

**TRIGGERING SUCCESS:
INNOVATIVE INTERVENTIONS TO
PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN INDIA**



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Triggering Success: Innovative Interventions to Promote Educational Access in India

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2016

This publication is an outcome of a grant from the Tata Trusts to the Harvard University South Asia Institute for a project on 'Livelihood Creation in India through Social Entrepreneurship and Skill Development'. The project explores strategies for strengthening the educational, social and economic empowerment of women.

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Contents

Preface..... 4

Introduction.....5

REFLECTIONS

Educate a Girl, Educate a Nation - Alison Bukhari and Safeena Husain..... 9

Champions: Voices of Girls studying in Senior Secondary Schools in Telangana
- Dr. Shantha Sinha..... 29

The Champions Project: Exploring drivers of girls' educational success in
college, in Rajasthan - Orla Kelly and Jacqueline Bhabha.....41

CASE STUDIES

M V Foundation.....53

White Lotus Trust.....71

Ibtada.....103

Centre for Unfolding Learning Potentials.....139

Preface

Thanks to the generosity and support of the Tata Trusts, the Harvard South Asia Institute, in collaboration with the Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, had the opportunity of convening some of India's most impressive and creative civil society organizations working in the field of girls' education. The convening took the form of a short but intensive workshop outside Mumbai at the end of January 2016. During the course of this meeting, formal presentations on aspects of law, policy and practice concerning education in contemporary India in general and girls' education in particular combined with opportunities for group discussion, networking and case presentation. The result was a rich exchange of views, a learning opportunity for participants, and a decision to highlight for more general dissemination and benefit some of the most original and innovative gender education-related interventions. While some contributions focus on aligning intervention outcomes with development investments to advance a clearly articulated reform agenda, others probe elusive questions about the social factors that impinge on girls' educational success. This publication's modest goal, and hope is that the following pages will provide interesting and instructive reading for a range of audiences. This effort is, part of a broader set of projects distributed nationwide and across public and private sectors aimed at radically improving access to quality education at all stages of the pedagogical process for all India's children and adolescents, an aspiration still a long way in the making.

We welcome feedback from readers and hope to develop further work with our dedicated researcher and practitioner colleagues over the coming months and years.

Jacqueline Bhabha
Professor of the Practice of Human Rights
Harvard University.

Introduction

Education is central to the future development of India's citizenry as active and empowered contributors in building a vibrant and democratic country with social justice and non-discrimination at its core.

Over the past decades, dramatic strides have been witnessed in terms of exponential increase in access to primary education of very large sections of previously excluded populations. However, enduring challenges remain. One relates to ensuring access for the most marginalized and stigmatized groups, including low caste girls, tribal children, children with disabilities and children living in conflict-affected areas. Another challenge relates to improving the quality of learning and the outcomes of the educational system, to ensure access to skill development necessary for productive and well-remunerated employment. Finally, the imperative of reversing pervasive gender-based discrimination continues to generate challenging goals for educational interventions across India.

It is in this context, over an eighteen-month period, that the Harvard South Asia Institute (SAI) explored issues, challenges and solutions connected with the educational empowerment of women in India. The project consisted of field research, capacity strengthening, knowledge dissemination and engagement by Harvard faculty with select organizations across different states. The project reached out to over 45 organizations and worked closely with six of them. Contributions to this volume are primarily based on the work done by four of these organizations. They outline a range of approaches, research studies and policy innovations. Together they paint a rich picture of the toolkit available for future scaling by the central and state governments in India.

The reflections by Alison Bukhari and Safeena Husain from Educate Girls, and Dr. Shantha Sinha, Orla Kelly and Professor Jacqueline Bhabha discussing the Champions Project focus on strategies for incentivizing and scaling success. They explore a range of questions, from the impact of volunteer assistance on increasing the adult to child ratio in schools to multi-factoral drivers of female educational success in challenging contexts. The reflections generate the context for detailed case studies that follow.

The case studies by M V Foundation, White Lotus Trust, Ibtada and Centre for Unfolding Learning Potentials (CULP) focus on innovative strategies introduced

to maximize educational potential, while at the same time exploring the individual narratives that illustrate the broad array of challenges and obstacles that students continue to face. The case studies capture a diverse set of initiatives, from the introduction of targeted means of transport to ensure safety, reliability and affordability in access to education, to the development of alternative forms of educational opportunity that drive significant norm and behavior change in vulnerable communities.

Throughout the different narratives, several themes recur. They include the deep commitment of most parents, particularly mothers, to their children's educational success despite the difficulties they encounter in supporting this practically or financially. They also include the powerful impact of consistent community-based engagement by non-governmental actors as an essential element in building the trust and confidence needed to change traditional gender and child rearing norms. Together these essays and case studies generate useful material for future educational interventions, not only at the primary school level but also at the secondary and tertiary levels, areas that are increasingly vital if entrenched social and economic inequalities are to be challenged.

We wish to acknowledge the efforts of our team that made this publication possible. The guidance from Professor Tarun Khanna, Director, and Meena Hewett, Executive Director, Harvard SAI was valuable. We are very grateful to Professor Jacqueline Bhabha, Faculty Chair of the women's track of the project, for compiling this publication and providing very valuable inputs and insights throughout the course of the project. She was ably assisted by Anisha Gopi who coordinated the field efforts with all grantees, knowledge partners and subject experts. The creative team led by Usha Gawde and Aashika Cunha spared no effort in presenting the content with fine aesthetics. Clare, our copy editor, has done a brilliant job despite tight deadlines. Kundan, Nora, Meghan and Diana from the Harvard SAI Team helped us at every stage of this project. We are obliged to R. Venkataramanan, Executive Trustee, Tata Trusts, and his team for the grant and their consistent cooperation.

We hope that researchers, practitioners, civil society leaders, gender activists, educationists and policy makers will draw some valuable insights from this compilation.

- Dr. Shashank Shah

**Project Director, *Livelihood Creation in India*
Harvard University South Asia Institute**



Reflections

Educate A Girl, Educate A Nation

Alison Bukhari - UK Director, Educate Girls

Safeena Husain - Founder and Executive Director, Educate Girls



educate girls

Educate Girls

Founded: 2007

Geography: India

Outreach: 2 States, Rajasthan
& Madhya Pradesh

Districts: 10

Villages: 8,000+

Schools: 12,500+

Children: 1.5 million

Budget: \$6.4 million p.a.

Funding: Grants

Registered: India, USA
& UK

Brief History

Established in 2007 and initially focused on the state of Rajasthan, Educate Girls works through its own staff and by leveraging community volunteers and the government school system, to get out-of-school girls in rural India into school and learning. The organization is holistically tackling issues at the root of gender inequality in India's education system and, to date, has helped to ensure over 90% enrolment and higher attendance of girls as well as improved school infrastructure, quality of education and learning outcomes for boys and girls in some of the most marginalized communities in India.

The Social Problem

Approximately 3.8 million girls aged 6 to 13 are out of school in India according to the most recent data,¹ 350,000 of whom are in the state of Rajasthan.² This situation stems from the low quality of education, teacher shortages, poverty, limiting attitudes towards gender roles and a lack of support from parents and communities. With only 55% of schools in India having toilets for girls and only 42% of teachers being female, enrolling girls from marginalized backgrounds poses an immense challenge. This has resulted in a large disparity in the literacy rates of males and females, known as the 'gender gap'. When Educate Girls started, the state of Rajasthan had nine out of the 26 districts with the highest gender gap in the country.

Growth

After a 50-school pilot project in 2007, Educate Girls immediately scaled up its efforts to 500 schools and then incrementally increased its outreach to 12,500 schools across two states by 2016, namely Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The growth in outreach is set to reach 16 'gender gap' districts by 2018, and to have an impact on 30,000 schools and 2.8 million children annually.

Model

Educate Girls creates community ownership through village-level volunteers, community-led enrolment plans, school management committees, classroom support through the delivery of a creative teaching and learning curriculum, and the development of and support for girl leaders. Field coordinators and volunteers work with the government, village leaders, parents, schools and the girls themselves. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is signed with the state and district governments in order to work in the public school system and to avoid duplication or the creation of a parallel system.

Measurement

Educate Girls has an established Theory of Change that maps the outcomes and impact of operational activities carried out by *Team Balika* volunteers (see below) and field coordinators. The organization aims to enroll all girls aged seven or over within a particular geographic area, into an educational program

¹ UNESCO (2015) Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: South Asia Regional Study. <http://www.unesco.org/Library/Documents/out-of-school-children-south-asia-study-2014-en.pdf>, p. 18.

² Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (2015). <http://ssa.nic.in/patrimities-documents/NS.pdf>

over the course of a year, measuring progress against a baseline door-to-door survey undertaken at the beginning of the year to identify all out-of-school girls. Retention is measured on an annual basis through school records and additional verification, and learning outcomes in Hindi, English and math for both girls and boys in program schools are assessed annually using the ASER Test.³ Our results were evaluated in 2014 through a Randomized Control Trial (RCT)⁴ and further evidence is currently being gathered through a 3-year RCT being delivered alongside a Development Impact Bond (DIB).⁵



Government School Rajasthan 2016 © Educate Girls

Success: Track Record & Recognition

Educate Girls has a strong track record of achievement, with a cumulative reach over its nine years of:

- 120,000 out-of-school girls enrolled into school with a 93% retention rate
- 600,000 children with improved learning outcomes in Hindi, English and math
- 3.8 million children benefitting from improved school infrastructure and governance

³ ASER Centre. (2016). Annual Status of Education Report. <http://www.asercentre.org/#c5b0d>

⁴ Educate Girls (2013). Interim Report. http://www.educategirls.org/pdf/EG_RCT%20Interim%20Results.pdf

⁵ Educate Girls. (2016). A new finance model for international development. <http://instiglio.org/educategirls/dib/>

Its theory of change was confirmed through interim results from a RCT run by the University of Michigan⁶ in 2014, and Educate Girls is now involved in a new 3-year RCT (2015-2018) for the district of Bhilwara, where Educate Girls is running the world's first Development Impact Bond⁷ covering 140 villages, 166 schools and 15,000 children. After one year, the results were very encouraging:

- Learning gains were 27% higher than the control⁸
- Average learning gain was 1.32 grade per child⁹
- 44% of out-of-school girls have been enrolled i.e. 42% of the 3-year target.

Critical to its success is Educate Girls' relationship with the government and its ability to successfully negotiate MOU contracts with the state ministry. The team has built an excellent working relationship with the Rajasthan government and, each year, the team has signed MOUs. Educate Girls' ability to work with government has also been demonstrated in the signing of an MOU with a new state government for the 2016 school year, namely Madhya Pradesh. Alongside operational partnerships with government, Educate Girls was a founding partner of the Rajasthan Education Initiative (REI). Two program strategies developed by Educate Girls have been adopted as best practices by the government, namely the Educate Girls School Assessment Chart and the Girls' Life Skills Modules for schools.

Policy Recommendations:

1. The Provision Of A Teaching Assistant & Girl Champion In Every Village

With a track record of nine years of delivering demonstrable impact at scale, Educate Girls is now in a position to make policy recommendations, and to agree with policy recommendations made by others,¹⁰ that village-level community workers can have a huge impact in their own community on educational access and attainment. Herein lies a cost-effective and scalable policy initiative for state education departments. Such a policy could help address the country's

⁶ Note 4 above.

⁷ Note 5 above.

⁸ Results are independently verified by ID Insights.

⁹ Learning outcomes were particularly encouraging as the curriculum was compressed into only 7 of the 12 planned delivery weeks.

¹⁰ NUEPA's recommendations for the new National Education Policy and K. Muralidharan's recommendations made in 2013. An Evidence-based Proposal to Achieve Universal Quality Primary Education in India.

teacher shortage, learning crisis and continuing issues around gender discrimination and inclusion in many States, ensuring access, quality and equity.

Educate Girls recommends that State Education Departments:

1. Provide a *Team Balika* / village level volunteer in every village in an Educationally Backward Block (EBB¹¹) to:

- a) Work as a teaching assistant alongside government school teachers
- b) Work at the community level to map and enroll out-of-school girls, into school

2. Pay for the *Team Balika* program through an outcomes-based contract with government funding committed to pay when learning and enrollment outcomes are achieved – with targets set by a central body and results independently verified. Essentially, we recommend that the State government should only pay for success in the early stages of roll out.

This approach could support state education departments in achieving results, and is particularly timely given the NITI Aayog and MHRD's new proposal to rank states on their educational outcomes through the School Education Quality Index (SEQI).¹² This new plan will encourage states to innovate to improve results with access and learning outcomes as key indicators.



Out of School Girls Rajasthan © Educate Girls

¹¹ An EBB status is designated on the basis of the two criteria of Female Literacy Rate being below the national average of 46.13% and the Gender Gap in Literacy being above the national average of 21.59%.

¹² Nanda, P.K. & Gupta, K. (2016). Govt. Plans to Rank States on Education.

<http://www.livemint.com/Education/06akjSs2Y1lnDHHmWU6H0J/Govt-plans-to-rank-states-on-education.html> referring to the new proposal.

Against a backdrop of declining learning levels, it has been clearly demonstrated that a traditional inputs-based approach to education (build more schools, train more teachers and provide midday meals) is ineffective. There is an estimated shortfall of 586,000 primary school teachers; implementing the Right to Education Act mandated pupil to teacher ratio (PTR)¹³ would cost the government INR 25,000 crores per year.

The unique success factor in Educate Girls' community outreach approach to girls' education has been identified as village-level volunteers. The model depends on the recruitment, training and motivation of young people to give back to their community and to champion the rights of girls, while building skills and gaining valuable work experience that will enable them to improve their own livelihood opportunities in the future. This approach provides the program with local cultural knowledge, community access, appropriate mentorship and regular intervention. By embedding the behavior change in the community, Educate Girls builds self-sufficiency and sustainability as it exits out of villages.

Much as the *Aanganwadi* worker is provided by the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to become a champion for nutrition and early childhood development, a *Team Balika* volunteer should be provided by state education ministries in villages to champion and deliver on a girl's rights to education. Each block or district should institute a *Team Balika* program with one volunteer in every village. Their focus should be twofold: first, to improve learning outcomes of children in early grades of primary school to ensure basic literacy and numeracy by grade 5, and second, to ensure that the program has gender equality at its heart and that there is a focus on girls. *Team Balika* will map every out-of-school girl in the village and at the beginning of term and over the course of the school year, work to enroll them. Eventually, the expectation is that *Team Balika* will change mindsets and behaviors to ensure that all villages become 'all girls in school' villages and that the gender and literacy gap in Educationally Backward Blocks will be closed before Educate Girls exits.

Despite the launch of the centrally sponsored *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*¹⁴ (Save daughter, Educate daughter) policy of 2014, little focus or funding has gone beyond the initial program in 100 districts, which reversed the trend of female feticide and gender-based sex selective elimination. Other core commitments

¹³ Muralidharan, K. (2016). *A New Approach to Public Sector Hiring*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, (2015). <http://www.betibachaobetipadhao.co.in/>

made by the cross departmental initiative, particularly to ensure the education of girls, have received little attention or funding to date.¹⁵

Educate Girls' policy recommendation would result in measurable outcomes for children, especially girls, in learning and access, and it would also help solve one of the government's other problems, that of a lack of female teachers and teachers of either gender in remote rural schools. The government has recently run a consultation to make recommendations for a new National Education Policy. The recent NUEPA report, summarizing recommendations from the consultation, concludes that teaching is an unpopular profession and that effort has to be made to change this perception.¹⁶ After two years of working as volunteers on the *Team Balika* program, thousands of young people with experience in the classroom and strong employability /teaching skills will be ready for more formal teacher education. Today, Educate Girls recruits, trains and manages 8,000 village-level volunteers to deliver its program across 62 educationally backward blocks in India. With the replication of this approach and a national-level program, the pipeline of education professionals will dramatically increase.

Currently, 60% of Educate Girls' volunteers are male and 40% are female due to the paucity of girls in rural India who have managed to stay in school to 12th Standard. However, over time the hope is that this program could have an impact on the teaching profession and women's empowerment with more women moving into the teaching profession as a result. The visibility of jobs for women in the community could also improve rural families' perception of the returns on education for girls.¹⁷

a) Outcome One: Improved Learning

Teaching assistants have been proven to play a critical role in improving learning outcomes for children in primary schools, in stark contrast to expensive inputs such as infrastructure, teacher salaries and midday meals that have shown little evidence of impact. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that having an additional 'pair of hands' in the classroom can have a direct impact on student learning outcomes. As the enrolment gap slowly closes, there will be a

¹⁵ In a pilot of 100 districts, BBBP implementation has ensured 100% institutional delivery which in turn has led in Haryana to an increase in female births from 830 to 907 per 1,000 in one year.

¹⁶ Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2016). National Policy on Education 2016: Report of the Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy.

¹⁷ Note 13 above.

pressing need to address the learning crisis and the poor quality of instruction and mentorship in the classroom that is resulting in a worrying decline in learning outcomes for children.¹⁸

Educate Girls has found a highly cost-effective way of improving basic literacy and numeracy outcomes for children through the provision of twice-weekly three-hour sessions of remedial teaching and learning support in the classroom provided by our *Team Balika* volunteers, who work alongside the government teachers as classroom assistants. The volunteer is trained and provided with a curriculum kit of creative learning and teaching activities to lead the children. These focus on delivering some of the most critical micro skills required to ensure children can improve their numeracy and literacy skills. The Educate Girls Creative Learning and Teaching curriculum, *Gyaan ka Pitaara*, has been developed with the help of pedagogical experts who specialize in teaching children with learning difficulties. In our recent RCT, improved learning gains were on average 1.32 per child after a mere seven-week intervention. Progress in learning outcomes was assessed for 2,036 children against a control of 2,104 children in similar government schools. Educate Girls accelerated learning by 27% more than the control group – all independently verified by an external evaluator, ID Insight.¹⁹

To add to our own evidence, the economist Karthik Muralidharan, who has recently been appointed to the NITI Aayog, has drawn on a number of studies to demonstrate that remedial education can effectively improve learning outcomes, even when delivered by simply trained village volunteers. He states that ‘Relatively inexpensive interventions such as using modestly trained and paid community volunteers to provide supplemental instruction to children at their level of learning (as opposed to the level dictated by the curriculum or assumed by the textbook) have proven to be highly effective at improving learning outcomes in multiple settings across India.’²⁰ He cites three experimental studies in Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh, among other states. The studies demonstrated that remedial education programs delivered by volunteers, all informally trained and paid only modest stipends, were able to deliver significant improvements in learning outcomes.²¹

¹⁸ Note 3 above.

¹⁹ UBS Optimus Foundation and CIFF. (2016). World's First Development Impact Bond on Track to Deliver Social Impact and Financial Returns. http://instiglio.org/educategirlsdib/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/DIB-results-press-release_05072016.pdf

²⁰ Muralidharan, K. (2013). An Evidence-based Proposal to Achieve Universal Quality Primary Education in India.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Muralidharan proposed that the Indian Government adopt this approach at scale and use a large cadre of teaching assistants across all primary schools to deliver remedial education. The government has been under pressure to reduce the Pupil to Teacher Ratio (PTR) from 40:1 to 30:1, and in fact the RTE Act incorporates this as a commitment. However, a wiser investment he suggests, given the evidence demonstrating their impact on learning outcomes, is investing in teaching assistants who would cost less, deliver more and reduce the PTR to 13:1 if you were to have two in every classroom.²² He makes a strong case for the cost efficiency of this recommendation. However, our evidence goes further to suggest that this could be delivered as a volunteer engagement with modest funding spent on the performance management, training, monitoring, and alternative incentives and motivation strategies for a nationwide group of *Team Balika*.



Enrollment Plan 2016 © Educate Girls

b) Outcome Two: Enhanced Female Enrolment and Retention

Our recommendation goes further again, in suggesting that the *Team Balika* program should have gender at its core and an additional outcome for the village volunteers should be the enrolment and retention of girls in school and an ultimate behavior shift in villages towards gender equality.

Good progress has been made towards universal education and the enrolment of children into grade 1 of primary school. However, in harder-to-reach areas there are still problems with basic enrolment and retention, particularly of girls,

²² *Ibid.*

and retention particularly after grade 1. In Educate Girls' latest door-to-door survey of 2.12 million households, 62,580 girls were discovered to be out of school. This extreme problem with access to schooling for girls is born out in the gender gap, the difference between male and female literacy rates. According to the 2011 Census, there is a 16% difference between male and female literacy in India, with the male literacy rate at 82.14% and female only at 65.46%. In Rajasthan, female literacy is as low as 52.5%. The roll-out of a nationwide program of Girl Champions (*Team Balika*) across villages, prioritizing areas with the widest gender gap, will help states to tackle the gross inequality across the education system.

Educate Girls has seen that there has to be a local solution to overcome the barriers that prevent girls from enrolling and staying in school. There is no one solution to the problems, and whereas some barriers are practical (including transportation, perceived and real lack of safety getting to school, etc.) many of the barriers are deep-seated societal and cultural norms, rooted in patriarchy and a lack of value for a girl's education. Very often it is the parent who stands in the way of a girl's path to school and so each out-of-school girl needs personal attention and an individual strategy to enable her to go to school. By having a champion for girls' education in each village and *from* that village, personal attention can be given; the champion can act as a role model and work out how to get each girl into school within the cultural context of that village.

*The Report of the Committee for the Evolution of the New National Education Policy*²³ was published in April 2016 and makes a number of recommendations that align with Educate Girls' position as stated here. The NUEPA report recommends that locally contextualized support has to be designed to assist students from socially or economically weaker sections of society and agrees that weaker students in classes should be identified and remedial education delivered not just by teachers but also by volunteers (see recommendations 9.6.2 and 9.15.3). Already, a new program *Vidyanjali* has been launched, promoting volunteering in schools where graduates and professionals can provide assistance to weaker students through 'co-scholastic' activities to enhance learning, in particular reading.²⁴ The results of this initiative are yet to be seen but it demonstrates that there is an appetite at the policy level to consider volunteer support in India's classrooms.

²³ Note 16 above.

²⁴ Government of India. (2016). <http://vidyanjali.mygov.in/index.php/frontend/guideline>

Educate Girls is already demonstrating scale and success across Rajasthan and our growth plan includes Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, all priority states for the government. Once the approach is successfully adopted by two or three states, we would advocate for a much wider roll out.²⁵

Case Study: The Educate Girls *Team Balika* Model

The *Team Balika* model follows a process of promotion and aspiration alignment, recruitment, training, monitoring and assessment. Field coordinators are employed to manage every 10 *Team Balika* volunteers.

Recruitment: Educate Girls invests significant effort in the promotion of *Team Balika* recruitment in order to raise the right aspiration levels of applicants and set the tone for the engagement. *Team Balika* volunteers are recruited through advertising in local papers, SMS/phone calls to school management committee members, teachers, alumni of the *Team Balika* program, District Institute of Education and Training trainers, *Panchayat Raj* institutions, SSA representatives, *Anganwadi* workers, announcements through loudspeakers and posters. At a public recruitment event, Educate Girls spends half the day explaining the model and answering questions and the second half identifying strong candidates via a rigorous interview process. Final recruitment is done in accordance with the community. The hope is that the expectation-setting for the program will deliver commitment and low attrition and eventually lead to better outcomes.

Profile: Typically, a *Team Balika* volunteer has passed 12th grade at school. Educate Girls currently has 40% female volunteers but over time hopes to increase this to 50-60% as more girls in remote areas are educated to 12th standard. *Team Balika* volunteers are assigned to their own village.

Motivation: *Team Balika* volunteers are selected for their passion and commitment to girls' education. Having experimented with different levels of remuneration and incentive structures, the most effective strategy was discovered to be a package of non-financial incentives that include: training, hand-holding, mentoring, CV development, work experience, reference letters, uniforms, stationery and awards. Additional benefits of being part of *Team Balika* include opportunities for social and employability skills development, English language development and career counseling.

²⁵ Note 12 above.



Team Balika in the Classroom 2016 © Educate Girls

Training: All recruited volunteers go through a 12-day (residential and non-residential) training on their roles and responsibilities around community engagement, enrolment strategies, and on Creative Learning & Teaching (CLT) methodology and classroom practice. Both pre- and in-service training is provided.

Support: Educate Girls provides the *Team Balika* volunteer with hand-holding support in the form of regular visits, phone calls, monthly monitoring meetings and assessments. Volunteers keep a daily log of activities.

2. Funding The Girl Champion Program Through Payment By Results

Educate Girls recommends the national roll-out of a village-level girls' champion with a suggested funding approach. Evidence consistently demonstrates that increased funding does not always lead to improved outcomes in social development agendas, particularly in education. For example, in Indonesia, when teacher salaries were doubled, learning outcomes did not improve at all. What is required is more accountability to outcomes and tying funding to results, not activities. As the Government of India starts to experiment with results-based financing in certain social development areas, we would like to propose that education also be considered as an area for payment by results. This is in line with NITI Aayog recommendations for outcomes-based funding, and would work well with the newly proposed

ranking of states on education and focus on results through the SEQI.²⁶

As Muralidharan states in a recent article about results-based financing, 'While there are anecdotal examples of ineffective spending in almost every sector, the best evidence of such inefficiencies comes from the primary education sector. Indeed, these inefficiencies are so large that there is almost no correlation between increased expenditure and improved student learning outcomes.' He goes on to recommend that the government considers 'results' or 'outcomes' based financing: 'Pivoting the focus of government to measuring outcomes and financially rewarding improved performance will increase the policy focus on outcomes, encourage States to innovate to improve them, and enable better identification and dissemination of cost-effective best practices across states.'²⁷

The new National Education Policy is clear in its recommendation that 6% of GDP should be the Government of India's target for education spending. The government, however, needs to bring a lot more transparency and governance to that funding. Alongside this, the government has also recognized the role the private sector can play in collaborating with the education sector. Investment in education by private providers through philanthropy and corporate sector responsibility will be encouraged. The government will take steps for incentivizing private sector investment in education, such as tax benefits and inclusion of education within the definition of infrastructure. In general, public funding will continue for core activities, whereas other functions can be through private funding. We would like to recommend that the government consider how private funding could be used as the working capital for large-scale payment-by-results contracts focused on education improvement.²⁸

Paying for outcomes is an approach that is slowly gaining traction in development funding and there is now a precedent of the Government of India paying for outcomes in its loan contract with The World Bank for the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* national sanitation initiative. As concluded by the Centre for Global Development, 'India has become the single largest payer for outcomes.'²⁹

²⁶ Note 12 above and Indian Express, (9 November 2016), <http://indianexpress.com/article/education/niti-ayog-conducts-workshop-on-school-education-quality-index/>

²⁷ Muralidharan, K. (2016). Ask for Results. <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/union-budget-2016-ask-for-results/>

²⁸ Note 16 above.

²⁹ Savedoff, W. & Madan, J. (2016). The New Leader in Cash on Delivery is...India. http://www.cgdev.org/blog/new-leader-cash-delivery-is-india?utm_source=160802&utm_medium=cgd_email&utm_campaign=cgd_weekly&utm_&&&

Educate Girls is contributing to experimentation in this field through its Development Impact Bond³⁰ and has evidence after one year of operating a pilot outcomes-based contract that outcome incentives can improve service delivery, performance management and the resulting outcomes for boys and girls.

The Government of India could tender for education service providers, skilled in managing community-level volunteers at scale, to provide *Team Balika* management and yet only pay for pre-agreed positive outcomes in enrolment and learning. The state government could commit to paying for girls enrolled and aggregate learning gains achieved each year and, through such an approach, enable flexibility and innovation in delivery, learning about what works and at what cost.

As Muralidharan speculates, the newly formed NITI Aayog (replacing the Planning Commission) 'would be well placed to define the outcomes goals and be an objective entity that independently measures them'.³¹ Service providers would then manage the *Team Balika* program and, if required, investors could provide upfront capital to the service providers if they are unable to take on the contracts with their own reserves or working capital, receiving their capital back from the government once outcomes have been verified.

The DIB model could enable the government to unlock much larger quantum of funding for education programs, with the commitment of the private sector to bear the financial risk of the program delivery and by supporting service providers with upfront financing for their work – an area where debt financing from the usual sources would be impossible to come by.

There is a growing movement of social impact investors in India who would be interested in investing in such results/outcomes-based financing, and anecdotal evidence suggests that there would be great interest in providing the risk capital for such contracts with returns in the region of 7-10%.

³⁰ Note 5 above.

³¹ Note 28 above.

Case Study: The Educate Girls Development Impact Bond

Outcomes-based contract

Educate Girls has entered into a three-year outcomes-based contract, using a Development Impact Bond (DIB) structure, to enroll and educate marginalized girls and boys in a remote rural district of Rajasthan. The goal is to improve education for 15,000 children, 9,000 of them girls, in 166 schools in 140 villages in Bhilwara district.

The Partnership / Funders

The Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), a private foundation, has committed to pay up to US\$422,000 for outcomes that are achieved by the end of the program ('Outcomes Funder').

UBS Optimus Foundation (UBSOF) is providing the working capital of \$270,000 for program delivery and will be repaid, with interest, if – but only if – the contractual outcomes are achieved.

ID Insight independently verified all results and designed an RCT as the evaluation mechanism.

Instiglio structured the DIB and provided performance management assistance to Educate Girls.

Payment Mechanism

Payment from CIFF is contingent on the independent verification that Educate Girls has:

- Increased enrolment of out-of-school girls (20% of total outcomes funds);
- Increased learning outcomes relative to a control group (80% of total outcomes funds).

Tracking Metrics

Whilst the DIB only includes two payment metrics, Educate Girls tracks

several other indicators to measure progress and inform their program delivery. These Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) identify opportunities to improve resource allocation, and potential challenges to prompt course correction.

Efficacy of the Approach

The DIB has required Educate Girls to redesign and improve its performance management systems in order to be able to make rapid course corrections and understand the barriers and enablers to the achievement of the pre-agreed outcomes. It has forced the organization to think more deeply about its impact and put data in the hands of fieldworkers so that they can understand how effective their work is. Rather than having fieldworkers bound by a prescribed work plan and a set of activities, an outcomes-based contract enables them to put what they are trying to achieve first and design their activities and effort around achieving those outcomes. As an example, when Educate Girls conducted a midline test for learning outcomes, it was discovered that children were improving in Hindi but not in English. These results were immediately shared among the *Team Balika* volunteers who reported back that they were spending less time on English as they felt least comfortable teaching it. In the second half of the program period, the *Team Balika* volunteers were given more support in English and encouraged to spend equal time focusing on each of the three subjects and results improved accordingly.



School Management Committee 2016 © Educate Girls

Conclusion

Given that we now have a mere 14 years to achieve the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals, there is an imperative to rethink India's approach to the delivery of education. Whether or not this globally recognized set of targets should be our motivation, there is no denying the fact that India is facing a learning crisis and a tragically backward and paralyzing culture of gender discrimination.

Time and again, it has been proven that a 'business as usual' approach to education and more funding alone is not going to have the desired impact on our children's learning. Over 90% of education funding goes to expensive inputs such as infrastructure, teacher salaries and midday meals,³² none of which have managed to reverse the trend of declining learning. The modest funding left over needs to be wisely allocated and carefully measured.

We have solid evidence that the Educate Girls' approach works. Yet, we are advising the government that they can still mitigate the risk of a new program through a payment-by-results approach. We are convinced that investors will be willing to put up the working capital required to enable service providers to deliver programs that the government will only have to pay for once results have been demonstrated. We are bringing to the table a model that has already been demonstrated at scale so we can leapfrog the pilot stage and deliver a tried, tested, evidenced and at-scale solution to reach the hardest to reach and improve their education.

The progression from policy recommendation to legislation will need to be accelerated. As Safeena Husain, Educate Girls' founder, says, 'For every year a girl is not educated, her prospect for a better future dims.' If we want to reverse the trend in diminishing learning outcomes for children across India, we have to think differently, fund differently and move quickly. The economic, social and health benefits of educating girls are now indisputable. This is one of the wisest investments a government can make. In the search for a strategy to improve learning outcomes, Educate Girls advocates that by educating a girl, you are educating a nation.

³² Marudharan, K. (2013). Priorities for Primary Education Policy in India's 12th Five-year Plan. p. 8 found at: http://pdel.ucsd.edu/_files/paper_2013_karibik.pdf and <http://accountabilityindia.in/paisa/study/download/169>





Champions: Voices Of Girls Studying In Senior Secondary Schools In Telangana

Dr. Shantha Sinha - former Chairperson National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

Most girls in India, especially those from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes or backward classes, Muslims or first-generation learners, grapple with impoverishment, gender discrimination, domestic violence and abuse, fractured families and social exclusion in their pursuit of education. As the girls grow and graduate beyond elementary education or 8th grade they work hard, earn wages, and support their family through periods of deprivation, lack of livelihood and ill health. They endure eve teasing, harassment and pressures of early marriage. They cope with state deficits in provisioning of physical infrastructure such as classrooms, toilets and human resources such as school teachers even as they claim their entitlement to education. It is a miracle that they complete secondary school education or the 12th grade.

Instead of looking at the factors that cause girls to drop out of the education system, this paper is about positive triggers that have enabled girls -especially first-generation learners - to arrive at secondary school education. It looks at the institutional factors such as government schools and hostels and their reach, and the non-institutional factors such as support from family, friends, teachers and others that have helped girls to move upwards in education.

