



Our experiences with open schools in Rajasthan

Girl-led research in Salumbar district



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Who are we?



About us: The girls who led the study

The research study was conducted by a diverse group of 20 girls, all of us belonging to the ST (Scheduled Tribe) community, which aligns with the community of most girls we interviewed during the research. Our age ranges from 16 to 25, with most of us falling between 17 to 21 years old. Most of us are currently pursuing our education, with some attending college, while some are in the 10th to 12th grade. Notably, seven of us are studying through open school education, making us aware of the challenges and opportunities it presents for girls in rural Rajasthan.

As a group, most of us are unmarried, but two members are married. We share a strong association with Vishakha, actively engaging with the organization's activities, particularly the Kishori Samuh, for a year or more. Our collective experiences as members of the ST community enable us to deeply connect with and understand the challenges faced by girls in similar circumstances, making us well-equipped to conduct this research with empathy and insight.

Here is something about each of us, and why we are doing this study:

*My name is **Bhavna**, and I am pursuing my Bachelor's degree. Alongside my studies, I also work to earn some money. I want to help girls who are unable to pursue education so that they can move ahead in life. Through this research, I am gathering information that can help other girls like me.*

*My name is **Radha**, and I am studying in the third year of my bachelor's degree. Many girls in my village and nearby villages face interruptions in their education. Sometimes, they have to quit their studies, and other times, their families force them to drop out. Through research, I aim to help these girls.*

*My name is **Sharada** and I am currently in the final year of my Bachelor of Arts. Through this research, I want to overcome my fear of interacting with people from different villages, and also help other girls continue their education.*

“Our collective experiences as tribal girls from Salumbar enables us to understand the educational challenges of girls like us.”

My name is **Bhooli**, and I am studying in the 12th grade. I am involved in this research because I want girls who have dropped out of their studies to start learning again. Helping them makes me happy.

My name is **Raju**, and I am in the 11th grade. Through this research, I want to be able to meet and chat with many girls.

My name is **Kavita**, and I am studying in the 10th grade. I also have fears, and with this research, I want to overcome them. Understanding and listening to girls' problems gives me courage.

My name is **Devu**, and I am a student in my final year of a Bachelor of Arts degree. Through my involvement in research, I have acquired significant knowledge about the challenges faced by girls.

My name is **Ranjeeta**, and alongside my studies, I am doing this work to enhance my own experiences. Each girl has a different story and understanding that story is essential to help them.

My name is **Lakshmi**, and I am studying in the 12th grade through open school. Despite facing many difficulties, I am fighting for my right to education. I am doing this research because I want other girls to study too.

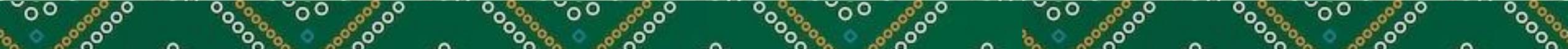
My name is **Neepa**, and I enjoy studying. I decided to be part of this research to enhance my understanding.

My name is **Tulsi**, and I am studying in the 12th grade through open school. I have noticed that girls face many difficulties in open school education. It becomes even harder after marriage. I believe that this research will help girls.

“I am doing this research because I want other girls to study too.”



Context and background

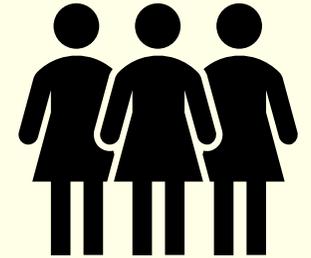


About Vishakha

The present study was conducted by girls in rural Rajasthan, with the facilitation of Vishakha, a voluntary organization dedicated to empowering women, young people, and marginalized communities. Since its establishment in 1991, Vishakha has been actively working with communities, institutions, and the state to challenge gender norms that perpetuate inequality. The organization's initiatives aim to enhance opportunities for learning, education, address violence, ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and promote overall well-being.

Vishakha emerged in the backdrop of the women's movement in Rajasthan and India. Many of the members have been a part of the Women's Development Project (WDP) of the Government of Rajasthan since the very beginning and closely involved with issues related to women's empowerment. The organization's early involvement as one of the key litigants in filing a joint PIL in Bhanwari Devi's case resulted in the Supreme Court of India issuing the landmark Guidelines for Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace in 1997, popularly known as the Vishakha Guidelines.

Learning from the Women's Development Project (WDP) highlighted the significance of collectivization at the village level for countering issues of gender-based violence (GBV). Hence, formation of women's groups became important for empowerment of women/girls and in prevention of violence against them. In Salumbar, adolescent girls forming collectives at the village level, understanding strategies used by women combating violence in their own lives, making their own decisions, and leading to a movement became part of Vishakha's work.



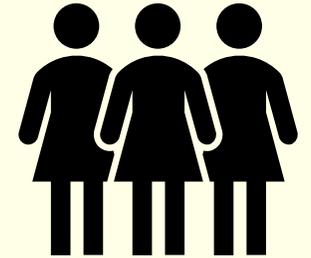
About Vishakha (contd.)

Vishakha's interventions primarily centre around enhancing the capabilities of adolescent girls in the tribal populated villages of the Salumbar and Jhallara tehsils of Udaipur district. They conduct community awareness campaigns, engage in meetings, and collaborate with government departments and schools, with a particular emphasis on open schools.

