



# aarambh

Supporting Communities  
to Safeguard Children

## Annual Report

### 2015

An Initiative By



ADM CAPITAL FOUNDATION

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## I. Executive Summary

*'The beginning is always today' – Mary Shelley*

Year 2015 was a year of new beginnings at the Aarambh Initiative of Prerana & the ADM Capital Foundation. While we continued to consolidate the National Resource Centre, trained different groups and provided care & support to victims, we ventured into three new areas of work – creating child friendly systems in the city of Mumbai, research and advocacy.

Throughout the year more than 30 organizations contributed to various aspects of the initiative. 10 new organizations signed up to be a part of the Safety Network at the National Resource Centre. We averaged close to 2500 visitors every month on the online portal. More than 10 organizations/individuals reached out to us and contributed time and resources towards strengthening the national portal.

We directly intervened in 87 cases of child sexual offences through our programs. Prerana was appointed as a support agency for 19 children where our social workers worked as 'Support Persons' under the POCSO law providing care and support to victims. The teams continue to work towards ensuring comprehensive rehabilitation of children who have come in contact with us. UNICEF came on board as a partner and a funder for the pilot initiative on creating child friendly systems in the city of Mumbai. Through this initiative we started direct interventions at the Child Welfare Committees and Hospitals in Mumbai City and Suburban districts.

We developed the concept and working model of a 'Mobile Child Friendly Kit' – a tool kit that can be assembled and used by individuals accompanying child victims to various locations. After a successful pilot, 32 child friendly kits were developed and distributed to key government agencies and organizations in Mumbai, Thane and Raigad districts.

We trained close to 1500 individuals in 6 comprehensive modules on child safety and child protection. Our module on 'Online Safety' was delivered in local languages for the first time.

We launched our advocacy initiative 'POCSO On The Ground' to stimulate evidence-based discussions on successes and challenges of working with the new law on protecting children from sexual offences. The aim of these discussions were to understand from people on the ground, the nuances of working with the law. We wanted to collate their experiences to influence state and national policy. In 2015, we engaged with more than 22

organisations and 100 individuals throughout the year to understand and collate their view points and experiences.

Under our new Research Unit, we began work on statewide research on understanding POCSO implementation in Maharashtra. The aim of this research was to generate evidence especially from the rural areas on the effectiveness of the law and availability of child protection systems. The research design and pilot data collection has been completed.

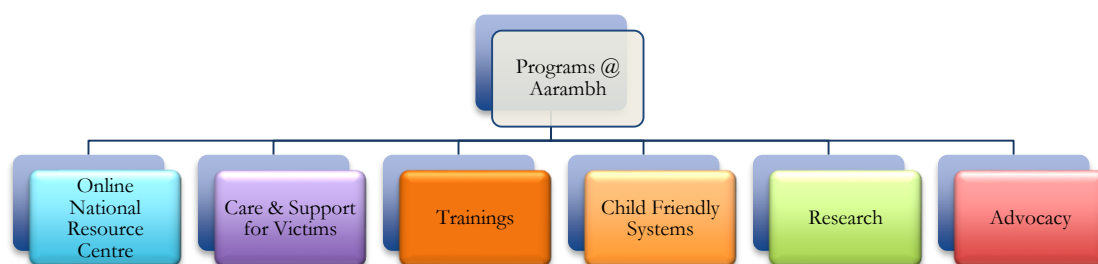
Throughout the year we had our shares of challenges and moments of struggle. However we continue to work everyday with the hope and determination that we can support all communities to protect our children. We will continue to do so one person, at a time.

## II. About Aarambh

Started in 2012, Aarambh is a joint initiative of NGO Prerana & the ADM Capital Foundation. This initiative that gathers Prerana's 28 years of experience as well as the international 'Break the Silence' work promoted by ADM Capital Foundation to support communities to safeguard children from sexual abuse & exploitation. (For more visit [www.aarambhindia.org](http://www.aarambhindia.org))

With the philosophy of, 'learn from the best, demonstrate on the ground and share with all', Aarambh focuses on building knowledge through intensive training, case management, support in the implementation of the new law POCSO and providing access to accurate & targeted information on child sexual abuse.

