The changing lives of women adapting digital tools
Digital Roshni
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This book is the first in a series of four publications that describe the socio-behavioural insight of girls and women across villages in the country where they are being introduced to digital media, social media, ICT tools, community media, computers, mobiles and other modern digital tools or devices.

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As per readers’ wish
Roshni, shamama, noor, bijli - all of them have the almost same meaning, ‘light’. They are feminine, and they provide or spread light around them. If we truly begin to consider our women, girls, daughters, wives, sisters, mothers as sources of light, our world would be far better, equal, knowledgeable, empathetic and loving than it is today.

This is what we have been learning at Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) through its various projects, especially the widespread Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs). In the last 13 years, DEF has been able to spread its wings across the country, covering more than 150 locations in 80 districts across 22 states. At these places, DEF has managed to bring thousands of people and hundreds of houses under one platform (online medium) through broadband towards its mission to provide last-mile connectivity through wireless technologies.

In these 13 years, DEF has helped create innumerable impact stories. And so, this International Women’s Day (March 8, 2016), the organisation decided to look under its umbrella to find cases of success, to see how it has been able to empower India’s girls and women, to gauge the spread of digital literacy across villages, and to explore how DEF centres have been able to reach out to women to provide them easy access to rights and entitlements. More importantly, to reflect upon how DEF has been able to bring forward the women and make them have their voices heard, in their houses and their society or community.

So here, in the first of a four-part series, we bring to you stories that discuss socio-behavioural changes among women who
have been impacted through DEF’s various programmes — such as CIRC, Soochna Seva, Wireless for Communities and eNGO, among others — that offer access to information, digital skills and digital literacy, besides information services, last-mile broadband wireless Internet connectivity and assistance to go online.

In this first part of the series, we share with you 25 stories of women and girls — all from remote villages — who were encouraged to share their lives and their stories with our team. It was a rigorous process of documenting their stories and an even more tedious task to convert their stories into simple illustrations which could be consumed by every reader. We hope to bring out a total of 100 stories from across the country.

Meanwhile, we hope you enjoy these 25 stories and they will give you a chance to reflect upon several issues related to the status of women, especially the advantages of digital inclusion as a means to achieve gender parity. We also request you to share your feedback with us to help us provide you with better content in our forthcoming parts.

Warm regards,
Osama Manzar
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CHANDRAKALA MEENA

MY MOTHER TOLD ME THOUGH EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT, A WOMAN SHOULD STAY AT HOME AND KNOW HOW TO RUN HER FAMILY.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A GIRL’S HOME BELONGS TO HER IN-LAWS.

Located in Alwar district of Rajasthan, village Malakhera is mostly inhabited by an agricultural community. DEF runs a CIRC in this village.

Age 32; married; 2 brothers and 2 sisters; Sibling rank #4; Education level MA in Political Science; Background Both her sisters were engaged when they were six months old and one year old, respectively. Her brother always acted as a mentor and teacher who encouraged her to go to a nearby school in the village despite their father’s opposition. Their mother, though an illiterate, supports her children’s dream of acquiring education. She is like a friend to Chandrakala. Their father has a more conservative role in the family, he is worried and scared about their daughters getting into a bad company or causing trouble.
Wakes up at 4am to milk the buffaloes

Married at 22, mother-in-law opposed her further education, but husband is supportive of her decision; often helps her out with household chores and takes care of the kid so she can study. He also sneaks extra readings to her.

Mother-in-law is happier that she goes out. She would not let her work alone without her husband.

Past: 10 years ago

She and her sister take buffaloes for grazing

Present

Works at CIRC from 9am - 5pm

Mobilisation: talks to local people, conduct surveys

She goes to the market with her husband and child (mostly for the sake of the child).

When she has time, she studies law.

She prefers tablet over computer. She uses internet for recipe search, mehandi design, job vacancies, to check train schedule.

She receives practical knowledge. Villagers respect her.
Chandrakala’s Aspirations

Help and educate women to stand up on their own feet, to be more independent

Meet new people

Teach more and more children about social science
I would tell my daughter
a woman can match up
to a man. Anything a man
can do, a woman can do.
AARTI DEVI

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD RESPECT HER IN-LAWS AND TRY TO ADJUST IN THE FAMILY.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD BE FRIENDLY WITH THE ELDERS.

Age unknown; married, 1 son & 1 daughter; 2 brothers and 2 sisters; Sibling rank #2; Education level 7th standard; Background Aarti has grown up in a joint family. Her father has held two jobs — he works as an accountant and a wall painter. Aarti’s mother is a housewife who sometimes works in the field. She is strict and scolds the children when they’re not focused, if they’re playing outside barefoot, or when they don’t take proper care of their books. All of Aarti’s siblings had the choice to study or drop out of school; it was up to them what they chose. Aarti has a very close bond with her middle brother who is one year younger to her. Whenever she needs help with household chores, she asks him. Aarti’s childhood dream is to fly an aeroplane.

At Barefoot College in Tilonia, Ajmer district of Rajasthan, DEF has set up campus-wide wireless broadband connection, under its Wireless for Community programme, besides two CIRCs and a community radio station.

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Wakes up at 5am and prepares food for buffalo
Works in kitchen: prepares chapati
Enjoys dancing. She dances and sings while doing household chores. She listens to music on TV.
She gets time to nap for a few hours before commencing her evening chores.

Past: 10 years ago

She lives in a big joint family: mother-in-law, father-in-law, four brothers and their wives and ten children
Makes chai for everyone in the family

Present

Wakes up at 5am: prepares food for buffalo, cleans and cooks
9am: reaches Barefoot College, and gets ready for her radio programmes
7 hours of daily broadcast divided into 3 time slots
Because she wears earphones all day, her ears are beginning to suffer a bit.
She uses email, but has very little time for Facebook. She likes to ‘google’ about basic knowledge such as pension guarantee and government services.
She now uses her mobile phone to listen to music and talk to her children.
She does not like to look at the screen (TV or computer) at home, because she is on screen all day at work anyway.

She does not have enough time for her family.
Aarti’s Aspirations

Help more women learn about computer and radio programmes

Learn skills and try out different opportunities, and learn to speak better English
I would tell my daughter a woman should be a good listener. She should listen to people carefully before reacting. It will help her in the future.
Age 43; married; 1 brother and 3 sisters; Sibling rank #2; Education level BA in Political Science; Background Asma’s father is a businessman who is very disciplined, strict and punctual. Her mother is a very loving, protective and strong woman who has always been supportive of what she likes to do. The family, however, had some financial difficulties in the old days. The siblings are very close to each other but they had difficulties in opening up to their father. If they wanted something, they approached their mother and asked for support. The mother then delivered the message to the children’s father. However, their father passed away in 1988, when Asma was 15 years old. Asma believes that wherever she stands today, it is because of her mother’s hard work in bringing everyone together.

Sonapur is a semi-urban region of Assam located near the state capital Dispur. A large population in the region is engaged in agricultural farming. DEF operates one of its oldest CIRCs in Sonapur.
Past: 10 years ago

She is a strict but friendly teacher. She used to receive the most number of gifts from students on teacher’s appreciation day. Her former students are still in touch with her.

She practice her singing on harmonium when she has free time.

She has been learning Hindustani vocal music since 1991, and has received a degree. From 1991-1997, she performed on stage, radio, and TV.

When she comes home at 9pm, her mom always has dinner ready on the table.

This is the time when her older sister, her mom and she share everything that has happened in the day. Her brother is in Delhi.

Present

School at 9am; she teaches Assamese and Hindi

She gives tuition classes in the morning at 6am and in the evening from 5-9pm.

Wakes up at 6am, and completes a few chores

When she has free time, she visits her neighbours and has simple talks.

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Mobilisation activities: she travels to different villages and talks to grassroots people and tells them about government schemes, computer training programmes and encourages them to join CIRC.

9:30am reaches CIRC office, and remains busy until 5pm. She is mostly busy with official paperwork.

She doesn’t like to use computer outside office but she really appreciates the use of Google. She believes there are many things one could find through Google.

She likes to flip through the dictionary, read online or learn recipes from video tutorials.

She practice her singing on harmonium when she has free time.

When she comes home at 9pm, her mom always has dinner ready on the table.

