

Girls

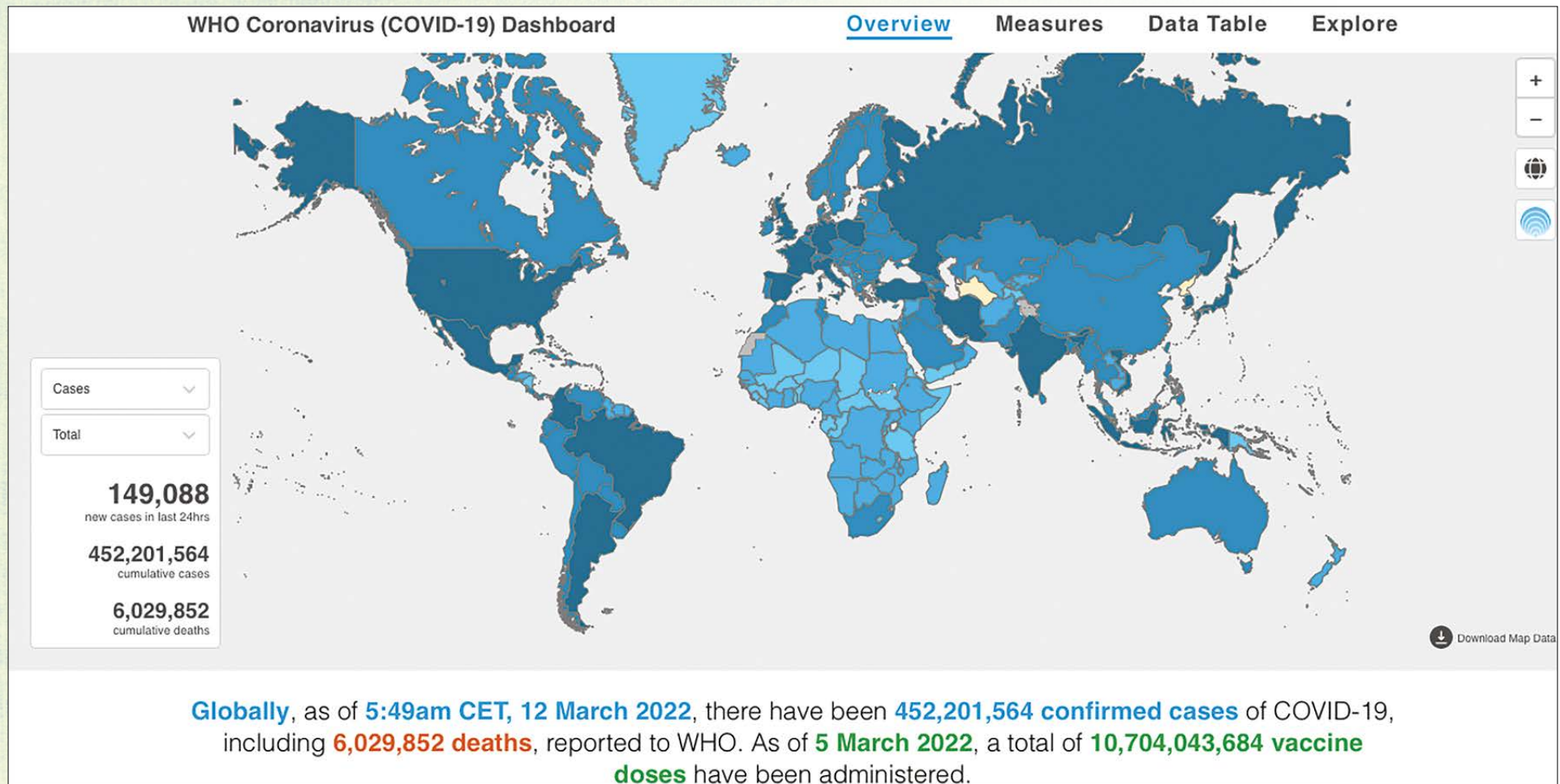
Education Program

Unceasing learning amidst a pandemic



Girls Education Program

Unceasing learning amidst a pandemic



Screenshot of the World Health Organisation's COVID-19 dashboard, accessed on March 12, 2022

Introduction

Supported by a vast body of evidence, it is quite clear today that the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged lives and upended aspirations. Nowhere has this impact been more evident than in the lives of adolescent girls and young women of the world who have

borne the brunt of this pandemic rather disproportionately. Their education has been disrupted, their mental health has suffered, and they have experienced significant gender-based violence¹.

In India, this disparity has been all the starker. Merely 33% of girls in the country attended online classes during the COVID-19 lockdown, while as many as 68% of girls struggled to access health services and 80% were unable to access sanitary items during the nationwide lockdown².

The situation has been further compounded by the downward spiral of the economic conditions in the country. At the onset of the pandemic, the unemployment rate stood at a 45-year high of 6.1%³ which only worsened and rose to 7.9% in December 2020⁴. Removing girls from the formal schooling system to either marry them off or to engage them in work that contributes to family income are some of the direct consequences of joblessness in most emerging economies.

It was in this backdrop that Humana People to People India's Girls Education Program (GEP) was launched in mid-2021 in the states of Maharashtra, Haryana and Bihar of India. The Program is supported by the Macquarie Group Foundation's COVID-19 Donation Fund.

Focussing on the girls in the age group of 6-16 years, of whom many are first generation learners and belong to the most vulnerable sections of the society, the Program aims to provide remedial classes to 1,500 school-going girls to ensure that they do not drop out of formal schools due to the hardships brought about by the pandemic. The project, simultaneously, helps enrol 500 identified out-of-school girls into a bridge education program that brings them to their age-appropriate learning levels before enrolling them in formal schools. The comprehensive Program aims at holistic development of all the enrolled girls through extracurricular activities like sports, cultural events and exposure visits while also empowering them through life skills and educational support.

From the flooded Gangetic plains of Patna and Vaishali in Bihar to the parched shanty colonies of Ambojwadi slums in the Maximum City Mumbai, from the district of Nuh, perennially placed at the lowest rung of nearly all socio-economic development indicators to the shining Millennium City of Gurugram in the state of Haryana, the stories presented in this document encapsulate the trial and tribulations of its resident families during the harsh COVID-induced lockdowns, and also the hopes and aspirations of the adolescent girls of these families propelled by education and education alone.

¹ *The Shadow Pandemic – Violence against women during COVID-19: UN Women*

² *WINGS 2022 – World of India's Girls report: Save the Children*

³ *Unemployment rate at 45-year high, confirms Labour Ministry data: The Hindu, accessed March 2, 2022*

⁴ *COVID: India's economy battles widespread unemployment, inflation: Deutsche Welle, accessed March 2, 2022*



Fuelling dreams amidst a pandemic

And it is in Mullahera, down one of the narrow, grey alleyways and amidst the cacophony of nearly every language spoken in the subcontinent, where the 15-year-old 9th grader Lakshmi resides with her parents and four other siblings.

"I will be a police officer once my studies are over," says Lakshmi.

"It was my grandparents' wish. Now, that they are no more, I am obligated to see their wish through."

It is not easy to ignore the resolve in her voice and the light in her eyes as she shares her plans for the future.

