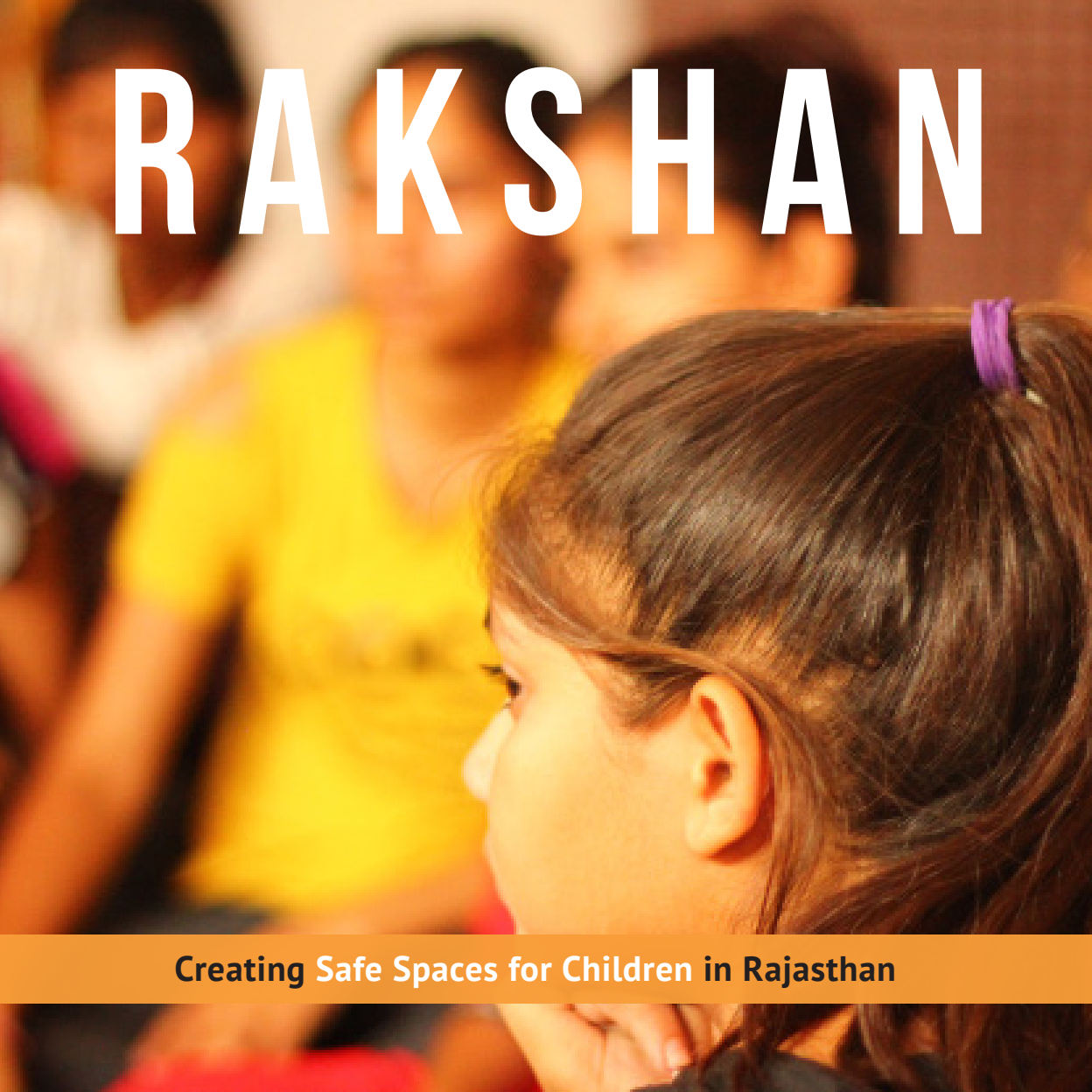