## III. Our Programs & Team



In 2015, three new programs started under the initiative. We started our Partnership with UNICEF on 'Creating Child Friendly Systems in Mumbai & Suburban districts. We also began work on our research project and the advocacy initiative 'POCSO On The Ground'.

The programs are implemented by a team of 9 professionals with a background in social work, mental health and communications.

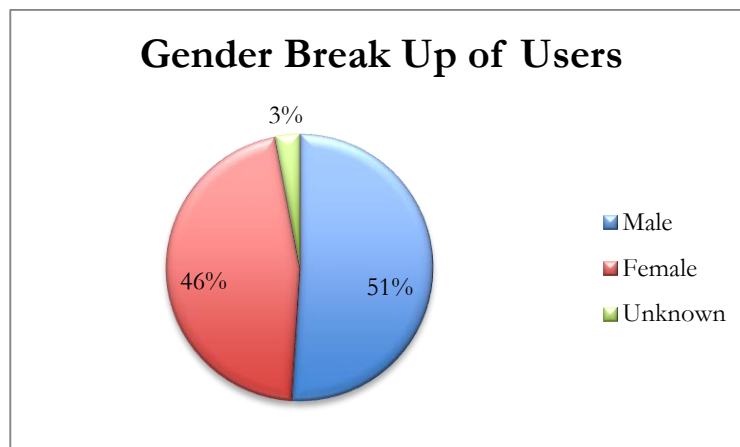
## IV. Program Specific Information

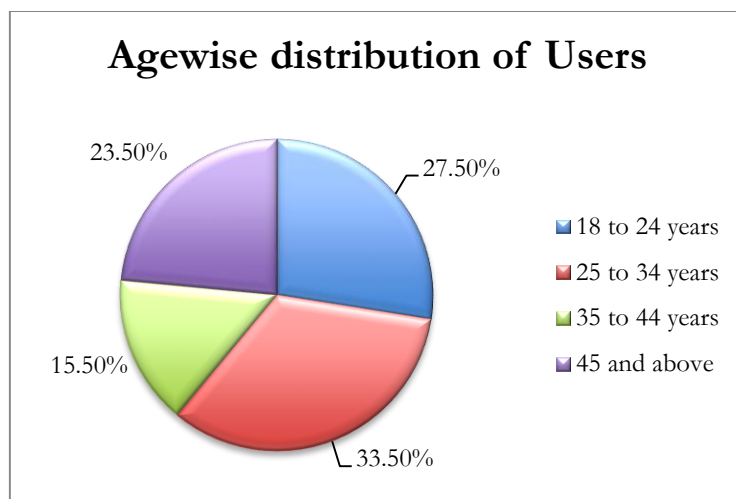
### 1. National Resource Centre:

Launched in November 2014 [www.aarambhindia.org](http://www.aarambhindia.org) is India's first online resource portal on the issue of child sexual abuse prevention and child protection. Over the last one-year we have had a great response from civil society organizations and government agencies on information that is presented on the portal.

Some of the National Resource centre for the year 2015 were a 30% increase the in the number of visitors on the portal every month and our social media engagements. We also aimed to weekly update the information on the portal, create content in local languages and at least aim at getting 2 to 3 smaller organizations to be a part of the National network.

**We had 12,636 users in 2015** with an average of ~2500 visitors on the National Portal every month. This was our first full year when we measured the number of visitors since the portal was launched only in end of 2014.





We published 51 posts thus meeting our target of one post a week throughout the year. The posts were on varied aspects of child protection and child rights with a focus on prevention of sexual abuse of children.

We realized that there was a need to collate weekly news on the issue of child safety and child protection across the world. There was a lack of centralized system to access updated and current news on the issue. Thus we launched **‘The Catalog’ - the first weekly newsletter in India to focus on issues of Child Safety and Protection.**

These posts and newsletters inform and enable a wide variety of stakeholders like parents, teachers, doctors, lawyers etc. - to strengthen and implement preventive and protective measures to safeguard children around them

We were also featured and acclaimed on the Satyameva Jayate’s website and social media. We have been mapped as part of UNICEF’s “State of World’s Children 2015” campaign.



