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SAMVEDNA

Annual Report 2019-20

Introduction

Samvedna works to combat caste-based commercial sexual exploitation and human sex trafficking specifically in the Bedia community by working with both State and non-state actors in rural Madhya Pradesh. The organization has a two-pronged approach – working with the survivors for their rehabilitation and reintegration, and prioritizing prevention for the vulnerable members of the community through advocacy and direct intervention. Presently, Samvedna works in 20 villages across 5 districts – Bhopal, Guna, Raisen, Rajgarh, and Vidisha – in Madhya Pradesh with over 500 Bedia families and 1200 Bedia children.

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The Chairperson's Message

Dear friends,

I look forward to writing this message every year. Looking back at the past year propels us to move forward, and it strengthens the commitment that all of us have made to our cause. It also gives us an opportunity to pause for a few moments and look at all our hard work – the fruits it bore and the lessons it taught us.

My team and I – the very people that Samvedna is – are relentlessly committed to our cause. I would thus like to take this moment to congratulate them and celebrate their efforts, their milestones, and their stepping stones; their unequivocal dedication that ensures that Samvedna can surmount the challenges that come in our way. I would also like to thank our board members, and our donors, for their guidance, kindness and all the support that comes from them at the times when we need them the most.

However, the unprecedented challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon us do not allow me linger on the past year – normalcy is being ravaged by the virus and we are looking at changed ways of social interaction and communication that none of us are prepared for.

For an already marginalized community like the Bedia, the pandemic can have devastating effects – younger girls could be coerced into this vicious cycle of community-based commercial sexual exploitation to meet the demands of dwindling number of customers or to pay off debts, or hundreds of children might drop out from schools.

The situation is precarious because the circumstance is unforeseeable. But with creativity, compassion, and humility, we are prepared to handle whatever might lie ahead.

In these trying times thus, while I urge everyone to take care, I also remind my team, and myself of the hundreds of lives that we have touched with our work, and the commitment that we have made to them and the world that we have envisioned together.

Best,
Trupti Jhaveri
Chairperson, Samvedna

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Highlights

332 new admission through Education Drive.

512 documents made and updated for connecting Bedia community members to various welfare schemes being implemented by State and Central Government Departments.

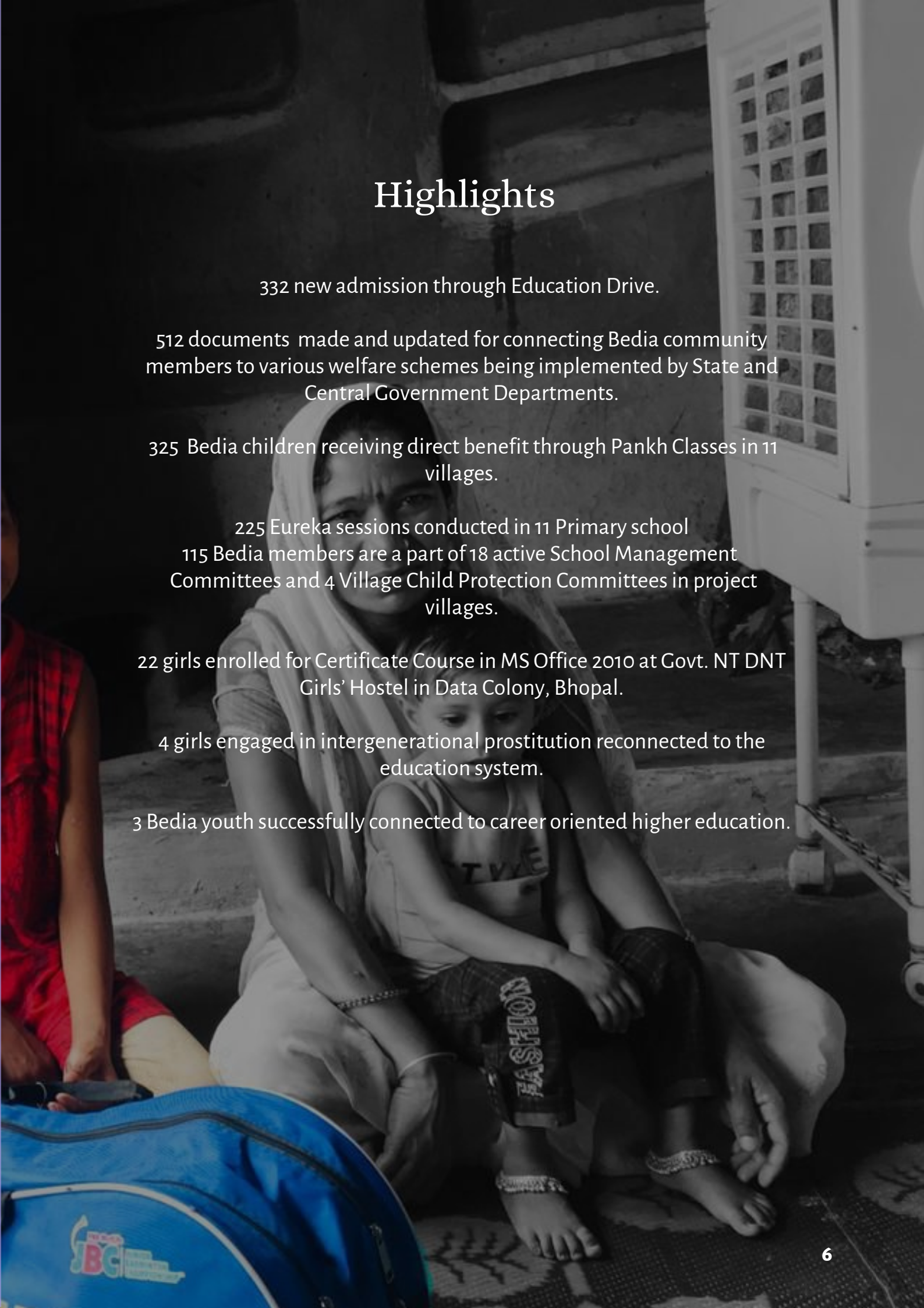
325 Bedia children receiving direct benefit through Pankh Classes in 11 villages.