"We moved here from Darbhanga, Bihar, more than 20 years ago. Before corona came, I worked as a babysitter, earning about three thousand rupees monthly, while my husband made nearly 10 thousand rupees working as a cleaner in a nearby international call centre," says Lakshmi's 44-year-old mother, Sunita Devi.

"COVID changed everything."

With the onset of the nationwide lockdown, Sunita and her husband lost their jobs while the rent charges for their one-room shack and electricity charges kept on accumulating.

"All our savings got used up in those terrible months," recalls Sunita.

The landlord did not allow any concession or delay in payment, and consequently, Lakshmi, to conserve family savings, had to drop out of her tuition classes.

"The quality of education in government-run schools is not the best. There is also lack of focus on individual students in the school, which is not the case in the classes at the GEP Centre," says Lakshmi.

One has to take a sharp left at a swanky multi-storeyed condominium complex on the old freeway connecting the central business district of Gurugram, Haryana, to the national capital to get to Mullahera. And then, suddenly, the world stands transformed.

The high-rises and manicured lawns of rowhouses give way to dimly lit alleyways set amidst criss-crossing open sewage drains and shoddily parked two-wheelers eating up on the pedestrian pathway. The glaring spectacle exemplifies the ubiquitous national economic disparity.



Lakshmi and her mother, Sunita Devi, stand outside their one-room house in Mullahera, Gurugram

The GEP classes have come as a boon for Lakshmi and many other girls of Mullahera who were on the verge of discontinuing education due to the extreme financial hardships brought about by the pandemic.

“From activity-based teaching to learning from my classmates in a group, there are various aspects of these classes that I find very interesting. I can also notice significant improvement in my performance at the school due to these classes,” says Lakshmi.

Her mother, who never received any formal education, also considers herself very fortunate that the Program is running in Mullahera.

“Had it not been for the free education at the Government-run

school and free classes at the GEP Centre, I would have been forced to discontinue Lakshmi’s education,” says Sunita.

“We received sufficient numbers of masks, soaps and sanitisers from the project staff during the lockdown. We were also provided some dry ration through the efforts of the project staff. Most importantly, my daughter’s education continues even in these tough times.”

The sun is setting as the students leave the GEP Centre in Mullahera and walk homewards under the long shadows of the condominium complex. And Lakshmi’s resolute walk is a confirmation of the power of education which fuels dreams that outgrow the looming disparities.



'Education, the foundational wealth'

apparent that the only thing holding this despondent individual together is his duty to provide for his children.

"My wife contracted COVID during the second wave. She passed away a couple of months back," says Mithilesh, his eyes welling up as he looks on at his phone screen which has his wife's picture as the backdrop.

"With her passing, I lost everything. The company I worked at stopped operations due to the lockdown and I was laid off. I had to stop tuition classes of all my children. To pay off the mounting debt, I had to sell my belongings, including my bed. Then I moved here, in this tiny room, with my children. The rent here is more affordable," he says looking around.

Today, as a single parent, Mithilesh leaves his house at 7 a.m. to travel to a textile factory two hours away where he works as a tailor and returns at 9 p.m. and is paid the minimum stipulated wage. He prepares meals for his children before he leaves home and then cooks dinner after returning.

"I'm fortunate to have a job. But I'm more fortunate to be able to provide my children quality education," he says.

Mithilesh's 10-year-old daughter, Deepmala, is a 6th grade student in the local government-run school and is also attending the GEP classes at the Kadipur Centre in Gurugram.

"These classes are much better than the tuition classes I used to go to earlier. My teachers here are responsive and pay attention to each student," she says.

"We also have theme-based activities once a week where we learn through activities in groups."

Mithilesh Singh's voice is commanding and confident as he introduces himself sitting on the floor of his barely furnished 60 square feet residence, located in one of the many unauthorised buildings providing cheap accommodation to migrant labourers coming to Gurugram, Haryana. The room is lit by a single fluorescent light and 46-year-old Mithilesh is surrounded by his son and three daughters.

No sooner is he asked about the hardships brought about by the pandemic, however, he develops a lump in his throat, turns incoherent, and it becomes



Mithilesh Singh and his family, with Deepmala standing in front of him

The fact that his children are growing amidst a range of uncertainties is not lost on Mithilesh who today makes barely enough to make ends meet and partially pay off the debt he has accrued during his wife's long treatment. But, he is also well aware that educating his children is the only way out of the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

"My oldest daughter is now married but it is not easy to raise three young children alone. I'm glad that through the free GEP classes Deepmala is able to access quality education which is mostly lacking in state-run schools," he says.

Significance of education has also been deeply instilled in Deepmala whose mother took active interest in ensuring she attends school regularly. When asked about the importance of education for a girl child in India, Deepmala's response reflects a maturity much beyond her age.

"Other than education, there is no source of complete independence and self-reliance for a girl in this country. Education is the foundational wealth," she says.



Education: Panacea for an unjust world

that has inspired her to be a lawyer. And when she begins to speak again, she seems unstoppable.

"It's not uncommon to hear people say that we belong to a lower caste and hence should stay away from them. My parents have been spoken to inappropriately in front of me by so-called educated people. What good is your education when you don't even know how to speak properly with someone, particularly in front of their children? To talk respectfully was one of the first things taught by my school teacher. As a lawyer I'll be able to stand up to these everyday injustices which are mostly brushed under the carpet," says Tamanna, visibly angry and upset by the end of the tirade.

Tamanna is a student at the GEP Centre, Kadipur in Gurugram, Haryana. She has two siblings; a younger brother and an older sister. Her 45-year-old father, Dilkhush, drove a rented autorickshaw and her mother, Sonu, worked as a lady guard in a nearby private school before the pandemic hit India.

"Income from the autorickshaw was always minimal. My salary was more stable. But, as soon as the lockdown kicked in, about 25 of us lady guards working at the school were immediately laid off. I had been working at this school for nearly 6 years," recalls Sonu.

"All the savings we had for educating our children and for any untimely exigencies were completely used up in the months of the lockdown. The debt still continues."

Due to ensuing financial hardships, all the three children had to discontinue their private tuitions. The parents have not been able to go back to their old jobs after the lockdown was relaxed and the house runs on the meagre income brought by Sonu by working as a maid in three nearby houses.

"Law."

Thirteen-year-old Tamanna drops that word and turns silent while answering what she would like to study once her school-level studies are over.

"You know, there is a lot of injustice in our society today. Gender-based injustice, caste-based injustice. All this is really unfair, don't you think," she says after much thought.

The 7th grader lapses into silence once again when asked if she has personally faced any discrimination



13-year-old Tamanna (extreme left) with her family

The eldest daughter, Himanshi, an 11th grade student in the local government-run school, has enrolled in a beautician course to secure income from part-time work to purchase books for her higher studies.

Amidst these challenges, the launch of the GEP Centre came as gift for the family.

"I've never seen Tamanna so enthused after returning from a tuition class," says Sonu.

"I myself have visited the Centre a few times and it has a very healthy environment with active involvement of the parents as well as teachers."

For Tamanna, along with the attentive teachers and innovative teaching methods employed at the Centre, it is the theme-based

activities that are the most engrossing part of the classes.