To support this cause, Vishakha has established various mechanisms and services, such as short-stay guest houses, providing course books, coaching classes, and mediating with parents to encourage their daughters' education. Over the past five years, Vishakha has been working tirelessly to enable girls who do not regularly attend school to access open school facilities. Annually, the organization supports the enrolment of 150-250 adolescent girls in these open schools.

During extensive grassroots coverage through village meetings, numerous examples have surfaced, highlighting the challenges faced by both parents and girls due to the complex and time-consuming documentation process of the open school system. Despite all other preparations for admission being in place, this cumbersome process has been a significant hindrance.

In light of these issues, the current study aims to delve deeper into the barriers faced by marginalized girls in accessing open school facilities and provide valuable insights that can inform future interventions to improve educational opportunities for these vulnerable communities in rural Rajasthan.



About Salumbar

Salumbar was chosen as the site of study to understand the various experiences of girls with open school. Salumbar is situated in the Udaipur district of Rajasthan and is predominantly inhabited by tribal communities, with diverse cultural heritages and unique societal dynamics. According to the latest demographic data, approximately 70% of the population in Salumbar belongs to various tribal groups¹. Education levels in Salumbar have historically been lower than the state and national averages, presenting significant challenges for the overall development of the community. Around 48% of the population in Salumbar is literate, with the literacy rate among women (35%) being notably lower than that of men² (60%).

According to the State of the World's Children Report³ (2020), the dropout rate among adolescent girls in rural Rajasthan is as high as 58%. One of the primary challenges faced by girls in Salumbar is the lack of access to quality education facilities with Higher Secondary Schools only available at Gram Panchayats. The geographical terrain and inadequate transportation infrastructure make it challenging for girls to travel long distances to schools.

Furthermore, the presence of single teachers, lack of female teachers, negative perceptions about female education among guardians, inadequate menstrual management systems, and limited opportunities post-education are key factors that hinder girls from accessing education effectively.

“Education levels in Salumbar are lower than state and national averages.”

References

1. Tribal Profile of Udaipur District, Tribal Area Development Department, Rajasthan Government
2. <https://villageinfo.in/rajasthan/udaipur/salumbar.html>
3. State of the World's Children Report 2020, UNICEF.

About Salumbar (contd.)

Traditional beliefs which prioritize early marriages and domestic duties over schooling also perpetuate the gender gap in education. Economic challenges further compound the barriers for girls' education in Salumbar, where widespread poverty affects a considerable number of families. The latest Socio-Economic Caste Census data indicates that around 45% of rural households in Udaipur district are economically vulnerable⁴, causing families to prioritize limited resources, often leaving education as a lower priority, especially for girls.

Additionally, gender-based violence and safety concerns act as significant deterrents, as Rajasthan ranks among states with higher incidences of crimes against women⁵. This contributes to dropout rates and reinforces parents' reluctance to send their daughters to school due to fears of violence, harassment, and unsafe travel routes.

The selection of Salumbar as the study area to examine girls attending open schools is justified, given its predominantly tribal population, lower education levels, limited access to quality education facilities and socio-cultural norms favouring early marriages and domestic responsibilities over education.

“A high tribal population, poverty and low education levels are reasons for selecting Salumbar as the site of study.”

References

4. Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
5. Crime in India 2020, National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

What are Open Schools?

The open school system in India, managed by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), offers a flexible and inclusive approach to education, accommodating learners with diverse needs and circumstances. Through its learner-centric model, it aims to empower individuals facing challenges attending regular schools, such as geographical constraints, economic limitations, or personal commitments, to pursue education at their own pace and convenience. The open school system provides a wide range of courses and recognition on par with regular boards, promoting inclusive education and lifelong learning across the country.

According to statistical data from Shala Darpan, there are concerning trends regarding adolescent girls' educational access in remote and rural areas of Rajasthan. Many of them encounter significant challenges in reaching VIII and X standard and passing examinations. Data shows that each year, approximately 10,000 girls drop out between VIII and IX, and from IX to X. In response to this issue, the Rajasthan government has established Open Schools across the state, aiming to ensure educational access and uphold girls' constitutional right to education.

Earlier surveys conducted by Vishakha have highlighted barriers that hinder around 20% of adolescent girls from accessing the Open School education system. These barriers include lack of information about the enrolment process, delays in obtaining Transfer Certificates (TC), and excessive fees charged for TC issuance (ranging from 200 to 500 rupees). Additionally, girls face challenges in obtaining caste certificates, with kiosk owners demanding arbitrary amounts. These obstacles persist despite these girls securing social and financial support for their education. The identification of these challenges is crucial for developing effective interventions to enhance educational opportunities for marginalized girls in the region.