This is the time when her older sister, her mom and she share everything that has happened in the day. Her brother is in Delhi.
Asma’s Aspiration

80% of people in her locality should know about computer
I would tell my daughter a woman should have a pure heart. She should strive for her dreams and ignore those who discriminate. A woman can achieve anything she desires.
DURGESH KANWAR

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD BE FREE TO DO ANYTHING.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD SET NO BOUNDARIES FOR HER ACTIONS.

At Barefoot College in Tilonia, Ajmer district of Rajasthan, DEF has set up campus-wide wireless broadband connection under its Wireless for Community programme, besides two CIRCs and a community radio station.

Age 26; married/widow; 1 brother; Sibling rank #1; Education level Double MA in History and Sociology, nursing; Background Born in Tilonia, Durgesh, eldest of the two siblings, was brought up like a boy. Her mom always thinks on her behalf, and brings home anything she thinks Durgesh would need. Durgesh has been observing her parents working in the social sector at Barefoot College for several years. She first saw her mother receive training and now watches her train others. Unfortunately, Durgesh lost her husband in an accident just a few months after their wedding.
Wakes up at 6am and does chores: fetches water from hand pump.

She wakes up at 6am and starts her household chores.

In the afternoon when she returns to Barefoot College campus, she plays with children in the campus: football, volleyball.

She has limited contacts on WhatsApp, but her friends and family often send funny photos and jokes through WhatsApp.

Dinner time is family time where everyone shares their day stories.

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After tenth standard, she moved to Kishargarh to continue her education because science stream was not available in her village; it is then she realised that the world is really big beyond Tilonia.

Her mom would ask her how she remembers her vast vocabulary.

The family does not have a phone; they go to the PCO booth in the campus to call her grandparents.

From 9am to 5pm, she works in the campus’ pharmacy.

She gives people injections, provides prescribed medicine and does general administrative reporting work.

She uses the Internet to research about virus and get updates on science. She always finds it amazing to see how fast people can type.

People around the campus like to come and ask her questions regarding medicine and science.

Past: 10 years ago

Attends school at 10am. Favourite subject is science

Past: 10 years ago

Sometimes, she enjoys the atmosphere, and likes to watch and not play.

She likes to spend time on apps, playing general knowledge quizzes.

Her mom would ask her how she remembers her vast vocabulary.

Dinner time is family time where everyone shares their day stories.

Sometimes, she enjoys the atmosphere, and likes to watch and not play.

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People around the campus like to come and ask her questions regarding medicine and science.
She believes it is very important to be close to one’s family and fulfill their needs.

She would like to be involved in a science-related career.

**Durgesh’s Aspirations**
I would tell my daughter a woman can do whatever she wants, and she doesn’t have to care about what others think. A woman should not be seen as a burden on her family.
Her schooling stopped at age 16, when she got married. After eleven years, she convinced her in-laws and husband to let her pursue further education under three conditions: never flunk any class, never complain about housework and take no external coaching education. 

**GEETA SWARNKAR**

**MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF HER FAMILY.**

*Tamnar is a semi-urban area in Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh. The area is known for coal mining, and had access to only expensive digital education until DEF opened a CIRC here.*

*Age 44; married, 3 children; 1 brother and 2 sisters; Sibling rank #2; Education level MA in Political Science; Background Her parents are protective. Geeta’s father is a primary school teacher who never discriminates between genders and takes everyone’s opinions when making decisions. Geeta’s mother is a housewife. Whenever Geeta goes out, she needs to be accompanied by either her mother or her brother. Geeta was married early (before she turned 20) because her parents believe that it is difficult to find a decent guy when a girl is older. Now, she is married to a man who is 10 years elder to her. In her initial years of marriage, there were a few frictions between her and her in-laws due to dowry complications. However, Geeta proved to be a dedicated and understanding daughter-in-law, and soon overcame the phase.*
Wakes up at 6am, prepares lunch for children, gets them ready for school, and prepares tea for in-laws.

Helps children with homework. She reads their textbooks and helps them with all subjects.

She spends time with neighbours; they paint and stitch together. She also paints curtain and sofa cushions.

She reads books and magazines and tries out new recipes.

Geeta adjusts her routine according to her husband’s shift at work.

She wanted to teach in school but at the time, she wasn’t allowed, because she doesn’t have a degree.

Study time shifts according to her husband’s schedule: 12am to 2am or 8:30am to 9:30am.

Her schooling stopped at age 16, when she got married. After eleven years, she convinced her in-laws and husband to let her pursue further education under three conditions: never flunk any class, never complain about housework and take no external coaching education.

Past: 10 years ago

Her children do not live in the village: one lives in Europe, another lives in Chennai and the third lives in Chhattisgarh. Her son in Europe sends her recipes.

Everyday, she chooses different routes to go to the centre so she can visit different villages on the way and learn about their conditions. Because of this, she makes many friends through her social service work, which has become her hobby.

She leaves home at 8am, and reaches CIRC centre around 9am. She educates girls, makes reports, holds panchayat meetings.

Past: 10 years ago

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She also teaches English to village children and helps teenage boys get away from drug abuse.

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Geeta’s Aspirations

She hopes for an empowered society for women where there is zero discrimination between genders.

Wants to care for senior citizens; hopes for them to spend the rest of their lives in joy.

Reduction in poverty and zero drug abuse

Ways to empower women

- Encourage women to study and acquire education opportunities.
- Translate household chores to livelihood opportunities.
- Connect various self help groups (SHG) with different institutions.
I would tell my daughter that a woman should be a good human being, and maintain the balance between being a mother, a sister and her other roles. A woman has the ability to analyse and feel deeper; she should not feel inferior to men.
GEETA DEVI

MY MOTHER TOLD ME
A WOMAN SHOULD TAKE CARE OF
HER HUSBAND AND HER
HUSBAND’S FAMILY.

At Barefoot College in Tilonia, Ajmer
district of Rajasthan, DEF has set up
campus-wide wireless broadband connection
under its Wireless for Community
programme, besides two CIRCs and a
community radio station.

Age 40; married, 2 sons and 1 daughter;
4 brothers and 2 sisters; Sibling rank  #2;
Education level 3rd standard; Background
Her parents are farmers who believe girls
can do everything. Geeta’s mother is very
dedicated to her children’s upbringing; she
used to feed them as soon as they would
get out of bed. Geeta’s father passed away
when she was very young. As Geeta grew
up, she was taught the traditional values of
women hidden under their veils. When she
heard about Barefoot College, she became
curious about its culture as it seemed to be
a completely different world. Though, initial-
ly, her husband was unwilling of her wish to
visit the campus, he let her go. She then
started working at Barefoot College in the
manual labour section and, sometimes,
does patchwork for bed sheets.
She wakes up at 5am to cook, cleans, and helps children get ready for school.

At Barefoot College, she also helps build buildings.

She is always very supportive of her children’s education.

Past: 10 years ago

She always has the desire for learning, so she tries out many different things at Barefoot. The first time she saw a computer, she thought it was a TV.

She learns how to type in Hindi, to scan documents, and copy CDs.

She helps with farm work at Barefoot College.

Wireless Internet was implemented a few months before the interview.

She wakes up at 5am, cooks for everyone and gets ready for office.

She reaches office at 9am. She catalogues and archives digital materials.

Present

She starts learning how to use the Internet, she’s still exploring her interest and its potential. She reads news online.

She has been learning to catalogue media in the video library since 2005. Sometimes, she would receive videos from external agency as well.

She now owns a smartphone, which she uses to call her mother almost every day, depending on the available balance on her phone.
She wants to return to her village, which is 150-200km away from Tilonia and open a computer centre, where she can train villagers and also earn a little from helping others type out documents. She would charge 10 rupees/page.

Geeta’s Aspiration
I would tell my daughter a woman can live a good life, serve her own family with honesty and integrity, and become whatever she wants to become.
GIZALA PARVEEN

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD SUPPORT EDUCATION.

MY GRANDFATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD STUDY, MAKE WISE DECISIONS AND NOT MINGLE WITH BOYS.

Shamshabad, with limited rail and road connectivity, is a semi-urban area located in Farukkhabad region of Uttar Pradesh. DEF operates a CIRC here.