"There are weekly activities conducted at the Centre, including painting, dance and sports activities," she says.

"During the classes, we learn from each other in the group of three student formed by the teacher. If the three of us fail to understand something, then we approach the teacher. This kind of learning is much quicker."

As she stands up for a photograph with her family members, Tamanna's tee displays a cheeky message which is a play on the phrase 'do not judge'. With a clear perception of the injustices prevalent in the society, this future lawyer, propelled by quality education, will definitely ensure that the judgments go the right way.

GEP: Ensuring no girl drops out of school



I am a teacher in the Girls Education Program (GEP) in Mullahera village in Gurugram, Haryana. I am a qualified engineer with a Bachelor of Technology degree in Electronics and Communication. Under the Program, I have 30 girl students enrolled in my Centre and they range from grades 6th to 9th.

Since I belong to the same community as these girls, I'm well aware of the challenges and hardships they face every day, and more significantly, during these COVID times. With the onset of the lockdown, as the schools were shut, everyone, including enrolled

students, were completely homebound. With their livelihood options reducing and lifelong savings quickly getting used up in daily expenses, several parents were already planning to de-enrol their daughters and marry them off. Several girls had already taken up menial work to contribute to their diminishing family income. So, the girls of this locality were clearly on the cusp of dropping out of the formal school system as a direct result of the hardships brought about by the pandemic.

The GEP is a significant intervention in this area, as one of the key focus of the Program is to ensure that the girl students do not drop out of the school system and continue to receive quality education. The families residing in this area mainly belong to the migrant population group from other states and from the lower socio-economic strata, working mostly as daily wage labourers. Hence, they cannot afford private tuitions outside of school hours. These details became evident when we conducted baseline assessment in the initial phase of the project.

During the door-to-door visits conducted as a part of the baseline, we selected girl students who were clearly on the verge of dropping out of schools due to financial issues. We also focussed on girls who were of school-going age but showed no inclination of going to school. Further, we encountered a number of parents who, themselves being uneducated, saw no good in sending their girl child to school. In such cases we had to counsel them and encourage them to send their child to our Centre. There were cases wherein parents were uninterested in sending their child to the Centre as she was responsible for looking after her younger siblings as both the parents went out to work. In such cases we accommodated the younger siblings in the Centre to ensure that the girl child could attend the classes. Such improvisations are critical for the



Sweety interacting with her students at the GEP Centre, Mullahera, Gurugram

success of the intervention in my opinion.

The interesting teaching methodology and some of the key elements inherent in the Program also play a vital role in keeping the students engaged and interested in coming to the Centre. There are monthly theme-based activities, covering co-curricular and sports activities, conducted under the program that students find very interesting. The sitting structure in the class is in the form of a trio,

wherein students sit in a group of three thereby facilitating peer-to-peer learning. This method is particularly efficient in a multigrade-multilevel classroom configuration such as ours.

Sweety
GEP Teacher
Mullahera, Gurugram, Haryana



'Education is the strongest weapon to transform a society'

It has been a common issue here that most parents are apprehensive of sending their children to school or anywhere outside their homes. The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) under the leadership of the State Project Director has organised various exposure visits for the girl students of the district to address these concerns of the parents and instil a higher level of confidence amongst the parents towards the state administration and the school authorities.

In the last two years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been unprecedented educational challenges for the children. While these challenges have been felt in all parts of the country, their effect has been particularly pronounced here in Nuh. There are various reasons for this. Firstly, technology penetration is very minimal in this district. Access to mobile devices among the residents is very limited here which hindered the government's efforts towards imparting online education. Secondly, the solution to the pandemic emerged in the form of a vaccine. However, due to high prevalence of illiteracy here and with a significant section of the population uneducated, various misconceptions about the COVID-19 vaccinations spread quickly in the society here. Hence, the administration has to put in more effort in regions such as Nuh to achieve the same degree of success as elsewhere.

It is a universally known fact that education is the strongest weapon to transform a society. Particularly in a democratic and diverse country like India, Education is the cornerstone of all progressive social transformations. In our country, each time some important academic results are announced, the most

There is a particular need for girls-focussed education intervention in Nuh. Due to various socio-economic realities of the district, there is a high degree of gender-based discrimination against girls' education here. Previously, this issue was prevalent across the entire state of Haryana. However, due to progressive measures taken by the government over the years, the situation has improved markedly in almost the entire state. The progress has been relatively slow in Nuh but the district is surely catching up with the rest of the state.



A class session underway at a GEP Centre

common media headlines are about girl students outperforming the boys. In context of rural India, even Mahatma Gandhi has famously said that girls augment the fortunes of two families; one where they are born and the other where they are married into. So, clearly, focus on girl's education through a Program like GEP is most needed, particularly in a backward district like Nuh.

I would like to mention here that the role played by organisations such as Humana People to People India in scaling up government efforts is commendable. The dedication and the earnestness with which the project team operates in the field and the sensitivity with

which they overcome the challenges they encounter are the primary reasons for the team's success in achieving their project results in a challenging region like Nuh.

Active communication with all stakeholders involved in a project help address many misunderstandings among the public and the results of such efforts are already becoming apparent here, with more and more girls enrolling in formal schools every year.

Dr. Narendra Kumar Yadav,
District Project Coordinator, SSA
Nuh, Haryana



Powering inspiration amidst a tragedy

It is a warm spring morning as we walk a fair distance to get to a small house located in the corner of a vast compound of the government hospital in Nagina, Nuh in Haryana. Summer is approaching rather quickly this year and hence it is unusual to see 40-year-old Kanhaiya sitting on an improvised broken hospital bed, covered in a thick blanket. It's only when he begins to tell his story that one starts to observe the solitary red slipper on the floor and the thick wooden stick lying at his bedside.

"It happened about a year back, at the peak of the

pandemic. I was on my way to a small temple across the main road when from nowhere a car took a sharp, fast turn and hit me, crushing one of my legs," he says, before lifting the blanket to display the healed stump.

"They had to chop it off."

Kanhaiya worked as a cleaning staff at a nearby Primary Health Centre (PHC) but was laid off about five years back. Subsequently, he had been working as a daily wage labourer, up until the day of the dreaded accident.

"I'm completely bedridden now. The house runs on the money my wife brings in working as a cleaner in nearby shops," he says.

The meagre income now sustains the family of eight, including the couple's six children.

"The accident couldn't have happened at a worse time," says Kanhaiya.

"During lockdown, there were days when we did not even have food on the table. Through word of mouth we would learn about a place where free ration was being distributed and that's how my family was fed in those months," he recalls.

"My children's education was not even remotely important to me at the time. When you have family to feed, such things take a backseat. I had decided to de-enrol my children so they could start to work."

Preeti, Kanhaiya's 15-year-old daughter who is today an 8th grade student at the Government Girls Senior Secondary School, Nagina, had already started learning tailoring on his father's small feature phone.

"With the schools shut and with no access to a smartphone to attend online



15-year-old Preeti sitting with her father Kanhaiya

classes, I decided to skill up myself to get some additional income for the family," she says.

It was during this time that the GEP classes were launched in Nuh, with a Centre coming up close to Preeti's house.

