization that specializes in vocational training and placement of the trainees. KOSHISH has been in conversation with them for planning a recruitment drive for the current outgoing batch of trainees.

On an overall basis vocational training in the male beggars’ home has proved to be a tool for the social, economical, psychological empowerment of the inmates. It has become a way engaging the inmates in a fruitful activity with multiple benefits.

**Casework and Group Work with Clients**

This method is considered as required for catering to the immediate emotional and psychological needs of individuals. Many of the persons detained went through painful and callous procedures under the law, which ultimately had affects on their psychological condition to a large extent. As a result of their sudden arrests under the law, Depression, sadistic or aggressive behavior, exhaustion and apathy towards the present environment
are some of the immediate effects emerging in the personalities and behavior-patterns of such individuals. These changes accompanied by the grim situation in the homes blocked the passages for their re-integration or rehabilitation. To remove this hindrance, case work and group work activities are carried out for the very purpose of preparing individuals to give up negative attitudes and revitalize their positive personalities.

Casework means crafting a unique care plan for each individual and can include the following:-

Getting a chance to speak to one’s family can be a big relief especially when a person is in custody. It is the first step for building contact with a person’s family. Once established the regular consistent talks with family can be very instrumental in the ultimate rehabilitation of a client. Some clients demand that their family be traced so the family members can be informed about the whereabouts of the client. Others might demand that no one in their family be informed that they have been arrested. In each of the cases the situation is assessed and accordingly a decision is taken about whether the family needs to be traced or not for the betterment of the client.

Casework might involve:-

**Family counseling:** - This can be seen as the next step to tracing the family. There are times when small disputes in the family are the cause of a person’s homelessness. With the team’s intervention in several cases the family has been counseled to welcome the client back into the family.

**Medical Aid:** - Through our experience we found that persons living a life of destitution have very little access to long term medical aid in case of a severe injury or accident. As a result, we meet people who have been injured in the past without having been treated for full recovery. In such cases the team has to facilitate the treatment of the client with the support of government hospitals and other organizations.

Residents of Lampur Beggars home, playing Chess
Special Aids: - The team has been very instrumental in facilitating the provision of some special aids for the clients. Recently in Lampur Beggars home, spectacles were made with the support of the Superintendent. Cruches were arranged for a few differently abled clients through an individual donor. Very recently a provision for prosthetic limbs was made through the support of another organization called Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti.

Mental health: - In our experience we have observed that homelessness and destitution are conditions well equipped to take away people’s sanity in severe conditions. Separation from family, break down of an economic system, physical health, trauma, abuse can be factors associated with the poor or deteriorating mental health of a client. Also in certain cases a client suffers from a disorder that needs long term medical attention. In such cases the team’s intervention along with the treatment by Institute of Human Behavior and Allied Sciences, has proved to be fruitful in the rehabilitation of a client.

Referral to old age home/shelter: - For some clients who are from another city and who don’t wish to or are not able to go back to their families, and if they express their willingness to stay in a shelter or an old age home, an arrangement is made with other organizations so as to provide for the stay of a client in a shelter for the homeless, or an old age home.
Training of staff in the Female Beggar Home

The team interacts almost daily with the staff of the beggar’s home. In these daily interactions the team is slowly and gradually able to sensitize the staff to the difficult lives of our clients.

While observing our day to day work with the clients, caretakers and welfare officer get a chance to observe the lives of our in a deeper, more involved and sensitive manner. As a team we regularly try to zero in on issues and areas where the capacity of the caretakers can be built or their attitudes need to be influenced.

In the female beggar home there have been several occasions when the women arrested were suffering from mental illness or undergoing seizures. We observed that the caretakers, welfare officer and the residents of the home were absolutely unaware of the first steps one must take in case a resident is having a seizure. Also any person with Mental Illness was seen with suspicion and instead of receiving the care and support needed for their better health they would be at the receiving end of bias, doubt and all other acts of superstitions believed to cure mental illness.

Clients with their new Crutches
The Metal Health Unit set up by Manas Foundation at Nirmal Chaya complex has been quite instrumental in providing support in case of mentally ill patients. The psychologists and therapists at the Unit agreed with our opinion and a joint training was organized for the staff of the short stay home and the Female Beggar home. The small workshop explained and clarified the difference between the seizures caused due to epilepsy and the ones due to some psychotic disorders. It also helped in listing out the absolute ‘don’ts’ in case of a seizure, so as to not harm the client in any way.

Recreational and Cultural Activities

As a part of our programme for improving the conditions inside these institutions, such activities like sports, street plays, drawing etc. becomes altogether important. These activities introduce a sense of freedom among people, while in custody, and also allow them to explore themselves in better ways. Certain thought-provoking sessions are also carried out for the very purpose of preventing people from stagnation in their lives while living in custody.