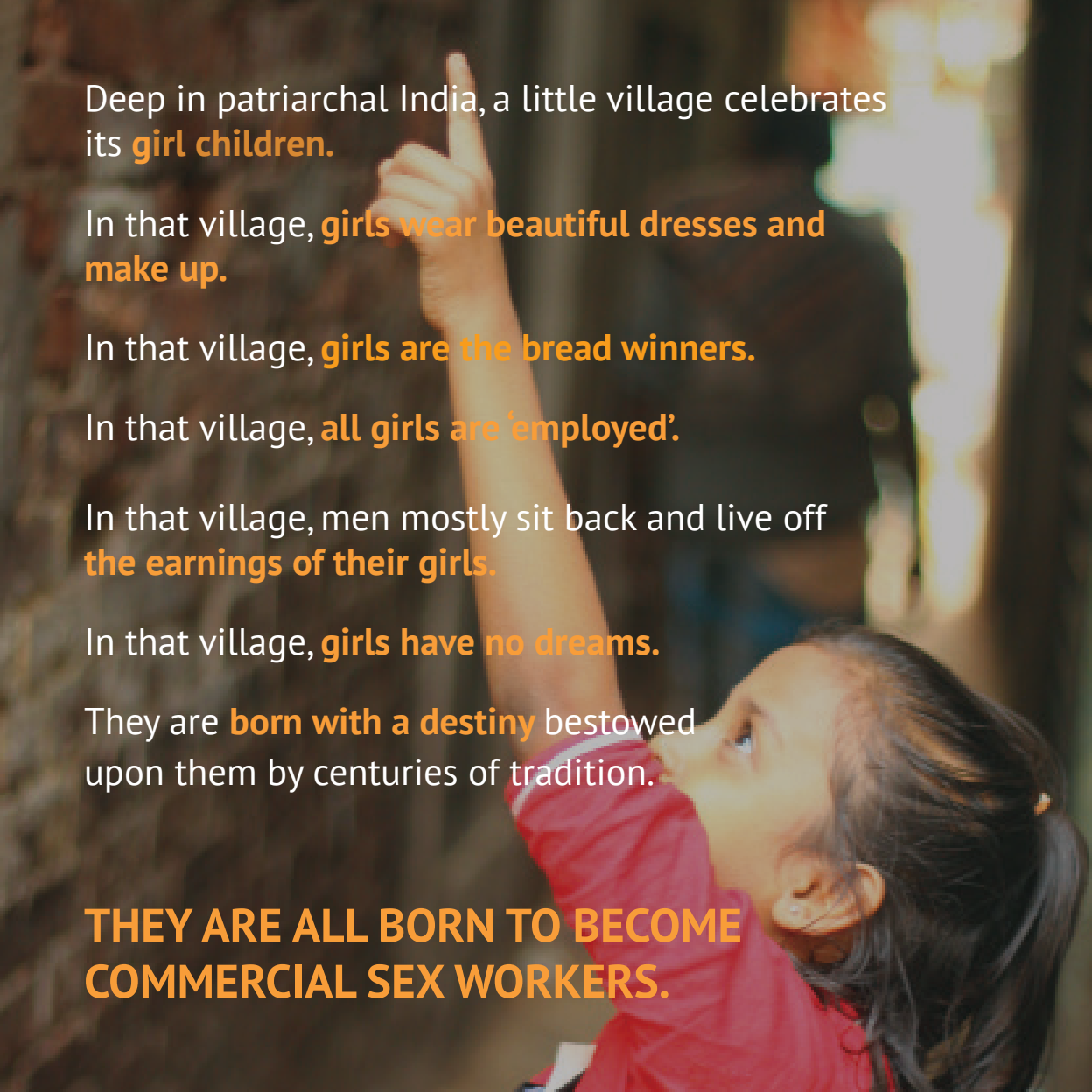
RAKSHAN