While it took a lot of coaxing from the GEP teacher to convince Kanhaiya to send Preeti to the classes, he clearly understands the significance of education today.

"I'm immensely grateful to the GEP teacher for all her help and support. She has continued to come to our house regularly to check up on me, follow up on the progress of my court case regarding the accident and provide much-needed counselling to me and my family," he says.

For Preeti, the GEP classes have catalysed a significant shift in her attitude towards education in general.

"Due to the poor quality of education in schools, I was never really interested in studying. But the teachers at the Centre teach through such innovative activities and games that two of the subjects that I was very weak in – English and Math – have become my favourite subjects," she says.

And sitting next to her father in the corner of that vast hospital compound, Preeti is quick to share her plans for the future.

"I'll be a doctor. It's a noble profession that can truly help the poor of our country," she concludes.



Where girls are denied phones

Before the nationwide lockdown was announced in India on 24th March 2020, 45-year-old Asmina's 14-year-old son, Javed, was enrolled in a local private school in Firozpur Jhirka block of Nuh district of Haryana. Asmina's four younger daughters are enrolled in the local government-run school.

"He was never really interested in studies. With the lockdown, as the schools shut down, he rapidly receded from studies and after the schools reopened following the relaxation of the lockdown norms, he decided that he will drop out altogether,"

says Asmina.

Asmina, a homemaker, has not received any formal education and her husband, who works as an excavator operator, is also uneducated. The situation faced by Asmina is all too common in the households of most first-generation learners, where parents fail to convince their children to continue their education due their own inability to recognise its value and social capital for their child and the family.

The situation has only aggravated due to the unprecedented social seclusion and financial hardships brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Rich people can send their children to tuition classes to retain their interest in studies. That is not the case with us. We belong to the Meo community and sending our daughters to government schools itself is considered a radical idea by our members. Most of our girls don't continue their studies beyond the 5th grade," says Asmina.

Asmina credits the repeated visits to her house by the local GEP teacher for her children continuing their education and actually improving their academic performance.

"Now, my daughter, Rizwana, attends the GEP classes regularly," she says.

13-year-old Rizwana is a 7th grade student in the local government-run school. Her GEP teacher, Nirma, is with us and interposes to provide a crucial perspective to the challenges the girls of this community face to access education.

"Most people will be shocked to know that even today, the girls of this community are not allowed to even look at phone screens. So, challenges abound in conducting educational interventions here," she says.



Rizwana (right) with her mother and siblings at her house in Firozpur Jhirka, Nuh

Being a resident of the same area, Nirma is well aware of the challenges she faces as a GEP teacher and the ways to overcome them.

“These girls have never played any sport in their life. So, I started conducting games sessions every Saturday after the remedial classes. Just after a couple of weeks, a local *maulvi* (religious teacher) along with several community members thronged the Centre complaining about the girls being made to play sport. I was forced to take written permission from the parents of each GEP girl to let them be a part of the weekly sport session,” she says.

Rizwana herself is very excited about coming to the school regularly now. She is all the more excited about the sports activities she gets to participate in through the GEP initiative.

“I was very scared and nervous on the day we went to the nearby Shamshuddin Park for the sports day celebrations. I had never travelled so far from my house to participate in an extra-curricular activity,” says Rizwana.

The park is at a distance of about seven kilometres from her house.

“Nirma mam’s presence was a source of encouragement for all of us. I participated in three races on that day and stood first in all three,” she says with a proud smile stretched across her face.

And Rizwana’s confident smile, coupled with her unprecedented achievements, have today become a source of inspiration for all the girls of Firozpur Jhirka who overcome unsurmountable odds to pursue their dream of quality education.

ON PROGRAM - NUH

IAL EDUCATION C

y- Macquarie Group Inc

y- Humana People to Pe



"We are five members in our family," says 15-year-old Priyanka, an 8th grade student in the Government Girls Senior Secondary School, Ferozpur Jhirka in Nuh, Haryana.

"An elder brother, an elder sister, my mother and myself."

She quickly realises the mistake and goes on to correct herself.

"Four. My father died of COVID a few months back," she says looking at the floor, clearly, still trying to

GEP Classes: Keeping the dream alive

come to terms with the loss.

Priyanka's father worked as a goldsmith before the second wave of the pandemic took him. His passing pushed the hitherto happy family into an unprecedented turmoil, emotionally as well as financially.

"All my children have always studied in good private schools, have received the best after-school tuition classes and have secured the highest grades," says Priyanka's mother, Saroj, as her elder daughter, Krishna, hands over her 10th grade mark sheet.

She has secured 498 out of 500.

"Due to the financial constraints after my husband's passing, I was forced to enrol them in government schools, and I can see that their education has gravely deteriorated since," she says.

Saroj and her children live in her husband's house with her in-laws who are physically challenged. All the family savings got used up in her husband's treatment.

"My elder son is 18 years old and has recently cleared his 12th grade exams. Looking at the family's financial condition, he decided to give up plans for higher studies and is now getting trained to be a goldsmith," says Saroj.

For now, the only source of finance Saroj has is the monthly widow pension of Rs. 2,500 that she receives from the State. The amount is barely enough to put food on their table.

"I was on the verge of de-enrolling both my daughters from the school. The only reason they're still able to continue is due to the GEP Centre operating in my locality," she recalls.



Priyanka (right) with her mother and sister at her house in Firozpur Jhirka, Nuh

The GEP Centre has come as a gift for most students of the Ferozpur Jhirka locality, particularly for the students attending the government-run schools.

“At the school, there isn’t much focus on the students. There are no teachers for some of the subjects,” says Priyanka.

“On the other hand, in the GEP classes, our teacher is very attentive towards each student. These classes also help us prepare for our school exams much better. The classes also include various types of activities, such as quiz competitions, sports activities and cultural events. It is great fun to participate in these activities.”

The efficiency of the GEP Centre and its faculty is also corroborated by the parents visiting the Centre.

“I have visited the Centre multiple times during the last few months, including during the monthly parent-teacher meetings. It is a very lively Centre with very good teaching methodology and an active teacher,” says Saroj.

“All the parents I interacted with during these meetings had similar opinion about the quality of teaching being much better than that of the schools.”

When asked about their plans for the future, the girls speak in unison, “Doctor.”

“It was their father’s wish,” says Saroj.

“I’m thankful that through the GEP classes Priyanka has the support she needs to achieve that dream.”



When Gods forsake their creator

The rooms of his humble mud-house, located in Kanpa village in Patna, Bihar, are lined with idols of Hindu gods and goddesses in various stages of completion. The house itself is located in the part of the village where potter families have lived for generations, and where Baijnath today lives with his wife and seven daughters.

“My father used to make earthen lamps and other earthenware. So, growing up I was always surrounded by mud and clay,” says Baijnath.

“My interest, however, grew in the area of making clay figurines and idols. Initially, it did not pay much, but as my art became more refined and word spread about my work in the neighbouring villages, the revenue started coming in.”

The finesse in Baijnath’s idols is quite apparent. Considering the niche area of his work, however, it’s quite clear that it does not go on all year round.

