Roohi's Triumph Over Adversity: From Discrimination to Advocacy

Roohi (name changed), a resilient participant in Room to Read India's Girls' Education Program since 2019, faced numerous challenges due to her neurological condition. Despite societal discrimination and negative perceptions following a spinal cord infection, Roohi's family supported to propel her forward. Confronting isolation and discrimination in school, the turning point came in 2019 when Roohi joined the Girls' Education Program.

Guided by a support mentor, Roohi found a platform to express her challenges. Life skills sessions empowered her with assertive communication and emotional expression, boosting her confidence to navigate challenges. Eager to break societal stereotypes, she aspires to become a teacher, supporting children with disabilities in their education.

In August 2023, Roohi took an active role in a Community Service and Learning Project, challenging perceptions about disability. Despite her condition, she participated in rallies and delivered speeches, emphasizing the capabilities of persons with disabilities.

Roohi's involvement is reshaping societal attitudes, promoting inclusivity, and advocating for accessible environments for differently abled children.

Annual Flagship Campaign
#HarKadamBetiKeSang

To address the ongoing challenges of gender inequality and ensure that adolescent girls have the necessary skills to navigate through life, Room to Read's Girls' Education Program continues to champion initiatives that make a tangible difference. In 2023, the fourth edition of the annual Girls' Education Program Campaign #HarKadamBetiKeSang was rolled out. Centered around the theme "Me and My Digital World" also known as #DigitalRahBaneSugam, the campaign highlighted the transformative power of technology for adolescent girls, accentuating their agency to engage with the digital world in an informed, active, and personalized manner. The campaign successfully rallied support from 222,397 participants across our eight Girls' Education Program states.

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Life Skills Collaboratives

In Uttarakhand, Room to Read is a part of the Life Skills Collaborative (LSC), a consortium of 18 organizations, working with the government of Uttarakhand on innovations like research-based assessment tools and framework for effective implementation of the Life Skills program across the State. The State led large-scale assessment of life skills for students, teachers and systems with technical support from Room to Read India. One key finding from the assessment was the need to develop teachers' capacities in life skills. This recommendation has been included in SCERT's Annual Work Plan and approved. Additionally, the Life Skills Collaborative (LSC) was selected by the prestigious HundrED platform in the Education Innovation category in 2023 (hundred.org).

Room to Read is a global nonprofit, working in India since 2003. Through education, Room to Read is transforming the lives of millions of children to create a world free from illiteracy and gender inequality. We are working with the government, local communities and partner organizations to build a world where all children have room to read, learn and grow and can use their skills to accelerate positive change. We support children in communities experiencing deep educational, gender and economic inequities.

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GIRLS' EDUCATION PROGRAM

Our Girls' Education Program Presence in India

Delhi
Uttarakhand
Rajasthan
Madhya Pradesh
Chhattisgarh
Maharashtra
Telangana

Girls' Education Program

Room to Read's Girls' Education Program ensures that adolescent girls develop the skills needed to succeed in school and make key life decisions. Room to Read India works with adolescent girls, their families, schools and local communities to understand gender-specific challenges and devise relevant solutions. The Girls' Education Program focuses on enabling adolescent girls to empower themselves. Our program goes further by supporting young people of all genders to build knowledge and skills with which they can create a gender-equal world and tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges, from climate change to poverty.

Lifeskills sessions

Classes and activities supporting the development of key skills needed to make informed decisions and meet daily challenges.

Mentoring support

Caring adults from the local community, known as social mobilizers, act as role models, providing In-person and remote mentoring support, especially to girls identified to be at risk of dropping out from school.

Family School and Community Engagement

Collaboration with local governments, schools, families and communities conduct home visits to support girls identified at risk of dropping out.

According to UNESCO reports, 4.2 million adolescent girls were out of school before the COVID-19 pandemic further shook India's secondary education scenario. With the growing challenges, adolescent girls from historically low-income communities face a bigger threat than ever. Poverty is one facet of the issues giving rise to inequities and inequalities for adolescent girls.