There is hope that sufficient evidence is built to make the voices of the girls heard so that the system is awakened to fulfill its obligation towards children, their education, entitlements and rights. In a way, research has become a site for contestation of resources for the underprivileged, in making demands to invest in the right direction.

Status of Education of Girls aged 15-19 years - India and Telangana

This section outlines the education profile of girls and boys in the 15-19-years age group in India as a whole and in comparison with the State of Telangana. Although a child is defined as a person below 18 years of age, the age group of 15-19 is used as a base.

According to the 2011 Census, 15-19-year-olds constitute 120.5 million people and 10% of India's population. In the State of Telangana, this figure stands at 3.4 million people and 9.8% of the total population. 59.8% of this age group in India are in educational institutions. Of those who are not studying in any educational institution, 29.5% attended school earlier whereas 10.6% had never attended school. The situation of 15-19-year-olds in the State of Telangana is better than the national average, with 67.15% of them having attended educational institution.³³ Of the 32.8% who are not in any educational institution, 24.2% attended school whereas 8.6% never attended any educational institution. The percentage of girls not attending schools is greater when compared to that of boys in the country as a whole and in Telangana as well. Those who are not in any education stream constitute 40% of 15-19-year-olds in India and 33% in Telangana, comprising mostly marginalized children who have fallen through the cracks.

At the level of 11th and 12th grades or senior secondary school education or junior colleges - these nomenclatures are used interchangeably in this article - in the State of Telangana, 78.3% of children study in private colleges with

³³ Quoted from M.V. Foundation. (2016). 'Lost Childhood, Voices of Out of School Children: A study of 15-18 year old boys and girls in Telangana'. <http://weindia.in/documentation-research/>
Census of India 2011. In the year 2014 the State of Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated to the state of Telangana and the State of Andhra Pradesh. Thus the data for the districts under the newly formed Telangana state was separated and computed from the Census 2001 and Census 2011 data of the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh.

with 37.9% of them being girls and 40.4% of them boys when compared to only 21.7% studying in government colleges with 11.2% of them being girls and 10.5% boys.³⁴ This indicates the absence of government provisioning of senior secondary school education.

Privatization of intermediate colleges at such a large scale is contrary to national-level data which suggests that over 45% were enrolled in government schools.³⁵ The growth in private sector institutions is also indicative of the huge demand for higher education. This has given rise to tuition and coaching centers to prepare candidates for entrance tests to get admission into professional courses. On the whole, this trend in increasing privatization is convenient for the government as it is seen as the benefactor that gives away scholarships to poor students and sees no cause to expand and invest in secondary school education.

Overall, on average, total household expenditure was Rs. 2,158 for a student attending secondary education in a government school compared to Rs. 3,874 in an aided school and Rs. 7,542 in a private unaided school in a year.³⁶ Contrary to the international evidence which shows that, as countries get richer they tend to have more students in government schools, the opposite is true in the case of India.³⁷

Some Findings Of The Study³⁸

This study was conducted during the academic session from August to mid-September 2014 in the senior secondary schools of the newly formed State of Telangana. It has a total of 709 respondents, of whom 327 were girls studying in 12th grade and designated as 'Champions' (CH) who are the first-generation learners, i.e. both parents having never attended school in Telangana and 381 are Champions' Classmates (CC) comprising 75.2% of children whose fathers and 25.4% of mothers have completed secondary school. It must be noted that the Champions and their classmates in the sample are from economically disadvantaged background with their annual income not exceeding Rs.75,000.

This section gives an overview of the findings of the study of the challenges that

³⁴ Primary data : Sourced from Board of Intermediate Studies, Govt. of Telangana.

³⁵ Toby Linden, 'Secondary Education', India Infrastructure Report 2012: Private Sector in Education, (2102), IDFC Foundation, http://www.idfc.com/pdf/report/2012/Chapter_12.pdf

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ This report is based on a study conducted by M.V. Foundation 'Champions-Voices of Girls: A Study of First Generation Girl Students in Senior Secondary Schools of Telangana' (2015), <http://www.indianet.nl/pdf/Champions-VoicesOfGirls.pdf>

girls faced in going to school: factors that enabled girls to continue with their education, policy recommendations in support of girls' education, and the positive steps taken by the Telangana government subsequent to the study and its research findings. It compares the Champions with their classmates to highlight the specificity of the predicament of the first-generation learner.

For the sake of brevity, and to capture the texture of the lives of Champions while pursuing education, the study summarizes the findings with reference to the exact statistical information only in some instances.

Challenges

The study shows that there are several challenges operating at the level of family and society, one reinforcing the other, acting as impediments to girls pursuing education.

Most mothers are abused, face violence with fortitude, and arrange for the well-being of their children, for their marriage and education. Several narratives show how families have been torn and fractured with violence and abandonment of the woman, leaving her with the burden of bringing up the entire family. In many instances, alcoholism has taken a toll and fathers are totally dependent on the wives' earnings for their survival. Being non-literates themselves, they have great desires for their daughters' education and, in more than one narrative, mothers expressed a belief that it is with education alone that girls get freedom from violence and abuse. In spite of marginal differences in the incomes of the families of Champions (CH) and the Champions' Classmates (CC), 80.1% CH mothers work as casual laborers in agricultural farms whereas 39.6% of CC mothers work as agricultural laborers, and 25.4% of CH mothers stated that they were self-employed compared to 41.9% of CC mothers. The involvement in various occupations is not mutually exclusive and thus mothers are engaged in multiple activities. 70.0% of fathers of CH work as agricultural laborers and 32.7% work on their own lands, making them vulnerable due to lack of stable employment and income. On the other hand, 32.8% of fathers of CC work as agricultural/casual laborers. The profound impact of education on employment can be seen with 30.2% of CC fathers in salaried employment as against only 8% of CH.

Parents of Champions have made enormous sacrifices to see their daughters receive an education. More than 70% of Champions' parents have made

economic sacrifices and taken loans to support their child's education while 50% of the parents of Champions' Classmates took loans. Support given by a single mother who is divorced, abandoned or widowed to her children's education against all odds is telling.

It is clear that the aspiration of the poor for educating their daughters is immense. They see it as the only path for a life with dignity. Poverty or ill health of the girl or any of the family members has pushed several of the Champions to penury, causing irregularity of attendance in schools and forcing them to work to meet educational expenses. While, among the Champions, 44.3% participated in agricultural work, this figure stood at 18.6% among CCs. It is significant that 66.1% of CCs did not work at all while 31.2% of CHs stated that they did not work at all. Most are hungry when they arrive at the college as they have to work and have no time to eat.

Further, on aspects of giving support to their daughters in interaction with school and support to academic activities, it was found that the participation of parents of Champions was negligible. For example, with regard to checking the regularity of attendance of children, homework and monitoring of performance in school, the parents of CC pupils have shown greater involvement than those of the CH. When it came to interacting with school officials, the parents of Champions seldom spoke to the school teacher as they were more accustomed to negotiating with an employer than with dealing with intimidating school authorities. This, in itself, is an indicator of the exposure that the Champions' parents have to the world outside, their levels of dependence and vulnerability, hidden fears and lack of self-esteem in dealing with authority and power structures, systems and institutions. The experience of Champions' Classmates' parents with the school has shown how there has been a positive journey through education.

Thus, sending a child to school is an unusual situation for families of Champions. The practices and new ways of thinking and doing things have not as yet evolved in a manner which reflects parental involvement in the child's education. They simply do not have the cultural capital of engaging with the school system and sending their children to school as a matter of habit. At another level, the general social atmosphere understands when poor children are not in school and tolerates a school dropout, with out-of-school children inevitably joining the labor force.

The Champions and their classmates had to contend with patriarchy and witnessed daily how the preference for the male sibling and his well-being plays out when compared to their own. Girls are forced to fit into the stereotype of obedient and ever-sacrificing daughter. They find a huge mismatch between the duties and atmosphere at home and the demands of going to school which requires time off from domestic chores to study and do homework, play games and socialize with friends just as boys do. There were several narratives of CHs and CCs describing how they remained silent about sexual harassment, eve teasing and stalking while traveling to school. The first casualty would be their education and restrictions of their mobility, making them vulnerable to stigmatization and child marriage.

Finally, it is in this pervasive mood that the system too is insensitive to the challenges faced by the first-generation learner. Absence of classrooms, labs; reading materials; and infrastructure gives a message that the system is not serious about providing education for the poor. Lack of toilet facilities makes it hard for girls to attend school during their period. This affects their progress from Upper Primary School (UPS) to Senior Secondary School (SSS). Children can ill afford to meet the costs of education towards school fees, education material and stationery, transportation charges for buses and autorickshaws and decent clothes. Even regarding punishment in schools, CHs experience more instances than the CCs at all levels. Up to UPS level 50% of CHs and CCs have faced corporal punishment in school. As they go to the higher levels punishment is reduced, although it is still alarming that 8.2% of CHs have reported being subject to corporal punishment even at the senior secondary school level.

Indeed, the governance of schools is designed for families who are literate and fully aware of the rituals of 'packing' a child off to school.

Factors enabling Champions to attend schools

Non-institutional support to pursue education was primarily through the sacrifices of parents and especially the mothers who are convinced that education alone would give them a break from drudgery and provide a life with opportunities. They are witness to peers completing school education and gaining confidence. They value education and feel that their children should attend school and attain all that they have missed out in their own lives. These parents are

themselves children of independent India in their mid-thirties and forties, who missed going to school.

Some of the girls among both Champions and their classmates mentioned in their narratives that they received support from their father and male siblings. The brothers who for some reason or the other discontinued their education would also extend support to see that their sisters studied well and became self-reliant. It is so crucial that the male members in the family encourage girls to study as it is one less obstacle to overcome. All Muslim girls (who were 6.1% of CHs and 23.8% of CCs) made specific mention of the support they received from their fathers and their brothers. 16.7% of all CHs, compared to 3.8% of CCs, stated that there was no support from their fathers. 43.7% of CHs and 63.9% of CCs stated that grandparents were very supportive.

The Champions and their classmates have largely depended on their friends and seniors for information about college and the process of application. The classmates, however, had the advantage of consulting their parents. Information from TV, newspapers, websites and other forms of electronic and media communication was very insignificant.

Non-institutional support for both the Champions and their classmates continued in school due to support and encouragement of motivated school teachers who understood, empathized and encouraged the girls not to give up on their studies through each stage of education. This was in their individual capacity and not as a concerted institutional arrangement that offered counseling and advice on prospects of various education streams.

Last but not least is the inherent strength and determination of the girls to withstand pressures. Their resilience and ability to combine work and study and to face sexual harassment and not to complain prevents them from being pulled out of the education stream. It is significant that 91.8% of CHs and 97.1% of CCs have shown interest in pursuing their education beyond senior secondary education. The aspiration levels of CHs and CCs are quite similar as they want to be teachers and at least graduates. Most of them exercised agency to reconstruct their lives and to have an aspiration to become productive persons with dignity, a sense of well-being and the ability to realize their creative potential. In defiance of existing milieus that discourage girls' education, their struggle has opened a path for future generations.

Institutional factors include the location of the school close to the girls' dwelling and the availability of a viable public transport system. More CCs studied in schools close to their dwelling from primary school up to SSS. This is curious but it seems that the location of school has determined the place of dwelling as far as the CCs are concerned. Being first-generation learners, the primacy of school in the household routine of the CH is yet to be established, and it shows that it takes only a generation for such a shift to occur.

Regarding mode of transport from home to school, all through their education from primary to SSS, both CHs and CCs walked to school. There is variance up to upper primary level where more CHs traveled on foot and at the secondary school level more CCs traveled on foot. The next preferred mode of transport up to secondary school level is the bicycle. It is interesting that 10% of CHs would ride a bicycle as they reached secondary school level in grades 9 and 10, and the shift to public transport occurs at the SSS level. Since there are far fewer senior secondary schools, public transport becomes the obvious choice for both the CHs and CCs.

The role of residential schools and hostels in encouraging children to study and continue with their education is undoubtedly an important institutional factor. These hostels have been accessed progressively from 5.3% at the stage of primary school to that of 14.8% attending junior secondary classes. The narratives show how the conditions in the hostel in terms of quality of food, crowded rooms, lack of adequate water and toilet facilities, and poor hygienic conditions causing skin infections, do not in any way deter students from staying there. Living in the same space, they draw strength from each other to continue in schools through shared values. In spite of adversities, they do not give up on education or the yearning for equality and justice.

Scholarships have been accessed by 51% of Champions and 54.1% of Champions' Classmates. The amount is only Rs. 900 per year which is disbursed after the academic year. This does not relieve the students of the burden and can be an added anxiety. Yet, it demonstrates that they can engage and negotiate with the system, seize an opportunity to claim an entitlement which is rightfully theirs and feel empowered. To this extent, access to scholarships has been successful.

Policy Recommendations

Most importantly, all planning for education must ensure that children move from one grade to the next until completion of secondary school without any disruption. In other words, there has to be greater investments in government colleges and their physical infrastructure such as classrooms, furniture, libraries, labs, drinking water and toilets, as well as faculty, without dependence on the private sector. Further, education has to be free, with provision of free education material, waiver of school/college and examination fees, free bus passes and transportation facilities.

In addition, there has to be an increase in hostel facilities, considering the distances and family environments which may not be supportive of girls' education. The amount contributed towards scholarships for scheduled castes and scheduled tribe communities, Muslim minorities and economically weaker sections has to be increased, with timely disbursements. It should also include the provision of temporary shelter and counseling for those girls at risk of violence.

There have to be certain systemic interventions such as inclusion of issues relating to gender equality in the school curriculum from primary school onwards in all classes. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, should be amended to make education free and compulsory for all children up to 18 years of age. The Child Marriage Act too, must be amended to make all child marriage totally voidable and structures and processes for providing safety to girls who defy child marriage and seek to pursue education must be built.

Similarly, there has to be an enabling social environment in support of equality for girls and their education. Boys will have to be given exposure to healthier relationships and sensitized to look at girls as equals. They must be educated about the fatal consequences of eve teasing, stalking and other forms of sexual abuse. A sustained campaign in all colleges, hostels and educational institutions on girls' education should be included. Further, girls are to be given information and knowledge on reproductive and sexual healthcare. Awareness regarding the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 to all government functionaries and gram panchayats and boys and girls should be facilitated.

Policy Responses

The State Government of Telangana has made education free for all children, both boys and girls until completion of senior secondary school education.³⁹ The midday meal program has been extended to include children at this level as well.⁴⁰ It would be presumptuous to state that the study was solely responsible for these developments, but it can be said that, in highlighting the challenges faced by the girls, a debate was generated regarding their education.

Conclusion

It is universally acknowledged that girls enter into a hostile environment from the time of their conception. The girls in this study, through their everyday acts of defiance, showed determination to extricate themselves from the quagmire of all forms of discrimination. With their firm conviction that education alone would help them break away from injustice, they have exercised agency to reconstruct their lives. Their voices must be heard. What is needed is an enabling societal environment and wholehearted governmental support for their education, against patriarchy and gender discrimination to end violence against them and give them dignity.

³⁹ Telangana State G.O MS, NO 2 Dated 7-1-2016 Titled: Free Intermediate Education by Government of Telangana. (<http://www.teachers.in/2016/01/inter-free-education-colleges-telangana.html>)

⁴⁰ <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/250616/midday-meal-in-junior-colleges-says-kadham-sihard.html>



Classroom in Rajasthan

Champions: Exploring Drivers Of Girls' Educational Success In College, In Rajasthan

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I. Project Overview

The Champions project is a study in India that analyzes the factors that have enabled adolescent girls from underprivileged, low-literacy families to overcome significant personal, social and infrastructural barriers, and to forge a path to personal empowerment through education. Specifically, 'Champions' are defined as female students in their second year of undergraduate studies whose parents have completed primary school education or less. The aim of the research is to identify the infrastructural support, social triggers, and public policies that helped these disadvantaged young women reach tertiary education. Rather than focusing on barriers, the project focuses on success or 'positive deviance'. The term applies to situations where individuals demonstrate above-average outcomes in challenging or adverse environments.⁴¹

The goal of the Champions project is to probe the enduring challenge of female educational disadvantage in India. The research is intended to generate an evidence base for enhancing the access of disadvantaged girls to education and to the social, economic and psychological benefits that education is known to

⁴¹ Zeitlin, M, Ghassemi, H., Mansour, M. (1991). Nutritional Resilience in a Hostile Environment: Positive Deviance in Child Nutrition, *Nutrition Reviews*, 49, 9, 259-268.

bestow. Support for the Champions project in Rajasthan has been provided by the Passport Foundation, the Population Foundation of India, the Gustav and Rita Hauser Foundation and the South Asia Institute at Harvard.

The Harvard François-Xavier Bagnoud (FXB) Center for Health and Human Rights initiated the first phase of the study in Maharashtra in 2012 in collaboration with partners at the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre, University of Pune. The National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights, a government-funded human rights commission, provided material support and technical guidance. In Maharashtra, 20 government colleges participated in the research; data was gathered with 425 participants from across 10 districts. The findings from this stage informed the research design in Rajasthan.

In 2013 the FXB Center implemented the next phase of the project in Rajasthan in collaboration with partners at the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur. The project involved quantitative data collection from more than 400 Champions (CHs) drawn from 13 colleges across the state. Government colleges were randomly selected from five districts in the state: Banswara, Dholpur, Jaipur, Jhunjhunu and Jodhpur. To identify Champions, all female students enrolled in their second year were asked to complete a screening questionnaire. Those students who reported having parents with a primary school education or less were invited to be interviewed. Data was also collected from a comparison group of 223 'non-Champions' (NCs) matched by age, geographical location and parental education levels. Comparisons between these two groups enabled the research team to isolate the unique contributors to success for the Champions. A subgroup of 25 Champions also took part in a qualitative empowerment workshop. This policy brief is based on the key findings that emerged from Rajasthan.

II. Context

Rajasthan is geographically the largest state in India. Despite considerable investment from the government, gender discrimination (including low levels of female educational attainment) remains pervasive.

India is currently home to almost 300 million young women and girls under 25, who, if empowered to access meaningful education and training, have the potential to be a socially and economically transformative force for the nation.

However at present, beyond the primary level, school retention rates remain unacceptably low. According to official government data, by the end of upper primary school, only 60% of the initial cohort are still enrolled, falling to 50% by the end of lower secondary school.⁴² In Rajasthan, gender-based inequalities are particularly acute. The state has the fourth lowest child sex ratio at birth, with 870 girls born for every 1,000 boys. Rajasthan recorded a female literacy rate of 53% in 2011, well below the national average of 65%.⁴³ Against this challenging backdrop, the achievement of these 'Champions' is even more remarkable. Since education has long been considered an unparalleled mechanism for correcting historic gender inequality and is a proven springboard for human development, exploring the successful strategies of these exceptional few provides essential lessons for all engaged in promoting the education and empowerment of marginalized young women.

III. Successes

These young women are a source of inspiration. Their experience shows that, with the right support, even those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds can forge a path to personal empowerment through education that would have been unimaginable for their mothers' generation.

While the rates of educational attainment among young women remain below acceptable levels, it must be noted that Rajasthan has made significant strides in girls' school enrolment rates and other indicators of gender equality. For example, between 2001 and 2011 the overall sex ratio for the State of Rajasthan increased from 921 girls per 1,000 males to 928.⁴⁴ For the same period, the overall female literacy rate showed drastic improvement, increasing from 43.9% to 52.1. Some promising evidence of an intergenerational change in the status of women in the state also emerged in this study.

• **A remarkable intergenerational shift:** Of the 713 second-year students who completed a screening questionnaire across the 13 government colleges, more than half came from households where neither parent had completed secondary school. In fact, 71% of CH participants' mothers and 23% of fathers had absolutely no formal education. A further 16% of mothers and 14% of fathers had not completed lower primary level. The fact that daughters from these

⁴² Government of India. (2013). Key Education Statistics 2010-11.

⁴³ Government of India. (2011). India: Maternal & Child Mortality and Total Fertility Rates Sample Registration System (SRS). http://censusindia.gov.in/vital_statistics/SRS_Bulletins/MMR_release_070711.pdf

⁴⁴ Though worrying trends are manifest for girls in the 0-6 age category where the ratio fell from 909 girls per 1,000 boys to 888.

families are in college represents a significant shift in one generation; a manifestation of upward mobility in modern India.

- **Government social schemes:** At the household level, on average CH families were more likely to have benefitted from government assistance in the form of food, pensions and healthcare than NC families. This indicates that alleviating poverty through household programs at the family level can positively impact girls' education.

- **A cohort of leaders:** In keeping with their limited educational attainment, 91% of CHs' mothers did not work outside the household. Despite limited exposure to female economic participation, CHs did not view a college education as simply a means to secure a better marriage match. 97% reported plans to pursue professional occupations such as teaching and civil service jobs.

- **Empowerment through education:** The questionnaire included a scale to measure participants' sense of personal agency. Questions probed their perceived levels of control over a range of issues such as education, mobility and marriage prospects. CHs scored an average of 18.9 out of a possible 32 while NCs scored 9.5. The scale provided an insight into the dimensions of agency and the differences between the two groups. 46% of NCs reported never participating in family discussions with the head of household, compared with only 8% of CHs. Only 2% of CHs felt that they had no control over their future as opposed to a staggering 55% of NCs. These statistics reflect the well-established virtuous cycle between continued educational attainment and girls' sense of personal empowerment.

- **Access to information:** Television emerged as an important medium for access to information and exposure to the broader society for both the CH and NC groups. 54% of CH and 73% of NC reported regularly watching TV. The pervasive penetration of this medium represents an opportunity to provide information about government programs, health and other social issues to a cohort of the population that are often difficult to reach. The Population Foundation's drama series 'I, a woman, can achieve anything' (MKBKSH), for example represents an unparalleled opportunity to challenge deep-rooted social issues among this group.

- **Shifting norms for violence against women:** Both CH and NC groups expressed more progressive social views than peers interviewed in

a large-scale survey conducted by the Population Council in Rajasthan in 2006.⁴⁵ For example, 94% of CHs and 88% of NCs stated that it is never acceptable for a man to hit his wife. In comparison, in the 2006 Population Council survey, 32% of unmarried 15-24-year-olds answered that it was acceptable for a married man to beat his wife on at least some occasions.

- **Violence in schools:** The survey used a 15-point scale developed by the Population Council to measure the extent to which participants experienced physical, sexual and verbal violence at the hands of school teachers. Low levels were reported by both the CH and NC groups (lower than reported levels in Maharashtra.) A surprising finding was that NCs reported lower levels of violence than CHs with a score of 1.8 out of a possible 15 vs. 2.4 for CHs. Notably, on average those participants that attended government schools reported lower levels of peer violence than their counterparts attending low-cost private schools.

IV. Challenges And Opportunities

We highlight several opportunities, drawn from empirical evidence collected in Rajasthan, to address the challenges facing young women from disadvantaged backgrounds striving to attain a college education.

1. FAMILIAL SUPPORT

Challenge: The data indicate that the primary triggers of CHs' success are family support, teacher mentorship and personal resilience. The most striking difference between the CH and NC groups was at the family level. Despite similar socioeconomic profiles, CHs were far more likely to report having parents, siblings and extended families that supported them on their educational journeys than their NC counterparts.⁴⁶ In a scale that measured parental involvement in education, CHs' parents scored an average 16 out of a possible 28 as opposed to NCs who scored an average of 6.⁴⁷ Further, families often buffered the young women from extended family and broader community censure for pushing against restrictive gender norms by delaying their marriage arrangements.

⁴⁵ International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Population Council. (2009). *Youth in India: Situation and Needs 2006-2007*.

⁴⁶ For example 70% of CHs as opposed to 16% of NCs reported having an extremely supportive father, and 50% of CHs as opposed to 7% of NCs reported having extremely supportive brothers. Relatedly, nearly four out of five NCs reported that grandparents were extremely unresponsive of their educational goals as opposed to just 28% of CHs.

⁴⁷ Notable examples of responses included: 69% of CHs reported that their parents checked in with them very often to see how they were performing at school, as opposed to just 6% of NC parents.

This finding is troubling from a policy perspective: Reliance on exceptional families is not a good or universally scalable strategy for social change because it leaves out those who most need support, including those with weak or dysfunctional families.

Opportunity: Given the critical role that parental support plays in young women's educational attainment, targeting educational interventions at the household level is a potentially transformative and underutilized strategy for realizing equitable educational attainment. Some state and non-profit-led initiatives have successfully mobilized families and communities to support girls' primary education.⁴⁸ However, more could be done to shift the focus beyond the 'girl child', to challenge stereotypes and mobilize grassroots support for young women's secondary and tertiary education. The CH group that participated in the empowerment workshop recommended involving teachers and local government functionaries to engage with the parents and mobilize broader community support for girls' post-primary education and rally against deleterious social norms that often prevent progression such as purdah and early marriage.

2. GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SCHEMES

Challenge: More than half of the participants reported benefiting from government programs administered at the primary and lower secondary level, most commonly, the provision of free meals, books and uniforms. However, despite the fact that the majority of participants came from low-income and traditionally marginalized ST/ SC and OBC backgrounds, the portion of students that received scholarships was remarkably low. Just 15% of CH participants received any kind of governmental monetary support for their education at the upper primary level increasing to one in four at the lower secondary level. Overall far fewer CHs benefitted from government education programs. This can be partially attributed to the fact that many more CHS attended non-government schools where the penetration of government schemes is low due to restrictions on eligibility. The financial hardships experienced by participants' families to cover the costs of their education are evidenced by the fact that 22% of CHs reported that their parents took loans to support their education. Relying on parents to secure high interest loans to enable their daughter to complete

⁴⁸ Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi oversaw 'Kanya Kelavani Mahotsav' an annual three-day state-wide girls' primary school enrolment campaign. Civil society, village education committees and parents involved in community-wide activities committed themselves to ensure that every child in the village got at least a primary school education. See: http://www.unicef.org/india/resources_1873.htm

secondary school puts a tremendous strain on both individual students and their families.

Opportunity: It was noted by those who took part in the CH qualitative workshop that many students eligible for government assistance are struggling to navigate the unfamiliar administrative terrain. Some CH participants reported that the lack of transparency around the application process for grants and scholarships at the upper secondary and college levels was particularly problematic. Increased transparency and assistance at the school level could help more low-income families take advantage of government and scholarship programs that do exist. It is noteworthy that more NCs than CHs reported benefitting from these educational interventions such as books and uniforms, but failed to progress beyond the lower secondary level, which suggests that a retargeting of resources and priorities may be necessary.

As noted earlier the lower penetration of government educational schemes among the CH group can be explained by the fact that, despite being from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds, those who attended low-cost private schools are not eligible for assistance by virtue of their private school enrolment. As the government increasingly looks towards public private partnership both through the SSA 25% reservation policy at the primary level and to meet the swelling demand for secondary education,⁴⁹ restrictions on entitlement for those low-income students attending non-government institutions will need to be addressed.

3. MENTORING

Challenge: The need for formalized academic guidance and career mentoring among this group is acute. The data show that the majority of the CH population relied on exceptional teachers to provide administrative, moral, and on occasion even financial support, just to progress through the education system. Given the low levels of educational attainment among participants' parents, and indeed the millions of other first-generation learners across India, it is not surprising that teachers are relied upon to help students navigate the academic system. Currently this support is not systematic and once more disadvantages those not propitious enough to have had a teacher willing to go beyond the

⁴⁹ Government of India. (2012). 12th 5 Year Plan- Report.

bounds of duty to provide the guidance that these young women require. Many teachers are operating in overburdened and underfunded institutions, which compounds the challenge.

In addition to administrative assistance, first-generation learners require formalized early career mentoring. This cohort reported having very little contact with adults outside their immediate family due to restrictions on mobility. This confined their exposure to career mentors which probably had negative implications for their aspirations and subject choices. In fact, many CHs reported that their subject choice at the upper secondary and college level was dictated by gender norms and costs and not by employment interest or subject matter affinity - the majority of CHs were enrolled in liberal arts (BA) degrees. Those from the lowest income categories were found to be significantly less likely to have specialized in a non-liberal-arts subject such as science, limiting the potential for the most marginalized to secure better remunerated future employment.

Opportunity: Encouraging and rewarding teachers for time invested in supporting female students from economically and educationally deprived backgrounds, both in their engagement with academic school pursuits and with the college application process, could facilitate a more equitable system. There are also implications for the private sector. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, particularly in the science and technology sectors, should explore the establishment of internship programs for motivated students, including girls starting in secondary school. Offering career guidance and mentorship to young women would simultaneously address the national technical skill shortage and ensure that motivated young women receive the training needed to participate in the knowledge economy. Private mentoring initiatives such as those established by the Intel Foundation could also serve as models to help more first-generation learners successfully pursue careers in the growing industries of science and technology. The government could take the lead in convening private sector players interested in developing such CSR initiatives and provide good practice examples, trainings and, eventually, PR rewards for successful programming.

4. ADOLESCENT EDUCATION:

Challenge: Opportunities to create healthy, caring and trusting friendships

across the gender divide seem nonexistent for today's Indian adolescents. CHs too characterized their relationships with boys as driven by apprehension, insecurity and fear. Fora for discussing and learning about reproductive and sexual health, sexual attraction and desire, the complexities of relationships and marriage appear to be nonexistent. Just half of participants had ever received sex education. Of those who did receive information on the topic, mothers were cited most often as the primary source (71%), followed by teachers (18%) and healthcare providers (11%). The data suggest that conversations with mothers may have been limited to issues related to menstruation and that information about sex, conception and sexually transmitted infections was inadequate. For example when asked if a girl could get pregnant from kissing, 18% said yes, 12% said no. The majority of participants (70%) did not answer the question, suggesting pervasive discomfort/unfamiliarity with the topic.

Opportunity: Life skills-focused adolescent education was introduced as a separate subject across 4,500 government schools in Rajasthan in 2005 and the subject is now institutionalized within many government schools.⁵⁰ Widespread roll-out of this program in both government and non-government schools is essential to ensuring students acquire accurate information about adolescent reproductive and sexual health including HIV/AIDS, substance abuse and other traditionally taboo subjects. It should be noted that more than half of the Indian adolescent population is not attending any type of formal schooling. As such, other mechanisms for addressing these social issues need to be explored. The data shows that a large portion of both the CH and NC groups watch television every day. Television therefore offers an unparalleled opportunity to reach this traditionally underserved youth population.

5. HARASSMENT IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Challenge: Champions are challenging prevailing social norms for girls and young women by spending increased time in the public sphere, at college, on public transport and in public spaces. For many this exposure is perilous and fraught with dangers of stigma, community censure and sexual harassment. For example, by the upper secondary level more than half of the 413 Champion participants regularly experienced unwelcome touching on the journey to or from school.

⁵⁰ UNFPA India. (undated). Empowering Young People with Life-skills Education. <http://www.unic.org.in/display.php?E=12870&K=>

Opportunity: If these problems are not addressed more systematically, significant advances in female educational access and mobility are likely to be hampered, whatever the economic investment in promoting these goals. The CH participants in the empowerment workshop provided the following suggestions to enhance public safety for young women:

- Provide safe transportation facilities in rural and urban areas
- Open more schools and colleges with hostel facilities for girls
- Install CCTV cameras at crucial public places, e.g. bus stops
- Discuss incidents of harassment and violence against women and girls at the panchayat level, and also in schools and colleges
- Establish help lines in all towns/gram panchayats to address violence against women
- Generate awareness about violence and sexual harassment issues as part of the curriculum at the school and college (girls are often blamed for the violence/harassment they face)
- Establish Mahila Thana (Women's police stations) in all districts

6. TECHNOLOGY

Challenge: Just one in three CHs had ever used the Internet. None of the NC cohort had ever accessed it. Internet access and computer skills can be a vector for the enjoyment of freedom of expression, political engagement, and access to information about health, education and economic empowerment. Conversely, in an increasingly technological age, digital exclusion can result in the de facto denial of a range of critical skills.

Opportunity: Investment in programs in government schools to train young women in computer literacy at the secondary level could help address the national technical skill shortage while also ensuring that these young women have the training necessary to participate in the knowledge economy. Public private partnerships, fulfilled by corporate social responsibility programs, such as those undertaken by NASSCOM and Google for female technology entrepreneurs, could play a role in bridging the digital divide.



Girls at the residential camp in Rangareddy reading the newspaper

Case Studies

M V Foundation

Combating Barriers to Adolescent Girls' Education



MV Foundation (MVF) has been working on the protection of the rights of children in partnership with communities for over two decades. Using a rights-based approach, MVF took a position that all children must attend full-time formal day schools and that any child out of school is considered to be subject to child labor. So far, MVF has withdrawn over 1 million children from work and enrolled them into formal schools. These children, both boys and girls, have been from the most backward districts in India.

With the belief that full-time formal education is intrinsically valuable for adolescents too, and that secondary education is a non-negotiable right, MVF has extended its activities to specifically address children in the 14–18 age group across three districts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana since 2012. Their intervention tracked 126,020 children including 60,664 girls in this age group. They identified girls and boys who had dropped out of school for a longer period than one year (long-term dropouts), those who had dropped out more recently (short-term dropouts) or those who were potential dropouts.

