



SKOCH GROUP
GROWTH | LIVELIHOODS | EQUITY
www.skoch.in

GARDEN REACH SHIPBUILDERS & ENGINEERS LTD (GRSE)

Project Akansha

Abstract

Children growing up in red-light localities face a complex web of vulnerabilities including educational exclusion, social stigma, unsafe living conditions, trafficking risks, child labour, substance abuse and early marriage. Accepting these challenges, Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd (GRSE), through its Corporate Social Responsibility initiative and in partnership with Child Rights and You (CRY), launched Project Akansha in June 2023. The three-year intervention focuses on the highly vulnerable red-light localities of Munshiganj and Watgunj in Kidderpore, Kolkata. It creates a safe learning environment, strengthening educational continuity, promoting life skills and self-defence training and building community-based child protection mechanisms. The project strives to break intergenerational cycles of poverty plus exploitation. Supporting over 300 children annually and engaging families, schools, local institutions and community stakeholders, Project Akansha demonstrates how targeted, holistic interventions has the ability to transform vulnerable communities and create pathways toward dignity, education, safety and opportunity.

Introduction

The Munshiganj-Watgunj red-light area of Kolkata is home to a large population directly or indirectly associated with sexual labour, informal labour and precarious livelihoods. Children in these communities frequently grow up in overcrowded rented accommodations with restricted educational support, low parental literacy and persistent social discrimination. Many are first-generation learners facing learning gaps and risks including trafficking, child labour, substance abuse, violence and early marriage.

To address these linked challenges, GRSE initiated Project Akansha as a comprehensive child-centred intervention. First, the programme established Child Activity Centres (CACs) that serve as safe spaces for supplementary education, life-skills development, psychosocial support, self-defence training and community

participation. Next, the initiative combines educational support with child protection mechanisms and community mobilisation to ensure that vulnerable children remain in school, advance learning outcomes and develop the confidence and skills necessary for a better future.

Over the course of implementation, Project Akansha has evolved into a reliable community institution. It has improved school enrolment and retention, strengthened protection systems, empowered mothers and community leaders as child rights advocates and created a sustainable supportive ecosystem for safeguarding children. The project demonstrates how corporate social responsibility initiatives are able to address entrenched vulnerabilities and support social transformation.

The Problem Statement

Children residing in red-light areas face vulnerabilities apart from economic deprivation. In Munshiganj and neighbouring localities, many households are headed by women engaged in sex work or informal occupations, resulting in unstable incomes, social stigma and scarce access to institutional support systems. Educational opportunities are often compromised by poor learning environments, inadequate parental guidance and unsafe social conditions.

The baseline survey conducted in September 2023 highlighted these challenges. Among 399 households surveyed, 83 percent lived in rented accommodation, maternal literacy levels were very low and access to identity documents and government entitlements remained weak. Children frequently lacked safe spaces for study, while overcrowded homes and unstable livelihoods contributed toward inconsistent school attendance and

poor academic performance.

Adolescents, particularly girls, faced heightened risks of trafficking, early marriage, child labour, sexual exploitation and substance abuse. Social exclusion compounded these vulnerabilities, as children from red-light areas often experienced discrimination within schools and neighbouring communities. Learning deficits, especially in mathematics and science, increased dropout rates and lowered long-term educational and economic advancement opportunities.

Without intervention, these conditions threatened to perpetuate cycles of exploitation, poverty and marginalisation across generations. The challenge required an integrated solution that addressed education, protection, psychosocial well-being and community participation simultaneously.

Strategic Vision

Project Akansha was conceived to ensure that every child in vulnerable red-light communities has access to education, safety, dignity and opportunities for holistic development. Rather than focusing solely on school enrolment, the initiative attempted to create an enabling ecosystem that addresses the underlying causes of exclusion and vulnerability.

The project aimed to revamp educational support systems by creating safe learning environments close to children's homes while simultaneously strengthening community ownership of child protection. In doing so, it integrated

supplementary education, life-skills development, self-defence training and stakeholder engagement to build resilience among children and adolescents while reducing the influence of exploitative social structures.

A long-term objective was to establish sustainable community institutions capable of continuing support beyond the project lifecycle, enabling children not only to remain in school but also to transition successfully into higher education, employment and empowered adulthood.

Solutions Stack

Project Akansha adopted a multi-dimensional intervention strategy to address educational, social and protection-related challenges simultaneously.

At the centre of the intervention is the Child Activity Centre (CAC) model. These centres were established within a 1-1.5 kilometer radius of beneficiary communities, guaranteeing accessibility and safety. The CACs provide structured learning spaces where trained teachers deliver supplementary education, homework assistance, remedial classes and academic reinforcement across multiple grade levels. These centres address the major challenge of inadequate study environments in crowded and insecure households.