Several competitions organized on regular basis, on one hand, provoke progressive thoughts and enhanced confidence in individual capacities and also unwrap the chances for “Trust-building” and “Improved relations” among the as a group, which otherwise remain defunct in the aggrieved ambiance of Beggars’ home. Such activities keep these people away from the stagnation and emptiness in their lives, which occurred as a consequence of their arrests and surrounding environment within the Beggars’ Home.
**Employers Collective**

It has been our observation that persons engaged in Begging have found it difficult to find stable safe opportunities to work. Whatever work is available is daily wage work in the informal sector where one must work at the whims of the employer. It has also been seen that such employer-employee relations turn out to be exploitative. Most of our clients are very poor people with negligible education and limited skills, thus finding a job in the formal sector becomes even more difficult. Also some employers feel inhibited as a person who is released from Beggars Home is perceived as someone who has come out from Jail after getting convicted for a crime. As a result of this stigma employers are even less likely to give an opportunity to work to the people who have been arrested under the act.

After release some of our clients express a willingness to work. We at KOSHISH have tried to develop a small network of employers who are willing to employ our clients after being fully aware of their antecedents and present condition. The process of Rehabilitation comes full circle when a person gets a chance to start his/her life afresh with a new work opportunity. Our small collective of employers believe in giving a chance to people who haven’t had such a luxury before. Some of these employers are Khao Piyo Namkeen factory and DLF Gurgaon, Cyber City. At Khao Piyo Namkeen factory our client Ramzani has been working for more than six months now. At DLF Gurgaon our client Abbas has been working in the housekeeping department.
Persecution, abuse and perpetual struggle for survival are some of the terms defining the existence of homeless persons on streets. Struggle on streets for survival is never ending and these situations are immensely wretched when it comes to defining the lives of women on street. They are in a more vulnerable condition than their male counterparts; given the deterioration of a woman’s condition in our social structure, whereby they are victims of rampant abuse, exploitation, ignorance and violence till date. Women’s position, even on streets lies at the periphery, if one articulates a categorization of homeless persons in accordance with their life situations or positions on streets. Marginalized among the marginalized; they face atrocious, exploitative and harassing situations on streets.

During our initial visits to the home, we found that many of these women have developed a tendency of mistrust and suspicion around them and are not in a position to allay that pessimism. “Mental illness” came across as a consequence of all those torments and appalling experiences one had undergone while living on streets. Their already miserable conditions are further aggravated through their criminalization under the Act. Rather than addressing their critical issues and problems, they are put into jail simply for being helpless or victims of abuse and harassment; leading them to the state of mental illness.

To prevent them from the vicious circle of exploitation and emotional breakdowns, we focus our interventions towards working for the re-integration and rehabilitation of this group in larger society.

With regard to the female in RCC home, our interventions are directed towards the release of women; who are innocent, but at the same time, are victims of ambiguous and misleading definitions of “begging or beggars” in the existing law, which in turn is criminalizing the people. Individual Interactions and home visits comprised our efforts
towards the accomplishment of aforesaid task. SIRs are submitted to the court mentioning
details and particulars of a woman along with her circumstances at large. With these
reports, we have been able to re-integrate and repatriate some of the women into their
families.

With regard to work with females in custody, we have been interacting with the females in
the home at both individual and group levels. With our few visits made to these homes,
we have been able to develop trust among the females; a comfortable relationship wherein
they feel free while interacting and sharing their feelings with us. Earlier this space of
sharing was not available to them.

Simple Art based activities involving both women and children have proved to be good
stress buster for the residents of the home. Being able to speak to their families over the
phone helps them to maintain mental well being and also keeps them in the know about
their family.

**New Year Celebration at Female Beggars Home**

The beginning of the New Year 2013 was celebrated with full enthusiasm in female beggars’ home and
Mahila Sadan in a programme organized by KOSHISH team along with participation from the staff of
Beggars home. The programme was structured to include performances that were
informative, entertaining and inspiring at the same time. Two children who are residents of Beggar home presented a dance, and one inmate performed a folk dance of her native
town in Rajasthan. Such participation from the inmates infused life into an otherwise drab
atmosphere of the home. Also it encouraged other residents to join in the celebration.

In addition to this Shanti a physically challenged (Deaf) woman, and a resident of Short Stay home, Nirmal Chaya complex, presented Magic Tricks before the audience.
‘Angel theatre group’ of Mother NGO for Homeless, (Community Medicine department of St. Stephens Hospital) thoroughly entertained the audience with two thrilling dance performances and a comic play. They also enacted another play about the symptoms and treatment of Tuberculosis which highlighted the easy accessibility of Dots Centers. As part of the programme a brief orientation was given about the work of KOSHISH by one of the members of the team.

The District officer (West Delhi), Ms Lata Negi was one of the primary guests of the programme, and there was also participation from the Child Development Project Officers and Superintendents of other homes within Nirmal Chaya Complex.

The successful completion of the programme was the result of the able guidance of Superintendent Ms Pomilla Chibbar and sincere participation of welfare officer of the female Beggar home Ms Shivani Bisht, and the joint efforts of Mother NGO for the Homeless, and KOSHISH team.

