EDUCATIONAL GENDER GAP IN INDIA

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Author: Voluntary Action Network India

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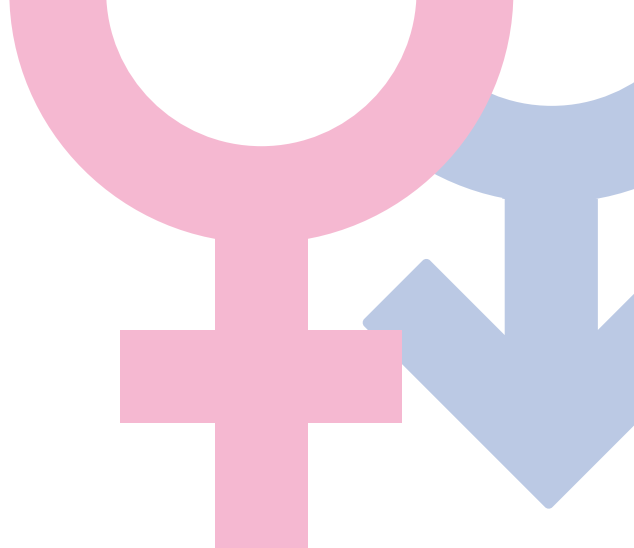
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender inequality in India is indeed a complex and deeply entrenched challenge. Despite commendable efforts to narrow these disparities, the stark statistics serve as poignant reminders that significant work remains. Achieving gender equality requires a concerted endeavor that spans policy reforms, educational initiatives, and shifts in societal attitudes. Empowering women and girls transcend mere human rights—it serves as a vital catalyst for India's socio-economic development. By confronting these challenges head-on, we pave the way toward a more equitable future for our nation and its people.

This article/study explores the status of educational gender gap, emphasizing the role of civil society platform for promoting Girl child education in India. The goal is to convey a synergy for quality education for girl children and improving the environment for adolescents in India, by forming a civil society coalition of CSOs and working towards a common goal.

Through this desk research we would be aiming to achieve the objects –Survey and mapping the CSOs that actively work towards the improvement of girls' and women education in India. Identify potential civil society partners who are members of VANI in the identified states with maximum gender gap. Document on the contribution and scope of CSOs in strengthening girls' education, draft a report on current status of educational gender gap.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Population Matters for support in facilitating this desk research. Their commitment to meaningful change echoes VANI's mission and I thank Ms. Subhashini Prabhaker, Programme Associate at VANI for writing this document. We together continue with our efforts of contributing significantly to our collective understanding of the educational landscape in India, particularly concerning gender disparities.

Harsh Jaitli
Chief Executive Officer - VANI

Acronyms

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

NSSO -National Sample Survey Office
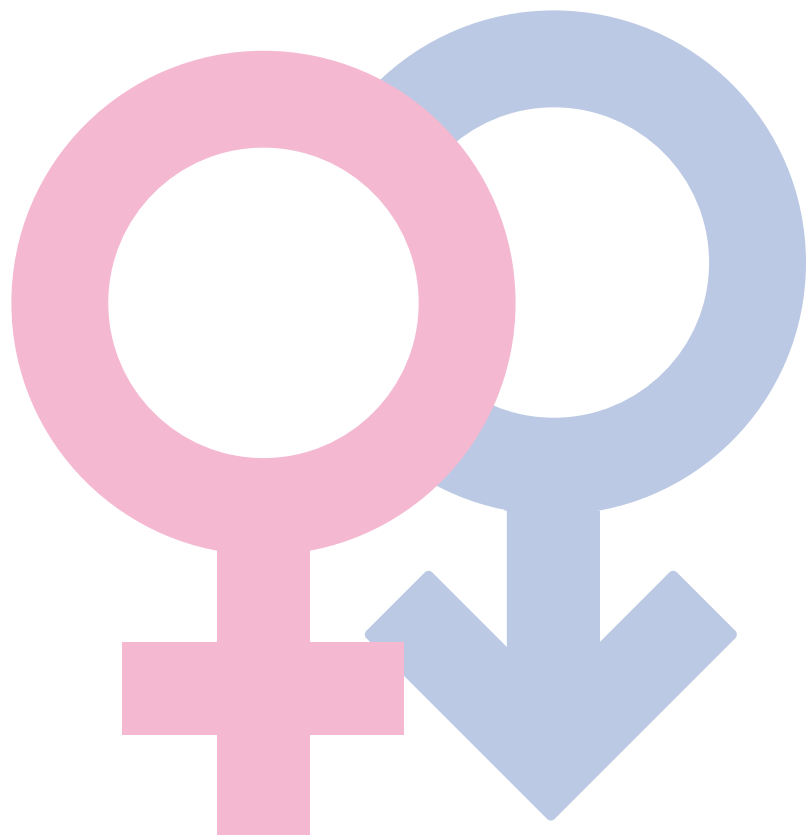
NEP - National Education Policy

CSOs – Civil Society Organizations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

RTE – Right to Education

GDP - Gross domestic product

MoE – Ministry of Education

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INTRODUCTION

Population of India is increasing rapidly with 1.37 billion people currently. 65% of Indians being under 35 years age group, face several development challenges, which include access to education, gender inequality, health services and gender education gaps. As per UNFPAprojections, India will continue to have youngest populations in the world till 2030. There are both negative and positive implications because of the country`s youthful demography presenting a complex scenario. This youth population should be adequately integrated into society. The participation and leadership of the educated and motivated young people in India can further transform the social and economic fortunes to higher levels.

According to a report by NSSO, only 59.5% of young Indians are literate, with disparities in the quality of education still existing in urban versus rural areas and with socio economic categories This lack of skilled workers hinders the nation`s economic development[1].

Education plays a major role in social progress, well-being and development of a country. Literacy level is a crucial development indicator as it improves awareness and quality of life and produces a skilled workforce. It also promotes gender equality, health awareness and community well-being apart from offering a wide spectrum of social and economic benefits.

There is an ample percentage of young girls in rural regions who still do not have access to opportunities of access to education and necessary training for this rapidly changing global economy.

Education is the crucial part of women`s life. A well-known African Proverb "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation" this will remind everyone to reflect and accelerate on the gender parity. According to Bloomberg, higher female literacy rates can "yield a growth premium in GDP". There are still barriers preventing universal female education[2].

PROBLEM

Girls` education is still indeed a critical area of concern in India. In the year 2006, approximately 10.3% of girls aged 11 to 14 years were out of school. By 2018, this improved to 4.1%. Similarly in 2008, 20% of girls aged 15 to 16 years were out of school which marginally improved to 13.5%.

There is progress over time as per the statistics but it`s essential to recognize that still challenges persist. A survey and report of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) revealed that 40% of adolescent girls leave school prematurely due to various reasons.

65% of those who left school were engaged in household chores. Societal norms and gender biases are significant factors for girls dropping out of schools and colleges.