225 Eureka sessions conducted in 11 Primary school
115 Bedia members are a part of 18 active School Management Committees and 4 Village Child Protection Committees in project villages.

22 girls enrolled for Certificate Course in MS Office 2010 at Govt. NT DNT Girls' Hostel in Data Colony, Bhopal.

4 girls engaged in intergenerational prostitution reconnected to the education system.

3 Bedia youth successfully connected to career oriented higher education.



The People We Work with...

The Bedia is a Denotified Community that is engaged in intergenerational community-based commercial sexual exploitation. In the community, a 12 to 13-year-old girl is commercially sexually exploited to earn money for supporting her family. Most engage in prostitution and some are sold to work in dance bars in cities.

Men in the community become pimps for the women in their families engaged in commercial sex and young boys run errands – buying liquor and cigarettes – for customers.

The community is doubly marginalized – discriminated against because of their position in the caste hierarchy and stigmatized because of their traditional 'occupation'.



The Change We want to See...

Samvedna believes in neither the abolitionist nor the neo-regulationist views on prostitution – we choose to maintain our stance against caste-based commercial sexual exploitation of women and children. Samvedna works towards a violence-free, equitable, and just society for women and children where they have equal access to opportunities to reach their full potential, and their human rights and dignity are upheld.



Our Belief

The change that we wish to see in the Bedia community is deep and internal which necessitates community participation and involvement. We believe that for these changes to become sustainable, it is imperative for the community members to feel ownership towards our initiatives. We thus emphasize on intensive community participation and support the community members to act for their own benefit.

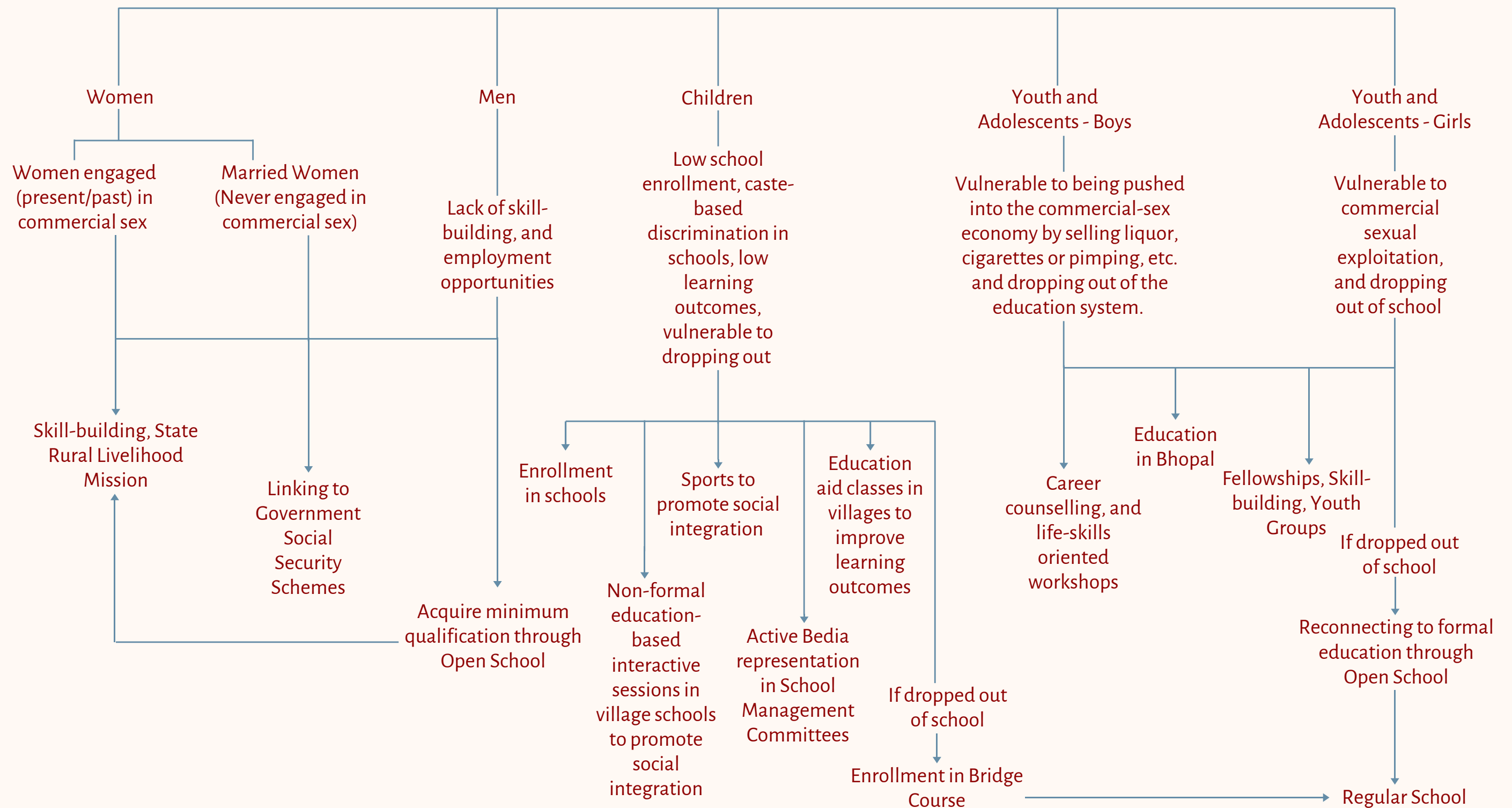
The composition of our team, more than 40% of which is constituted by members of the Bedia community, also ensures representation at every level of decision making.