“My work is seasonal, and mostly limited to three festivals – the Dussehra-Diwali period, Chhath and Vasant Panchami. During other months I’m involved in house painting work and farming our small piece of land,” he says.

“It all came to a standstill in the COVID months. It was as if the gods had forsaken us,” he says, recalling the turbulent times.

As the nationwide lockdown was announced on 24 March 2020, Baijnath’s large family was packed in their small house, troubled over dwindling food supplies. With all mass gatherings and religious celebrations completely halted during the pandemic, the idol-making work ceased completely.

“All our savings were used up in the first couple of weeks. All we had left for sustenance was a small amount of rice from our rice farm, which was also getting over quickly,” he says.

Ask Baijnath Pandit’s neighbours where Baijnath Pandit lives and you are very likely to receive a very puzzled look.

“No one calls me by my real name. Everyone knows me as Guddu Murtikar,” says Baijnath, barely looking away from goddess Sarasvati’s left eyebrow that he is painting in rapt attention.

That last name, ‘Murtikar’, appended to Baijnath’s sobriquet, denotes his profession. Baijnath is an idol-maker.



Nandini (second from right) with her family outside her house in Kanpa village, Patna

Even amidst such pressing challenges, Baijnath, who himself is uneducated, was quite clear that he would not let the education of his daughters suffer.

“I’m glad that the GEP Centre was launched so close to my house. My daughter, Nandini, is benefitting from it immensely,” he says.

“Due to financial limitations, I’m not able to afford private tuitions for her. These classes have helped her retain keen interest in studies even during the period of lockdown.”

14-year-old Nandini is an 8th grade student in the nearby government-run school. While she has a sharp interest in studies, it is the quality of teaching at her school that she finds dispiriting.

“Teachers at the school do not make efforts to repeat a point, so some of the concepts are not very clear. Whereas in the GEP classes, our teacher ensures that every point is clear to all the students before proceeding further. Activity-based teaching practiced at the Centre also makes learning fun and keeps all the students engaged,” says Nandini.

“All of us, but mostly my father, struggled a lot during the lockdown. I’m glad that he has started working again,” she says looking at her father.

Baijnath is back at painting the idol of Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge. And it appears that the gods have returned to the Murtikar’s humble abode.



Quality education bolstering an iron resolve

Around the time the nationwide lockdown was announced by the government of India, 13-year-old Muskan Kumari's father, Sujeet, developed a nerve disorder paralysing a side of his upper body. As a contract farmer tilling the land of big landowners in Wazirpur village near Patna, Bihar, Sujeet's family of seven is completely dependent on the money his labour brings in for sustenance.

"My father was bedridden for a short period, and my sister and I helped work a little in the fields during those days to help sustain the family," says Muskan, an

8th grade student in the Government Middle School, Wazirpur.

On one of the days while working in the fields, Muskan was bitten by a snake. The snake was later found to be non-poisonous, but the bite angered Muskan and settled the snake's fate.

"I killed it with a brick lying nearby," she says laughing at the memory of the incident.

But, the medical expenditure to fix the bite, even though not much, was felt as an additional burden by the family when the finances were already precarious.

"My parents have always supported our education and want us to pursue our dreams. But the quality of education at the school is not satisfactory. The learning environment in the school is a bit intimidating," says Muskan.

"I learnt about alternate and more efficient teaching methods only when the GEP Centre was launched in our village."

The GEP Centres promote activity-based teaching which actively involves students and hence provides a hands-on environment to learn in. Also, the classroom structure at the Centres comprises of students sitting in a group of three, called a trio, where they learn from each other, promoting peer-to-peer learning.

"My teacher at the Centre is very friendly and it gives me confidence to feel free in clarifying my doubts and asking for help even beyond the subjects taught. I want to grow up to join the Indian Police Services (IPS) as an officer and my GEP teacher is constantly helping me with information and knowledge to get closer to my dream," says Muskan.



Muskan during her classroom presentation at the GEP Centre, Patna

When asked what motivated her to choose IPS as a career option, Muskan takes time to give a thoughtful reply.

“Often when I go to the local market in the nearby town, I see cops either taking bribe from traffic offenders or hitting poor people for no fault of theirs. This is a common sight in these parts. I want to change this, and it can be done only from a position of responsibility

and power which an IPS officer wields,” she says.

“I would like to do so all the more because as a girl, it is expected that I would always be homebound and look after my family and focus on marriage. I want to change this perception of girls that is common in our village, and education is the only way through which this can be achieved successfully,” she concludes.



GEP: A multipronged solution to a layered educational issue

I have been teaching the children of my village since the year 2010. Previously I used to charge a nominal fee but with the launch of the GEP Centre, the same students can benefit from the classes free of cost.

There is a highly entrenched mindset in these parts wherein parents prioritise marriage over education for their girl child. Secondly, there is a high degree of caste dynamics in almost all spheres of life in the villages here. One will find that the communities belonging to the scheduled caste are mostly illiterate and living below the poverty line. Due to these persisting caste

issues, illiteracy and poverty are endemic in such communities here.

Further, due to these reasons, there is a severe lack of awareness about their constitutional rights among the residents of the villages here. Most of the time when we counsel them on the significance of education, they see it as additional burden of paying school fees and purchasing books and uniforms for their children. In spite of the Right to Education Act securing free and compulsory education for children since the year 2009, parents in the villages here are still unaware of these rights for their children.

Also, girls of the villages here suffer significant gender discrimination. Even in the families that are relatively well off, there is a clear preference in prioritising education of boys over that of girls. It is a norm to see girls primarily as homemakers and groomed accordingly, with focus on ensuring that they know how to cook and do other mundane household chores. Over generations, this behaviour percolates to the psyche of the girls as well and they come to believe that their place in society is only that of a homemaker and they're not given to other higher aspirations; either academic or professional.

The GEP has been instrumental in helping offset such entrenched regressive social norms and beliefs about girl education in the villages here. Quality remedial education being offered free of cost is the most attractive prospect of the Program for the residents.

Elements such as activity-based teaching and peer-to-peer learning inherent in the teaching methodology of the Program are novel approaches for the



Vijayata during a class session in GEP Centre, Patna, Bihar

students here and keep them keenly interested in coming regularly to the Centre. Also, monthly parent-teacher meetings held under the Program instils a high degree of ownership among the parents and goes a long way in bringing attitudinal shift in how they view girls' education.

I recently completed my Master of Science degree with a major in Physics from Patna University. While I continue to work towards my career aims, I did not want to let go of an opportunity to serve the girls of my village through this Program. I myself belong to a poor

farming family and my parents have made significant sacrifices to help educate me. So, I can relate to the challenges and hardships faced by the parents of my students enrolled in the GEP classes. I'm glad to have this opportunity to serve my community through this Program and help the girls of my village achieve their dreams.

Vijyata Kumari
GEP Teacher
Patna, Bihar



'Critical need to scale up Girls Education Program'

Since this is a remote, rural area of Bihar, most of the students in my class are first-generation learners. Either the parents are completely illiterate or semiliterate. So the environment at home is not conducive to formal education or even learning. Their poor financial condition is a major contributing factor in this situation, since they're not able to afford private tuitions or coaching classes. The financial condition has only deteriorated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There have been a few instances in the surrounding villages, where 8th grade girls have been married off due to the financial hardships faced by their families. Since such parents are mostly illiterate, no amount of counselling works against the social pressures they face. They fail to understand the long-term implications of their actions on their child.

