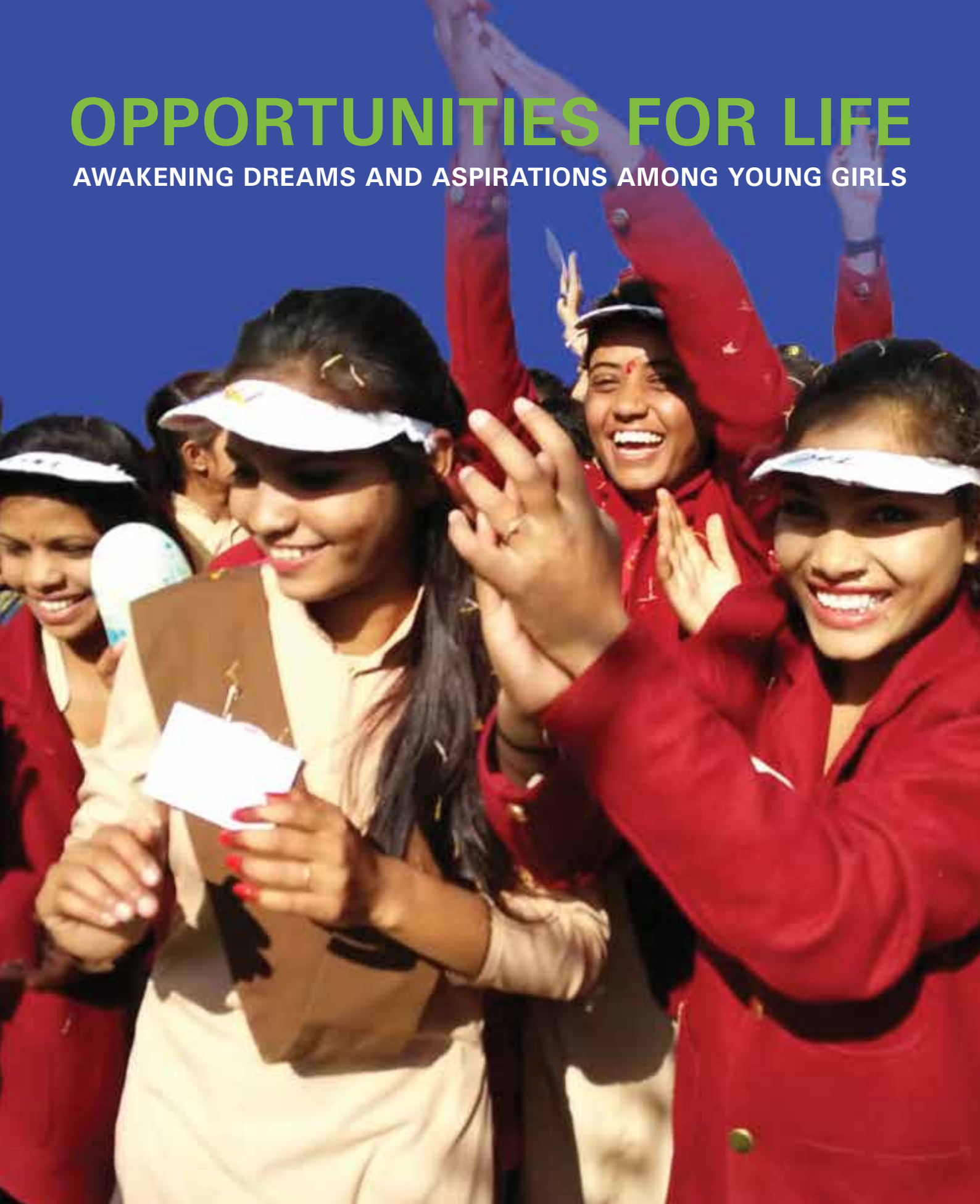


OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE

AWAKENING DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS AMONG YOUNG GIRLS



**end child
marriage**
A voice. A chance. A future.



समग्र शिक्षा
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Context

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBV) have been envisioned by the Government of India as residential schools that enable access to quality education and a safe environment for girls belonging to marginalised and disadvantaged groups. They reduce gender disparity in education among weaker sections of society.