Our programs rely heavily on intramural 'agents of change' – Bedia youth who wish to change their social realities – and we are committed to supporting their initiatives by linking them to education and alternative means of livelihood generation.



Our Strategy

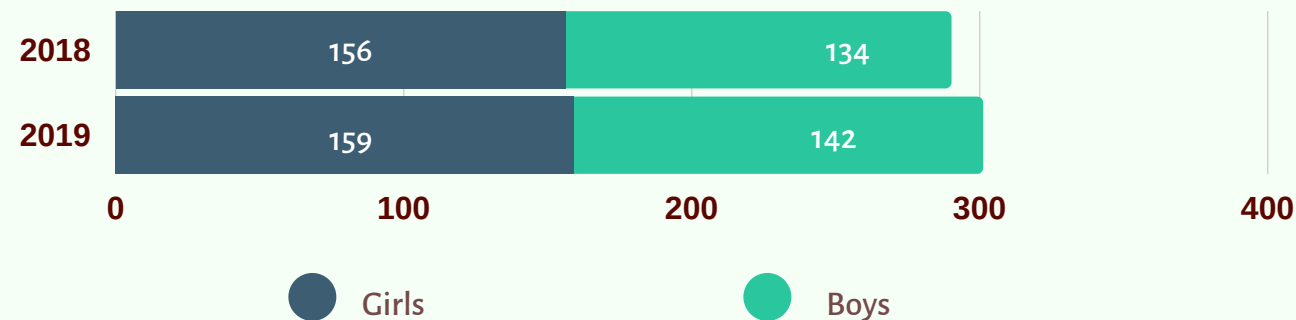
Bedia Community



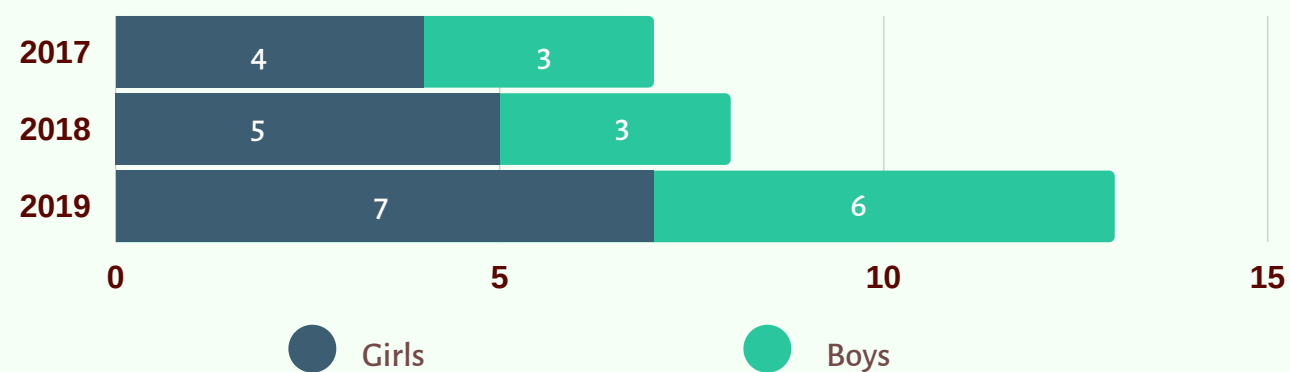
Our Programs



Program Pahal is our first step towards ensuring a bright future for all children associated with us by connecting children of school-going age and reconnecting school-dropouts to formal systems of education. As a part of this program, we conduct Education Drives which bring together various stakeholders such as parents, teachers, the State Education Department, etc. We also conduct Documentation Drives aimed at correcting existing or making new identification documents requisite for accessing various government schemes and benefits.