Although the broad contours of the strategies to reach out to adolescent children remained the same as those targeting children under the age of 14, MVF had to contend with certain specificities. Adolescent girls' access to formal education is mediated by a range of factors in India including a paucity of

schools at the secondary and senior secondary levels, no extension and support services for those who have dropped out, and lack of commitment to formal education in the form of law or policy. At this age, they are also entrenched in the informal workforce. Girls' access is additionally restricted by social and cultural factors including control over their sexuality and their mobility.

This case study initially reflects upon the evolution of MVF's program strategy in three phases: working with bonded labor children in the early '90s, expanding the mandate to all out-of-school children from the mid-'90s onwards, and developing strategies to address adolescent children from 2011. It then sets the context of the MVF adolescent girls' education program, by examining access to secondary education, adolescent participation in the workforce and control over sexuality and mobility. It then describes the program intervention that MVF undertook between 2011 and 2015 in girls' education by stopping early marriages, facilitating retention in schools, enabling girls and boys to take 10th standard examinations and preventing them from dropping out.



On the way to school in Mahboobnagar district

I. Program Strategy

MVF's program strategy is primarily informed by a set of non-negotiable principles for the children's right to education and the emancipation from child labor. These are:

1. All children must attend full-time formal day schools.
2. Any child out of school is a child laborer.
3. All work/labor is hazardous and harms the overall growth of the child.
4. There must be total abolition of child labor. Laws regulating child labor are unacceptable.
5. Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labor must be condemned.

Phase 1: Bonded Labor

These non-negotiable principles evolved over the initial phase of MVF's work with children who were in bonded labor in the early '90s. Their approach was through confrontation of upper-caste and landowning employers, and creating conflict within the community. However, the organization found that this strongly antagonized employers, and found no support among parents or the community. They also found that one set of bonded labor children simply got replaced with another set – not creating a sustainable or lasting impact. Girl children were totally ignored. In addition, other children in the same areas who were either working in their family enterprises or in agriculture and allied sectors but not as bonded laborers put pressure on MVF volunteers to be withdrawn from work too. This forced MVF to reflect upon such a strategy. Instead, MVF sought to build support for children's rights by 'invoking the liberal and humanistic tendencies of all involved'³¹ towards child rights.

Phase 2: Child Labour

At the end of this phase, by the mid-'90s, MVF widened its scope to all children, not only children in bonded labor. This raised several important questions. If children should not be at work, where should they be? The only acceptable answer to this is full-time, formal day schools. If all out-of-school children are child laborers, this automatically also meant that a distinction cannot be drawn between 'hazardous' and 'non-hazardous' work, since all work affects the overall development and growth of a child. Such an emphasis drew

³¹ Sinha, S. (2005). Emphasizing Universal Principles towards Deepening of Democracy in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*.

from making universal education a social norm through a rights-based approach. MVF's approach sought to build social consensus for the right to education for all children while being fully cognizant of and resolving caste, class and gender-based conflicts through debate and discussion at local levels.

Central to a rights-based approach is engagement with the state, making it accountable for children's rights. In all its activities, MVF was conscious to not set up its own institutions parallel to those of the state. Recognizing that it is the state's role to guarantee rights, the organization engaged at many levels with public institutions. At the local level, this meant working with public schools, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) centers, primary and secondary healthcare, local self-governance institutions, the police, block and district administrative and revenue officials and members of the legislative assembly to create an environment where children and their rights are a central political issue. In the process of engaging with the state, MVF identified the gaps in law and policies. At the state and national level, MVF then lobbied for changes in law, budgeting and planning for children's education, and creating enabling policies for children's rights. More importantly, it worked towards ensuring that state institutions worked proactively for children.

Phase 3: Adolescents' Education

MVF sought to adopt a similar strategy for children between ages 14–18 on issues of education and early marriage, with a few key departures. Seeking to build a universal principle on the right to education even for adolescents through a rights-based approach, the organization focused specifically on enrolling out-of-school adolescent children into formal education – either through the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) or by enabling them, in various ways, to take Class 10 examinations. They also provided extension and support services to all children, allowing them to focus on preparing for examinations without the hassle of engaging with the school administration for numerous certificates and documents.

In the past year, MVF supported 3,638 adolescent children (1,867 boys and 1,753 girls) in three districts to take their Class 10 examinations. They also supported 9,110 adolescent children (5,109 boys and 4,001 girls) to take their Class 12 examinations. In addition to this, they supported 106 children to study through the open schooling system.



Girls outside their higher secondary school with books and stationery

II. Setting The Context

1. Access to Secondary Education

Through its interventions, MVF has seen that the completion of elementary school education itself is a herculean task for poor children, more so for girls. Only 41% of children in the 15-17 age group attend school. Within this group, only 34.5% of girls attend school, whereas the same figure for boys is markedly higher at 49%. There is also an urban-rural differential in the attainment of education. The gender disparity is higher in rural areas, with only 23% of girls attending school, compared with 46% of boys. For the ages 15-19, the overall girls' literacy rate is 15 percentage points behind that of boys.³²

There are several supply-side factors that impede access to higher education for both boys and girls, including presence of schools, their geographical location, distance from the village, regularity of teachers and availability of physical infrastructure. As opposed to 790,640 primary schools in India, there are only 401,079 upper primary schools, 131,287 secondary schools and 102,558 senior secondary schools. The drastic drop in the number of schools for adolescents is telling. They are simply not adequate to accommodate the out-of-school children and the increasing demand for the expansion of secondary education.

³² Department of Health. (2010). National Family Health Survey – III.

Consequently, the number of children enrolled in secondary and senior secondary schools is much lower than those up to the 8th standard.⁵³

2. Adolescents' Entry into the Informal Workforce

Participation in the workforce increases for both boys and girls at adolescence. Nationally, the workforce participation (WPR) for adolescents in the age group 15 – 19 years is 14.7%. The male WPR for this age group is 19.9% (main workers) while female WPR is 8.81% (main workers). 10.4% adolescents are marginal workers. Such an increase can easily be attributed to poor access to secondary school education. Padmini Swaminathan finds that “While at one level, the gender gap (females per 1,000 males) increased significantly when data were computed for different levels of literacy, what data also corroborated was the fact that districts with higher levels of adolescent girls in employment were also the ones where significant proportions of adolescent girls were ‘not attending schools’.”⁵⁴

The entry of an adolescent girl into productive work such as agricultural labor, wage work or even skilled work happens seamlessly as she is in any case absorbed into domestic work from her childhood in informal ways through assuming smaller responsibilities. At adolescence, she is expected to take the lead in performing these roles, no longer as an assistant to her mother or her older siblings, but on her own. As part of the workforce, both boys and girls are forced into ‘a routine of drudgery and suffering at the cost of realizing their fullest potential. They are gradually edged out of any economic activity that involves skilled labor. They have no claim to any system of security or insurance; thus, they are unable to take advantage of state programs and policies as well as market interventions. Ultimately, their fate is sealed by their lack of access to education.’⁵⁵ Additionally, the lack of secondary schooling also prevents their access to university, vocational and professional schools, and makes them ineligible for a range of jobs.

A large number of poor adolescent girls and boys are forced to join the agricultural workforce for want of free and compulsory education at the secondary school level, reinforcing gender discrimination, with exclusion of Dalits adding

⁵³ Government of India (2014). Educational Statistics at a Glance. http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/EAG2014.pdf

⁵⁴ Swaminathan, P. (2008). Exclusions from and Inclusions in Development: Implications for Engendering Development. *Economic and Political Weekly*.

⁵⁵ Sinha, S. (2014) Beginning in the Middle - Ending the Exploitation of Adolescents in India. In Bhabha, Jacqueline (ed.), *Human Rights and Education*, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 293-308.

to the axis of marginalization and class distinction. All of these combined factors operate as systemic barriers to access to education.

3. Combating Control over Sexuality and Mobility

At adolescence, there is an intensified compulsion to enter the workforce as earning members of the family on the one hand, and on the other, the perception of adolescent girls as sexual beings. Exercising control over mobility and bodily integrity becomes explicit through arguments such as safety and security of girls, or the fear of sexual harassment in and on the way to schools. MVF found that these arguments only come into play in the context of girls' pursuance of higher education. The safety argument does not seem to deter parents from getting girls married at an early age, forcing them to walk miles to fetch water or firewood, migrate for work as agricultural laborers or trafficked for child labor and sex work; exposing a double standard.

Control over sexuality also operates within the context of marriage. Around 40% of girls aged between 15 and 19 in the country are married, 12% have become mothers and 4% are expecting their first child. Girls between ages 15–19 also report the highest incidence of emotional, physical and sexual violence.⁵⁶ Early marriage leaves the adolescent girl in her marital home with a heavier burden of work, an education that has been abandoned midway, hardly any decision-making abilities, constrained access to healthcare and a higher risk of facing violence.

Such control is reinforced by the fact that the state does not reach out to adolescent girls and boys. MVF's programmatic intervention chose to address these issues by demanding adequate infrastructure and support for girls and boys to reach and be retained in schools at this age, so that such issues of control over mobility and sexuality through marriage and restricted access to public spaces could be tackled systematically.

III. Programmatic Intervention

MVF's program for 14-18-year-olds addressed out-of-school adolescent children's re-entry into formal education. Specifically, it made visible the challenges faced by girls through forced marriages and pressures operating at every

⁵⁶ Department of Health, (2010). National Family Health Survey – III.

sphere of life from the family, neighborhood and community. In the face of such gendered obstacles to education for girls, MVF initiated its program with an explicit focus on girls between ages 14–18 enabling their exercise of agency to pursue higher education. MVF also galvanized the support of the community and the various functionaries of the system to give girls the courage to access education. A consequence of this program was the impact it had on adolescent boys, enabling them to go to school as well.

In doing so, MVF viewed the 14-18-year-olds as adolescent children, as opposed to viewing them as young adults who are in a transitional phase to be prepared for adulthood. A view of ‘young adults’ promotes a policy towards skill-based or vocational training which can help adolescents generate an income, precluding them from pursuing higher education in mainstream schools. MVF found it imperative to question this acceptance of vocational education in place of secondary education, and ‘oppose the adoption of relativist arguments prioritizing teen work over learning.’⁵⁷ Instead, MVF’s view is that adolescent children have to be guaranteed their right to education until completion of secondary school.

Step 1: Survey and Mobilization

MVF started by mobilizing communities to build support for girls’ education. This included carrying out a door-to-door survey of all children in the age group of 0-18 years, with a special focus on the educational, marital and employment status of adolescent children in the 14-18-year age group. Through this process, volunteers transformed numbers into faces and built a relationship with each family in their villages.

Through a dynamic ‘tracking’ process, MVF constantly followed up on three kinds of children: those who go to private schools, those who go to government schools and those who have dropped out of school. MVF’s tracking strategy works at two levels, once in a quarter for private schools and once in a month for government schools. In government schools, they follow up on children who are absent for several days in a row without a reason. MVF also continuously tracks children’s transition between academic years, between primary and secondary school, between secondary school and junior college, and between intermediate college and undergraduate college.

⁵⁷ Bhabha, J. (2014). Introduction. *Human Rights and Education*, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 1-19.

Through the survey process, the organization identified two groups of adolescent children for intervention: the first was potential and short-term dropouts who had been out of school for less than a year; and the second was long-term dropouts who had been out of school for longer than a year.

In the three blocks of Shankarpally, Marpally and Vikarabad, MVF identified 620 girl dropouts between the ages of 11–18. 373 of them were married girls – 173 were forced to marry in the 10th standard, even before they completed the school leaving examination. The rest were forced to marry between the 5th and 9th standards.

Step 2: Institutionalizing Local Support

Once the organization collected data from the villages, they started reaching out to the community through street plays, marches and rallies. At the same time, they worked towards institutionalizing local support through existing forums such as women's Self Help Groups and School Management Committees, and by creating forums such as Child Rights Protection Forums and Girl Child Protection Forums. These forums partnered with elected local self-governance institutions (Gram Panchayats) and local political leaders to actively prevent child labor, child marriage and drop out from schools. They also worked to strengthen the Integrated Child Development Services, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (residential schools for girls from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Classes and minority communities) and other institutions.



Adolescent girls at a rally against child marriage

With the help of the village-level Child Rights Protection Forum, MVF visited children's homes to motivate parents to send their children to school. Often, they found that children absent themselves from school to take care of their siblings, the elderly or relatives at home, or to assist in agricultural labor. At the end of each academic year, the risk of children dropping out of mainstream education is high for many reasons. Parents have to be motivated to send their children to the next year or level of schooling. These forums reached out to parents to give them the confidence to support their daughters' education, and helped them secure admissions for their children into schools and hostels. The members of these forums were also given training on laws and policies regarding child labor, child marriage, the right to education and other child rights, and their role in addressing these issues.

The organization worked with village-level governance institutions including the Gram Panchayats and School Management Committees (SMCs), set up under the Right to Education Act to place an emphasis on girl child retention in schools. SMCs worked with school headmasters, parents of girl children, single mothers and migrant laborers to ensure adolescent girls did not drop out of school. Gram Panchayats took up issues of lack of infrastructure in schools, teacher shortages, corporal punishment, transportation to secondary schools and stopping early marriages. School headmasters, Anganwadi workers and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) regularly attended Gram Panchayat meetings to monitor and review their progress.

MVF also worked towards mobilizing young people in villages through non-gender-segregated youth clubs. The clubs held regular meetings to articulate their own concerns in their relationships, access to reproductive healthcare, sexual harassment, violence, lack of educational and recreational facilities and toilets. MVF conducted exposure visits for youth to local police stations to build relationships and familiarize youth with these institutions. Through these youth clubs, MVF sought to build girls' mobility and access to public spaces. The youth clubs also monitored child marriages in their villages, put pressure on the Gram Panchayats to register all marriages and ensured that no one in their families or communities were married before the minimum legal age. Members of these clubs collected scholarships for the needy, interacted with government officers about providing infrastructure facilities and volunteered to teach in state-run non-residential special training centers.

Step 3: Working with District and State-Level Administration

MVF worked with administrative institutions including the revenue, labor, health, women's and children's departments, District Collectors and the police at the state and district levels to ensure accountability and action on child rights. It worked towards efficient collaboration and convergence between these departments to release children from child labor, stop early marriages, support poor children in applying for examinations by waiving fees and streamlining documentation processes, open residential schools, hostels and training centers, improve public transportation and make nutritional supplements and reproductive healthcare readily available.

Between 2012 and 2015, MVF worked extensively with the police to stop child marriage. Police officials made religious leaders and priests demand proof of age documents before solemnizing any marriage, and warned them against abetting child marriage with punitive consequences. Many priests put up boards in front of their homes and in temples announcing that they would not perform underage marriages. They ensured that Gram Panchayats insisted on registering every marriage in their villages. MVF also put pressure on local political leaders to stop attending and supporting child marriages. Additionally, MVF lobbied for a mandate from the state government, which ensured the formation of sub-district Child Marriage Protection Committees (CMPCs). These committees became responsible for identifying and preventing underage marriages.

Working to make the state responsive to violence against children remains a challenge for the organization, especially in cases of sexual violence. In 2015, MVF took up the implementation of Childline in 600 villages. Childline is a helpline that facilitates response to various children's issues including child labor, trafficking, physical and sexual violence, sexual harassment and child marriage. However, it has been difficult to convince the police to respond to sexual violence against children (by registering a First Information Report [FIR]) and investigate such cases. It has also been difficult to secure medical care with any urgency for children who have faced such violence. On the other hand, the extreme vulnerability of children to violence from within and outside their families is becoming increasingly visible. The organization is currently dealing with many such cases where the perpetrators are fathers, grandfathers or uncles.

Step 4: Working With Children

a. Providing Extension and Support Services

At the heart of MVF's programmatic intervention is the work it does with children.

MVF volunteers identified all children who had registered for secondary and senior secondary examinations through regular schools, and contacted each student to ensure that they wrote the exam. Tutorial classes after school were arranged for children to help them prepare. Parents were asked to accompany their children to the examination center on the day of the first exam to support them. They also identified short and long-term dropout children, enrolled them into open schools and helped them apply for their examinations. Considerable work went into contacting each one of them (girls and boys), giving them the confidence that they can take examinations conducted by the state government, and applying for and obtaining innumerable certificates and documents from the government.

Children who had dropped out of school were prepared to take the 10th standard examination through open schools (through the government-run National Institute of Open Schooling), which is the only available source for formal education for such children. These schools required children to attend classes on weekends. MVF required training and tuition centers, and had to build support among headmasters and Gram Panchayats to provide the space for coaching and organize transport for girls to reach the classes. They were given support to take classes two days a week, and time off to prepare for those two hours of class. They also worked with several district administrative institutions to facilitate the provision of free bus services for girls to reach the centers. If children have to appear as private candidates for the 10th standard examination, they have to pay a fee. MVF negotiated with the state government and Commissioner of School Education to waive these fees.

Children who were prepared to take the examinations faced further challenges in obtaining certificates that enabled them to write examinations. There is no transparency or information provided on the protocols and documentation required for application. Children face endless difficulties in getting forms signed by many officials in many different offices, obtaining birth, caste, income, transfer, character and migration certificates, and getting the details on their examination hall tickets right. All of these procedures faze children who

are interested in writing the exam. Each banal detail is a battle, pushing the children out of mainstream public education. Children are told that their role is only to write the exam – MVF volunteers acted as a support system to handle everything else. The lack of such support systems to help adolescent children sit for examinations and study further discourages children from going back to school. Such support systems also have to address questions of control over labor, mobility and sexuality; and work with boys on issues related to masculinity.



Girls at a Balika Sangha meeting at their school in Nalgonda district

Nedimenti Devendrappa of Nerniki, Holagunda mandal had registered for 10th standard examinations in 2015. By mistake, Urdu language was mentioned as the second language in his hall ticket, although he had chosen Telugu language. Devendrappa was denied admission to the Telugu exam, and asked to write the Urdu paper. The MVF volunteer explained the error to the invigilator. The volunteer ran to the Education Officer in the block, who changed the entry in the hall ticket. He then got an affidavit signed and notarized by the student. Devendrappa was finally allowed to write the Telugu language exam after these efforts.

At the end of this process, some students fail their examinations – and these students need to be motivated to sit for them again. The students who pass have to be supported to move to the next level of education, whether it's the 11th standard or undergraduate, professional and vocational degrees. Each year, MVF volunteers compiled a list of all children studying in the highest class available in the school they were enrolled in, and matched them to the best possible schools at the next level of schooling where they had to be admitted the following year. The headmasters of those schools were contacted; hostels and residential facilities were identified each year for each student. Also, meetings were conducted with parents by the Gram Panchayat and ICDS centers where volunteers and elected representatives counseled girls and their parents to continue their education. They were given detailed information about the choices available to them, both in terms of vocations and degrees, and hostels and scholarships. At these meetings, college lecturers shared their personal experiences, and gave confidence to the girls to pursue their education. Volunteers negotiated with private colleges for fee concessions to poor students, and arranged bus facilities in remote villages through the RTC.

b. Working with Girls: Individual and Collective Action

Girls only remain in educational institutions as long as they have the strength to defy existing relations of power within their families and communities, and their parents and communities make way for them. MVF worked towards creating an enabling environment for girls to exercise agency towards their right to education. Through a process of social mobilization and sustained engagement with relevant government functionaries, MVF devised various strategies to address socially entrenched institutions of child marriage and child labor. MVF had a two-pronged approach to early marriage. The first was to stop marriages that were taking place. Between 2012 and 2016, MVF identified 3,564 child marriages in the villages where they are based of which 566 were stopped. The second was to deter marriages from taking place at all, by supporting girls in their pursuit of education instrumentally to stall early marriage.

In order to enable girls to take action towards their rights, they were collectivized through Balika Sanghas (girl child committees). Between 2015 and 2016, MVF facilitated the formation of 291 girl child committees with close to 5,800 members. They also formed 127 college and school committees with around 3,100 members. Girls were initially hesitant to trust these

committees and open up, but as MVF volunteers reached out to them, they built up the courage to discuss the gender and caste-based discrimination they faced in homes, schools and public spaces. They gradually gathered the strength to identify, oppose and take action against child marriage. They contacted girls who were not in schools and encouraged them to join their forums.

These committees were used as training forums where workshops were conducted on gender discrimination, sexual and reproductive issues, laws on child marriage, juvenile justice, the right to education, child labor and sexual offences against women and children. The committees also interacted regularly with community health workers such as Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) and leaders of women's self help groups in their villages for resources and support. Balika Sanghas from different villages met regularly to learn from each other and share their concerns. The girls also visited the local police station. They wanted to know how FIRs were filed, especially in cases of sexual and domestic violence, and child marriage. It gave them the courage to work against marriage and in support of their education.

A consequence of the social mobilization and action on adolescent girls' enrolment was the enrolment of boys too. Consequently, even though the program was focused on adolescent girls, more boys were able to access formal education at secondary school level than girls. However, it would not have been possible to enroll as many girl children into school without focusing specifically on the gendered obstacles girls face.



Discussing the adverse effects of child marriage at a training session in Rangareddy district

IV. Conclusion

Over the past five years, MVF has been working towards a new strategy taking into consideration the complexity of gender relations in bringing about equal access to education for all children. In this period of time, MVF has evolved a set of non-negotiable principles for working with adolescent children in this context, which are:

- All children must be in a full-time school or any full-time education stream until the age of 18 years.
- Girls and boys must have equal opportunities to pursue education and build their capabilities.
- The discourse on gender equality must be introduced into the school curriculum from class 1 onwards.
- Presence in an educational institution should be a precondition for building awareness on reproductive healthcare, sex education and life skills for both boys and girls.
- Arguments that control girls' bodily integrity and deny them autonomy such as domestic work, distance to schools, lack of safety for girls, eve teasing, increases in dowry, sibling care, poverty, and pressure of marriage are unacceptable.
- Youth clubs must be non-gender segregated, secular spaces where all members are equal, without distinctions of gender, caste, religion, disability or any other forms of discrimination.
- No girl shall marry before 18 years of age. Child marriage laws must be amended to nullify the marriage of all girls until 18 years of age.
- Even after the age of 18 years, the girl's decision and choice for her marriage has to be given full support.

MVF's work with adolescent girls has been based on the belief that working on education alone does not bring about gender equality. Through these principles, MVF's explicit focus is on making the right to education a political issue, resolving gender, caste and class-based conflicts locally through community action with the support of state functionaries.



Pooja against the Blossom School Bus

White Lotus Trust

Access To Education Through Intervention Of Blossom Bus, In Mewat, Haryana



WHITE LOTUS TRUST

Objective Of The Study

This study documents the approach and impact of the Girls' Blossom Bus program, both in the context of villages targeted and in the context of a broader program to build community participation and functional governance in 580 government schools at Mewat. This study will document the impact on the bus riders, their parents, the broader community, schools and school authorities.

Further, there are so many inspiring stories about the achievements of these girls who have not only achieved a milestone for themselves but have been role models for their siblings and other young girls. It is especially noteworthy that this has been achieved in a minority community.

Background Of Our Work In Mewat

White Lotus Trust has been running a program called Blossom Bus in Haryana for the last six years. It provides transport to 315 girls⁵⁹ in order for them to reach their high schools located between 2 to 10 kilometers from their home villages. There is no reliable public transport available in these villages. Walking to school or cycling is unsafe as the girls have to travel through empty fields and there had been instances of harassment, leading to most girls from Mewat dropping out after passing grade 8.

⁵⁹List of Blossom Bus riders, 2016-17 school year. <http://www.whitelotustrust.org/new/reports.html>

This transport is provided to girls who do not have access to upper primary or high school education in the village. Many of these 315 girls have now been traveling on the Blossom Bus for five years and have become the first in their village to reach grade 10.

Forty Blossom Bus riders that graduated high school have now entered colleges and White Lotus is providing transport for them to attend classes. Eighteen of these girls are now in their final year and will graduate in March 2017.

The Blossom Bus has not only changed the life of many girls; the mindset of people has changed drastically and they are now asking for an increase in the number of seats in the buses, especially in Rajasthan where many schools are closed by the government due to policy changes. Most of the Muslim girls from the villages of Mewat never thought of attending college. Many of them who were the first in the village to reach grade 10 or 12, are attending college in Palwal and talk about a career and a better future.

Education For Adolescent Children At The National Level

Of the approximately 100 million children in the 14 to 18 age group, there are 44.8 million children in secondary education in India with overall Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in classes 11-12 at 45.1%. The higher secondary GER for classes 11 and 12 is 33.48%. In other words more than 50% of children are not enrolled in schools in the 14 to 18 age group. There is a shortage of 200,000 teachers⁴⁰ at the secondary level and only 53% of the teachers required are available.

More than half of the students in secondary education study in privately managed schools that are:

- (i) Privately aided schools, which receive recurrent funding from the state government, usually through paying teachers' salaries and some other costs, but where the school management is responsible for capital costs and investments.
- (ii) Unaided schools, which receive no public funds and charge heavy fees.

³⁹ MV Foundation report. (2016). *Champions: Voices of Girls: Stories of First-generation Girl Students in Senior Secondary Schools of Telangana*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

In classes 9 and 10 in 2007-08, 45.6% of children were enrolled in government schools, 28.6% in aided schools and the remaining 25.8% in private unaided schools. In addition, there is a small number of 51,788 students studying lower or higher secondary education in the National Institute of Open Schooling in the year 2012-13, 29.7% being girls.

Overall, on average, total household expenditure was Rs. 2,158 for a student attending secondary education in a government school compared to Rs. 3,874 in an aided school and Rs. 7,542 in a private unaided school in a year.

It is significant that between 2004-05 and 2011-12 there is a major jump in the percentage of girls who completed class 8, almost doubling from 37% to 63%. Likewise, while nearly 27% completed class 10 in 2004-05 in the year 2011-12, this figure stood at 43%. Thus, between the 2004-05 and 2011-12 NSSO rounds, there has been a substantial increase in the number of girls who aimed to complete education up to class 10.⁶¹

On the other hand, there has been an increase in the overall dropouts after class 10 up to class 12 with a 63% dropout rate in 2011-12, whereas the dropout rate was 44% in 2004-05. In comparison, the performance of girls is slightly better, with a 41% dropout rate in 2004-05. The increase in the dropout rate in 2011-12 was 56%.⁶²

Impact Of Blossom Bus

Direct impact of the Blossom Bus service and program on girl's enrolment in classes 6-10 of the target group (table 1).

There are 17 high schools and senior secondary schools serving classes 9 to 12 in the block with 995 girls in Hindu-dominated villages and 201 in Muslim-dominated villages.⁶³

⁶¹ MV Foundation report. (2016). *Champions: Voices of Girls: Stories of First-generation Girl Students in Senior Secondary Schools of Telangana*, p. 3 & 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ A list of village-wise boys and girls in 17 villages is available below.

School Name	Year	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 9	Grade 10	Muslim girls
Aharwan	2010			72	75	1
Aharwan	2016	35	24	81	65	43

Table 1 for the year 2010 and 2016, the number of Muslim girls compared to 'all girls' in Aharwan High School in Palwal block of Mewat⁶⁴

Initially, the Trust started free transport for 100 girls from four villages studying at one high school in March 2010 for the 2010-11 academic year. By April 2013, the number had increased to 300 girls from 16 villages, served by three high schools including 50 girls from Meo villages of Rajasthan. This transport became very effective in bringing girls to higher classes and many of the 300 girls reached grade 10, being the first in their villages to achieve this distinction. In 2016, 275 girls are attending high school and senior secondary schools, and 40 girls are attending college in Palwal.

As the girls from the Blossom Bus graduated, the Trust extended the program providing transport to their college. We now have 40 girls on the Blossom to College Bus; they are all first-generation college-goers and 20 of these will be completing college education in 2017.

⁶⁴ White Lotus Trust Report. (2016). <http://www.whitelotustrust.org/new/reports.html>

Attitudes Of Parents With Respect To Girls' Education

The following are accounts the Trust has selected from a sample of 25 parents of Blossom Bus riders which are representative of attitudes held by most parents of girls served by this program and across the broader target area of Mewat, if not the entire State of Haryana. Information was recorded from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) held in groups of four to five parents and while interviewing Blossom Bus riders as well.

Sukh Ram lives in Dhamaka village with his family of three daughters and a son. He has no land and works as a laborer to earn two square meals for the family. He was a worried man when three of his daughters passed grade 8 and wanted to go to school 4 kilometers away from the village. Sukh Ram is sensitive about the education of his children as he knows that he does not have any regular source of income and will need to empower his children with education so that they can live their lives with dignity and respect.

Sukh Ram felt challenged when his two daughters Manju and Madhu approached him for his permission to attend high school. From a financial point of view, he was able to manage the school fee, books, uniform and general costs, but was more worried about the girls traveling to school as according to him, 'the environment out there is not good for adolescent girls.' Traveling 4 kilometers on local transport was not considered a safe option and Sukh Ram does not have a motorcycle, which could have been used to drop his daughters at school.

Sukh Ram told us that, in general, parents are willing to educate their daughters, but are concerned about their safety. Manju, the elder daughter informed her father about the bus provided by the White Lotus Trust, carrying girls to school without charging any money. He was only convinced to let them avail of the bus after his daughter suggested he check with parents of girls using the Blossom Bus for the last two years, during which they found no issues regarding the safety of their children.

Sukh Ram is now a happy person as Madhu has completed high school this year and is now enrolled at a college in Palwal, traveling on the Blossom to College Bus. Another amazing achievement for his daughter was that she was appointed

as a paid teacher in the newly started White Lotus program, 'Education Quality Addition' (EQ+) and that provides a decent salary. This appointment has strengthened the faith of parents of this community in the perception that there are jobs if their children become eligible through educational outcomes.

A summary of parental attitudes in responses extrapolated from a sample of 25 of 250 families included in the field survey:⁶⁵

- Parents of these girls always say that they want their daughters to be educated, but when asked what they can do about it, they have no answers. They think that their only job is to give consent for attending school.
- Most of them are not ready to drop their daughters at school in case the bus does not come due to a breakdown even once in 2-3 months.
- One mother said that her son is riding a motorbike all day in the village but will not go to drop his sister at school if asked to do so.
- They have no time, even to visit school to attend parent/teacher meetings or meetings of school management committees, although they may not have other pressing tasks.
- The general perception is that parents do not think that they need to do something so that their daughters can receive an education.

The Types Of Harassment Girls Face

- Generally, they say that they are not harassed directly but it always has an impact on their emotional state when they see some boys standing at the place where they board the bus.
- The parents or villagers do not object to these actions as it may create more problems in the village.
- Sometimes, the low-caste parents or the girls do not have the courage to say anything to people from the upper castes, even if they pass comment about the girls who are going to school.
- The parents also feel pressure from neighbors and family members to try to prevent them from allowing a teenage girl to go out alone and be vulnerable to male advances.

⁶⁵ See table 1 - Data summary.

Target Area Demographic, Need Analysis And White Lotus Response

Mewat

There are around 1 million 'Meo' people inhabiting five blocks at Mewat, which is one of 21 districts of Haryana state that borders Delhi and Jaipur. There are 600+ elementary schools across six blocks including Hathin that is also Meo but is now situated in the newly created district of Palwal.

Mewat is a predominantly Muslim area and this may be the reason it has fallen behind in development in comparison to the other 21 districts of a state now considered one of the most prosperous in the country. Whatever the root causes, even the government has admitted an atrociously low literacy rate at Mewat, especially that of females, and likened arriving at Mewat's inner villages to stepping into medieval times.

Need Analysis

Below (table 2) is the status of enrolment of girls in schools in Hathin block, which was part of Mewat district until 2010 and then was shifted to the newly created district of Palwal. The figures shown in red are from Muslim-dominated villages and are clearly showing a huge decline in the number of girls joining senior classes in comparison to boys. Also, the girls from non-Muslim villages are not dropping out. There are more girls than boys in some schools.

Notes on Table 2

- 1. The number of students are missing for grade 11 because the results for grade 10 were not announced at that time.*
- 2. Some schools are up to grade 10, so there is no data for grades 11 and 12.*

⁶⁰ Data is no longer on the Haryana government website but is verifiable at the 17 schools.

S. No	School	Total Enrolment									
		9 th		10 th		11 th		12 th		Total	
		B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
1	Ali Meo	28	21	28	14	0	0	7	7	63	42
2.	Kondal	9	9	18	19	0	0	21	21	48	49
3.	Bahin (boys)	59	0	43	0	0	0	32	0	134	
4.	Bahin (girls)	0	92	0	66	0	0	0	51	0	208
5.	Mandkola	62	68	42	57	0	0	37	28	141	153
6.	Hathin (girls)	0	138	0	90	0	0	0	93	0	321
7.	Malai	39	12	31	2	0	0	23	0	92	14
8.	Chaisa	61	17	65	14	0	0	23	12	140	43
9.	Uttawar	66	10	49	6	0	0	29	0	144	16
10.	Gharrot	84	45	52	24	0	0	0	0	136	69
11.	Guraksar	37	8	36	6	0	0	0	0	72	14
12.	Hurithal	56	19	51	14	0	0	0	0	107	32
13.	Kalsada	22	37	26	10	0	0	0	0	48	56
14.	Mandarka	12	22	30	11	0	0	0	0	42	33
15.	Manpur	39	68	22	38	0	0	0	0	61	106
16.	Ransika	29	9	26	9	0	0	0	0	57	18
17.	RanialaKhurd	16	8	16	14	0	0	0	0	32	22

Table 2 - Details of students sourced from the website of the Education Department of the Haryana government.¹⁶

Intervention Response

Seeing this situation in the beginning of 2009-10 forced the Trust to meet some parents to know why there are very few girls in high schools. The White Lotus Trust representatives were told by the parents that they are willing to educate their daughters but they are concerned about their safety and security while traveling to schools in an unsafe private bus, autorickshaw or walking to school which is generally 3 to 10 kilometers away from villages. It is generally said in India that only 10% of the children that enroll in grade 1 reach grade 12.