Several other factors contribute to the pressing need for girls' education. Some of these are:
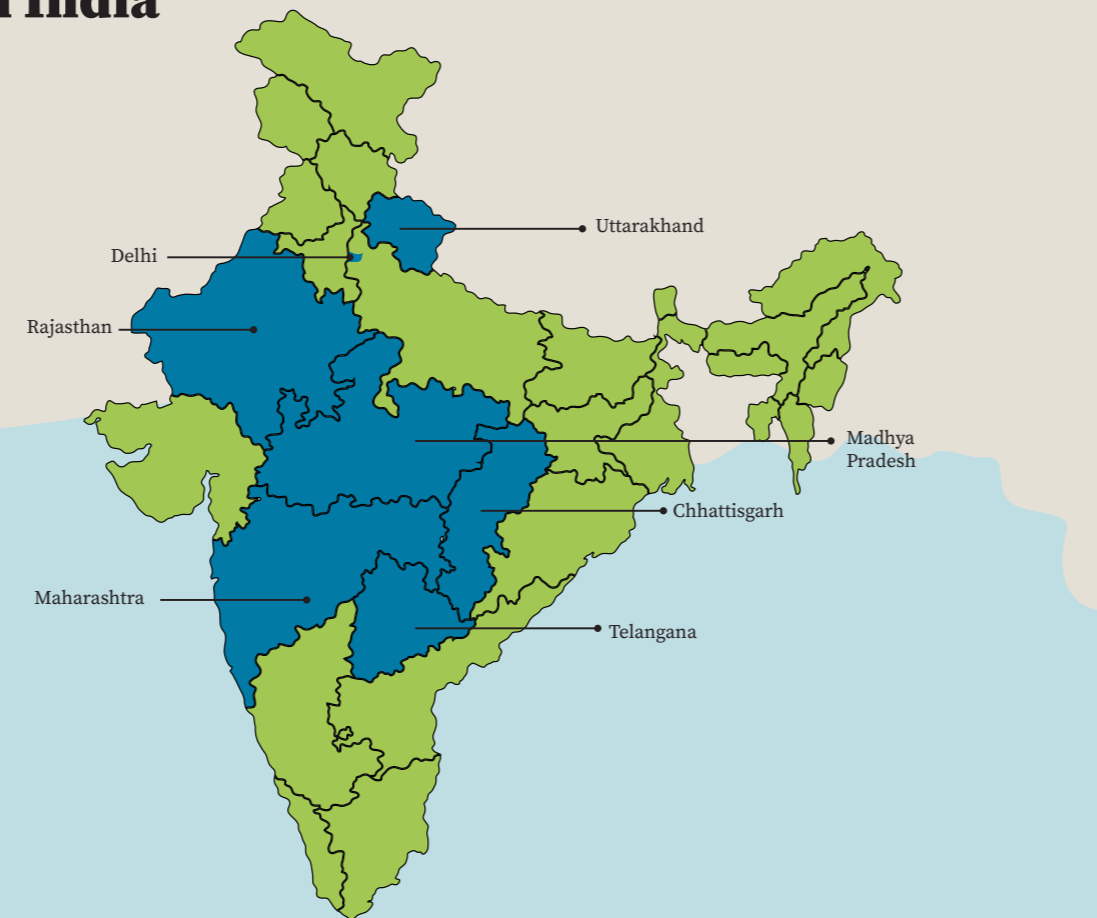
Approximately 50% of girls enrolled in school in India do not complete secondary education.
(Source - UNESCO's 2023 State of the Education Report for India.)

1.2 million female workers in India are between 15-19 years of age.
(Source - Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-2023)

Approximately one in four young women in India were married or in a union before they turn 18
(Source - Unicef)

Nearly one-third (64%) of women use sanitary napkins when menstruating, almost half (49%) of the women use clothes to prevent bloodstains. However, 0.2% of women continue to utilize no method at all.
(Source - NFHS-5 2019–2021)

In 2024, India closed 64.1% of its gender gap, ranking third lowest in the region. India's overall rank was 129, marginally lower than the previous year.
(Source - World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report 2024)

Some of the gender-specific challenges adolescent girls face in completing secondary education and developing life skills to make informed choices about their lives include:

- Lack of voice and agency
- Lack of positive role models
- Lack of resources
- Lack of family and community support

Gender Transformative Life Skills Curriculum

Room to Read India believes that with the right life skills, girls can more effectively negotiate life decisions, including the decision to stay in school and break the stereotypes that affect their lives. These skills equip them to take charge, effectively respond to life situations, and identify the best solutions and implementation practices.

Life skills that Girls' Education Program focuses on to support adolescent girls :

SELF-AWARENESS
(I am Valuable)
1. Self-confidence
2. Expressing & managing emotions
3. Empathy

SELF-EFFICACY
(I am empowered)
1. Self-control
2. Critical thinking
3. Decision-making
4. Perseverance

SOCIAL AWARENESS
(We Can Do It)
1. Communication
2. Creative problem-solving
3. Relationship-building

Group and Individual Mentorship of Girls

I am resilient and can overcome challenges!

I have goals and can make independent, informed choices!

I have voice and deserve to be heard!

I am healthy and have control over my body!

| Peer solidarity groups | Enhanced Knowledge | Right attitude | Practice enabled skilling | Agents of change for self & others |

Facilitating Space for Inter-Generational Dialoguing

| Engagement with family, caregivers and community | Girls as leaders in community campaigns | Engaging Boys through Life Skills Club | Field based learning: Exposure Visit to Banks/Financial Institutions,Universities, colleges, women-focused organizations, vocationals schools, etc. | Community Projects-service and Learning and Interaction with Community Resource Speakers and going in the public spaces as leaders |

Positive Influence

392,669
Adolescent girls supported till 2023

98%
Grade advancement rate among program participants

System Integration Efforts

We support schools, communities, and governments to observe, collaborate and deliver Girls' Education Program through their education systems, processes, and structures.

I-DO
(Demonstration)

Demonstrating Efficacy: Create evidence of success for the model

WE-DO
(Collaboration)

Partner with the system for scale up: Simplify, Standardize and Institutionalize

YOU-DO
(Expansion)

Integration with the system: Government led scale up with Room to Read's Technical Assistance