Creating Safe Spaces for Children in Rajasthan



Deep in patriarchal India, a little village celebrates its **girl children.**

In that village, **girls wear beautiful dresses and make up.**

In that village, **girls are the bread winners.**

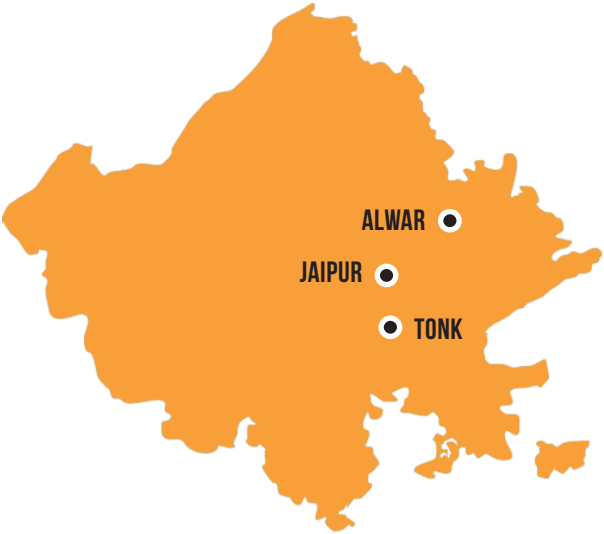
In that village, **all girls are 'employed'.**

In that village, men mostly sit back and live off **the earnings of their girls.**

In that village, **girls have no dreams.**

They are **born with a destiny** bestowed upon them by centuries of tradition.

THEY ARE ALL BORN TO BECOME COMMERCIAL SEX WORKERS.



RAJASTHAN

In the western Indian state of Rajasthan, in the middle of India's tourist triangle, just 100 kilometers away from the pink city of Jaipur a community continues to preserve an abysmal practice: to force all its girls into sex work.

Each day, for as long as this region remembers, girls of a particular community have been doing just that. These communities, systematically marginalised and excluded from mainstream society, face numerous challenges, including the disturbing practice of sending their minor daughters for commercial sex work. For decades, this custom has persisted, girls as young as 13 years old, dressed in bright clothes and amateur makeup, stand outside single-room shacks lining the road. Many are sent to distant cities to earn for their families, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation that has plagued the region for generations.

At iPartner India, we are deeply committed to breaking this cycle, empowering these vulnerable girls, and advocating for systemic change within these communities.

CHANGE IS COMING,

BUT THE REVOLUTION IS FAR AWAY

WHAT WE DO

From education and employment opportunities to awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts, Rakshan works tirelessly in 22 villages of Tonk, Alwar and Jaipur districts with the De-Notified communities to create a safer, more inclusive society for all.

Rakshan works with the entire eco-system to bring a systemic change. We collaborate, take action and facilitate engagement between families, community leaders, as well as the legal, administrative, economic and socio-cultural environment through a range of bespoke and targeted interventions. The aim is to build a future where every child can thrive, free from the shackles of exploitation and injustice.

THE INTERVENTIONS ARE AT VARIOUS LEVELS:

ACCESS AND LINKAGES WITH FORMAL EDUCATION AS A LIFE TRANSFORMATION APPROACH

Scholarship Programme for children and young adults: Providing scholarships, and also linking girls and boys to existing government and private scholarships, to encourage girls to stay back in school. The most vulnerable girls are sponsored for education in a leading boarding school in Rajasthan.

Ensuring Secondary Education for School Dropouts: Drop-out children are enrolled with the State Open Education Board and provided with coaching classes.

Rakshan Education and Resource Centre: The centers operate as RS-CIT (Rajasthan State Certificate Course in Information Technology) centers authorized by the State Government, offering courses in basic computers and English and providing extra support for youth to become job-ready.

Safe Play Spaces – To bring back play and sports in the lives of children by making play accessible through interactive and sustainable playscapes, the play elements are made of used tires and other scrap materials. The playgrounds are upgraded in government schools.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND MOBILISATION

Connecting Women with Credit Institutions:

Formation and strengthening of Self Help Groups (SHGs) to help women save, diversify their source of income, get inputs on financial management, small businesses and also a space where discussions on violence against women and girls can take place during the SHG meetings.