This is the situation for both boys and girls, although girls drop out more than boys for safety reasons. The girls of lower castes or the minorities are more vulnerable to harassment and abuse while they walk to school or travel on public transport.

In 2016, 270 girls are riding the Blossom Bus to attend school regularly and none have dropped out after enrolling in grade 6. Many of these girls are the first to reach grade 10 or 12 in their villages. A Blossom girl from Jarali village was married while still at school along with her elder sister to save marriage expenses, but she refused to go to her in-laws' house until she completed her school education.



Blossom school graduates teaching remedial classes in own village schools

Features And Chronology Of Broader Education-based Work Through Lotus Education As A Right Networking (Learn) Program

The first visits of White Lotus Trust in August 2007 and subsequent surveys of schools and amenities confirmed estimations of the situation when they found just four of 85 schools with three core elements; namely running water, toilets and a boundary wall. The Trust prepared a one-page questionnaire with questions relating to basic amenities and conducted a survey of all elementary schools of Hathin block of Mewat district to find out the facts relating to availability of these elements. The headmaster of each school was asked to fill out the questionnaire and sign it so that the information is authenticated and placed before the authorities with a request for remedial measures.

Some findings from the survey on infrastructure conducted from 6-28 January 2009:

1. Only four schools out of 85 surveyed had all three facilities of drinking water, toilets and a boundary wall.
2. 63 out of 85 schools do not have drinking water and eight out of the remaining 22 that do have access to water have hand pumps. It was admitted by the teachers that the students go home after taking midday meals (MDM) as there is no water in the school. More than half of these students do not come back to school after lunch.
3. No water in the school also means that the MDM are not cooked in clean water, which is not hygienic. Some schools are not providing MDM regularly as there is no water for cooking.
4. 39 out of 85 schools do not have toilets. The Girls' High School at Aharvan in Palwal block does not have a toilet for girls.
5. 46 out of 85 schools do not have a boundary wall; 28 schools have boundary walls that are either broken or ineffectively low. Many schools are free passages for the villagers, their tractors and animals. The animals and tractors can be dangerous for the students. Many teachers complained that the school buildings become toilets for villagers who sometimes also damage school property after school hours.

Lack of Governance

Construction work by teachers – The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan manual for Village Education Committee (VEC) and Village Council Chairman (VCC) says that the VCC is responsible for construction work in the school but by virtue of being the employee of the government and accountable for work done, the headmaster is given the sole responsibility for construction of classrooms. This is a very big distraction from teaching and a corruption-breeding activity too. There is ample scope for making money by using inferior construction material. Honest headmasters are not interested in shouldering the responsibility of construction work as it puts a question mark on their integrity apart from adversely affecting their performance as teachers and resulting in poor exam results as mentioned by some teachers during the survey. Some headmasters pointed out that they are not qualified or trained for construction work but qualified and trained for teaching.

The number of rooms does not match with the number of students. Schools with larger numbers of students have very few rooms, whereas some schools like Bhamrola have many rooms free while there are less than 100 children enrolled. The sweeper of the school is living in the classrooms permanently with his family.

Motivation of Teachers and Parents

White Lotus Trust found some very good examples where the schools were very well maintained and run by the teachers, e.g. the schools at Vinoda and Kumrehda villages. They were surprised to see the primary school at the modest village of Mankaki which is an example for everyone in maintenance of the building and compound. All the children were dressed in very tidy and clean uniforms with neckties and belts which are unusual in government schools. The teachers of the school informed them that they had organized a meeting of the parents and asked them to provide good uniforms to their children and offered to contribute by providing neckties and belts to every child for motivation.

White Lotus Trust submitted a report to the Education Department of the Government of Haryana and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).

A public hearing was organized in Rupraka village in Hathin block of Palwal district in Haryana by the NCPCR in collaboration with White Lotus Trust and the Village Education Committee, Rupraka on 2 March 2009. The NCPCR was represented by its chairperson Dr. Shantha Sinha, and the state government was represented by Mr. C.R. Rana, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Palwal district.

Dr. Shantha Sinha, chairperson of the NCPCR listened to the grievances of the parents of students from the schools of Hathin block and asked the representatives of the education department to reply to the questions. NCPCR also wrote a letter to the Chief Secretary of Haryana asking for a report of the action taken on the recommendations of the public hearing.

In 2011, the NCPCR started a project called a Social Audit in 10 states of the country including Haryana. The Social Audit was conducted in 25 panchayats (34 villages) in five blocks of Mewat district in collaboration with White Lotus Trust, from March 2011 to June 2011.

Major findings of the NCPCR-partnered 34-village research program:

- The report shows that we found 4,000 children out of school in the 34 villages in 25 panchayats. Some children are enrolled in schools but not attending classes regularly.
- Infrastructure was not satisfactory; most of the schools didn't have proper storage for drinking water, and toilets are not cleaned on a daily basis due to lack of regular water availability. Many schools have broken or non-functional boundary walls.
- Teachers are engaged in illegal non-teaching activities such as construction of classrooms and arranging midday meals for children, ignoring the quality of education.

After presenting the findings of the Social Audit in Mewat district before the District Education Officer and the Block Education Officers of five blocks, White Lotus Trust project manager, who was also a state representative of the NCPCR for Haryana, was invited by the Government of Haryana to present the findings and suggestions for corrective measures before the Hon'ble Minister of Education of Haryana on 5 August 2011. The Government of

Haryana agreed with the findings of the Social Audit and accepted this as a challenge. At this point, the Haryana government formerly invited White Lotus Trust to collaborate and work towards improving schools at Mewat.

Education Campaigns

Dastak-e-Taleem

The campaign called Dastak-e-Taleem was designed by the Directorate of Elementary Education, Haryana in collaboration with White Lotus Trust with a focus on bringing all out-of-school children to schools. It was decided that teachers from all schools should visit every household in every village and enroll all children in the age group of 6 to 14 in the school.

Other authorities, also became part of this mission. Seeing the sincerity of the Principal Secretary for Education, they contributed to make the mission successful.

Various activities like meetings with the SMC, the community and parents, enrolment rallies, meetings with mothers of girl students and sports events were conducted during this campaign by White Lotus Trust in collaboration with district authorities.



White Lotus given a certificate for Dastak E Taleem

The outcome was that thousands of children were enrolled in schools all over the district, including 34 village schools that achieved 100% enrolment with assistance from White Lotus Trust.

Shiksha ka Haq

The launch of the Shiksha ka Haq campaign of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) was carried out from Nuh in Mewat district on the suggestion of the Government of Haryana. The Hon'ble Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Hon'ble Minister of MHRD, Hon'ble Chief Minister and Education Minister of Haryana with other dignitaries were present at Mewat to launch Shiksha ka Haq on 11 November 2011.

This event was the first big program in Mewat District with a focus on education, in which about 5,000 parents and teachers participated. The presence and sensitivity of the government in Mewat made a big difference in the minds of the people of Mewat and encouraged them to think about the education of their children.

White Lotus Trust was given a certificate of appreciation during this program by the Haryana government for achieving 100% enrolment in 34 villages during the Social Audit program of the NCPCR.

Shirkat-e-Taleem

The aims of this campaign were:

- To train the Block Education Officer on block management techniques;
- To get exposure to the realities in the schools and learn about the recent practices being followed for school development in Mewat;
- To communicate with parents, community leaders, religious leaders, political leaders, members of the PRI and Maulvis of Madrasas;
- To establish the problems and deficiencies and prepare a micro-plan for every school;
- To consolidate data and findings to innovate and exchange ideas about critical management issues.

The outcomes were mixed. It was observed that 30% of schools can be termed as good, 30% average and 30% need serious attention. After visiting all the schools of the five blocks, Block Education Officers presented their findings before the Director General for Elementary Education and suggested remedial measures.

The government took all of these suggestions very seriously and measures were taken to provide all resources and corrective steps to implement the recommendations. These steps were very effective in improving the infrastructure, quality of education and attendance of students in the classes.

The next task at hand was to make the community and parents of the students in schools empowered to manage the schools better as the RTE Act 2009 provided a very powerful tool in the hands of the community by strengthening the powers of School Management Committees (SMC).

Training of School Management Committees (SMC)

Along with many other education firsts, the Government of Haryana was one of the first states that constituted and notified state rules for implementation of the Children's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. SMCs were constituted in March 2011 in compliance with the RTE Act timeline. Haryana schools have a parent as the head of the SMC unlike many other states, including Delhi, where a headmaster is made head of the SMC in violation of the RTE Act. The White Lotus Trust focused on giving inputs to the SMC trainers appointed by the government and on making trainings participatory. The members may be allowed to speak about what they have observed in the schools and what the solutions to the problems are according to them. The trainer should also understand the knowledge level of the SMC members and communicate with them in their language.

Another challenge was to make schools attractive for the students and compliant with the RTE Act in terms of infrastructure and quality of education. To achieve this objective, the government started another initiative to make all schools RTE compliant. In 2013, a plan with input from White Lotus Trust was prepared to conduct another campaign called Shirkat-e-Taleem. All 119 Block Education Officers from the state were invited to Mewat for a six-day residential program in which they were oriented about the task on the first day by a high-level team led by the Principal Secretary for Education.

Training of Teachers on Comprehensive and Continuous Evaluation (CCE)



WLT trust employed DIET Gurgaon trainer for CCE training

White Lotus Trust initiated training of 600 teachers, one from each school of five blocks in the Mewat district in 2014. This training was conducted in five phases, covering different topics in different phases such as concepts of CCE, the Shiksha Setu card, record keeping and progress reporting. One hundred to 120 teachers from each block participated in these training programs, conducted at block level. The teachers attending these training programs were given all required materials to understand the process and its implementation.

Follow-up training was also conducted in 50 schools. Ten schools in each block received feedback on their compliance with the procedures of CCE. The results of the follow-up were quite positive and all schools appreciated the initiative, the first in the State of Haryana and many north Indian states. These training programs were quite effective in giving answers to the questions of teachers on the No Detention Policy of the RTE Act 2009.

White Lotus Trust was given a certificate of appreciation for partnership in improving the quality of education for 1 million children in collaboration with the Education Department of Haryana, by the Chief Minister of Haryana in February 2014.

Case Stories from White Lotus Trust



Suman extreme right, Irshana on her right, Shaista second from left with their teacher

Suman from Durgapur village is studying in grade ten in Aharwan School and has been traveling on the Blossom Bus for the past year after passing grade 8 from Durgapur School. She does well at school and wants to study as much as possible as she wants to be independent even after marriage. When asked why she is so keen to study until college she became silent. We asked, 'Will your parents send you to school if there is no Blossom Bus?' She did not respond directly but only said, 'Please do not stop Blossom Bus or many girls will be out of school and will lead a bad life.' It was a serious statement and we wanted to know why Suman was so interested in education.

After a lot of persuasion Suman opened up and told us, 'My mother is illiterate and my father is a drunkard. He beats my mother every day for money for alcohol, earned by my elder brother who works after passing grade 10 and gets a meager salary. My mother has to bear all the beatings silently as she is illiterate and cannot work.' We asked her if she is confident that she will get a job after studying until grade 12. She said that she may or may not get a job but if married to a drunkard, she may not have to face domestic-violence as it will be difficult for a husband to beat an educated wife. She also said that she knows about the helpline number 1091 for complaints against domestic violence and will call the police if subjected to such behavior by her husband.

We asked her why she does not ask her father to stop drinking. She said that she has seen her father drinking since she was a toddler and has many times asked him to shun alcohol but he never listens to anyone. He says that he will keep drinking as long as he is alive.

Suman is worried about her family as her two younger sisters are studying in grade 3 and 5 in the village school. The whole family is dependent on the earning of one brother and Suman wants to help her brother and earn more so that her sisters can also complete school.

During this discussion, Suman kept repeating 'Please never stop Blossom Bus' as this is the only hope for hundreds of girls who have reached grades 10 and 12.

Irshana comes from Jalalpur village and is studying in grade 10 in Aharwan School. She has a sister who is also attending Aharwan School and traveling on the Blossom Bus. Her three brothers are studying at the Industrial Training Institute in a small town in Mewat district.

We asked Irshana, if her brothers can afford to travel to a town for studies, why her parents refused to allow her to attend school after passing grade 5 from a village school. She said that though her parents were supportive of girls' education, they were also concerned about her being harassed by village boys on the way to school. The boys are allowed to travel any distance but girls are not allowed to walk even 1 kilometer to school.

We then asked her whether she will also go to college or some polytechnic for further studies. Irshana said, 'Only if a girls' college or polytechnic is available as my parents feel and I agree the environment at co-ed places is not conducive for girls.' Irshana is confident about getting a job after completing her school education or college as she feels that all who are not educated cannot get a job but those that are educated will. 'I will be one of those who get a job as I am still at school in grade 10 and not those that stopped studying after grade 5 and married at an early age.'

Khushboo wants to become a doctor of medicine

Khushboo has now reached grade 9 after traveling on the Blossom Bus for the last four years. She started going to Girls' High School, Aharwan from her village, Bhanguri after passing grade 5 from the village primary school four years ago. She has three siblings, the youngest is a brother studying in grade 2. She is the eldest in the family with three sisters and one brother. Her mother told us that it was not possible for her to send her daughter to a school 4 kilometers away from the village as they had no income at that time. Khushboo's father is an alcoholic and does not work. Her mother was able to get a petty job recently as a village health worker with a meager salary. The Blossom Bus is a blessing for the family as Khushboo was very keen to continue her studies. Khushboo is a very confident and serious student and performs well in school. She did not think even for a second before responding to us, 'I want to become a doctor.' She said when asked about why she is so serious about her education, 'I want to practice medicine so that I can help my family in their fight with poverty.'

Her teacher also appreciated Khushboo for her keen interest in schoolwork and requested Lotus Outreach to continue supporting the girls by providing transport.



Khushboo 2nd from left on right side of class



Pooja will be a graduate next year

Pooja is excited that she will become a graduate next year and then will do her degree in education to become a teacher. Her younger sister Sushma is also studying in grade 12 and is traveling on the Blossom Bus. Her elder sister is a primary teacher and is working in a private school with a small salary as she could not do a graduate degree. She did her Junior Basic Teacher (JBT) training after passing school as there was no transport at that time for her to go to college. Her youngest brother is studying in grade 2 in the village primary school.

Pooja comes from a family that is very interested in education of girls, but they were not able to send their eldest daughter to a college more than 10 kilometers from the village without safe public transport. The family has no land and no regular income. They keep goats and sheep and sell them for their living. The family is dependent on the income from selling the animals and the eldest daughter, working as a teacher, is supporting the education of her younger sisters.

Pooja told us that her family is going through a very tough phase as the expenses for schooling at grade 12 and college (other than transport) are difficult to manage and they look forward to the completion of their daughters' education for the financial support as they will get better jobs. Free transport provided by Lotus Outreach is an immense support.

Nisha Khanam is one of the many girls from village Jalalpur that has now reached grade 10 this year after traveling on the Blossom Bus for the last three years. She is the eldest daughter of a Maulvi in a mosque in the village and has six younger sisters. One of her sisters, Aisha, is also traveling on the Blossom Bus and is enrolled in grade 6 this year. 'It was very difficult to convince my parents to let me attend a school 8 kilometers away from the village, although I was very much interested in continuing my studies,' said Nisha. Her father was reluctant to send her to school because he was afraid about her safety and security.

Nisha invited home some of her friends who were already traveling on the Blossom Bus and attending Girls' High School in Aharwan. The girls told Nisha's father that the school is a girls' school and that transport is quite safe for girls as one person from the village (father of a girl) travels with them. The transport is trusted by parents and it is free. Her father agreed reluctantly. He feels that having no male child in the family in Mewat is a big problem, but he



Nisha in her school

is happy now as he feels that his daughters will get a good education and it will be easy to find a good, educated bridegroom for them, which is a great relief.

Headmaster Mr. Balbir Singh and Nisha's class teacher Mrs. Rawat informed us that Nisha is a good student and performs well in the class. They are happy with the transport and thanked Lotus Outreach for this great service being provided to the students from the poor families of Mewat that has transformed many lives. Some of the girls who have graduated from this school are now in college which is like a dream come true for the girls from Mewat.

The headmaster told us with pride that 45 out of the 54 girls in grade 10 have passed the exams in the 2015-16 school year from this school compared to 40% pass percentage in the state.⁶⁷ In a high school at Hathin block, of 103 students appearing in the grade 10 exam only one passed.⁶⁸

He further informed us that the number of girls at Aharwan High School has increased from 180 in 2008 to 340 in 2016 because of the availability of the Blossom Bus, now transporting 205 girls from different villages to this school daily.⁶⁹

We now have 275 girls traveling on the Blossom Bus, including 70 from villages in Rajasthan for the year 2016-17.

⁶⁷ Department of Elementary Education. (2016). Harprathnik.gov.in

⁶⁸ <http://www.whiteclonustrust.org/new/reports.html> 2016 reports.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Adding Value While Deepening The Work On Education

White Lotus Trust Blossom to College Bus Service

As mentioned earlier, in 2014, 20 girls from four villages expressed their willingness to study in college after completing their high school education on the Blossom Bus and asked White Lotus Trust to provide transport to colleges in Palwal. White Lotus agreed to their demand and they are now attending Government College in Palwal. In 2016, the Trust added a further 20 girls to our Blossom to College Bus for a total of 40, and 20 from the 2014 batch will graduate in this coming year.

Sending these girls to college represents a big change in the mindset of the people in Mewat. It is often said that parents do not want to get their daughters educated. However, the Trust's experience is that every parent of Mewat wants to get their children educated, provided facilities are available.

Hiring Blossom Bus Graduates for White Lotus Education Quality Addition (EQU+) Program

The Trust has hired five of the Blossom Bus grade 12 graduates to work as teachers in their own villages, where the program is operating. These talented young women, having been served by Blossom Bus program for some years, are now contributing to their communities. They broke many barriers and glass ceilings along the way, to become the first girls to complete year 12 in their villages. Forty of these girls are now in college!

White Lotus Trust created the EQU+ program recognizing that many research projects have shown there is a learning gap in many government schools where children are unable to complete required tasks.

Further, in the past year there have been an alarming number of failures at grade-10 board exam level across Haryana even though we have started with the provision of primary school classes. The Haryana government recently established a 'zero tolerance for cheating' in exams, which has shocked a system that

was long used to passing children on the basis of payments. It's a good thing this practice has been stopped as there is now a real incentive for children to complete their studies in the knowledge that cheating will no longer provide them any support.

The EQU+ program has been designed with input from NUEPA and District Institute of Education and Training Gurgaon along with local NGO partners working on remedial education. White Lotus Trust is now in the process of base-lining the educational levels of 150 children in five government schools in collaboration with the Government of Haryana.

In terms of sustainability, the Trust has established the EQU+ program as a pilot study with the intention of presenting the results to the Government of Haryana to inform the rolling out of a program at scale. A program like this is required to ensure that all children are being brought up to standard. There is provision for this in the RTE Act, recognizing there will be a lot of gaps in the government school system while it is getting back into shape after being left to atrophy for some 20 years since the government centralized control of education.

Challenges Identified by White Lotus Trust

Discrimination

Gender discrimination is prevalent, both at home and in the broader community. Anecdotal evidence from our interviews of the girls revealed that other families in society at large do not like some girls getting a chance to attend college while, at the same time, many boys from these same villages have failed to reach college level. Even the members of their own extended family do not agree to their nieces going to college while their own daughters could not reach college. They feel inferior or backward in terms of education and work against girls' education because of jealousy.

Discrimination in terms of harassment

During the interviews, girls informed us that boys generally keep standing around the area where girls walk or even board the Blossom Bus. Boys may not say anything to the girls, but the fact that there is no reason for their presence creates a feeling of fear and discomfort in the girls. It should also be noted that this behavior is happening in broad daylight and intensifies the lack of security

which girls feel when passing through uninhabited areas such as fields. It is also very common for boys to hang around near schools and even sit on the boundary walls. If a girl feels obliged to respond verbally and simply out of good manners, a boy might use that to push the girl further.

Some girls also mentioned that some boys or even elders sometimes stand at the door of their houses dressed scantily, which also makes girls feel uncomfortable while walking through the village streets. In general, girls feel they cannot complain to their parents or the villagers as the harassment is non-verbal. Just the fact that boys are there leering is not enough for villagers that do not like to chasten the boys.

We can see in Figure 1 that 49% of all girls in the program told us they faced harassment and threatening behavior on the way to school.

There is reason to believe that these figures may be underestimated due to:

- Girls having faced this kind of behavior daily to the extent it seems normative;
- Girls, being traditional, will not feel comfortable complaining openly about the behavior of boys as misbehavior will always be blamed on girls, even when boys are the perpetrators.

We can see from the above paragraphs how gender discrimination raises many challenges from the point of view of family and social attitudes toward girls.

In terms of sustainability, we have always identified an exit strategy for our programs through government or community takeover. That is why we empowered SMCs and led the training of teachers on CCE in our LEARN program. Where the Blossom Bus is concerned we've been asking the parents of the girls traveling on the bus and the broader community to take over this responsibility from the outset. During interviews, all the parents profess concern for and understanding of the importance of girls' education, but we get no response when it comes to finding solutions using their own resources. We have offered to pay for fuel to run their tray-tractors, to help set up committees and a roster to share drop-off and pick-up of girls, but to no avail. Parents always have many reasons such as lack of a vehicle or lack of time. They seem to feel that getting their girls safely to school is not their responsibility and will only send their girls to school or college when an organization or the government provides transport.

Further, the community does not recognize the role that boys play in making travel to school perilous for girls. We believe that community leaders need to take a strong stand in this regard and work should also be done with boys to bring changes in the normative behavior in these communities. We are planning a 'bikes for girls' program for some of the less dangerous areas and seeking ways to include boys as chaperones.

Conclusions Extrapolated From Field Surveys Regarding Parental Attitudes Towards Girls' Education

We can see from Figure 3 in this report that 82% of parents support their child being educated and yet are not willing to take responsibility to make it happen.

We can see from Figure 4 that 89% of respondents believe education for girls evokes respect from society. Still, parents will do very little except give their permission when a 'safe' and 'effortless' means presents itself.

Figure 5 shows us that, while the vast majority of parents want their children educated (82%), 81% of parents do not help with homework.

Comments from Teachers and School Authorities

The White Lotus Trust Team asked questions about discrimination and support from the teachers, both male and female. The teachers responded that they are happy about these girls coming to school for various reasons. Enrollment in the Girls' High School has increased by 50% between 2010 and 2016 due to the girls using the Blossom Bus. Only two girls were enrolled in the school from other villages in the year 2010.⁷⁰ The current batch of 252 girls is coming from seven different villages. Another reason is that the teachers feel that the girls are better behaved than boys. The girls are more attentive and serious about learning, making teachers' jobs easier and more pleasant.

⁷⁰ White Lotus Trust Report. (2016). <http://www.whitelotustrust.org/new/reports.html>

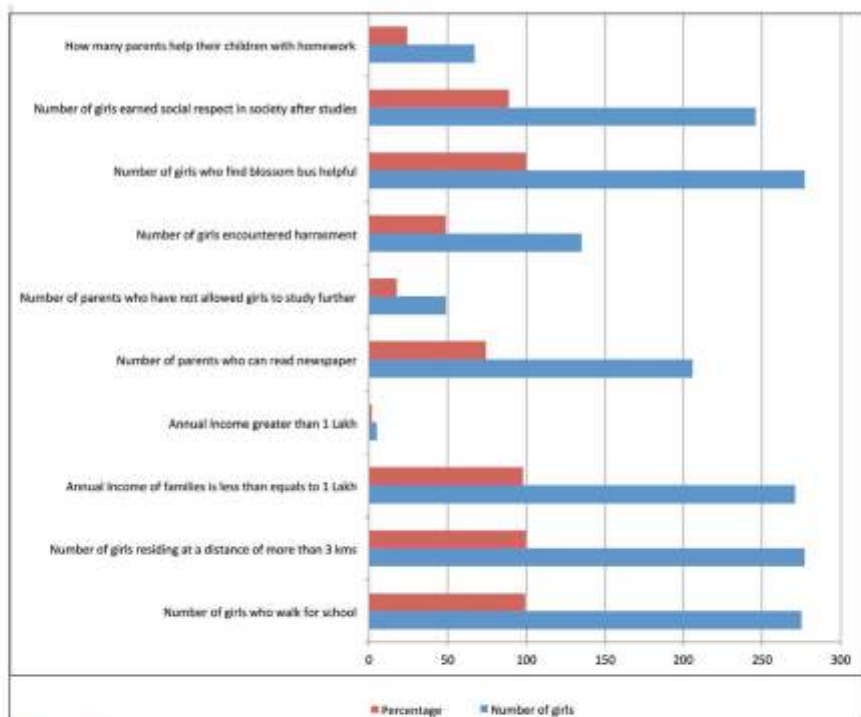


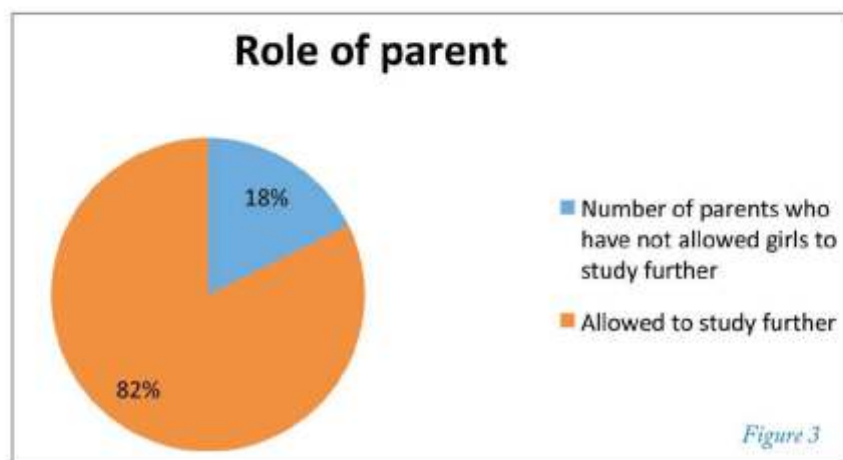
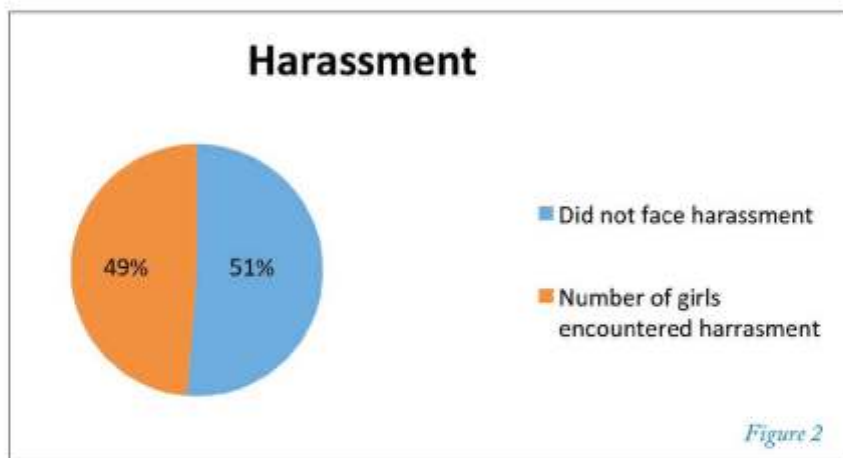
Figure 1

Figure 1⁷¹ provides a summary of the WLT field survey we undertook to analyze various elements contributing to and bringing into contrast attitudes, behaviors and local conditions that are impacting the Blossom girls as they strive towards achieving their dream to complete their education. We can see that all girls live more than 3 km from their school and that 98% of parents live on an income of less than 100,000 rupees per year.

⁷¹ White Lotus Trust Report, (2016). <http://www.whitelotustrust.org/new/reports.html>

Notes On Tables / Graphs / Methodology

White Lotus developed questionnaires and directly visited schools where the Blossom Bus girls are attending classes. The program manager and assistant asked the girls questions in small groups and individually. They also set up Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with parents in small groups and visited them individually at their homes. Parents were asked questions, both in the presence of the students and alone. Parental responses remained the same in both contexts while students were less responsive in the presence of their parents.



Change in status of girl

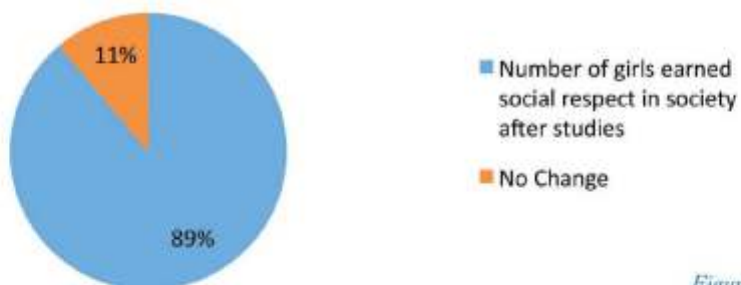


Figure 4

Academic support from family



Figure 5

Annual Income of family

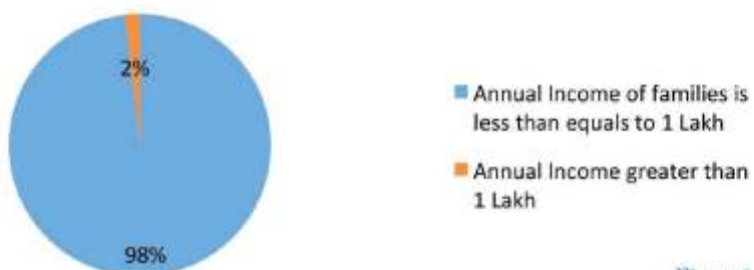


Figure 6



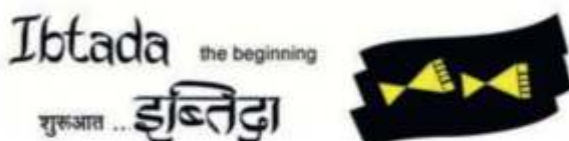


A Meo Muslim girl at Taleemshala

Ibtada

Taleemshala

(An initiative of Ibtada for Girls' Education)



SECTION A

1. Background of the Taleemshala Project

It is difficult to meet the objective of universal primary education without understanding the status of girls' education, especially for those girls from socially, economically and educationally marginalized communities. In the 1990s, most of the girls from these communities had either never enrolled in school or dropped out before completing primary education. The statistics of boys' to girls' enrolment in the year 1995-96 reveals that compared to 2,284,362 boys, only 1,329,375 girls were enrolled in primary classes in Rajasthan - a gap of 42% in enrolment rate between boys and girls.⁷² There are many reasons attributed to this: poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, social customs and taboos. Apart from these, there were systemic failures. The government system neither creates a situation of dialogue with the community, nor could it establish its credibility among the people. The poor status of primary education in the late 1990s was mainly due to irregularity and irresponsibility of teachers, adverse teacher-student ratios, lack of an enabling environment in schools, stereotyped pedagogy and curricula, use of traditional teaching and learning methods, unhealthy relationships between teachers and students and teachers and

⁷² Government of Rajasthan. (1996). Statistical Abstract of Rajasthan, ,p.65.

communities. All of these factors together helped the community to construct its particular viewpoint about education. It is difficult to impart primary education to deprived girls without establishing a dialogue with the parents and community and improving the teaching and learning methods. Against this backdrop, Ibtada started its alternative schools to promote girls' education.

1.1 Ibtada's Understanding of Education

Quality of primary and high school education is a common concern in present-day development forums. Everyone defines it differently. When it comes to reaching the unreached, the question of quality has been left untouched. Ibtada felt that questions of both quantity and quality are worth addressing with a balance. It started its intervention in the field of education in the year 2000 with no prior experience. However, Ibtada had some experience of working with communities through its savings and credit-based women's institutions. As an organization, Ibtada is premised on the assumption that 'Education Empowers'. It is a proven fact that education is the strongest tool to fight exploitation. It liberates and equips us with an understanding of the world, develops sensitivity in our attitude and thinking, makes us skilful in expressing ourselves and enables us to create our own space in the existing society and world. As far as the teaching and learning process is concerned, we believe that it should be relevant to the culture and society. School should be a place of joy for every child, where she can feel safe and secure, and can spend time with pleasure. It is a better learning strategy if we start from our own understanding of the child instead of a given syllabus. Learning by doing is the first basic step of learning abstract concepts. Although Ibtada is in the process of defining the criteria of quality education, it seems clear that standards of education imparted in larger systems are not representative of a quality education.

