



Children tying 'rakhee' to Station Master, Lucknow. The rakhee symbolises a bond of protection.

India's first child friendly railway station Charbagh, Lucknow

Photo credits: Ehsaas Lucknow



Child protection booth at Lucknow station, jointly manned by peer educators and police personnel

A process documentation 2011 An Executive Summary

Railway Children India Office: Flat No. 3&4, 1st Floor, Plot No. 109, Shere Punjab C.H.S.,
Mahakali Caves Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai – 400 093, India
Telephone: 91 – 22 – 40056445 / Telefax: 91 – 22 – 28386506
Email: enquiries@railwaychildren.org.uk
Website: www.railwaychildren.org.uk



Tracing the journey of Charbagh, Lucknow as it evolves into India's first child-friendly railway station...

Lucknow, capital of Uttar Pradesh, often described as the City of Nawabs, the Constantinople of India and the Golden City of the East is no stranger to titles. By the end of 2011, a humanitarian initiative underway at the Charbagh, Lucknow railway station promises to give the city a new, benevolent avatar.

A dedicated group of individuals from the Northern Railways (NR), the Railway Protection Force (RPF), the Government Railway Police (GRP), civil society organisations, citizens and children, are striving to make Charbagh, Lucknow India's first Child Friendly Station (CFS).

An estimate that at least 15-20 new children who arrive unaccompanied at the station every month triggered off a series of activities at Charbagh, aimed at reducing the risks faced by such unattended children at the platform. That these initiatives emerged out of a consensus and were implemented in co-operation, promised stability at the outset. In the past five years, the various collaborative child friendly initiatives prevalent at Charbagh, Lucknow have facilitated positive, sustainable change in lives of several children at risk on the railway platform. The facilitators of these changes are now stakeholders in a systemic network, collectively working to attain a vision. Vision 2011: making Charbagh, Lucknow, India's first child friendly station by the end of 2011.

Through this document, Railway Children¹ has attempted to trace the journey of the vision by understanding the factors leading to the conceptualisation and the progress of the earliest child friendly initiatives. It will also offer the reader an insight about the enablers that smoothed the initiatives' trajectory gradually assisting their evolution into a vision, and the disablers that scarred it.

Developing Charbagh into a child friendly station was not set as an agenda at any one given point in time, but evolved over the years. Some of the civil society organisations like Ehsaas, working for the welfare of runaway, destitute and other unattended children at risk at the platform began engaging with the Railways, RPF and GRP officials by exhorting them to be a part of child welfare initiatives. Other groups like porters and vendors who spend a considerable amount of time at the platform, were also roped in.

Since 2006, this proactive network of stakeholders began functioning as a part of the Railway Children Protection and Surveillance Mechanism. Initiated by Ehsaas and the STF and supported by Railway Children, the RCPSM works in three tiers and is focused on ensuring that every unattended child at the platform is away from risk.

The STF's ownership to the cause was reflected through milestones like the installation of the first child protection booth at the platform, the formation of a Special Task Force which vowed to make Charbagh, a 'child protection station'

In 2010, with the stakeholder network offering an effective safety net to children susceptible to risk at the platform, Ehsaas and the STF felt the need to channel the

¹ A UK based development agency working for the cause of street children worldwide, which supports NGOs working for the welfare of street children, in India.

commitment to the initiatives into a larger vision, which led to the inception of Vision 2011.

A series of consultations to conceptualise the vision, involving stakeholder representatives like the Railways, police, NGOs and children, ensured that the vision had a strong, common voice. A space for children at the platform, quick and easy medical facilities, separate shelters for girls and awareness measures to orient everyone arriving at Charbagh about the child friendly practices in progress, were some of the envisaged features in the Charbagh of the future.