Gender gap in educational literacy also hasan impact on the economic status of the country. The Mc. Kinsey report, 2018 and Confederation of Indian Industry states that the contribution of women to India`s GDP is only 18% and women constitute just 25% of the workforce which falls below the global standards.

Despite concerted efforts by both the government and non-governmental organizations, the gender gap in literacy rates remains entrenched in India. Gender discrimination poses a significant obstacle to girls' education, perpetuated by societal norms that prioritize boys' schooling over that of girls. This bias contributes to early marriages, cultural barriers, and violence against female students. However, advocating for gender equality through accessible educational opportunities is not only a right but also essential for a prosperous and equitable future.

The obstacles which remain that impede girls` access to education more specifically in rural regions of the country should be addressed.There is a dire need to overcome these barriers and challenges in India to positive shift its outlook towards a more gender-sensitive society.

BACKGROUND

According to UNESCO, "Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals to develop their knowledge and potential and to participate fully in their community and wider society".

Government Policies and regulations for Gender Equality

The Kothari Commission (1964–1966) was set up to formulate a coherent education policy for India. The commission emphasized the need to eradicate illiteracy and provide adult education.

In 1971, 22% of women of India were educated as compared to 6% in 1947 and a lot of credit goes to our leaders who felt women must walk with men if a country wants to develop[3].

In the year 1986, new policy on education was announced emphasizing the need for change and removal of disparities, to equalize education opportunity especially for women. In 1992, when education policy was re-examined, the NPE was found to be a sound way forward for India's education system, although some targets were recast, and some re-formulations were undertakenin relation to adult and elementary education.The new emphasis was on the expansion of secondary education, while the focus on education for minorities and women continued.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) was created on September 26, 1985, through the 174th amendment to the Government of India, 1961. Currently, the MoE works through two departments – Department of school education and literacy and Department of higher education.In the year 2009, the RTE Act mandated that it is the right of every child to obtain a minimum amount of education.

Over the years there`s a notable change the percentage of literacy rate in India but the country still has not yielded the results as expected, as even today in 2024, we see a gender gap with girl child education lagging far behind.

The Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India, came into existence as a separate Ministry with effect from 30th January 2006, earlier since 1985 it was a Department under the Ministry of Human Resources Development.

The Ministry was constituted with the prime intention of addressing gaps in State action for women and children for promoting inter-Ministerial and inter-sectoral convergence to create gender equitable and child-centered legislation, policies and programmes.

The potential of our youth has to be realized through education, skill development, elimination of gender bias, and employment. With this aim NITI Ayog(National Institution for Transforming India), in place of the erstwhile Planning Commission, India was set up in the year 2015.

Under the education vertical of NITI Ayog, it seeks to facilitate a conducive learning environment through policy and programmes so that people can develop to their full potential and contribute towards the socio-economic development of the country.

Policies and rules are reframed relating to school readiness, socio-emotional learning, critical and higher-order thinking, and grade-level competency amongst children. The aim was to empower youth with employability skills, research temperament and subject matter expertise through a high quality, accessible, equitable, accountable, and affordable education system.

The Government of India has taken several steps to promote girl child education in the country. These schemes and programs provide financial assistance, scholarships, and other incentives to families and girls to encourage them to continue their education.

Some of the important schemes are:

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

2. Kashturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

3. Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana

4. National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship

5. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan

6. National Scholarship for Higher Education of ST Girls

After quite a number of public consultations in 2019 the Ministry of Education released a draft New Education Policy (NEP) replacing the National policy on education. The policy is built on the pillars – Access, equity, affordability and accountability aligning with the 2030 agenda for Sustainable development.

The National Education Policy (NEP) aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary, suited to 21st-century needs, and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student.

Recently, the NCERT renamed the Department of Women's Studies as Department of Gender Studies in the light of a landmark judgment of the Supreme Court of India in 2014, for treating transgender (TG) as 'third gender'.

Therefore, for the purpose of safeguarding and enforcing appropriately their rights guaranteed under the Constitution, DGS stands committed to working for a gender-inclusive society. The Department also advises and helps the Centre and the States in formulating and executing policies and programmes in the area of girls' education and empowerment[4].

Interventions of CSOs/NGOs in empowering Girls through education

During ancient times the society was mostly male dominated where educating girls was considered as absolutely not needed. When we look back at the history of India, in the year 1848 Savitribai Phule, India`s first female teacher became the trailblazer in setting up a school for girls along with her husband, Jyoti Rao Phule. Both of them together establish an education society in 1853. She has worked for the upliftment of women in the field of education and literacy.

Gradually there has been improvement and changes happened in the literacy rate of women since independence. Chandramukhi Bose and Kadambini Bose cleared the entrance exams for Calcutta University and went to college in 1883. They had special women's classes started in Bethune College as there were no girls' colleges and men's colleges did not admit girls.

During the British rule however various socio-religious movements emphasized the importance of women's education and eminent personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar etc. played a prominent role in this.

In India CSOs and NGOs have been working hand in hand as active champions in empowerment of Girls` through educating them along with the Government and Ministry of Education. These organizations actively promote educational opportunities for Girls and women, by conducting workshops, training sessions and awareness campaigns to empower women to make informed decisions of their lives.

These organizations work directly with the communities to understand local contexts and tailor interventions accordingly.

Grassroots connections enable them to address specific needs, whether related to education, healthcare, or livelihoods.NGOs/CSOs advocate for policy reforms and legal changes and raise their voice against gender-based discrimination and violence.

They influence laws and regulations through lobbying, collaboration and research. These organizations collaborate with the Government, other organizations, and stakeholders to amplify their impact.

There are many genuine NGOs in India working for the safety and well-being of a girl child and ensuring all the rights of the girl child. Few NGOs among them which are doing excellent work for women empowerment and education in India over the years are mentioned below:

1. *Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation (KSCF):* Founded by Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi is a leader in child protection and child development. KSCF has been concentrating on supporting girl child education for 40 years.

2. *CRY – Child Rights and You:* Started in 1979, NGO in India working for underprivileged children. It has been working towards creating happier and healthier childhoods for more than four decades. It is committed to doing everything it can to ensure the rights of India's children – right to education, safety & protection, health &nutrition and participation. It has transformed the lives of over 3 million children so far.

3. *Pratham:* Pratham is an innovative learning organization created to improve the quality of education in India. Established in 1995 to provide education to children in the slums. As one of the largest non-governmental organizations in the country, Over the years, Pratham's advocacy in the education sector has become well recognized and regarded. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) has become an important input in the education policies of both the central and state governments. Pratham focuses on high-quality, low-cost, and replicable interventions to address gaps in the education system.

4. *Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN):* PRADAN was started in 1983, believed that well-educated professionals working within communities can bring both the empathy and knowledge needed to help poor people improve their lives. In 1987 PRADAN began working with the government and over the years we have played a major role in developing such programs as IRDP, SGSY, and the National Rural Livelihood Mission. They continue to work for change that is sustainable and self-perpetuating, bringing skills and systems that help women, families and communities gain confidence and take charge of their own lives.