**Work With the Children in the Beggars Home**

Children under the age of five years form part of the profile of female beggars home, because as per the Bombay Prevention of Begging act any child below the age of five years if arrested will be detained with the mother. (Check with the copy of the act). It is worth realizing that, in these cases, children with no fault of theirs are forced to spend one of the most crucial years of their life within a confined space, in detention, away from their larger family and most natural environment. The children are kept away from the free space they most crave for at this age.

*Our client Santoshi with her children Durgeshi and Nisha in Female Beggars Home.*

Research on Early Childhood Education shows that 95% of a child’s mind develops during the first three years of his/her life, for which the child should be encouraged to play freely, eat and sleep well. A custodial setup can potentially hamper the growth of a child. A child can feel bored, dull unattended around aged clients and caretakers and without the company of other children.

In the past one year four children between the age group of 2-7 years, were residing in the female Beggars home with their mothers. Needless to say that these children were enormously instrumental in livening up the otherwise dull atmosphere of the female beggars home. Also we realized that as the children spend a considerable amount of time in detention some concrete and sustainable interventions need to be made to make sure their time inside is fruitful, well spent and boosts their mental growth.

Thus activities related with Pre School Education were started with the objective of facilitating the growth of motor skills, cognitive skills, emotional and social skills.

The mothers being destitute, poor access to Healthcare and complacent attitude towards child care ensured that none of the children had ever been vaccinated before. Inside the Beggars home the children were vaccinated and their vaccination cards were prepared, under the Universal Immunization Programme of the Government of India.

We observed that as we engaged with the children in playful activities all the women residents also got very involved with us, thus changing the whole atmosphere.

**Interventions Outside Beggars Home**

**Night Outs**

A peculiar and inseparable feature of the homeless populace in any city is their employment in the informal sector of work. The regular rigors of this sector which include inconsistency in finding work at the same place, poor wages and working conditions make the homeless a very mobile group to work with. Most of the working homeless men, women and children move around the city during the day, looking for opportunities to work or to earn a meal otherwise. However, most people have a fixed resting place, especially at night. This place, most essentially becomes a small ecosystem for an individual or family, within which they slowly increase their knowhow of the infrastructure available around them, which could include Shelters run by the government,
No cost/ Low cost Medical Units, Water Dispensing systems, Schools and crèches in some specific cases.

During extreme weather conditions like in winters the survival of this group becomes a humongous challenge. With temperatures ranging from 2-5 degree Celsius, the situation is like that of an emergency, or calamity. The program of Night Outs was initiated to engage more fully with the homeless people who are more easily accessible at night. Also it is a good time to know the realities of the homeless group and their living conditions. For a social worker the skill of observation is the essence of any sustainable intervention, but the quality and success of the observation depends upon an appropriate time.

**Interventions**

- **Mapping of the Homeless:** - One of the first things Night Outs could facilitate was an accurate mapping of the homeless population of the city, especially because doing this during the day can hardly give a close to real, estimate of the number of homeless populace, due to their extreme mobility.

- **Blanket Distribution:** - Cold weather conditions necessitate the distribution of Blankets along with Bubble wrap and medicines to extremely needy.

- **Rescue:** - Any extreme weather condition results in adversely affecting the health of homeless people directly exposed to it. Also it can worsen the condition of an already ill person. Thus, another important intervention during extreme seasons is the work of rescuing homeless patients from medical emergencies and admitting them into a hospital. This is done with the help of other organizations like Aman Biradri and Mother NGO for the Homeless.

- **Referral to Shelters:** - Some people living on roads are both unaware of the temporary and permanent night shelters in the vicinity or haven’t been able to access them for some reason. Our work during night outs also involves linking the beneficiaries with the night shelters, by referring the people to the nearest shelter for the homeless run either by the government or by any NGO, forming part of our network.

- **Rehabilitation:** - Once rescued a person is treated as our regular client and interventions like Home Calling and family tracing are made, for exploring possibility of reuniting a client with his/ her family.
• Sensitization of Students: - Students from various colleges of social work are mobilized for participation in this programme. This helps in sensitization of students towards the issue of homelessness and destitution.

• Awareness Generation: - Efforts have also been made to create awareness about the effects of adverse weather conditions on homeless people through the print media.

• Advocacy: - Advocacy has been one of the main areas of focus of this programme. KOSHISH as a part of a network of organizations has been consistently advocating for more permanent and temporary night Shelters. As a result the Delhi High Court in a petition filed by People’s Union For Civil Liberties, passed an order on 20th Jan 2010, directing the Delhi Government to set up 140 Permanent and 100 temporary night Shelters for the homeless. Also a recent development has been the inclusion of Cold Wave/ Frost as an eligible natural calamity in the guidelines for relief assistance under National / State Disaster Response Fund.