Life skills are a set of **abilities, attitudes and experiences** that enable individuals to learn, make informed decisions and exercise rights to lead a healthy and productive life and subsequently become change makers.

While the sheltered existence in the hostel does ensure a safe and secure environment, it does not equip them with skills to negotiate the vicissitudes of life, nurture and pursue aspirations, make balanced life decisions and move ahead in life with confidence and self-assuredness.

Opportunities for Life (O4L) is a much needed intervention that has been piloted in Dungarpur district from October 2018 to July 2019, to strengthen employability and self empowerment skills among girls studying in classes 9–12 in five Sharde¹ (KGBV – IV) hostels.

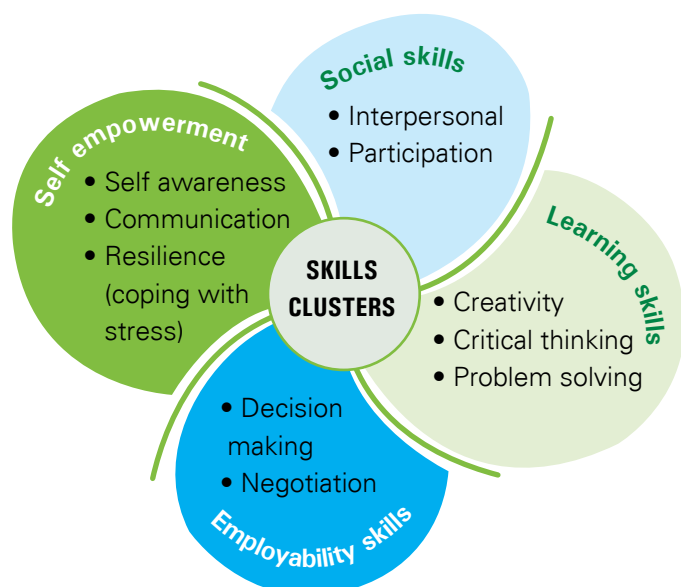
Sandhan (Society for Study of Education and Development), a non-government organisation, piloted O4L with the technical and financial support of UNICEF and endorsement of Government of Rajasthan's Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SMSA).

“KGBVs take education to the doorsteps of girls who can't otherwise access it easily. With experience we have realised that these girls require a practical approach. Along with knowing about opportunities, they also need to be aware of the challenges that they are going to face. They need more exposure to shed their diffidence.”

Snehlata Harit
Deputy Commissioner
Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan

Designing an intervention for empowerment and employability

Core skills framework



O4L’s design focuses on providing equitable learning opportunities, resources and supportive opportunities, to help develop core skills for life.

The core skills framework itself is based on the four pillars of self empowerment, employability, social and learning skills. This intervention’s main impetus is on empowerment and employability, which were identified as the two most critical concerns in the given context, regarding the adolescent girls planning for an adult life. O4L is designed to help these young girls to develop their personalities, acquire self empowerment skills including self awareness, communication, resilience, decision making and employability, with the ability to negotiate through the highs and lows of life and to evolve as more self assured adults. The goal being to ensure they are better equipped to take on life’s challenges as they step out of the confines of the residential schools.

¹Since March 2018 Sharde Hostels have been renamed KGBV-IV. O4L was piloted in five hostels: Bankoda hostel, Aspur, Peeth hostel, Simalwara; Manakpura hostel, Sagwara; Damri hostel, Dovra; and Genji hostel, Jhaunthari.