Key features of Rajasthan State Open School

- **Multiple chances:** Students have nine opportunities to appear for exams within the span of five years.
- **Flexibility in subjects:** Students have flexibility in choosing subjects as per their preference
- **Recognition:** An open school qualification is recognised by all by all types of schools
- **No fees:** Open school education is free for all students

Good practices from different National and State Open School Systems



- **Madhya Pradesh State Open School (MPSOS)** offers **admissions throughout the year**, providing flexibility to students to enrol at any point and continue their education
- **Rajasthan State Open School (RSOS)** offers **fee waivers to women and girls**, encouraging all those whose schooling was interrupted, to re-start education again
- **NIOS** provides **structured learning support of 35 days** to all Open school students, which includes 30 days of theory and 5 days of practical
- **NIOS** provides **vocational education** programs as well for those in employment
- **NIOS** and Sikkim State Open School provide the option for **downloading the admit card** for the exam directly from the website, which is considered valid without seeking the signature of the nodal school principal
- **NIOS** and MPSOS have **sample papers** on their website, which can be accessed by students to prepare for their exam
- **NIOS** and MPSOS have **functional helplines** for students to seek support

NIOS provides learning support for 35 days: 30 days theoretical and 5 days practical



Why did we conduct research on
open school?



Why did we feel the need to do this study?

A recurring topic in our group discussions is the inability of girls to attend regular school due to various reasons. In the Salumbar tribal region, employment opportunities are scarce, leading most boys and adult males to migrate to Gujarat and Maharashtra in search of better prospects. Consequently, we (girls and women) shoulder the burden of household chores, farming, and daily expenses.

Despite our strong desire for education, household circumstances often hinder our access to formal education. Among the reasons mentioned by girls in our group are societal restrictions on education, pressure to engage in household chores and labour for financial support, doubts about the value of education, and early marriage. These challenges significantly impact girls' educational opportunities.

External factors also contribute to our dropout rates, including distance to schools, safety concerns during commutes, inadequate numbers of teachers, and a lack of female teachers. These challenges hinder us from attending regular schools, making Rajasthan State Open School (RSOS) an appealing alternative. In recent years, the Department of Women and Child Development has waived fees for girls' admission to open schools, offering hope for many. However, even open school enrolment presents its own challenges.

Not all girls in our group are able to fill out the forms for open school enrolment, and sometimes, we miss the form release altogether. Meeting the necessary requirements demands time and effort, such as obtaining caste certificates, setting up bank accounts, and obtaining mobile phones. Additionally, a lack of supportive behaviour from teachers in nodal schools complicates the admission process, causing us to lose interest in their studies or face delays in completing necessary documents. Consequently, some of us are unable to complete the forms, while others feel exhausted after going through the process.

“Open school offers hope for those whose education has been interrupted but its admission process presents many challenges.”

Why did we feel the need to do this study (contd.)?

Although the government aims to promote open school by waiving fees and emphasizing its significance through various media channels, there is a lack of understanding regarding the difficulties and pressures we face in our lives. We appeal to the government to establish rules and regulations for open school admissions that cater to our unique circumstances. Eliminating the need for caste certificates and bank accounts would be a significant step forward.

RSOS allows girls to complete their education up to 12th grade without attending regular school. Furthermore, it provides a lifeline for married girls to pursue education up to 12th grade, offering a second chance for those whose focus shifted away from studies after marriage.

For eight years, Vishakha has been instrumental in connecting girls and women with Rajasthan State Open Board to help them complete their education. Throughout this journey, we have observed various obstacles. Girls like us earnestly attempt to re-enter the educational system, but the admission process and documentation requirements often do not align with their circumstances, leading to numerous challenges.

Through this study of RSOS, we aim to understand these challenges better and seek evidence-based solutions to address them. There are two key objectives of our study:

1. To compile a factual and comprehensive account of girls' experiences while pursuing admission and education through the Rajasthan State Open School system
2. To initiate a constructive dialogue with the government, advocating for changes in the admission and delivery process of Open Schools that better cater to the specific needs of girls.

“ This study aims to initiate a constructive dialogue with the government to advocate for changes that make Open schools better suited to the specific needs of girls.”

Our Experiences of conducting this research

Our journey through this research has been both eye-opening and challenging. We've faced a range of experiences that have shaped our understanding of the realities girls face when it comes to education and empowerment.

Some moments were disheartening, like when fathers hurled abusive words at us, accusing us of spoiling their daughters just because we were advocating for their education. The struggles were physical too – we remember having to walk long distances under the scorching sun to fill out forms with the wrong addresses. Those walks sometimes exposed us to uncomfortable situations with groups of men who harassed us along the way.

But amidst the challenges, there were heartwarming encounters too. In certain places, people offered us tea and responded positively to our efforts. Some parents even dropped us off at the bus stand after the survey, to ensure that we reached safely.

Throughout this journey, we learned profound lessons. We delved into the reasons behind girls dropping out of school and the hurdles they face. Our interactions illuminated the expectations that many girls and parents had of us, often viewing us as sources of information and even as role models – a feeling that filled us with pride.

“ Some girls and parents viewed us as role models - a feeling that filled us with pride. ”

Our Experiences of conducting this research (contd.)

We discovered the intricate web of societal norms that can limit girls' aspirations. For instance, in one village, we encountered girls from the Rajput community who concealed their enrolment in the open school due to the stigma attached. The pressure on girls not to pursue education was evident, particularly in Rajput households.

In our exploration, we also discovered the significance of community dynamics. Different temples for different castes and separate cremation ghats in some villages revealed the deep-rooted divisions that persist.

One remarkable moment was visiting a Harijan basti where we were treated with incredible kindness. Our preconceived notions were challenged as we saw husbands advocating for their wives' education by enrolling them in the open school.

Through it all, we realized that change is a complex journey, filled with moments of adversity and triumph. Our experiences have enriched our perspective and fuelled our determination to continue this important work.