Number of children enrolled in schools at the end of our Education Drive and Documentation Drive.



Number of students who have cleared their Senior Secondary and Higher Secondary School Examinations through Madhya Pradesh Open School.

Stories of Change

It only takes the courage of one person to become a harbinger of change – that is what Raima didi's life has been all about. Now in her fifties, Raima didi, a Bedia woman, was pushed into caste-based commercial sexual exploitation during her adolescence. With her earnings, she supported an ailing mother and 4 children of her own. Her circumstances never limited her vision for her children; she was determined to give them a future different from her own present. However, Raima didi's sister put her elder daughter into commercial sex in her absence.

Determined to let her other children – another daughter and two sons – pursue education, Raima didi approached Samvedna; her second daughter became the first girl to come to Bhopal and pursue education in the city with Samvedna. Raima didi's elder son too joined his sister in the city. Today, her daughter has completed her Bachelors in Engineering in Electronics and Communication from a reputed private college in Bhopal and her son is pursuing his Bachelor's degree in Arts. Her youngest son is also studying in the city and has just cleared class 9.



Raima didi has been active in advocating for the education of other Bedia children, especially girls, in her village. She participates in Samvedna's Education Drives and Documentation Drives every year with gusto, encouraging other parents and children to do the same!

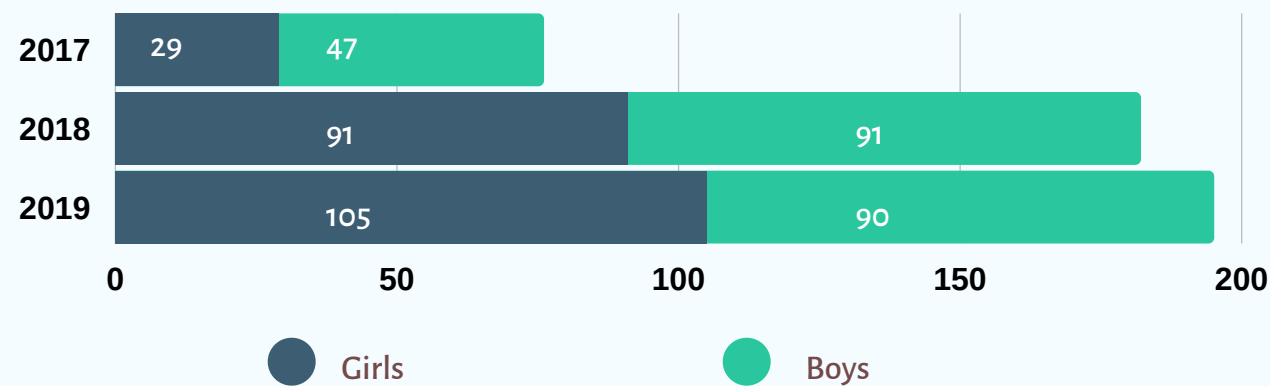
Samvedna's experience of working on the issue of intergenerational community-based commercial sexual exploitation in the Bedia community has grown with Raima didi and other women like her. She has become an inspiration for other parents in the community – Samvedna's initiative to educate children of the Bedia community has been transformed into a movement led by women like Raima didi!

Our Programs



Program Pankh aims to empower children in villages with wings of knowledge, and transform them into agents of change within their immediate realities of village and community life.

Pankh Classes, conceived to address a variety of concerns, are classes guided by Educators appointed by Samvedna in each of our project villages. These classes supplement children's regular school education and aid in bridging the gap between age-appropriate class and children's learning outcomes.



Number of children enrolled in our Pankh Education Aid Classes



य से Eureka is an anthology of ideas, and an eclectic mix of tools to convey those ideas to children. Devised as a non-formal education (NFE) platform, Eureka aims to create awareness among children about their social context, and empower them to approach their immediate reality from rights-perspective. With an aim to increase retention in primary schools and integration among children from different communities, the program introduces elements of NFE in the very formal setting of formal education – a school.