Key objectives of O4L pilot intervention



Helping build self-empowerment and employability skills among young girls through development of:

- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Resilience and foresight
- ◆ Self awareness
- ◆ Problem solving and negotiation skills



Improving and strengthening their confidence and aspirations through role modelling



Enhancing their knowledge about entitlements, services, legal and protection rights

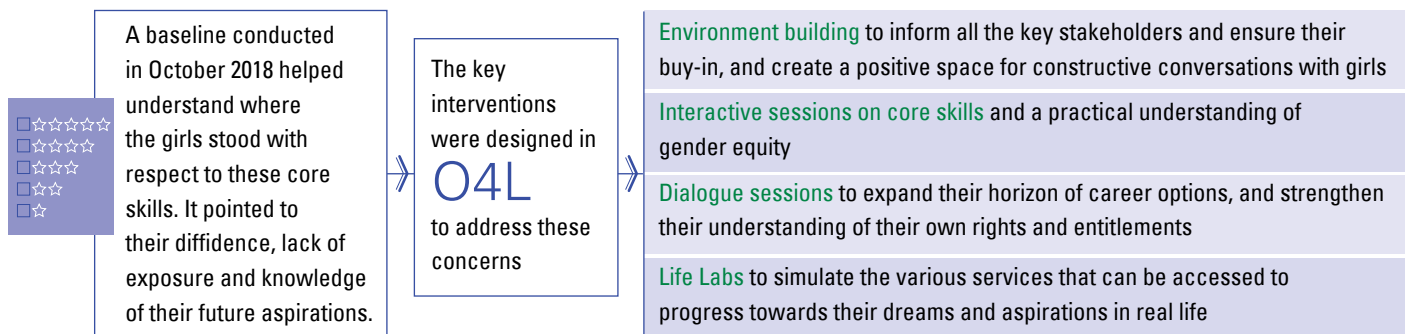


Expanding their understanding of rights and gender equity, and ways to address their violations



Building their exposure to employment/development opportunities and capabilities to choose employment options

Building experiential project interventions and methods



Environment building

To ensure support at the state and district level, SMSA officials were met and informed about the intervention. Additionally, principals and teachers of the 10 schools where the girls are studying and the wardens of the five hostels were met, informed and sensitised on the initiative.

A **conducive environment** was created in the hostels through group exercises such as singing, games and group work before initiating the interventions, which also aimed at building communication and self awareness.





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Interactive sessions on core skills and gender equity

A key component of life skills education was showing select AdhaFULL² episodes to the girls and conducting group discussions after the episode was shown.

This paved the way for reflection on their lives and experiences, and honest sharing and discussion around personal aspirations, gender norms, life skills and other relevant issues. Using interactive tools like role plays, charts, posters and drama, hypothetical situations were enacted and different scenarios presented.

“ The character of Tara in AdhaFULL taught me that however big a problem, we have it within us to find a solution.

Manisha
Class 12 student

Every day on our way back from the school we were harassed by boys who would follow us and tease us. Earlier we used to keep quiet, put our head down and try and reach the hostel as quickly as possible. However, we were inspired by Kitty and Tara who had their own voice. One day we mustered the courage to turn around and confront the miscreants. And it worked. I feel so much more in control of my life now.

Krishna
Class 9 student
(narrated in an experience sharing workshop)

The first time we visited the hostels, the girls could not muster the courage to open up with us. Post the two-day training on communication and problem solving where they also got a chance to see AdhaFULL episodes we discussed their fears, apprehensions and insecurities. They themselves came up with solutions to tackle each of these.

Beenesh Choudhary
Facilitator



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‘Samvaad’ (dialogue) sessions

Dialogue sessions were organised at two levels, namely with representatives of banks, police department, post office, E-Mitra etc. and with a career counsellor to introduce the interactive career portal of Government of Rajasthan. Achievers from different spheres were identified and invited, preferably women from relatable contexts, who the girls could look up to as role models. When service providers like police officers and bank employees came and spoke to the girls about their infrastructure, services and schemes apart from their own life stories, the girls became extremely enthused.

These sessions went on to provide practical information about jobs and the prospects that existed in the medium to long term and removed fear and hesitation among the girls. Most of all they emphasised on the preparation and process required to fulfil these aspirations.

² AdhaFULL is a 78-episode TV drama series that tackles many coming of age issues like higher education of girls, stereotyping of women and girls, gender-based violence and other such issues.