Working at a Preventive Level: - Snake Charmers Community

Introduction to The community

• Sapera Basti is home to people from a wide variety of vocations. Historically known as a community of street performers, it consists of men engaged in playing the drums at celebratory occasions. Some others are into rag picking, with many of the children joining them either during or after school hours. Earlier some of these people used to be known as snake charmers and were able to earn a small amount of money through that work, but with laws related to wildlife having become more stringent they were compelled to leave this work. Now, some of these people also earn

Children of the Basti during an activity
their living by engaging in the traditional performing art of ‘Behrupiya’ or ‘The Impressionist’. Traditionally several of their ancestors used to do similar work. But with the traditional art on the verge of extinction most people pursuing it are living in poverty. In our short stint with them the people of the basti have shown inclination towards seeking opportunities and support for self employment.

There are close to fifty (50) children in the Basti, most of who are engaged in rag picking and are used to consuming soft drugs. The children growing up in a basti full of street performers have learnt a fair share of acrobatics. Around 7-10 children are regularly going to school. The rest of the children loiter around and spend their time rummaging through waste at dumping grounds close to the basti. It has been observed that this is less a matter of compulsion and has more become a part of the culture of the community. The small amount of money the children earn out of this work doesn’t form a significant part of the family income but it takes some pressure off the shoulders of their parents as the children are able to take care of their needs whether legitimate or otherwise. In this short period of time the children have opened themselves up and accepted our interventions. They have demonstrated a possibility and potential of getting back to mainstream education whether through open schooling or regular school. The adolescent girls have also shown interest in getting back to education and gaining vocational training. Almost negligible number of families has a separate toilet of their own. There is one public toilet (run by Slum and JJ Department) close to the basti which caters to all the people of the basti, for a small charge of Rs 2/person for usage of toilet and Rs 5/person for Bathing. The basti otherwise is characterized by open ‘Nalis’ and drains all across causing a grave danger of infection and spread of dangerous diseases. Overall the level of sanitation is dangerously poor. With most lives affected by drugs and alcohol the status of health is poor amongst the people of the basti. As the children earn some money of their own through rag picking there is least sanction on the usage of toxic substances. The anganwadi worker does visit the basti for vaccination of children but the residents don’t make use of the other facilities at the Primary Health Centre by choice. Instead they prefer to go to a private clinic run by a doctor within the Basti. Alien to the idea of Institutional Deliveries all women have given birth at home. The children during their work get exposed to hazardous substances that adversely affect their health notwithstanding their fragile immunities.

**Rationale for the Snake Charmers ‘Pilot Project’**

The Bombay Prevention of Begging act defines ‘Begging’ in a very debatable and controversial way. The act says that Begging can be defined as ‘Soliciting or receiving alms, in a public place whether or not under any pretence such as singing, dancing,
fortune telling, performing or offering any article for sale’. This clause obviously suggests that any person who is performing on street will be considered an offender as per this act. Thus, this group of people was used to getting caught in raids and paying heavy amounts of money to the lawyer, to get them released. Almost everybody in the basti has heard about the Bombay Prevention of Begging act, or further has experienced its implementation.

As we observed this group we realized that historically they have been a community of performers. We believe that street performance takes as much hardwork as any other job and it is highly unconstitutional to equate it to begging. Having adapted to a particular way of living and livelihood the present young generation also doesn’t see much scope in any other vocation. The children find it hard to adjust in neighborhood schools. Having been isolated from mainstream society Indira Vikaas colony is a dull reminder of lack opportunity perpetuating poverty.

Thus our Advocacy with the government has been for initiating a pilot project to facilitate the growth of the people of this community. The strategy is to work with the group in a non threatening, non judgmental manner, and to ensure they have access to all the basic necessities for growth. We also need to ensure that they are able to avail government schemes.

After this phase of Rapport Building we were in a position to put forth to the government our basic engagement with the community. As a result of which an Anganwadi has been proposed in the Basti. Having built a relationship with the people of the Basti we were able to collect the basic information of each of the families. Average number of family members in the Basti is Six.

12% of the families interviewed don’t have any proof of identity. Some 47% of the families don’t have a bank account. Around 73% of the families interviewed don’t have an LPG connection, and use firewood for cooking. Also after having engaged with the community for a while our apprehensions related to working with people in alcoholism and drugs have reduced. We need to work with the people on a one to one basis and also at the policy level.

Non formal education has been initiated in the basti within a small space provided by the people of the community themselves. This has opened up the possibility of children attending regular school. It has helped us to observe the capacity of these children for integration in the normal School.
Over a period of time our realization has been that our cause, or Beggary as an issue has not received the requisite and much deserved attention whether in universities, government circles or the development sector. If anything persons engaged in Begging are ‘infamous’ for causing nuisance and public disorder especially in the mainstream society.

