



## Doosra Dashak's Journey to Empower Adolescent Boys and Girls in Rajasthan<sup>1</sup>

*"I joined the 4-month residential camp in 2007 and later got admission in a government school in grade 7. There were only 2 girls and the rest were boys. The other girl was absent most of the time. I hated going to school as the boys used to tease me. Doosra Dashak officials helped me get admission in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), even though it meant going back to Grade 6. After completing my course in KGBV, I took admission in Grade 9 in the government school. When I was in Grade 12, my father passed away; soon after my mother also passed away. I was informed that there was a scholarship I could apply for pursuing higher education. I joined an undergraduate course. I did not tell anyone at home about the scholarship, as it would have been used for household expenses. I worked at the Ikhvelo along with my studies and completed my B.A. Since 2021, I have been working with Educate Girls as a Field Coordinator." (Female participant residential camp, Pindwara)*

Doosra Dashak (Second Decade)<sup>2</sup> was initiated in Rajasthan in 2001, by the Foundation for Education and Development (FED) with the aim of empowering adolescents in the age group of 11-20 years. The focus was on giving a 'second chance' and developing a sense of self-worth among out-of-school adolescents and promoting skills for life to them. The objectives as formulated in the initial proposal included- meeting the basic learning needs of adolescents, their health care, imparting vocational and life skills, and utilisation of science and technology to develop and harness the adolescents' energies for nation-building (Saldanha, 2007). The project strategies were based on an understanding that holistic and integrated education was not only about imparting knowledge but also focussed on the development of the personality of the adolescent learners, meeting their learning needs and equipping them with skills for the future.

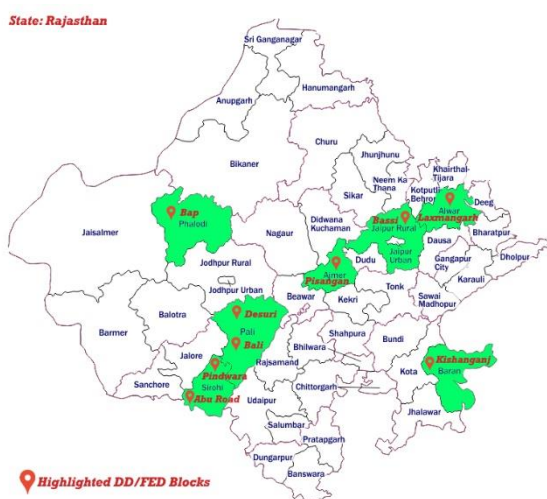
By early 2000, research evidence clearly indicated that enrolment in primary grades I-V had increased steadily since the NPE 1986. Several initiatives were launched by the Government of India for primary and elementary education in different states of India. These initiatives also generated greater demand for and interest in gender issues in education. On the other hand, it was also evident that there were no central or state government schemes or interventions to address the specific challenges posed by the large proportion of adolescents who were out-of-school and had no alternative pathways for learning. Despite their dynamism and idealism, they were adrift, vulnerable and at risk. FED felt that there was a need to channelize the potential and talent of marginalized adolescents for constructive purposes by providing them avenues

<sup>1</sup> This article has been jointly authored by DD team, Shobhita Rajagopal and Mukta Gupta.

<sup>2</sup> The Foundation for Education & Development (FED) was registered as a non-profit Trust in 2001 by its Founder Shri Anil Bordia, the eminent educationist and social activist. He also played a central role in designing innovative programs like, WDP, Shiksha Karmi and Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan.

for self- development and a sense of purpose. It took a decision to launch the Doosra Dashak (DD) project for the 11-20 years age group in 2001.

The need for an intervention like DD was based on the premise that adolescents can play the role of catalysts in a process of social transformation. The proposed vision was “*creation of a new social order through community participation, based on values of equity and justice; providing a second chance for education to the unschooled adolescents and the preparation of a cadre of committed adolescents and young persons equipped with relevant education and skills*”. Today, the project is operational in 9 Blocks in 7 Districts of the state covering 238 Panchayats and 1,143 revenue villages. (Source: MIS data of FED)



## Key Strategies and Processes

The DD project strategies and processes have focussed on linking learners’ social and ecological environment and experience with intensive learning inputs to influence the thought, behaviour and practise of the learners. The main activities of the project that have crystallised over time include:

**Community Mobilisation and Social Mapping** helped lay the foundation of the project in the selected intervention areas. Social mapping exercises also led to understanding the educational needs of adolescents in the area and identifying adolescents for camps.

**Training and Residential Camps** are key to DD engagement with adolescents living in the most remote and challenging geographies of rural Rajasthan. These customised residential camps are organised every year for out-of-school adolescents. Here “residentiality” plays a significant role in promoting, behavioural change and social inclusion. Various activities in the camp help learners to tap their latent potential and ‘discover themselves’; their self-esteem increases and they learn to express themselves with confidence on a range of issues. 8993 adolescents (5488 girls and 3505 boys) have benefitted from 199 residential camps that have been organised till date.

