



## **Concept Note**

### ***Umang: Breaking Free***

#### **About Gramin Shiksha Kendra**

GSK was set-up as a response to poor quality of education in government schools in villages around Ranthambhor National Park of Rajasthan. Our vision is to have thoughtful, supportive and sensitive citizens who will create a world which is sustainable, less inequitable, and believes in peaceful co-existence. We aim to reform education to set the children free of exclusion and discrimination, help them being curious, supportive, sensitive, thoughtful and aware, and having abilities to take on responsibilities. GSK established three Uday Samudayik Pathshalas to demonstrate their idea of quality education to parents' community, so they demand quality from the government schools. Through Vistaar programme, we helped government school teachers to adopt child-centered practices in their classrooms and strengthened the School Management Committees. We now aim to eliminate discrimination and exclusion of vulnerable groups - adolescent girls and DNT communities, to help them lead their lives from a position of strength.

#### **Problem Statement:**

Our work over the past eighteen years has enabled us to offer concrete learning to the education ecosystem.

Patriarchal practices affect the day to day lives of the adolescent girls and so they are suppressed and often lack basic life skills to lead their own lives. While interacting with the parents, we realized that there is a constant fear among them, about the girls breaking free and running-away or eloping if they are educated enough and have agency. The stringent patriarchal norms in families do not allow the girls to exercise freedom to explore and take informed decisions in their lives especially related to the education, marriage, and career. While working with the adolescent girls, they have admitted that they do not get safe non-restrictive spaces within the families, or schools, or the villages to discuss about their feelings, apprehensions, and desires. The families also do not allow the spaces for the girls to engage intellectually in the household or societal affairs.

The sexuality of the adolescents especially of the girls do not often get recognized by the parents and discussed. And therefore, their intellectual hunger remains unattended and unserved throughout their lives. The girls do not have the role-models in their neighbourhood - who can inspire them to lead their lives from a position of strength.

Adolescent girls residing in the periphery of Ranthambhor National Park run the risk of dropping out after passing class 8<sup>th</sup> due to a variety of socio-cultural and economic reasons (Substitution Effect (Kabeer, 2003), puberty, livelihood sustainability threats). In this milieu, academic grades are a very poor (and a rather feeble) incentive for learning. These girls tend to drop out successively in higher classes.

#### About the pilot programme - Umang



GSK has been working with children and adolescents for more than a decade. The alumni especially the girls graduated from Uday Schools were evolved into confident learners who have excelled in various areas in their career and act as the role-models for their younger siblings. To be more focused and realizing that the girls in their adolescence are more vulnerable owing to patriarchal norms and gender disparity, GSK took a conscious decision to work with them through Umang programme. The first pilot for Umang began in August 2016 in four hamlets with 29 girls from socio-economically marginalized community. Building upon the learning of the pilot project, we resumed the programme in 2020 with another cohort of 25 girls at Shyampura village of the district.

The course was aimed to reduce dropout rates in class 9<sup>th</sup> by engaging the girls enrolled in government school through an intensive training of academic subjects as well as of life skills, which was designed to suit their context and learning needs. We continued our support to the

girls in the subsequent year making sure that the girls pass grade 10 board exams. The pilot phase of the programme has provided us insights into how best the programme can be run. It has helped us understand the program area better, the communities and their concerns better, the aspirations of the girls better and most importantly it has helped us understand our preparedness and limitations better.

### Umang - breaking free

We now propose to initiate the program with more village communities and schools in our programme area. We would work with those at the risk of dropping out in class 9<sup>th</sup>.

There are three main objectives of the programme:

- i. To support the girls, develop core life-skills and resilience to be able to challenge the adverse forces that could prevent them from pursuing their aspirations in their lives.
- ii. To academically support girls in class 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> who are at the risk of dropping-out of education and enable them continue their education
- iii. And eventually, to create role-models within each of the village communities around Ranthambhor who acts as change-agents in their communities.

We shall adopt a need-based approach and accordingly relevant strategies have been worked out. We have chalked out dedicated strategies to take different stakeholders- parents, teachers, opinion leaders, SMCs, and Panchayats on board with us. A bouquet of activities such as leadership camp, academic and life-skills sessions, Dance movement therapy, sports camps, kishori manch, STEM exhibition, exposure visit, reading club, etc. that complement each other shall be carried out to facilitate the group for their holistic development.

The duration of the *Umang* programme at a location will be of 5 years, during which four batches of girls from each of the centres will be graduated. The programme will take the enrolled girls through a two years' long course where girls will attend the sessions five times a week after their regular school-hours.

### Expected Outcome

We intend to strengthen the agency of these adolescents. This program goes beyond getting girls into school. The success of our program would be attained if the class 9<sup>th</sup> goes aspire to complete all levels of education with the skills to effectively compete in the society; learn the skills to navigate and adapt to a changing world; make decisions about their own lives and contribute to their communities.

The expected outcomes of the program are as follows:

- Stronger agency of girls in the intervention villages
- The confident cohorts become role-models for the younger generation of girls in the villages
- Girls advocate for their rights and of the other girls in their village communities
- Reduced school drop-out rate of girls in the intervention villages

- Reduced occurrence of early-age marriages
- Improved core life-skills among the girls
- Parents play a supportive role in the holistic development of their girl children.
- Improved social-capital among the girls
- Improved health and nutritional level among girls

This project aims to equip girls with confidence and life skills to gain consciousness about their agency. This would complement their academic competency developed during the programme in the areas in the periphery of Ranthambhor National Park.

The impact stories of our first cohort of girls can be accessed using this [link](#).

Carrying this forward, in the next 5 years, GSK aims to reach 2500 adolescent girls across rural Ranthambhore who will act as change-agents to challenge and overcome patriarchal norms and beliefs in the society.