A photograph of a young woman with dark hair, wearing a light green blazer over a patterned top, smiling broadly at the camera. A young man in a striped shirt is standing to her right, holding a black digital camera up to take her picture. The background is blurred with warm, bokeh-style lights.

Equipping Youth with Knowledge, Awareness and Training

More than 12,00,000 youth equipped with life skills and provided with livelihood training by Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS)

Background

One of the biggest concerns of today's youth is the mismatch between labour market requirements and their education and training. This skill gap is one of the key reasons why youth face difficulties in finding jobs. With this understanding, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) caters to the developmental needs of young people from the age 15-35 years. The organization is dedicated to mobilising and organizing youth, especially those not attending schools and colleges.

UNICEF West Bengal forged a partnership with NYKS in 2018, with the twin objectives of scaling up the strategy to end child marriage and to further the Young People's Agenda (YPA). It is aimed at leveraging the pool of National Youth Volunteers (NYVs) across the state by building their capacities on addressing adolescent issues and organizing community level programmes to end child marriage. Specially designed programmes successfully linked young people to vocational training opportunities, providing career guidance and referral pathways with critical information on employment opportunities. A multi-dimensional approach towards programme planning and implementation was adopted by working closely with local partners to strengthen focus areas that included child rights and child protection and improving employability through skill development and vocational training.





Engage youth members on a large scale for building a social movement against child marriage and violence in West Bengal

Objectives of the UNICEF-NYKS partnership



Link adolescents and young people to vocational training opportunities, provide them with career guidance, referral pathways and information on employment opportunities

Activities within the UNICEF-NYKS partnership

- Link youth to vocational training opportunities
- Provide career guidance and referral pathways with information on employment opportunities
- Promote employment-oriented vocation skills and training in intervention districts
- Encourage entrepreneurship
- Organize community-level programmes to end child marriage
- Network with government/non-government institutions to strengthen training and placements.



How 'Youth for Adolescent Empowerment (Y4E)' was initiated

"In early 2018, we met the Chief of UNICEF West Bengal. We discussed various challenges faced by adolescents and how NYKS could play a role at the grassroots level in West Bengal. During our discussion, we realised that we have the capability and reach with the potential to change thousands of lives. In all our blocks, we have stationed two NYVs who received INR 5,000 stipend through a Government of India (GoI) scheme (selected by the District Collector, NYVs are mandated to work for two years on a project and are tasked with conducting activities at the community level). We felt that considering the high rates of child marriage in West Bengal, we must intervene."

Nabin Naik
Director, NYKS, Kolkata

Approach

All interventions were planned keeping in mind the broad goals of adolescent empowerment, namely, prevention of child marriage, promoting and safeguarding child and adolescent rights including protection, and enhancing their life skills. Later, aspirational mapping workshops linked to career pathways were conducted to study the youth profiles present in the state and identify appropriate trainings that would help them move into more fruitful and remunerative career streams. In 2019, the partnership was expanded to carry out community level campaigns on prevention of child marriage and violence through volunteers trained by a communications agency, banglanatak dot com.



Interventions

1. Acquiring livelihood skills with an eye on the job market

NYKS works with two groups, namely unskilled youth, providing them with skills that are aligned to their interests, aptitude and educational background while the other group comprises of youth with basic skills that can be further developed. In a structured manner, training sessions are designed for graduates and non-graduates. The courses are provided to both groups at subsidised fees and free to those who cannot afford to pay. Concerted efforts are made to place candidates in suitable jobs after they complete their courses. For example, NYKS offered courses on data analysis including Python, R-programming etc. with assurance of placement following course completion.



Partnerships with skill training institutes like Trinity Institute of Skill Development, Smile Foundation, SEOMP and Magic Bus Foundation helped us train a large number of youth. In 2018, we were able to secure jobs for over 52 youth in the food/retail/financial services/insurance/BPO/banking/telecom sectors.

Nabin Naik
Director, NYKS, Kolkata



Automobile engineering

A popular sector that many opt to work in has seen a huge value add through the collaboration between NYKS and Honda Corporation for providing training to youth on automobile engineering. After course completion, candidates are screened and assessed. Those who score well were sent for advance training and placed in one of the Honda branches/showrooms.



Creating platforms for aspiring painters and artists

A three-day workshop-cum-exhibition on painting was organized in South Kolkata, with support from UNICEF. Acclaimed artists like Indrani Haldar and others interacted with young budding painters. The young artists had the opportunity to sell their art at tourist spots and hotels. About 56 youth attended the training on commercial aspects of painting.

