

EXPLAINER: UN WOMEN'S SECOND CHANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Many women are re-entering formal education, and subsequently the workforce, thanks to a unique initiative by UN Women India

What is the Second Chance Education Programme?

It's a programme that encourages women, who could not complete their education, to re-enter formal education. Women who take part in the programme can choose to learn a new professional skill, or start a business. The programme also connects the women to employment and business opportunities.

The programme is part of a multi-country effort. In India, it is funded by the BHP Foundation, and implemented by Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) in four Indian states currently – Odisha, Maharashtra, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. It has a budget of \$3,834,800 for 2018 – 2022.

Why is this programme needed?

India's current female labour force participation stands at 22.3 percent that is well below the global average of 47 per cent. This has been declining steadily over the years. While the number of girls enrolled in schools overall is increasing, 17.3 per cent still drop out of secondary school, because of long distances between school and home, unsafe public transportation, lack of gender-specific toilets, and unequal gender norms that place the burden of domestic work on girls and women. There is an urgent need to bring women back to education and the workforce. Investing in formal education and vocational training, combined with job placement and financing can significantly raise female employment and entrepreneurship in India.

How is this programme different from other adult education programmes?

The programme is tailored to the differential needs of women. It connects women to community educators near their homes and provides safe, women-friendly spaces for them to study. During the Covid-19 lockdowns when mobility restrictions created significant barriers for women's and girls' education and livelihoods. The community educators with Second Chance Education were trained to adapt their lesson plans through WhatsApp video calls and Zoom so women could continue to learn.

How many women has the programme reached so far?

The programme has reached out to more than 50,000 women across four states in India, and impacted more than 15,000 through education, training and entrepreneurship opportunities. A network of 54 community educators across the 12 programme districts under the Second Chance Education programme have enrolled 4016 women and girls in formal education out of which 2741 have cleared their class 10th / 12th standard.

Twelve Women Empowerment Hubs, one in each programme district, provide safe and women-friendly spaces to learn and develop vocational skills and small business ventures. Nearly 5774 women are currently being trained in nursing, hospitality, retail, tailoring, production of low-cost and sustainable sanitary napkins, packaging of food items and candle-making, and driving auto-rickshaws, which are a popular means of transportation. During the peak of COVID-19 pandemic, the programme trained and certified 10,000 nurses and nurse assistants across 20 states to provide front-line health services safely during the pandemic.

Has it been able to influence policy?

Yes. In July 2020, the Rajasthan State Women's Policy waived school fees for women and girls returning to formal education based on the Second Change Education Programme recommendations. UN Women is also working with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to create an enabling vocational training ecosystem for women learners. One of the upcoming initiatives of the programme includes gender-responsive training sessions for 4,500 master trainers who will then go on to deliver vocational training across the country.

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