Few people even in the development sector are aware of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act. This is a grim reminder of the fact that KOSHISH has a very long way to go
before one can expect repeal of the act, or before a good number of lawyers, development professionals, and activists can be mobilized to push for its repeal. As a result we at KOSHISH use several ways of advocating for the right of persons processed under the BPBA. Those are:-

**Youth Engagement:-**

Since the start of the organisation volunteers, interns and fieldwork students have played a very crucial role in taking the work forward. To our minds engaging with them has proved to be the best way to spread awareness about the Bombay prevention of Begging Act and our interventions amongst their peers and amidst academic circles. KOSHISH has had the opportunity to work with Post Graduate students of Tata Institute of Social Sciences and Delhi School of Social Work. We have had interns from undergraduate colleges of Delhi University, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, and Faculty of Law at Delhi University.

Volunteers help us see a fresh alternate perspective of what we have been witnessing or doing since long. They come with new, innovative ideas for achieving the same old targets. A big source of vibrant energy volunteers have also done the important task of keeping us on our toes as they compel us keep up with the changing trends in academic circles. While engaging with them we must be able and willing to place and articulate each of our steps and interventions in the context of theories and

*Nishita, a volunteer with the children in a clay modeling workshop*
methods of social work. Volunteers at KOSHISH have brought in unique and diversified talent and perspectives. They have kept us engaged by pushing us to articulate our experiences and learning.

Our Presence within Collectives

Pension Parishad

Pension Parishad is a collective that is pushing for universal pension for all elderly. We at KOSHISH found immediate resonance with the goals of Pension Parishad as we had observed that many persons arrested under the Bombay prevention of Begging act are above 60 years of age and have been pushed into destitution as a result of lack of support from family and absence of social support schemes like old Age pension. The present old age pension scheme has many flaws and it is as good as being non functional especially for the most needy persons. The amount given as pension is abysmally low and hasn’t kept up with the rising rate of inflation and as a result has failed to provide any financial support to those elderly who are unable to work. Through our engagement with the people inside the Beggars homes we have observed that many old people who have been into daily wage work when they were young and who now suffer from various occupational disorders are still compelled to work in order to feed themselves.

The collective Pension Parishad has been demanding that the government must establish Universal Old Age Pension system which provides for a monthly pension not less than 50% of minimum wage or Rs 2000/- per month, whichever is higher. Another important demand has been to link monthly pension to the rate of inflation and to increase it on a regular basis as done in case of the salaries/ pensions of government servants. The age for receiving old age pension should be reduced to 55 years from the 60 years that it is at present. Considering the
historical disadvantage women have faced Pension Parishad is also demanding that the age for receiving pension for women be kept at 50 years. It is also pushing for a special provision for highly vulnerable groups (such as the Primitive Tribal Groups, Transgender, Sex Workers, PWDs), which says that their eligibility age to be fixed as 45 years or fixed according to their particular circumstances. The payment of pension should not be used to deny any other social security / welfare benefit such as benefit under the Public Distribution System. KOSHISH has contributed to the campaign in some concrete ways, like collecting and documenting case studies of the elderly and training of volunteers for the purpose of data collection for the survey.

Shahri Adhikar manch

Several organizations came together in September 2008 and agreed on the need to work collaboratively on the issue of homelessness as the problems are multi-dimensional. These discussions led to the creation of SHAHRI ADHIKAR MANCH *(Urban Rights Forum: with the Homeless)*. The main purpose of this Manch is to develop a platform to work with and for the homeless people and ultimately to enable them to lead their own movement and advocate for their own rights. Recently, a need was however perceived for a stronger and larger coalition consisting of groups and movements of the homeless to deal with the severity of the homelessness crisis in Delhi. Manch aims to improve response to the crisis of homelessness by ensuring better services for the homeless, including through the provision of shelters, kitchens, and access to other basic services and livelihood options. The ultimate long-term goal is to ensure the provision of adequate and secure housing for all homeless people by holding the state accountable to its national and international legal commitments. Although KOSHISH is not a member of SAM but has been engaging with it and extending support to it for issues of common concern.

Networking with Other Organizations

A multi pronged approach is required to deal with the problems of homeless people. Thus our work or interventions can’t stand in isolation. It needs the support of other organizations working with the same client group. KOSHISH has been in touch with Aman Biradari, SPYM (Society for Promotion of Youth Masses), Mother NGO for the Homeless and IGSSS (Indo Global Social Service Society). On many occasions the support of these organizations has been asked for, for the purpose of providing shelter to an individual client after release from the Beggars Home. SPYM has a special shelter for
persons recovering from an injury, accident or illness which has been used by some of our clients. Similarly the Shelters of Aman Biradari and IGSSS have also been used for both men and women.

**Direct Engagement with Governments**

If we want significant and sustainable changes at national and state level, we need to make linkages with the government. It is extremely critical that civil society groups and government come together, combine their efforts in ensuring rights and dignified life to people, especially the vulnerable groups. While Civil Society groups have the understanding and experience of working with people, it is only the state that has the capacity to reach out to communities as a whole. Models of excellence can be created by CSO's, however; it is only with the State's involvement that those models can be utilized for the benefit of larger population. Koshish follows this approach of Positive engagement with the government. All our interventions are in collaboration with the government. While we resist the criminalization and continue to fight for fair opportunities and procedures, we also recognize the constraints at the government's end.