1.2 The Beginning of the Intervention

Ibtada started as a small initiative of Taleemshalas (girls' learning centers for primary education) in the Umren block of the Alwar district in Mewar region in May 2000 with financial support of Action Aid India. Digantar, a renowned educational institute based at Jaipur, extended technical support. Since its inception, Taleemshala initiatives focused on the most disadvantaged groups of

of society, girls of Meo Muslim⁷³ and other marginalized communities. Providing education for girls in Mewat is considered difficult for sociocultural reasons. In the first instance, it may be said that no community will appreciate innovative education, where children have no textbooks to carry home, where there is no beating or punishment of students, and where children have friendly relations with teachers rather than being afraid of them. It takes a lot of time and energy to educate parents and the entire community about the new ways of teaching and learning. This is particularly true in relation to first-generation learners.

Ibtada's seven Taleemshalas were started in villages where it had its base through women's self-help groups (SHGs). Ibtada had done intensive work with the poor and deprived rural women through these self-help groups. Because of this work, it was easy to discuss the idea of girls' education. A series of interactions were conducted with the women and other community members, and seven centers were started in five villages. Each teacher worked with one group of 25-30 students. Classes were held for four hours and timings were set after consultations with the community. There was no standard or class system, nor was there an examination system. The students were provided with the freedom to learn at their own pace. Although it is widely advocated that every child ought to be given freedom to learn at her own pace, this is truer in the case of marginalized girls who do not have the freedom to attend school regularly. Therefore, each student is at her own stage of learning. Students have to learn 'arambhic kshamtayen' (start-up capabilities), and then keep working on textbooks. Teaching and learning materials (TLM) developed by Digantar were used. The girls had to work on 5th-standard government schoolbooks in order to pass primary school education as per the government system.

⁷³ The Meo Muslims share a common ancestry with Hindus, and identify closely with them in several social and cultural customs. History suggests that the majority of them embraced Islam during the Tughlaq dynasty and the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.



A typical classroom learning



Donor visiting Taleemshala Chandoli village

Year-wise coverage of Taleemshala



In 2002, 13 more Taleemshalas were opened with the support from Aide-et-Action in Ramgarh block. In 2003, IIMPACT supported Ibtada to open 21 more Taleemshalas in Ramgarh and Umren blocks. In 2006-07, Taleemshala made its inroad in Tijara block where 25 Taleemshalas were established. IIMPACT started its second phase with 20 more schools. This time, 20 Taleemshalas were set up in a new block, Kishangarh Bas. The third phase of IIMPACT started in the year 2009, with 30 new Taleemshalas (20 new Taleemshalas were set up in Kishangarh Bas and 10 Taleemshalas in Ramgarh). By the end of 2009, Ibtada was operating 120 Taleemshalas in four blocks of Alwar district.

Average attendance in these centers is more than 75%. Girls who are absent have been kept home for work or have gone to relatives. Teachers of the schools kept in regular contact with the parents and repeatedly reached out to the parents of girls who were frequently absent. These intensive efforts ensured that girls who would never see the classroom are now attending an institution which imparts child-centered, quality education.

Apart from the fact that these girls are getting high-quality education, many more changes are observed in their behavior. These include sensitivity to each other's caste and peer support. Girls are also less hesitant and their expressive ability has improved. They have developed a spirit of cooperation and they help each other to learn. Cleanliness among school-attending girls has improved and there is improvement in their spoken language. Girls have also developed an affinity towards school and education and do not like to miss school, even if

their parents insist that they work at home.

Apart from these impacts, the girls are learning various capabilities. To learn to read and write is one part of Ibtada's program. In addition, these girls are also learning poems, story-making, storytelling, songs, acting, drama and handicrafts. They are getting trained to think logically. These girls are developing the capacity to learn on their own, whereby they can keep learning throughout their life.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act, also known as RTE, was enacted on 4 August 2009 by the Indian Parliament and came into effect from 1 April 2010. After this, Ibtada decided to gradually phase out these Taleemshalas by 2014.

2. Profile of the Area



The main operation area of Ibtada is Alwar district of Rajasthan. The district is spread across 8,380 sq km. It is bound on the north by Rewari district of Haryana, on the east by Bharatpur and Mewat district of Haryana, on the south by Dausa and on the west by Jaipur district. The district is divided into 14 administrative blocks.

Ibtada started its Taleemshalas in 2000 with seven centers in five villages of Umran block. Year after year, it has made additions to the number of Taleemshalas and expanded geographically. By 2007, Ibtada started Taleemshalas in four blocks, namely Umren, Ramgarh, Tijara and Kishangarh Bas. All of these blocks fall under the educationally backward blocks of the Alwar district.

The district falls within the Mewat region of Rajasthan, which is inhabited by the Meo Muslim community. The Meos are one of the well-known communities of the Mewat region. Mewat is the geographical name given to a region that covers parts of Haryana and Rajasthan with very small pockets in Uttar Pradesh. The community speaks Mewati, which is a Rajasthani dialect influenced by Brij Bhasha (a western Indian Hindi language closely related to Hindustani). Once a warrior tribe, the Meos are now marginal farmers, with nominal landholdings cultivating onions, wheat and mustard.

Meos are believed to have been converted to Islam in the 14th century and trace their ancestry to Rajputs or Yaduvanshis. Even after their conversion, they remained proud of their ancestry and maintained strong links with their Hindu background. Until a few decades ago, they used to be Musalmans in name only and their village deities were the same as those of Hindu cultivators. They also observed several Hindu festivals. The Meo and non-Meo relationship is an excellent example of Hindu-Muslim harmony. However, this has been weakening over the last three to four decades.

The Mewaties were considered a warrior class and were notorious for their turbulence and predatory habits. They were a constant source of trouble to the rulers of Delhi. In the revolt of 1857 against the British, the Mewaties actively supported the last Moghul emperor, and when the revolt failed, the area was severely neglected. Years of social alienation and economic deprivation have had a negative impact on education, leading to an abysmally low literacy rate among Meo Muslims.

A mismatch between traditional cultural and religious beliefs and the 'modern' formal school education system has driven up the non-enrolment rate, especially of girls, among Meo Muslims. According to official estimates, the proportion of Meo Muslim girls in school is less than 1% in the Mewat region.⁷⁴ The influential local clergy or Maulanas advocated deeni taleem, the study of

⁷⁴ Mewat Shiksha Panchayat (It Takes a Village to Educate a Child), p. 7, authored by Ms. Ananthapriya Subramaniam, a Child Rights Good Practices Documentation, is a series prepared and published by Child Rights Focus, a knowledge initiative of ActionAid.

religion, as the only form of education that was permissible for girls. Duniya-ki taleem (modern education) was considered antithetical to Islam. The educational character of formal schools - especially the use of Hindi as the medium of learning, singing and dancing, and the pictorial representation of characters and events - was perceived as un-Islamic or even anti-Islamic. Parents complied with the clergy's diktats. The non-availability or poor availability of schools and teachers, and sheer absence of all-girls' schools and female teachers, further exacerbated the state of educational deprivation among the Meo Muslims.

SECTION B

3. Objectives of the Study

- i. Understand the impact of Taleemshalas on girls' continuity of education and on their lives
- ii. Understand the impact of Taleemshalas to change parents' perspectives and their efforts in furtherance of girls' education
- iii. Document success stories of girls who are first-generation learners

4. Methodology

Between 2010 and 2014, 1,926 girls have passed grade 5 from Taleemshalas. A survey of all of these girls was done to find out their present status of continued education. Ibtada could finally gather data for 1,883 girls.

Ibtada was running 121 Taleemshalas in 91 villages. These Taleemshalas were operational in 45 gram panchayat of four blocks. A sample survey and interview of 325 girls out of 1,883 pass out girls (17.2%) from Taleemshalas was done through stratified random sampling. At least one village (having the maximum number of pass out girls) from each gram panchayat was covered, in which a maximum of six girls from each selected village were surveyed. Similarly, 167 parents were also surveyed and interviewed. The girls and parents were selected randomly from the prepared list.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) schedule was carried out in all the sample villages. In total, 45 FGDs with girls and parents were carried out.

For case studies, 10 girls were selected based on the following criteria:

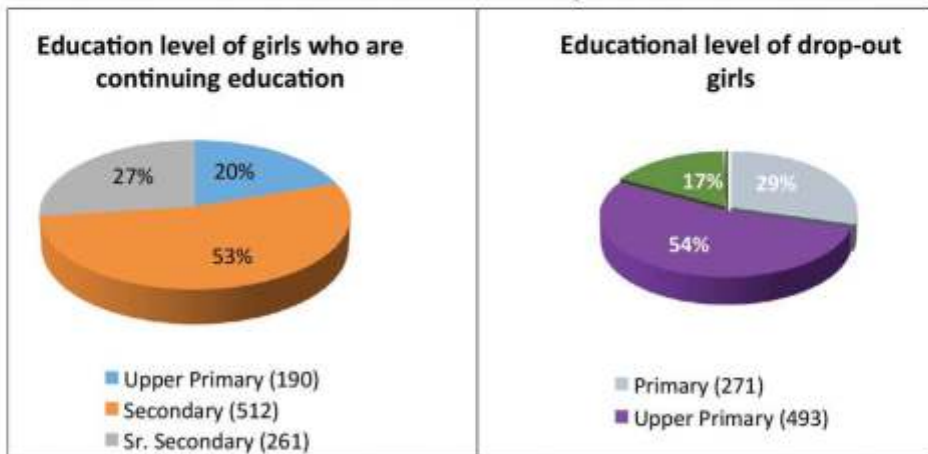
- Girls who have passed out since 2004
- Girls pursuing education above senior secondary level and who have high aspirations
- Girls who have joined a profession such as government or a private job
- Girls who got married after completing education and influenced their in-laws' family about the importance of education

SECTION C

5. Analysis and Findings

5.1 Findings of the Survey of Girls Passed Out in 2010 to 2014

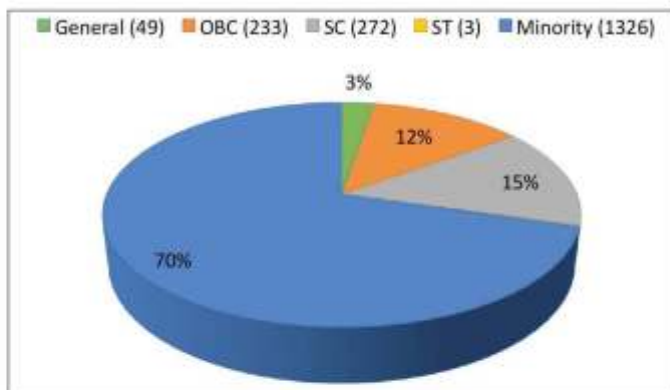
5.1.1 Present Educational Status of Passed Out Girls



The present educational status of girls who have passed out from Taleemshalas reveals that 51% of girls (963 girls out of 1,883 girls surveyed) are continuing education at a different level. The majority of them are pursuing secondary education (53%). Of those who are studying, about 27% are studying at senior secondary level. Out of 1,883 girls surveyed, 14.4% of girls did not continue education after passing out from Taleemshalas. 649 girls discontinued

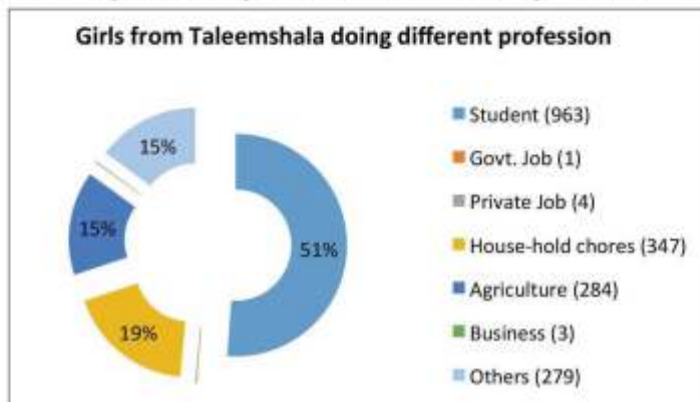
education at various stages. Out of these 649 students, 493 girls (76%) obtained education to upper primary grades. Out of 649, 24% of girls dropped out after completing secondary education.

5.1.2 Caste-wise Reach of Taleemshalas



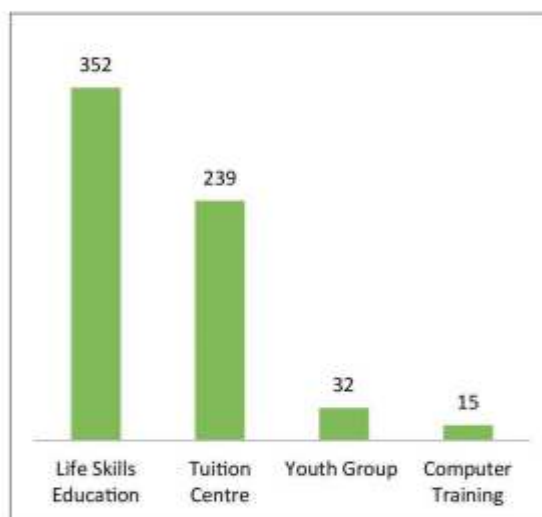
The above graph presents the caste-wise reach of girls in Taleemshala interventions. It is quite evident that more than two-thirds of girls belong to the most educationally marginalized group, i.e. Meo Muslim. Apart from this, 14% of girls belong to a scheduled caste category and 12% of girls represent other backward castes. Overall, 97% of the girls studied are from marginalized sections of society.

5.1.3 Professions of Girls Passed Out of Taleemshalas



At the professional level, it is interesting to note that 51% of girls who have passed out between 2010 and 2014 continue to pursue education at different levels. 15% of girls are involved in agricultural work and 20% are taking responsibility for household chores.

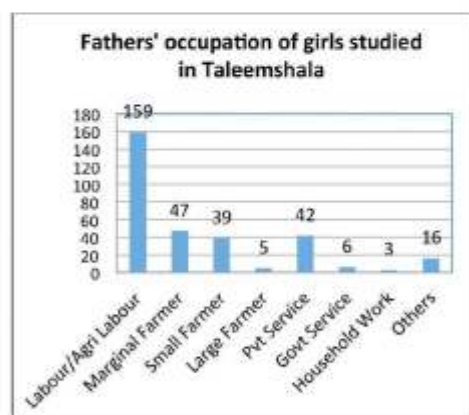
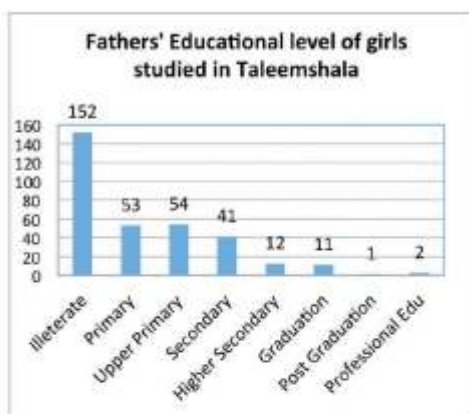
5.1.4 Taleemshala Girls Associated with Other Programs of Ibtada



Ibtada endeavors to provide various opportunities to girls such as life skills education, computer training, and supplementary education through tuition centers and youth groups. These endeavors have significantly helped girls to develop various skills beyond formal education. Out of 1,883 girls who have passed out in the period between 2010 and 2014, 497 (26%) girls were associated with other programs of Ibtada as mentioned above. Out of 497 girls, 352 (71%) girls were associated with Ibtada's life skills program and 239 (48%) girls were associated with supplementary education programs.

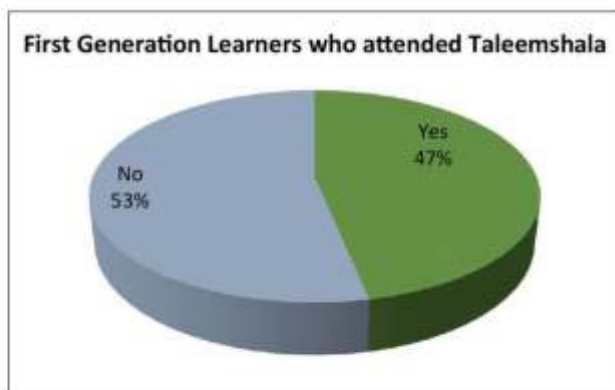
5.2 Findings of Girls' Interviews

5.2.1 Educational and Occupational Background of Family



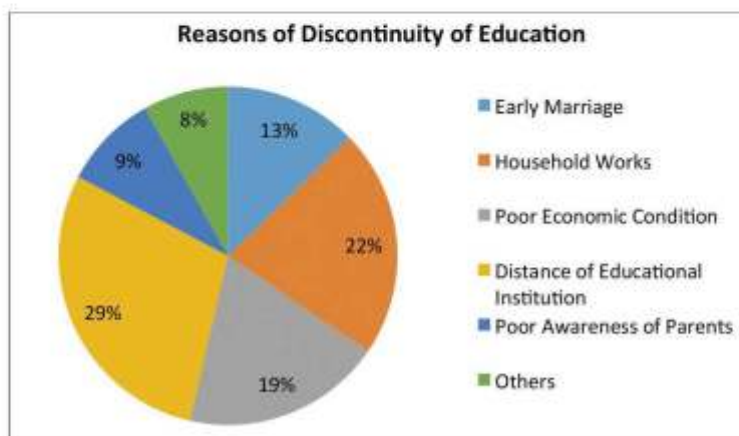
From the above graph, it is quite evident that the social, educational and economic background of the majority of the girls studied in Taleemshalas is poor. The heads of the families of half of the girls interviewed are illiterate and depend on unskilled labor for their livelihoods. The fathers of 26 girls (out of 325 girls interviewed) have an education above secondary level, while the fathers of 47 girls are marginal farmers. The fathers of 39 girls are small farmers and those of 42 girls are dependent on private jobs.

5.2.2 First-generation Learners from Taleemshalas



It is interesting to note that 47% of girls (152 out of 325) are first-generation learners. Among these, 22% of the girls are the first member in their family to attend any school. It captures the educational backwardness of the region.

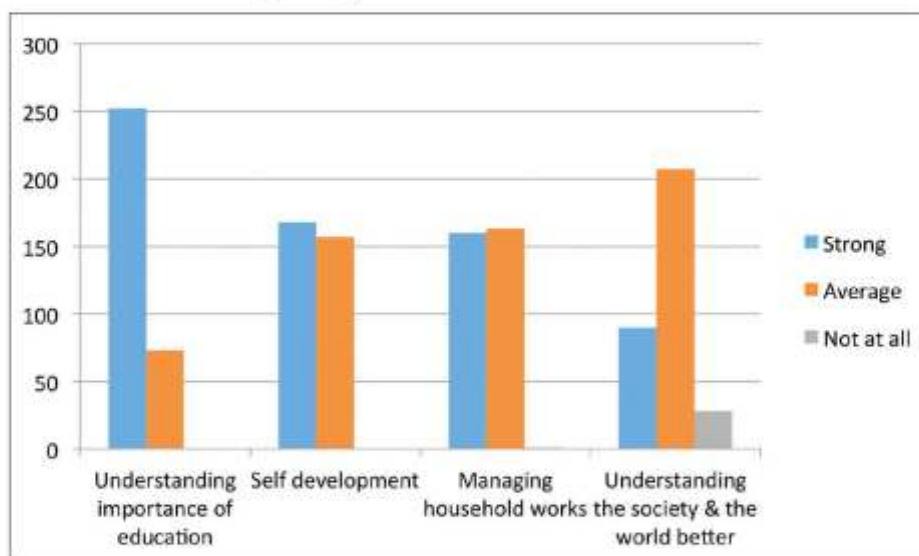
5.2.3 Reasons for Discontinuity of Education



Out of 325 girls interviewed, 110 were found to have discontinued education at various stages. The three most important reasons are the distance of the educational institution (29%), household work which also includes agriculture

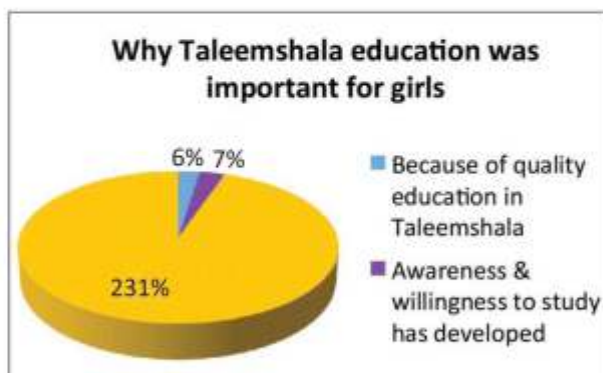
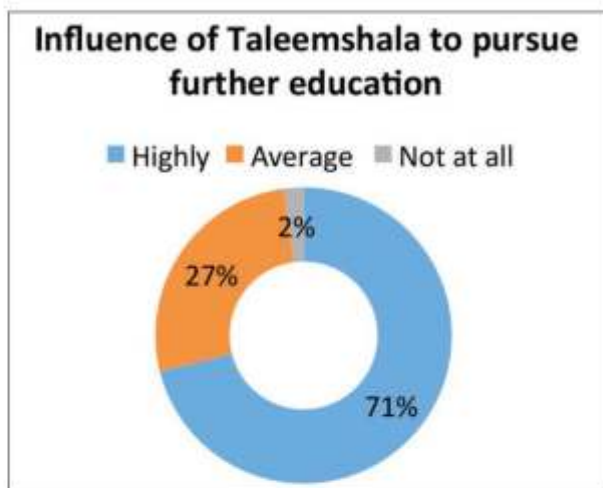
and the poor economic condition of the family (19%). Although access to primary and upper primary schools may not present a problem, distance of secondary schools and beyond definitely poses a challenge, particularly if there is no adequate transportation facility available. At completion of upper primary grades, girls enter adolescence and many parents fear for the safety and security of their child if she has to travel a long distance for higher education. Poor economic status of the family has come out as a strong reason for discontinuation of education. Other reasons are early marriage and poor awareness of the parents of the benefits of continued education.

5.2.4 Impact of Taleemshalas on Girls' Lives



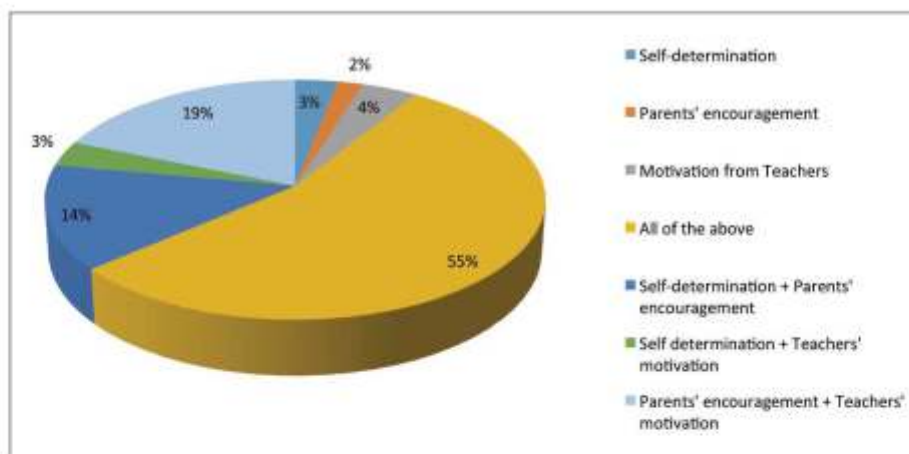
The study has tried to understand the impact of Taleemshala education upon the lives of girls on the basis of four parameters. These are: understanding the importance of education, self-development, managing household work and understanding society and the world better. About 80% of girls perceive that it is because of Taleemshalas that they realize the relevance of education in their lives. Therefore, it is quite clear that Taleemshalas had a high impact in creating awareness of the importance of education in the community. Nearly 50% of girls opined that Taleemshala education has helped in facets of self-development and in better managing household work.

5.2.5 Influence of Taleemshalas on Girls to Pursue Further Education



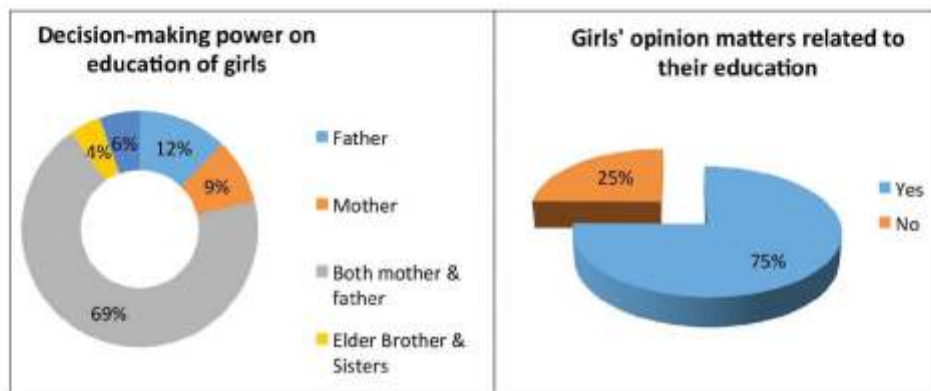
Undoubtedly, Taleemshalas have a very strong influence on girls to continue further education. 71% of girls stated that it had strongly influenced them. 27% of girls felt that it had a minor influence on them. Taleemshalas have been able to strongly influence the girls to continue to pursue further education because of two primary reasons: i) quality of education; and ii) development of an awareness and willingness to study.

5.2.6 Factors Responsible for the Success of Girls



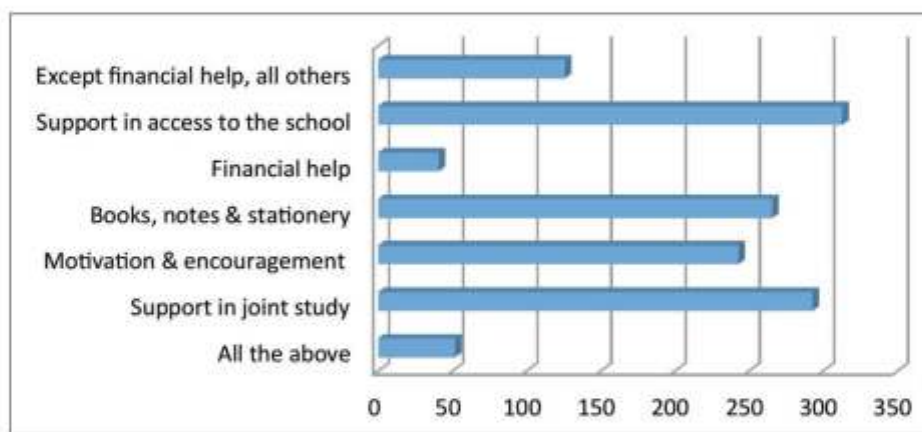
Interviews were conducted in order to understand the success factors for girls. More than half of the girls interviewed revealed that three factors are equally responsible for their success: self-determination, encouragement of parents and motivation of teachers. Apart from this, about 20% of girls are of the opinion that parents' encouragement and teachers' motivation are crucial for their success, and 14% stated that self-determination and parental encouragement are mainly responsible for their success.

5.2.7 Decision-making in Girls' Education



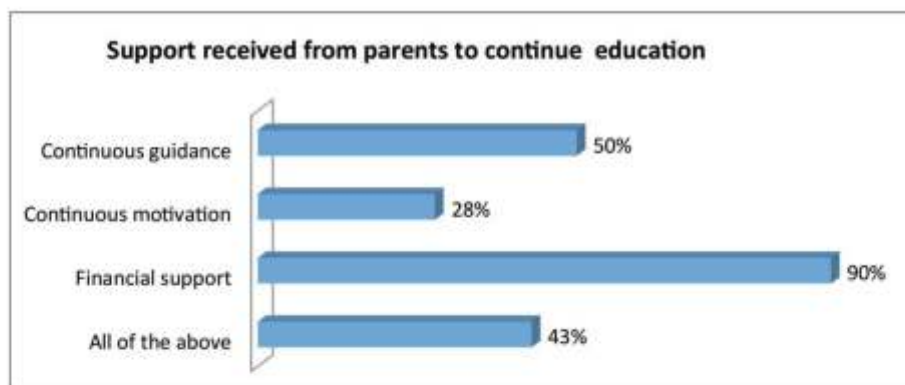
The study reveals that in about 70% of cases, both fathers and mothers jointly decide on matters related to the education of their daughters. This has been made possible due to continuous work within the community, as a result of which mothers' opinions are given high importance in matters of education. Traditionally, in the Meo community, fathers' decisions prevailed over those of mothers. However, this has gradually shifted. Another revelation that has strongly emerged from the study is that the opinions of three out of four girls are taken into account in matters related to their education.

5.2.8 Peer Relations in the Pursuit of Continued Education



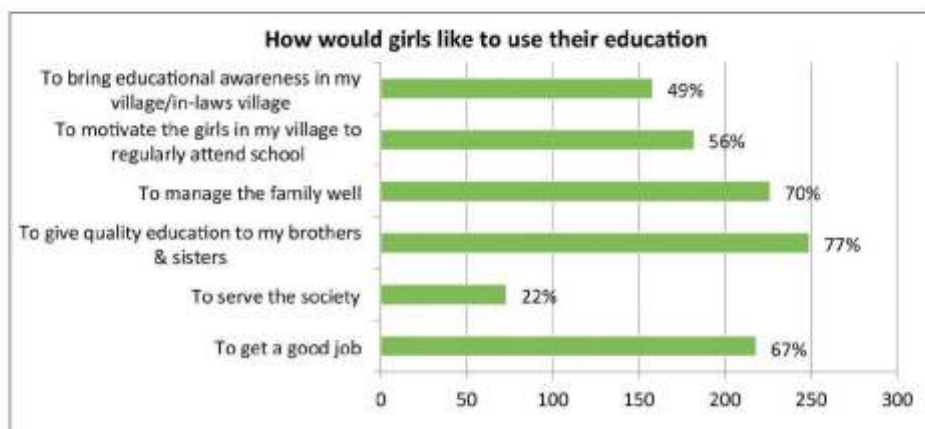
It is well-accepted that peer support is very important in relation to children's learning. The study revealed that 96% of girls received adequate support from their peers in terms of access to school. 90% of girls received peer support in terms of joint study, 82% of girls supported each other in terms of books, notes and other stationery and 75% of girls stated that they motivate and encourage each other. All of these factors are likely to have contributed in the learning process of girls, and the role of Taleemshalas in ensuring peer support in the learning process is key.

5.2.9 Parental Support in Girls' Education



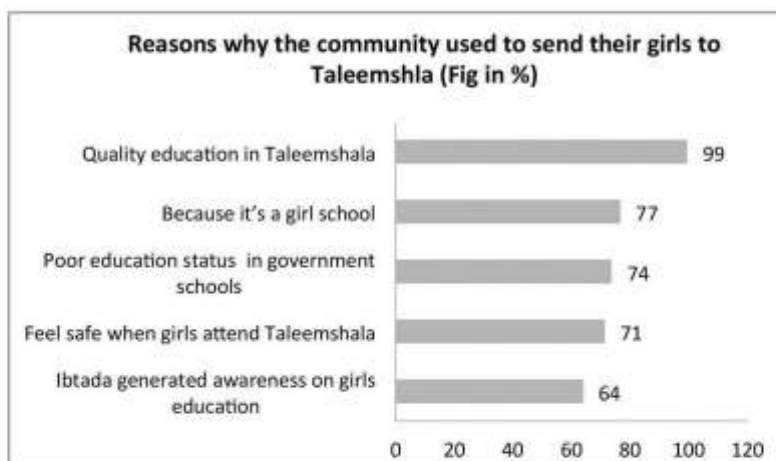
In the Mewat region, generally parents exhibit low levels of participation in their children's education, particularly among parents of girl children. Merely sending a girl child to school is considered a laudable achievement in the Mewat region. The study revealed that 50% of girls received continuous guidance from their parents with respect to education and 90% of girls received financial support for their education. 43% of girls stated that not only were they supported financially for their education; they also received continuous guidance and motivation from their parents.

5.2.10 Perceiving the Benefits of Education



5.3 Analysis and Findings of Parents' Interviews

5.3.1 Parents' Perceptions of Taleemshalas

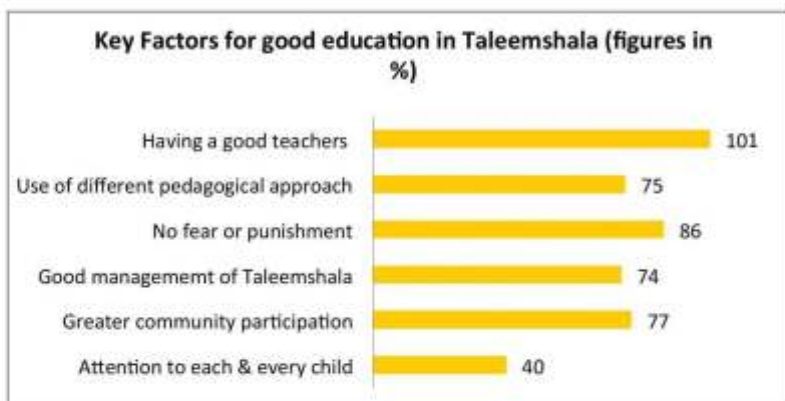


The analysis reveals that quality of education is the most important factor of attraction for the community to send their daughters to Taleemshalas. Apart from quality of education, other factors such as the Taleemshala being a girls' school, the poor status of education in government schools and the perception of their daughters' were motivating factors in sending their children to Taleemshalas. It is interesting to note that awareness generation by Ibtada's staff to promote girls' education has also influenced the community to a great extent.

