

# Educate and empower 450 girls in West Bengal

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## Big Idea:

This project provides education and skills training for 450 girls, equipping them to transcend current social barriers, such as child marriage and trafficking. School attendance and retention will be fortified through awareness-raising on reproductive health, hygiene, and basic rights.

## Need:

### *What problem is the project trying to solve?*

An entrenched system of patriarchy means that girls are grossly devalued and excluded in key arenas. Education is one such area. The female literacy rate is just 60%. Deprived of education, many girls are married off as minors, and pregnancies at a young age are common. The prevalence of child labour and violence against girls in the home has also contributed to the situation where the number of female students dropping out of secondary school is double than that of boys.

### *How will your project solve the problem?*

The project will directly tackle current barriers to girls' education on three fronts. First, it will equip them with the material and out-of-school support needed to attend school, such as home visits. Peer education through the formation of Girls' Groups will take place, where the focus will be on rights sensitisation issues such as reproductive health care, gender discrimination and child marriage. These efforts will be fortified by a mass awareness generation campaign targeting all stake-holders in the community to underline the central importance and need for girls' education.

## Aims

1. 450 poor girl children will attend school
  - 450 vulnerable girls will be identified
  - These girls will be enrolled into mainstream schools
  - School fees, uniform, tuition fees and study materials will be provided
2. School retention rates will be increased by 70% over 3 years
  - Home visits and meetings with parents will take place to encourage them to be proactive in their child's education
  - School visits will take place to maintain the engagement of students and teachers
3. Physical violence and discrimination against girls will reduce significantly
  - Girls Groups will learn about and initiate campaigns against the issues of violence, child labour and child marriage.

4. Girls will be aware of their fundamental rights
  - In the Girls Groups, girls will learn about their rights, such as the right to education and equality safeguards
  - Leadership and life skills training will equip girls to assert those rights
  - Specialist training will be given on the issues of child trafficking, child labour and child marriage.
  
5. Societal perceptions about the status of girls will be improved
  - Girls groups will impart their learning through awareness-raising campaigns in the community
  - Meetings with all concerned stakeholders will sensitise them on the need for girls education
  - Meetings will be facilitated to encourage mothers to send their daughters to school and not to engage in child labour
  - Meetings with parents will take place to alert them to the ill-effects of early marriage
  - Awareness-building will take place through posters, rallies and the distribution of informal education materials

### **Success – how it will be demonstrated**

1.
  - 450 girls will be supported to enter and to continue education at school
  - School progress reports will be testimony to their attendance and achievement
  
2.
  - School drop-out rates will drop from 72% to 15% over the project period
  - Retention in school will increase to 70% over 3 years
  
3.
  - Success will be indicated through dialogue with the girls and other stake-holders in the community
  
4.
  - Girls will have an increased awareness of their rights and confidence to access them
  
5.
  - There will be an increased uptake in the use of educational facilities in the community
  - On realising the imperative of girls' education, parents will include this in their family budget

### **Long-term changes**

This project will break social barriers to empower 450 girls to access education. Girls will be made capable of accessing the opportunities of the market economy.

We will demonstrate the success of this project by witnessing an attitudinal change in how the community view the status of girls and their self-perceptions. Quantitative indicators will include an increase in school retention rates of 70% over 3 years and a rise in the marriage age of girls from 13-14 years to 18-19 years.

## Potential Risks

Girls' education has seldom been a priority for parents, so there may be resistance to sending them to school. This will be addressed through building close relationships with parents. Nishtha has experience of working in this area for over 30 years and has a very good rapport with the target community. A further risk comes from how girls may not be used to participating in formal education. Teaching methods and materials will therefore be very simple, clear and engaging.

## Project Location

Due to its large population the delivery of meaningful education in West Bengal is a big challenge. There is an 'Education for All Mission' in the state, so most villages have government primary schools. It is beyond this when many female children quit school in, mainly due to gender discrimination. Girls drop out of education at a rate of 80%, compared to the 63% national average. Deeply-rooted socio-cultural practices and beliefs relating to females continue to impede their advancement.

## Beneficiaries

In India, the caste system entrenches a system of inequality by classifying people hierarchically according to birth. 350 of the girls in this project are 'lower caste' or Scheduled Caste. 85 girls come from other minority groups and 15 comprise the abject poor from 'higher castes'. These girls are the most marginalised in India; they experience discrimination on account of both gender and caste. Their vulnerability is exacerbated by their exclusion from mainstream education.

## Why Karuna?

Karuna is pleased to have entered into partnership with Nishtha, the implementing organisation 3 years ago. Nishtha has been working for women's empowerment at grassroots level for over 30 years. Its position as a community-based organisation with a strong emphasis on participation means that it has gained the confidence and trust of stake-holders. Nishtha has successfully mainstreamed 3033 children into school, 80% being first-generation female children.