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**4TH EDITION**

## KEY THEMES AND TRUE CHAMPIONS OF CSR ACROSS SECTORS



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# INDIA'S LARGEST GIRL CHILD LITERACY PROGRAMME BY IIFL FOUNDATION



**M**s. Madhu Jain, Director of IIFL Foundation, is a senior social sector leader and philanthropist. Ms Jain oversees the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives at the diversified financial services conglomerate, IIFL Group. Ms Jain has led the immensely successful CSR function at IIFL with strong emphasis on impact-based social intervention in the fields of education, health, financial literacy, water conservation, livelihood, poverty alleviation and climate action.

Under her leadership, IIFL Foundation has launched 'Sakhiyon Ki Baadi' initiative, which is one of India's largest girl child literacy programs and has brought about 36,000 out of school girls into education fold in the state of Rajasthan through a network of 1,218 community schools in some of the most inaccessible areas. *Sakhiyon Ki Baadi* community schools have also been a source of livelihood for about 1,220 women, mostly from the economically underprivileged and scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities. The program takes special care to preserve indigenous languages of the communities by using it during



**IIFL Foundation has launched 'Sakhiyon Ki Baadi' under the leadership of Ms. Madhu Jain, Director, IIFL Foundation, which is one of India's largest girl child literacy programs**

teaching. The foundation has helped mainstreaming of over 3,200 students into higher government schools and is recognised globally as one of the best CSR programs for girl child education.

Under her active supervision, IIFL Foundation has supported development of rooms and a fully equipped science laboratory in a government residential school of girls for SC/ST communities with over 1000 student enrolment and facilitated smart board learning in another nine schools.

Ms Jain has initiated one of the most unique literacy initiatives in India – *Rathshala* – for the children of migrant *Rebari* community, who migrate between Rajasthan and Gujarat for over eight months in a year. *Rathshala* is a mobile school set-up build on a cart and towed by a camel along the moving caravan of the *Rebari* community. IIFL Foundation runs another initiative for the children of migrant construction workers in the state of Maharashtra and UP called '*Chauras*', which is a learning centre cum crèche, and provides basic functional literacy along with nutritious meals to the children.



Under Ms Jain's leadership, IIFL Foundation runs an expansive financial literacy initiative in eastern Indian states exclusively for women. The financial literacy centres spread across Odisha, West Bengal, Assam and Jharkhand imparts financial literacy lessons to women and empowers them to connect with banking system and benefit from the government welfare schemes. The program has already trained about 22,000 women and touched lives of over one lakh beneficiaries.

Health has been a focus area for Ms Jain and IIFL Foundation. The foundation has initiated 'Arogya', a preventive health project for over 35,000 girl children in 11 districts of Rajasthan. In addition the foundation supports two annual mega medical camps at Pandharpur (Maharashtra) and Barsana (UP) touching the lives of about 300,000 beneficiaries facilitated by over 300 doctors.

IIFL Foundation has done some pioneering water conservation work in the state of Maharashtra. In 2019 the foundation facilitated 'Arvi water rejuvenation project' with the Government of Maharashtra. The foundation helped revival of the drying *Wardhona* rivulet in Arvi Taluka, which after revival during 2019 monsoon benefitted 6,400 people and 3,531 livestock in over 16 districts. Besides, IIFL Foundation also contributes during calamities and helps running an animal husbandry project.

Ms Jain is recognised as one the most innovative CSR leaders today in India for bringing frugal and effective product innovations to create large-scale community level impact. Under her leadership IIFL Foundation became the first CSR organisation to develop India's first drone for last-mile vaccination as well as India's first agricultural drone – both initiatives were approved and operated in collaboration with central government and Maharashtra, Rajasthan state governments. The drone innovation helps reducing vaccine and medicine delivery time by over 90%, same in the case of agricultural drone for use of agricultural inputs. Ms Jain has also been a proponent of climate action to meet global emission reduction goals. Under her leadership IIFL Foundation has installed off-grid solar panels across 50 schools in India, most of which didn't have access to electricity earlier or were having patchy connections. IIFL Foundation has also established a 10000 tree strong urban forest in Mumbai as a part of Mumbai Climate Action Plan. It has also established Mumbai's first medicinal garden.