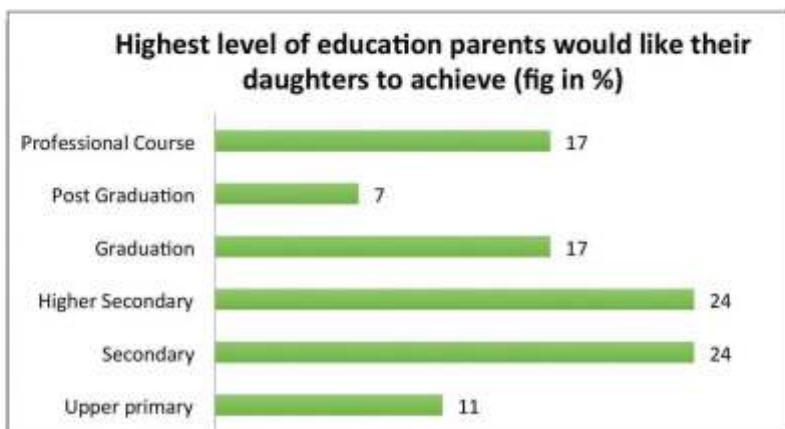
5.3.2 Key Factors Responsible for Good Education in Taleemshalas

All the respondents of the parents' interview shared the opinion that, because of the sincerity and dedication of teachers in Taleemshalas, quality of education was ensured. It is important to mention here that, after selection of teachers through a strict procedure, all teachers have to undergo 40 days of quality training. The second most important factor mentioned was the fact that there

was no fear of corporal punishment. As a result, a better relationship between teachers and pupils was possible. The girls did not hesitate to ask questions if they did not understand anything. Greater community participation, the use of child-centered pedagogies and good management were the other important factors responsible for ensuring quality education in Taleemshalas.

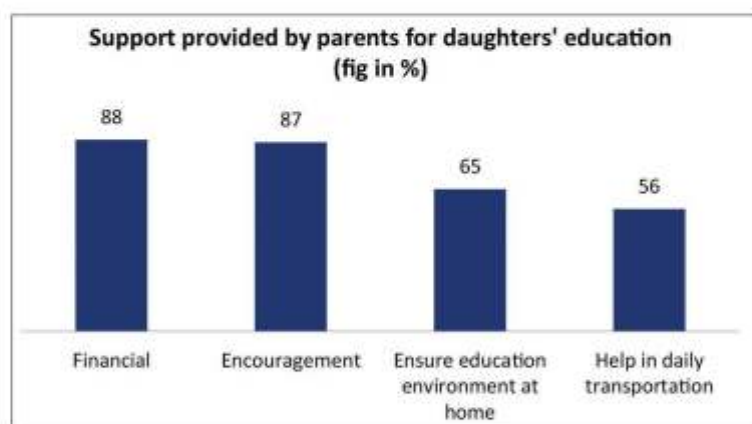


5.3.4 Parents' Views about their Daughters' Highest Educational Level



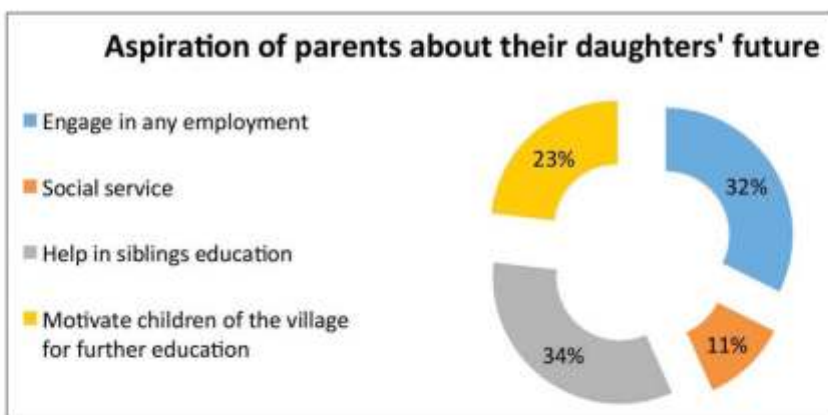
The Taleemshala intervention undoubtedly changed the perception of community members towards the education of girl children. The community has realized the importance and relevance of educating their daughters. As a result of this, 55% of parents are of the view that they are encouraging and providing scope for their daughters to pursue education above higher secondary level. It is interesting to note that 17% of the parents would like their daughters to do some professional courses, and 24% of parents expressed that they will encourage their daughters to do post-graduation-level education. It is indeed a significant trend as more and more parents are showing willingness and making efforts for their daughters' education beyond elementary level.

5.3.5 Support Level of Parents for Girl Child Education



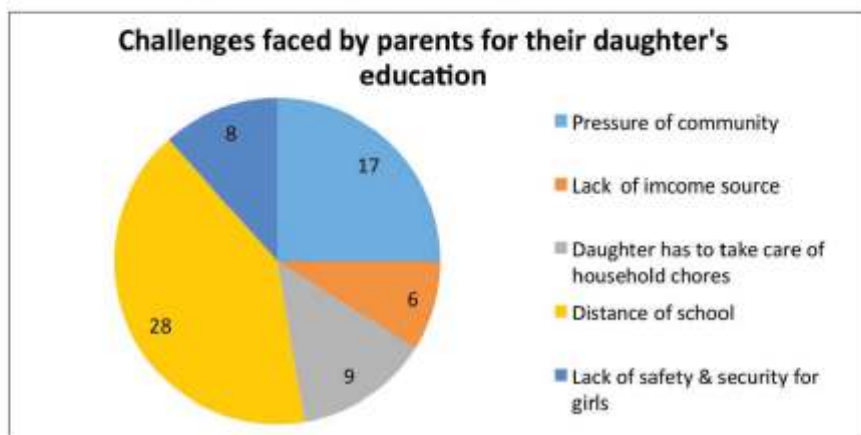
Support for daughters' education is very uncommon in the Mewat region of Alwar district. However, the situation is changing, particularly in the villages where Taleemshalas intervened. 88% of parents expressed that they provide financial support for their daughter's education. 87% of the parents interviewed said that they continuously encourage and motivate their children to continue further education. Two-thirds of the parents have created an enabling environment for education at home so that girls have adequate time to study. In addition, more than half of the parents support their daughters in their daily commute to their educational institution.

5.3.6 Aspirations of Parents for their Daughters' Future



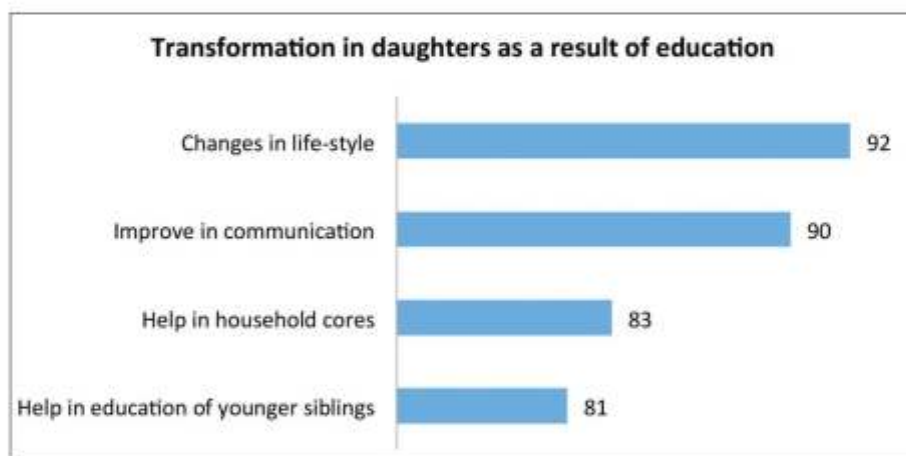
It is interesting to observe the aspirations of parents with respect to the future of their daughters. The data suggest that one-third of parents have aspirations that their daughters will engage in gainful employment after completing education. Another one-third of parents desire that their daughters will help younger siblings to get a quality education. Besides this, the rest of the parents are of the view that their daughters would motivate other girls in the village to pursue further education and do social service in the village and adjoining areas.

5.3.7 Challenges Faced by Parents for Girl Child Education



There were many challenges faced by parents for their daughters' education, the most significant being the distance of the educational institution (28%), especially after the primary level of education. 17% of parents expressed concern that they are being pressured by their own community members not to send their daughters to school or outside of the village for education. Other challenges are the pressure of domestic work, the lack of safety and security for girls, and the lack of an income source.

5.3.8 Transformation in Daughters as a Result of Education



Education is considered an influential factor in changing human life. Many of the parents acknowledged that education has a significant role to play in bringing about positive changes. These positive changes can be seen in the way their daughters conduct themselves. More than 90% of the parents are of the opinion that the lifestyle and communication skills of girls have improved significantly. Besides this, the daughters are also providing a helping hand to their parents in managing household affairs and also significantly contributing to the education of their younger siblings.

5.4 Key Findings of Focus Group Discussions with Girls

FGD Questions	Key Findings
1. Three things you liked most about Taleemshala:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) studying ii) playing iii) morning assembly
2. Three things that could have been improved in Taleemshala to get better results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) availability of toilet facilities ii) infrequent change of teachers iii) availability of drinking water facility iv) permanent place for Taleemshalas
3. How would it have changed your life, had there been no Taleemshala?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) many of the girls would not have studied at all ii) the progress and awareness level among the girls would not have been possible
4. How important is the role of Taleemshala education for you to pursue further studies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) the quality of education and other things that the girls had received in Taleemshalas immensely helped them to pursue further education ii) it has helped the girls to move forward in life iii) the Taleemshala girls have been able to out-perform other girls when they joined government schools beyond class 5
5. Does education (Taleemshala & beyond) help you in getting a good marriage proposal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) girls agreed to the point that having a good education will definitely help them get married into a good family ii) girls also agreed that it would be very easy for them to get a good marriage proposal and get married to an educated person
6. Is education important for girls in life? If yes, why? If no, why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) keep financial records at home ii) improve lifestyle iii) educate the children iv) be independent v) be able to contribute in the development process of the panchayat
7. What challenges do girls face in seeking to continue their education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) distance of school and college ii) financial problems iii) heavy workload at home iv) safety & security of girls v) early marriage vi) social barriers vii) lack of transportation
8. What steps should be taken to overcome those challenges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) arrange transportation facility ii) convince parents about continuing education and financial support iii) manage household work after school iv) to avoid safety & security problems, girls should travel in groups v) strongly object to getting married at an early age

5.5 Key Findings of Focus Group Discussions with Parents

FGD Questions	Key Findings
1. Three things you liked most about Taleemshala:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The most important aspect of Taleemshala was that girls were getting good-quality education which was evident in their learning level. ii) The girls educated in Taleemshalas are learning much more than their counterparts in the government schools. ii) There have been sincere efforts by the teachers in ensuring that every girl attends school regularly. iii) In Taleemshalas there was a strong rapport between teachers and girls as well as with community members.
2. Three things that could have been improved in Taleemshala to get better results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) permanent place for Taleemshala premises ii) Taleemshala should be up to grade 8 iii) less dropout or transfer of teachers
3. How would it have changed the lives of your daughters, had there been no Taleemshala?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The girls would not have studied at all. ii) There is a high chance that they would have remained illiterate. iii) The girls and the community would not have understood the importance and relevance of education in their lives.
4. Does education (Taleemshala & beyond) help you in getting good marriage proposals for your daughters?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) In the present scenario, there is a high demand for educated life partners, even in the Mewat region. ii) An educated girl will not only get a marriage proposal from a good family but also there will be less demand for dowry.
5. Is education important for girls? If yes, why? If no, why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Education of girls pays rich dividends for the self, family and larger society. ii) Education empowers girls to the extent that they become self-dependent and good decision makers, able to distinguish between right and wrong and good and bad. iii) An educated girl will be able to successfully manage various household affairs and lead a good-quality life. iv) She will be able to give a good education to her children and younger siblings.
6. Has your perception of education changed? If yes, why? If no, why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii) We have seen what education can bring in the lives of people. ii) We have realized the importance and relevance of girls' education. iii) If a girl is educated, she will be able to manage the affairs of the home properly. iv) Because of education, we are no longer discriminating between boys and girls.

SECTION E

6. Impact

6.1 Impact Findings of the Study

Continuity & Relevance of Education for Girls

The most important impact of the study is that 85.7% of girls continued studying after passing out from Taleemshalas. As per the state report card 2012-13, there is a gap of 39.2% in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of Rajasthan in primary classes (116.1) and in upper primary classes (76.9).⁷⁵

Taleemshala education greatly impacted the girls in understanding the importance and relevance of education in their lives. This impact will have a lasting impression for the future generation too. The girls have also stated that they will contribute to ensure quality education for their brothers and sisters. Taleemshala education significantly contributed to the overall personality development of the girls. Education has definitely developed self-confidence in girls as a result of which they were able to form their own opinion and express themselves in any platform without any fear and hesitation.



Annual event of Taleemshala program 2011

⁷⁵ Ministry of Human Resource Development, (2012). State Report Card 2011-12, p. 61.

In rural Mewat, especially among the Meo Muslim community, traditionally adolescent girls are not encouraged by their family and the larger community to travel a distance of a few kilometers for their schooling, be it upper primary or secondary level. But that was not the case for girls who passed out from Taleemshalas. Many of them stated that it was because of the influence of Taleemshalas that they pursued further education.

Peer support has a greater role and relevance, especially in early grade education. In the case of Taleemshalas more than 90% of girls have said that they have received immense support from their peers in access to schools and studies.

It is because of the education they have received that girls are feeling confident to face both opportunities and challenges. Many of the girls believe that Taleemshala education will help them not only in getting a good job in the future but also in managing family affairs better. A sense of responsibility towards girls' education has also developed in them as they are eager to help girls of their own village and community to get quality education and also to make sure that no girls should remain uneducated in their village.

Changes in Community Perceptions

Traditionally in the Meo Muslim community, the decision of male members of the family prevails in matters related to girls, be it education or their marriage. The female members and girls have little say in the decision-making process. However, this myth has also been broken as many of the parents strongly stated that matters related to their daughter's education are jointly being taken by the parents and the opinions of the daughter are greatly valued.

It is generally perceived that girls from illiterate, poor and marginalized families do not send their girls to school despite the provision of free and compulsory education, but in Taleemshalas 97% of girls are from marginalized communities and 50% of girls' parents are illiterate and depend on manual labor.

Success Factors of Taleemshalas

The most important aspect of Taleemshala education is the belief that 'education empowers' and the non-stereotypical method it employed in developing girls as self-learners. Girls strongly felt that, had there been no Taleemshalas, they would not have been educated at all.

Relations between students and teachers were informal and cordial. The girls addressed teachers by name. As a result, the girls were studying in an environment with no fear or punishment.

SECTION F

7. Selected Case Studies

Aina: The Girls' Icon



Aina, the change icon

Aina Bano, aged about 22 years, was born and brought up in a Meo Muslim family in Jatoli village of Umren block of Alwar district. Ten kilometers inside the Alwar–Jaipur national highway, the village is surrounded by hills on three sides. With a population of 1,597 (as per the 2011 census), the village is largely dominated by Meos and Scheduled Castes. The village only has a primary school. The educational environment of the village in the early 2000s was pitiable. A random visit to the village during those years revealed girls doing household chores or taking care of younger siblings.

When Aina was only three years old, her father was convicted in a murder case and sentenced to a 14-year jail term. Due to an out-of-court settlement by both the parties, he was released after six years. It was a tough time for the entire family. Aina is the second youngest of six children. Hansina is the eldest daughter and she never went to school. Next is Maman who studied in Taleemshala and passed out in the year 2004. Due to community and family pressure, in the year 2005, the family decided to marry both Hansina and

Maman. At that time, Hansina was just 15 years old and Maman was only 12 years old. Maman was studying in class 7 in the year 2005.

Aina's educational journey started when she joined Taleemshala in the year 2002. She never looked back after that. In the year 2005, she passed out from Taleemshala. It is because of the strong foundation she received in Taleemshala that her father agreed to continue her studies. She had to travel 3-4 kilometers to reach the nearby school in Mohabbatpur. After completing class 8, many of her relatives insisted that she stop going to school. However, she was determined to continue studies and Ibtada staff motivated her parents. Looking at her determination, her parents defied relatives' pressure and supported her admission in the Kalsada Secondary School where she completed matriculation with 54%. Aina used to cycle 18 kilometers daily to attend secondary education. After this, she joined senior secondary school in Malakheda for which she used to cycle 24 kilometers.

She didn't stop there and continued further studies in the district headquarters, i.e. Alwar. She pursued a Bachelor of Arts in G.D. Women's College in history, sociology and economics. During her graduation year, she also joined a basic computer course but could not complete it. She graduated in 2015.

While working towards her graduation in April 2013, she joined a non-government organization named AIMED as a teacher in Udaan (a residential special training center for girls). She continued at AIMED until May 2015. At present, she is working for Ibtada as a teacher in the Udaan project in Nuh, Haryana.

'It is because of Ibtada and Taleemshala that I have reached so far. I have faced lots of challenges to continue education. Because of my achievement, many girls are inspired and going for higher studies. I aspire to be a police officer.' - Aina

Wazida: The Torch Bearer

Mohar Singh Bas is a small hamlet of Neekach village, situated in the foothills of the Aravali mountain range in the Ramgarh block of Alwar. The hamlet of about 60-70 households is divided into three habitations and inhabited mainly by Meos. The primary source of livelihood is agriculture, animal husbandry and unskilled work. A few families migrate seasonally to Punjab and Gujarat.

Wazida is the second child of Fateh Mohammad. She lives with her parents, four sisters and two brothers. She is the eldest daughter of her family. Agriculture is the main economic source for the family. Wazida's father is very active in local politics and her mother does the household and agricultural work.

In the year 2003, the educational environment of the hamlet was quite deplorable. There was no primary school in the hamlet and the distance to the village school was about 2 kilometers. **Not a single girl from Mohar Singh Bas was attending school.** In such a situation, Ibtada decided to set up a Taleemshala there. Initially Fateh Mohammad was suspicious and reluctant, but witnessing the good results of Taleemshala for six months, he decided to enroll his daughter Wazida, when she was only four years old. Recalling her days in Taleemshala, she narrates that the learning environment, teacher-student relations, the helping attitude of each girl, the group work and the English education of Taleemshalas was very good. She says she will never forget the games she played while in Taleemshala. I am still good at English because of my strong foundation laid in Taleemshala. She and all her sisters eventually studied in Taleemshalas. Their interest in education was primarily laid in Taleemshala.

After completing primary education in Taleemshala, she attended a private school in Badi Bas - a village 1 kilometer away from her home where she continued until class 9. However, when she finished class 9, that private school was shut down. In such a scenario, continuing her studies after class 9 became a challenge for her. But she never succumbed and showed a keen determination. She joined class 10 in a government school 6 kilometers away. She secured 52% in class 10. After completion of secondary education, she continued to pursue further education and secured 72% in higher secondary and stood first in her school. It was a proud moment for the entire family. Thanks to her achievement, Wazida was given an award in a district-level function 'Meo Pratibhavan Samman Samaroh - 2015'. On the occasion, her parents said that they were proud of their daughters and that they would continue to support all of their children to get a good education.

After her senior secondary education, Wazida faced additional challenges in order to continue her studies. The nearest college was in Alwar, which is around 60 kilometers away from her village. There is also no direct transportation facility available from her village. However, she took admission in the G.D. College and started attending every day by bus. Her father or elder brother drops her at the nearest bus stop at Mubarikpur, from where she could avail the

bus service to Alwar.

In Mewat region, early marriage of daughters is commonplace. Wazida also became the victim of this phenomenon. Although she could not stop this (and got married in 2015), she strongly put a condition that she would agree to marriage only when her in-laws' family would agree to let her complete her B.Ed. She is currently pursuing graduation and even completed a three-month computer course by Ibtada. She aspires to be a teacher once she has completed her B.Ed. Looking at her determination, her sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law, who had already abandoned their education, resumed their studies.

Expressing her gratitude to all her teachers in Taleemshala, she acknowledged that it is because of the strong foundation she received in Taleemshala that she is now able to pursue her dream. The family educational environment has completely turned all of their lives around. Among her siblings, Manisha is studying in class 11, Sumeya in class 9, Sania in class 8 and Rohina in class 4. Her elder brother is in his second year of college.



Wazida



Anjum at Taleemshala

The Story of Anjum

Anjum is from Mahua Khurd village. It is located at Rajgarh Road, 12 kilometers from Alwar. The village has about 500 households where most of the families belong to the Meo community. The educational status of the village

population is very low, despite the existence of a senior secondary school. Little attention has been paid, especially in the case of girl child education.

Anjum belongs to a Meo family. The economic condition of her family is very poor. The agricultural land held by the family has been sold due to financial crises. The family is forced to earn its livelihood by wage labor and animal husbandry. She has two brothers and two sisters.

Ibtada started its Taleemshala in Mahua Khurd in the year 2000. Anjum joined it in 2004. Besides her studies, she learnt several competencies useful in life, like the capability to express her views, and dealing with challenges and problem-solving. After she passed out from Taleemshala in 2007, her parents did not allow her to study as her elder sister was continuing her studies and her parents wanted Anjum to help at home. Ibtada staff convinced her parents and she was enrolled in class 6 in the government school in her village. She passed class 10 with 50% in 2012.

Anjum was forced to discontinue her schooling after class 10. Her parents had already supported the education of her elder sister Samina, an ex-student of Taleemshala. The parents were disappointed that Samina could not find a job after studying until class 12. Both Samina and Anjum were married in 2014. Whereas Samina went to live with her in-laws, Anjum stayed with her parents.

Recently, Anjum met Bhuteri from the adjoining village of Bandipura who had also studied at a Taleemshala and is now a teacher in an NGO-run center. Bhuteri motivated her to continue her studies. Anjum convinced her parents and got enrolled in class 11 in a private school. Then she also got the opportunity to teach in the NGO-run center. Anjum was easily selected as she was a bright student and had experience of studying at a non-formal education center. She joined as a teacher in July 2016 and gets a salary of Rs. 6,000. She and her parents are very happy. She also continues her class 11 studies as a private student.

Anjum quotes that she was deeply motivated by the teachers at the Taleemshala due to their helpful attitude. She says, 'They convinced my parents to continue my studies after passing class 5 from Taleemshala. It was the best support for my life that changed my life completely. My parents initially thought that there was no utility of educating the girls. I have proven that a girl child can too financially support her family after education. My parents are proud of me.'

SECTION G

8. Conclusion

When the girls' education program of Ibtada was initiated in 2000 in the Meo Muslim-dominated Mewat area of Alwar, girls were hardly attending school. Ibtada started setting up Taleemshalas for girls until grade 5. Initially, girls of a higher age group were attending the centers, but with the passage of time, girls between 6-10 years also started attending these centers. Until the year 2010-11, Ibtada was running 121 Taleemshalas in 91 villages. After the advent of the Right to Education Act in 2010, Ibtada started phasing out these Taleemshalas, which was eventually completed in 2015.

This endeavor of Ibtada had a large impact not only upon the lives of girls but also in changing the perspectives of the community. As has been seen in the study, many girls continue to pursue further education and have bold aspirations. They are now considered an asset for their family and contribute to the family and society in many ways.

Over time, Ibtada's interventions in girls' education have deepened. Now Ibtada manages an upper primary school for 100 girls and supports 60 government schools to improve learning outcomes of children in primary grades. In addition, Ibtada provides supplementary education for girls in grades 6 to 8 comprising life skills education, computer education, career facilitation and coaching classes for competitive exams for jobs. Ibtada also seeks to motivate parents to see that more and more girls are educated and continuing their education.



Girls learning to use computers



A glimpse of girls learning at Taleemabala



Center For Unfolding Learning Potentials (CULP)

Contextualization of Primary Education in Small Remote Schools of Rajasthan



SECTION - 1 Introduction

The Center for Unfolding Learning Potentials (CULP) was founded in 1998 by a group of professionals to take up innovative experiments, organized field studies and teachers' trainings for independent schools. Once the strength of the group was consolidated, it was registered as a non-profit, non-government organization under Rajasthan's Society Registration Act 1958 in the year 2001. Thereafter formal project proposals were submitted to organizations.

CULP's vision is 'towards a learning and democratic society' and its mission is 'to make learning unfold and develop in an environment of mutuality and discovery'. The broad objectives of the organization are:



Girls bridge course graduates joined mainstream schools

- To conduct action research and undertake initiatives on current social issues related to human development, environment and population;
- To organize and strengthen people and the structure and form of institutions as the need arises;
- To ensure appropriate strategies and management processes for information through assessment of educational and social realities;
- To develop and disseminate diverse educational material;
- To conduct innovative experiments in the areas of education and social development;
- To empower deprived sections of society, especially women, for their development;
- To build up a learning environment according to the learners' needs, both institutional and individual.

In 2002, based on the strength of its members, CULP was invited by the Government of Rajasthan and UNICEF and assigned the task to design and implement an innovative project called 'Pehchan'⁷⁶ for education of out-of-school girls in rural Jaipur district. Looking at the strength of the Pehchan project and its learning material, the Jaipur District Administration instructed the government schools to take help from CULP functionaries for qualitative improvement in their schools.⁷⁷ Subsequently, the state government also decided to expand the project model for educating out-of-school children in 22 blocks of seven tribal districts in Rajasthan, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNICEF for funding support under the Rajasthan Education Initiative, and invited CULP to collaborate on the project with the government and UNICEF.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ A Hindi word that means 'identity', used to establish self-identity of girls in rural society where a discriminatory environment prevails for girls or women.

⁷⁷ District Collector Jaipur. (2003). Office Order no. Vikas / 2002/1054-1073 dated 4.04.2003.

⁷⁸ Rajasthan Council of Elementary Education. (2008). Office Order no. RCEE/ Jai / REI / 08 / 28864-70 dtd 13.06.2008.

When the process of conceptualization of the Pehchan project was initiated in 2001, the situation in rural and tribal Rajasthan regarding the status of girls was poor, both educationally and socially. The status is shown in Exhibit – 1.1.

Exhibit – 1.1

Status of girl children in rural and tribal Rajasthan

Problems/gaps identified by CULP team addressed:

- (i) Gender discrimination in education
- (ii) Child marriage (Average age of marriage of girls: 13 years & boys: 17 years in tribal areas)
- (iii) Child labor
- (iv) Poor functioning of rural government schools, causing low learning levels of students and high dropout of children

Nature of the problem: Out-of-school adolescent girls

Scale of the issue: (i) 38-48% over-aged out-of-school girls (9-14 years) in rural Jaipur (2002),⁷⁹ Tonk (2005)⁸⁰ and Banswara (2008).⁸¹

(ii) The District Administration identified about 30,000 adolescent out-of-school girls (2000-01) in rural Jaipur, and Household (HH) survey (CULP 2002) data projected the above figure to be more than 1 lakh out-of-school girls in rural Jaipur.

iii) Government survey (Child Tracking Survey 2010): about 12 lakhs children (6-14 years) out of school, comprising about 59.4% girls.⁸² 32.2% of the total workforce are children in the 7-14-years age group, 62% are

⁷⁹ CULP (2002). Household Survey Report, Chaksu Block in Jaipur District (Rajasthan).

⁸⁰ CULP (2002). Household Survey Report, Niwai Block in Tonk District (Rajasthan).

⁸¹ CULP (2008). Household Survey Report, Ghatol and Peepalkhoont Blocks in Banswara District (Rajasthan).

⁸² CULP (2013). State Education Report Rajasthan – Primary Middle and Secondary Education: A Working Paper.

girls,⁸³ and 28% of children are engaged in labor. 35% of HHs have at least one child working in tribal areas,⁸⁴ 13% migrate for work (for 3-12months).⁸⁵ Female literacy in rural Banswara is 24%, which is the lowest in the state (Census 2011).

(iv) Significant decline in basic learning skills of students in primary grades, causing declining trend in enrolment and retention of children in government schools (ASER 2012 & Shiksha Samblan 2013).

(v) *Dungarpur* and *Banswara* are the lowest-placed districts in the Human Development Index (HDI) (2007) with a value of 0.409 and 0.425, compared to an overall HDI of 0.710 for the entire state of Rajasthan. Worst malnutrition was recorded in Banswara. (HunGama Report 2011).



The pertinent information about CULP is as follows:

CULP's major goals are to:

- Bring positive change in society, particularly towards the education of girl children.
- Strengthen the school system for ensuring quality education to all children, especially children of excluded communities.

⁸³ Burra, N. Child Labour in Rural Areas with Special Focus on Migration, Agriculture, Mining and Brick Kilns, p. 20.

⁸⁴ Rajasthan Baseline Report, pp. 14 and 26. Dakshini Rajasthan Majdoor Union, Child Labour in Cottonseed Production – A Case Study of Comonseed Farms in North Gujarat, p. 43.

⁸⁵ Save the Children (2011). Report on Consultative Process for Addressing Issues of Child Migration and Child Labour in Cotton Agriculture.

CULP's vision is to:

- (i) Demonstrate effective learning strategies in Multi-Level Multi-Grade (ML-MG) situations
- (ii) Mainstream out-of-school girls in age-appropriate grades
- (iii) Qualitative improvement in government schools
- (iv) Empower children's collectives / adolescent girls' forums for inculcating self-esteem, self-confidence and life skills
- (v) Strengthen the government system and community-based organizations

Larger opportunity for scaling the organization's solutions:

- The model has proven its relevance in numerous geographical and cultural/social settings without making any significant change.
- The model is already being used by government / SSA and NGOs / Civil Society Organizations for education of out-of-school children in Rajasthan and also in other states (e.g. Uttar Pradesh and Odisha).

External factors (e.g. government schemes), which can take solutions to a wider audience:

- Since the program is being implemented in collaboration with the SSA/state government, public resources are available for that purpose.
- The Right to Education Act 2009⁸⁶ ensures 'free & compulsory education' (Classes 1–8) to all children (6–14 years) and the government is committed to comply to achieve this target.

The CULP model can be seen as a viable intervention for educating all children, irrespective of their location and context.

Innovativeness of the project:

The Pehchan project has evolved and matured as an innovative project in terms of addressing the education of girls, its features and the best approach to learning.

⁸⁶ The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, <http://mhrd.gov.in/rte>

How are needs being addressed?

- Reaching out to unserved and underserved population in remote geographical locations to address the learning needs of girls from deprived communities.

Unique features of the program:

- Rights-based framework
- Participatory approach in assessing the situation, planning, review and monitoring of the program
- Collaborative nature
- Organizing *Pebchanshalas*⁸⁷ for imparting age-appropriate learning competencies (including life skills), as a precondition for successful mainstreaming of out-of-school children
- Use of multiple intelligences for developing professional skills of teachers
- Locally relevant teaching and learning material

Multi-level learning approach of CULP:

- Children normally work in three groups, each at a different level of learning.
- Learning process divided into three parts:

- (1) Teacher-directed learning activity
- (2) Group learning activity
- (3) Individual practice activity

For the latter two, worksheets are used. Relevant Teacher Learning Material (TLM) facilitates accelerated learning.

The implementation of the first project was acknowledged as innovative and effective.⁸⁸ It even became a subject of research for educating out-of-school girls. Prior to the Pehchan project, for about one year, the CULP group members used their professional competence by organizing teacher trainings and survey

⁸⁷ Bridge Course Centre(s) for imparting age appropriate learning skills to out-of-school adolescent girls for their mainstreaming.

⁸⁸ Centre for Educational Innovation (2015). <http://www.educationinnovations.org/program/pehchan-project>

studies sponsored by various schools and organizations, as indicated by pictures 1, 2 and 3 of Exhibit 1.2

Exhibit – 1.2
Box 1: Brochures of CULP and assorted activities before and after CULP was institutionalized.



Thereafter, the Pehchan project was extended to other districts (Tonk, Jhalawar and Banswara) and supported by other organizations, such as UNICEF, Save the Children, Axis Bank Foundation, The Hans Foundation, Dasra, Resource Alliance and EdelGive Foundation in collaboration with government and other NGOs.

It has been reported that CULP ensures access to quality education to out-of-school children, especially girls, and improves the teaching and learning processes in mainstream schools.⁸⁹

The experience of CULP during its various phases has shown that the Pehchan-shala model is replicable and scalable because of the learning material it has developed. Reports by Dasra⁹⁰ and The Resource Alliance⁹¹ validate this conclusion.

⁸⁹ Krishna, G. (2015). In the Rajasthan Desert, Education for Girl Children Blooms. Business Standard.

⁹⁰ Dasra. (2014). Empowering Adolescent Girls in India.

⁹¹ The Resource Alliance. (2015). Celebrating Success ... Rewarding Excellence, p. 13.