Stories by Children

एक बार की बात है, एक गाँव में पाँच बच्चे थे – रानू, शानू, मोनू, सोनू और कमलेश। पाँचो मिल कर कोई न कोई नया काम करते रहते थे।

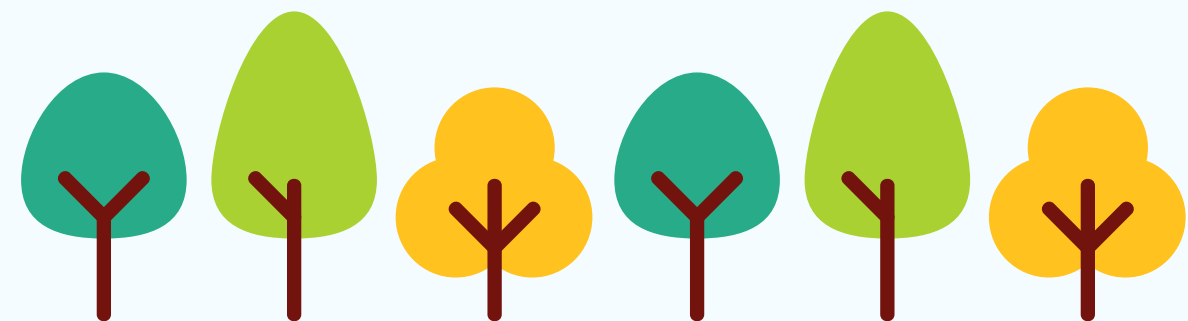
बारिश का मौसम था और बारिश के मौसम में जैसे ही पेड़-पौधे हरे होते, वे पाँचो घूमने निकल पड़ते। ऐसे ही एक दिन वे घूमते-घूमते खेत पर चले गए। वहाँ उन्हें बहुत सारे पौधे दिखे तो वे तरह-तरह के पौधे घर ले कर आ गए। पाँचों बच्चों ने मिल कर उन पौधों को सड़क के किनारे दोनों तरफ़ लगा दिया। बच्चे उन पौधों को रोज़ पानी भी देते थे और उन पेड़ों का ध्यान भी रखते थे कि कहीं कोई उन पौधों को हानि तो नहीं पहुँचा रहा है।

एक दिन बच्चों के माता पिता ने उनसे कहा कि उन्होंने फालतू ही यह पेड़ पौधे लगाए हैं...बड़े हो जायेंगे तो फिर से काटने पड़ेंगे। तब बच्चों ने अपने माता-पिता को समझाया कि हमें पेड़-पौधे नहीं काटने चाहिए।

वे बोले “हमारी किताब में लिखा है और हमारे टीचर भी यही बताते हैं कि हमें अधिक से अधिक पेड़ लगाने चाहिए! पेड़ों से हमें ऑक्सीजन मिलती है और पेड़ों से ही हमें कई और भी वस्तुएँ प्राप्त होती हैं। ये बात उनके माता पिता को भी समझ में आ गई और वे बोले, “हमने इतना तो कभी सोचा ही नहीं! बच्चे ठीक कह रहे हैं। हम भी आज से पेड़ों की रक्षा करेंगे।”

इसी प्रकार गाँव के सभी लोग पेड़ों की देख-भाल करने लगे और गाँव हरा-भरा हो गया!

Story written by children from Rajgarh district as a part of "Kahaniyon ka Sheher" Eureka session.

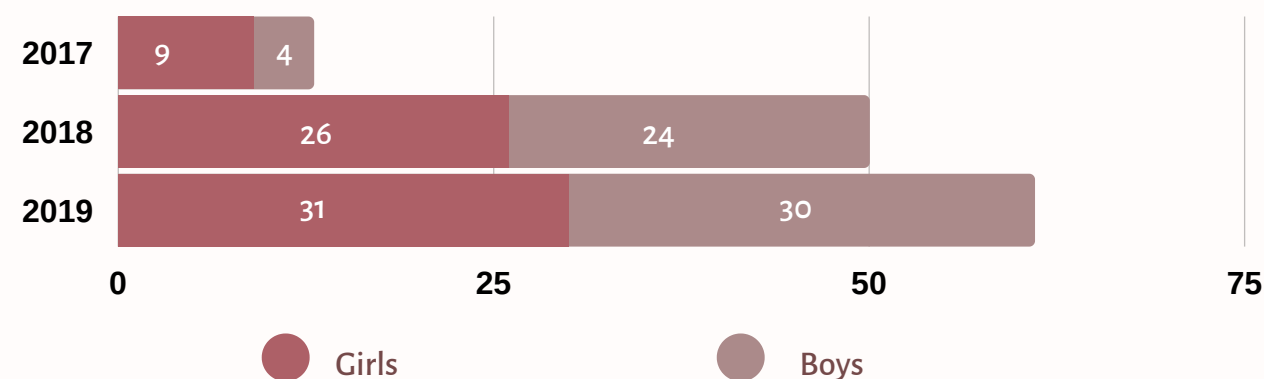


Our Programs



For our children to be able to imagine a reality that is not characterised by experiences of marginalization, it is imperative that they are removed from their prevailing environment and are placed in a setting that is replete with possibilities and opportunities.

In Bhopal, children are enrolled in government-run schools and hostels. These hostels give children the metaphorical and physical distance they require from their village. Also, when living in hostels, children have time to dedicate to their studies unlike their home-villages where they are engaged in household chores.