## AWARDS

**Awards: Ms Madhu Jain has been awarded the prestigious United Nations Global Compact BackSwan Award for "Women Empowerment".**

At the World CSR Congress, Ms Madhu Jain was awarded as one of the 'Women CSR Leader's for her contribution to girl child literacy, water conservation and health sectors. She has received the 'Sustainable CSR Leadership Award' at the Asia's Best CSR Practice Awards, 'Social Innovator of the Year' award at the Responsible Business Awards and the 'Social Entrepreneur of the Year' and 'Philanthropist of the Year' award at the World CSR Congress.

Under her leadership, 'Sakhion Ki Baadi', IIFL Foundation's flagship girl child education initiative received the ET Now World CSR Award for 'Best Support and Improvement in Quality of Education'.

At the CSR Summit and Awards, Ms Jain received the 'Best Innovative CSR Project Award for Financial Literacy' for IIFL's financial literacy program for women in eastern India and 'Best CSR Impact Award' for Wardhona Nullah recharge project.

IIFL Foundation's Urban Forest project received the 'Best Smart City Initiative' Award, Gulabi Nagar project received the 'Poverty Alleviation Initiative' award at the Responsible Business Awards. The Drone-based Vaccine delivery project received the 'Most Innovative Solution for Covid 19' award at Global CSR Leadership Awards.





**IIFL Foundation's flagship initiative is Sakhiyon Ki Baadi – one of India's largest girl child education programs, which aims to bring 100% girl child literacy in the state of Rajasthan. The program has already brought over 36,000 out-of-school girls into education fold and is revolutionizing education system through its 'Sakhiyon Ki Baadi' schools and digital education support. In this interview Ms Madhu Jain, Director, IIFL Foundation takes us through the journey of Sakhiyon Ki Baadi, and discusses the future of girl child education and the IIFL Foundation's role in it.**

**When was 'SakhiyonkiBaadi' founded? What is the story and inspiration behind the foundation?**

IIFL Foundation's 'SakhiyonkiBaadi' was conceived in 2016. Rajasthan is the largest state in India, in terms of land, with scattered settlements of the population. It has the highest population of Indigenous tribes native to Rajasthan viz. *Bhils*, and the southern part of the state is highly inhabited by the scheduled tribes communities - *Meena, Garasiya, Kalbeliya, Gameti*, to name a few. Rajasthan had recorded the lowest literacy rate among females at 57.6%, according to The National Statistical Office (NSO) (A nationwide study on 'Household Social Consumption: Education' in India as part of the 75th round of National Sample Survey (NSS) - from July 2017 to June 2018). Over surveying the communities and studying further, we understood that the state is highly infested with the issue of girls being never enrolled in a school, or if enrolled then they either drop out of school or are highly irregular.

Thus, IIFL Foundation launched 'SakhiyonkiBaadi', as a platform for allowing 'Equal' opportunity to girls, to attain literacy and have access to a wider world of opportunities.

We are active in 14 districts of Rajasthan viz. Udaipur, Rajsamand, Pratapgarh, Chittorgarh, Banswara, Dungarpur, Sirohi, Bali, Pali, Jalore, Bhilwara, Jodhpur, Jaipur and Ajmer.

**What are the main activities and projects that you have done? What kind of classes and subjects are taught to the children?**

With 'SakhiyonkiBaadi' initiative we engage with girls of 4 yrs to 14 yrs in age. The learning centre is operational for 4 hours a day, runs for 6 days a week. Every SakhiyonkiBaadi is conducted by a girl or a woman from the community, who is willing to brave the challenge of educating girls from that community. We address her as 'Daksha', who plays the role of a friend and a guardian for fellow girls.