Age 20; unmarried; 1 brother and 3 sisters; Sibling rank #5; Education level first year in BA; Background Gizala has very friendly parents who are supportive of their children’s education. Her mother is a simple, obedient woman who expresses that girls should do what they like. However, she didn’t allow Gizala to go anywhere without a trusted company. Gizala's father owns an electronic shop where her brother has been working since the age of seven. Gizala has a close bond with her sisters.
Aside from Gmail and Facebook, she likes to search for images for design inspiration. She replicates the drawing on paper and paints it on clothes. Sometimes when she is curious about the author of a reading material, she would look it up. When she asks her sister to join CIRC, her sister tells her to learn first and then show her. After that, she will consider joining.

She goes to CIRC every day because it is only 3 to 4 houses away from her place. At the centre, she connects with friends and checks exam data sheet. She shares a mobile with her sister. They never feel they need to have personal mobile phones. When she is at the centre, the phone stays with her sister.

Her brother has two mobile phones: one for games, the other for work.

Her father wants to watch news on TV, but she and her sister want to watch a soap opera or listen to songs. Sometimes they fight for the remote.

She shares a mobile with her sister. They never feel they need to have personal mobile phones. When she is at the centre, the phone stays with her sister.

She draws, paints and colours scenery and portraits.

She goes to CIRC every day because it is only 3 to 4 houses away from her place. At the centre, she connects with friends and checks exam data sheet.

She does not attend college every day, because it is too far away from home. Even the teacher does not go every day.

She enjoys designing patterns on clothings.

Before 2005, the family used PCOs to call relatives; in 2005 dad bought a landline phone and her classmates now call her up to talk about school-related issues.

She plays badminton with her girl friends.

She and her sisters play with the four dolls that they have. They stitch new clothes for the dolls. Sometimes, the mom helps them too.

Once a week, she, her sisters and her mom visit grandma’s place and chat with her uncle and aunt. Gizala’s brother is shy, so he stays home with their dad. Their aunt sometimes play doll games with them too.

She shares a mobile with her sister. They never feel they need to have personal mobile phones. When she is at the centre, the phone stays with her sister.

Aside from Gmail and Facebook, she likes to search for images for design inspiration. She replicates the drawing on paper and paints it on clothes. Sometimes when she is curious about the author of a reading material, she would look it up.

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She does not attend college every day, because it is too far away from home. Even the teacher does not go every day.

She enjoys designing patterns on clothings.

Past: 10 years ago

Everybody cooks together

Her father wants to watch news on TV, but she and her sister want to watch a soap opera or listen to songs. Sometimes they fight for the remote.

She draws, paints and colours scenery and portraits.

Once a week, she, her sisters and her mom visit grandma’s place and chat with her uncle and aunt. Gizala’s brother is shy, so he stays home with their dad. Their aunt sometimes play doll games with them too.

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Aside from Gmail and Facebook, she likes to search for images for design inspiration. She replicates the drawing on paper and paints it on clothes. Sometimes when she is curious about the author of a reading material, she would look it up.
Gizala’s Aspiration

She wants to be a home-economics teacher and provide others information about nutrition, diet, stitching.
I would tell my daughter 
a woman can be what 
she wants to be and she 
should not let anyone 
tell her otherwise.
HASEENA AGWAN

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD BE EDUCATED.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD WORK HARD AND THINK.

At Barefoot College in Tilonia, Ajmer district of Rajasthan, DEF has set up campus-wide wireless broadband connection under its Wireless for Community programme, besides two CIRCs and a community radio station.

Age 19; unmarried; 1 brother and 5 sisters; Sibling rank #4; Education level 2nd year in BA; Background Haseena’s parents are very supportive of her goals in life. Both her parents work at Barefoot College; her mother is an accountant and her father works in the iron and welding department. Haseena is very close to one of her elder sisters who has a very pretty handwriting. Haseena believes that marriage is not necessary in life.
Past: 10 years ago

Grew up in Barefoot College. She roams and visits different centres.

In school, her favourite subjects were History and Geography.

She submerges 75% of her time in books. She also enjoys writing poems and stories.

While chatting with her older siblings, they give her advice for her future.

“...if you don’t know what to do, I’ll tell you what to do.”

Flies kite and plays different village games with children in Tilonia.

She loves singing: old Hindi songs, Barefoot songs and prayer songs.

Wakes up and starts with her chores: cleans, makes tea, cuts vegetables with her mom in the kitchen.

Uses Internet to search for information for studies.

She searches for education material, videos to learn how she can teach better.

Trains villagers, solar mamas and night school children to use computers and iPads.

Teaches video calling, Facetime, email, and photo sharing from phone.

She prays every day.

Present
Haseena’s Aspirations

She is interested in community social work.

She wants to study about the history of the world and travel to big cities.

She wishes to learn more about photography.

She wants to live close to her family.

She is interested in community social work.
I would tell my daughter a woman should be brave, educated and independent. When one woman is educated in the family, the entire family is educated.
KHUSHBOO

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD STRUGGLE AND WORK HARD.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD NOT WORK OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.

At Barefoot College in Tilonia, Ajmer district of Rajasthan, DEF has set up campus-wide wireless broadband connection under its Wireless for Community programme, besides two CIRCs and a community radio station.

Age 24; unmarried, 1 brother Sibling rank #2; Education level 8th standard; Background Khushboo is very close to her brother. As children, they would sometimes stop her father from beating up their mother. Khushboo’s father did not like her mother working outside the house; nevertheless, she has been working in Barefoot College’s craft shop. She also trains women in creating new designs and producing craft material. As a child, Khushboo would visit Tilonia with her mother and roam around with MKSS Founder Aruna Roy. Khushboo expresses that she was never really good at studying. Khushboo’s father passed away in 2006 after succumbing to jaundice.
She wakes up at 6am and gets ready for school by 7am.

She helps her mom chop vegetables and make dough for chapati.

Her mom is like a friend to her. Her mom used to be a tailor. She likes to observe and spend time with the girls who come to learn from her mom.

When she comes back from school to the old campus, she watches television.

She is very close to her brother. They talk about everyday life and make fun of each other.

She plays hopscotch with friends on Barefoot campus and school friends.

She wakes up at 7am, and makes tea for everyone in the house.

From 9am to 6pm, she works at the medical centre in Barefoot College, providing acupuncture treatment to people on campus.

She learnt her acupuncture skills in Himachal. She sometimes does acupuncture on herself when she has knee pain. Aside from this, she does data feeding related to midwife's schedule, patient's medical information and medicine dispatch schedules.

Sometime earlier, she trained some people in the medical complex in computer literacy.

She spends much time on her phone: Facebook, WhatsApp, Candy Crush and Rajasthan Patrika are some of the frequently used apps.

In the evenings, she helps her mom out in the kitchen with cooking.

Past: 10 years ago

Present
She would like to improve her acupuncture skills to a more professional level.

She wants to be more independent and not depend on anybody financially.

She wants to travel outside India and look at the world.

Khushboo’s Aspirations
I would tell my daughter a woman should be independent and fight for her rights.
KIRAN KUMARI

MY AUNT TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD PAY MORE ATTENTION TO HER MANNER AND BEHAVIOUR. SHE SHOULD BE CALM, COMPOSED AND NOT ATTRACT ATTENTION.

Mansoorpur is an underserved village in Bihar that is mostly inhabited by an agricultural community. DEF runs a CIRC in this village.

Age 28; married, 2 sons; 1 brother and 1 sister; Sibling rank #1; Education level BA in Psychology; Background In Kiran’s memory, her mom always took really good care of them. However, as her family lived in Assam, she spent much of her childhood with her aunt and uncle, in Mansoorpur, who initially didn’t have any children of their own. Later, when they had two sons, they became like Kiran’s own little brothers. The aunt is like a ‘chhoti ma’ (younger mother) to Kiran. While Kiran’s parents and relatives supported her in acquiring education, villagers believed that girls should stay at home as education is not that important for them. When Kiran complained about this mentality to her uncle, who is like a second father to her, he teased Kiran but told her to concentrate on her studies.
Kiran likes to read things out loud when studying. While questioning the need for girls to study, she was asked by the neighbours to keep quiet, and not attract so much attention.

Transition: Kiran married a man who she believes she can learn from, even when the marriage was against the family’s wishes. Together, they moved to Tilonia, Barefoot College, for a couple of years. There, Kiran learnt about radio programming, solar engineering and created radio circuits.

Sometimes, she comes home while her husband stays at the centre. She cooks food and chats with her son. She asks him about school, and tells him about the centre. The son asks her, every day, if she has downloaded any cartoon for him at the centre.

