



The Young Voices of Sundarban: Learning, Leading, and Growing

In the remote village of Nandakumarpur Sundarbans, **Kishalaya Sishu Siksha Niketan** Primary School is changing students' lives through an innovative and comprehensive approach to education. Emphasizing open-mindedness and learning through nature, the school has become a vital resource for the community. From a young age, children are introduced to global issues and encouraged to think beyond the boundaries of their village. This unique approach sparks curiosity and awareness, enabling students to connect classroom lessons with real-world challenges. A recent highlight was the celebration of **World Yoga Day** at the Nandakumarpur Knowledge Campus, where students from **Kishalaya Sishu Siksha Niketan** participated with enthusiasm. For these young learners, it was more than just a celebration—it was an opportunity for personal growth and development. The children performed yoga with impressive skill, demonstrating focus, discipline, and genuine eagerness to learn.



Saving Childhoods: Bilash Naiya Rises from Adversity



In the deeply vulnerable coastal belt of South 24 Parganas, where poverty, climate fragility, and lack of education intersect, the lives of children are often confined within cycles of deprivation. Many children, growing up without the presence of either parent—due to distressed migration for livelihood—are left to fend for themselves. With little guidance, they fall prey to early school dropout, child labor, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation.

Bilash Naiya, an 18-year-old youth from Kuemuri village, stands as a symbol of quiet transformation in this grim reality. Born into a humble farming family, Bilash's world was upended when he lost his father to cancer at a young age. The emotional trauma was soon followed by crushing financial burdens incurred from his father's treatment. With debt mounting, Bilash had no choice but to drop out of school and assist his mother in farming while his elder brother migrated to support the family.

Bilash's story mirrors the plight of hundreds of children in the Sundarbans—children who are bright and full of potential but are pulled into labour at tea stalls, cracker factories, or trafficked in the name of jobs. The practice of employing children as domestic workers remains common. In this area with little community awareness and few child protection systems, such realities are tragically common.

To address these challenges towards the upbringing of the children and to provide a safe space, **'Natun Alo'**, a boarding facility for underprivileged children, was established to rescue and rehabilitate at-risk children from exploitative labor and trafficking. In 2018, with the help of the local Village Pradhan, Bilash was identified and enrolled in this life-changing initiative. Though initially overwhelmed by the separation from his mother, Bilash gradually found comfort, friendship, and guidance at the residential school. With a nurturing environment and dedicated mentorship, he began to rebuild his academic journey.

Bilash excelled in his studies, scoring **75.3%** in Class 11 and **92.8%** in Class 12 from Krishnachandrapur High School. A passionate reader, he developed a deep love for English literature and fiction. Today, he is pursuing a **B.A. (Hons) in Geography from Ashutosh College, affiliated with the University of Calcutta**, a remarkable achievement considering the challenges he has overcome. He secured nearly 77% marks in the first semester, which is a significant achievement. Though the pressure to earn and support his family still looms large, Bilash remains determined. He is actively seeking part-time work opportunities to ensure that he can continue his studies without burdening his already struggling family. Bilash's dream is not just about personal success, but also about uplifting others like him. He aspires to work for social development in the future, helping other vulnerable children reclaim their lost childhoods and shape brighter futures.

[Read more](#)



Safe Spaces for Girls: Promoting Gender-Sensitive Infrastructure in Schools



As a progressive stride towards ensuring **gender-sensitive infrastructure** in educational institutions, 15 girls' common rooms have been renovated in 15 schools across the **Nadia, Alipurduar, Murshidabad, and East Midnapur** districts. This initiative is part of the Infrastructure Development Project and aims to create a safe, private, and supportive environment for adolescent girls within school premises.

The newly set-up common rooms are equipped with essential facilities to address the health, hygiene, and comfort needs of girl students. Each room includes a **Sanitary Pad Vending Machine, a Used Pads Disposal Machine, a Bed for rest during illness, and an LED TV** for educational and recreational purposes.

This intervention is expected to significantly enhance the well-being and dignity of girl students, reduce absenteeism, and foster active participation in school life. It marks an important step towards creating inclusive and empowering environments for young girls in educational settings.

From Char Lands to Green Shields: Women Driven Mangrove Revival in Sundarbans

SHG groups from **Mathurapur II, Namkhana, Patharpratima, and Sagar** blocks are actively engaged in pit cutting for **mangrove plantations** in char lands and riverbanks—a critical intervention to strengthen embankments and safeguard against tidal surges, erosion, and cyclonic impacts. Alongside this, Mangrove Nurseries are being developed by the SHG groups to ensure a sustainable and community-driven supply of saplings.

The Sundarbans, one of the most vulnerable ecological zones in the world, faces constant threats due to geographical challenges, environmental degradation, frequent embankment breaches, and limited livelihood options. In this context, the grassroots involvement of women not only protects the ecosystem but also creates dignified livelihood opportunities in remote areas.

Under the **Aranya Project**, the initiative aims to restore **95 hectares** of degraded land by planting **7,15,000** mangrove saplings across the four blocks. This effort signifies the power of community resilience in building climate adaptability and ecological sustainability in the Sundarbans.



Nayantara - Kishori Bahini: The Peer-Led Force Powering Social Change



What began in 2017 with just 18 girls has now blossomed into a vibrant and impactful grassroots movement for adolescent empowerment in rural coastal villages across the districts of West Bengal. In its eighth year now, the **Kishori Bikash- Nayantara Program** has grown to include nearly 800 girls across South 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur districts of West Bengal. 44 **Kishori Bahinis**—adolescent girls' peer groups—are formed already, with more groups forming steadily. Each **Kishori Bahini** consists of 10–12 girls and is led by a peer leader and co-leader. These groups meet monthly to engage in thoughtful discussions on pressing issues such as **child marriage, trafficking, gender-based discrimination, and disaster preparedness**. Far beyond routine meetings, these gatherings serve as hubs for learning, leadership development, and collective action.

A distinctive strength of the program lies in its emphasis on community outreach. These adolescent girls have become powerful local advocates, spreading awareness and mobilizing action across their villages. Each group also maintains a **self-managed savings fund**—a vital safety net created by the girls, for the girls—to support peers facing financial or educational crises.

One such story stands out from 2023: A member of a **Kishori Bahini** lost her father suddenly and was forced to drop out of school. With her mother unable to support the family, she was at risk of early marriage. Recognizing the urgency, her group stepped in. Using their collective savings, they funded her education, preventing the marriage and enabling her to return to school. For this young girl, the support of her peers was more than financial—it was life-changing. She went on to pass her Madhyamik examination in 2025 and is now preparing for her Higher Secondary exams. Her story is just one of many that reflect the power and promise of peer leadership.

The **Kishori Bahini** model stands as a shining example of what happens when adolescent girls are equipped with **knowledge, leadership opportunities, and a platform to act**. They not only uplift themselves, but also their families, peers, and entire communities—proving that the future of social change is already here, and it is being led by young girls with courage, clarity, and conviction.