The learning happens in an open environment, such as a community hall, a verandah or a room that is willingly offered by the community for the cause. Girls from the community gather to learn, share, care and grow, thus the name 'Sakhiyonkibaadi' that literally translates to a gathering place for friends (females), in the local dialect of *Mewari*.

We've referred to the syllabus from the textbooks prepared by SIERT (The State Institute for Educational Research and Training, Rajasthan), simplified the topics and to some extent even translated in local language for better understanding by the students. The topics cover 2 languages - Hindi and English, and subjects as Mathematics, Moral Science, Environmental studies and General Knowledge. In addition, there are sessions on Art -



Painting, singing, dancing and dramatics.

One of the major objectives of this initiative is to make these girls a 'curious learner', who shall question things and build their understanding, and not be a rote learner. They shall develop a civic sense, understand their role in the larger society and attain functional literacy.

The children who have the probability of attending a school, are prepared and are enrolled at the nearest Govt. School by our team.

### **How many people have you reached out to so far? How did you do so? This includes the teachers and the students.**

We have a total of 1164 Sakhiyon ki Baadi centers operational in 12 districts of Rajasthan, having 1164 Dakshas (Teachers) and enrollment of 35,964 girls. The intervention has reached out to 1164 Gram Panchayats and benefitted over 29,000+ families from rural hamlets of Rajasthan.

The operations are supported by a team of 118 members that include Field Level Support (District Manager, Block Head, Cluster Head), Trainers, Accountants, External Mentors and Program Manager.

### **What are the costs involved? How much has been for this CSR projects?**

Cost is incurred on procurement of resource material (stationery goods), toys, conducting residential training of team members, undertaking field visits and payment of salaries to the staff members.

Since its inception in the year 2016, we've invested over 35+ crores to eradicate female illiteracy from 12 districts of Rajasthan.

### **The impact that you have had so far? Can you share some of the beneficiary stories?**

Ramila Bhil, a 9-year-old school drop-out girl from Morchucha village, of Kotra block in Udaipur, enrolled at Sakhiyon ki Baadi centre in 2017. Being eldest among children in family, she took responsibility of looking after siblings, cattle and house chores very early on. The family is primarily engaged in farming (season) and father even migrates to city for work during non-farming periods. Ramila showed good progress and soon developed an affinity to attain school. She was helped by her Daksha, to secure admission at Govt. School in neighboring village and is now is a regular student, studying in 6<sup>th</sup> std. She still helps her family in daily chores, by managing her study time.

Anjali, a 8 year old girl from Jaipur village at Rohat Block of Pali district, was identified while conducting survey by our team members during 2018. She had never been enrolled at a school and thus had no formal education at all. Priyanka (Daksha) took her under her wing and allowed Anjali to grasp topics at her own

pace. Gradually, Anjali was prepared and enrolled at a nearest Govt. School in 5<sup>th</sup> Std. At school Anjali enjoys a special stardom, being the brightest student in the class. Anjali, does visit Priyanka and Sakhiyon Ki baadi, whenever possible and motivates other girls to learn and attain school.

Prior to establishment of Sakhiyon ki Baadi, girls from native tribes were full-time engaged with goat grazing, cattle care, sibling care, working on field and conducting daily chores at home. None of them was ever enrolled at a school nor had attended any kind of formal learning. Educating the girls (or rather children) is neither a need nor a necessity among these communities.

Sakhiyon ki Baadi has been successful in not just promoting literacy among children, but also to elevate the overall status of the women (Females) in these communities. Through this initiative, we've been able to provide livelihood to 1000+ women from the remotest of villages, who otherwise would not have been able to be an earning member of the family. During lockdown, many male members of the family lost their jobs and income source, however, the house survived solely over the income contributed by our dakshas. This contribution has earned them respect within the family, and now their opinion holds a ground.