Short-duration training /camps on specific themes like life skills education (LSE), have also been organised. 58,734 adolescents have benefitted through DD’s LSE package, which seeks to equip adolescents with Reflective, Social and Negotiating skills to navigate challenges related to their self-development and nurture their potential to work as agents of social change. In addition, leadership skills are inculcated among youth through discussions on various social issues such as caste discrimination, gender equity, and economic disparities. These discussions help them understand and address real-world problems, fostering critical thinking and leadership skills.

**Ikhvelo** centres have been set up at the panchayat level to facilitate continuing education and promote reading and learning amongst adolescents and youth. Over the years these centres have also emerged as multipurpose centres for community and adolescents and offer opportunities for peer learning in a conducive environment. With the provision of digital devices (laptops, tablets, and smartphones) and the presence of at least one woman supervisor, Ikhvelos attract disadvantaged children and adolescents, especially adolescent girls. DD block teams spread awareness about open schooling, support out-of-school adolescents to submit prescribed forms and encourage parents to support their children, to complete their education. Academic guidance is provided to the aspirants through DDs Ikhvelos where they get help to prepare for their exams. A total of 553 adolescents (107 boys and 446 girls) had completed their Grade X and XII through Open schooling in 2022-23. (DD Annual Report, 2023)

## Community Based Programmes

DD believes that to bring about social change on a large scale, community participation and ownership is necessary. It increases the prospects of sustainability of the project. DD invests in nurturing and capacity building of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in the form of Yuva Manch and Mahila Samooh in its project villages to implement its programmes, sustain and deepen their impact. DD's youth groups at the village level and Yuva Sakti Sangathan at the block level in project areas are well positioned to assist and guide Sahbhagis (DD beneficiaries) who graduate from its residential camps and short-duration life-skills training. The Mahila Samoohs (women's groups constituted at the village level) and Jagrit Mahila Sangathan (groups constituted at the block level) contribute and work towards improved reproductive health, nutrition, safe motherhood, improving livelihoods and empowerment of rural women.

In 2013-2014, DD also started the Anil Bordia Scholarship which is awarded annually to those adolescent participants of Doosra Dashak who wish to pursue higher education but are inhibited by financial constraints.

## Capturing Transformation

Successive reviews undertaken over the years at different stages of project implementation show that the various strategies have been effective in raising awareness and confidence among adolescents who have participated in residential camps and short-term training. It has also enabled a large number of adolescents to be linked with continuing education both directly and indirectly. As per official reports, DD has reached out to 25821 direct participants and 90897 indirect participants.

The camps have provided an atmosphere of equity and freedom to girls and boys who have led restrictive lives. The first residential camp at the Bap block in 2002 was for boys. The exposure to various activities helped them to become more inclusive and it was the first step towards gender sensitization and becoming agents of change. The various continuing education initiatives supported by the women's and youth groups have led to collective action for communitarian gains.

The following cases give a glimpse into the journey of transformation experienced by adolescent beneficiaries of DD:

*I was not enrolled in a school and used to take livestock (goats) for grazing. My parents were approached by the DD team to allow me to join the 4-month residential camp in 2008 in Desuri. My parents were apprehensive and my mother asked, "Are you taking her to sell her to someone? Don't waste my time- she is not going anywhere." After much persuasion, I was admitted to the camp. It took me a month to adjust there, but gradually I started participating in all the activities with enthusiasm. I later completed my school education from a government school in my village. There was no college in my village. The nearest one was in Desuri, which meant spending at least Rs.80 per day for transport. This was beyond my parents' paying capacity. When the DD Project Director informed me about the scholarship, I promptly applied for it and finished my graduation. I am now an active member of DD and I work as a resource person in school and in other blocks to talk about menstruation to young girls. (Female participant residential camp, Desuri)*

*"I belong to a Dalit family and was brought up in a conservative milieu. I always wanted to study but I got married when I was in Class 8. I was barely 13 years old. Marriage disrupted my life and dreams. Post-marriage, my mobility was restricted both inside and outside the home. Soon after I gave birth to two girls. DD started Ikhivelo (Continuing Education Centre) in our village. I never in my dreams thought that I will get a second chance to study again! After much persuasion and negotiation with my parents-in-law, at the age of 21 years, I joined the 4-month residential camp organized by Doosra Dashak. I have now passed my Class 10 through open schooling and I am preparing for my Class 12 exam. I have gained confidence and have become a role model for girls and young women in the village. I want my daughters to be able to complete their education before marriage. I strongly believe that early marriage is a major barrier to women's education and emancipation". (A Female participant in residential camp, Bap)*

*"My association with DD started when I was just 12 years old and was a regular visitor to the Ikhivelo. I was selected by DD team to participate in a workshop organized by APPI at Bhopal when I was in Class 12. I came in contact with the staff of*

*APPI who encouraged me to apply to the University. I am now pursuing my Bachelor's degree. My life has changed! (Female participant, Pisangan)*

*"I participated in the short-term LSE camp organized by DD. I was an active member of the Yuva Manch and participated in all the activities while continuing my education. I am now employed in the Indian Railways. In the camps/training, we had learnt about the ill effects of dowry and when I married, my family did not demand any dowry. I owe my success to my association with DD". (Male participant of LSE training, Bassi)*

All the above experiences show that the project enabled a change in attitudes regarding the need for education, especially for girls. The fact that a large number of girls have participated in the residential training with parental support and consent has been a significant step. The parents and community members observed the changes that came about in the boys and girls who attended the camps and encouraged the adolescents to study further (Rajagopal, 2019).