Strengthening School Management Committees (SMCs):

Strengthening SMCs and making them aware of offenses against children, the helpline number, and motivating them to further sensitise teachers on the same.

Formation and Strengthening of Village-Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPC):

Activating and strengthening of VLCPCs in all villages and making them aware of their role in child protection during the SHG meetings.

Promoting Goatry and Poultry Units for Increased Income and Nutrition:

Goat farming and small poultry unit farming offer economical and sustainable livelihood opportunities within rural communities and add to the family income thus reducing the burden on the girls to earn.

Kitchen gardens:

An important activity to form rapport with the community, Kitchen Gardens have also proven to be a source of small income for the families and better nutritional status of women and children, reducing the burden on the girls to earn.

LEADERSHIP AND AGENCY BUILDING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

Bal Panchayats:

22 Bal Panchayats have been formed and strengthened with children in the age group of 7 – 17 years. Children through the Bal Panchayats learn about their rights and learn to address the issues concerning their lives.

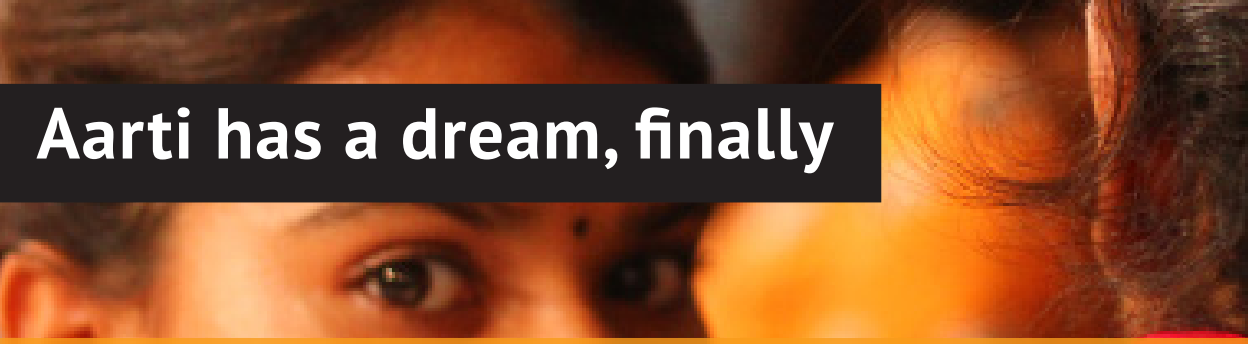
Youth Groups:

22 youth groups have been formed and strengthened. This is an important space for the youth to interact and enhance their leadership and aspirations.

WORKING WITH LOCAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS FOR AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Continuous engagement with Panchayat representatives to ensure the linkage of the target community to relevant welfare schemes and programmes.

Regular interactions with the Child Welfare Committee on individual cases that need immediate intervention.



Aarti has a dream, finally

Aarti, whose name has been changed to protect her identity, grew up in a family deeply entrenched in a tradition of commercial sex work. Despite societal norms and family pressures pushing her towards this path, Aarti had a strong determination to chart her own course in life. Aarti's family, spanning several generations, had only known one profession: commercial sex work. This legacy posed significant challenges for Aarti as she sought to pursue her education and break away from the traditional expectations imposed upon her. Her desire to pursue an alternate career as an IAS aspirant was met with a lot of resistance from her family and extended relatives.

Aarti's journey towards empowerment began when she received support from Rakshan to study in a boarding facility and complete her graduation. This was a crucial aspect of the intervention as the scholarship to study in a boarding facility not only enabled her to focus on her studies without the distractions and pressures from her family environment but also gave her a safe space to nurture her aspirations and talents. The support continues as she takes the coaching for her IAS exams and pursues her dream of becoming an IAS officer.

Despite facing immense familial and societal pressures, Aarti remained steadfast in her commitment to excel in her studies. She engaged in constant dialogue with her family, advocating for her chosen path and negotiating for the freedom to pursue her education and career aspirations.