Exhibit – 1.3

The project from its pilot phase to expansion phase

- Pilot project initiated in 12 habitations in one block of Jaipur benefitted about 350 out-of-school adolescent girls in 2002.
- Scaled up to 3,500 habitations in 15 blocks of three districts covering about 1 lakh out-of-school children (75% girls) in a period of one and a half decades.
- About 80% of girls successfully joined mainstream schools at upper primary and secondary level at the age-appropriate grade.
- Pehchan project as successful model, still being continued and able to attract funding sources.
- Replicated by other partner NGOs in 19 districts (e.g. Jhalawar, Dholpur, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Alwar) with the technical support of CULP.
- Treated as an integral part of the school system by the government due to the collaborative mode which synergized efforts for ensuring quality education to adolescent girls.
- Learning package being used in link schools for improving pedagogic process and creating a child-friendly environment.
- Course curriculum integrates life skills and adolescent health issues.
- Both NGOs and government are using the package under different programs for similar groups.

A serious attempt was made by CULP to contextualize primary education through the Pehchan project of bridge course schools for dropout and non-starter girls (viewed as over-aged and never-enrolled) of small habitations of rural Jaipur district which made an impact at the national and international levels as mentioned in a UNICEF-sponsored study report⁹² and action-research studies on feministic pedagogy by a senior member of the academic team of the organization. These got disseminated through e-group discussion⁹³ as well as a discussion paper for the Harvard Extension School (Education)⁹⁴ that emerged

⁹² Sullivan, A. et al. (2005). Educating 'Out-of-School Girls': An Assessment of the Pehchan Project in Rajasthan, UNICEF New Delhi.

⁹³ Kishore, L. (2008). Do Men and Women Learn Differently? <http://www.meritnews.com/article/do-men-and-women-learn-differently/140198.shtml>

⁹⁴ Taylor, T. (2009). Do Men and Women Learn Differently? <http://sites.harvard.edu/ich/ich.do?keyword=k40630&pageid=ich.page251753>

out of a concept note entitled 'Do women and men learn differently?' Also, incorporation of some of the practices of the intervention in some consequent projects in rural and tribal small schools in Rajasthan has been reported.

Furthermore, the National Council for Educational Research and Training supported the research⁹⁵ of CULP on intervention activities relating to transition from home to school language.

On the basis of the observational visits and invited inputs by various organizations such as the Rajasthan State Education Department officials, the intervention was highlighted. Some salient features of CULP's intervention were included in the *Bal Mitra Vidyalaya Shikshak Margdarshika* (Child-Friendly Schools: Teachers' Guidebook) to be used by the DIET (District Institute of Education and Training) Dungarpur.⁹⁶



Teacher's Diaries

CULP is working on multi-level, non-graded and rights-based curricular frameworks by assessing the current situation (e.g. learning level of children, awareness of the community and capacity of stakeholders) and sharing it with

⁹⁵ CULP. (2004). Developing and Trialling Language Material for Transition from Local Dialect to Standard Hindi for Rural Rajasthan Children Entering Grade one.

⁹⁶ District Institute of Education and Training. (2014). Child-Friendly Schools: Teachers' Guidebook.

stakeholders. This is the beginning point to initiate discussion and discourse, followed by intervention through engagement with duty-bearers including their capacity building, development of study materials, teaching and learning materials, packages for classroom support to out-of-school children to improve learning, pedagogic intervention with teachers (activity-based accelerated learning, development and usage of innovative TLM) and formation of a collective resource group for shared learning (e.g. teachers' resource group on pedagogic sharing). CULP works with marginalized girls' populations where access and quality is a major concern for them by engaging intensively with the government system and the community.

Some newspapers have also been following the success stories of the Pehchan project,^{97,98} and advocacy for the protection of the girl child.⁹⁹

CULP's model focuses on leveraging government infrastructure and funds and garnering community support to make its intervention sustainable.

CULP, as an NGO, is a well-recognized organization in education and its work won recognition by receiving two prestigious awards:

(i) The **Dasra Girl Power Award 2014 for empowering adolescent girls in the Education**¹⁰⁰ category. The award is an initiative of **Dasra** in collaboration with **USAID** and the **Kiawah Trust**. The award recognizes innovative and high-impact work for adolescent girls but also draws attention to issues affecting adolescent girls.

(ii) **India NGO Award 2014–15 in Small Organization category**.¹⁰¹ The award is an initiative of *The Resource Alliance* and sponsored by the *Rockefeller Foundation* and the *EdelGive Foundation*. The award recognizes and celebrates excellence in the non-profit sector and promotes good standards and practices in resource mobilization, accountability and transparency, and overall credibility of the non-profit sector for long-term sustainability.

⁹⁷ Times of India. (2009). Pehchanshala: A boost for women education, p. 4.

⁹⁸ Dasgupta, K. (2014). Back to School. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/back-to-school/story-YR4INDc3Q6CRLRTbH2ReKM.html>

⁹⁹ Hindustan Times. (2010). Need for Strict Application of Act for Saving Girl Child, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Dasra Girl Power. (2014). Award Announcement - Education Category - Dasra Philanthropy Week 2014.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBxmupqEMNc>

¹⁰¹ India NGO Awards 2014–15 Winners Felicitated in Delhi. http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/india-ngo-awards-2014-2015-winners-felicitated-in-delhi#.V_CJNNR97VQ



Girls' Festival

Pehchan Project

The Pehchan project has been the flagship project of CULP.^{102,103}

The specific objectives of the program are to:

- (i) Create a positive environment among the rural community towards girl child education.
- (ii) Ensure access to quality elementary education to out-of-school adolescent girls for achieving age-appropriate learning levels for their successful mainstreaming.
- (iii) Inculcate life skills and impart adequate knowledge of health and personal hygiene to adolescent girls so that they can understand their bodies, democratic and development processes, and can develop their identity, self-esteem and self-confidence in order to make conscious decisions about their lives.
- (iv) Improve pedagogic processes in government elementary schools in order to create an enabling environment for girls.

¹⁰² Khattar, S. (2009). School Education in Rural India. Retrieved from: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/School-education-in-rural-India/articleshow/4172974.cms>

¹⁰³ Pehchanshala: A Boost for Women Education by CULP. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=du4YXdeGinE>

Project Beneficiaries

The following steps were involved in selection of direct beneficiaries (mainly out-of-school adolescent girls):

(i) Interactive meetings with concerned officials of education departments at block and district levels, community leaders and teachers at block and district levels for selection of blocks, gram panchayats, villages and habitations where the maximum number of out-of-school children (OoSC) were found as per government records/child-tracking data.

(ii) Block-wise and gram panchayat-wise lists of habitations/revenue villages were prepared for conducting household surveys/rapid assessment for identification of OoSC.

(iii) Lists of OoSC were collected from government schools.

(iv) A household survey was conducted in selected habitations for identification /updating of the list of the target beneficiary children (OoSC) procured from the government schools.

(v) Habitation-wise lists of OoSC were prepared after consolidation and analysis of information of the survey/assessment. We then shared the surveyed data or lists in community meetings and with school teachers for verification/endorsement of the survey data.

(vi) The final lists of the target beneficiaries were prepared with the verification of the school head teacher. We submitted lists to the SSA/ government with the proposal to start the bridge course centers in those habitations where a minimum of 15 children were available in the target group.

(vii) After getting final approval from the district authority, the Pehchanshalas (bridging course centers) were started to impart quality education in addition to providing life skills to the target beneficiaries.



Interactive classroom

Exhibit – 1.4

Pictures of beneficiaries of the Pehchan project



The project was implemented with the following strategies:

- (1) Utilization of existing resources of government school systems.
- (2) Establishment of inter-linkages with the Education-for-All project to initiate a model of bridging courses with emphasis on multi-level cooperative learning.
- (3) Ensuring the participation of the community so that it can play a vital and pro-active role in the project.
- (4) Sensitizing the community and government school system to address the larger social and gender equity issues in society.
- (5) Forming adolescent girls' forums after the completion of bridging courses for continued activity in the village for social change.

The project has four main components to facilitate annual and quarterly action plans. These are:

- i) Community cooperation and micro-planning at the village level;
- ii) Two/three-year bridging courses;
- iii) Pedagogic improvement in government schools;
- iv) Adolescent girls' forums.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Voice of Beneficiary, CULP. (2015). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXFSGopbuGM>

The major activities organized were as follows:

- Household surveys/situation analysis to identify the target children and rapport building with the parents and community through interactive meetings and enrolment drives;¹⁰⁵
- Developed a 40-day training module for bridging course teachers;
- Reorganized the curriculum of elementary education by integrating life skills and adolescent health issues to make it relevant to local environment and adolescent girls;
- Bridging course centers (5 hours per day at village level) for a period of 24 to 30 months;
- Two-day monthly workshops with the bridging course teachers (four camps);
- Organized pre-tests, mid-session tests and post-tests for assessing the learning achievement levels of bridging course students and impact studies;
- Organized three to five-day reflective workshops with government school teachers to strengthen their professional skills;
- Formed and strengthened community/parents' groups for seeking their support in planning and running the bridging course activities at the school level and regular participation in formal meetings of gram sabhas and gram panchayat meetings to share the activities of the project;
- Exposure visits for adolescent girls;¹⁰⁶
- Games and sports, children's and girls' festivals.¹⁰⁷



Girls with community leaders supported for higher education

¹⁰⁵ Campaign for Enrolment in School. CULP. (2015). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkhVen_zmfQ

¹⁰⁶ The Times of India, (2006). A Learning Experience.

¹⁰⁷ Children's Festival. CULP. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkhVen_zmfQ

Exhibit – 1.5

Pictures of some prominent activities with girls



- Formed and strengthened adolescent girls' collectives (*Kishori Manch*s) at village level to impart life skills (inculcate self-confidence, self-esteem, identity in the community/society, understanding the traditions and customs related to women/girls prevailing in the local community and also understanding development and democratic processes/practices and achieving skills in decision-making).
- Organized adolescent girls' meet / *Kishori Melas / Utsav* (festivals).
- Systematic documentation of the activities organized and shared with the partners and other stakeholders.

I. Curriculum (for grade levels 1 to 5, relevant for over-aged, non-starter, out-of-school girls)

The curricular approach of a multi-grade, multi-level learning strategy has been conceptualized at CULP through the following measures:

- Prepared a curriculum document by reorganizing state curriculum into learning units, making it relevant to the local context and age-appropriate;

- Three to five-week-long integrated concepts as learning units;
- About 25 to 30 total learning units from grade 1 to 5 for each subject;
- Freedom for self-pacing.

Developed systematic learning material:

- Teacher-made big-books (*Anubhav Pothis*) with visuals;
- *Dhara Pothi* for grade levels 3 to 5 with abridged subject matter appropriate for older children;
- *Setu Pothi* (a guidebook for teachers for grade levels 1 and 2);
- Worksheets for different subjects;
- *Jeevan Koshal* (a teachers' guide booklet) for imparting life skills to adolescent girls.

II. Bridging Courses: Teaching Learning Material (package) for Each Center

Teaching and Learning Material (TLM) was required which met the learning levels of students for the multi-level learning situation described above. Materials to facilitate the learning process were developed and provided to both teachers and students in the centers.

All Pehchanshalas have the following TLM package in the required quantity, which facilitates group learning:

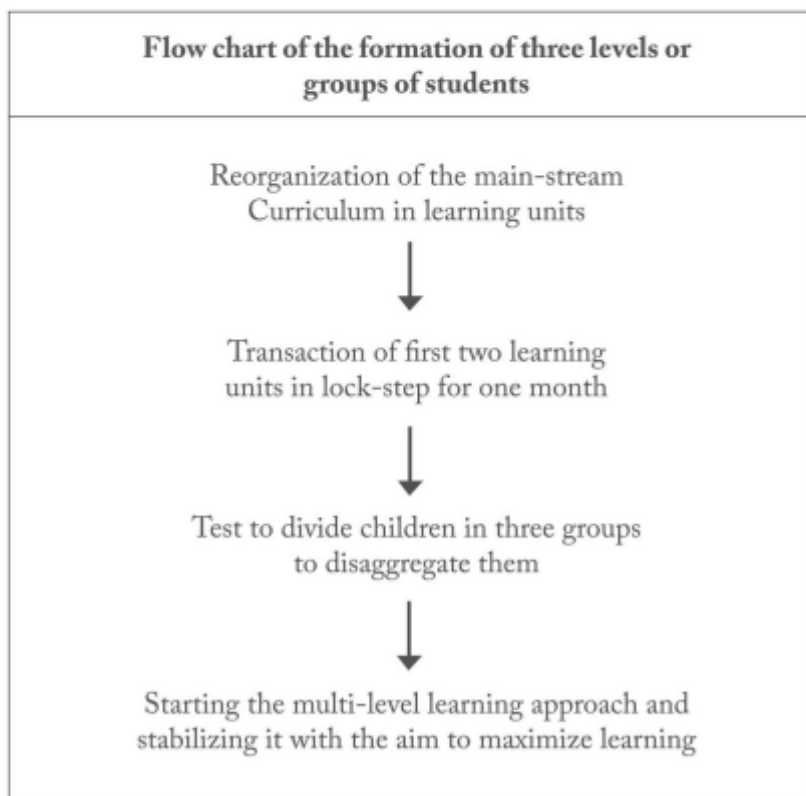
1. A curriculum document;
2. *Setu Pothis* for mathematics and language (Hindi): A guidebook for teachers for grade levels 1 and 2;
3. *Dhara Pothis* for Hindi and math: Guidebooks for grade levels 3 and 4 developed by academic supporters;
4. *Chhan-Been*: Environmental Studies (EVS) activity booklets for grade levels 3, 4 and 5 developed by academic supporters;
5. *Anubhav Pothis*: Eight-page big books (one for each learning episode) developed by teachers for beginners;
6. Material for transition from home language to school language;
7. Group-learning worksheets (50-60) developed by teachers under the guidance of academic supporters;
8. Self-learning worksheets (about 100);
9. Flash cards (100-150);
10. Game boards;
11. Concept learning charts (10-20);

12. Other charts (10-20) including web charts and flow charts;
13. Resource material on adolescent health, HIV/AIDS, life skills, etc.

The above material was continuously developed and revised based on new experiences, and teachers and project support staff were oriented in the process of innovative learning material development.

Multi-Level Learning Approach: CULP follows the multi-level learning approach in which children work in three groups, each at a different level of learning. In order to handle three groups of students with five to nine students in each group, the learning process has been divided into the following three parts: (1) Teacher-directed learning activity; (2) Group learning activity; and (3) Individual practice activity. For the latter two, worksheets are used.

Exhibit – 1.6



Since the learning experiences needed to be related to over-age, dropout and non-starter girls, special learning materials were developed as summarized in the following exhibit.

Exhibit – 1.7

The development and use of supplementary material relevant to bridging courses and some pictures	
Stages	Features
1. For standards 1 and 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition from home language to school language • Use of big books for Hindi, math and English • Use of worksheets for group work and individual practice
2. For standards 3 and 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of abridged version of Hindi material • Combined learning units for EVS and use of a workbook • Complete course of mathematics and English with worksheets for group and individual work • Mainstreaming of girls in the 9-11-year age group
3. For standard 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete textbook lessons with the use of teacher-presented material in the form of charts and use of blackboard • Use of worksheets for group and individual work • Preparation for test for entrance to formal school/mainstreaming/certification for girls in the 11-14-year age group

Furthermore, the span of two years was split into periods of six months or semesters. In the first semester, an effort is made to prepare children to become proficient in literacy (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and numeracy (numbers and basic arithmetic operations) skills with comprehension. After this, the abridged material (booklets) of grades 2 and 3 are taken up with children in the next two semesters and the process of accelerated learning of grades 3 and 4 is used. In the last semester, the textbooks of grade 5 are taken up. While using the textbooks, each lesson is generally split into two or three segments with group learning and individual practice sheets for each part.

Use of Multiple Intelligences (MIs) Theory of Learning and Capacity Building of Teachers and Project Staff

CULP has adopted the MI approach (verbal, visual/drawing, kinesthetic, mathematical-logical, musical, interpersonal and intra-personal) to promote learning in a multi-level situation and accordingly the teaching material has been developed. The instructional skills of teachers were developed based on MIs theory. Three basic teacher skills for each intelligence have been identified for which the training was imparted to teachers and support project staff in the form of demonstrations, reflection and practice. The relevant teaching and learning material was developed which facilitates accelerated learning of children in multi-level learning situations.

Community Ownership¹⁰⁸

The success of the project depends on community participation. This issue was strongly tackled by the CULP team from the inception of the project. The field team members organized interactive meetings with peoples' representatives (*Sarpanchs, Ward Panchs, Women's groups, parents of educationally deprived children/especially out-of-school adolescent girls*) and other community members, head teachers and teachers on relevant issues like gender, social discrimination, quality in education and local resource mapping and mobilization. The meetings with the members of village communities and Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) were planned in a phased manner, as follows:

Exhibit – 1.8

Pictures of the community-based activities for community ownership towards small schools



¹⁰⁸ Addressing Gender Issue in Education. Girls' Festival by CULP. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aV4zMNb2OR0>

Phase I: Rapport building with members and sharing the project objectives and planned interventions/activities.

Phase II: Participation in formal meetings of the *Gram Sabhas/Panchayats* and sharing data and the situation analysis of girls' education in the project village.

Phase III: Proposals are invited from *Gram Sabha/village* community for those villages where the number of out-of-school girls was more than 20.

Phase IV: Preparation for starting bridging course centers (called *Pebchansbala*) at village level with three preconditions which the village community must fulfill:

- Ensuring that 90% of out-of-school girls are enrolled with the bridge course center, of which 80% will attend the course center regularly (80% attendance) for two to three years to complete it successfully by achieving age-appropriate learning competencies, essentially required to join age-appropriate grade in mainstream school for further education;
- Providing adequate and appropriate space/building/rooms for running the bridging course center for two to two and a half years;
- Providing free accommodation (one room) to female teacher/ education volunteer in the village.

If the village community made a full commitment for completing the above conditions, the CULP team took the decision to start the program in that village.

The concern of the parents towards the education of their children was considered a driving factor. The education-based initiative brings positive social impact in the local community which motivates people to send their children to school, keeping child marriage and child labor checked. Social concerns related to child rights were discussed through regular discourse in community meetings and collective solutions were worked out through their participation. In the course, curriculum content related to life skills and adolescent health was integrated, which capacitated the adolescents to understand their development. For this purpose, Adolescent Girls' Forums were formed and strengthened at village level, which created an enabling, non-discriminatory learning environment even after graduation. The bridging course aimed to establish self-esteem and identity of the girls. In the forum meetings, the adolescent girl members discussed social and gender issues (such as traditions and customs related to girls and women in society, democratic decision-making mechanisms in society and the role of girls/ women in this process).

Exhibit – 1.9

Pictures of adolescent forums and their features



Community Volunteer Teachers

For ensuring the quality of the learning process for the target children, CULP considered the quality and the commitment of bridging course teachers. Therefore, criteria for selection of teachers in the local area were established, providing continuous back-up academic support. The criteria for the selection and capacity building of bridging course teachers were as follows:



Training of Pehchan Shala Teachers of Niwari (Raj) on pre writing skills

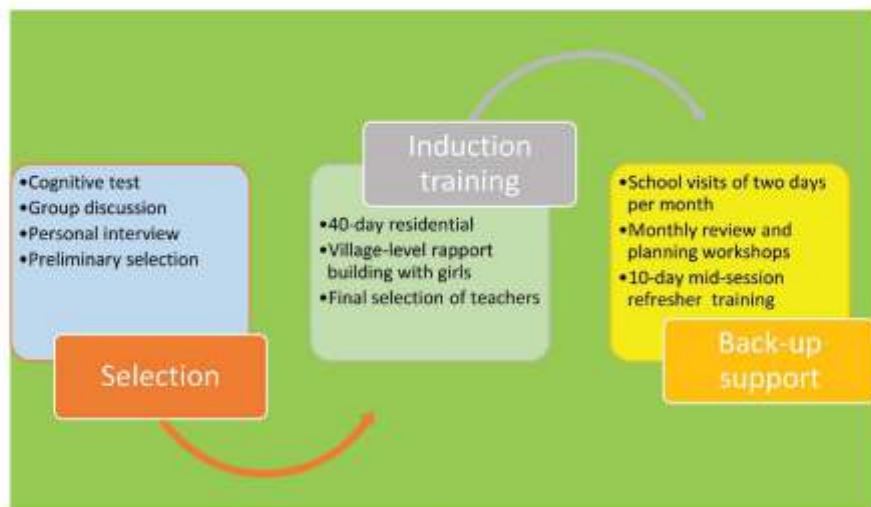
1. Young woman who is willing to stay in the village;
2. Educational qualification with minimum grade 12 pass;
3. Four-stage selection procedure with the use of relevant selection tools;

4. 40-day induction training in teaching and learning processes and development of TLM for the bridging course;
5. Teacher required to work for eight hours per day for effective functioning of the bridging course center – 5.5 hours for actual teaching; 1-1.5 hour for preparation, one hour for report writing and one hour for community contact;
6. Monthly two-day review and planning workshops for teachers;
7. On-site academic support to teachers (at least one visit per week by an academic support person);
8. An annual refresher course.

The teachers' selection and development process under CULP has been summarized in the following exhibit.

Exhibit - 1.10

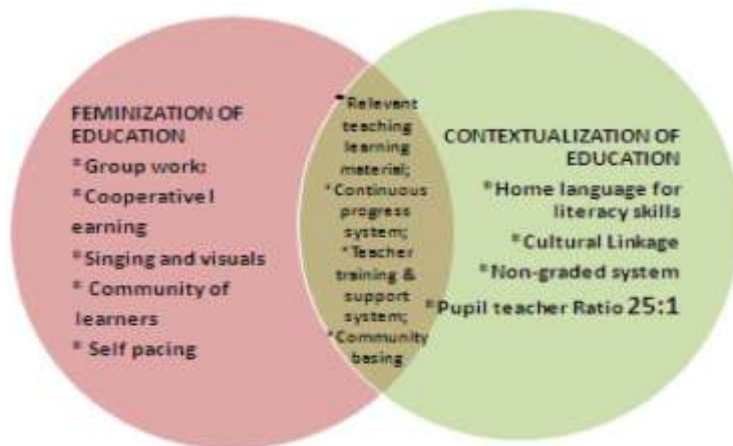
Flow chart of teachers' selection, induction training and support system



On the basis of the foregoing, CULP's philosophy has been summarized in the following exhibit.

Exhibit - 1.11

Venn diagram summarizing CULP's philosophy of small rural schools



CULP believes that the relevance of elementary education in small rural schools can be maximized through feminization and contextualization of education. The organization looks at the quality of education in the form of relevance of school organization, classroom processes and contextualization.

SECTION – 2

Study Methodology

Descriptive case study methodology was used to describe various interventions, individuals, processes and products in the real-life context as they occurred or evolved. The study team, designer of the intervention, field functionaries and teachers who worked during the project period constituted the research team. For the present research, the case study method was viewed as a 'flexible qualitative method ... it reports about a person, group, institution, practice or situation that has been studied over time in a real-life context and found to be effective or successful'.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Kishor, L. (2016). Understanding Case Study Research Methods. Retrieved from: <http://www.alldoapp.net/understanding-case-study-research-method>

Also, the draft tools and the methodology describing the study design and study plan were shared with experts and their suggestions were incorporated to strengthen them.

The principal investigator oriented the research team for construct validity of the instruments, and reliability was ensured through similarity in note taking, abstraction and interpretation through monthly participatory reviews. As suggested, the sample was chosen at random from the best cases identified in each category.

Also, case studies consisted of multiple source data such as (a) documents and archival records, (b) focus groups, (c) interviews of individuals, (d) physical artifacts and products, (e) processes/inventory, and (f) participants' direct observations for each case unit. This was helpful in cross-validation of data.

A focus group was organized for developing this research tool for collecting and collating quantitative data /information. After the collection of data / information / observations, analysis occurred. A monthly review meeting was organized for discussion and exploration.

The research instruments, mainly in the form of schedules, were as follows:

- Content analysis schedule for desk study of the documents;
- Focus group schedule;
- Interview schedule with closed and open-ended questions;
- Individual reminiscences and articulation schedule;
- Artifacts, materials or products analysis format;
- Processes/practices/intervention analysis schedule.

During orientation, besides sharing the entries in the tools, a consensus of investigators was built about the case studies in the present research. For this, a sketch note¹¹⁰ on the case studies was prepared along with the process of doing such research. The sketch note on the case studies is given in the following exhibit.

¹¹⁰ Kishore, L. Case Study Sketch Note and Process. Retrieved from: <http://www.slideshare.net/lalitkishore31/case-study-a-sketch-note-and-process>

Multi-level continuous progress strategy pertains to instructional transactions in a small school where children of different learning levels get the opportunity to learn at their own pace and teachers monitor the learning levels of each of the students and accordingly organize teaching and learning activities in three groups (instead of grades) based on the learning levels of students.

Multiple intelligences pedagogy pertains to student-centric instructional processes which respect diversity and promote inclusion by the use of music, visuals, verbal reasoning (mathematical/logical), interpersonal (group work) and intra-personal (individual practice work) exercises.

Feminist pedagogy in the project was seen as a combination of an emotive learning environment, emphasis on group learning and making use of non-competitive or cooperative learning strategies.

SECTION – 3

Case Studies

Case 1: ‘*Setu Pothi*’ or ‘Abridged Courseware’

Various documents available at CULP were accessed and were listed in Schedule-1 of the tools. In all, 15 main documents were identified, namely, (i) Pehchanshala profile files; (ii) monthly and quarterly reports of the project; (iii) news clippings; (iv) meeting minutes registers; (v) planning registers; (vi) teachers’ diaries and field notes; (vii) photo albums; (viii) girls’ profile files; (ix) girls attendance registers; (x) staff movement registers; (xi) visitors’ registers; (xii) *Setu Pothi* or abridged courseware; (xiii) observation registers; (xiv) review reports; (xv) mini-books.

Three investigators, using the principle of triangulation, identified the best three documents out of all the documents to discuss and build consensus on which one would be the subject of the case study. It was agreed to describe the process and features of *Setu Pothis*. The identification of the case from 15 documents has been shown in Exhibit – 3.1.

Exhibit - 3.1

Box 2: Various documents, the best three and the case




Various *Setu Pothis* were scanned by the investigator to capture their features. It was revealed that the non-starter and dropout rural girls in the age group 9 to 14 in single teacher schools had to complete five grades in two years. After the girls acquired the basic numeracy and literacy skills in the first six months, for grades 3 and 4, the textbooks of Hindi, English and environmental studies were abridged to one-third since there were some aspects which over-age girls found childish. For grade 5 and mathematics from grades 1 to 5, worksheets or workbooks were introduced. The abridged courseware was typed and soft-bound photo copies were used for classroom purposes.

When examined for the basic features of *Setu Pothis*, it was found that they had courses for which the subject matter other than mathematics was condensed to one-third by removing the material which was not suitable for teenage girls and designing some lessons with cross-curricular linkage so as to link language skills and context-based cognitive skills. The outstanding features of *Setu Pothis* in various subjects from grades 3 to 5 have been summarized in the following exhibit.

Exhibit - 3.2

Pictures of *Setu Pothis* and their features through content analysis



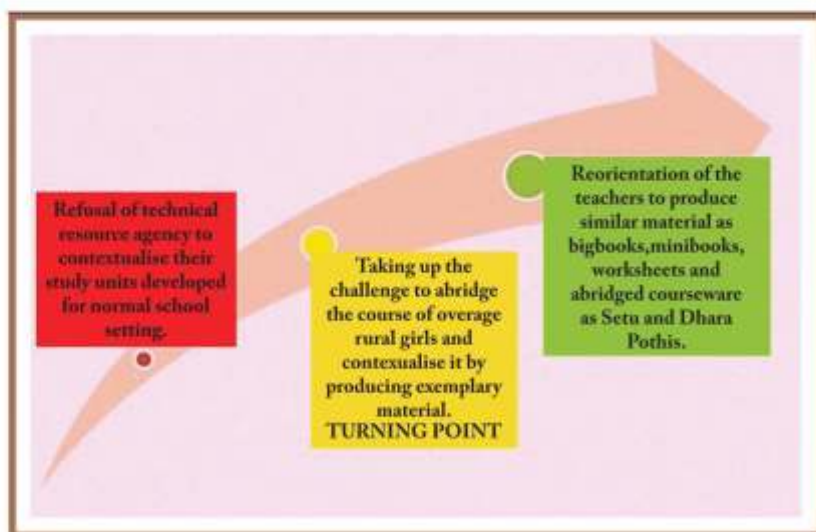
- Up to 32 pages of learning material
- Half A-4 size, soft-bound, could be locally duplicated through photo copying
- Subject matter reduced/ condensed to one-third
- Same lesson used for different cognitive skills
- Worksheets included for group work in the class
- Handy for revision before common examination

An interview which was video-recorded¹¹¹ with the then chairperson of CULP who had designed the curriculum for multi-level learning, the teacher training module and the *Setu Pothis*, reveals the biographical details of the development of courseware in which over-aged girls had to complete five grades in two years.

Initially, a technical resource agency provided training to the teachers of CULP. In a meeting with an academician, the issue of abridging the curriculum was brought up and the technical agency refused to do so. CULP took up the challenge and consequently, abridged learning material based on the government school textbooks was produced to be implemented with the three-stage learning system with the freedom of self-pacing. Consequently, the exemplar material was produced in the form of big-books, mini-books and *Setu Pothis*. This was followed by training of CULP teachers and production of similar materials by teachers for grades 3, 4 and 5.

The following exhibit depicts the turning point in the development of bridge school courseware.

Exhibit - 3.3 The turning point in the development of *Setu Pothis*



¹¹¹ Interview on bridge courseware development, Peshchanshalas of CULP-NGO, Jaipur (2016).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EX1zzVhA0o>

The new curriculum design and matched instruction material boosted the confidence of both teachers and learners, leading to better learning outcomes and mainstreaming most girls in grade 5 or 6 after two-year bridging courses. In the interview with the bridging courseware designer, it was held that the courseware was abridged curricular material for over-age learners with high social learning. By accelerating the pace of learning, the courseware would cover the requisite competencies in various subjects in a shorter period of time.

The rationale of *Setu Pothis* was explained in terms of their advantages, such as the fact that the courseware helped both teachers and learners to integrate it with three-stage learning. Appropriate learning material was also included in the form of worksheets and supplementary material to finish and consolidate the requisite levels of learning in time.

The 'how' was explained as a process of exemplary material preparation; training of teachers on this material and developing similar material during teachers' workshops. It was gathered that once the *Setu Pothis* were ready and transacted, for grade 5, the courseware helped to revise and consolidate learning for taking the common examination for certification and mainstreaming. The elements of group learning and self-learning helped some of the bridge school girls to opt for an open education system to continue their studies up to higher education.

Case 2: Applied Research on the Transition from Home Language to School Language¹¹²

CULP views research as a tool to improve ongoing activities and build quality in various projects. Therefore, it subscribes to ideas of responsive research, action research and formative evaluation research. CULP and its members conducted several research studies for government and UN agencies, INGOs and other corporate groups which support social development activities. Most of the action-research projects are of one to six-month duration and were meant to improve processes and practices. The studies which were supported by external agencies have been listed below:

¹¹² International Mother Language Day: How Can Teaching through Local Dialect in Early Grades Succeed in India?
<http://www.meritnews.com/article/international-mother-language-day-how-can-teaching-through-local-dialect-in-early-grades-succeed-in-india/15913877.shtml>

- An educational needs assessment study of schools of Govindpura and Neemrana villages in Sikar district, Rajasthan (2001);
- A study of multi-grade teaching in India (2003);¹¹³
- Mid-term evaluation of the education project of ASSEFA Rajasthan (2003);
- Situation analysis of elementary education and NGO-mapping in Rajasthan (2004);
- Rapid assessment of elementary education in rural Chaksu block in Rajasthan (2004);
- Developing and trialing material for transition from home language to school language (2004);
- Mid-term evaluations of a girls' education program of four partner NGOs of Plan International in Rajasthan (Urmul Setu and Urmul Seemant), Karnataka (Samuha) and Odisha (PREM) (2004);
- A co-partner-led evaluation of the pilot phase of the education program in western Rajasthan being implemented by Urmul Trust (2005);
- An assessment study of education centers of two partner NGOs (GVNML and GSS) of Save the Children in Tonk district (2005);
- Impact assessment of the Taleem project for educating girls of deprived minority groups in Alwar district (2005);
- Joint evaluation of the education program of seven partner NGOs of Plan International in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Maharashtra and Karnataka (2006);
- In-depth study of classroom processes in elementary schools of Rajasthan (2007-08);¹¹⁴
- Impact assessment of Prabhat project for education of out-of-school girls in Jhalawar district (2007);
- The case of the Lok Jumbish project in Rajasthan: An ex-post facto secondary analysis and qualitative study (2010);¹¹⁵
- Situation analysis study of child rights in Banswara district (2014).

During a scan of available research study reports, the three outstanding educational research studies were found to be relevant for this study. These are as follows:

¹¹³ Kishore, L., Multi-grade Teaching in India. <http://opac.tiss.edu/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=272164>

¹¹⁴ In-depth Study of Classroom Processes in Elementary Schools of Rajasthan. (2008).