Visit the Charbagh as it exists today and you will witness for yourself that though a lot remains to be done, Vision 2011 is albeit on the route to realisation. The members of the STF show an ownership to the child protection and care initiatives by combining their roles as official and moral guardians of children at the platform. Porters and vendors confidently implement the procedure of reaching out to new, unattended children at the platform and referring them to NGOs or the RPF, GRP. Civil society organisations besides Ehsaas are equally dedicated to Vision 2011 as it stands to benefit the 'cause of children at the platform'. Four Child Welfare Officers (two each from RPF, GRP) have been designated to deal with child rights violations and involving children - who may be victims or willing participants in an offence.

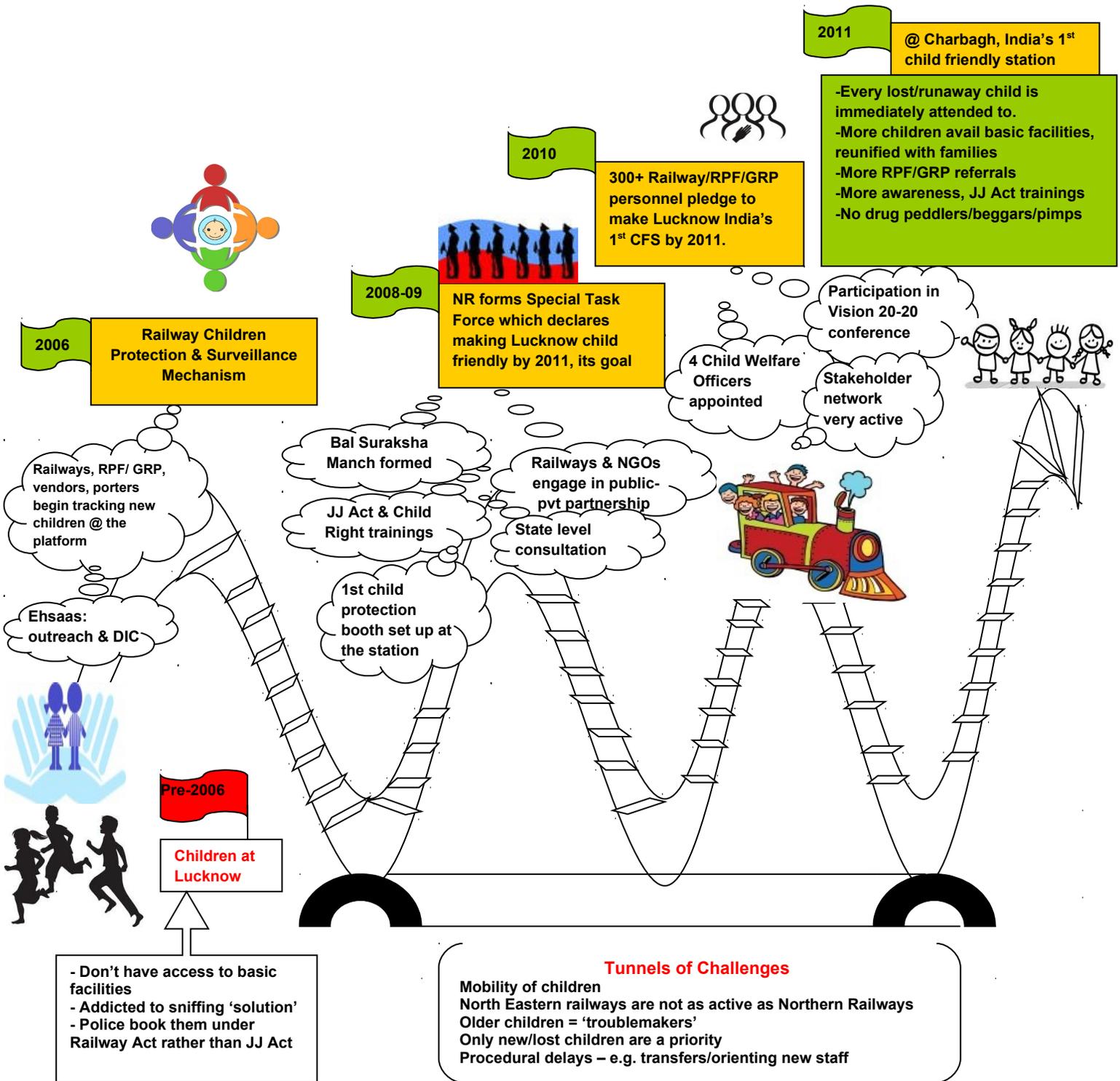
The journey of the vision till now hasn't been entirely smooth as some challenges that existed earlier are yet to be overcome and are likely to persist. The mobility of children, the socio-economic conditions that make them leave home are realities that won't change with a station turning child friendly. Some active stakeholders from the STF have played crucial roles in the planning and practicing phase of the vision, but the risk of official transfers threatens the continuity of their contribution. Certain sections of stakeholders like the GRP, the North Eastern Railways are yet to be actively involved. Challenges are the opportunities to attain excellence and the stakeholders aim to address the above gaps in the near future.