Aarti's dedication and resilience paid off. She has become a role model for other girls in similar circumstances, inspiring them to defy societal norms and pursue their dreams. Most importantly, Aarti's determination led her to become the first girl from her village to not only complete her education but also graduate—a significant achievement in a community where girls often leave school by the 8th grade.

SHE NOW HAS A DREAM.

WHAT RAKSHAN WANTS TO ACHIEVE

1. Make government and service providers accountable for child protection.
2. Engage with policy makers and advocate for better implementation of existing policies on child protection.
3. Ensure that youth have access to alternate livelihood opportunities and create an environment where women and girls exercise autonomy over their lives.
4. Create an effective network of adolescent girls and boys for peer learning and building leadership skills.
5. Facilitate knowledge sharing to ensure replicability of Rakshan's model in other Indian districts.

THE RAKSHAN MODEL AT A GLANCE

iPartner india - Theory of Change

1 THE CHALLENGE

The main challenge is keeping children – girls and boys from all communities especially the De-Notified Communities (DNT) from being trafficked. A largely invisible population, the minor boys and girls, especially those in rural and tribal areas, are victims of a socio-cultural belief system that renders them powerless with no freedom to decide their future.

2 WHAT WE DO

Founded in 2009 as a registered trust, iPartner India's vision is to help create a just and equitable India where vulnerable communities, without discrimination, have access to opportunities and the ability to seek sustained and effective solutions to overcome their marginalisation. We work on three thematic areas - **1). Rakshan** focuses on transforming the lives of the most vulnerable and marginalized children and young adults in Rajasthan and West Bengal; **2). Educate Her Empower Her** focuses on providing quality and transformational education to children to build their agency and choose a life of their own and **3) Climate Change** where we connect rural populations with practices that help them become resilient to Climate Change.

3 BARRIERS

1. Lack of political will; 2. Dominant social norms; 3. Inadequate services - Education, health, social welfare & protection; 4. Lack of social, legal and economic autonomy of girls and women; 5. Stigma attached with the DNTs that keep them on the fringes.

4 ASSETS

- Experience of 15 years of working with the most vulnerable and marginalized children and young adults.
- 5 years of experience in implementing Rakshan on the ground to empower the Nat communities, part of DNT.
- Partnership with on-ground organisations who have immense grassroots experience and a stronghold in the given project area.

5 INTERVENTION

1. Generating livelihood for the women, men and out-of-school adolescent girls and boys.
2. Providing education scholarships to children and young adults.
3. Creating an effective network of adolescent girls and boys for peer learning and building leadership skills.
4. Strengthening and coordinating with existing governance bodies like the Village Level Child Protection Committees, Child Welfare Committees, School Management Committees, Panchayat and Child Helpline.

6 OUTCOME

7 KEY ASSUMTIONS

- Generating awareness on child protection leads to safe mobility for children.
- Access to better education and healthcare facilities leads to a better future.
- Access to better education and healthcare facilities leads to a better future.
- If parents understand the importance of education, children will be able to continue with their education and not be sent out for work.
- If existing government bodies are strengthened they will be able to advocate for better implementation of policies.
- If better livelihood opportunities are given to parents and other family members, children will have a higher chance of completing their education.

8 IMPACT

THE CHILDREN FROM SELECTED BLOCKS AND VILLAGES WILL HAVE SAFER MOBILITY. IT WILL BREAK THE CYCLE OF TRAFFICKING BY MAKING SELECTED VILLAGES A SAFE SPACE FOR CHILDREN. IT WILL EMPOWER THE COMPLETE ECOSYSTEM TO SUPPORT CHILDREN IN RE-CLAIMING THEIR LIVES, FREE FROM TRAFFICKING AND CHILD MARRIAGE. THUS, IT WILL WORK WITH THE WHOLE COMMUNITY TO GARNER SUPPORT FOR THE GIRL, THEREBY BENEFITTING ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY.