

Second Chance Program - Education Continued.

आत्मजा (maybe)

India boasts one of the highest populations in the world. It is also believed that our demographic dividend will be a great resource for the future. However, while women constitute almost half the population, India still struggles with keeping its girls in schools.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 by way of Article 26(1) lays down that everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary (till 8th standard) and fundamental stages. The UN recommendation has been re-enforced in the provisions of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, which came into effect on 1st April 2010 . The Act intends to provide full time elementary education to every child (between the age of 6 and 14) in a formal school, which satisfies certain essential norms and standards. Additionally, private education institutions have to reserve 25% of their seats starting from Class I.

Keeping that in mind, we would like to focus on girl child education from the age of 6 to 17 in the first phase of the roll-out, with special focus on girls from the age of 14. India's dropout rates for girls are as high as 57% by high school. The average dropout rate of girls was 17.3% at the secondary education level (classes 9-10) and 4.74% at the elementary level in 2018-19, the Women and Child Development (WCD) Ministry said in February 2021 . Karnataka, Assam, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura were among the States that recorded high drop-out rates among girls in the period.

Note: Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana and Karnataka have managed to bring down dropout rates at the primary level to zero. (approx. 6-12)

Why are girls dropping out of school?

There is obviously no single good answer, nor is there conclusive data to show us which factors relatively impact girls the most. However we can identify a range of possibilities that could suggest specific reasons for the marginalization of girls (specially from the age of 15) from the schooling system.

Even though we believe each of the girls need to be understood on a case-to-case basis, we believe there are some common factors, in general, which hinder a girl's education.

1. Lack of Resources

Poverty and entrenched patriarchy plays a vital role in affecting girls' education. We also see a fear that educating girls causes excessive independence, and this is seemingly manifested in the attitude that parents take to a girl's education.

2. Expectations of Domesticity

Regressive gender norms place the burden of sibling care and household chores on girls. Due to parents and even older siblings working, the household chores often fall solely on the daughters. In 2019, 40% of girls ages 15-18-year-olds had dropped out of school, usually to help with housework. Even if a girl does complete her education and gets a full-time job, there is still a high expectation that she will do the majority of the housework.

3. Menstruation Awareness and Hygiene

Schools all over India face a variety of challenges when dealing with menstruation as well. Whether due to a lack of resources, proper health education or common taboos about being "unclean" during menstruation, millions of girls drop out of school or start taking extended periods of absence around middle school due to their menstruation cycles. According to a survey in 2018, as many as 80% of teachers still believe in menstrual taboos.

4. Safety & Security

Safety of girls travelling alone is a major concern for Indians – the prevalent discourse surrounding recent events has brought to the forefront a longstanding problem.

In a recent article, the Guardian told the story of a girl in Delhi who was being taunted by boys on the way to school. She was afraid to tell her parents, for she thought that they would prevent her from attending school if she did. She was right – her family was, in the words of the author, 'worried about the effect on their "honor" if she was sexually assaulted.' These stories are not isolated; rather, this is an endemic and very gendered problem in economically disadvantaged India, be it rural or urban.

5. Infrastructure Barriers

The Right to Education bill has set forth some norms and standards in this regard – it codifies expectations and requirements of norms and standards relating inter alia to pupil-teacher ratios buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours. Therefore we do see legislators are at the very least, considering this

area of concern further. It is also one of the easier aspects to tackle, as it falls within the purview of Education Departments in the Centre and in States. However, it is commonly perceived that girls suffer for various reasons from the lack of infrastructure much worse than boys do—for instance, as of 2012, 40% of all government schools lacked a functioning common toilet, and another 40% lacked a separate toilet for girls. This in fact creates even more reluctance to allow for girls to be educated.

Although including girls in the scheme of Indian universalized education, these causes seem to make one thing clear – the causes are ingrained in systems that are larger than education. While temporary solutions are rampant and popular, it will take attention on the long-term scale to ensure that girls across India are able to freely, safely, and consistently attend school and access an education.

How is the pandemic affecting girl child education?

It is also believed that ten million girls in India could drop out of secondary school due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a Right to Education Forum policy brief. With 1.6 million girls aged 11 to 14 years currently out of school, the pandemic could disproportionately impact girls further by putting them at risk of early marriage, early pregnancy, poverty, trafficking and violence .

Other barriers to Girl Child Education :

Going to school doesn't necessarily mean an adequate education. There are several factors like parent's education, their ability to teach at home as well as the fact that only a little more than half of all children enrolled in Class 5 can read a Class 2 level text is worrisome .

What is our role?

“Our Constitution fathers did not intend that we just set up hovels, put students there, give untrained teachers, give them bad textbooks, no playgrounds, and say, we have complied with Article 45 and primary education is expanding...They meant that real education should be given to our children between the ages of 6 and 14.”

– M. C. Chagla – Education Minister of India, 1963-66

It is somewhat incredible that almost 75 years after M. C. Chagla ruled the state of Indian education, after funding and development, the problems seem to have barely changed at all.

We all know that educating a girl is educating a family and community. The _____ program is the opportunity to give young girls across India the ability to pursue an education. It's especially important at a time like this, when the country is waging a difficult battle against Covid 19, to ensure that their education continues so they can build a better life for themselves and those around them.

We would like to roll out this program in several phases. In the first phase, our goal will be to support young girls one-at-a-time across Delhi NCR by providing them with programs/opportunities, digital facilities, counselling, basic infrastructure as well as, if

required, reaching out and educating the families and monitoring their progress from time-to-time. It also needs to be taken into consideration that we intend to provide more than just literacy or skills for survival but also intend to equip them with an education of the truest form. But, making them aware of social issues, teaching them to learn from them, making informed decisions etc. The aim will be to bridge any gap that stands in the way of their education.

As Maria Montessori wrote, “Here is an essential principle of education: to teach details is to bring confusion; to establish the relationship between things is to bring knowledge.”

#GenerationEquality #GirlChildEducation

How do we go about it?

This program works with young girls, mostly in need of primary and secondary level of education, who are living in slums and resettlement colonies, with meagre access to economic capital. Most of them cannot afford to continue an education and many have dropped out of formal education prior to completing class 12, hence their employment choices will be limited. Many have not been outside their neighbourhoods and several live in abusive households. In addition to this, there may be several unique factors for each girl child, which needs to be carefully understood and attended to. Education of a girl in our country requires more than just providing access to education, it requires significant restructuring of mindsets.

The Second Chance program provides an opportunity to continue formal education until they complete class 12, which is an opportunity for them for self-empowerment and self-development, and to fully equip them to become self-sustaining professionals in the future. Once qualified, these girls can continue higher education and look for employment opportunities. And let's not forget they can bring about a change in the next generation as well – directly as well as indirectly.

They will be provided with financial and other support, wherever necessary.

Step 1: Identify students. Understand the problems. Analyse their level of education.

Step 2: Approach the student as well as the family.

Step 3: Find a teacher. Organise mediums of education. Devise of education strategies to be implemented.

For example: while penetration of laptops and computers are not significant, penetration of mobile phones is quite significant. Use the platform to do the needful.

Step 4: Organise support including books and stationary.

Step 5: Devise incentives. We have seen how mid-day meals played a significant role in getting students to school, hence, there is a need to design incentive models.

Step 6: Additional training in the form of self-preservation and teaching them how to deal with problems.

Step 7: Provide them with a wholesome education. Sensitise them to the world. For example: we will include events, books, storytelling sessions etc to give them a wholesome education – a step further than literacy and skilling. At the end of the day, our demographic dividend depends on the kind of people we are and what values we hold.

Step 8: Skill them to teach the younger lot in the family or the locality. Like 'Big Sisters' helping the community to grow and also perhaps an ability to earn a little in return. We will equip them with knowledge and hand-hold them for a period of time.

Step 9: Regular analysis apart from school exams and maintain progress reports.

Step 10: Creating modifiable frameworks or templates for the teachers, we include under this program.

FOSTERING AGENTS OF CHANGE:

We work with trainees to facilitate education opportunities in the lives of young girls. Our team works with other women's rights organizations and networks to ensure that these girls are given the right education material and are empowered to protect their lives and dignity and that of other vulnerable members of their family and communities.

The training modules on women's rights, protection from sexual harassment and violence, sexual and reproductive health and others are the building blocks of this process. In addition, we facilitate a network of trainees so they can support and learn from each other. We also provide access to teachers or counsellors to ensure girls are accompanied throughout their journey and have somewhere to turn to if facing difficulty.

We will also engage with awareness campaigns that can make an impact on the lives of young girls and their communities. Lajja trainees are part of the women's movement advocating for gender equality in India. We would also like as many people as possible to adopt a girl's education in any capacity possible. We will define involvement markers to help them get involved.

Uniqueness of our Program

1. We take into account a 360 degree understanding of a girl's situation and plan their education accordingly.
2. Education doesn't only mean the ability to read and write or skills for employment, it requires us to make sure they use their mind for anything and everything they do.
3. We give special emphasis to gender equality.
4. We also give emphasis to out of course reading and knowledge gaining activities to be sensible and sensitive citizens of our country.