Every evening, the centre projects a video outside the CIRC building. People who pass by, stop and watch the video. The broadcasted video can be about a community meeting, or meeting with the village head, etc.

Past: 10 years ago

Coaching school
5:30am - 7:30am
School starts from 9am to 3:30pm

Prepares lunch for her son and gets him ready for school

Son asks her to check weather on her mobile phone every morning.

‘Picche dekho’ (look behind and wave) she says to her son every morning as he leaves for school, just as her mom used to say to her.

Kiran learnt about radio programming, solar engineering and created radio circuits.

Uncle has a small kitchen garden, and she plucks zucchini.

There is a 90m² field at her grandmother’s place. Kiran romps around, plays on swings there.

After school, Kiran strolls with her cousins and plays with them.

Kiran likes to read things out loud when studying. While questioning the need for girls to study, she was asked by the neighbours to keep quiet, and not attract so much attention.

Sometimes, she comes home while her husband stays at the centre. She cooks food and chats with her son. She asks him about school, and tells him about the centre. The son asks her, every day, if she has downloaded any cartoon for him at the centre.

Every evening, the centre projects a video outside the CIRC building. People who pass by, stop and watch the video. The broadcasted video can be about a community meeting, or meeting with the village head, etc.

People like to visit the centre even after its working hours. It is a community hangout hub for many people in the area.

Manages and teaches at the CIRC centre from 10:30am to 5:30pm. She also handles video recording and writing work.
Kiran’s Aspirations

Kiran and her husband, Raghav, wish to resume their community radio centre someday.

She wishes to have sub-centres that teach villagers about

- solar energy
- accessing a library
- re-cycling
- crafts and stitching
I would tell my daughter
a woman should always have
a positive attitude and not
be cynical of situations. She
should always speak up, try
and learn. The next generation
depends on women’s
education. A woman can
influence younger generations
and pass on education to them.
LIPIKA DEY

MY MOTHER TOLD ME
A WOMAN SHOULD CHOOSE HER
WORDS WISELY.

MY GRANDFATHER TOLD ME
A WOMAN SHOULD STICK TO
HER FAMILY.

Sonapur is a semi-urban region of Assam located near the state capital Dispur. A large population in the region is engaged in agricultural farming. DEF operates one of its oldest CIRCs in Sonapur.

Age 29; unmarried; 2 sisters; Sibling rank #1; Education level BA in Political Science and Post-Graduate Diploma; Background Lipika’s parents never made the children feel like that they had regrets for not having a son. Lipika has a soft and caring mother from whom she has learnt much. She is very close to her grandfather who helps her solve many problems and fulfills her small demands. Her grandmother has been mentally ill ever since she lost a son, and so the grandfather takes care of all the household responsibilities. For Lipika, he is an inspiration.
She wakes up at 7:30am, helps her mom with household chores. She watches TV and reads magazines. She often listens to songs on TV.

She likes to study and often studies until 1-2am. After graduation, she got a job which requires her to use computer. Aside from basic computer knowledge, she also learnt HTML, C Program, Java. She had an Orkut account.

She gives tuition to neighbourhood children who come to her house from 4pm - 6pm. She is a strict teacher, so children are not so mischievous around her.

When she started off as a trainer at CIRC, she often sat idle due to lack of students; but after the implementation of an Internet connection, and a better curriculum, the number of students gradually began to increase.

She attends college between 9.15am - 10am. From 10am - 5pm, she spends her time at CIRC, managing graduation courses.

Sonapur Centre is the only centre that provides A.K. Handique State Open University graduation courses, through which her mother managed to take 12th standard exams.

She sets her alarm for 6:30am but wakes up at 7:30am. She prays and has breakfast.

On her phone, she uses Facebook and WhatsApp.

She has a laptop at home where she listens to a radio programme: Yaad Sheher with Neelesh Mishra.

If she misses the broadcast, she watches it on YouTube.

She likes to read Nandini, an Assamese women’s magazine. In it, she finds cooking recipes.

Past: 10 years ago

She and her sister go to market together, and would often imitate the way their mom gets angry.

After CIRC, she goes home and watches TV with a cup of tea. She cooks food for everyone, and her mom helps with some preparation for cooking.

Sonapur Centre is the only centre that provides A.K. Handique State Open University graduation courses, through which her mother managed to take 12th standard exams.

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If she misses the broadcast, she watches it on YouTube.

She likes to read Nandini, an Assamese women’s magazine. In it, she finds cooking recipes.
Lipika’s Aspiration

She wants to be an entrepreneur, have her own business and be financially independent and secure, so that she can use the funds to help her community.
I would tell my daughter a woman has the right to dream. A woman’s role is not destined for marriage, but she has the same prospects a man has.
MADIYAS MALI

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD BE PROUD OF BEING A WOMAN BECAUSE SHE CAN DO ANYTHING.

At Barefoot College in Tilonia, Ajmer district of Rajasthan, DEF has set up campus-wide wireless broadband connection under its Wireless for Community programme, besides two CIRCs and a community radio station.

Age 20, unmarried; 7 siblings; Sibling rank #5; Education level BA in Fine Arts; Background Both of Madiyas’ parents have been employees at Barefoot College. Her father was a gardener and her mother works in the solar section. Madiyas had much freedom when she was growing up. Her parents did not interfere with the way she dressed but her father wanted her to have a job even before she completed her studies.
She does not like to study much. She used to go to school and head to computer room to play games: pinball and puzzle.

After school, she plays kanche and cricket with her brother and neighborhood friends.

She wants to be a policewoman, even though it seems like it is only applicable for boys, but she feels like yes, she can do this too.

Her second sister teaches her Math and English in the evening. They chit chat while studying.

There are two baby goats she likes to play with. She likes to bathe them as well.

After playing, mother always asks them to wash their feet and hands before entering the house.

She studies more now: history, political science and sociology.

She likes to read animal-related stories and children’s stories.

She is an IT lab trainer. She trains people in basic digital literacy and how to use an iPad.

She teaches 10-15 children in one class. Every day, she takes 3-4 classes.

She uses the Internet to check definition of words and searches for recipes.

She takes at least 10 selfies everyday. What is in the background does not matter.

She watches TV with her family during dinner; either news or a comedy show.

Present
Madiyas’s Aspirations

She wants to travel and see other places.

She is interested in doing social work in the education sector.

She would like to improve her English and speak more fluently.
I would tell my daughter a woman can have the freedom to do anything.
MOHINI JAGTAP

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD NOT RAISE HER VOICE AGAINST ELDERS.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD HELP PEOPLE.

Yamuna Nagar is an urban slum located in the Viman Nagar area of Pune city in Maharashtra. The slum is also home to a CIRC established by DEF.

Age 22; unmarried; 1 brother; Sibling rank #1; Education level completed 2nd year in Bachelor of Computer Science; Background While growing up, Mohini always needed permission to go out with friends. She enjoyed short bicycle rides around her home. Mohini’s mother, a housewife, is into social work and often gives out money to children on the street. Her father owns a sugarcane field. Mohini has grown up in an ancestral home where everyone lived together as a joint family. There were always many women in the house to help out with the chores; hence Mohini never had to cook when she was a little girl.
From 10am - 5pm, she attends school. Favourite subjects: Hindi and Maths. Every subject was taught in Marathi until fourth standard.

She learnt to operate a computer when she visited her aunt. Her dad also bought a new phone when she was in tenth standard.

If she wants to go on a cycling trip, she needs to inform her parents 8-10 days in advance.

She enjoys Baramati music: she likes to dance and sing.

She plays cricket, hide and seek with the boys in her family.

Grew up in an ancestral home with three girls and 12 boys, she was never needed in the kitchen.

After fourth standard, text books were introduced in English.

Takes extra courses twice a day: 6-9 am and 5:30pm-7pm for all subjects, especially English.

She has to cook for herself now.

She calls her mom and updates her of her wellbeing every day.

She chats on WhatsApp groups with family and friends.

She doesn’t use computer for personal use much as she does not have much spare time.

Past: 10 years ago

Present

Wakes up at 6am to do yoga. She now lives in a hostel.

She goes to CIRC every day and stays till 7pm: she teaches tools like Paint, Microsoft Office, and how to use the Internet.

Her dad gave her a one-month deadline to find work, otherwise she would have to return to her village.

Past: 10 years ago

Present
Mohini wishes to work with orphans in a slum area, and help improve the facilities and living conditions there.