In the light of these facts, the GEP has proven to be very beneficial for some of the girls of my school. Observing the changes in the girl students enrolled in the GEP classes, it is quite evident that the Program should be scaled up to include all the girls of the school.

GEP Centres being run within the community to which the girls belong has a cascading impact on the community members as well. They're able to see the significance of educating girls and this helps offset some of the social ills of child marriage to a certain extent.

COVID-19 threw up its own unique challenges for the rural residents of this region whose children are enrolled in our school. Some of the parents, who would send their children to private schools before COVID, have now enrolled their children in this government school due to the financial troubles brought about by the pandemic. When they visit the school, they find no difference in the quality of education being imparted at the school. They're particularly impressed with the GEP initiative that is helping the girl students of the region achieve their dreams.

I've been a part of this schools for the past 14 years and have seen a lot of changes in this school, its surroundings and the community I work with. The GEP is a very crucial intervention here due to the socio-economic factors I've



A class session underway at a GEP Centre in Patna, Bihar

mentioned above and it is critical that this intervention is scaled up because at present it is only reaching out to a fraction of the girls of my school.

Ajay

Headmaster

Government School, Andhra Chowki

Patna, Bihar



Education that lights up the dark

Power outages have today become less frequent but are still quite common in the rural hinterland of the Vaishali district of Bihar. So, when we enter a classroom in Government Middle School, Senduari, the dark classroom is acceptable. While opening the classroom windows helps dispel the darkness to a large extent, it is the bright smile of 13-year-old Anjali Kumari, an 8th grade student at the school, that provides the biggest respite.

That smile is permanently etched on Anjali's face all along as she introduces herself and takes us through

her family background. Hence, it is very unsettling when her voice begins to quiver and her eyes well up as she begins to talk about her father and the hardships her family faced during the lockdown months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"My father drinks a lot. His liver is damaged. The liver damage was diagnosed during the lockdown," she says through sobs.

Anjali's father is a daily wage labourer and Anjali is the youngest of the four siblings. Her elder sister recently got enrolled in a university degree program and teaches primary level children at her house during the evening hours to sustain the family. Her mother sometimes takes up tailoring jobs to add to the family income.

"During the lockdown, it was my sister's coaching classes and my mother's tailoring income that sustained us and paid for my father's treatment," says Anjali.

"My mother has severe gastric issues and is now getting treatment at my maternal grandparent's house."

In better times, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world and Anjali's father became seriously ill, she would attend private tuition classes. But as the medical expenses started increasing, she had to drop out of the classes.

It was during these tumultuous times that the GEP classes were launched in Senduari and brought a sense of relief for Anjali.

"At school we are not given opportunities to make presentations in front of the entire class. Whenever I had to speak in front of people, I would get very nervous and keep failing," she says.

"Here, in the GEP classes, we're given a free environment to make mistakes and



Anjali making a presentation in her GEP class in Senduari, Vaishali

learn from them. All of us are encouraged to motivate each other. I've never experienced such a learning environment before."

It is also the unique teaching methodology employed by the GEP teachers that most students enrolled in the Program, including Anjali, find very interesting.

"Our GEP classrooms are structured around a group of three student. These trio groups mainly comprise of students with mix academic qualities so we can learn from each other. It is a much more efficient way of learning compared to the methods followed at the school," she says.

"If any of the concepts are not clear, our GEP teacher breaks it down for us in such a way that it becomes easier to grasp. Math formulas, for example, are turned into a song and become so much easier to memorise."

When asked about her plans for the future, Anjali is quick to say, "Army officer."

"I want to serve my nation as a member of the armed forces."

And the bright smile etched on Anjali's face again lights up the classroom in Senduari village in Vaishali.



A critical intervention for rural girl child

economically vulnerable groups that head to the government schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic has produced an unprecedented situation in Bihar. It is a known fact that many families from Bihar migrate to other Indian states in search of employment. With the sudden announcement of the nationwide lockdown in March 2020, there was a huge influx of such families back in Bihar. They felt a clear need to return to their home state, closer to their relatives and amidst the relative security that was not available in the bigger cities. With such a huge number of families coming back to the villages here, their children also needed enrolment in schools to ensure continued education. This caused an unprecedented pressure on the school infrastructure, particularly on the government-run schools.

In the light of these developments, the launch of the GEP Centres in Vaishali has been a very welcome move. It is a critical intervention, particularly due to its focus on the girl child, an area which requires a large degree of attitudinal shift among the masses at the ground level to bear impact.

All the teachers in the GEP Centres belong to the same communities as the girls they are teaching. This has a cascading impact on the parents as well, since there is frequent contact between the teaching staff and the parents of the girl students through parent-teacher meetings and various events where parents are invited. I've also observed the teaching methodology at the Centres and the approachability of the teachers and the healthy environment they create during the classes are other reasons for the success of the Program.

The frequent use of informative and innovative teaching-learning material by the GEP teachers is another factor that makes the girl students interested in attending these classes. The students are also involved in various activities

In the rural parts of India, particularly in our state (Bihar), girls' education continues to be an area of grave concern. Due to endemic poverty and continued financial challenges of most families in the rural hinterland here, even progressive legislations like the Right to Education Act, that provide free primary education to all children, have been able to make little headway.

The families that can afford private education, naturally gravitate towards getting their children enrolled in private schools. It is mainly the



A class session underway at a GEP Centre in Vaishali, Bihar

which are conducted as a part of the Program, giving them a much-needed platform to express their opinions creatively. This is very encouraging, particularly for the girls of marginalised communities, who have gone on to represent the school in such activities outside the school as well. This has immensely helped to boost the self-confidence of the girls and also improved the image of the government-run schools, where it is mostly expected that only the traditional chalk-and-talk method of teaching is practiced.

Initially there were certain logistical challenges in implementing the Program here. Since the Centre is running within the school premises here and the class timings were after the normal school

working hours, there were issues about a school administrative staff staying back to ensure the safety of the girl students and that the premises are locked after the classes. These were, however, teething issues and we resolved them through consultations among the school faculty and the GEP staff. The coordination and communication between the GEP staff and the school faculty in this regard has been excellent, ensuring smooth functioning of the Program.

Satish Kumar Sinha,
Headmaster, Government School,
Chandralay, Vaishali, Bihar



My name is Vibha Kumari. I am a teacher at the GEP Centre, Dighikala, Vaishali.

I grew interested in teaching when I started teaching my own children and have been teaching in a private school since the year 2004. I teach in that school till 1 p.m. and then conduct the GEP classes at the Centre here. I also conduct tuition classes for underprivileged children from 7-8 in the morning and again in the evening after returning from the GEP Centre. So, teaching is something that involves me all through the day.

GEP: Bridging the learning gap

We came across many parents during the door-to-door visits conducted in the initial phase of the Program, who had the perception that there was no quality education being imparted in the schools and hence they should de-enrol their children and engage them in some sort of work to augment the family income. Many parents assumed that we were faculty from the government school and would be rude to us. Due to endemic illiteracy among the parents, they were also apprehensive about sharing their identity details with us. It took a lot of explaining to convince them about the Program and its significance.