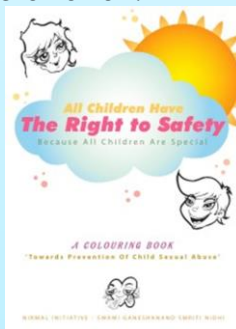
Contributions and participation from other organizations was and remains a key to the success of the National Resource Portal. More than 30 organizations contributed to the various aspects of the initiative. 10 organizations signed up for the Safety Network on the portal. 10 organizations/individuals contributed time and resources towards the portal.

When we launched the portal in 2014, we had a humble target of getting a few organizations to contribute towards the initiative in 2015. However the response has been reassuring. The participation from smaller initiatives and groups in the discussion on child safety has helped us take the resources to our target audience. We also ensured that we engaged with media professionals, feminist groups, health experts and gender experts throughout last year. The aim was to bring everyone's perspective to the table and widen the discourse on child protection in India.



## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ACROSS INDIA - VRINDAVAN TO KERALA

A small initiative based in the temple town of Vrindavan, in the northern State of Uttar Pradesh wrote to us and shared with us their wonderfully practical 'All Children Have a Right To Safety' coloring book in English and Hindi. This initiative was unheard of and we found that they were doing some good work in the communities around Vrindavan. We readily published a post highlighting the book and how it helps adults engage children in a series of discussions about personal safety in a manner that is easy, creative and fun.



Delhi based firm I-ProBono that provides free legal assistance to civil society organizations shared their guidelines on 'How to question a child in court?'. In 2014, they successfully represented a child victim whose credibility as a witness had been previously questioned by the Trial Court. The High Court based its decision primarily on the testimony of the child, and criticized the trial court for not attaching due importance and credibility to her testimony. Their Guidelines took the salient parts from this judgment and also draws from other cases and international standards.

Kerala based organization, Bodhini contributed to the resources on our online safety page by sharing their films and posters for raising awareness among civil society on the issue of online safety. The films and posters are available on the portal in Malayalam and English.

## 2. Care & Support:

While we were building the national resource centre we met with many organizations working on the issue and realized the providing comprehensive care and support to victims was one of the major challenge. The sexual assault has the potential to throw the well being of a child off balance. We realized that while it is important to ensure that justice is delivered through proper legal proceedings, it is equally important if not more to ensure that the child's regular day-to-day life remains unhampered. Thus we introduced our care and support program to demonstrate a best practice model in providing the needed support



for victims. Thorough follow up and long term rehabilitation are main ethos of our care and support program. In 2014 we were providing care and support to 3 victims, we wanted to increase the reach to at least 10 cases in 2015.

In the year 2015, we were appointed as a support agency under the law to provide assistance to 19 children who are victims of Child Sexual offences. The social workers from team Aarambh were support persons to these children and ensured that their education, counseling and other activities continued unhampered. We worked closely with the police, the judiciary, children and their guardians/families to ensure that they were not revictimised and continued to live a regular life.



We have had some great learning's through our care and support program throughout the year. We believe that these observations and learning's are our building blocks in creating a robust program that could then be widely disseminated and replicated by other organizations in the years to come.

**IF IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO PROTECT A CHILD,  
IT TAKES THE WHOLE TOWN TO REHABILITATE ONE**

In May 2015, the Child Welfare Committee in Raigad district brought to light a horrific case of sexual assault in a shelter home. 18 children housed in a unregistered, unauthorized residential facility suffered severe abuse at the hands of the care takers and family of the managing staff of the shelter home. Some of the girls were subjected to severe sexual abuse over a period of 2 years. Most of the children had no information about their parents & family.

The Child Welfare Committee proactively set up a fact-finding team to support the case. The girls were housed in Prerana's Naunihal Shelter home and Prerana was appointed as a support agency to provide care & protection for victims. Our social workers were appointed as support persons to support the 18 children in the case.

We were present throughout the process of police enquiry and investigation. Regular counseling sessions began with all the children. The children were extremely worried about their future. Most of the girls mentioned that they wanted to continue schooling and did not want a halt in their education.