Stories of Change

Birth of a girl child is much celebrated in the Bedia community albeit for an unusual reason – women of the community engage in intergenerational prostitution to earn household income. Often, women in prostitution are the only source of livelihood for families and men remain unemployed and idle. As the roles are considered predestined, education is never seen as a vital part of a child's life.

Supriya, a Bedia girl from the Rajgarh district, grew up with many dreams in her eyes – the biggest being her own independence and her family's respect. Supriya cleared her secondary school exams with a marvellous 86% and with the support of her brother and Samvedna, she came to Bhopal to pursue her education further. In the city, she was enrolled in a government school and hostel where she decided to study science with biology.

Even with the difficulties of adjusting to life in the city, Supriya had her eyes set on her goal. Thus when a teacher in her school introduced her to a government scheme which helps girls train for Paramilitary Forces, she jumped at the opportunity. After she cleared the physical fitness and written examination, her training commenced!



Supriya is making the best of the opportunity that she has gotten – putting in effort in her academics and her training. With this dedication and grit, she is sure to scale new heights and fulfil all her dreams!

Our Programs



Samvedna promotes education for children as a tool to combat community-based commercial sexual exploitation of young girls in the Bedia community. Our programs are aimed at connecting and reconnecting children to formal systems of education, improving academic performance of students and increasing retention rates in village schools. Along with education, we also believe in nurturing a strong sense of community among Bedia youth and children, which will be crucial in preventing commercial sexual exploitation in the community. It is thus that with our program Ban Patang we seek to introduce sports among the community youth and children with the dual aim of promoting physical fitness and making stronger peer groups in the villages.



Samvedna, in the year 2018, with support from CRY successfully introduced badminton in two of its project villages. 6 children from the two villages had also participated in the PNB MetLife Junior Badminton Championship 2019 in Delhi and 3 of them had won sports scholarship worth rupees 1 lakh each. Junior Badminton Championship 2020 will see the participation of another 6 children from Samvedna after receiving training and nutrition support.

Stories of Change

The only two things that are on Ambika's mind when she is practising badminton are making her game stronger, and her little niece waiting for her to return home from her weekend practice sessions. "Ambu's" little niece is too young to understand that her aunt is striving to scale new heights every time she swings her racquet.

Ambika belongs to the Bedia community where young girls are commercially sexually exploited as a 'traditional occupation' to financially support their families. Ambika's mother, however, is determined to ensure a different future for her.

The tall 13-year old 8th grade student works hard to excel at everything she does – be it academics or sports. She loves to read and is passionate about learning English.

She is one of Samvedna's six children who have received the Junior Badminton Championship scholarship in the year 2019-20. She travels to Bhopal city from her village every weekend to practice. Ambika hopes to learn everything about badminton as fast as she can in order to represent her state, Madhya Pradesh, successfully.

Ambika's drive and her love for the sport have helped her scale new heights and with her dedication, she is sure to achieve her goals!



Our Programs



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This year, our children visited museums, parks and also participated in workshops!

We spent a day at Sair Sapata, and another day at the Regional Science Centre (Bhopal) where the children saw some hands-on applications of scientific principles that they learn about in school.

We also spent a few Sundays at the Chinar Park, participating in quizzes, revising before exams began or just enjoying the winter sun!



Jatan celebrates courage and the fruit it bears. The program aims to empower members of the Bedia community, especially women who are/were commercially sexually exploited, by providing them with a means to earn their livelihood and lead a dignified life



We successfully linked three women's self-help groups to the Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission and 2 Bedia youths to fellowship positions with Praxis: Institute for Participatory Practices.

Our Programs



Machaan, a residential workshop, along with providing a platform to the children to talk about their lives, also equips Samvedna's educators with unique tools to interact with children. The workshop facilitates peer-interaction among the children, and initiates career-oriented conversations with them which eventually leads to a stronger children's group in the villages, who are determined to broaden their horizons and pursue their dreams. This further fortifies Samvedna's foundations in our project villages.

Sankalp

We organized a 3-day residential workshop, "Sankalp", in Bhopal. Sankalp was envisaged as a platform where Bedia adolescents could get an opportunity to talk about their future aspirations. The workshop, focused on three groups – adolescents who have dropped out of school, those who are pursuing education (either in Bhopal or in their native villages), and those who are vulnerable to being forced into prostitution – was aimed at initiating career-oriented conversations with the participants. As an initial step, the workshop encouraged the participants to articulate their aspirations as goals and arrive at a process of achieving.



The then Deputy Director of the Nomadic, Semi-nomadic and Denotified Tribes Welfare Department, Mr Vedprakash Shrimali also joined the workshop and felicitated 8 Bedia students who'd scored more than 60% in their annual exams.



42 children and 6 staff members from 9 villages across 5 districts participated in the workshop from June 1 to June 3, 2019 in Bhopal. With various facilitators bringing a potpourri of activities to the participants, Sankalp was interactive, informative, insightful and a lot of fun!