How did we conduct the study?



How was our capacity built to conduct this study?

Our venture into designing and executing a study on open school education unfolded across distinct phases, each profoundly shaped by our capacity-building journey. In the initial phase, we engaged in a transformative three-day workshop. This training redefined our perspectives, enlightening us about the pivotal role of education in nurturing dreams. As emerging advocates, we absorbed the significance of continuous education via the Rajasthan State Open School (OS) and embraced our role as local champions for girls' education. A spirit of collective action was instilled, urging us to band together to address prevalent issues within our communities.

The outcomes were genuinely empowering. Equipped with newfound knowledge, we could adeptly guide girls through the OS admission process. Remarkably, around 70% of girls were galvanized to champion open schools in their communities, spreading awareness. Moreover, approximately 50% of us eagerly volunteered for advocacy roles. Through the training, we gained the ability to strategize, envisioning conversations with girls and parents in villages to encourage open school enrolment.

Transitioning to the second phase, we delved into research methodologies during another three-day workshop. Our skills as researchers were honed, enabling us to identify problems, understand interconnections between issues and appreciate research's role in addressing concerns. Practical experience with research techniques like Focus Group Discussions (FGD), surveys, and observations deepened our proficiency in data analysis and intervention strategies.

Finally, the third phase encompassed continued support for us in the field. The hands-on experience of engaging with girls directly, discussing their challenges, and witnessing their aspirations further enriched our understanding. This phase solidified our abilities as advocates and empowered us to contribute effectively to the cause of open school education.

What methodology did we employ?

To achieve the objectives of the study, we employed a mixed methods approach, combining individual interviews and focus group discussions. The sample comprised girls residing in Salumbar, aged between 15 to 35 years. 97% of the study participants were enrolled in the open school program. This high representation of open school students was identified as crucial for gaining nuanced insights into their educational experiences.

The data collection process included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. We conducted seven focus group discussions, allowing for group dynamics to highlight shared challenges and perspectives. The interviews and discussions were semi-structured and guided by a set of pre-defined questions, covering topics related to the challenges faced, support systems, and recommendations for improvement.

The strength of this study lies in its emphasis on girls' voices and experiences, ensuring a more authentic representation of challenges and needs. However, the study has some limitations, including potential response bias and the focus on a specific geographical area, which might affect generalizability.

In conclusion, our study employs a comprehensive methodology involving interviews and focus group discussions to capture the experiences of girls in the open school program. By considering their perspectives, our research contributes to a more inclusive and effective education system that addresses the unique challenges faced by these girls, ultimately fostering empowerment and positive change.

Who did we interview?

We conducted interviews with 205 girls residing in the Salumbar, most of whom hail from the same background as us. In addition, we also conducted 7 focus group discussions with these girls and women. The age range of the participants was between 15 to 35 years. Notably, two-thirds of these girls were above 18 years old and 97% of them are pursuing their studies through the open school program. This high representation of open school students makes them an ideal sample to provide insights into their experiences and challenges with this mode of education.

The girls we interviewed represent a diverse cross-section. Around half of them were unmarried or single, while the other half were either engaged or married. Our survey revealed that 93% of the girls belonged to disadvantaged castes, with 70% of them identifying as Scheduled Tribes, particularly from the Meena community. Furthermore, nearly all the girls we spoke with followed the Hindu faith.

Having girls' perspectives at the forefront of this research is crucial as we can authentically voice the challenges we encounter and the support we need to succeed in education. Our girls-led research ensures that our experiences are accurately captured, contributing to better insights and targeted interventions for the improvement of open schooling. By amplifying the voices of girls like us, this study can create positive change and pave the way for a more inclusive and empowering education system.

Profile of girls interviewed

- **205** girls from 59 villages
- **199** girls have experience in filling forms for open school **admission**
- **166** girls have switched from regular schooling to **open school** education
- **144** girls belong to the **tribal** community.
- **Out of the 199** girls, **50** have **family** members (brother, sister, aunt, husband) who have also filled the **open school** form



What did we find?



Who joins open school and why?

1

The majority of girls who join open school have studied in a regular school earlier but whose education has been interrupted for some reason.

82% had attended regular school before beginning open school while 94% had a gap of over one year between their transition from regular school to open school. 100% of the girls in open school are trying to pass examinations that can help them achieve the milestone of either a secondary or a post-secondary certificate.

2

Main reasons for joining open school include failing in regular school, education getting interrupted due to family pressure/marriage and having to balance studies with household chores.

Open school offers the girls a chance to restart their education. This includes girls who have dropped out due to an illness, failing in an exam, who want to resume education after marriage, and who find it a good option to study while continuing to be engaged in household chores.

For many girls, their parents are unwilling to send them to a regular school. For them, open school offers the flexibility to continue education by studying at home. Another reason for joining open school is that girls feel embarrassed or ashamed about going to regular school after having dropped out earlier.

“My education stopped because of my marriage. After a few years away from education, I wanted to study again and Open school gave me the chance to study from home.”

How do girls get information about open school?



1

Through a family member

One in four girls who enrolled in open school had a family member (most likely a sibling) who had studied from open school previously. Having a family member provided these girls with a positive role model or mentor that they could emulate and get guidance on the process from.