Promoting artisans in Kolkata

The Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) issued photo-identity cards to artisans. The Pehchan card was issued under the Pehchan Scheme and facilitated easier identification of artisans. It acted as an official proof of their identity when they dealt with government schemes related to skill training, credit access, marketing, and insurance, amongst others. NYKS strengthened the scheme by collecting data of youth with special talents (painting, handicrafts etc.) and connected them to resourceful people to sell their wares. The programme aims to reach over 1,000 youth in Kolkata in the initial phase and gradually build up.

Link for Pehchan IDs

<http://handicrafts.nic.in/ApplyOnline/ArtisanHelp/FrmArtisanIDCard.aspx>



Media and photography

A 10-day training programme was planned in South Kolkata supported by UNICEF where famous artists were invited to mentor participants on techniques of photography and commercial media skills. A photo exhibition was organized at prominent locations such as the popular Kishor Club. Students showed interest in specialised domains like wedding and event photography and were provided training. After the training, they were linked to suitable platforms where they could share portfolios and seek assignments/jobs. Many students were screened and on securing good grades recommended to prospective employers. As many as 55 youths were trained on professional photography.



Fisheries

Tie-ups and collaborations were sought and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) inked with NYKS, the Central Inland Fishery Research Institute (CIFRI) and ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth, to develop fisheries as a viable means of livelihood. Efforts will be made to strengthen existing wetland fisheries with ICICI giving support for marketing and quality training. Future plans include exporting fish and other marine products. Plans are also on the anvil to provide beautician training and provide training towards army careers.



Mushroom cultivation

A practical and replicable model of good practices with respect to mushroom cultivation has been developed as an economically viable means of livelihood generation. The initiatives include providing training to youth on techniques related to mushroom cultivation, followed by developing a network with related agencies and stakeholders. Usually mushrooms are sold at a competitive price of INR 600 per kilogram which offers the opportunity to earn steady incomes.



I met the NYKS counsellor and took admission in Trinity institute's computer course. I even got a training assignment with NYKS followed by a job but when my family moved to another village I had to give it up. I was thrilled when I was told to apply to another job close to my new residence. I had never expected this kind of support.

Chavi Chakrabarti
Beneficiary, Kolkata



2. Leveraging technology

Several technology-enabled services are being offered to provide information, technical expertise and connectivity to young people, thus improving their chances of getting better jobs.



Udyogi portal

The previously difficult-to-monitor large number of CVs that were being received are now routed through a special portal that has been set up by NYKS under the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs and is supported by UNICEF. The portal, "Udyogi Bangla", provides career counselling, skills training and job opportunities to youth, especially those representing marginalised groups. On uploading the CV, the person can choose from five career domains, namely skills training, career counselling, job assistance, livelihood/self-employment and innovations. Simultaneously, the employer database is set up with login IDs provided to the corporate sector, the government, other organizations and mentors.

Link to Udyogi Bangla: <https://www.udyogibangla.com/>



Social media platforms

E-training is provided with additional technology features like videos, livestreaming of events and other interactive features that can build traffic and visibility. These platforms are excellent ways of initiating dialogue around complex and less-understood and supported issues. Youth leaders who have already received trainings are encouraged to become 'coaches' for e-training programmes, thus turning their training into a remunerative job opportunity.



IP phone and video conferencing

This facility has been initiated and will be completed for every NYKS centre in the state. It will include creation of a unique ID for each NYKS team member along with provision of virtual domains to conduct meetings and ensure appropriate flow of information, enabling real-time monitoring, effective linkages and convergence among NYKS centres and a platform for sharing best practices.



HIV awareness and testing

Given the large migrant population in the intervention districts, HIV awareness and testing have been taken up on priority. Usually, lack of awareness and the stigma associated with HIV, keeps the condition undetected and/or untreated with fatal consequences. A district-level ToT on HIV-AIDS prevention was organized by NYKS for NYVs and other youth leaders in all districts in collaboration with the West Bengal State AIDS Control Society. Around 1,376 youth were provided training. They committed to spreading awareness in their local communities and encouraging high-risk populations to adopt preventive methods and seek counselling and testing.



Promoting use and production of sanitary napkins

As part of menstrual hygiene initiatives amongst adolescent girls, more than 50,000 sanitary napkins were distributed with the help of a local NGO. The NYKS team is finalising a plan to engage youth to make sanitary napkins that can be sold at subsidised rates.



