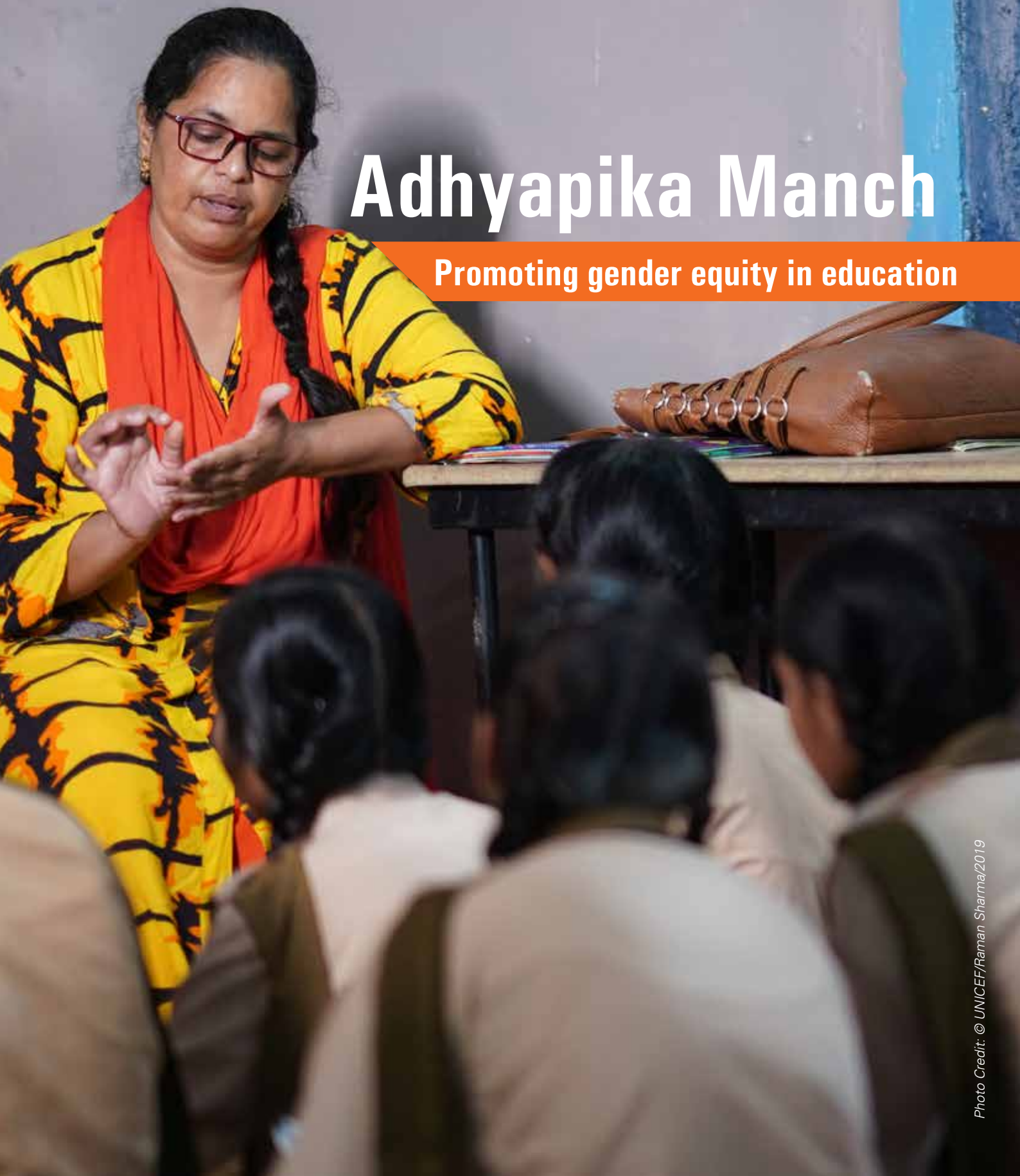


Adhyapika Manch

Promoting gender equity in education



The need

Strong social norms rooted in the caste system and feudal patriarchal family structures are still prevalent in Rajasthan. Girls are denied the right to education due to gender-based discrimination. As a result, dropout rates among girls, as they reach upper primary and secondary classes, are very high. In far-flung areas of Rajasthan, girls do not easily find a role model for interaction and guidance.