2

Through friends, other school going children and teachers

Their friends or peers going to school also provided information about open school to the girls. In many cases, the decision to enrol in open school was made because there were friends or peers in the village who were enrolled/were considering enrolment. In addition, ex-teachers also told the girls about the option of continuing education through open school.

3

Through Vishakha

Quite a few girls became aware of and enrolled in open school through the support of girl leaders and facilitators associated with Vishakha.

“The information about open schools is still very limited. Mostly, only girls whose friends or family have studied in open school know about it.”



Improve information dissemination and awareness about open schools by:

- Placing posters in public locations, such as bus stations, water tanks, Gram Panchayats, prominent spots in villages, and schools
- Providing information about open school through the E-Mitra centres



The process of seeking admission



Challenges in getting the admission form



1

Lack of information and making multiple visits

There is a lack of information about the nodal school including when forms will be available. In addition, girls are forced by the teachers in the nodal school to make multiple visits before being given the admission form. After a few visits, many girls give up and end up not enrolling in open school.

2

Lack of transportation and unwillingness of family members to send girls

The distance to the nodal school is 10km or longer for most girls. Further, families are unwilling to allow them to travel this far. This problem is compounded by the fact that regular transport is not available. This discourages many girls from even collecting the admission form for open school. Some girls also faced harassment while travelling to the nodal centre.

3

Fear and discomfort about asking teacher for form

The girls are afraid and uncomfortable about asking the teacher in the nodal school for the admission form. There is a feeling that the teacher might shout at them or speak rudely with them, which correlates with the reality as well (details on next slide).

“I went to the school to get the form but the teacher refused to give it to me, saying the date is over. I ended up wasting one year because of that.”

Improve information and access to admission forms by:

- Establishing multiple distribution centres for admission forms in easily accessible locations, such as the E-mitre kiosk, gram panchayat office or mobile outreach units, to reduce the distance and travel burden for girls and their families.
- Implementing a transparent schedule for the availability of admission forms and ensuring timely communication through village-wise information campaigns to inform potential candidates in advance.



Challenges in filling the admission form and selecting subjects to study

1

Language and instructions in the form are difficult to form

The type of wording used in the form is complex and difficult for the girls to understand. To make matters more difficult, some nodal schools have the form in English, which is not understood by most.

2

Lack of support and discouraging behaviour of teachers in the nodal school

18% girls said that they received support from the teacher in the nodal school to fill the form. However, most girls said that the teacher discouraged them by asking them to go back, pointing out mistakes (without providing support) and questioning their desire to study.

3

Challenges in selecting subject to study

Around 80% girls faced challenges in selecting subjects to study. The main challenge faced is lack of information about each subject and its parts. The form only includes the list of subjects and no one provides information about each individual subject and how many subjects to select.

“When I went to take the open school form and the teacher said ‘*what will you be studying now*’, I felt like giving up.”

- 
- **Make the admission form more understandable** by revising the language to make it simpler and provide translated versions of the admission form in regional or local languages
 - **Establish a support system at nodal schools** to assist girls in filling out the admission form, offering guidance on selecting subjects and addressing any questions or concerns they may have.
 - **Conduct regular sensitization workshops for teachers at nodal schools** to raise awareness about the importance of open school education and the significance of providing a supportive and respectful environment for girls seeking admission.

Challenges in submitting the admission form



1

Making multiple visits and paying additional fees

2 in 3 girls had to make multiple visits for filling and submitting the form. Further, most of them did not get a receipt immediately after submitting the form. In addition, the fees charged by the school while accepting the form were arbitrary in nature with 43% girls having to pay over Rs. 200, while the guidelines state that only Rs. 80 should be charged. In one nodal school, the girls were asked to pay Rs. 500 each for the admission form.

2

Getting a TC from the school

71% girls faced challenges in getting their TC from school, which includes the teacher's or principal's unavailability and refusal of the teachers in issuing the TC and shaming the girls to study further. If a girl has studied from outside Rajasthan, their TC is not accepted by open school for the purpose of admission.

3

Need to have a bank account and documents

The form asks girls to fill in details of their bank account, which many of them don't have, discouraging them from completing the process. In addition, girls are also asked to provide caste and domicile certificates along with the form. Opening a bank account and getting these documents both require money and time, which these girls are unable to afford, leading to their withdrawal from the process.

“My house was burnt in a fire and with it, all my documents. Now, I can't study because I don't have documents.”



- **Implement a single-window system for form submission**, reducing the number of visits required for girls to complete the process efficiently.
- **Remove the requirement to provide bank account details** from the admission form, recognizing that many girls may not have access to bank accounts, and this information is not essential for admission.
- **Remove the requirement of caste and domicile certificates** during the admission process, to ensure that no girl is excluded from seeking admission, for lack of documents.

Case Study: Navigating Challenges of Open Schooling - The Saga of Sugna Meena

Sugna Meena, a 19-year-old hailing from Rajpura village, stands as a resilient example of a girl navigating the intricate web of challenges within the open schooling system. Sugna's academic journey took a hiatus when she left school seven years ago due to financial constraints. Rejoining the education circuit seemed daunting after such a prolonged break, compounded by the complexities of open schooling admissions. Her re-entry required a meticulous documentation process, encompassing the procurement of Transfer Certificate (TC), mark sheets, and crucially, a caste certificate.