Mobile health camps

NYKS prepared a design model for running mobile health camps in Kolkata. These were implemented with funding support of Z2plus Placement & Security Agency Pvt. Ltd., Kotak Mahindra and the Waqf Board who provided equipment, medicines and a van. This camp is set up on a fortnightly basis and is managed by trained NYKS volunteers. Around 15,000 youth have been provided free health check-up and medicines in the camps.



Well-coordinated outreach strategy



Our career counselling and aspirational mapping has helped us build a large database of youth and prospective employers. All through the year, our skill development training representatives and employers directly interact with youth, motivating and guiding them on job readiness. In several instances, we have been able to ensure advance training with 100% placement. Our district level job fairs see a full house and a lot of on-the-spot hiring takes place.

Monoj Kumar Roy
District Coordinator
NYKS for Howrah and Jalpaiguri

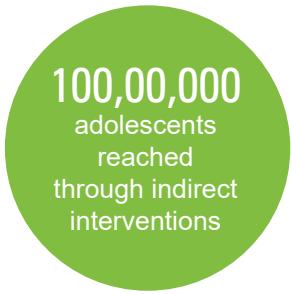
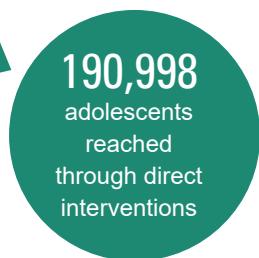
4. Ensuring widespread reach

Trainings, activation of community groups like *mahila mandals*, observing special days like the International Day of the Girl Child and recognising and felicitating outstanding efforts of youth volunteers and networks brought visibility and goodwill to the programme.

1. One-day ToTs were organized by NYKS for all their Youth Officers and Volunteers. High levels of political commitment were exhibited with participation of Central Ministers (Agriculture) and other district and state government officials. Focusing on issues around child marriage prevention, the training dwelt on processes and methodologies that could be adopted to bring about desired behaviour change and eliminate regressive beliefs and practices.
2. Special days were observed and events planned to bring stakeholders together on a common platform. The theme for International Day of the Girl Child in 2018 was “With her: A skilled workforce” and the celebratory event saw senior officials gracing the occasion and felicitating 16 girls for their stellar work in empowering adolescents in local communities. A special signature wall was created with hundreds of messages and motivational keywords penned by the girls and other audience members. National and International Youth Days were celebrated in 2019 though involvement of youth members, Minister for Self Help Group and Self Employment and government officials.
3. Youth motivation sessions brought young leaders to the fore, encouraging them to share their stories with the larger audience and instilling the “I can” spirit in them. Success stories of youth who had completed skill training and secured attractive jobs were particularly inspiring.



Results and outcomes



Training imparted



2,464 youth leaders trained on child rights, child protection and prevention of child marriage	300 youth provided training on soft skills	719 youth linked with training institutes for vocational training	81 participants identified for skill upgradation training	600+ youth interacted with experts from various sectors
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Job placements



5,238 youth provided career counselling	1,873 youth provided job placements in 37 companies with salaries of INR 10-25,000	422 participants selected for skill-based jobs	129 young people guided on starting their own entrepreneurial initiatives
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Menstrual hygiene activities

12,000 adolescent girls sensitised on menstrual hygiene	45,000 sanitary napkins distributed
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Child protection activities



12,000 child marriages prevented	45,000 child labourers rescued from hazardous work conditions
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Recognition and felicitation

Prize money worth INR 18 lakhs was awarded to outstanding clubs and youth volunteers, several volunteers at state level and individual volunteers at district level.

Around **57** individual youth and youth platforms were felicitated.



Achievements

Large-scale awareness created on child rights, child protection, child marriage and life skills

Massive reach was ensured through state and district level interventions. More than **126,821** male youth and **63,766** female youth were reached with messages in **23** NYKS centres across **19** districts of the state.

High quality of training

More than **700** volunteers conducted orientation training in five focus districts and **23** other districts to create a corpus of NYVs. Four training modules covered the core programme, special activities, the correlation programme and the volunteer programme. Thus, the ToT for the volunteers proved to be a huge success in preparing a cadre of trainers who can continue to hold trainings and workshops. Following a participatory approach, the training content was carefully planned, covering the entire spectrum of issues of child marriage, child protection, human trafficking and community mobilisation.

Motivating achievers through recognition platforms

Training on soft skills and providing recognition platforms and felicitations at state and district levels is helping align young people better with real life situations. At the state level, a youth volunteer was awarded INR 51,000 for his outstanding contribution in programme management and mobilisation. At the district level, **21** individual youth volunteers and youth groups were felicitated with prize money of INR 30,000, 20,000 and 10,000. At the state level, the best performing *mahila mandal* – Khanpur Ganaunnayan Kendra was felicitated along with another **21** district level clubs and **21** youth clubs with prize money of INR 25,000.