Women teachers in schools can wield tremendous influence on girls and convince them to continue their education, but they too are weighed down by the same social norms. They need to be empowered to strengthen their voice and motivated to act as role models for girls in schools. They need to help them to reflect and take informed decisions about their life and continue to complete their education.

The main objective behind setting up Adhyapika Manch was to provide a forum for women teachers to build their leadership skills. They are platforms where women teachers can brainstorm, have healthy discussions, discuss the challenges that they face at school and collectively solve problems. In the process they can improve their performance at school and act as an inspiration for the girls.

These forums are formed at the block level. With regular meetings of the Adhyapika Manch, teachers discuss challenges and strategies as well as reflect on their own competencies and methods of addressing developmental and learning needs. They appreciate each others' efforts and most importantly, learn from each other's experiences. The block level meetings take up many issues ranging from safety of girls, child marriage, eve teasing and other challenges faced by girls.



Adhyapika Manch

Goal

To promote access, retention, achievement and completion of schooling by girls through strengthening the skills of women teachers and building their positive image as role models.

Approach

- Working for self – Building a strong sense of self among women teachers
- Working for girls – Creating a gender-friendly environment in school and responding to gender-related challenges



Up to **100** female teachers come together at the block level to form an Adhyapika Manch.

Composition

As per the guidelines of the Rajasthan Council of Elementary Education (RCEE)¹, membership of the Manch has been maintained at 100 teachers. Two-year membership provides an opportunity for more teachers to participate in the Manch. At present, there are nearly 25,000 female teachers across the state, covering 301 blocks of 33 districts, who have grouped into Adhyapika Manch at the block level. The Manch function under the overall guidance of the Chief Block Education Officer (CBEO). The Block Resource Person (a senior technical resource) leads the programme from the CBEO's office. Each Manch has an Executive Committee, which is led by a Convenor and a Co-convenor. Quarterly meetings of the Manch are organised, preferably in the first weeks of August, October and January every year. Inter-block experience sharing has also been introduced to help Manch learn from each other.

Strategy for implementation

A three-pronged strategy has been adopted to roll out the Adhyapika Manch which includes: capacity building and skill enhancement of women teachers on leadership; instilling improved understanding on gender and allowing women teachers to seek peer support to challenge gender-based discrimination; and leading school-level interventions to ensure a girl child-friendly environment and break gender stereotypes.

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¹ UNICEF supported the RCEE in conceptualising and crystallising the concept of the Adhyapika Manch, preparing its guidelines and identifying the modalities and execution of activities. UNICEF oriented key resource persons on the broader framework of gender equity in education. UNICEF also advocated for the continuity of these Manch with the State Department of Education.

A series of capacity development workshops and trainings are organised and the women teachers are encouraged to actively practice these skills, adapt them as per their

comfort and make suggestions to strengthen the training modules. Their skills are enhanced in the following areas:



Personal skill enhancement

- Gender sensitisation (including understanding gender-based violence)
- Enhancing understanding of financial rules
- Developing skills to articulate their own issues, thoughts and ideas, and building leadership on a variety of subjects including effective communication, health and nutrition for self, helping students to plan their future and using technology for education and skill development
- Empowering through training on self-defence and judo, driving



Professional skill enhancement

- Mentoring, counselling, guidance and emotional support for girls in school (largely on social/personal matters, health-related issues and academic problems)
- Legal orientation on Right to Education Act (RTE), Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, Right to Information Act (RTI), Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) etc.
- Facilitating innovation, like creating contributory Adhyapika Manch funds, mobilising donors for sponsorship to children and schools, etc.



Interaction with children and adolescents

- Bringing out-of-school children to schools and facilitating their retention and transition to secondary school using various initiatives
- Conducting dialogues with girls and boys on issues of gender, violence, stereotypes, etc. and creating an enabling environment
- Strengthening support system for girls (Meena Manch) and female teachers
- Using innovative teaching techniques



Programme monitoring

The Adhyapika Manch is a part of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and monitored on specific indicators. Since it is difficult to quantify the work of Adhyapika Manch, monitoring is based on process indicators, such as the number of members participating in each forum, number of meetings held, number of capacity building workshops organised, any special initiative undertaken, documentation of activities and success stories, etc. These process indicators reflect largely on the functionality of the Manch. The success of these Manch is recorded through sharing meetings and documentation studies.

Results achieved so far

The programme contributes to creating gender-inclusive processes in schools and awareness in the community about educating girls. Documentation studies have recorded the areas in which Adhyapika Manch have brought changes in the performance of women teachers, the lives of girls and in positive environment building. Adhyapika Manch have strengthened the following aspects.