We engage constantly with the governments through meetings, trainings, consultations etc. As a conscious effort to make decriminalization of destitution a central issue, we reached out to State governments like Bihar and Kerala state. In Bihar, our discussion with the government led to the start of direct intervention at the community level. We have now partnered with the State government to implement the community based rehabilitation program while supporting the government in building capacities of its functionaries to independently run the program eventually. Kerala State Planning Board involved us in its planning for the 'Assisted living program for persons with disabilities'. We presented on how Beggary Prevention law has been criminalizing the group, putting them at risk of getting arrested for their disability and failed miserably in its stated goal of controlling Beggary.

We also engaged with Union government on the issue. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India has been involving us in the consultation regarding the formulation of the National Scheme of the rehabilitation of persons in Beggary.
Research

As part of research KOSHISH (Delhi) has done a study to look into the lives of clients after they have been released. Our general observation had been that most people who are arrested under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act are engaged in some work and have been wronged. We had to support our observation with empirical data. Thus we did a research to see if persons who were released after serving the remand period in the Beggars home are working or engaged in Begging.

Follow up of Men arrested and convicted under BPBA

- Percentage of clients who went back to Begging - 8.24%
- Request for Commitment to certified institution (Request Accepted by the court) 8.24%
- Request for Commitment to certified institution (Request Rejected by the court) 9.27%
- Released on Bail Before interaction with us 10.30%
- Not traced 24.74%
- Percentage of clients found to be working - 39.17 %
The report of the research study revealed that a majority of persons (39.17%) were working after release. This was a huge indicator of the fact that most persons arrested under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act are being wronged. Thus the act has been proactively criminalizing the poor homeless persons who earn a meager amount of money to support themselves and their families. For around 8% of the clients a request was made to the court to commit them to the certified institution for a period of one year. These were mostly persons for who it was perceived that their release would be more detrimental and would result in deterioration of their condition in comparison with their stay at the Beggars home. Some of these persons need shelter or treatment from mental illness on an urgent basis. A small percentage of people (8.24%) went back to begging after release. Some of these people were Sadhus who felt that it was their religious duty to get back to surviving by receiving alms. Others were persons who had zero support from family and elsewhere.

Follow up of Women arrested and convicted under BPBA

- Released on Bail Before interaction with us - 21.42%
- Request for Commitment to certified institution (Request Rejected by the court) - 7.14%
- Percentage of clients Not traced - 35.71%
- Percentage of clients found to be working - 35.71%
As per the results of the study 35.17% of the women were found to be engaged in work. However the same percentages of women were untraceable. Around 21% of the women got released on bail before any interaction with us. For around 7% of women a request was made to the Mobile Court to commit them to the certified institution, but this request was rejected. This study also showed that a majority of women were found to be working after their release from the beggars’ home.
Case Stories:-

Annapurna was a resident of the Female Beggars Home during September 2010 when she was arrested under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act. At this time Annapurna was working at a Tea Shop as a helper. Annapurna is more than 75 years old, but most candidly shares all the memories associated with her childhood and youth. She was born in Bardhaman, West Bengal in a poor household. Her father was a mason and the family managed to survive on his limited earnings which didn’t allow the luxury of education especially for a girl child. As a result she and her three sisters were never sent to school, while her brother did gain some basic education. Annapurna got married at the age of 11 to a 40 year old man whose first wife had expired and already had four children. When asked about the huge age difference between her and her husband she highlights the fact that he had a big tract of land and was wealthy enough to support Annapurna’s maternal family. Thus this ‘deal’ was finalized.

Soon after, her father passed away in an accident, when he fell off from a five storey building. Annapurna became a step- mother to four children and gave birth to four children of her own, two of whom were twins and passed away due to some illness.

After her four step children got married and settled into their families she could devote full attention to her two daughters Poornima and Pratima. By this time her husband passed away due to some infection that could not be treated. Annapurna decided that both her daughters will attend school and pass matriculation immaterial of her situation. She worked as domestic help back in her village, to support her daughters. Her elder daughter Pratima started doing odd jobs after finishing school, and became a bit independent.

It was time for Annapurna to look for better work opportunities as she could leave Poornima who was still in school, in the care of Pratima. Annapurna came to Delhi to meet a friend, who helped her find a job with a very well to do family. Annapurna was to become an affectionate caretaker of this family for the next 12 years. She travelled with them to the US and the UK and many other states within India.

Through her employer she managed to find a job with the family of a renowned film director.

Annapurna came back to Delhi and both her daughters got married and settled into lower middle class families. Annapurna lived with her younger daughter Poornima for a while,
although it was not a very pleasant stay as Poornima didn’t want her mother to live with her. In a Home Visit to Poornima’s place, she mentioned that when Annapurna lived with them there were conflicts and difficulties in the family. On a regular day there was a fight in the family and Annapurna went outside the house and was wandering around Sai temple, at Lodhi road in September 2010, when she was arrested under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act. After release she was placed in the shelter for destitute women run by IGSSS, where she lives right now.