Initially when we asked the girls what they wanted to do after finishing their education it was difficult for them to answer this question. More than half of them had not given this aspect any thought because they felt it was not in their hands. This changed after the interactions we had. They are brimming with confidence now and are aware of what they need to negotiate to get there. There is hope and they have dreams of a future.

Maresh Sharma
Lead Faculty

After being a part of the Samvaad sessions I want to become a police officer and thanks to these sessions I now have a game plan and the confidence that I can achieve this dream.

Suneeta
Class 12 student

Not only did we talk about the protection and legal rights that the girls have, I also emphasised that they can drop notes with their issues in the *suraksha peti* (safe box) installed in their hostels, which only I have access to. We have a relationship of mutual trust now.

Madan Singh
SHO, Police Station Genji



Samvaad sessions were held with a career counsellor, representing The Rajiv Gandhi Career Portal. These sessions broadened their understanding of specific careers and informed them on what they needed to do to apply and emerge victorious.

Sessions were also organised for information dissemination and knowledge building on laws and rights related to children, adolescents and youth. Using interactive methods, they quizzed each other to ensure that central messages and do's and don'ts were clearly assimilated by them. This helped them to know their rights and who to turn to for help.

Life Labs

Experiential exercises were well received since they brought alive situations that participants could easily relate to. A *mela* (fair) was organised in the hostels, for the girls to undergo a simulation and get a hands-on experience of real life situations. They were provided practice sessions to fill up various forms such as a cash deposit form in the bank, application for an Aadhar card or a domicile certificate etc. to avail services. There was a registration card in which around 20 different types of activities, forms and interactions, such as at a bank, post office, E-Mitra counter, police station, career counselling etc. were enlisted. At each stall, the girls attempted the prescribed methodology to avail that particular service. Only when they accomplished it correctly could they attempt the next. They could come back multiple times until they got it right. This positive and healthy competition further added to the enthusiasm and learning by doing.

The stalls were managed by girls from the school, who were oriented to be peer leaders. They acted as bank representatives, E-Mitra representatives, post office representatives, etc. and helped make the form available and check if these were filled properly. These Life Labs cemented the understanding of legal rights, entitlements and schemes among girls. A reference book on these, further acts as a refresher.



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Perceptible changes



Photo Credit: © UNICEF/2018

“ No one can make me feel inferior without my own consent. I can and I will bring about positive change in my life and through my life in the lives of those around me.

Yashwani Ahari
Class 10 student

If we experience true freedom, we will be able to change our destinies. Whether it is to study further, get a job, be of use to the community or help our families, we now know that we have it in us to take on these and more roles.

Seema Raut
Class 9 student

I am studying science because I want to become a doctor and so does my family. I case I do not become a doctor I know my family would be very disappointed. But I will not stop there. I will study science and I know there are many other options that I can exercise with science.

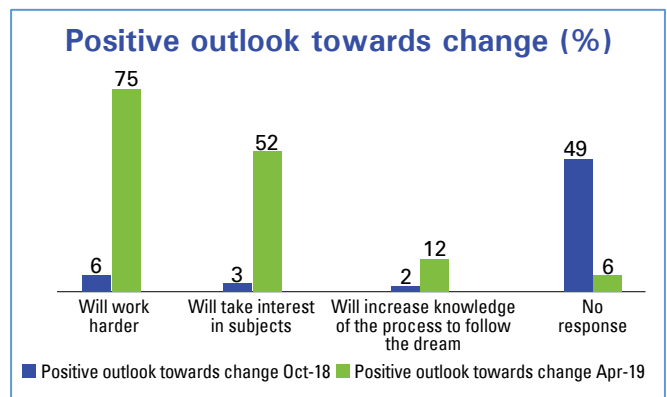
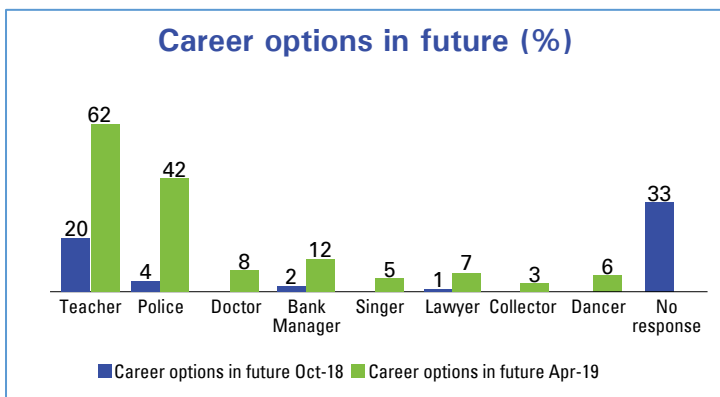
Payal
Class 12 student