5. *Teach for India:*Teach For India was founded in 2008. Today, we are a movement of 900 Fellows teaching 33,000 children and 4,500+ Alumni who are collectively reaching 50 million children across India. Their fellows create reimagined educational spaces where students are safe, loved and challenged to reach their potential.

CONTEXT

While there have been several policies and initiatives implanted at the local (panchayat), rural, urban, state and national levels still there are substantial gaps in the communities between strategic advancement and practical implementation. The fourth target of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasizes the importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for everyone. Achieving this goal would be challenging without India's specific focus on re-enrolling girls in schools and ensuring high-quality education for all.

As a national platform, Voluntary Action Network India - VANI strengthens the support ecosystem of Civil Society organizations in India. It has 670 members with an outreach of almost 10,000 organizations. Our members work on development issues, like health, education, climate change, and policy analysis.

VANI not only works towards building the capacity of CSOs on compliance, governance, and organizational development but also helps and motivates CSOs in cutting-edge issues and methodologies.

The Indian Government is also working towards building more schools, colleges, capacity building of teachers from Government schools, improvising holistic curricula under the revised 2020, but There is still need in betterment of enrolment process especially girls and reducing their dropout rates.

Sustained and focused efforts from the Government, educational institutions, CSOs and community at large joining together to address this.

VANI has joined hands with **Population Matters** to work towards shared goals focusing on mobilizing and motivating the networks and organizations towards achieving sustainable development through universal education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Mapping of "states in India with maximum educational gender gap.

2. Identify potential civil society partners who are members of VANI in the identified states.

3. To draft a report on the current status of educational gender gap in identified states.

4. To document on – the roles, contribution and scope of CSOs in improving girls' education.
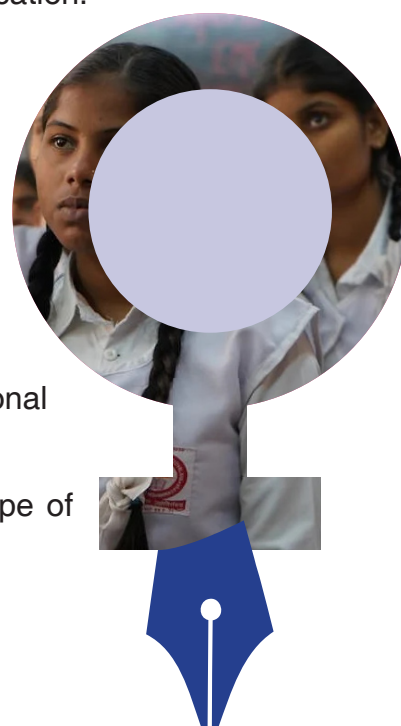
FEMALE EDUCATION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

With the right kind of education girls can take decisions that will safeguard them from unhealthy and toxic people, situations that may arise in their lives.

Girls` education decreases inequality and gender discrimination. Girls who get an education join the workforce, take care of the families financially, can marry at a mature age and take informed life decisions, which will support them in building better futures for themselves and their family members.

Educating females will contribute to more stable and resilient communities that pave way to citizens to utilize their full potential leading to good standard of living.
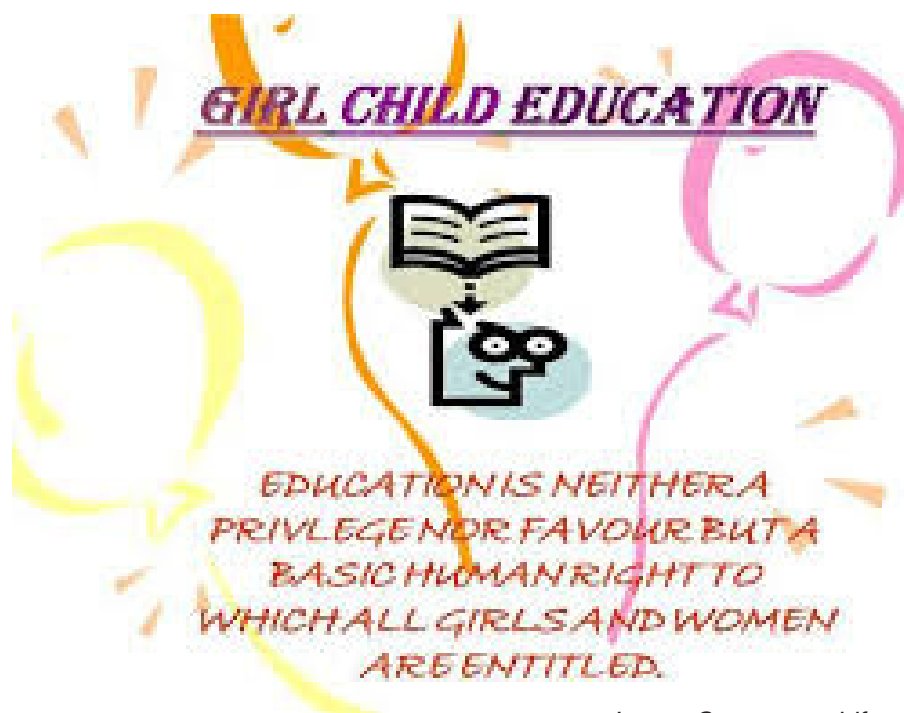

Image Source: suubiforuganda

Education is a basic right for anyone. It is not a privilege but a fundamental right.

Education creates various avenues for girls to make them aware of the vast professional opportunities.

Women who are educated are more self-confident, empowered and financially independent.

Education reduces the risk of child marriage and early pregnancies, leading to healthier lives.

Educated mothers invest in their children`s education, creating a positive path for future generations.

Educated girls become active citizens who advocate for their own rights, participate in community development and contribute towards inclusivity in society at large.

WHY THERE STILL EXISTS EDUCATIONAL GENDER GAP IN INDIA

There are several factors and reasons which attributed towards low female literacy rate. They are as follows:

Poor financial conditions: Families which fallunder - below the poverty line and under privileged may have limited resources to pay fees for their children's education. In most of these families, children work at differentplaces to contribute to the family`s income, making it difficult for girls to attend regular school. In some families the elder sisters take care of the younger siblings at home so that both the parents can work full-time.

Social and cultural norms: Majority of Indian families are patriarchal in nature in rural societies. Girls are supposed to get married at a young age, before completing their basic education levels. Most families give more preference to their son`s education compared to their daughters, leading to girls dropping out of school.