Sugna embarked on the formidable quest for a caste certificate, a prerequisite for her open schooling application. The bureaucratic ordeal entailed acquiring signatures from the village head and revenue officer. For two months, she pursued the elusive revenue officer's approval, repeatedly foiled by his absence. In addition to the administrative roadblocks, Sugna encountered scepticism from her parents who questioned the necessity of resuming her studies.

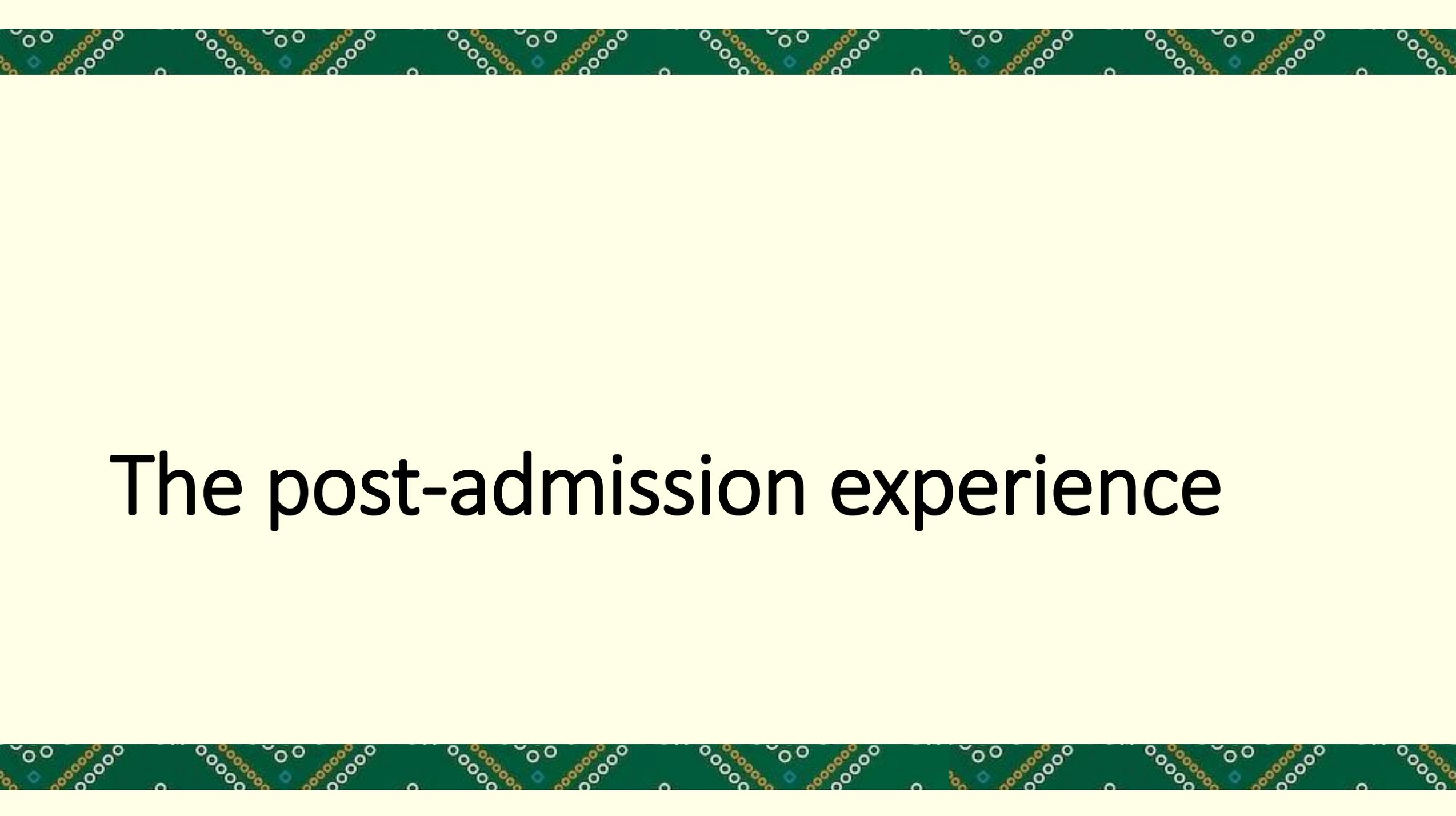
Sugna's resolve found refuge within the Kishori Baithak group, where she confided her frustrations. Bolstered by her peers, Sugna refused to yield. They managed to secure the revenue officer's signature after obtaining his contact details. This collective endeavour spanned nearly two months. Despite overcoming this hurdle, Sugna still awaited her caste certificate's arrival after submitting the form through e-Mitra.

Sugna's narrative mirrors the layered challenges within the open schooling system. The re-entry into education after a hiatus demands navigating complex administrative processes and stringent documentation prerequisites. Scarce resources and procedural inefficiencies can deter eager students. Societal norms and familial pressures exacerbate these challenges.

In conclusion, Sugna's journey underscores the need for streamlined administrative procedures and robust support networks for re-entering students. Addressing these challenges within the open schooling system can create an inclusive and enabling environment, ensuring that girls like Sugna can surmount obstacles and pursue their educational aspirations unhindered.