<http://purbamedinipur.gov.in/SSA/Research%20Studies/Research%20Studies%20Under%20SSA.pdf>

¹¹⁵ List of: Educational Research Innovation Committee Projects Completed over the Last Six Years. http://www.ncert.nic.in/departments/nio/dert/activities/pdf/ERIC_poj.pdf

- Developing and trialing material for transition from home language to school language (2004);
- In-depth study of classroom processes in elementary schools of Rajasthan (2007-08);
- The case of the Lok Jumbish project in Rajasthan: An ex-post facto secondary analysis and qualitative study (2010).¹¹⁶

The investigators chose ‘Developing and Trialing Material for Transition from Home Language to School Language’ as the study worthy of case illustration since it is a unique study recognized by the National Council for Education, Research and Training (NCERT) under the projects sanctioned by the Educational Research Innovation Committee (ERIC).

The following exhibit shows the pictures of the study reports, the identified best three research reports and the report as a case illustration.

Exhibit - 3.4

Pictures of the available and identified reports as case illustration



The research areas of multilingualism, transition from Home Language (HL) to School Language (SL), and cultural linkage of curriculum are almost untouched in the Indian context. Therefore, this research can be considered a landmark work in the area of language instruction in rural primary schools. The research proposal was submitted to the National Council for Educational Research and Training after having encountered the problem of high dropout rates of girls due to the gap between their home language and school language.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

The desk study of the research report revealed that the objectives of Research & Development (R & D) in the area of language instruction were:

- (1) To develop and test a pre-standard language program for first graders in rural Rajasthan;
- (2) To make Home Language to School Language transition a part of the in-service training program of the Pehchan project;
- (3) To collect 10 to 20 children's folk songs for transition from Home Language to School Language, institutionalizing the same.

Fieldwork was done to identify children's folk rhymes/songs in the *Dbundhari* dialect of rural Jaipur which were converted into short pedagogical poems to build vocabulary through a padding strategy. Mini-books were produced for transaction in the classroom with a procedure developed which used flash cards. After developing 'sight' vocabulary of 20 or so words, the transition was made to literacy skills in the school language (Hindi).¹¹⁷

Exhibit - 3.5 Pictures of research instructional material



- Mini-books of adapted folk songs for student use
- Padding strategy for transition of spoken words
- Flash cards for sight vocabulary and for mental images
- Learning of alphabets of Hindi with four-line clap rhyme and worksheets

The material, developed through the fieldwork and its successful evidence-based testing was incorporated in the training of teachers through refresher courses first and, later, was made a part of induction training as a strategy to teach language as a part of the first level of learning.

¹¹⁷ Interview on research on transition from home language to school in Pehchanshala.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEDCD83Xgk>

Exhibit - 3.6

The turning point for linking home language to school language

TURNING POINT: Devising and trying out 30-hour home to school language transitional course for respect to linguistic diversity and cultural linkage and treating it as first level of language learning

Switch over to standard language learning as next level of learning and normal bridge course of Hindi

Learning disability due to gap between home and school languages leading to push/drop out

The dialect or home language is seen as the language variation spoken by a regional group, suggesting the group's collective identity.¹¹⁸ Delpit¹¹⁹ has advocated the idea of bringing home language into the classroom. Thus, CULP has brought theory into action by imparting literacy skills to rural girls through their home language.



Multi-level learning in 3 groups (CULP)

¹¹⁸ Ogbu, J.U. (1999). Beyond Language, *American Educational Research Journal*, 36, 147.

¹¹⁹ Delpit, L. (1995). *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in Classroom*, New York: The New York Press.

Case 3: Three-group Three-stage Learning Process

Among various processes mobilized by CULP during the implementation of the Pehchan project were the teacher selection and development process; the community mobilization process; the review and planning process; and the curriculum planning process in the form of levels of learning. The process of three-group and three-stage learning (TGTS) was chosen as the case to be described and explained.

The TGTS process consists of dividing students into three groups working at different levels due to their individual pace of learning. Initially, they are described as slow, medium and fast learners. Further, daily learning episodes for each of the groups pass through three stages of learning called: (i) teacher-directed learning or teacher-learner (T-L) interaction; (ii) group learning/learner-learner (L-L) interaction; and (iii) individualized learning or learner-material (L-M) interaction.

The TGTS process systematized the space, time and material management aspects of single-teacher, small school organization. A concept paper on the TGTS process,^{120,121} has been developed and the process was stabilized in Pehchanshalas through teacher training programs, monthly review and planning workshops, and a back-up support system for teachers.

The process has been studied and mentioned in research reports by Kishore and Kulhari¹²² and used for two types of worksheets developed by CULP to systematize the process.

The steps of the TGTS process, gathered from an interview of the curriculum designer, revealed the process as depicted in Exhibit – 3.7.

¹²⁰ Kishore, L. (2016). Small School Success Strategy: Graphic and Sketch Note.

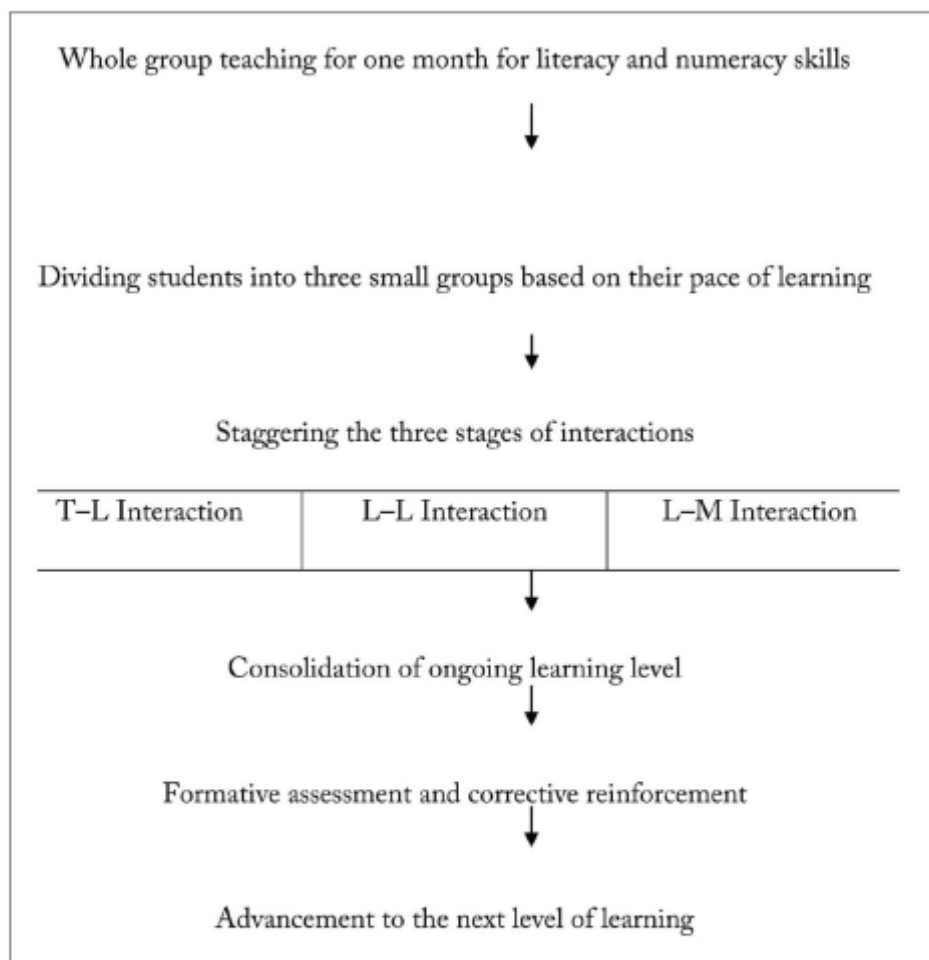
<http://www.slideshare.net/lalitkishore31/small-school-success-strategy-graphic-and-sketch-note>

¹²¹ Kishore, K. (2016). Multi-grade multi-level: Some Reflections. <http://www.slideshare.net/lalitkishore31/multigrade-multilevel-teaching-some-reflections>

¹²² Kulhari, P. (2011). A Comparative Study of Multi-grade Teaching on Achievement Levels Hindi and Mathematics of Grade 2 in Government and NGO Schools, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Jaipur: University of Rajasthan.

Exhibit - 3.7

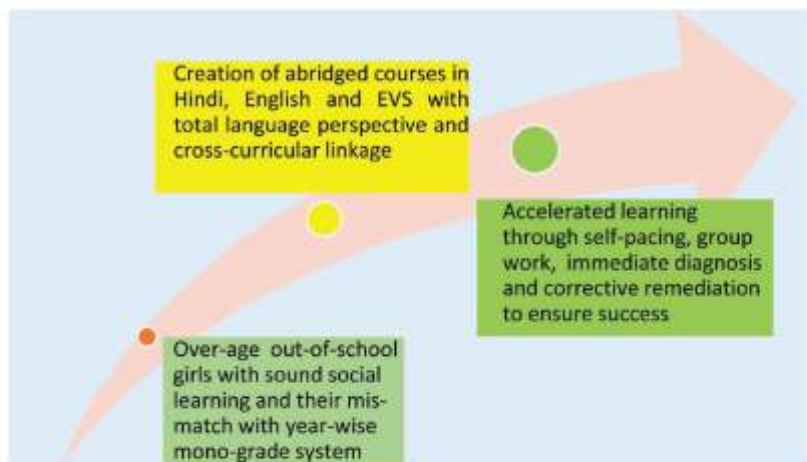
The steps in the TGTS process



The observations from the documents, along with interviews with the education program coordinator and curriculum designer, led to the course being organized in an abridged format. This was a turning point to impart success in learning by girls as shown in the following exhibit.

Exhibit - 3.8

The turning point for creation of a bridge course in text for over-age girls



Multi-grade Multi-level Teaching: Some Reflections

The learning material review and interview of the curriculum designer further revealed that the two main types of learning materials used in the TGTS strategy have been the 'group worksheets' and the 'individual practice worksheets'. The features of the worksheets, which evolved through discussion with the volunteer teachers, have been shown in the following exhibit.

Exhibit - 3.9

Two types of worksheets as the learning material

Worksheet type	Features
Group worksheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading exercises• Ticking, matching and circling exercises• Word search puzzles
Individual worksheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vocabulary writing• Filling the blanks exercises• Examples, comparisons, graphics• Drawing and rewriting

The group work and reading exercises de-emphasized competition and enhanced cooperative learning, leading to the feminization of classroom processes and making the curriculum transaction female-friendly. This has been validated by Kishore.¹²³

Case 4: Individual Beneficiary Adolescent Girl Who Showed Transformation

To identify the individuals who benefitted from the Multi-Level and Multi-Grade bridging courses and experienced transformation in their lives, a girls' conclave cum alumni meet was held, marked by self-narration of changes in their lives in an open forum as well as interviews of the cases identified.

The girls who came for the conclave (total of 35), in their narrations, attributed the change in their lives to the self-esteem-building environment, systematic completion of the bridging course in which group learning took place and individual practice. They also found the exemplary behavior of their teachers and mutually respectful relations the prominent change agents in their lives, both as individuals and students motivated for further studies.

Some of the typical expressions of the girls were as follows:

- Both girls and their parents were less interested in education, keeping girls engaged in domestic chores, cattle grazing or sibling care and preparing them for marriage at an early age.
- A girl, Dhapu, shared that she had never attended school and had never been interested in receiving an education, while her younger brother was studying in class 7. She got married at an early age.
- Three other girls (Sugana, Vijanti and Badam) dropped out in grade 3 or 4, and were found engaged in activities to support their families. They did not find a child-friendly environment or joyful learning activities in school.
- Eight girls, after completion of secondary education, joined higher education.
- Two girls obtained government jobs - Vijanti Meena (Trilokinathpura) is a teacher and master trainer in Maabari education center run by the Tribal Area Development (TAD) department of the state government for tribal

¹²³ Kishore, L. (2016). Should Education Be Feminized to Build Quality into It? <http://www.merinews.com/article/should-education-be-feminized-to-build-quality-into-it/15912516.shtml>

- habitations, and Anita Meena (Thikriyan Meenan) is serving in the post office.
- Five girls, after completion of school education, got married and were looking after their homes and taking care of their children.
 - The remaining 16 girls are studying at secondary level. Six girls are engaged in self-study to appear in the board examination for secondary education as private students. They are expecting coaching support in three core subjects, namely English, science and mathematics for class 10.
 - CULP teachers and field staff members contacted their parents and persuaded the girls to join Pehchanshala.
 - They joined Pehchanshala and found a joyful learning environment since there were interesting activities (games, songs/rhymes, dance). Diverse materials were used which inculcated interest among them.
 - They also expressed that they were very shy and were hardly able to speak a single word/sentence about themselves, but now they have developed confidence and can speak well. They have developed their identity and self-esteem.
 - CULP team members also extended academic support for the board examination of class 8 and subsequently for class 10 and 12. Dhapu was married even before joining Pehchanshala and five other girls got married after completion of class 12. Both parents and in-laws also became enthusiastic and encouraged the girls to pursue higher education.

Some individual girls who came forward to narrate their case stories were: *Sugana, Dhapu, Vaijainti, Manisha, Badam, Suman, Nirma, Mangali, Karwa, Lekha, Pinky, and Mithilesh, Lali (ST, Trilokinathpura); Anita Meena (Thikariyan Meenan, graduates); Saroj Prajapat (Sanwalia Dhani), Roshani Meena (Dablala), Lali Meena, Jyoti Meena (ST), Lali Khateek, Gudi Khateek, Sona, Lali, Mamata, Suman, Geeta, Sunita, Sarita, Puja, Sunita, Asha (all from ST, Hingonia), Prem, Lada, Kaushila (ST, Badrinathpura).*

The girls were of the opinion that the way the bridging courses were organized, and the way the classroom was converted into a web of relationships, helped them to gain confidence and provided success in learning. The condition of rural girls prior to the bridging course is depicted in the following exhibit:

Exhibit - 3.10

The condition of out-of-school girls prior to the bridge course



Vaijanti Meena who was a dropout and married (born: January 10, 1993; attended bridging course: November 2004, Trilokinathpura, Chaksu, Jaipur district).

She belongs to a 'Below Poverty Line' (BPL) family and a 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST) community. She dropped out in grade 3 and stayed home for three years. By persuading her parents, she joined Pehchashala and gradually became very regular.

She completed the bridging course and attained a learning level equivalent to grade 8 in a period of two years. After completion of her school education with first division grades, she moved to her in-laws' home but continued her higher education since her parents and in-laws supported her.

She obtained a Bachelor's degree and is pursuing a B.Ed. (Bachelor's degree in Education). She is working as a teacher in Maa-Bari education centers run by the Tribal Area Development Department (government) and she has also been selected as best teacher and trained as a master trainer to instruct other teachers of Maa-Bari centers in Jaipur and Dausa districts.

Her study was supported by her in-laws and her 'Gona' (move to the marital home) was delayed until after the completion of her school education. Both her parents and in-laws feel proud of her. She dreams of joining the Rajasthan state service.

Exhibit - 3.11

1) Self-narrated case stories; (2) Exemplary cases; and (3) Cases for illustration



Case 5: The Case Illustration of 'Board Games' as a Product

CULP resource persons, support functionaries and teachers produced a variety of supplementary teaching materials such as: (i) pocket charts; (ii) poem charts; (iii) board games;¹²⁴ (iv) word strips; (v) flash cards; (vi) stick puppets;¹²⁵ (vii) masks; (viii) window charts; (ix) word booklets; (x) sentence strips and sentence booklets; (xi) mathematic operation strips; (xii) word puzzles; (xiii) jigsaw puzzles; (xiv) finger puppets;¹²⁶ and (xv) origami-puppets.

The three most exemplary supplementary teaching aids were reported to be: (1) board games;¹²⁷ (2) window charts; and (3) stick puppets.

¹²⁴ A concept note on the use of board games in early primary classes. <http://www.slideshare.net/lalitkishore31/a-concept-note-on-use-of-boardgames-in-early-primary-classes>

¹²⁵ Ice cream stick puppet ideas as craft for kids and teaching them content. <http://www.slideshare.net/lalitkishore31/icecream-stick-puppet-ideas-as-craft-for-kids-and-teaching-them-content>

¹²⁶ Eight animal faces for finger puppets, stick puppets and masks for primary classes. <http://www.slideshare.net/lalitkishore31/eight-animal-faces-for-finger-puppets-stick-puppets-and-masks-for-primary-classes>

¹²⁷ Interview regarding supplementary learning materials for Pehchanshalas. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fx_L8yd4m8o

The main advantages of these aids were the heightened interest of children, improved manipulative skills, cognitive development and use of performing arts (see Exhibit – 3.12).

Exhibit - 3.12

Pictures of learning aids, three exemplary aids and best case illustration



The most popular supplementary teaching aid in literacy skills was found to be the board games. The use of these was extended to mathematics learning. The features of the board games are depicted in the following exhibit.

Exhibit - 3.13

Picture of a board game and its features

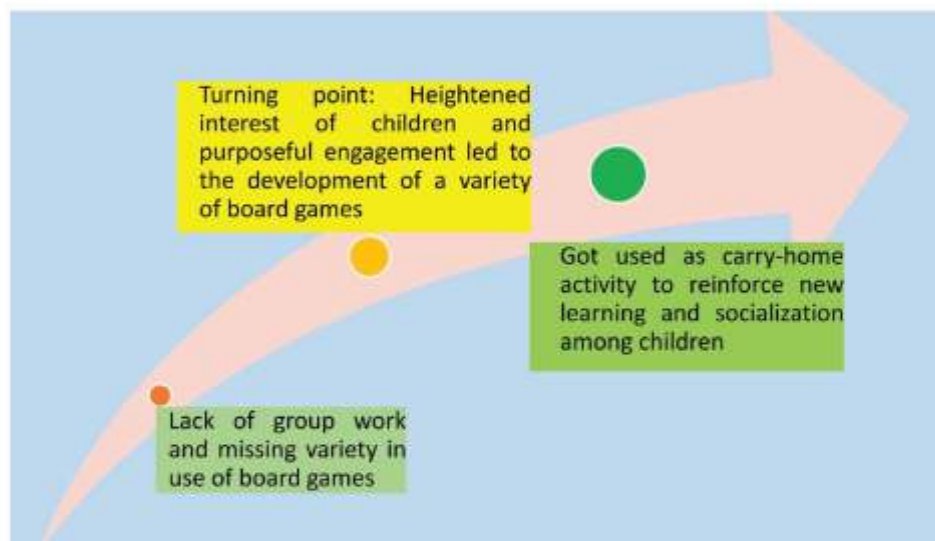


- Facilitates group work
- Helps in reinforcement of new words and concept labels in a non-competitive way
- Engagement of children with light cognitive load
- Linkage with worksheet
- Interest building with hands-on kinesthetic intelligence

Board games were seen as a meaningful device for group activities, engaging four children at a time. This led to the creation of many board games to be played with dice, counters and cards. Also, it was reported that board games also helped in aiding the socialization of girls.

Exhibit - 3.14

The turning point of group work for purposefully engaging children in the learning process



Feministic Pedagogy

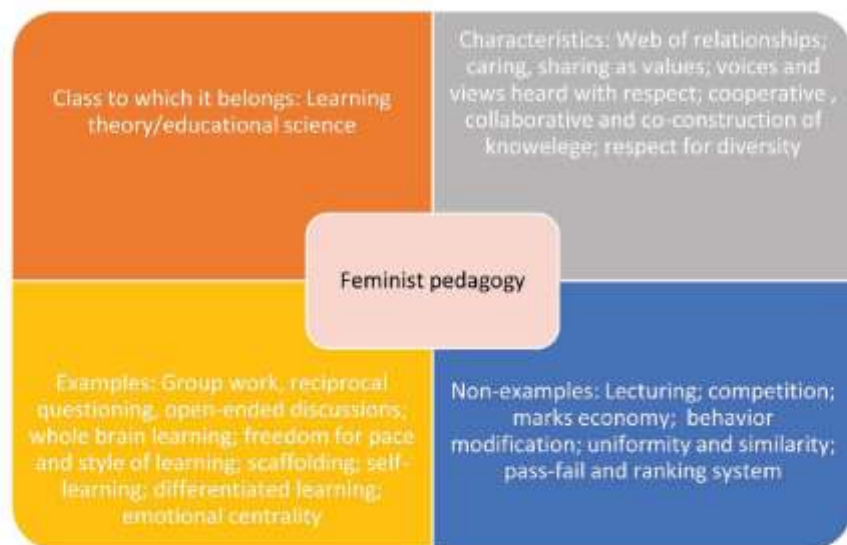
The draft was shared with a representative of the Harvard University South Asia Institute¹²⁸ and the suggestions regarding incorporation of CULP's views on feministic pedagogy were discussed and crystallized in the form of a short note,¹²⁹ reproduced in the following exhibit.

¹²⁸ Anisha Gopi visited CULP office in Jaipur on 14 October 2016 and shared her comments and suggestions on the draft report.

¹²⁹ Kishore, L. (2016). A Short Note on Feministic Pedagogy. <http://www.slideshare.net/falukishore31/crystallizing-feminist-pedagogy-model-at-culp-queries-on-research-and-focus-group-outcome>

Exhibit - 3.15

The Feminist Pedagogy Evolved at CULP



A distinct learning theory, feminist pedagogy theorizes about teaching, learning organizations, institutions and knowledge as democratic concepts. Viewing traditional measures of education as the responsibility of the teachers, feminist pedagogy places the responsibility of learning on the students. It also proposes that the best learning environment should be one wherein students' opinions and ideas regularly contribute to the learning process.

Feminist pedagogy is distinct in its encouragement of individual conclusions, combined with a mutual respect for other students, or perhaps just an understanding that reality has many perspectives.

CULP subscribes to six fundamental principles of feminist pedagogy. First is the relationship between the teacher and students. Second is empowerment, and third is constructing a learning community. The fourth is the privilege of voice. The fifth is respect for diverse personal experiences among all students. Lastly, feminist pedagogy challenges typical traditional instructional methods.

In feministic pedagogical settings, mutual respect, critical and positive thinking, and empathy create better relationships and safer, more open learning environments. Distinctions among learners are no longer set, allowing everyone equal learning opportunities matched to their contexts.

Impact Analysis:

The year-wise cumulative figures in the following exhibit shows the target beneficiaries of different categories impacted under the program:

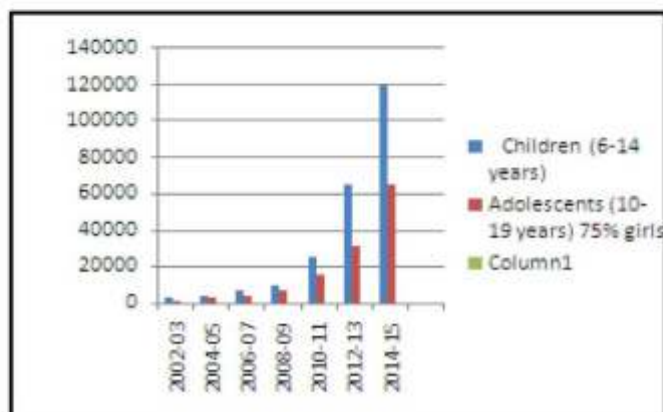
Exhibit - 3.16

The trend of cumulative coverage of girl beneficiaries in the project

Year	Children (6 to 14 years)	Adolescents (10 to 19 years)	Percentage of adolescent girls (10 to 19 years)
2002-03	3,000	1,200	80
2004-05	4,000	2,500	75
2006-07	6,500	4,200	70
2008-09	10,000	6,800	70
2010-11	25,000	16,000	75
2012-13	65,000	30,665	75
2014-15	120,000	65,000	70

The data of exhibit – 3.16 when represented graphically show the trend of coverage of girls over the years visually, which has been depicted in Exhibit 3.17.

Exhibit - 3.17



In addition to the above figures relating to the beneficiaries of the project, several students and volunteers of technical and research institutions also received exposure/internship training for one month to three months in the program.

Case studies conducted by external experts,^{130,131} and volunteers (overseas interns/students),^{132,133} reflected the following impacts on the lives of adolescent girls who were deprived of basic education:

Impacted group	Impacts
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instances of delayed marriage • Continuation of studies at upper primary level by about 70% of admitted girls • Better understanding of concepts in science and math • Better articulation • Health awareness
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heightened awareness of relevant and quality education • Mothers feeling concerned about their daughters' education • Enhanced stake in school through collective effort • Positive attitude towards investment in girls' education: better marriage prospects
Government partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saw the positive effect of community-based schools • Recognizing the baseline data of children provided by NGOs • Providing free textbooks to complementary programs of NGOs • Certification of bridging course of girls
Other programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other NGOs adapting the TLM • New UNICEF programs and SSA include the strategy

¹³⁰ Sullivan, A. et al. (2005). Educating 'Out-of-School Girls': An Assessment of the Pehchan Project in Rajasthan, p. 6-15.

¹³¹ Mathur, K. (2006). Review of Pehchan Project in Rural Jaipur District for UNICEF.

¹³² Punia, R. (2009). Pehchan Project: Making a Difference in the Life of Rural Girls.

¹³³ Patel, C. (2010). Pehchan: Giving Girls an Opportunity at Life.

A case study of the Pehchan project and review study supported by UNICEF-INDIA concludes that 'For many girl students, participating in Pehchan led to increase in self-discipline, respectful behavior, freedom to question and discuss, and sharing of learning outcomes. In addition, Pehchanshala students experienced improvements in personal hygiene, hygienic handling of food and water, and knowledge of feminine health and motherhood. Positive impacts were also observed on inter-caste relations within the classroom'.¹³⁴ Further, the research team strongly recommended continuation of Adolescent Girls' Forums or *Balika Manch*es along with co-educational environments within Pehchanshalas. Another aspect that has been highlighted by the study is the fact that the participation of girls in Pehchan programs delayed the age of 'Gona' (the third stage of marriage when girls move to their husband's home). Surprisingly, education of non-school going girls even increased their value in the marriage market as perceived by the parents of Pehchanshala girls.

The impact of CULP's pedagogy was studied through content analysis of teachers' diaries, which were selected as representatives of reasonably written diaries chosen through random sampling. A schedule was also prepared and a five-step process¹³⁵ was adopted. The steps have been summarized as follows:

1. Read through the transcripts individually and make the list of the relevant information in phrasal form;
2. Categorize the relevant information pieces in a given format (a sample given below) and validate them with two other content analysts for vetting category labels;
3. Identify the categories that can be linked to the research topic;
4. When the above is completed for all the transcripts, collect all of the identified categories and themes and get them vetted or validated by two other content analysts. Alternatively, organize a mini focus group for review, finalization or short listing of categories;
5. Prepare another sheet for the frequency of each of the short-listed categories.

¹³⁴ Mathur, K. (2006). Review Study of Pehchan Project in Jaipur District. (Rajasthan).

¹³⁵ Kishore, L. (2016) Content Analysis of Field Functionaries' Diaries or Notes Depicting Personal Experiences: A Five-step Process.

<http://www.slideshare.net/lalitkishore31/content-analysis-of-field-functionaries-diaries-or-notes-depicting-personal-experiences-a-five-step-process>

The diaries were read for content analysis to identify the categories of comments, reflections and feelings of teachers. An interview of one of the investigators who had been associated with CULP since project inception was also conducted. The frequency of occurrences of reactions in three categories were computed and converted into percentages by a research team member. These have been summarized in the following exhibit:

Exhibit - 3.18

Teachers' diaries and table summarizing the categories from teachers' diaries and percentage of occurrence



Category	Frequency in %		Chi-squared value
	Observed	Expected	
Positive	80	33	61.15**
Neutral	18	33	
Negative	2	33	

**Significant at 0.01 level with degree of freedom (DF) as 2 ($p \leq 0.01$ with $DF=2$)

The pedagogical intervention of CULP with 40-day residential training, back-up support, periodic review workshops and refresher courses impacted teachers significantly in a positive manner.

Some Reflections from Community Members, Parents, Local Government Members and Officials

During the research study, the comments of community members, parents, PRI representatives and government officials were also recorded. Some of the comments have been listed below.

‘The efforts of Pehchanshala teachers for inculcating learning and leadership skills in out-of-school adolescent girls deserve appreciation.’

– **Mustak Khan, block Chairperson, Chaksu**

‘We are thankful to CULP for providing opportunities to dropout and non-starter adolescent girls to study again and supporting them to join mainstream schools for continuation of their education in Khejri village.’

– **Badri Lal Meena, Sarpanch, Thikrayan Meenan, Chaksu block**

‘Adolescent girls achieved expected, age-appropriate learning levels and developed personality and leadership skills in Pehchanshala. After joining mainstream schools at primary and secondary level, they perform better than other regular students. For this, we are grateful to CULP.’

– **Narsingh Lal Meena, HM, Govt. Sec. School Jhampada Kalan (Chaksu)**

Voices of community leaders: as reported in visitors’ register (translated from local dialect/Hindi in English)

‘I observed the learning process and material in Pehchanshala of Chimapura where 19 girls were found busy in group work. These girls never attended formal schooling before. I express my gratitude for CULP and the Axis Bank Foundation for giving an opportunity to the deprived girls within our community to study. This will transform the lifestyle of the deprived girls for better development.’

– **Hanuman Prasad, Ward Member, Chimapura (Member of PSMC)**

‘The learning levels of girls are assessed periodically and displayed in a competency-based chart sheet which is available for all visitors. This gives the overall performance of girls at a glance. The ways of learning are quite effective

and facilitate accelerated learning by girls. All concerned stakeholders and associated partners must extend their support for continuation of Pehchanshala in the village for the overall development of rural girls.'

- Shyoji Ram Jat, Sarpanch, Gram Panchayat Dahlod (Niwai block).

On the basis of the case illustrations of various aspects of the Pehchan project, it can be stated that the success of primary education depends on numerous factors. These include sound pedagogical processes supported by contextualized learning material; non-graded school organization permitting the freedom of self-pacing; intensive teacher training and robust support systems and the strengthening of social processes through group learning opportunities. In addition, treating the small school system as a community of learners can have a significant positive effect.



CULP receiving Dasra Girl Power Award 2014

CONTRIBUTORS TO CASE STUDIES:

Centre for Unfolding Learning Potentials (CULP)

Dr. Lalit Kishore completed his master's in physics in 1968 and taught physics for 15 years. He then made a shift towards pedagogy by pursuing a doctorate in education at the Punjab University, Chandigarh. He had his advanced training in school technology in the UK; quality of education from the International Institute of Educational Planning in France; and evaluation from Queen's University in Canada. He has published over 300 papers on education and written six books. He has completed three research studies for ERIC of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and one for UNESCO. For his contribution to education, he has received 11 national awards and 13 Commonwealth awards. He has been founder chairperson of CULP, and has worked on various educational projects as well as for NGOs including CULP. Currently, Dr. Kishore is working as a research consultant with Disha which is an institution for differently abled students. He also writes for the e-media as a citizen journalist and has presented papers on various national and international conferences held in India, South Africa, the UK, and Malaysia.

Dr. O.P. Kulhari studied for his Ph.D. at the University of Rajasthan. He then studied botany for six years, and subsequently shifted from higher education to work in the social development sector. He became a part of Sandhan, a professional group in education to provide technical support to the government's innovative education projects (mainly Shiksha Karmi and Lok Jumbish) for universalization of elementary education in Rajasthan. Dr. Kulhari has published several articles and research papers in various national and international journals. He has also conducted/coordinated more than 35 research studies (action research, baseline, evaluation, and impact studies) for various organizations including government, UN agencies, and INGOs.

MV Foundation

Sita Mamidipudi teaches at the School of Gender Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Hyderabad, India. She is also involved in research and advocacy on public healthcare response to gender-based violence, laws and policies on women's livelihood rights, and adolescent girls' education.

Ibtada

Rajesh Singhi set up Ibtada in 1997 to work for the betterment of deprived sections in Mewat and its adjoining areas. Ibtada focuses on working with women and girl children in about 350 villages in six blocks of Alwar. Some of its major programs include SHGs and federations (women's savings and credit program), and livelihoods – improving the livelihoods of SHG members in areas of agriculture, dairy animal and goat rearing among others. He has published a paper titled “Unlocking a Potential: Findings from a Baseline Survey of Mewat”. He holds a master's in public administration and a postgraduate diploma in rural management.

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White Lotus

Glenn Fawcett has been living between India and Cambodia as executive director of White Lotus Trust and Lotus Outreach International field operations for more than 15 years. He has built program portfolios, both of his own design and through collaboration with capable partner organizations, which mainly focus on creating opportunities for and toward protection and post-abuse care for women and girls. He is currently studying toward an MSc in poverty reduction in policy and practice at the University of London.

Suraj Kumar is the program manager at White Lotus Charitable Trust and is currently working on a project to improve government schools in Haryana for which he is maintaining the monthly and annual financial reports of income and expenditure among other things. His work at White Lotus includes preparation and execution of monthly, quarterly and annual work plans, as well as capacity-building for School Management Committees (SMC), villagers, schoolteachers and headmasters to evolve the strategy to improve government schools to implement the RTE Act of 2009 in letter and spirit.

He was appointed as state representative for the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) for Haryana from January 2011 till March 2013, and was responsible for developing cooperation and coordination between the state government and NCPCR.

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