She would like to create a software on mobile phones that helps people who cannot afford computer to acquire digital literacy.
I would tell my daughter
a woman should be strong;
she can help achieve her
mother’s unfulfilled dreams.
PRIYANKA DEVEL

MY PARENTS TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD STUDY AND STUDY HARDER.

Shamshabad, with limited rail and road connectivity, is a semi-urban area located in Farukkhabad region of Uttar Pradesh. DEF operates a CIRC here.

Age 21; unmarried; 2 brothers & 2 sisters; Sibling rank #4; Education level completing BA; Background Priyanka’s parents are very encouraging of their children pursuing higher education. She was not a rebellious child but she liked to wear jeans. However, her parents wanted her to dress more conservatively in traditional attire. As a child, she wanted to be a doctor.
Her younger siblings are attached to her. They often play hide and seek with the children in the community.

Father bought a mobile phone. It became a family cellphone. They use it to call relatives.

Her favourite subjects in school are English and Math. She likes to draw geometric patterns.

Her father owns a general store. She helps in stocking the products in the storage room at her place.

It is not so common for girls to help out in the store in her village.

For three months, she has been attending 1-hour CIRC classes every day; she likes to search for employment schemes and exam schedules.

She likes to read Hindi literature. She is reading Nandan at the moment.

She is closest to one of the older sisters, who is in boarding school. They share everything with each other. They would visit their friends’ house together.

She and her sister-in-law help the mother with household chores.

Her mom encourages her to attend CIRC trainings. Priyanka also convinced her friends to join CIRC.

However, this attitude shifted when she grew older. She does not talk to boys in the community as much anymore.

She used to call up her sister on Sundays, and everyone in the family helps with cleaning.

Past: 10 years ago

Present
She would like to have a computer-related private job and a small happy family.
I would tell my daughter a woman can adjust according to her environment, and should pursue her dream.
PUSHPA TANWAR

MY MOTHER TOLD ME
A WOMAN SHOULD NOT GET CARRIED AWAY OR FORGET ABOUT HER RESPONSIBILITIES.

Kapashera is a semi-urban area located in South Delhi where DEF runs a CIRC.

Age 20; unmarried; 2 brothers & 1 sister; Sibling rank #1; Education level Second year in Bachelor of Mass Communication; Background Pushpa has protective parents who do not allow her to go out too much. The father owns a sweet shop. He initially wanted Pushpa to do courses through an open school, so that she would not have to go out to study, but her mother and her school teacher convinced Pushpa’s father to allow her to attend college outside their hometown.
Past: 10 years ago

She enjoys dancing in school. She would dance with her sisters and mom at home.

Her father owns a milk and bakery shop.

She fights with her brother over the remote control every day. They would race home to see who can get the remote first.

She used to be in a basketball team.

Wakes up at 5:30am, helps mom clean up.

Her siblings help her father at the shop. But she only goes there to have sweets.

Wakes up at 5:30am, studies and irons her clothes.

Present

She gets ready for school at 7am, and she attends tuition. She enjoys political science and English.

During free time, she likes to read books.

She has attended CIRC for seven to eight months to learn about basic computer knowledge. Now she uses Facebook, visits college websites, and watches crime-based TV shows on YouTube.

He helps her with household chores: cleaning, dishes and cooking.

After 4pm, she goes to CIRC, and hangs out with friends from the centre.

8am - 4pm college work time. Sometimes she goes out for film shoots.

Mom gives her the domestic responsibilities when she has to help out at the shop.

She is close to her youngest brother and likes to tease him. He also tells her about his day in school.

She has attended CIRC for seven to eight months to learn about basic computer knowledge. Now she uses Facebook, visits college websites, and watches crime-based TV shows on YouTube.
She wants to be a TV anchor for a news channel. She wants to show her father that she can be in front of the screen.

Pushpa’s Aspiration
I would tell my daughter a woman can be anything, and she can be better than a man. Nothing is possible without a woman’s role in it.
SHAHNAZ

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD NOT BE CONFINED TO HER FOUR WALLS.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD STUDY, GO OUT AND ACHIEVE SOMETHING.

Mungaska is a semi-urban area located in Alwar city of Rajasthan. There, DEF runs its smallest CIRC, with two computer systems.

Age 24; married, 1 daughter; 1 brother & 2 sisters; Sibling rank #2; Education level BA in Economics; Background Due to financial difficulties, Shahnaz has had a tough journey in acquiring her education. However, throughout the journey, Shahnaz’s parents have strongly believed in her ability to be successful. They have higher hopes for Shahnaz than they do for their sons. The father was a painter and the mom a housewife initially; but she was determined to take on extra jobs as a janitor at a local school and as a maid in neighbouring houses to provide financial support for Shahnaz’s education. Her father married Shahnaz off after she completed Class XII, when she was only 19, because he believed that her husband could provide Shahnaz better higher education than he could. Shahnaz’s father, even after his death, continues to be an inspiration for her. Shahnaz does not want to be known as Yusuf’s wife. She wants her father to be known by her name. The past illustrated on the right describes the two-year period when Shahnaz could not attend school, and when she and her sister would visit their aunt every day to help out with household chores and learn Islamic literature.
Past: 10 years ago

She wakes up around 7-8am, and together with her sister, help with chores.

Aunt also teaches them Urdu: writing and reading. Aunt often tells them stories from the Quran.

Little girls (10 - 15) would come to her aunt’s place, and Shahnaz would teach them Urdu and Islamic studies.

She spends much time with her sister at her aunt’s place. Aunt teaches them cooking and other chores.

Aunt also teaches them Urdu: writing and reading. Aunt often tells them stories from the Quran.

She reads the newspaper at night. During daytime, she doesn’t have time. She gets it from her aunt’s place.

At night, she sleeps with her grandmother.

Her parents fight often due to their financial situation, which upsets her. Very often, she cries at night, and her grandmother consoles her, telling her everything will be alright.

She receives a laptop from her scholarship. But she gave it to Yusuf. She didn’t know how to use it. However, she got interested in it later, and learnt from her husband.

She wakes up at 6am. Along with her sisters-in-law, she makes tea, does chores, and cooks for everyone (12 people).

During the day, she takes care of her daughter. When the baby sleeps, she studies, though sometimes, she falls asleep too.

Wakes up at 6am. Along with her sisters-in-law, she makes tea, does chores, and cooks for everyone (12 people).

She trains students from 2:30pm - 7pm. Before her class starts, she prepares for the class.

She got a laptop from her scholarship. She didn’t know how to use it. However, she got interested in it later and learnt from her husband.

Past: 10 years ago

When she visits her grandmother back home, they spend hours chatting.

She asks everyone to not touch her books on the shelf. She wants them in the same place where she has placed them in.

She uses Internet for recipes, online forms and government schemes. She especially appreciates how she can Skype with Yusuf when he is away to other cities/countries for Bhapang performances.

She trains students from 2:30pm - 7pm. Before her class starts, she prepares for the class.

She received a laptop from her scholarship. She didn’t know how to use it. However, she got interested in it later and learnt from her husband.

She still likes to read newspaper and course books. She checks for job vacancies on Google as well.

Present

She still likes to read newspaper and course books. She checks for job vacancies on Google as well.

She is very proud of Yusuf. He has made her more outspoken and confident; however, she insists that she has her own identity, rather than being just Yusuf’s wife.

She received a laptop from her scholarship. But she gave it to Yusuf. She didn’t know how to use it. However, she got interested in it later and learnt from her husband.

She likes to draw flowers and cartoons. She also likes to use recycled material to make craft items. She has made a bangle box and a wedding invitation card.

Past: 10 years ago

She uses Internet for recipes, online forms and government schemes. She especially appreciates how she can Skype with Yusuf when he is away to other cities/countries for Bhapang performances.
Shahnaz’s Aspiration

She wants to be a teacher. She wants to see herself in the newspaper, and wants her father to be known by her name. She does not want to be known as just Yusuf Khan’s wife.
I would tell my daughter
a woman can find a place in newspapers,
just as men always find a place there.
SHAMINA

MY MOTHER TOLD ME
A WOMAN SHOULD BE
SELF-RELIANT AND
INDEPENDENT. SHE SHOULD
TRY EVERYTHING AND LEARN
FROM HER MISTAKES.

Wazirabad is an urban slum in Timarpur
area of north-east Delhi where DEF has
set up a CIRC.

