



BRIDGING THE GAP OF EDUCATION

Collective efforts of Active Woman Lakshmi Murmu, village organisation, and gram panchayat, with support from Nala block administration, help Rupali find her way back to education

Thirteen-year-old Rupali Hembrom hasn't waited for summer vacations to get over as desperately as she is waiting this year. This July is going to be very special for her as she will go to school after a gap of two years. "I had studied up to grade 5 at a private school in Dumka, after which my education was discontinued as my chacha (paternal uncle) who was financing my education till then, couldn't afford my school fee anymore. I was called back home from hostel," says Rupali, resident of Benageriya village, Nala block, Jamtara. She lives with her paternal uncle & aunt as her parents are no more.

Since then, it has been a long wait for Rupali to resume her education. Government school at Benageriya is only till grade 5, leaving parents with no choice but to either drop out their children from education or seek admission at other schools in neighbouring villages. The nearest govt school that offers education till grade 10th is around 3-4 km away.

"I knew Rupali was a school dropout. Although her uncle was keen on continuing her education and I had tried to help him too, but the two biggest hurdles were lack of resources at his end (which didn't allow him to continue her education in private school); and absence of documents required for admission," recalls Lakshmi Murmu, Active Woman who is associated with Village Organisation (Benageriya Ajeevika Mahila Gram Sangathan).

Twenty-eight-year-old Lakshmi Murmu is responsible for managing nine Self-Help Groups¹; Benageriya falls under her monitoring area. She has been associated with Project Umang

since its inception in 2019 that works against child marriage and promotes girls' education in Jamtara & Godda districts of Jharkhand. JSLPS has partnered with PCI India to implement the project. Umang is improving the lives of adolescent girls through empowering SHG mothers. Identifying school dropout girls and getting them back on educational pathway is a major component of Umang.

Overcoming Hurdles

Fortunately, with collective efforts of Lakshmi Murmu, Benageriya VO, and gram panchayat along with support from Nala block administration, Rupali has been enrolled with Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)², Chakanyapara, at grade 6 this month. The residential school is around 15 km away, where she will receive education, books, accommodation, and food free of cost. Her classes will start in July. For a girl, who had lost her father at a young age of 4 and consequently, her mother too at 6, this admission has been no less than a blessing. "I had almost lost all hopes of studying again," says Rupali.

Her re-admission hasn't been easy for many reasons. Lakshmi Murmu's initial attempts to get her re-enrolled had failed as her transfer/migration certificate from Dumka was missing. She then reported the issue to Benageriya VO which offered support in getting the documents. Meanwhile, Nala BDO also enquired about school dropouts in the block and encouraged team Umang to identify such cases and get them enrolled with KGBV. "Rupali's Aadhar card was available. However, her uncle's BPL card wasn't

[1] Three-tier SHG structure includes SHGs, Village Organisations (VOs) and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs).

[2] KGBVs are residential girls' secondary schools run by the Government of India for the socio-economically weaker sections in the country.



“Parents need to be oriented towards the value of girls’ education. Unless we create a conducive environment for girls’ studies at home, it is pointless to just send them to school.”

-Lakshmi Murmu, Active Woman
Benageriya Ajeevika Mahila Gram Sangathan, Jamtara

available – a document mandatory for admission at KGBV,” says Lakshmi. Benageriya VO members along with Lakshmi helped him acquire his income certificate and other requisite documents.

System-level Engagement

Next, the school needed death certificates of Rupali’s parents. Both her parents had died years ago in the same village, and the family had never got any paperwork done. So, the VO stepped in. “VO members explained the situation to school authorities and how difficult & time-consuming it would be to get the certificates issued now. They also raised concern that probably Rupali will miss another academic year of learning if we wait for paperwork,” says Lakshmi. The admission body then agreed to accept letters from local authorities as an alternative to death certificates.

“Support of Nala BDO was a booster that helped us get through the admission process smoothly,” says Lakshmi. This shows the Increasing trust & interest of the administration in the work Umang has been doing. As a reflection of enhanced capacity and leadership for system level engagement, women leaders from Benageriya VO engaged with gram panchayat and got a letter issued from mukhiya (village head). “It took VO members many rounds of discussion and counselling before the gram panchayat agreed for the letter. We had to explain the significance the letter possessed in securing a better future for a girl,” says Lakshmi. The VO also played a key role in mobilising community heads for signing as witnesses. Another letter was issued by Benageriya VO

Counselling at Kishori Help Desk

Once the team got through admission process, it took Rupali to Kishori Help Desk – a unique space that offers complete guidance to adolescent girls & their parents on issues related to education, career, life skills and SRHR (sexual & reproductive

health & rights). A major component under Umang, these help desks are in CLF offices and are managed by trained counsellors.

“The idea was to offer an educational orientation to Rupali, since she will be joining school after a big gap,” says Lakshmi. “Counsellor didi guided me on setting goals better and about the significance of education, subjects, etc,” recalls Lakshmi. She feels grateful to team Umang, especially Lakshmi for all the support & guidance. “I am excited to be back to school,” she says.

Rupali isn’t the only girl benefitted by Lakshmi’s efforts. Over the years, Lakshmi has emerged as a vigilant member of community for social issues. In 2021, she helped three girls with admissions in Benageriya. Last year too, she found that around 22 children in her village were working as child labour brick kiln instead of attending school. “I counselled their mothers, many of whom were SHG members under my area. After repeated counsellings and follow-ups, finally the kids are back to school,” she says.

As a woman who had lost her mother at a young age of 8 and was married at 16, Lakshmi empathises with challenges of girls like Rupali. “I never want any other girl to meet the same fate. Umang has given me confidence & hope to work on the issues of child marriage and girls’ education,” says Lakshmi

In fact, her efforts have been acknowledged. She was felicitated at a special event held on international women’s day last month at Morbasa CLF. “It feels great to be appreciated at such a level. This has motivated me to work more strongly for women’s rights,” says Lakshmi.

Sharing her experiences, she says: “Girls need mentoring at schools as well as at household level. Unless we create a conducive environment for their studies at home, it is pointless to just send them to school. Parents need to be oriented towards the value of daughters’ education. That is our primary focus.”

For more information, please contact:

Project Concern International India, F-87, Okhla Industrial Estate Phase -3 New Delhi: Email: smukherjee@pciglobal.in