Process documentation in motion!

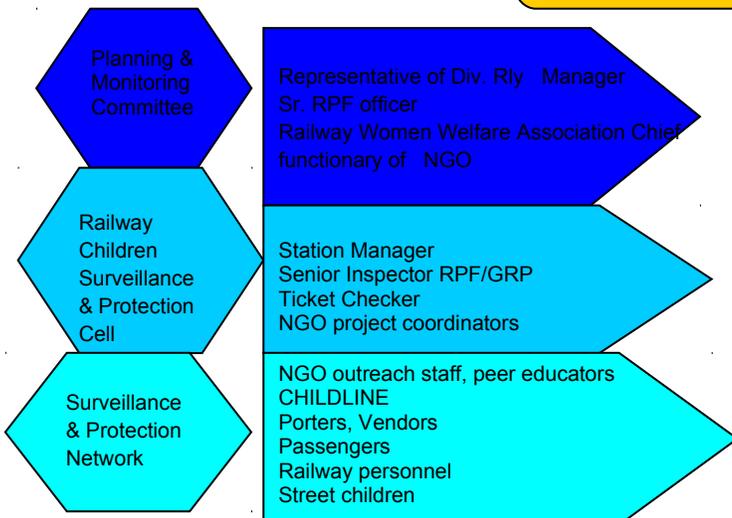
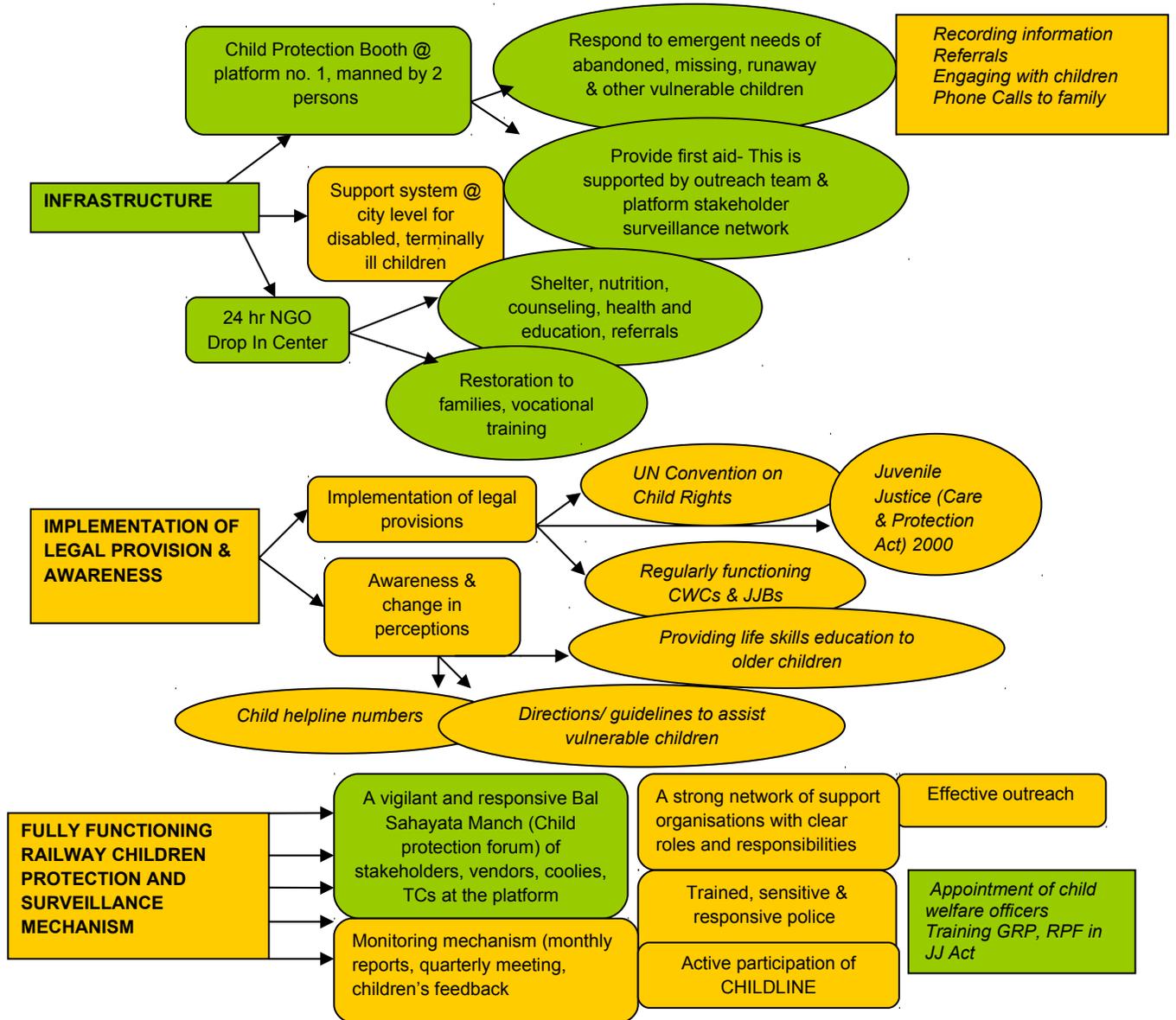
Documenting a process is often a strenuous task owing to the volume of information generated while mapping various stages leading to the challenge of what to incorporate. However, in this process documentation the respite came from a bunch of children! Children who were once the beneficiaries of the child friendly initiatives at the platform are now assuming the role of benefactors. Some such young adults are working as peer educators reaching out to the destitute and homeless children at the platform, determined that 'no other child sees life as they have'. These children represent a living vision of what Charbagh of the future entails. They are inspiring stories of change that display how efforts infused with patience, perseverance, dedication and co-operation can transform lives of children with embittered childhoods.

Note: Two pictorial representations have been given at the end of this document. One explains the trajectory of the child friendly station vision at Lucknow station, and the other is a diagram of the Railway Children Protection and Surveillance Mechanism.

Charbagh Lucknow – India's first child friendly station



Model of a child friendly station at Lucknow: Courtesy: Ehsaas



GREEN boxes indicate those initiatives which are successfully functioning.
AMBER boxes indicate 'work-in-progress' initiatives which are reasonably successful but yet to be completely effective.

RCPSM:
 The **surveillance and protection network** operates at the 'ground zero' level, reaches out to vulnerable children and hand them over at the child protection booth
 The **Railway Children Surveillance & Protection Cell** keeps a lookout for vulnerable children, take decisions regarding them and play a role in referrals
 The **Planning and Monitoring Committee** engages in regular monitoring of the effectiveness of the RCSPM, planning and approving new initiatives for improvement is undertaken during monthly meetings.