Age 32; married, 2 daughters & 1 son; 2
brothers & 3 sisters; Sibling rank #4; Ed-
ucation level MA in English; Background
Shamina’s family was originally from
Kalagarh in Uttarakhand but moved to a
village in Uttar Pradesh when her grand-
father passed away. Shamina had a cul-
tural shock in the village environment.
While the relatives wanted the daughters
to stay at home and not study, both her
parents were very supportive of the chil-
dren’s education. Shamina’s father taught
her maths while her mom, considered
illiterate, taught the daughters stitching
and cooking. Married for nine years now,
Shamina’s husband is a teacher based in
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
She moved to Delhi to provide children better education and work opportunities.

She wakes up at 6 am, prays, prepares lunch for children and feeds the baby.

She reaches centre at 10 am: teaches basic digital literacy and English. She has always been interested in teaching.

Earlier, when she taught English at school, children's grasping level was not as fast as children's learning pace today.

She speaks to her husband on her mobile phone for at least an hour, sometimes 2-3 hours.

She provides English tuition to students for two to three hours.

When she was growing up, she was not a very confident child. Her parents did not involve her in decision making. She always felt she was not as good looking as her husband. However, when she started teaching at 23, her confidence slowly began to build up.

Some of her students say she is the best teacher in the school; some pass outs still miss her. As a teacher, she tries to maintain a balance between being strict and fun.

When she has time, she repairs clothes.

She provides English tuition to students for two to three hours.

She lives in a two-floor complex. Every Sunday, she and her in-laws spend time together.

Earlier, when she taught English at school, children's grasping level was not as fast as children's learning pace today.

She likes to play with her children; sometimes she feels like she has become a kid herself.

Past: 10 years ago

Present

Some of her students say she is the best teacher in the school; some pass outs still miss her. As a teacher, she tries to maintain a balance between being strict and fun.

T:30am - 2pm, she teaches English at school

She provides English tuition to students for two to three hours.

She provides English tuition to students for two to three hours.

Past: 10 years ago

Present

She lives in a two-floor complex. Every Sunday, she and her in-laws spend time together.

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Past: 10 years ago

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Some of her students say she is the best teacher in the school; some pass outs still miss her. As a teacher, she tries to maintain a balance between being strict and fun.

T:30am - 2pm, she teaches English at school

She provides English tuition to students for two to three hours.

She lives in a two-floor complex. Every Sunday, she and her in-laws spend time together.
Shamina’s Aspiration

She wants her students to achieve their dreams. She also wants to grow, meet more people, expand her network and gain more knowledge.
I would tell my daughter
a woman can do anything. Everything is possible. A woman should stand for herself and keep her family strong. Behind every success, there is a woman.
SOMA SARKAR

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A DAUGHTER CAN FULFILL THE DREAMS THAT A MOTHER COULD NOT ACCOMPLISH.

Jauhar Academy is a school in Ranchi, Jharkhand, from where DEF runs a CIRC.

Age 54; window; 1 brother & 1 sister; Sibling rank #2; Education level BA; Background She completed her education from an English-medium school. Her father was a businessman, and Soma had a passionate and loving mother who wanted to see her daughter become a singer, but Soma, as a child, was more interested in becoming a dancer. Soma always wanted to continue her education along with her passion in dancing; however, she was deemed physically unwell. The doctor had advised her against dancing. Soma lost her sister when she was seven years old, and most of the household responsibilities fell upon her. She got married in 1986, and lost her mother four years later. A few years later, she lost her husband and children as well. Soma has always felt a sense of regret for not fulfilling her mom’s dream of becoming a singer.
She looks after the in-laws.

She cooks together with her husband and family.

She teaches English to children with disability.

She visits market places to identify drug abused street children and teach them hygiene and way of life. She tries to involve them in school with other children of the village.

Almost every Saturday, CIRC students visit her house and cook with her.

After she lost her children and husband, she used to feel lonely; but now she is busy with work, and CIRC students are like her family.

Mobilisation activity: she visits different villages and talks to children about digital literacy.

Every evening, she chats with her friends. She also brings a laptop to their houses and sometimes likes to share photos on Facebook.

Now she feels uneasy without her laptop. She likes to learn about new information, acquire the knowledge and transfer it to her students.

She likes to teach through a projector, and screen practical films. She finds English textbook problematic and videos to be more interactive and helpful.

Past: 10 years ago

She looks after her three brothers-in-law as her own sons.
Soma’s Aspirations

She wants to meet new and interesting people, and open a spoken English centre in her village.

She is interested in working with children in slum areas.
I would tell my daughter a woman can dream and stand on her own feet.
MY MOTHER TOLD ME
A WOMAN SHOULD DO WHATEVER
SHE WANTS TO DO.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN
SHOULD INSPIRE OTHER GIRLS
IN THE VILLAGE WITH HER
LEARNINGS.

TARA CHOU DHARY

At Barefoot College in Tilonia, Ajmer
district of Rajasthan, DEF has set up
campus-wide wireless broadband
connection under its Wireless for
Community programme, besides two
CIRCs and a community radio station.

Age 30; married; 5 brothers & 1 sister; Sib-
ling rank #3; Education level 10th standard;
Background Tara is conscious of her disability.
Initially, she could not imagine what she would
do with her life. When people visit Tilonia and
approach her, wishing to take a photo of her,
she refuses and, instead, provides them an old
photo of her. When Tara first came to the cam-
pus to attain computer training, she was scared
of what people would think of her. But she went
on to complete her education till Class X after
she arrived in Tilonia.
In the morning, the sound of her mother in the kitchen always wakes her up. Because there is a three-year study gap, she learnt to read different books by practicing reading and writing on her own.

In the evening, everyone sits together to study. She teaches her little sister. Sometimes, she helps in household chores, but only in the ones where she can sit down and work; but it is never compulsory for her.

When she joined Barefoot College, she took up different tasks and learnt various skills. She reads religious books and cooks for her brother. She feels responsible for her brother’s well-being and education.

Using her mobile phone, she listens to radio programmes and reads English. She also reads E-newspaper and listens to music online. She reads religious books and cooks for her brother. She feels responsible for her brother’s well-being and education.

She now works in Neerjaal, a water quality measurement project. Her colleagues collect water samples, test them and she records and feeds the data into an Excel sheet, using the Neerjaal portal.

She also joined English classes so she could learn and practice her English skills.

She sleeps at 8pm and wakes up at 5am. People often make fun of her schedule.

Past: 10 years ago

Learnt to use computer, input medical survey data, fill out data, handle Xerox machine, manage dairy shop, manufacture sanitary napkins and train other women.

She now works in Neerjaal, a water quality measurement project. Her colleagues collect water samples, test them and she records and feeds the data into an Excel sheet, using the Neerjaal portal.

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Past: 10 years ago

Learnt to use computer, input medical survey data, fill out data, handle Xerox machine, manage dairy shop, manufacture sanitary napkins and train other women.

She now works in Neerjaal, a water quality measurement project. Her colleagues collect water samples, test them and she records and feeds the data into an Excel sheet, using the Neerjaal portal.

She also joined English classes so she could learn and practice her English skills.
Tara’s Aspirations

She wants to be financially independent so that she can buy anything she wants. She is also financially supporting her brother’s education; she wants to see him succeed and be proud of him.

She wants to learn everything in Tilonia: solar engineering and waste management, and wants to be really skillful at them.
I would tell my daughter a woman should never lose faith in oneself; anything is possible for her.
KAKORIYA

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD NOT BE OVER-FRIENDLY WITH BOYS.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD BE FOCUSED AND NOT GET INVOLVED IN NEGATIVE ACTIVITIES.

Koylari village is situated on a tribal belt in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. The region is cut-off from mainstream progress or means of communication; most of the population is engaged in agricultural labour. DEF operates a CIRC in this village.

Age 18; unmarried; 1 brother & 1 sister; Sibling rank #2; Education level second year in BA; Background Lalita’s father works in the labour field and her mother is a housewife. The family had to face financial difficulties in the early days. However, Lalita’s mother is a friendly and hard-working woman who manages both household chores and labour efficiently. Lalita respects her mother very much. She believes that whatever she is today, it is because of her mother. Lalita has gained much confidence by looking up to her mother, who has been her inspiration. When the children were growing up, the son and the daughter in the family were not treated differently. There was just one rule in the family, to inform the parents about wherever they were going.
Mother is a seasonal worker under MGNREGA. She saves whatever money she earns. Sisters and father help out with housework, but not the brother.