In a recent workshop organised with the beneficiary of Anil Bordia scholarships the beneficiary participants were unanimous in voicing that their association with DD had brought about significant changes in their lives at the – individual, family and community levels. They felt that they had overcome fear and diffidence and gained the courage to go out of the house. They had met new people and interacted with them without fear and hesitation. The out-of-school girls had participated in the camps and were connected with education and later mainstreamed. Many got linked to higher education, and some of them fulfilled their dreams and aspirations. The DD experience also helped them make their own decisions and they were able to share their opinion/perspective with family members. Those who were not able to attend regular school completed their schooling through State Open board examinations.

The beneficiaries aspired to be self-reliant and gainfully employed. They felt that education is necessary for girls as it opened doors for a bright future. It is important that girls are not viewed as a 'burden' but encouraged to study and become self-sufficient. They can also create a new identity for themselves. It is observed that grade X is often a tipping point. Most of the girls who clear grade X seem to be able to negotiate for further education and show greater agency in making certain decisions about their lives. The intra-generational effect is also seen wherein older siblings are able to create a supportive environment within the family for other siblings to study. (Gupta and Rajagopal, 2023)

*"I have decided that after completing my post-graduation, I will prepare for B.Ed. I want to become a government teacher so that I can help those girls who have faced challenges like me." (Female beneficiary, Kishanganj)*

In tandem with their work with out-of-school adolescent boys through camps and other interventions, DD's recent involvement in the Gender Equity Movement in Schools for Boys (GEMS) has brought about significant changes in the perspective of boys. It has provided an opportunity for discussing issues of justice and gender equity. DD encouraged boys to actively advocate for impartiality both at home and in their communities. Through dialogue and collaborative activities, boys have started to understand the principles of equity and equality in their daily lives.

*"Before, I used to engage in fights at school, call boys by derogatory names, and tease them. But since I understood the GEMS sessions, I've changed a lot. Now, I avoid arguments, call boys by their full names, and don't use abusive names. I've also learned deeply about violence and have applied it in my life." (Teacher, Government Secondary School, Khakharwada, Pindwara)*

Doosra Dashak began with addressing needs of adolescent boys and girls who had been left out of the policy discourse. It has enabled a large number of adolescents to explore new knowledge and charter uninitiated pathways. This has enabled adolescents to communicate with confidence and provide information to the community on a range of issues. They have been able to raise their voice against practices of early marriage and discriminatory practices. Their employment opportunities have improved and their income has increased. Several adolescents who have benefitted from the DD camps are now engaged in government programmes as - Asha Sahyogini, Aanganwari Worker, MGNREGA Mate, Maabadi Shiksha Sahyogi, Police, Van Rakshak, ANM, Sathin and Forest Guards. Other have also joined private jobs as



Bank Assistant, Teachers and so on. They have also contested for post of Sarpanch and Ward Panch, and have become Zila Parishad members and Panchayat Samiti member.

*Kanta is a resident of a village situated in the Aravall valley; bordering Rajasthan and Gujarat. There was a single primary school in the village with high teacher absenteeism. Kanta changed her school which was 50 kilometres from her village. However, the teachers were not friendly and used corporal punishment to discipline the students.*

*In 2003, Doosra Dashak started its work in Abu Road block. The DD team met Kanta's parents and after a lot of cajoling and discussions Kanta agreed to join the camp. Kanta liked the atmosphere of the camp and behaviour of camp teachers. She was motivated to study in all seriousness. After the camp she enrolled in the KGBV and completed her grade 8. She was also active at the community level through Yuva Manch. She realized the importance of education and completed her B.A. and B.Ed. She was keen to serve the nation after meeting former President Shri A.P.J. Kalam with Shri Anil Bordia in 2008.*

*She appeared for the competitive exams to join the police department. Post the physical training and exam she was selected in the police force in April 2017. Known as "belt no. 813" Kanta has become a role model for her village and neighbouring areas.*

In a social context where inequality prevails and poverty, geographic distance and isolation based on class, caste, gender and religion continue, Doosra Dashak has tried to mitigate the marginalization of young adolescents and empower them through 'knowledge and information'.

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**Doosra Dashak is making a powerful impact in the lives of adolescents in the remote regions of India. To explore how the organisation is transforming education and empowering youth, view our latest collaboration [here](#).**