Having taken good care of her step-children and biologic daughters, Annapurna aptly justifies her name which literally means the Hindu Goddess of Nourishment. She was also very successful at breaking through the typically ‘difficult to break’ cycle of poverty, a cycle that affects several generations of a family before the children can become educated and self sufficient.

Her story fully encompasses the supreme difficulty of being a woman. Like many other women, Annapurna faced an absolute absence of choice and consent (especially in the most important decisions of her life) on one hand and the pressure to bring up a family on the other. Most girls within poor families are cut off from the most basic opportunities at gaining education and acquiring the necessary skills to become self reliant. Later in life the same girls could be callously called ‘Weak, unskilled and Dependent’ to take on the world.

Annapurna though an ordinary woman, in some ways defied this cycle and feels no bitterness towards anybody. Observing her magnanimous life, one is reminded of the goddess of empowerment whose full strength can be aptly expressed through a picture in which she has multiple arms.

Kashmere, Aged 60 is a resident of Saharanpur. She was arrested from Old Delhi Railway Station. She has never been to school as her parents were against it. She revealed that she has never seen economic deprivation at close quarters as both her maternal home and her in laws were very wealthy.

She has two sons Arjun pal (aged 30) and Dilip (aged 25). Her husband has a grocery business of his own. All her family members live in Saharanpur. Back home she was kept like a servant in her own family. She revealed that due to domestic disputes in relation to property some five men forcefully brought her to Delhi from Saharanpur some five years back. She adds that they are still trying to kill her and haven’t allowed her to go back to
her native village. She believes they want take away all her property, and have made plans to harm her. In the conversation she also revealed that these men hit her on her head and her back with a big stone, leaving her terribly injured. She named the gang members as Asok, Suraj, Bunty, Jai Karan, Preeta, Suresh, Harkirat. All of them live inside the station while she is kept outside. She believes in Sherawali Mata and says that Mata gives her crucial information in her dreams, which is extracted by the gang through some machine.

During these interactions we found that there is limited connection and logic between certain things that she mentions, and that she might be suffering from some sort of mental illness. Also it is a possibility that she has been harmed and abused by certain parties in the past whether in the family or outside which has had an adverse impact on her mental health. Our observation was duly supported by a report of the Mental Health Unit (Nirmal Chaya Complex), which mentions that she shows symptoms of Paranoid Schizophrenia and Delusional Disorder. As a result she needs long term medical treatment along with a healthy, nutritional diet. She also must live in a safe atmosphere not exposed to the cruelties that a woman faces outside on the road without any familial support.

She highlights the plight of mentally ill homeless women in India. Although the Social investigation report mentioned details about her mental condition and how she is in need of shelter and support the court didn’t order for her stay either in the Beggars home nor in any other institution, nor did it prescribe any community based rehabilitation.

She is entitled to a plethora of facilities and rights under the Mental Health Act of 1987, and under the Draft Mental Healthcare Bill 2012. The Bill an enhancement over the Mental Health Act provides for protection of certain basic human rights and freedoms like, ‘A person will mental illness shall be treated humanely, and their inherent dignity and privacy upheld’. Section 33 of the Mental Healthcare Bill says that, Whenever a mental health practitioner is of the opinion that a prisoner or an accused person is of unsound mind, he may, by order under his hand in the form prescribed, direct that such prisoner be removed to a mental health facility within the prison or outside the prison and be treated while under detention. Thus if this bill becomes a law women and men like Kashmere will have a right to have access to treatment inside the Beggars home, while in this case, the court was more looking forward to getting rid of her after knowing her medical condition. Also the act/ State penalized her for being a destitute instead of supporting her without knowing her mental condition.
Although a stay in the certified institution was pursued, for Kashmere, but the court ordered for her release on the date of hearing, after which she stayed outside the gate of the institution for very long without any clue about where to go, as she could also not figure out where she had come from. A stay in the Short Stay home was requested for which was strongly denied to her, after which she has started living outside the Bus depot close to Nirmal Chaya Complex.

She uses the washroom at the temple and arranges for her drinking water from the petrol pump. Her illness that is making her believe that everyone who builds a contact with her has an intention of harming her is one of the symptoms of Paranoid Schizophrenia. She is also having illusions about some people from her past who are still living around her and not letting her go. Such a condition is disallowing her to accept anyone’s suggestion of living in a shelter or start medication. Her arrest was in fact an opportunity to get her to access medical treatment, which was lost due to the state’s inability to recognize its responsibility, and Kashmere’s rights.