Community Engagement

Samvedna believes in and thrives on the power of people. We believe that the true test of our efforts is people's participation and the ownership that our people show towards them. Our community engagement initiatives are thus aimed at ensuring people's participation in the change process since a program's inception and growing their involvement at every stage.

Parents' Meeting

Samvedna successfully enrolled more than 60 children in Bhopal schools and hostels in the academic year 2019-20. Bhopal represents not just a city and city life but an oasis of opportunities and possibilities where children learn equally from the city environment as much as they learn from school.

Parents are an important stakeholder in the process of child's growth and development, and their support is indispensable during a child's education. It is thus important that parents along with other stakeholders that partake in the process of a child's education work in cohesion to ensure the best interests of a child.



To underline the importance of working in tandem with each other, a parents' meeting was organized in Bhopal on September 10, 2019 at the Pastoral Centre in Bhopal. The meeting was attended by 40 parents from across 20 villages.

Parents discussed how their children pursuing education in the city was changing the perception about the Bedia community. The meeting also addressed parents' concerns about their children's wellbeing in Bhopal hostels.

The Samvedna team outlined the various activities and workshops that are conducted for the children aimed at their holistic growth and personality development, and encouraged parents to engage in the process of their children's education by enquiring about their school activities and exams.

Apart from the meeting conducted in Bhopal, parents meetings were also conducted in every village where the students' performance in Pankh Classes and village schools were discussed.

School Management Committees

School Management Committees form an important local link in the process of child education. The committee, mandated by the Right to Education Act (2010), not only understands hyperlocal issues but also has certain authority to make decisions to mitigate these issues. Having community participation in issues that affect them increases the ownership of the community towards local initiatives, and also makes the functioning of concerned authorities more transparent and accountable.

With Samvedna's consistent effort, School Management Committees have been constituted in 18 villages and have more than 100 members from the Bedia community. Members from the Bedia community also hold the positions of President and/or Vice President in 10 Committees.

A capacity-building training of the Samvedna staff was conducted to understand the functioning of the SMCs and roles and responsibilities of all members.

Further we conducted regular meetings and trainings with SMCs in every village to support them as they worked for the improvement of the village schools.



Stories of Change

One of Samvedna's project villages in the Bhopal district, constituted by 96 families, 31 of which are Bedia, has been plagued by stringent hierarchical caste dynamics. These dynamics also affected the functioning of the school and the School Management Committee.

Samvedna representative from the village says, "...we (Bedia) were never involved in the functioning (of the School Management Committee). The school teachers didn't give us any information..."

Multiple meetings were conducted before the constitution of the Committee in the village by our representative. Using the meetings also as an opportunity to establish cohesion within the village society, members from all the communities residing in the village were encouraged to participate. Teachers of the school also attended the meetings with the community. Samvedna members focused on creating a dialogue about the functioning of the school and parents' concerns regarding the education of their children.

Thus, when the new School Management Committee was constituted in 2019, the committee not only had 4 Bedia members but the President of the Committee also belonged to the Bedia community. This has led to greater transparency in the functioning of the committee, especially in terms of the money received by the SMC and its expenditure.



With the new committee's efforts, the school has recently been whitewashed. Also, the students are now receiving mid-day meals according to pre-decided menu as opposed to earlier when the meals were irregular and insipid.

SMC meetings are conducted regularly and non-members also take interest in the education of their children and the functioning of the village school. Getting the school electrified is next on the SMC's agenda!

District and Block-level Meetings

Striding towards our goal of increased community participation in child protection and education in the Bedia community, Samvedna concentrated its efforts towards reviving old and forming new Village Child Protection Committees, Village Education Committees, and School Management Committees in our project villages. To this effect, we organized block and district level meetings where representatives from various non-governmental organizations and government line departments interacted with members from the Bedia community about the roles and responsibilities, and the powers of these committees.

These meetings were also aimed at understanding how various systems interact with beneficiaries through various schemes and policies to achieve multiple goals. During the meetings, we particularly focused on schemes of the Nomadic, Semi-nomadic and Denotified Tribes Welfare Department, the Women and Child Development Department, the State Rural Livelihoods Mission, Madhya Pradesh School Education Department and respective Block Resource Centres.



State-level Community Representatives Consultation Meeting

Samvedna has been working with the Bedia community for over a decade and along with promoting education and alternative means of livelihood-generation, our efforts have been concentrated towards promoting cohesiveness within the community.

As an organization, we have had the opportunity to interact with other organizations and individuals who are working with similar interests. To strengthen our bond with fellow organizations, and community leaders, Samvedna had organized a State-level Community Representatives Consultation Meeting on January 4-5, 2020. The meeting was attended by 29 representatives from the Bedia community from across 8 districts – Bhopal, Rajgarh, Guna, Raisen, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Gwalior, and Morena – in Madhya Pradesh. Additional Director, Bhopal of Nomadic, Semi Nomadic and Denotified Tribes Welfare Department, Mr. Anil Soni and Inspector, Mr. Shahid Khan also participated in the meeting.