Recognising that academic support alone is insufficient, the project integrated Life Skills Education based on CRY's structured curriculum. Sessions focus on ten core competencies, including self-awareness, empathy, communication, decision-making, stress management and affective regulation. These interventions help children build confidence, resilience and the ability to make informed life choices.

The programme also introduced self-defence training, including karate and martial arts sessions conducted three times per week. These activities strengthen confidence, mobility, personal safety and discipline, particularly among adolescent girls. Participation in tournaments and skill certification further enhances motivation and self-esteem.

To strengthen protection systems, the project established a network of Child Rights Ambassadors, including mothers, teachers, anganwadi workers, youth volunteers and community leaders. Through regular monitoring and referral, these stakeholders identify at-risk children, prevent child marriages, address trafficking risks and facilitate access to social protection services.

Community engagement forms an

additional critical pillar. In addition, regular meetings with parents, schools, local government representatives, police authorities and frontline workers help build collective ownership and create a local safety ecosystem. Mothers' groups have emerged as especially influential actors in preventing dropout and promoting educational aspirations.

The implementation followed a phased approach. Initially, Year One focused on baseline assessments, CAC establishment and community mobilisation. Then Year Two strengthened academic outcomes and protection systems, while Year Three concentrated on sustainability planning, adolescent support and expansion strategies for neighbouring vulnerable communities.

Outcomes

Project Akansha has generated significant educational, social and protection-related outcomes within a relatively short period of implementation. These results reflect the project's integrated approach and sustained community engagement.

Educational continuity has improved substantially. For example, a total of 241 children aged 6-14 years and 39 adolescents aged 15-18 years are now regularly attending school, while 16 out-of-school children have been successfully re-enrolled. Supplementary education interventions have improved learning levels for 184 children, addressing foundational academic gaps and strengthening school retention.

The project has achieved notable success in strengthening child protection outcomes. In particular, community-led monitoring and intervention mechanisms have helped prevent 12 child marriages, while 12

children were removed from seasonal child labour, considerably reducing exposure to exploitation and abuse.

Life-skills and self-defence initiatives have produced measurable improvements in confidence, communication abilities, emotional management and decision-making. As a result, more than 70 percent of adolescents showed improved psychosocial capabilities, while over 70 percent of children advanced through karate belt levels, signifying increased confidence and participation. Girls reported greater personal safety, mobility and engagement in public activities.

The programme has also produced distinguished achievements in extracurricular development. Specifically, three participating children won medals at the State Wushu Championship, showing the effectiveness of holistic development initiatives beyond academic outcomes.

Highlights

- Project Akansha, a partnership between Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd (GRSE) and Child Rights and You (CRY), supports vulnerable children in Kolkata's Munshiganj and Watgunj red-light areas through education, protection and community empowerment.
- The initiative established Child Activity Centres (CACs) that provide supplementary education, remedial learning, life-skills training, psychosocial support and self-defence programmes in safe, accessible spaces.
- It addresses risks such as school dropout, child labour, trafficking, early marriage, substance abuse and social exclusion, particularly among girls and first-generation learners.
- Educational outcomes show progress toward the project's education goals: 241 children and 39 adolescents attended school regularly, 16 out-of-school children re-enrolled and 184 children improved their learning levels.
- Community-based child protection mechanisms show progress toward the project's protection goals, preventing 12 child marriages and rescuing 12 children from child labour.
- More than 70% of adolescents improved psychosocial skills, while self-defence training enhanced confidence, safety, and participation, with some children winning medals at state-level competitions.

Conclusion

Project Akansha demonstrates how a well-designed, community-centred intervention can address deeply entrenched vulnerabilities affecting children in red-light areas. By combining educational support, life-skills development, self-defence training, child protection mechanisms and stakeholder engagement, the project has created an integrated model for social transformation.

The initiative has successfully improved educational access, strengthened child protection, enhanced psychosocial wellbeing and empowered communities to become active guardians of children's rights. Through the Child Activity Centre model, vulnerable children now have access to safe spaces where they can learn, grow and aspire toward brighter futures.

With plans to expand into neighbouring high-risk communities and evolve CACs into comprehensive "Transition and Resource Hubs," Project Akansha delivers a scalable and replicable framework for addressing child vulnerability in marginalised urban environments. It serves as a compelling example of how corporate social responsibility, when aligned with community needs and sustained social objectives, can create a lasting, transformational impact.



SKOCH GROUP
GROWTH | LIVELIHOODS | EQUITY
www.skoch.in

SKOCH

ECO-SYSTEM FOR GROWTH

e-Mail: info@skoch.in
www.skoch.in

Disclaimer:

- This case study is based on the information/content provided by the organisation.
- Information published in the case study is as of February 2026.
- All company names, app titles and trademarks mentioned are the properties of their respective owners and are used solely for illustrative and reporting purposes.