Further, the issue of child marriage is particularly acute in this region. There are many cases of girls in the age range of 13-15 years from the villages around this school who have either been married or whose marriage has already been fixed. Most of these girls are not interested in marriage and only want to study, but their family environment is such that education is not encouraged. Several girls opened up about their family issues when I interviewed them during the survey. Some come to school to escape the regressive environment at home and some from very poor families only to get a full meal as a part of the government's midday meal initiative.

Considering all these factors, it is quite clear that an initiative such as the GEP is very critical in this region.

There are several students who do not attend the school regularly but diligently come to the GEP classes everyday simply because they think these classes are more effective in educating them than the regular school classes.

The initial survey also revealed several girls who, in spite of being in the 6th grade, severely lacked reading and comprehension skills of a much lower grade. They had an ardent wish to achieve their age-appropriate learning level



Vibha conducting a class at GEP Centre, Dighikala, Vaishali

but were disappointed with the education in the school. Today, these girls attend our Centre regularly and have shown marked improvement in their learning levels.

The students are also interested in coming to the Centre regularly due to the activities conducted as a part of the Program. Such

activities are not conducted in the government-run schools. It goes a long way in keeping the students engaged and help develop new learnings in a creative and unconventional way.

Vibha Kumari, GEP Teacher,
Dighikala, Vaishali, Bihar



Education: Remediating intergenerational poverty

Shehnaz Khatun was six months pregnant with her youngest child when she was informed of free dry ration being distributed to underprivileged people in Madh, an opulent suburb about four kilometres away from her shack in the Ambojwadi slums near Mumbai, India's financial capital. It was the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. Shehnaz was hungry and surrounded by her five hungry children when she received this information from her neighbour.

"My husband was waiting in a queue about a kilometre away to receive khichdi being offered by

an organisation, so I didn't want to disturb him and walked with some of my neighbours through the forest path to Madh," she recalls.

"By the time I reached there, the ration kits were over. We all walked back empty-handed."

In the lockdown weeks, Shehnaz made this trip twice and came back unrewarded on both occasions.

"On most days, we ate khichdi offered by an organisation. On the days the khichdi-people did not come, I would ask neighbours for food. I had to do it for my children," she recalls.

Shehnaz and her husband are native of Nawada, Bihar and have been living in Ambojwadi for the past 17 years. Her husband drives a rented passenger car, making about Rs. 5,000 monthly that sustains their family of eight.

"Ladies in our family do not work and rarely step out of the house. It was only when our financial situation worsened, since last two months, that I started working at a cooperative making papad here in Ambojwadi. They pay me Rs. 20 per hour," says Shehnaz.

"Whatever minuscule savings we had was completely used up in the first few days of the lockdown. It came to a point that when one of my children fell sick during the lockdown, I was forced to borrow money from neighbours for the treatment. I'm still repaying that debt."

It was during these tumultuous times that the GEP classes were launched in Ambojwadi and Shehnaz's 15-year-old daughter, Muskan, was one of the first students to join the Centre.

"We're poor but I have the satisfaction to know that my children are receiving



Muskan (right) with her family in her shack in Ambojwadi slums Mumbai

quality education,” says Shehnaz.

For Muskan, the excitement of re-joining a free of charge remedial class so close to her home after the COVID lockdown was unparalleled.

“In the previous tuition classes before the pandemic, we were only taught from the class books with a focus on preparing for the exams, whereas in the GEP classes, we are given a well-rounded education through games and activity-based methods which are more interesting,” says Muskan.

“During the GEP class we sit in a group of three, called a trio, wherein we learn from each other. In these classes our teacher also

helps clarify our doubts which crop up during the school studies.”

The change is also perceptible to Shehnaz.

“Muskan always comes back very excited from the GEP Centre. She always shares the activities she did at the Centre on the particular day and the new things she learnt. I encourage a in her studies. What can she possibly learn by sitting here at home,” says Shehnaz, gesturing around her tiny shack.

“I am completely unlettered. Had I been educated I would’ve been able to earn good money and look after my family much better. I don’t want my children to suffer the way I have,” Shehnaz concludes.



On the evening of 24 March 2020, as soon as he heard the announcement of nationwide lockdown on the public television, 50-year-old Taribunisa's husband called her to quickly withdraw some cash and keep it in the house for any emergency.

"I ran from pillar to post but could not round up anything. The months that followed were the most harrowing I have experienced in my half a century of life," she recalls.

"We even ran out of cooking gas. In the name of food, we only had a few kilograms of ground wheat flour in

Education, the great equaliser

our house."

Taribunisa resides with her family of eight in a small house in the Ambujwadi slums near Mumbai. Her husband and 18-year-old son are daily wage labourers in the nearby localities, bringing in irregular income depending on the work they get.

"All of us were holed up in this small house and survived on chapatis and vegetable chutney for weeks. On certain days we were able to secure some khichdi being distributed in the slums by an organisation. On most days, however, their supplies ran out before we could get any," says Taribunisa.

"My son heard of some sewage pipeline cleaning work being available in a nearby locality and quickly took it up. He did that work for a few days and got Rs. 700 which is the only money we saw during those days."

While Taribunisa understands the significance of education, the financial hardships of surviving with a big family in an urban slum cluster has proven to be a significant roadblock.

"Due to our family's financial situation, my elder son quit his studies in the 7th grade and started doing petty jobs to contribute to the family income," she says.

One of her daughters had to drop out of education because the school was quite far from their house and the slums were in the middle of a forested area with no electricity at the time.

"So, owing to safety reasons, the family decided against her continuing her education," says Taribunisa.

But their perception about education changed markedly with the launch of



Shakreen (second from right) with her mother and sisters in her shack in Ambojwadi slums, Mumbai

the GEP Centre close to their house in the Ambojwadi slum cluster. Taribunisa's 14-year-old daughter, Shakreen is enrolled in the Centre and attends the remedial classes regularly.

"Initially, I was not convinced, since I saw these classes as an additional burden on my child, but the GEP teacher's continued counselling convinced me that these classes are essential for Shakreen's education," says Taribunisa.

"I have myself visited the Centre a few times and have seen that the classes are being conducted in all seriousness and in a good environment, where the children also participate actively."

Shakreen herself has experienced the change in her retention abilities since joining the GEP classes.

"Before joining the GEP classes, I had trouble understanding and reading English but due to the interesting ways in which my GEP teacher taught the subject – through the use of flashcards and through games – I'm much more confident in the subject today,"

she says.

"My teacher at the GEP Centre uses very interesting ways of helping us learn a subject. For example, instead of asking us to memorise and write an essay, they simply ask us to write about a daily life experience. It helps in understanding the language and sentence formation much more easily."

When asked about the significance of education for girls, Shakreen's response is equally lucid and articulate.

"None of my family members are literate. So, if any important document has to be read, it is given to me for reading," she says.

"Previously when electricity bills came to our house, my father had to take it to the neighbours. Now I can read it. Had I not been educated simply because I'm a girl, who would read these important documents and take right action? So, it is very important to treat girls and boys alike and educate them equally well," she concludes.