With the new committee's efforts, the school has recently been whitewashed. Also, the students are now receiving mid-day meals according to pre-decided menu as opposed to earlier when the meals were irregular and insipid.

SMC meetings are conducted regularly and non-members also take interest in the education of their children and the functioning of the village school. Getting the school electrified is next on the SMC's agenda!



In Pictures...



Connecting Bedia to the Mainstream

Samvedna believes that change can only be brought when members of the Bedia community have the opportunity to speak and to be heard. It is thus our constant effort to connect members of the community to and create opportunities and platforms where members of the Bedia community may be able to present their issues and concerns, and create a representation for themselves.



Present Scenario of Trafficking in Persons – Towards Evolving Best Practices

To be able to understand the gravity of the issue of trafficking in persons, it is essential to be able to see ourselves – the communities we're surrounded by, the work that we do and the policies we interact with – as a part of the larger global problem that trafficking is.

The Bedia community stands at the nexus of entrenched patriarchal attitudes and vicious caste hierarchy. While the society is currently experiencing and responding to globalization and an increased media exposure, it has remained unchanged in terms of its hierarchical composition based on caste – for a community like the Bedia whose women and young girls are coerced into prostitution as their traditional occupation, this translates into a looming threat of trafficking.



Thus, on World Day against Trafficking in Persons, July 30, 2019 Samvedna organized a stakeholder consultation meeting with an aim to understand the present day scenario of trafficking in India especially in the state of Madhya Pradesh. The perspectives presented by different stakeholders will enrich the work that is being done to combat this global epidemic at our local level.

An experience sharing exercise undertaken by various stakeholders lead to a discussion on various best practices revolving around the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of trafficking.

The Stakeholder Consultation Meeting, held at the Pastoral Centre in Bhopal, was attended by over 45 representatives from various stakeholder groups – Dr. Raka Arya from National Law Institute University (NLIU), Mr. Maloy Jain, AIG (Training) from Madhya Pradesh Police, Mr. Ashutosh Mishra, ADJ District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Mr. Brajesh Chouhan, Member of the Madhya Pradesh Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (MPCPCR) are a few people who were present at the meeting.



Jawali Then and Now – Sharing Impacts and Way Forward

Samvedna, with cooperation from the Department of Women and Child Development, conducted a study to understand the Jawali Yojana and its implementation. Jawali Yojana, came into being in 1991, is the only government scheme being implemented for the benefit of communities that are engaged in inter-generational prostitution.

To draw a meaningful conclusion to the study by ensuring that our findings and suggestions are translated onto the field, Samvedna organized a 2-day report and experience sharing exercise on 24th to 25th September, 2019 in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

Samvedna members presented the findings of the study and shared their suggestions with implementers from the four different agencies and representatives from the beneficiary groups on the first day. Various points were discussed at length and finalized for the following day.



On the second day, representatives from different implementing agencies, beneficiary groups, and concerned government departments came together to hold a dialogue on the implementation of the scheme and propose necessary changes rooted in experiences on.

The meeting was attended by Ms. Tripti Tripathi, Joint Director, Department of Women and Child Development, Mr. Prabhat Thakur and Mr. Quraishi on September 25, 2019.

Ek Jutata Diwas

For the past 2 years, January 19 has been celebrated as “Ek Jutata Diwas”. On this day 12 years ago, a 15 year old Pardhi girl named Tinti Bai committed suicide after suffering from a year-long of police brutality and violence. The day marks an important point in the Denotified consciousness and is recognized as a celebration of their identities, culture and their distinct histories.

For *Ek Jutata Diwas* 2020, Samvedna and Muskaan, a Bhopal-based NGO that works with vulnerable communities, specifically the Pardhi on issues of education, health, identity, violence, and survival needs, came together to mark the day

The event was conceptualized in the form of 5 corners that talked about aspects of people’s culture, education, livelihood, mental health, and their experiences of ‘othering’. The two organizations also presented the findings of their respective studies conducted with the Bedia and the Pardhi communities.

More than 300 participants from the Pardhi, Bedia, Kanjar, Banchhada, and Sansi communities were a part of the event. More than 100 Bedia people from across 8 districts of Madhya Pradesh participated in the event.

Bedia women who've actively come forward to educate their children were facilitated during the event. They addressed all the participants present and urged them to ensure their children's wellbeing and education.



Ensuring Higher Education is One Stop Closer to Stop Child Prostitution in the Bedia Community

Mr. Ramani Ranjan presented a paper titled “Ensuring Higher Education is One Stop Closer to Stop Child Prostitution in the Bedia Community” in the Nomad Inc. conference held in Delhi on December 06, 2020. The paper spoke about the role of education as a tool to change the socio-economic status of Denotified Tribes. With a special focus on the Bedia community, the paper analyzed how the introduction of education has reduced the entry of young girls into prostitution.

The paper is based on interviews conducted with 15 Bedia women who have completed their higher secondary education. The paper also outlined the role of family, community, non-governmental organizations, and the government in the education process of a child.

Our Gratitude

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