The educational year in India starts in the month of June. It was already mid May when the case was registered and the girls were shifted to the shelter home. There were also security threats if the girls continued to go to school they attended previously. But the girls made it clear that they would want to pursue their studies. 3 girls in particular had to appear for the Grade X exam in 2016 (Grade X is considered as an important educational milestone)

With the help of senior child rights activists in the fact finding committee, Prerana met with the Education Minister of Maharashtra to appeal to him to consider the case. It was decided that the girls (especially the older ones) do not have to attend regular schools; the 3 girls in Grade X can directly appear for their final exams from nearby centers. The education board agreed to consider this as a special case.

Subsequently we met the district education officers and completed the paperwork. The team also hired a tutor who could provide consistent and comprehensive coaching to the girls throughout the year. The 3 girls have settled well in their study routine and are preparing to appear for their board exams in March 2016.

The team also applied for identification certificates and other paper work for all children in this case. The remaining girls continue to go to school alongwith coaching sessions at the shelter home. The boys housed in different shelter homes are provided with regular counselling by our team.

The investigation in the case is completed and the children will have to appear in court soon to testify. The social workers will be present with the children as they testify in court. We will also start working on their long term rehabilitation plan post the trial of the case.

### 3. Trainings & Workshops:

Even before we launched our resource portal in 2014 we had realized that one of the key interventions in protecting children from sexual offences is to train the people who have access to children. We strongly feel that Parents, Teachers, Police, Media, Doctors, Social Workers and any other professional who comes in contact with children has to take the responsibility and ownership for child protection.

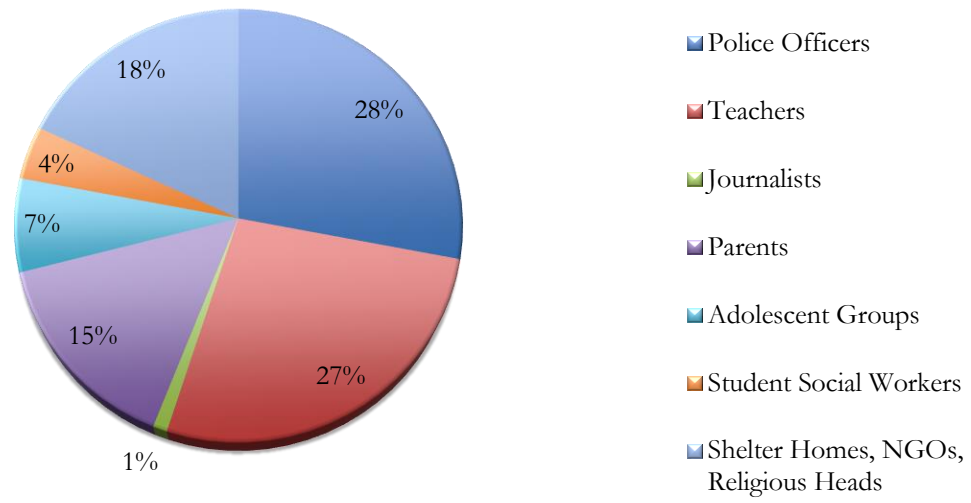
In 2014, we had trained 437 legal and non-legal custodians of children in 2 modules on child safety. The aim for 2015 was to reach out to at least 100 police officers and 500 members from other groups through our training and sensitization program.

In 2015, we trained over 1500 individuals in 6 comprehensive modules on child safety and child protection. The different modules included Basic Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, History and Evolution of Laws against Sexual offences of children, Online Safety and developing a child protection policy.

We were invited by the District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) across the 5 districts of Mumbai, Thane, Raigad, Satara and Solapur to train police officers on the POCSO law. We trained 420 police officers across these five districts. Our module on the law and online safety were delivered in local languages of Marathi and Malayalam for varied audiences.

We also helped a south Mumbai based day care center to develop their own child protection policy. Over a period of 1 week we ensured comprehensive training of all staff members, parents and the management of the day care.

## Training groups



## **'WE WILL STAY AWAKE & AWARE'**

### ***A story from our Solapur Police Training***

It was a hot afternoon in the Solapur district of Maharashtra. We had just finished addressing a crowd of around 70, which included police officers, members of the district child protection unit and the Child Welfare Committee from across the Solapur District of Maharashtra. Post the training a young police officer in the audience, a lady Sub-Inspector, reached out to the mike.