'Persistent and concerted efforts needed to produce sustainable change'

Education of children has suffered significantly during the COVID times. Due to significant intergenerational poverty in this area, in the times of crisis, everything, including education of children, comes to a halt here. To add to it, there is a persisting prejudice against educating girls in the community here. They become easy targets for early marriages and as a result their education is the first casualty.

In the initial phase of the Project, I went door-to-door to identify families with girl child who were at the risk of dropping out of school due to the exigencies

brought about due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It took us more than a month to convince the parents of these girls that we're genuinely concerned about the cause of girls' education. It was mainly due to their rigid mindset that they found it hard to believe that an organisation will launch a project simply to educate girls.

However, once the Centres started operating, parents started frequenting the classes with their children and noticed the earnestness with which we operate. That helped instill a lot of confidence among the parents. Today, they call us to inform us if their daughter is unable to attend the class on a particular day. This behaviour itself reflects a sea change in the attitude of the parents towards education.

After looking at the performance of many girls who come to our Centre, it is quite clear that the lockdown has had severe impact on the retention abilities of the students. Many 9th grade girls coming to our Centres are not able to solve even basic mathematics problems. They themselves open up and say that the gap in learning seems to have caused a huge vacuum in their education. In such cases we had to start from the fundamentals, and, through accelerated teaching methods, we have been able to bring few of them up to their age-appropriate learning levels.

The activities and games that are integral to our teaching methodology have helped a lot to retain the attendance and attention of the girls enrolled in our Centre. Initially, most of the students were very shy and lacked confidence in participating in the activities being conducted at the Centre, but today



Shehnaz during a Math class in the GEP Centre, Ambojwadi, Mumbai

they've all opened up and imparted confidence to other girls of the community as well to come forward and participate in any events.

When we take a consolidated look at the Program, it is important to remember that the issues of poverty, illiteracy and the rigid mindset against girls' education that persist in the communities here are very old and intergenerational in nature. So, a persistent and concerted effort is needed to produce any significant change.

While the parents are confident in our teaching methods today and willingly send their daughters to attend the classes, they also require continuous counselling to keep the impact sustainable.

Shehnaz Sheikh

Part-time teacher
GEP Centre, Ambojwadi Slums
Mumbai



Making quality education accessible

As we enter 14-year-old Saajma's house in the Ambojwadi slums of Mumbai, it is easy to tell that her family is financially better off than most in this vast shanty town. The brick-and-mortar structure is clearly very new and stands apart in size and design from the other corrugated metal-sheets structures it is surrounded by.

It is only when Saajma's 45-year-old aunt, Zaleema Khatun, opens up about the new construction that one realises how this supposed asset has turned into an albatross around their neck.

"The lockdown came at a wrong time for us," she says.

"We had loaned a substantial amount to build this concrete house, hoping to achieve safety from the elements. During rains all the sewage water would come into our house causing all sorts of health issues. However, with the lockdown, my husband and elder son lost their sources of livelihood and the debt kept on mounting. It still continues to pile up."

Zaleema's family of six continues to live in this house trying their best to pay off the mounting debt. Her husband works as a taxi driver while her eldest son works as an AC repairman. Both the earning members have irregular income sources which has perennially kept the family in a precarious financial situation. Her two younger sons suffer from a neurological disorder due to which they are not able to lead a normal life.

Saajma, an 8th grade student in a nearby school, is Zaleema's sister's daughter. She has been raised by her aunt since a very young age as a member of the family.

"While the lockdowns have been relaxed, the earnings have still not gone back to the pre-COVID levels. So, poor families like ours continue to suffer under mounting debts," says Zaleema.

"The only semblance of normalcy we have in our life is the continued education of our daughter which has been regular, except for a brief period of online classes being conducted during the lockdown. The remedial classes have positively only turned better from before the pandemic times."

Saajma was one of the first students to join the GEP classes when they were



Saajma (left) with her brother and aunt at her shack in the Ambojwadi slums Mumbai

launched in Ambojwadi slums.

“During the lockdown, my school classes were being conducted online but since I did not have a smartphone, I could not attend those classes. This caused me to become quite weak in my studies,” she recalls.

“Before COVID I was enrolled in private tuitions that costed us Rs.

200 per month. But those classes were very irregular, and we used to brush it aside by saying that we can’t expect good quality, regular classes at such a small price.”

For many school-going girls of Ambojwadi like Saajma, the launch of the GEP Centre in their midst was a welcome change.

“The GEP classes are free and our teacher here is much better at

MACQUARIE



HUMANANA
PEOPLE TO PEOPLE INDIA

EDUCATION PRO
MUMBAI
REMEDIA EDUCAT

Supported by- Ma

Implemented by- Hui



2/3/22

Your future is created by wh

teaching and clarifying our concepts than the previous classes. These classes are also held every day," says Saajma.

"In the GEP classes we are also taught using activity-based methods and games which makes learning a lot of fun."

With the Centre opening in the slums, the girls save a lot on the travel time as well. They have to walk for more than an hour, every day, to their school and back. Similar time was spent to get to their tuition classes as well. But now the Centre is merely five minutes away.

The proximity of the Centre also lets parents approach it and interact with the GEP teacher, creating a healthy environment and instilling a high degree of confidence among the parents about the quality of education their child is receiving.

"I visit the Centre during the monthly parent-teacher meetings. The environment at the Centre is very positive and all the students as well as the teacher are very attentive," says Zaleema.

When asked the significance of education for girls in today's times, she answers thoughtfully.

"I received no formal education but only religious education at a madarsa in my village. Such was the norm during our times. But today, it is essential that girls receive quality education so that they are self-reliant. Girls like Saajma who themselves are motivated and interested in studying should be given particular attention, and I'm glad she can benefit from the GEP classes to get closer to her dreams."



The Macquarie Group Foundation (the Foundation) is the philanthropic arm of Macquarie Group. The Foundation provides support to community organisations globally each year through financial support, volunteering and skills sharing, predominantly in the locations in which Macquarie operates. The Foundation's work is significantly influenced by the activities of Macquarie staff with a focus on capacity building within the community sector and increasing social and economic mobility.

To learn more about the Macquarie Group Foundation, visit macquarie.com/community



Humana People to People India (HPPI) is a development organisation registered as a not-for-profit company under section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956 as of 21st May 1998. It is a non-political, non-religious organisation working for the holistic development of the under-privileged and marginalised people in rural and urban India through social development and poverty alleviation interventions by coordinated and focused interventions in education, life skills, improved livelihoods, empowerment of women, health and sanitation, and environmental sustainability. HPPI works in partnership with international and national private and public partners. HPPI is implementing 70+ projects across 15 states in India with an outreach of over 2 million people.





HUMANANA
PEOPLE TO PEOPLE INDIA


111/9-Z, Kishangarh, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070

Telephone & Fax: 011- 47462222

E-mail: info@humana-india.org Website: www.humana-india.org

 www.facebook.com/humana.india  [@humana_India](https://twitter.com/humana_India)

 www.youtube.com/user/HumanaPeopleIndia

 www.linkedin.com/company/humana-people-to-people-india