Social norms in India position women as primarily responsible for housekeeping and caregiving. This undermines their perceived value as workers in the formal economy – responsible for work in the public domain[5].
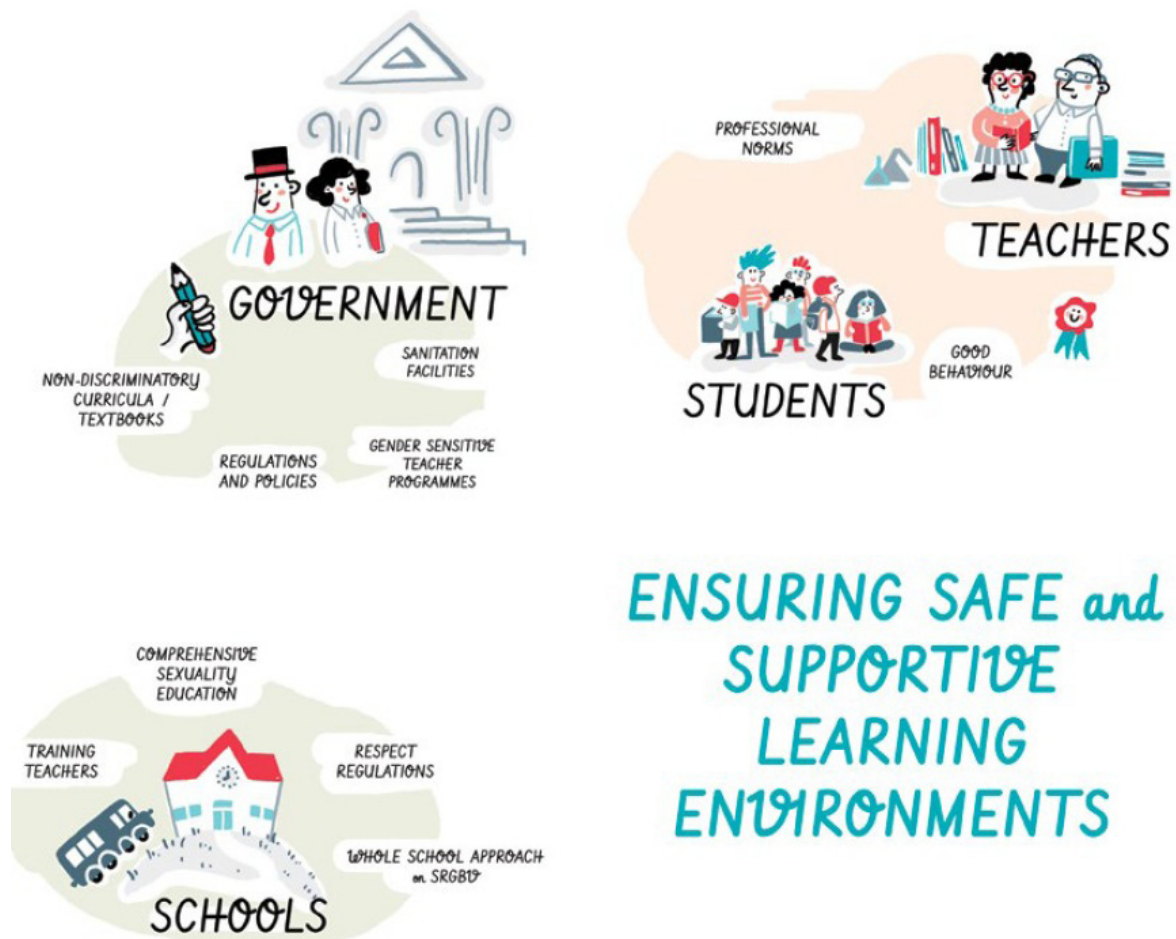

Image Source: Global Education Monitoring Report

Infrastructural challenges: In rural regions of India, there is lack of infrastructure in Government schools which do not have adequate classrooms, furniture and basic amenities like toilet and drinking water.

The problem for girls increases when they start menstruating, as they might not have access to proper sanitary products and no proper knowledge of managing the situation when it occurs. This may hinder girls from going to school regularly.

Spending on education: Parents in rural areas are still hesitant to spend money on Girl`s higher education than spending on boys' education. The Pro-male bias intensified with rising levels of educational spending. The household economic status is also a reason for which is creating further gap in higher education of females.

Migration of families: Families migrate from poor rural regions to urban localities to earn money in the construction and manufacturing sectors. Such a situationmakes it difficult for girl children to stay enrolled in the same school. So, they drop out of School as the education opportunities may be limited in those worksites or they might stay back at their source village. There may be long learning gaps due to prolonged absence.

Safety and protection concerns: Parents in rural areas of India are still scared of the distances their children need to travel to school, especially villages where there`s no necessary or reliable transport facility. It becomes a hindrance for full attendance at school and college education.

Local or regional language-based education: Recently there have been observations that many parents are willing and are open to sending their daughters to school which also provide native or regional language centric/based education. Such families prefer their children to be educated in their mother tongue.

Unqualified and untrained teachers: Many teachers in rural areas are not adequately trained to teach. Eventhough regular teachers areappointed there are many times discontinuation of the recruitment. There is also a shortage of teachers in rural regions.
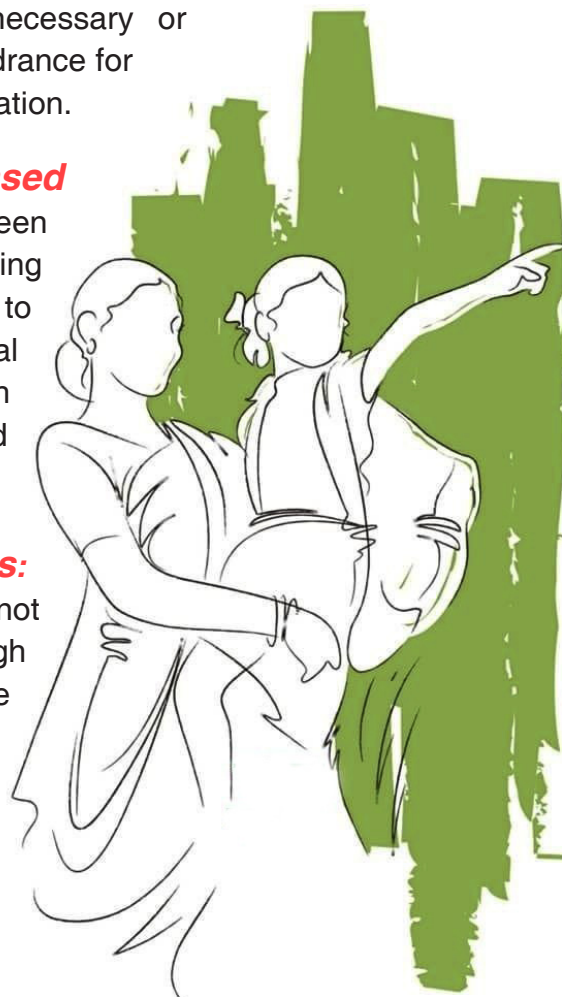
ROLE OF CSOs IN PROMOTING AND INCREASING THE RATIO OF GIRL CHILD EDUCATION

Awareness: To address the unique challenges faced by girls in India, promoting education and empowering them to realize their full potential and lead a healthy life is so important. Many CSOs are working tirelessly towards emphasizing and raising awareness through campaigns, capacity building and workshops on the ground level.