School 10am - 4:30pm, 15min journey

Wakes up at 5am. Helps mom with housework: fetch water; clean and mop.

Wakes up at 5:30am and helps with chores. Mother does not share the work anymore.

Dad tutors her and her brother on all subjects except for English and math.

She is closest to her youngest sister, who does not like to study. They discuss what to play.

After school, she plays games with siblings: hide and seek, Ludo, hopscotch.

Mom is a seasonal worker under MGNREGA. She saves whatever money she earns. Sisters and father help out with housework, but not the brother.

At night, her mom tells them stories and jokes.

When she has time, she chats with other trainers from nearby CIRCs.

After school, she plays games with siblings: hide and seek, Ludo, hopscotch.

8:30am - 11am
Stays at CIRC, teaches students basic computer literacy.

Maintenance work: Xerox, user registration, student attendance, passport photo and centre accounts, etc.

On Sunday she screens cartoons and other entertainment material for children at the centre.

She takes care of her sister’s education fee, taking some burden off the mother, who works in a poultry farm.

She is closest to her youngest sister, who does not like to study. They discuss what to play.

5 batches; 44 students. One batch from 4:30 - 5:30 for student who could only attend after school.

After lunch: practices skills such as filling in ID card or searching for government jobs for herself and others in the nearby villages.

After work: her sisters and she prepare dinner at 8:30pm. Brother fetches water from hand pump.

Past: 10 years ago

School

Wakes up at 5am. Helps mom with housework: fetch water; clean and mop.

Dad tutors her and her brother on all subjects except for English and math.

Mom is a seasonal worker under MGNREGA. She saves whatever money she earns. Sisters and father help out with housework, but not the brother.

At night, her mom tells them stories and jokes.

When she has time, she chats with other trainers from nearby CIRCs.

Maintenance work: Xerox, user registration, student attendance, passport photo and centre accounts, etc.

On Sunday she screens cartoons and other entertainment material for children at the centre.

She takes care of her sister’s education fee, taking some burden off the mother, who works in a poultry farm.

Present
Lalita’s Aspirations

She would like to work in the railway sector. She is interested in ticket booking and data entry jobs.

She would like to further her education, but she is not sure which route to continue; before she makes any decision, she’d like to commit herself to CIRC work to understand and probe further her future study plan.

At CIRC, she would like to collect information about government schemes and avail surveys.

She believes that nowadays, the opportunity to gain digital literacy is just available at the doorstep, unlike the old days; if children receive proper training at CIRC, the centre can be self-sustainable.
I would tell my daughter a woman should be independent and be able to contribute to the growth of her village.
SANGEETA VISHWAKARMA

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD TAKE CARE OF HER DIGNITY BECAUSE WHEN ONCE IT’S GONE, IT’S GONE.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD NOT GET INVOLVED IN ANY WRONG COMPANY OR ACTIVITY.

Jhakhli is a remote village, with little access to telecommunication, in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. Most of the people are engaged in sericulture and related activities. DEF runs a CIRC in this village.

Age 21; married; 2 brothers & 3 sisters; Sibling rank #3; Education level 10th standard; Background As a child, Sangeeta has seen her family face difficult financial conditions. Her father is a blacksmith and her mother is a friendly woman with whom Sangeeta shares everything. Sangeeta’s mother wants her children to be educated; however, due to financial difficulties, she has had to work as a labourer and often seek her children’s help as well. As a child, Sangeeta wanted to learn tailoring and computer but she could not pursue her dream. Now, Sangeeta helps pay for her youngest brother’s education who recently finished school.
Past: 10 years ago

Wakes up at 5am to study

Favourite subject: Sanskrit

11am - 5pm school

Fetches water after 5am morning study: 10 min to walk there and 20 min to walk back → 20 min

Wakes up at 5:30am and finishes all the housework alone

After school: works with elder sister with all the household chores: Fetches water, prepares dinner, cleans up

When mom comes back from field work, they share what’s happened in the day; sometimes mom complains to them about not doing chores properly.

After 8pm, 3 sisters would study together until one feels dizzy and they turn off the light to sleep.

Husband has three goats; she helps out, but she does not like their milk.

She likes to explain things to children through animation and images.

On the Internet, she wants to search for henna designs, tailoring, government schemes, information about fertilizers and learn pan-chayat work because she thinks they are not active enough.

Present

Wakes up at 5:30am and finishes all the housework alone

Husband has three goats; she helps out, but she does not like their milk.

She and her husband chat about the centre. She wants him to start studying, and helps him fill up education form.

New slot has opened from 7-8pm for the labourers in the village who want to acquire basic computer training.

He drops and picks her up from the centre, but does not like to visit the centre as other people would gossip.

8:30 am - 9am Teaches and manages CIRC: answer inquiries, Xerox tasks.

She and her husband chat about the centre. She wants him to start studying, and helps him fill up education form.

Present
Sangeeta’s Aspirations

She wants to turn her village into a proud village by encouraging people in her village and the nearby villages to learn about computers. She believes that children today are a place where they can learn really quickly and help disseminate their knowledge to others.

She wants to prove to her grandparents that education means something, and it can bring them somewhere. Education can help make them proud.
I would tell my daughter a woman should ignore other people’s mockeries. Help comes in all form, she should pursue her dream but understand her limits.
RASHMI BHALLAVI

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD LISTEN TO ELDERS AND NOT TALK TO STRANGERS.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD BE BRAVE WHEN SHE GOES OUT AND BE FOCUSED AND AWARE OF WHAT SHE IS DOING.

Raipur is the capital city of Chhattisgarh. DEF operates a CIRC in one of its semi-urban locations where rail and road connectivity is limited.

Age 22; unmarried; 1 brother & 4 sisters; Sibling rank #2; Education level Final year in BA; Background Rashmi’s father works as a labourer in the field as a daily wage earner and her mother is a housewife. Initially, the mother was unwilling about Rashmi pursuing further education and wanted her daughters to dress more conservatively and traditionally. However, as the mother became more empowered after joining the Narmada Mahila Sangh (NMS), she learnt about women’s right and influenced the father’s point of view. This allowed Rashmi to convince her parents to allow her to attend college. Throughout her childhood, Rashmi was taught to not discriminate among people on the basis of caste, gender or religion.
Wakes up at 6am: she mops, fetches water and sometimes cooks (if required). She cycles to college for 30 minutes. College starts from 9am and goes on till 1pm. She likes to roam around the village on her bicycle. Sometimes she and her brother would go out of the village on bike.

Wakes up at 6am and goes for a walk. After her walk, she fetches water from the hand pump.

Everyday, she has to help clean up the washroom and set up the classroom.

School is from 11am to 4:30pm. She participates in choir singing.

When she returns from school, she has to chop vegetables and prepare dinner.

Her father and her older sister help the younger siblings with homework every day.

She likes to sit in front of the classroom, and she is not afraid to ask questions.

She likes to draw rangoli designs.

Closest to her youngest sister, they go to the river and play house-house.

When she has Internet, she likes to listen to songs on YouTube, do online shopping and research on scholarships and job vacancies for herself and others.

She often travels to other villages and goes from house to house to collect villagers’ domestic data.

Her siblings like to watch videos and play games on her tablet.
Rashmi’s Aspiration

She wants to pursue Bachelor of Education and become a teacher.
I would tell my daughter a woman should pursue her dreams and not be restricted by rules constructed by society.
In the evening, she and her neighbourhood friends would play horror games and pull pranks on people.

NUSRAT BANO

MY MOTHER TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD BE TRADITIONAL AND IDEAL; AN ALL-ROUNDER IN HOUSEHOLD WORKS LIKE COOKING, CLEANING AND OTHER DUTIES.

Nagavara is semi urban area on the outskirts of Bengaluru city in Karnataka. DEF has established a CIRC in this region.

Age 23; unmarried; 1 brother & 2 sisters; Sibling rank #4; Education level Bachelor of Computer Applications; Background Nusrat lost her father when she was a toddler. Her sisters were not permitted to study beyond Class X, yet Nusrat was allowed to study further because her mother saw a spark in her. Nusrat’s uncle also encouraged her in pursuing higher education. She is like a friend to her immediately elder sister, and fights a lot with her eldest sister. Nusrat has, however, never been very close to her brother as he has always placed himself as the ‘man of the house’ and looks down upon women at home. This attitude has distanced Nusrat from him. But, at a very young age, Nusrat has bagged her first job.
She has held various jobs: accountant, telemarketer, teacher, besides working at places where she was involved in chocolate wrapping, fabric designing and noodle packaging. She and her mother are the only ones who provide for the family.