### **How did the pandemic impact your work?**

Interestingly, the pandemic was found to be a blessing in disguise. As the physical movement was restricted, our online connectivity with the team increased. We started interactions over video calls using platforms like Zoom call and Google Meet. Even earlier we conducted meetings online, but those were limited to the management team (Program manager, Trainers and District Managers). Now we had new joiners to our virtual world, our Girls from Sakhiyon ki Baadi.

One of the early concerns of ours was the drop in the academic performance of the girls, which was gradually built over a span of 4 years. We feared that if the communication with dakshas is lost and if they do not conduct the center, then the girls will slowly forget the topics. Hence, we started building virtual classrooms for students. The challenges were monumental owing to low Digital literacy and access *viz.* Having no access to an android phone, internet connection and technical knowledge to participate in online meetings (Trainings).

The training team and field support team worked hand-in-hand, coordinated over phone calls and guided parents to install applications on their devices (Zoom, Google Meet), and connect. Many of our students (family) do not possess an android phone, some borrowed it from friends (Community members). That was the mobilization of resources, owing to our strong community engagement with Sakhiyon ki Baadi.

Online sessions for students eventually took off, restoring our connection with them. They engaged in interactive sessions to learn, share and teach one another. The participation increased

over the course of time, as we were able to connect with over 485 Sakhiyon ki Baadi centers, spanning across 12 districts.

Currently we are proud to showcase the efforts and dedication of our team, as our Dakshas now have the technical expertise to create (schedule) online sessions over Google Meet and connect with children, to teach holding online classes. The sessions are conducted at a scheduled time, where they learn with help of educational apps (Screen Sharing), they watch educational videos and access interactive digital material.

Interestingly, in previous years (since 2016) we had made numerous attempts to build an online community of our Sakhiyon Ki Baadi team, however limitations posed by the pandemic, proved to be a beneficial time for progress of the literacy initiative.

### What are some of the major challenges that you face(d)?

One of the most prominent challenge during the inception of the project was convincing the community (parents) to consider Education as a need of their child, since most of them considered it neither a need nor a priority. There was a huge mental blockage among the parents, that resulted in leaving the children illiterate, moreso for a girl child. They would ask us, *“What would happen if the girls remain illiterate? Ultimately they would marry and go, so even if we spend money on their education, we will not get any of its benefits!”*

It was a nerve wrecking task to change their mindset and make them understand the benefits of having an educated child. Also, the patriarchal mindset, passed on through the generations, cultural practices (women shall not step out) proved to be a hindrance.

Secondly, the hard to reach terrain posed an obstacle to reach out to the communities, facilitating supply of material (Books, Toys and Stationery goods). Many of our Sakhiyon ki Baadi centers operate at locations where motorable roads are absent. Connectivity to such learning centers is nearly lost during monsoons.

Thirdly, absence or yet to develop means of Communication Technology, takes time to circulate messages. Still 50% of our Sakhiyon ki Baadi centers, are missing the digital connect due to unavailability of an android phone or network connectivity.

Fourthly, absence of skilled resources was a significant problem and the only solution we could see was to build up the skills of the available human resources. This has allowed us to build a sustainable model.

### Plans for the road ahead.

In the initial 5 years, we focused largely on creating a model that can prove effective in the given demography of Rajasthan. The period allowed for exploration and course correction. Now as the model has evolved to be a robust, fruitful and sustainable, we shall be focusing over replicating it across Rajasthan.

In next 5 years, we would scale up our operations in 10 more districts and gaining an overall engagement with 5 Lakh+ girls. This shall be attained by 2025, bringing an overall reach in 24 districts. This shall be achieved by collaborating with Govt. agencies and Non-governmental organizations. The ultimate objective is to attain 100% female literacy in the state of Rajasthan by 2030, having an overall reach with 10 Lakh+ girls. Eventually contributing and supporting Govt's mission to achieve SDG 4 – Quality Education for all.