Further CSOs along with the Government collaborate with Government to ensure that the schemes for promoting girl child education are effectively implemented, monitoring their impact on regular basis and filling up gaps.

Providing free education and creating career opportunities: NGOs and CSOs are providing free education specifically to girls in remote and rural areas as well. These organizations also provide scholarships to merit students. Other advocacy programs include career counselling and guidance to get employment opportunities.

Women`s rights: There are still women in rural areas who are unaware of their rights. CSOs and NGOs empower them by offering legal advice and support and making them stand up for themselves against injustices like domestic violence.

Vocational training and skill development: NGOs support women by teaching them skills and training in sewing, crafting, knowledge of computers, making sanitary pads, farming, etc. These skills help women find jobs or even start small businesses. This will motivate them to learn basic education and become self-reliant.

Functional literacy and Remedial education classes: Many women in rural regions have never had the opportunity to go to school. They feel that after a certain age they cannot go back to school due to various family or financial related issues, get embarrassed.

This is a misconception and should be removed from society. Reaching out to such women, counselling and helping those by providing functional literacy through remedial education classes will bring in a huge change in the communities.

SOLUTIONS FOR FILLING THE GENDER GAP IN EDUCATION

Advocacy for access to education: When parents are trained and educated on the positive effects of girls` education, the whole mindset changes and they can empower their daughters to become independent.

Hygiene kits: Mostof the girls in rural areas are forced to stay at home during their menstruation periods due to lack of access to sanitary pads and other hygiene products. Distribution of these products on a regularbasis, especially in the Government schools, is very much needed.

Incentives: To encourage families to send their girls to school, incentives such as scholarships, stipends, and merit awards will make a difference.

Conducive environment: Creating safe and supporting spaces for girls within the schools is mandatory. The school should be having facilities such as separate toilets, counsellor for addressing sexual harassment if any and the teachers should be gender responsive.

Economic factors: Since poverty is one of the reasons for gender disparities in education. The girls belonging to the under privileged sector should be provided free education till class XIIth all over the country.

Monitoring measures by Government: Regular collection of data on enrollment, attendance, dropouts, learning gaps, and outcomes at the village, town, state, and national level will support to track progress, and identify back logs, scope of improvement.

Social media: In this digital age, circulation of information is quite easy and quick.Conducting regular campaigns will create more awareness.

Collaboration with NGOs and civil society: These organizations work at grass root levels, and with their expertise and sustained efforts in implementing targeted interventions will definitely make an enormous difference ensuring equity and inclusion.

*Inclusive curriculum:*Incorporating local languages and mother tongue/ native language promotes inclusivity. This may improve student retention and progression.

Gender and comprehensive sexuality education: Educating the students with essential life skills will make them recognize their rights and make responsible choice about their social and sexual relationships, as they understand the concepts of adulthood and reproductive health in proper manner. Adolescent girls` vulnerabilities and their issues can be addressed with such school-based curriculum.

THREE STATES IN INDIA WITH MAXIMUM EDUCATIONAL GENDER GAP

Based on National Statistical Office (NSO) data 2021,the state with lowest average literacy rate is Andhra Pradesh (66.4%) followed by Rajasthan (69.7%) and Bihar (70.9%).

The following table shows the states with lowest literacy rates along with the lowest female literacy in those states of India.

| Number	State	Male	Female	Average
1.	Rajasthan	80.8	57.6	69.7
2.	Andhra Pradesh	73.4	59.5	66.4
3.	Jharkhand	83%	64.7%	74.3%

Rajasthan:

The female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) in Rajasthan is 14.7%, which is lower than the national average of 23.3%, according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019–20. The FLFPR calculates the proportion of women who are working or looking for work right now.

The same survey reveals that only 23.4% of women in Rajasthan are actively pursuing jobs, including both employed and jobless women. This is considerably less than the 43.4% national average.

Women's rights and prospects are severely constrained in Rajasthan because of the patriarchal attitudes and values that are pervasive there, particularly in rural regions. Promoting a change in cultural norms that prioritize girls' and women's education and empowerment is crucial.

69.7%

74.3%

66.4%

This can be accomplished through a variety of programmes, such as public awareness campaigns, community-led projects, and the promotion of strong female role models. It is equally vital to involve men and boys in the effort to advance gender equality and combat patriarchal attitudes and behaviours[6].

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, Rajasthan has one of the highest rates of crimes against women in the nation, with rape, dowry harassment, and domestic violence being frequent occurrences.Violence and discrimination against women are major obstacle for gender disparity.
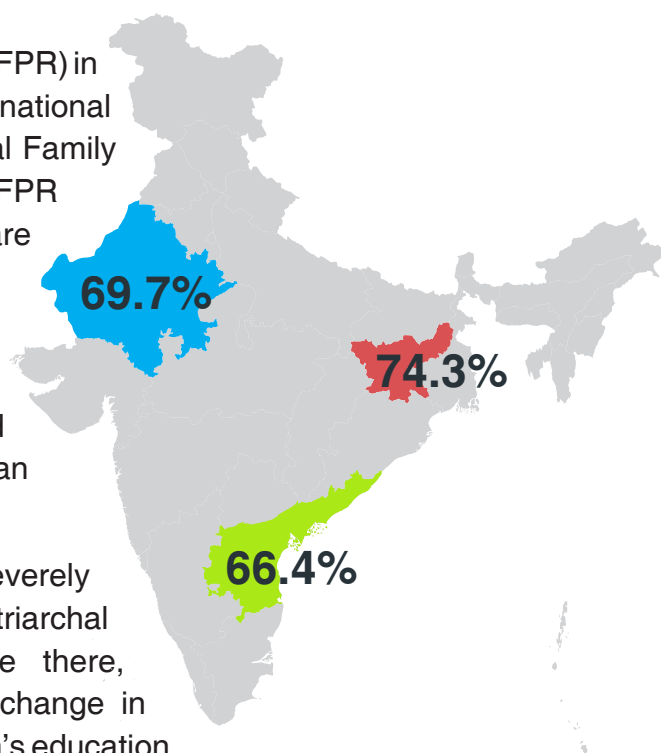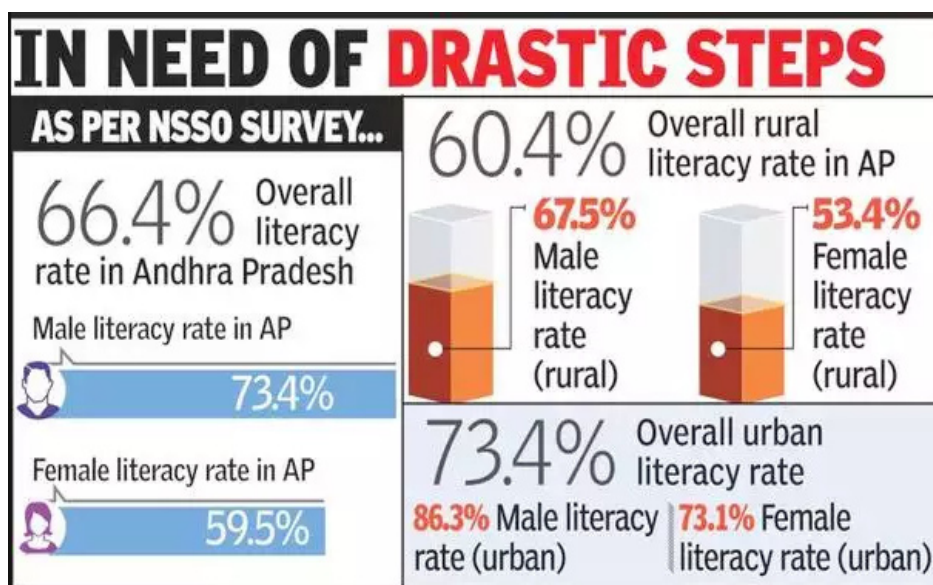
Andhra Pradesh:

Image Source: Times of India

As per a report of Times of India (2020) - Gender disparity in education hits Andhra Pradesh`s literacy. The female literacy rate for Andhra Pradesh is 59.5%, which is a bit higher than that of Rajasthan.It is further worse with 53.4% literacy rate among rural women.

However, the same data highlighted the gradually shrinking gap in the enrolment ratio in the young cohort, indicating a reducing gender gap and changing perceptions towards girl child education. Older adults, still being a majority of the population, continued to highlight the literacy gap[7].

Jharkhand:

The state has made progress on access related goals, girls share proportionate enrolments at primary, upper primary as well as secondary levels. However, the state battles many challenges. Low rates of retention and transition for both girls and boys continue to be major challenges.

A substantial proportion of children attending government schools are first-generation learning and come from extremely poor communities.

Many of these children also come from linguistically diverse backgrounds. To address their learning needs, schools must be responsive to the diversity of children.

Financial constraints account heavily for these low numbers-- 39 per cent of the state's population lives below the poverty line, including vulnerable communities from discriminated castes and tribes.

For example, schoolgirls are unable to pay for tuition, books, and uniforms. The disproportionate burden of domestic duties and unsafe public spaces further limits their educational potential.

The existing low percentage of girls enrolled in school declines further when girls reach 16 to 17, and their families expect them to marry and assume household responsibilities.

Financial restrictions create hurdles for many parents in educating the girl child. Usually, she is forced to stay at home to carry out household chores and take care of her younger siblings while the son in the family is sent to school.

Even if some parents wish to educate their girl child, lack of quality schools or other social factors create restrictions. Many girls are forced to drop out of school because of household responsibilities[8].

THE WAY FORWARD

Encouraging girls to study and participate in the workforce could add a substantial billion to India's GDP in future.

Civil society and government must collaborate more to address the challenges and completely fill in the gender disparity gap.

Investment in girls' education is not only a matter of social justice but also an economic imperative. By empowering girls through education, we can create a more equitable and prosperous future for India.

Increasing or appointing more female teachers and inspection staff will give more assurance for parents belonging to conservative families about the safety for girl children.

Even though the gender disparity is becoming low, still it needs to be taken up at the family level to fill up the gap and ensure the real status of women in the society at large.

Instead of creating barriers to development, cultural differences should be acknowledged, discussed and utilized positively to support each other.

Many research says that all educators, teachers at all levels need to have gender awareness to be open to both girls and boys choices in learning and in their future development, they will help children to explore their self, reflect themselves and make positive connections to the world around them and in gaining self-confidence, wellbeing, peer acceptance and social support.

EDUCATIONAL GENDER GAP IN INDIA

Survey findings and summary!

In continuation of our efforts towards strengthening Civil Society Organisations by enhancing their thematic outreach and effectiveness, VANI has started an intervention on Civil Society Engagement in Girls Education. This intervention aims for dual goals: a) to createsynergy among various stakeholders b) Provide a platform for mutual exchange and learning among CSOs.

To begin this initiative, VANI is documenting on the role, innovation and contribution of Indian CSOs with focus areas - reducing gender Gap and increasing enrolment of girls and the collaboration of government and private sector, Indian CSOs which have been working across the country to foster quality education and create an empowering environment for adolescents in India.VANI conducted a preliminary online survey for mapping states with educational gender gap among its members. And also, to fulfil the purpose of identifying potential partners in the formation of civil society platform for mutual exchange and learning.

A questionnaire in the google form format has been sent requesting the member organizations working thematically on Girls and Women education and empowerment for gathering information on their operational strategies, experiences and implementation challenges they faced.

Survey link:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1wEfV5SuaFnfTNUraeCMLilpOGig6RfHXNAjKg7M99yg/edit?ts=662a0b71
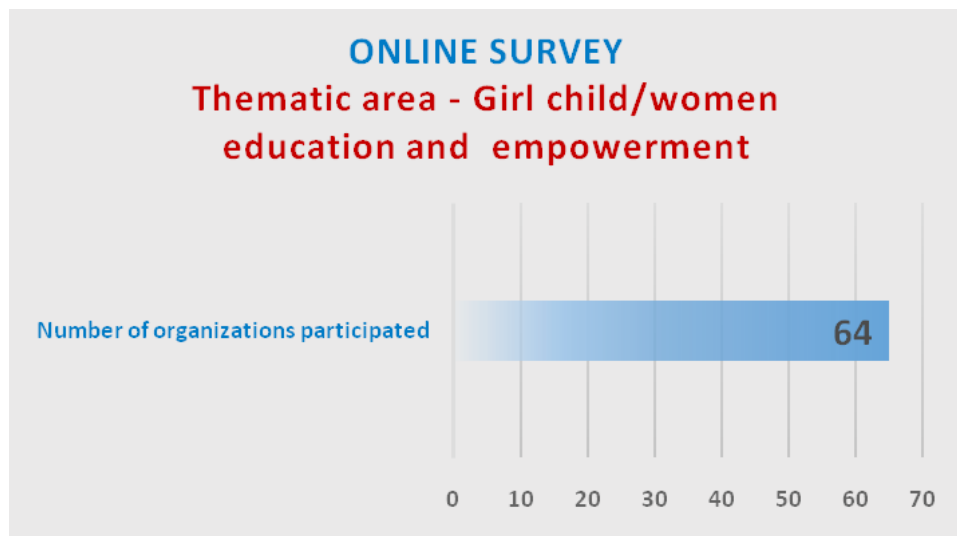
A total of 64 member organizations participated in the survey. These organizations operate at the grassroot level in both rural and urban locations across India. The survey forms were filled out by the Senior Management Team members. These members hold positions such as Secretary, Trustee, Director, Founder, CEO, Project manager etc.This comprehensive survey provides valuable insights into the efforts and perspectives of these organizations in promoting education and empowerment for girls and women.
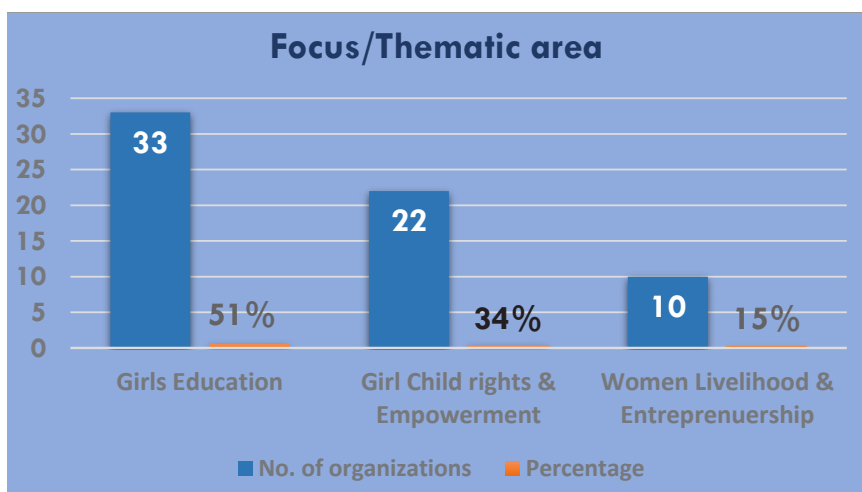
Main focus and operational objectives of the organizations are based on the following thematic areas.