**Aarti** was arrested under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, in May 2012. Her family includes her husband her mother, and two children (2 year old son and 6 old year old daughter). Her son Shiva and her mother Chandra were detained with her. Aarti’s mother married against her parents wishes and thus she was neither accepted by in laws nor parents, thus after the death of her husband she became homeless and destitute. As she lived outside with Aarti and Arti’s brother Kanhaiya, Arti got accustomed to street culture. Chandra married for the second time to seek safety and shelter, amidst the insecurity that a woman faces on the street. At this time Arti was an adolescent girl and her step father tried to sexually assault her. Chandra then left this man and started living on the street again. Arti never settled down with her mother. She says that she always roamed about with her friends and even visited Maharashtra with her childhood friend. In Maharashtra Aarti remembers selling oranges to earn money as a child. After this she never worked to earn a livelihood for herself and her family. She fell in love with Beenu who works with the Indian Army and was then working in Jammu and Kashmir. After getting married to Beenu she started living with him at staff quarters, military camp lodhi road. She gave birth to her first child Laxmi who is now six years old. Aarti had another child Shiva whos
is now 2 years old. Beenu was again moved to Jammu and Kashmir when Shiva was one year old. Aarti has had health problems, she was undergoing convulsions and was also alcoholic. Because of both these reasons she says she has had behavioral issues and has not been able to adjust with her husband. After Beenu was shifted to Jammu and Kashmir Beenu took Aarti along with the two children to Coimbatore where his parents live. He took a house on rent for them to stay. Arti fought badly with the neighbours and did not want to live there any longer. She moved to Delhi with her children and took a room on rent at Sarai Kale Khan where they lived for around a month, after which Arti found herself in a poorer position and was not able to pay the rent. After this Arti moved to Khan Market with her children and started living with her mother. Arti’s mother Chandra has been ragpicking to help Aarti and her children survive. During this time some public spirited citizen noticed the family and suggested to Arti that she admit her daughter to some NGO which can provide her with good quality education. Since then Laxmi has been staying in the Rose home of Salaam Balak Trust. Chandra and Arti were arrested by the raiding team from Khan Market. For seven months of their detention Arti’s brother and husband thought they were missing. After a contact was built with them, Arti’s brother Kanhaiya came to meet Arti and Chandra. Arti’s brother Kanhaiya says that he wishes that they go back with him to their native village and work there in the fields to earn a livelihood and live peacefully. Arti expressed a strong desire to start a new life with Beenu minus her addiction and illness, along with her two children.

Two months away from release Arti says that it is after a very long time that she feels very hopeful about life. When she was detained around two months back she was an alcoholic and was also suffering from epilepsy. Although the idea of being criminalised because of one’s poverty is very unpleasant, but a year stay at the beggars home proved to be good for Arti as her health improved due to the medication given to her. It gave her time to bring her life back on track.

After Release Arti went to her grandmothers’ place with her mother and lived there for some time. By this time Arti had realised that life on the street is driven by a culture of its own which involves drugs and alcohol without faila nd takes ones life through a downward spiral. She affirmed that she doesn’t want to go back to that life. She has moved to Chennai with her children. She works in a footwear factory, and earns Rs 3800 per month.
Arti’s situation clearly shows that she was in need of shelter, support and medical care. Unfortunately she could get all of this only after being labelled a criminal under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act.

**ROAD AHEAD**

A significant progress has been made from where we started this work. However, what we have completed so far is a response to the more immediate issue of protection of rights of persons especially in the context of arrests, health and livelihood etc. There is a recognition and acceptance from the government for our intervention. Koshish has established itself as a program that adds a certain value to the institutions and it is based on this space that we plan our next phase.

This intervention has clearly to be a one that is driven by the people who rights are being violated. Koshish at best would be playing a role of facilitator. Through our programs, we are focussing on building the capacities of people on the streets to fight for justice. Community engagement is going to be central to our work in the coming days. Having built strong intervention within custodial institutions, it is time now to build stronger community based rehabilitation framework. That is when we will be able to not just challenge but also provide effective alternative to the current punitive legislation. We will continue to work with persons in custody as state continues to implement the law, however, simultaneously, we aim to engage the government with the Community based program and gradually get the law and custody out. Our pilot program with Snake Charmers' Community is a step in this direction.

So far judiciary has largely remained out of the debate around the relevance of Beggary Law. We aim to involve them as well, by raising the issues of violations with the courts and judges and seek their involvement in creating a just and fair framework for rehabilitation, one that would provide for opportunities and not criminalizes.

Since htere is a willing engagement with the program from the government end, we will now work towards bringing various departments together, converging the strengths of all to develop holistic program of support.
Students being central to our work, we are going to expand our 'Youth Engagement Program' where we reach out to students, basically creating opportunities a platform for them to understand how governance impacts poor people, how certain biases can destabilize their lives to the point of permanent damage. We are working on a more regular and closer interaction with student communities.

It has not been easy coming this far, nor is it going to be easy further from this point. However, our biggest strength comes from people themselves. If they can continue to fight and stand against all injustice, picking up from whatever stability gets left and rebuild their lives, we have no reason to give up or take a pause.