E-trainings and other social media platforms

Reaching young people through social media platforms gave the initiative a contemporary focus and also drew in larger numbers of youth who may otherwise have missed the opportunity due to lack of information. Its success can be taken to another level through better convergence with stakeholders to introduce new and innovative job opportunities.

Much needed thrust on career counselling

Sound career counselling at an opportune stage of life is very crucial. As part of the project, funds were provided by UNICEF for career counselling in three districts and these were also used for skill development. For example, in Jalpaiguri district, **600-1,000** youth participated and directly got jobs in companies. An online resource hub Udyogi Bangla was also developed subsequently to create a database of the trained youth and organizations linked for employment opportunities.

Providing confidence, self-belief and promise of a better future

Overall, the wave of enthusiasm and positivity was palpable in each of the intervention blocks and districts. Young people, family members, school teachers, frontline health workers, local administrators and others were unanimous in acknowledging the improvement in quality of life as adolescents became optimistic about their future. Skilling them and making them job-ready was a major takeaway of the programme. This was followed by handholding support to enable them to find good jobs and build their careers.



Today after completing the sales and marketing training given by NYKS at Trinity institute I have an appointment letter to join Eureka Phones as a sales representative. I can now see a bright future ahead.

Rakesh Ganguli, Beneficiary, Kolkata

Challenges

Absence of professional aspiration mapping tool and methodology: While mapping in itself was a much needed exercise providing crucial information related to youth indicators including their background and needs, a systematic tool and monitoring efforts are needed. This exercise would provide clarity to the project team and evaluators.

Scarcity of training institutes especially in rural districts: Absence of institutes of higher learning and training in rural areas was a major impediment

to those youth who wanted to equip themselves with job-related skills. Practical learning is much needed to bridge the gap between employers' expectations and the level of knowledge and skill that career aspirants possess.

Need for more convergence to link new skills to market demand:

With limited exposure and knowledge of the job market, young people had restricted information about work opportunities, new skill sets and the emerging job scenario. There is a need for more convergence with various marketing sectors for creating job opportunities for the youth who have received vocational training.

Innovations

Holding “Sankalp se Siddha”, a district level youth convention

An awareness programme was conducted by UNICEF where over 3,000 beneficiaries participated directly and more than 300,000 benefitted indirectly. This initiative was converged with other ministries and departments to facilitate larger participation from block/district/state administration/Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs). The goal was to transform it into a mass movement that could transition itself into the post-project period.

Job-related training by companies

An effort was made to work with students who do not get jobs even after career counselling and prepare them more thoroughly. A major breakthrough came when companies like Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS) came on board. They came to the district and conducted training for 900 youth and absorbed

them. Similarly, training by the Honda Company led to many students getting suitable placement in their branches. Even now, after the skill development training has been completed, the team continuously follows up and keeps making efforts to place them.

Implementing the zero finance model

The self-sustainable model of zero finance ensures funding for viable projects. Several projects have been promoted through this scheme such as kitchen gardens which is the most popular type of project. Once youth acquire a certain basic level through trainings, they are linked to organizations like NABARD who can support skilled youth with self-sustainable models. This kind of initiative will be scaled up to other focus districts in the future. A youth club in Khuj Vihar began work with a zero sustainable model by integrating poultry, fishery and mushroom farming in 3,000 hectares of land. Since then, they have grown and registered an impressive turnover of INR 5 crores. In another instance, some youth groups had initiated artificial ponds of 15 x 15 sq. metres area at an investment cost of INR 12,000-14,000 and this yielded over INR 100,000 over a year.

Way forward

Building on the excellent response from NYKS volunteers and associated programme stakeholders, UNICEF will continue to provide direct and indirect support in linking youth/adolescents with vocational training in other intervention districts in 2020. The feedback and insights that have emerged from the initial implementation will address some of the gaps and challenges especially with respect to developing an effective tool and methodology to identify training required and mapping existing government/non-government resources to create more effective linkages for job placements. Strengthening partnerships with the private sector and a one-stop resource centre in Purba Medinipur are in the pipeline with support from Haldia Energy Limited. These efforts will go a long way in creating greater visibility around the need to empower young people with knowledge, skills and resources so they can be an asset to their families, communities and the country which is the overarching goal of NYKS.



for every child

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