She looked out to her fellow officers and said, "Let's face it – it is not easy for us (the police) to stay awake. We have night duty, extra hours, long days... you name it! We need our post-lunch siesta. But today is the first-ever training where our attention never wavered. We were aware and awake and felt like we were part of it. The session was delivered in a language and manner that we could relate to. And now the next time we come across a case of POCSO, we know what we must do."

The hall exploded in laughter, cheers and applause.





#### 4. Creating Child Friendly Systems in the city of Mumbai

As an attempt to understand how the POCSO law unfolds on the ground, we partnered with UNICEF, to start a pilot project on creating ‘Child Friendly Systems’ in the form of Collaborative Child Response Units (CCRUs) in hospitals, appointment of Support Persons in Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) in Mumbai and evidence-based advocacy on the POCSO law. The project was started in June 2015.

It was envisaged that the social workers based at hospitals and child welfare committees would work closely with the systems in ensuring their smooth functioning and sensitive response to cases of sexual offences against children. The social workers would act as a liaison between the various departments in the hospitals and support victims and families through co-ordination with police, CWCs, DCPUs, NGOs, support persons and agencies etc.



The hospital based response units could not be initiated due to lack of permissions from the departments. Our partner UNICEF was incharge of securing these permissions and getting us access to the hospitals, however the permissions were not granted last year. They hope to get us the permissions in 2016.

We started work at the two child welfare committees in July 2015. We focused on ignored aspects like digitization of cases registered under POCSO, follow up and long term rehabilitation of children who have come to the CWC, collaboration among stakeholders working with the CWC and training their teams in sensitive handling of cases.

**Under the project we have digitized more than 166 cases under POCSO at both the CWCs.** Previously there was no digital records of these cases. The cases were in files or bundle of papers that were precariously tied together. The digitized database is available at both the CWCs and is regularly updated by the team with the current status of the case. The details of the child victim such as name, age, gender, address, contact number, case details including FIR details, medical examination details, particulars of the alleged accused and follow up details at the CWC is mentioned in the database.



Many child victims were produced in front of the CWCs after the registration of an offence under POCSO. However there was no proper record and consistent follow up on the rehabilitation of the children. **Since June 2015, we have been able to initiate the process of follow up of 64 cases across Mumbai & Suburban district.** The teams are in the process of working with the police and the CWCs to ensure that victims get compensation and are properly rehabilitated.



There are many civil society organizations that work with both the CWCs in Mumbai. It was important to ensure that there was consistent and complete dialogue between all the civil society organizations and the child welfare committees. We wanted to ensure that the challenges at both ends were addressed and there were no duplication of efforts.

We organized for joint meetings of the civil society groups and the CWC members thus initiating an open discussion on 'How to best work on POCSO cases together'. **More than 40 individuals from across 12 organizations along with the 9 CWC members of both districts participated in these meetings.** It was an important platform where organizations had a chance to voice their concerns with the CWC members on POCSO cases. Various issues ranging from proper documentation of cases to recording statements of victims were openly discussed.

As an outcome of one of the meetings we were given the responsibility to train the Probation Officers and Civil Society Members in 'How to conduct a thorough Home Study of Victims?' and 'How to record the statement of child victims who come to the CWC?' We conducted this training program in partnership with International Justice Mission and trained more than 25 individuals on the above-mentioned aspects. Through this training program we have been able to ensure that we up skill frontline workers who work directly with child victims, this is a crucial aspect of building a child friendly system.

Throughout the year we have realized that the child friendly systems can be built if there is enough cooperation and collaboration among various agencies responsible for child protection. Through consultative meetings and joint trainings we are making a steady progress in achieving our above-mentioned goals.

## INNOVATE, COLLABORATE & SHARE Creating Child Friendly Kits & Localizing our infographics

The concept of a 'Child Friendly Kit' was born out of Aarambh's on-ground experiences in serving as a support person in cases of sexual offences against children. Despite keeping the best interests of the child at heart, the judicial process tends to be relentlessly tiring and traumatic for the child. The kit, a simple bag, which contains toys, storybooks, coloring equipment, video games, soft toys, food, water etc. helps children remain comforted and engaged throughout the process. It is practical, low cost and endlessly replicable.