Her friends and she often skip class and play around a water tank located close to the school, or they go to each other’s house to play games. Nusrath seldom studies, but she is a smart kid. She studies a day before her exam only for an hour, maximum.

She has held various jobs: accountant, telemarketer, teacher, besides working at places where she was involved in chocolate wrapping, fabric designing and noodle packaging. She and her mother are the only ones who provide for the family.

She wakes up at 5:30am and works at a sari factory where she polishes saris.

The sari mill is a small unit established in a house. She works there alone.

She earns on 50-60 saris a day at the rate of 50 paise per sari. In total, she would earn 10-15 rupees per day.

In the evening, she and her neighbourhood friends would play horror games and pull pranks on people.

Girls with long hair wrap white cloth around their faces and jump to scare passersby.

After school, she returns to the factory, and folds saris that she polished in the morning.

She also enjoys watching TV and eats dinner in between.

Few women ordered electrical appliances online through their cellphones.

She wakes up at 6am, and gets ready to take her 7am digital literacy class. First batch is for men, followed by a batch for housewives.

At 2:30pm, she takes rest.

Because she does so much work, she enjoys her sleeping breaks very much.

She visits her sister’s house, carrying one computer. There five to six women from the neighbourhood come for digital literacy and to learn to operate a smartphone. Besides that, Nusrat teaches them how to do online shopping and online ticketing.

She lives with her mother, brother and sister-in-law. She is close to her sister-in-law, and they cook together on Sundays.

She uses Internet to learn English and to practice C and C++; she is interested in learning more computer programing.

Nusrat teaches her mom to use a smartphone.

Past: 10 years ago

She studies in a government school.

She wakes up at 6am, and gets ready to take her 7am digital literacy class. First batch is for men, followed by a batch for housewives.

At 2:30pm, she takes rest.

Because she does so much work, she enjoys her sleeping breaks very much.

She visits her sister’s house, carrying one computer. There five to six women from the neighbourhood come for digital literacy and to learn to operate a smartphone. Besides that, Nusrat teaches them how to do online shopping and online ticketing.

She lives with her mother, brother and sister-in-law. She is close to her sister-in-law, and they cook together on Sundays.

She uses Internet to learn English and to practice C and C++; she is interested in learning more computer programing.

Present
Nusrath’s Aspirations

She wants to build her own house.

She wants to be in a good position and support her mother.

She wants to open a school.
I would tell my daughter a woman could be educated and independent. She shouldn’t marry until she is professionally settled, and a woman should be able to make her own decisions.
NEHA UIKEY

MY PARENTS TOLD ME A WOMAN SHOULD BE ABLE TO MANAGE THE HOUSE WELL ENOUGH TO AVOID COMPLAINTS FROM IN-LAWS ABOUT NOT BEING TAUGHT WELL BY HER PARENTS

Kala Akhar is a village located in a tribal belt of Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh. The region is secluded and cut-off from mainstream progress or means of communication, which convinced DEF to establish a CIRC in this village.

Age 21; unmarried; 1 brother; Sibling rank #2; Education level BSc; Background Neha’s father works as a seasonal farmer. Her mother is a housewife who has studied until Class XI. Neha’s mother and she are like best friends. Neha also has an uncle who is a college teacher, and the two families live together with their grandparents as a joint family. Neha has always seen her mother as a soft-spoken and friendly woman who takes care of the entire family. Whenever Neha leaves for college after a vacation, her mother cries but she wishes that all her daughter’s wishes are fulfilled. Neha is passionate about hockey but says that her college hockey team fights more often that they practice. She has even hit some boys in a few fights.
Past: 10 years ago

Wakes up at 8am, brushes teeth for 30 min. Dad often gets mad at her for taking too much time.

School from 10am to 4:30pm. Roams around with classmates and plays khokho.

Plays badminton with aunt and uncle.

The entire colony is housed by members of her extended family so she has many cousins. Mother would shout their names and then she would come home.

Grandparents are very religious. Children sit a bit and eat before the grandparents do. The mother would then serve the grandparents, and eat afterwards.

Watch TV together: Ramayana series

Long pooja before dinner

Favourite subject: Math

3 x 3 = 9

If their uncle (a teacher) catches them awake, he forces them to study.

Present

Wakes up 8am: study for competition exam.

Use Google on phone to help her answer questions.

Practices Bollywood dancing for 1-2 hour

If she has time, she chats on WhatsApp groups, and plays games like Candy Crush.

She has a monthly subscription of dance tutorial, 59 rupees per month.

During examination period, her CIRC visits decrease; but she often thinks of ways to implement and utilise the knowledge she has learnt from CIRC in her studies or tuition classes.

She teaches Math to students from Grade 1 to 9 from 7-8pm.

Mom and aunts take care of household chores: cleaning and cooking.

Wakes up 8am: study for competition exam.

Watch TV together: Ramayana series

Plays with cousins after school: badminton, pitthoo

Plays badminton with aunt and uncle.

Practices Bollywood dancing for 1-2 hour

She has a monthly subscription of dance tutorial, 59 rupees per month.

During examination period, her CIRC visits decrease; but she often thinks of ways to implement and utilise the knowledge she has learnt from CIRC in her studies or tuition classes.

She teaches Math to students from Grade 1 to 9 from 7-8pm.
Neha’s Aspirations

She wants to gain a job in the government sector - railways preferably. She wants to be able to work and earn enough so that she could give back to her parents, who spent much energy and finance on her.
I would tell my daughter a woman could do whatever her heart says. A woman should not be subordinated to her brother’s level.
PANDEY KUMUD SINHA

MY GRANDMOTHER TOLD ME
A GIRL SHOULD LIVE LIKE A ‘GIRL’
AND NOT TAKE ANY WRONG STEPS.

MY FATHER TOLD ME A GIRL SHOULD
GET OUT OF THE HOUSE MORE OFTEN
AND BE AN EXTROVERT.

Kumud lives in Dhanbad in the state of Bihar. She belongs to a big joint family in which her uncles, aunts and cousins lived together. She is the youngest among her siblings, and is pampered and protected by her five doting brothers. For almost every chore, there was a help employed at Kumud’s home, so she didn’t have to do much around the house and spent most of her time studying or playing. Kumud is inspired by her mother who single handedly manages the entire household. Her father is a free thinker and wants his daughter to pursue her dreams.
At 4:30am, she wakes up and does yoga.

Her husband drives her to school where she teaches sociology to 11th and 12th standard students.

She enjoys her afternoon tea.

As active members of Sri Aurobindo Society, every Friday, she and her husband host a study circle at their house.

She does not have the chance to work on computer because her husband occupies it quite often. Her husband is interested in online shopping.

Kumud and her husband have a dial-up connection. She does not enjoy using computer much as it hurts her eyes.

Kumud watches TV soaps.

She visits CIRC every day and learns basic computer skills and tools, such as Paint and surfing on Internet. She likes to write to her daughter who studies in the US.

She waits for her son to pick her up from the centre. They then drive to his office to have lunch with her daughter-in-law.

She also listens to Indian classical music on YouTube.

Plays sitar in the evening, and lights incense sticks

She wakes up at 5:30am and does yoga for an hour.

She drinks tea and supervises the cook in the kitchen. She then eats breakfast and takes her medicine.

She visits CIRC every day and learns basic computer skills and tools, such as Paint and surfing on Internet. She likes to write to her daughter who studies in the US.

She uses her phone to call to inquire about her paternal house in Darbangha and for village updates.

Past: 10 years ago

Her husband drives her to school where she teaches sociology to 11th and 12th standard students.

She enjoys her afternoon tea.

As active members of Sri Aurobindo Society, every Friday, she and her husband host a study circle at their house.

She does not have the chance to work on computer because her husband occupies it quite often. Her husband is interested in online shopping.
Kumud’s Aspirations

She wishes to see change in her village. She wants to see people become more open-minded and willing to accept changes. She would like to see them give up their orthodox and superstitious mentality to welcome progress.
I would tell my daughter a girl could fly as high as she wants and always keep her head up.