Challenges Related to Documents Hindering Girls' Admission to Open School in Rajasthan

1. **TC Availability:** Many girls encountered challenges in obtaining Transfer Certificates (TC) from their previous schools. Teachers or principals were often unavailable or unwilling to issue TCs promptly. This delay acted as a significant barrier to initiating the open school admission process.
2. **Non-Acceptance of Non-Rajasthan TC:** Girls who had pursued their studies outside of Rajasthan faced a unique challenge. The open school system often did not accept TCs from schools located outside the state. This limitation curtailed the educational opportunities for girls who had studied elsewhere.
3. **Financial Documentation Barriers:** The admission form required girls to provide details of their bank accounts. However, many girls did not possess bank accounts due to financial constraints. This requirement discouraged numerous prospective students from proceeding with the admission process, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
4. **Caste and Domicile Certificates:** Another hurdle for girls seeking open school admission was the mandatory submission of caste and domicile certificates. Acquiring these documents often involved expenses, bureaucratic procedures, and substantial time commitments. This made the process inaccessible for girls who lacked the necessary resources.
5. **Complex Administrative Processes:** Rejoining the education system after a hiatus, requires navigating complex administrative processes. The need to procure signatures, fill out forms, and gather the required documents posed challenges, especially for girls who lacked prior familiarity with such procedures or who lived in remote areas with limited access to administrative facilities.



The post-admission experience

Getting books to study



1

Multiple visits and delays in getting books

3 out of 4 girls got their books after over a month of filling the admission form. Rarely are the books given along with receipt of admission. There are also cases of girls not getting the books at all, leading to them not appearing for the exam. Even in cases when they get some books, not all books are available in one visit, forcing them to make multiple visits.

2

Lack of information and transparency about process of getting books

Like the entire process of admission in open school, there is no clear process and clarity on the number, type and availability of books, forcing the girls to make multiple follow-up visits and follow-up to the nodal centre in order to get the books.

“I did not receive any book after admission and had to buy one week series booklet to prepare for the exam.”



- Implement a streamlined book distribution system that ensures girls receive their study materials within a reasonable timeframe, ideally along with the receipt of admission.
- Provide clear and comprehensive guidelines to both students and nodal centres on the number and types of books included in the curriculum, along with their availability.

Getting support and preparing for the exam



1

Lack of preparation support and adequate tutoring

Most girls enrolled in open school have had a break from education. However, there is a lack of structured support and tutoring for them to catch-up. While a 15 day camp is organised, it doesn't offer individual or grade-wise support and is held for only an hour every day. In addition, the study centre is located more than 10km away for most girls and very few villages have regular transport available till the study centre.

2

No clarity and information on exams and study camp

No clear information is provided to girls on types of exams, such as practical and theory. Further, they are also not made aware of number of exams per subject. Further, there is limited awareness about the 15 day study camp organised by open school.

3

Lack of a conducive space to prepare

Most girls said that they lacked a conducive environment at home to study where their parents questioned their choice of continuing education. In addition, the girls are also burdened with household chores which takes away from their preparation time. There is also no physical space in the house or in the village where girls could study in a focused manner. This hindered their preparation for the exams.

“In the camp, they make 10th and 12th grade students sit together and mostly focus only on the 12th grade.”



- Set up dedicated rooms in nodal schools with personnel to help students, provide ongoing guidance, and make study materials available
- Conduct camps closer to students' homes to reduce travel burden and make it more convenient for them to attend.
- Assign dedicated resource persons to each grade to ensure comprehensive preparation during the camp.
- Establish study spaces or community study centres in villages, equipped with essential study materials and resources, where girls can study in a focused and conducive environment.

Case Study: Empowering Dreams Through Open Schooling - The Story of Kalpana Meena