We innovated the kit to ensure that children don't feel the pressure and trauma during the entire process of statement recording, medical examination and trial. We wanted other organizations and individuals working with children embrace this simple idea. The Deputy Commissioner of Police in Thane District immediately embraced the idea. We inaugurated our first kit in his office and in the next 6 months developed, 32 such child friendly kits and distributed them to key organizations and institutions across Mumbai.



In 2014, in our attempt to simply the law we created a series of infographics in English. These infographics on the law and how to record statements of children were translated in Marathi and distributed to Police Stations and Institutions across 5 districts in Maharashtra.



## 5. Advocacy:

The Aarambh initiative was conceptualized and started work just before India got its first law on Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO). The law was new and everyone was still trying to understand it's nuances. Although POCSO aspired to be a comprehensive legislation there are certain sections and clauses under POCSO that have evoked a lot of debate and thought.

The morality, legality, and feasibility of some of the clauses under the law have inspired wildly different opinions. Each stakeholder has a different view of a different aspect of the debate and we realized that it was important to hear these varied viewpoints.

**In May 2015, we launched 'POSCO On The Ground' (POTG) start a discussion on the law based on evidence and actual experiences.** POTG was envisaged to be an interactive series of conferences and meetings to create a space and platform where organizations could come together regularly and continue to share experiences and work together on the law.



We focused on understanding the on ground implications of the law. We provided a platform for people from different sectors from within civil society and government agencies to share their on-ground experiences in working with the law. Through the sharing of experiences, we deliberated on new ways to strategize around the issues presented to us by the new law. We seek to raise a collective voice that will advocate for strategic

collaboration, systemic reform, amendments to the existing law, social change and a safer and secure future for every child in India.

**More than 70 individuals representing 20 organizations from across Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore participated in the first series of discussion.**



At the end of the first edition of POCSO On the Ground – three smaller working groups were formed which then decided to discuss specific issues and come up with a consolidated road map/documentation of the discussions. The issues identified and groups formed were to discuss Mandatory Reporting and Age of Consent, Comprehensive rehabilitation of victims under POCSO and how to create uniformity in Health Systems.

Throughout the year we facilitated regular meetings of the working groups. We held the second round of discussion in November 2015, where each group presented the work done so far. We envisage a larger conference in 2016 as a culmination of the work of the groups. Once ready these suggestions, recommendations and learning's will be submitted to the State and Central Governments by the groups for them to take a closer look for the amendment of certain aspects of the law.

## 6) Research:

In 2015, we started our ambitious research project of understanding ‘Status of Implementation of the POCSO law across the State of Maharashtra’. The goal of this research is to get an in depth understanding of the status of the implementation of law in the state, this will then feed into our advocacy at the state and national level. The research will also help us understand in detail experiences of the people who have the mandate to implement the law. The research will also to hear the voices of victims and families, whom the law intends to protect, thus contributing to a very important dimension in child protection in the state.

Under the research project we decided to interview more than 10 stakeholders across 15 districts of Maharashtra to get a clear understanding of how the law is being implemented by them. We also wanted to know the status of the law and its implementation in rural areas. So far we have heard voices only from the urban areas.

We completed the vast task of finalizing the research design, tools for data collection for 10 stakeholders, some secondary data collection and translation of all the tools in the local language Marathi.



We have been able to complete our pilots with 8 stakeholders in Mumbai. In 2016, we plan to finish the rest of the data collection and release the report. We intend to release the research on or before 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2016. We hope that this knowledge will feed into the advocacy initiative and help us inform governments of the real challenges faced by people on the ground.



## VOICES FROM THE GROUND

*"There were situations when police called me during my school days. When I told them I cannot come because I might get late to school, they said 'if you have done something like this, you will have to face the consequences. They asked me if this happened repeatedly, did you not even give your consent once?"*

*- A 14 year old victim's voice*

*"We donot have enough lady police officers. There is one lady sub inspector who is currently on maternity leave and thus unavailable. So how do you expect us to manage taking statements of victims in POCSO cases."*

*- A male police inspector*

*"For me personally under any law I perform my duties with full interest and dedication. Even in normal cases if it is a child involved, we need to take that extra time to take the child into confidence, once the child becomes familiar then the child will answer to all the questions openly. So no matter under what case where a child is involved we need to gain the trust of the child and take them into confidence."*

*- A Public Prosecutor*

## 7. Engagements:

Aarambh was invited to present on 'How we created India's 1<sup>st</sup> Online portal Against Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation' at the second annual All Stakeholder's Conference on Child Sexual Abuse, in Mumbai. The conference was attended by national and international civil society organizations working in the space of child protection and prevention from sexual abuse.