Most of the organizations are running NIOS and engaging with adolescents, focusingschool dropped out girls and women of disadvantaged community.Some are operating on the child rights and women empowerment activities, inspiring people to send girls to school.Few organizations alsowork in tribal dominated areas. The communities are extremely backward. There is a primary school in every village. Due to being a forested area, it is difficult for children to reach schools in some areas. Especially during rainy days. In these areas, there is not much emphasis on girls' education. After studying till primary level, they devote themselves to household chores.

The thematic projects run by the organizations are based on the below objectives:

❖ To prevent child marriages, girl students studying in 9th standard from remote areas are selected and supported with scholarship, remedial coaching classes to improve academic performance, life skills sessions and career guidance sessions.

❖ Life skill education, sports, STEM Education, Anti Child Marriage awareness, Entrepreneurship for Women, Livelihood for widows.

❖ Promote women entrepreneurs, build women led community institutions, promote women farmers, work with adolescents through education and child rights programs, health awareness on menstrual health and hygiene.

❖ Ensuring the educational rights of socio-economically excluded children through a continuum of care and support starting from the age of 3 years to 18 years, which includes early childhood care & education towards preparing children for school enrolment to ensuring age-appropriate academic excellence for completion of elementary education successfully and promoting completion of secondary and higher secondary level of education.

❖ Advocating for inclusive and quality education to guarantee that every girl and young women from underprivileged backgrounds can access quality education from early childhood to upper secondary levels.Awareness sessions on menstrual hygiene

❖ Creating conducive environment for integrated development of the adolescent girls through the medium of Gram Panchayat/village level Resource Centres (RC).

❖ Providing life skill education to Adolescent Girls, capacity building education on Organic Farming, Financial Management andRecord keeping, Self Help Group Management, role of PRI towards Transparent and Accountable Governance Community Needs Assessment tool and Techniques to women. Nonstarter and dropout girls, Girlchild Labors were provided education on community Centre Approach.

❖ Provision of skills training to enable girls to pursue "earn while learn" strategies.

Focus/Thematic area

	No. of organizations	Percentage
Girls Education	33	51%
Girl Child rights & Empowerment	22	34%
Women Livelihood & Entreprenuership	10	15%

As per the survey done, out of 51% of the organizations exclusively work and prioritize initiatives on the Girls education and literacy programs. Their efforts aim to enhance educational opportunities to Girls. 34% of organizations work holistically by combining education with empowerment and their projects address legal rights, social inclusion and overall well-being of girl children.

15% of the organizations are working with main focus on Women economic empowerment. They support livelihood projects and encourage entrepreneurship among women. Simultaneously, they extend their support to girls` education within their communities.

SURVEY FINDINGS & SUMMARY!

The organizations' collective efforts span across diverse regions.The participating member organizations represent various states, as depicted in the image below:

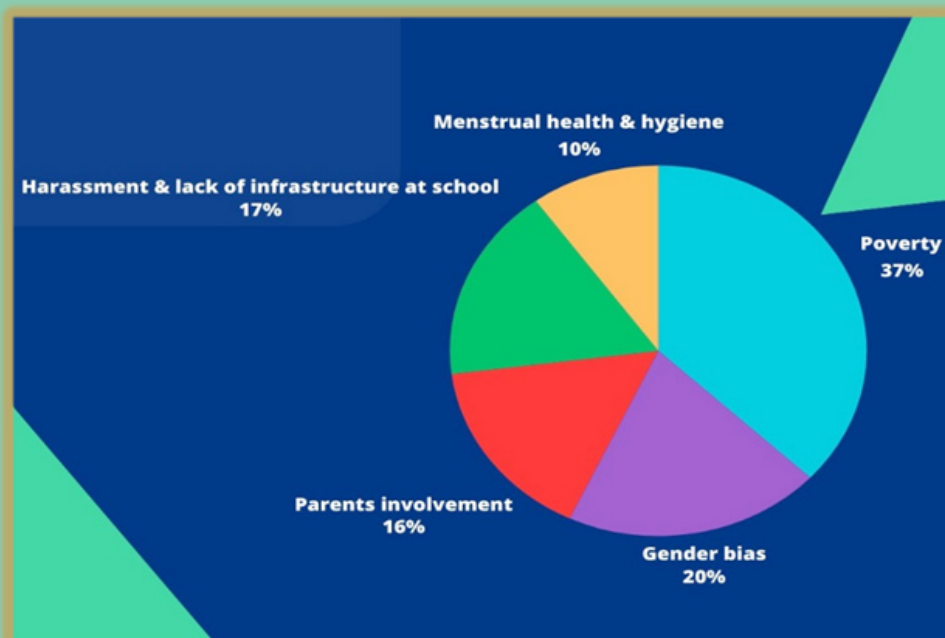| Sl. No.	States
1	Tamil Nadu
2	Uttar Pradesh
3	Chhattisgarh
4	Maharashtra
5	Bihar
6	Haryana
7	Gujarat
8	Rajasthan
9	West Bengal
10	Delhi
11	Odisha
12	Assam
13	Telangana
14	Karnataka
15	Uttarakhand
16	Manipur
17	Jharkhand

Important insights about the challenges faced by students.

The following are some observations highlighting crucial issues that need urgent attention in rural and urban locations, especially for girls, in accessing education shared by the organizations in the survey:

➤ Many students, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds, face resource constraints.