When we met the girls after their summer vacations almost 55% had tried to avail services from E-Mitra or made bank transactions on their own. This was a very encouraging development compared with the situation before the intervention when the response of the girls was at best a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ with lowered eyes.”

Salma Sheikh
Facilitator

Adolescent girls who have been engaged with as part of O4L state that they feel more confidence and are better equipped to handle life situations. Many articulated that with hard work they can achieve anything. They are more determined and resilient, and feel more in control of their lives.

When O4L implementation was initiated in October 2018, 40 per cent of the girls did not have any knowledge of essential documents as per the baseline, whereas the endline shows that this percentage came down to a miniscule 3 per cent. The percentage of girls with good knowledge of their rights and entitlements increased from 18 to 51 per cent and a much higher percentage is now aware of wider career options. Overall, they are looking towards the future with positivity and hope. With a single set of 21 interactions over four months, this is a significant achievement. The expectation is that repeated exposure will garner much sharper results.



“ Girls got many opportunities. They now have the confidence to put forth their thoughts. This engagement should continue to work and that will help reiterate the concept of empowerment among them.

Sharda Devi
Warden, KGBV Genji

Rural girls are trying to fight their circumstances and resist suffocation of conformity borne out of poverty, social discrimination and gender stereotypes. O4L enables them to be brave, determined and winners by cultivating skills to negotiate and make critical decisions. Combined with policy, advocacy and system support, they will be able to utilise all available opportunities of laws, schemes, career options and institutions, which facilitate them to become productive citizens.

Aparna Sahay
Director, Sandhan

Girls in India, particularly in Rajasthan, are bright in studies and have the calibre to do well in future. Given the right kind of opportunities, their aspirations and their will to fulfil their dreams is bound to become stronger. O4L fills this long felt need to encourage them to aspire and look for ways to fulfil those aspirations.

”

Rajendra Bhanawat
Chairman, Sandhan

Challenges faced

Though these results are heartening it needs to be added that self development being a qualitative concept does not get the prominence and attention that it should. Wardens are not oriented on the criticality of concepts of self development and awareness, which posed a challenge for the intervention in the initial stages. For interventions like O4L there is a need to revisit the activities and lessons multiple times to ensure that the learning stays with the girls for a long time.

Creating a ripple effect

Encouraged by O4L's impact, it will be scaled up in select aspirational districts followed by a state-wise scale up.

As a result of a multi-stakeholder consultation, a two-phase scale up is being envisaged and rolled out in partnership with Department of Education. The first phase will demonstrate this uptake of the experiences of O4L by government machinery for greater sustainability. This will also provide an opportunity to understand and address the challenges in the process. The enhanced understanding will then pave the way for a state-wide scale up in Phase 2. Simultaneously in the convergent district of Dungarpur, under the leadership of the District Collector, the experience of O4L is being expanded to 21 other similar institutions including those run by the Tribal Area Development Department and the Social Justice and Empowerment Department.

The resource kit used for O4L is available for the government to support the integration and scale up of the programme.³

The results of O4L show that given the right opportunities these girls have come closer to being assertive individuals, who now know they have the right to aspire and go for their dreams.

³ The resource kit includes: a calendar of activities; a facilitator's guide; a monitoring kit to record change; a reference book for adolescent girls; and a kit for Life Lab



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