

CHANGING LIVES IN INDIA: CREATING PATHWAYS TO SCHOOL



Issue Brief

Providing access to quality secondary education for all children is vital to India's continued economic and social development. A quality secondary education increases wages and macroeconomic growth. For example, each extra year of schooling increases wages by about 10 percent.¹ Greater levels of secondary education are also associated with improved health, increased equality and smaller family sizes.^{2,3,4} For example, a child whose mother can read is 50 percent more likely to live past the age of five.⁵



Despite these benefits, only about 40 percent of adolescents are enrolled in secondary school across India.⁶

With 41 percent of the population under age 20, the government struggles to provide many children with access to a quality education.⁷ Schools across the country experience shortages of supplies and trained teachers; many are in a state of disrepair. These challenges are magnified in the rural state of Uttar Pradesh where the government expenditure per student is one-third the national average.⁸

For many families, there simply isn't a secondary school within walking distance. For others, household financial constraints, family responsibilities and poor quality instruction, or facilities lead to high rates of dropout.⁹ Girls face particularly large challenges due to safety concerns and

pressure to marry early. As a result just 88 girls attend school for every 100 boys in Uttar Pradesh.¹⁰ Nevertheless, when girls remain in school, they do succeed. In 2016, girls outperformed boys in Uttar Pradesh's 10th grade state exams. Ninety-one percent of girls passed the exam compared to 85 percent of boys.¹¹

Milaan is a local NGO in Uttar Pradesh that is working to improve access to quality education. In 2008, the organization founded a eponymous low-cost private school in a district well known for low enrollment rates among girls. Today, the Milaan School enrolls an equal number of boys and girls and is the only secondary school within a five-hour walk from the village where it is located.

In addition to the national curriculum Milaan teaches life skills such as communication, self-



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Field Partner Spotlight: Milaan



confidence, decision-making, teamwork, and personal finance. Students learn about critical health issues that impact their community and participate in community-based projects to address local problems. Lunch is also provided each day, which helps keep students in class and allows them to focus on their studies. Families pay a nominal fee to attend the school, which is waived for the poorest students. In the 2015-16 school year, 100 percent of Milaan's students passed the 10th grade state exams, compared to a state average of 87 percent. In recognition of its work, the school received a rare life-time accreditation by the government.

The Milaan school also serves as a test bed for local education initiatives. The school designed and piloted a math, English, science and life skills program for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders that has been expanded to 54 public schools in region. The school also designed a program aimed at helping girls manage menstruation in schools that have inadequate sanitation facilities, which has been implemented in 25 local schools.

Milaan's most recent initiative is the Girl Icon Program, a two-year fellowship to help adolescent girls become leaders within their communities. The program pays for school expenses, provides professional mentorship and capacity building workshops, as well as a small social change grant of \$300 for girls to tackle a local challenge that they have identified. In 2015, 25 girls were selected from over 3,000 applications. The School Fund supported 10 of the Girl Icon fellowships and subsidized the cost of 94 students who are attending the Milaan School at no cost.



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She Refused to Be Silenced

In Vandana's small village in Uttar Pradesh, marriage often takes precedence over schooling. Neither of her older sisters ever went to school, but Vandana was not going to let this happen again. When she turned 12 and her father refused to enroll her in classes, she walked to school and enrolled herself.



Today Vandana is 16 years old and is excelling. She has come to believe that the root of all violence against girls and women in her community is a lack of education. To address this issue, she is using her social change grant to create an information campaign that educates girls about their rights and discourages the practice of early marriage. She has also become an outspoken advocate by encouraging parents to send their children to school and using her own success as a positive example of what girls can achieve.

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