➤ Lack of financial support, access to educational materials, and parental negligence can hinder their educational journey.

➤ It's commendable that students are fast learners. However, irregular schooling due to various reasons can disrupt their learning process.

➤ The absence of schools and learning centres during critical periods (such as Paddy and Potato seasons or marriage months) affects continuity in education.

➤ High costs of kerosene fuel and lack of electricity in students' homes create additional barriers. Malnutrition impacts cognitive development, making it essential to address health and nutrition needs alongside education.

➤ Parents' indifference toward education and early marriage practices contribute to girls' exclusion from schooling. Providing education in local dialects and culturally relevant curricula is crucial for effective learning. Ensuring safe schools and accessible infrastructure is vital, especially for girls with disabilities.

➤ Addressing gender norms and beliefs within communities is a significant challenge but essential for progress. Early marriage remains a barrier, and non-formal education can be an alternative for those unable to attend formal schools. Overcoming societal biases and discrimination is essential for promoting equal educational opportunities.

➤ Building awareness and providing support are key steps toward empowering students and their families. Collaboration among stakeholders, including civil society organizations (CSOs), is necessary to drive change.

➤ These insights underscore the urgency of addressing these challenges to ensure that every child, regardless of gender or background, has access to quality education. There`s still more scope to continue working towards a more equitable and inclusive educational system.

Major obstacles to Girls` education

Menstrual health & hygiene 10%

Harassment & lack of infrastructure at school 17%

Poverty 37%

Gender bias 20%

Parents involvement 16%

37% of the responding organizations shared that poverty and financial background is a major obstacle for the Girls secondary and higher education in India.

20 % say that Gender Bias and societal norms in rural communities where boys' education is preferred than Girl`s. Another 16% say that parent's involvement in taking decisions in the lives of daughters such as early marriage, education, giving household responsibility to girl child etc. There is lack of basic female friendly infrastructure (toilets, changing areas) especially Government schools which is hindering the regular attendance of girls specifically in rural regions. 10% of respondents informed that lack of awareness on menstrual health and hygiene still remains a taboo topic in Indian society. Integration into school curricula can empower girls with knowledge about biology, hygiene practices, and coping strategies.

Some specific points highlighted in the survey:

The participants shared their point of view on the major hindrances which are challenging while working in the community. Child marriage, gender discrimination, teenage pregnancy and parda system in rural areas. Parents are illiterate and not willing to send their daughters outside of their villages.

❖ Safety and protection from abuse is still a challenge for the girls which results in dropouts from schools.

❖ Poverty and domestic responsibilities also curtain the education opportunities for girls.

❖ Lack of education level of the parents- they need to be convinced.

❖ Lack of a bigger picture, or some visible benefits of education- because of the shrinking job opportunities.

❖ Higher education facilities are generally far from the reach of Girls.

❖ The infrastructural facilities of schools also lead to the drop out of girls from school. Lack of separate and functional girls' toilet; lack of facility for maintenance of menstrual hygiene etc. are playing great role in retaining girls in school.

❖ Sometimes the distance of school and the unsafe environment on the way to school hinders female students to attend school for safety reasons.

❖ The societal norms, patriarchy, lack of knowledge of government schemes in community and holistic view of education where a girl gets support right from family to school and society for pursuing her further education.

❖ In remote villages, girls are malnourished, they have to take care of household cattle and younger brothers and sisters, father is addicted to drugs and mother works outside the home to earn money.

The children are often left behind to fend for themselves. Although enrolled to nearby government schools, a majority of these children remain disinterested in studies. Many of them –especially the girl's dropout. These young women subsequently end up joining their parents in the unorganized sector and the vicious cycle is repeated. Several houses in the slums are replete with stories of early marriages, death due to early childbirth, sexual violence and young mothers deserted by their husbands.

- ❖ Raise awareness through community dialogues, workshops, and legal advocacy. Empower girls to assert their rights.

- ❖ Conduct parent sensitization programs, emphasizing the long-term benefits of education for their daughters.

- ❖ Ensure safe school environments, address harassment, and provide safe transportation options.Offer scholarships, flexible school hours, and vocational training to balance responsibilities.

- ❖ Showcase successful women role models, emphasizing education's impact on career prospects.

- ❖ Improve facilities, including separate functional toilets and menstrual hygiene provisions.

- ❖ Provide safe transportation options and establish schools closer to communities. Community awareness campaigns, involving religious leaders and influencers, can challenge stereotypes.

- ❖ Address nutrition, provide support for family responsibilities, and promote community kitchens.Enhance teaching methods, vocational training, and mentorship to keep students motivated.

- ❖ Legal awareness, health clinics, and counseling can prevent early marriages and support young mothers.

- ❖ By addressing these challenges holistically, we can create an environment where girls thrive academically and personally.

Footnotes:

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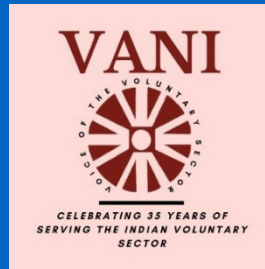
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About Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) VANI is a national platform of voluntary organizations of India, which was formed in 1988. Currently, it has a strong network base of over 620 direct and outreach to over 15,000 organizations, spread across 24 states and one Union Territory. VANI is widely known for its evidence-based advocacy for an enabling environment and efforts in collectivizing the voluntary sector for its sustainable development. Through its network, VANI disseminates pertinent information around policies, legislation, taxation, sustainable development, concerning the sector to its members as well as non-members in an effective and timely manner. VANI builds the capacities of Voluntary organizations on issues of critical importance including improved governance and effective leadership, legal compliances, accountability, transparency, strategic resource mobilization and Financial Management, for internal system strengthening and resilience building. Through stakeholder dialogues, VANI builds both intra and inter-sectoral convergences, thereby bringing government, corporate, civil society, donors on a common platform for cohesive and effective action. Through its created specialized forums, a) Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Leaders; b) Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) Chartered Accountants and Legal experts, VANI is able to steer inter and intra peer learning on issues of common interest. VANI encourages partnerships for national-level policy reforms on the basis of the evidence-based narrative. VANI plays a pivotal role in establishing the global footprints of Indian voluntary organizations on the global development discourse. It is a member of various international networks like FORUS, CIVICUS, Affiliation Group of National Associations (AGNA), Asian Development Alliance (ADA), Asia Democracy Network. It has partnered with Accountable Now, International Civil Society Centre and eight accountability initiatives across the world to draft Global Standard for CSO Accountability and is presently engaged in encouraging voluntary organizations across India and South Asia to adhere to accountability and transparency standards for enhanced credibility. VANI has played an extensive role in drawing the attention of Civil Society and encouraging its enhanced role play on several international development agendas and partnerships including SDGs, BRICS, BBIN, BIMSTECH, Blue Economy and their social implications.