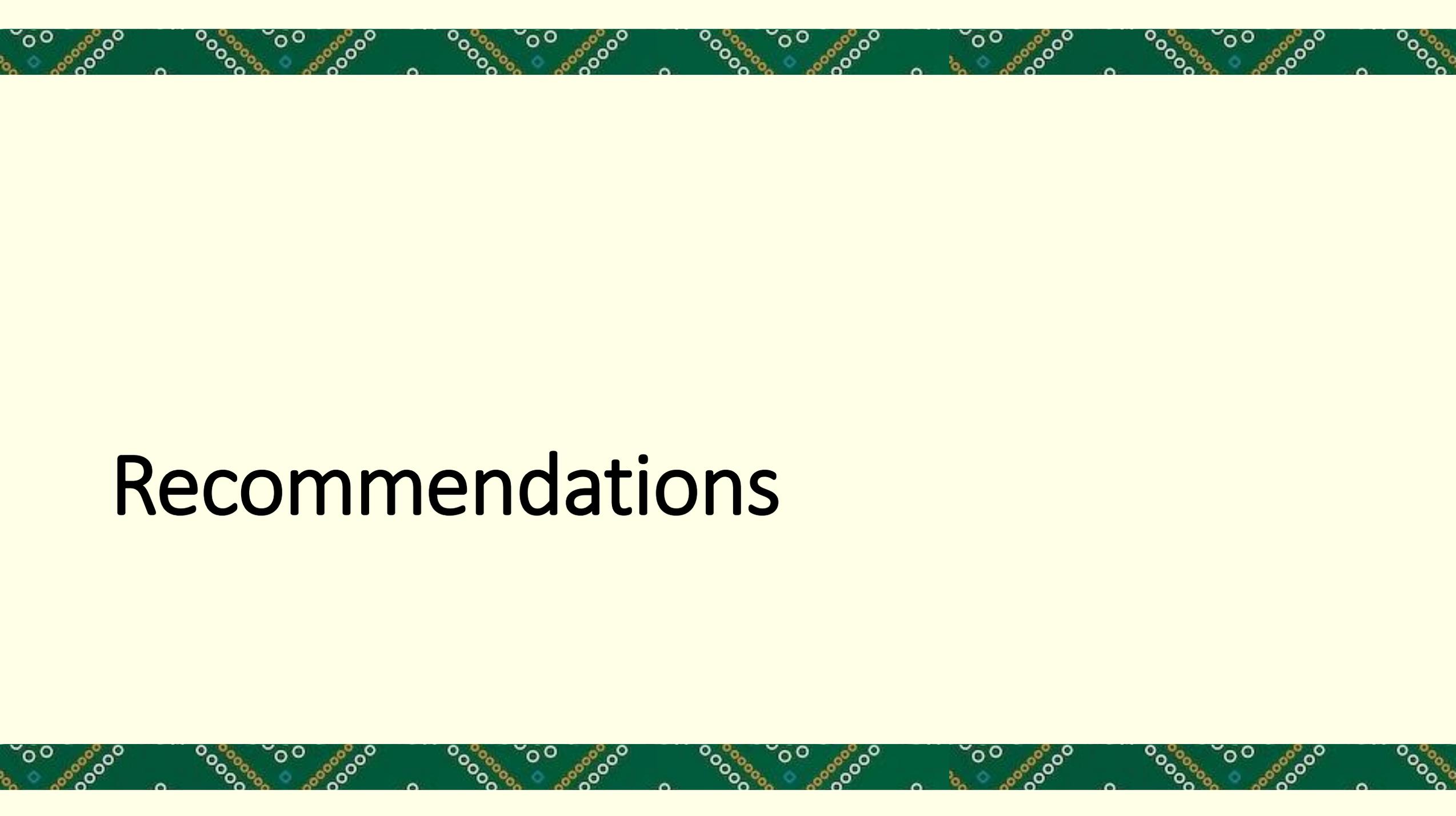
My name is Kalpana Meena, and I am 26 years old. I reside in the village of Ghatad within the Jhallara Gram Panchayat. When I was in the 12th grade pursuing regular schooling, I got engaged. The engagement brought pressure from my in-laws to discontinue my education, and my family arranged for my marriage, ending my 12th-grade studies prematurely.

Three years after a break from my regular schooling, I made the decision to resume my education. I aspire to study so that I can establish a small shop or business. If a position as an Anganwadi worker becomes available, I wish to work there and read any kind of documents. I want to be able to read and understand papers on my own and share my knowledge with my family. I want to be independent in reading any kind of document, without having to rely on someone else to interpret it for me. Hence, I decided to return to my studies.

I wish to convey to the government my aspiration for reforms in the open schooling system. Accurate information about open board exams should be accessible to everyone in a timely manner. Additionally, there should be a local-level system to educate girls and women. This would ensure that they receive the right guidance and support to pursue education, regardless of their circumstances.

Summary of the report in data

- **Transition Gap:** 94% of the girls experienced a gap of over one year between transitioning from regular school to open school.
- **Family influence:** One in four girls who enrolled in open school had a family member (often a sibling) with prior experience in open school education.
- **Distance challenge:** For the majority of girls, the distance to the nodal school is 10km or more, posing transportation challenges.
- **No teacher support:** A mere 18% of girls received assistance from nodal school teachers in filling out admission forms.
- **Subject selection:** About 80% of girls faced difficulties in choosing subjects due to a lack of information about each subject and its components.
- **Multiple visits:** Approximately 2 in 3 girls had to make multiple visits to the nodal school for form filling and submission.
- **TC Challenges:** 71% of girls encountered obstacles in obtaining their Transfer Certificate (TC) from their previous school.
- **Delayed materials:** 3 out of 4 girls received their study books more than a month after submitting the admission form.



Recommendations

Recommendations



Improve information about open school and access to admission forms by establishing distribution centres in accessible locations, such as the E-Mitra kiosk and the gram panchayat office

Make the admission form more understandable and available in local languages along with establishing a support system at nodal schools to assist girls in filling out the admission form, offering guidance on selecting subjects and addressing any questions or concerns they may have

Conduct regular sensitization workshops for teachers at nodal schools to support them in providing a supportive and respectful environment for girls seeking admission

Implement a streamlined book distribution system that ensures girls receive their study materials within a reasonable timeframe, ideally along with the receipt of admission.

Set up a dedicated resource centre in each nodal school with teachers to help students, provide ongoing guidance, and make study materials available

Make study camps more effective by assigning teachers for each grade, conducting camps in multiple locations which are convenient for girls to attend and increasing the duration of the camp to enable students to get more structured learning support

Establish study spaces or community study centres in villages, equipped with essential study materials and resources, where girls can study in a focused and conducive environment.

Offer admissions throughout the year to provide flexibility to students to enrol at any point and continue their education.

Offer vocational education programs as well for those in employment

Provide students the option to access their admit card through the local E-Mitra centre, rather than collecting it from the nodal school