Capacities of women teachers at a personal level

- The self-confidence of Manch members has increased. They are more capable of articulating their viewpoints and better able to speak in meetings, public forums and with department officials. The forums are also used to share personal problems where they collectively apprise and arrive at solutions.

Capacities of women teachers at a professional level

- At school, dependency of women teachers on their male colleagues has reduced as far as articulation and communication with higher officials are concerned. They are able to independently hold dialogues with community members for enrolment of out-of-school girls and regularity in attendance. They feel confident about initiating dialogues with girls on menstrual hygiene, early marriage and gender-based violence.
- As a collective, they have started raising their voices in existing forums for gender-sensitive school environments and asking for support from their networks. Problem sharing and solving related to their salary, postings, financial rules, workload, etc. has increased along with innovating at their workplace. Their representation has visibly increased as subject trainers and they are recognised at block and district levels for their effective contribution. Their leadership in campaigns such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (SBA), and Environment Day has been commendable.

Girl-friendly aspects in schools

- Manch have contributed to schools becoming more girl child-friendly and encouraged girls to become more regular in their attendance and transition to secondary schools.

- Being equipped with knowledge and skills on issues related to gender, the girls now have someone to go to in case they face problems at home or in school. Adhyapika Manch teachers give them special orientations and counselling on a range of issues that affect their lives such as child marriage and sexual harassment, health and nutrition, menstrual hygiene etc.
- Gender-friendly environments are being created in schools through enhancing girls' participation in sports, equitable task distribution between girls and boys, improving condition of toilets, and most importantly making sure that teachers listen to girls and respond to problems that they may be having.
- Meena Manchs are being revitalised to create awareness in the community on issues of child marriage, child labour and domestic labour, which are common causes for girls dropping out of schools.
- Awareness is being raised on social norms and women's rights through debates and essay competitions in various schools on topics such as declining sex ratio, sexual harassment, child marriage etc.



Gender-friendly environments are being created in schools through enhancing girls' participation in sports, and equitable task distribution between girls and boys.



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ACHIEVING SUCCESS WITH GROUP SUPPORT

Adhyapika Manch, Jhalrapatan block, Jhalawar district

A Class 7 student in a Government Upper Primary School in Mandawar village had stopped coming to school mid-session. The class teacher, Ms. Jain, an Adhyapika Manch member, tracked the student's absenteeism and found that she was being eve teased on her way to school. Though this was a matter beyond the purview of the school, she discussed it with the Head Teacher but did not get any support. She then decided to speak with the girl's parents who had supported her decision to stay out of school rather than face harassment every day.

In the following month, Ms. Jain also raised the issue in her Adhyapika Manch meeting.

Some Manch members joined her and visited the village to raise the issue at a Panchayat meeting. This made community members aware of the harassment faced by girls on their way to school. Panchayat members decided to join the teachers in starting a dialogue with boys who used to harass the girls. The boys were counselled and teachers reached out to their parents. Through this dialogue, the boys realised that what they considered "fun" was actually wrong and harmful. They apologised for their behaviour and promised not to harass girls in the village and instead ensure their safe passage to school. Ms. Jain now feels immensely satisfied that she is a part of an empowered and influential group i.e. the Adhyapika Manch.

Adhyapika Manch, Buhana block, Jhunjhunu district

Ms. Rajbala Yadav, a member of the Adhyapika Manch and teacher in the local Government Girls Upper Primary School has become a role model for her invaluable contribution in promoting girls' education as a part of the Manch. She was informed that a Class 7 student from a nearby school was being married off by her father for financial gains. On enquiring further, she found that the situation was already out of hand as a middleman had finalised the transaction and taken an advance of INR 40,000, as part of his share for organising the wedding. Ms. Rajbala immediately apprised her Manch coordinator that she was going to intervene and would require the group's support.

She tried speaking to the girl's parents but they completely ignored her. Then she contacted the middleman and told him that his actions were illegal. Instead of listening to her and making amends, he threatened her with dire consequences. But she did not give up and kept trying to convince the family. When none of these efforts helped, she informed the police. They intervened and the marriage was called off. On behest of the family and the girl, no punitive action was taken against the father and the middleman, but the police warned them that they could not get her married before the age of 18. According to Ms. Rajbala, the support of the Adhyapika Manch network boosted her confidence and gave her the courage to take the bold step to protect the girl's future.



for every child

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