Making an  aarambh



How We Created  
India's 1<sup>st</sup> Online Portal  
Against Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation

UNICEF India invited us to participate in a brainstorming workshop to develop Standard Operating Procedures on School Safety and Security for the Ministry of Human Resource & Development. We took part in the two day brainstorming exercise with 50 experts and drafted the outline for the policy on prevention of sexual abuse of children in schools.

We were also invited to be partners in the 'National Coalition To Fight Child Abuse' initiative by Member of Parliament Rajeev Chandrasekhar.



## V. Challenges

The year also posed three major areas of challenges.

The size of the team tripled in 2015. We had to ensure smooth transition from a team of 3 to a team of 9 and that wasn't easy. The UNICEF project was in its nascent stage and the team was inexperienced. The year threw major challenges in the form of expectations of new recruits and their motivation to do some real hard work on the ground. The only way to overcome this was to train the teams and prepare them to adapt to the ground situation as quickly as we could. We managed to overcome a lot of hurdles and retained 90% of the team that was recruited for the project. The staff turnovers and absenteeism created some roadblocks in the project.

Working directly with Government systems meant that we had to be patient. There were delays in getting permissions, appointments from key offices and convincing the authorities to come on board with our ideas. Thorough communication with our partners and a collaborative approach helped us sail through these challenges. There was a massive delay in getting permissions for the hospital based collaborative child response units. This resulted in changes in the project goals for 2015.

There were delays in the research project due to the inexperience of the teams and the ambitious project goals. We were unable to meet our targets for pilot and district data collection in a timely manner due to unprecedented issues in other projects. The research team had to manage their other activities and focus on the research that proved a bit challenging.

## VI. Conclusion & Way Forward

The Aarambh Initiative was started with a simple mission of guaranteeing access to information, resources and networks on child protection. We wanted to break the monotony and monopoly that existed in communication and resources on the issue of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention. We wanted to strengthen smaller groups and networks working on the issue. Our first attempt at this was the launch of India's first national resource centre [www.aarambhindia.org](http://www.aarambhindia.org).

As we worked on the resource centre we realized that it was crucial to engage with the law and be on the ground to form our opinions around the issue, innovate new models and demonstrate best practices.

### **The Way Forward**

2016, looks like another year of new beginnings. We will launch India's first hotline for reporting online child sexual abuse images. In partnership with the UK based Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) we hope to engage with the internet industry, law enforcement and the civil society to start a constructive discussion and concrete action on the issue of online sex abuse of children in India. We are currently in the process of exploring a partnership with Delhi Police and IWF for a pilot project to be initiated this year.

Our major goal for the National resource centre in 2016 is to build a strong network of contributors who would write for us and take the discourse on child protection to the next level. We also intend to create short videos on our resources, create new infographics on specific aspects of the law and experiment with our first podcast.

We will also release our first research on the 'Status of implementation of POCSO in Maharashtra' in 2016. This research will be our guiding light for advocacy and on ground programs

Working closely with victims and families over the last one year has unlocked a set of new and exciting challenges for the team. We realize the need to invest our time and energy in strengthening government systems and will continue to do so in the years to come. We will start our series on documentation of our learning's in the process of rehabilitation of victims.

We are committed to providing comprehensive care and support to victims & will continue to build on the Child Friendly Systems in Mumbai in partnership with UNICEF. We hope to start the hospital based collaborative crisis response units in 2 hospitals in Mumbai by March 2016. We would continue to ensure that children who come in contact with the initiative receive appropriate intervention and we plan for their long-term rehabilitation.

We aspire to stronger and worker harder in 2016. We hope that we continue what we have begun & everyday is a new beginning for us.



*The Team*