

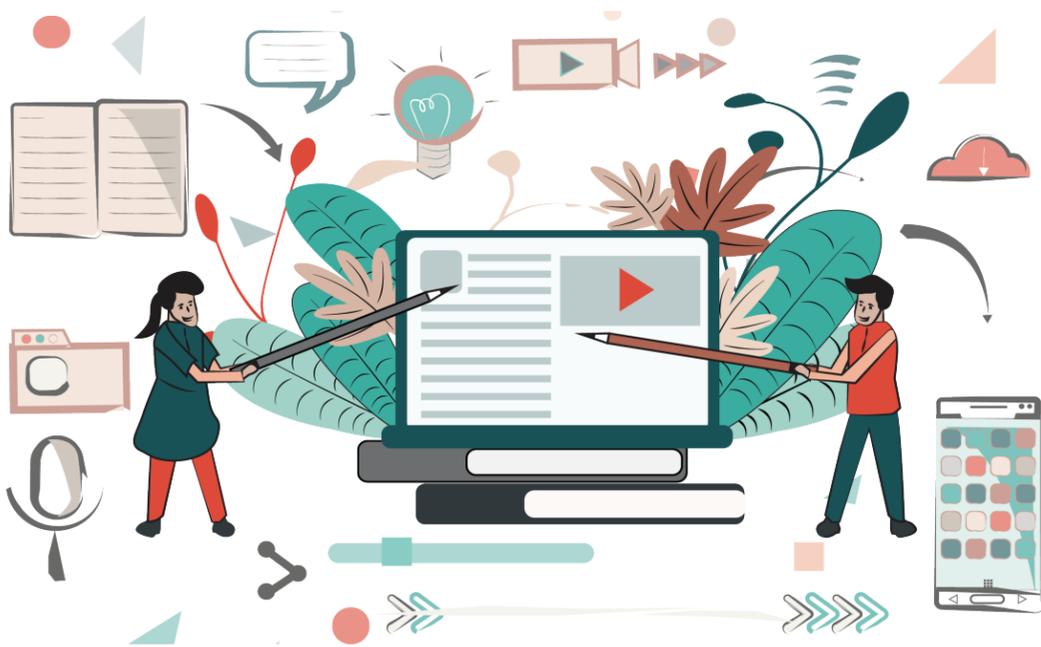


Umang Vani Newsletter

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ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

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Learning not hampered by the lockdown

Digital learning proves to be a boon during the pandemic

"The schools are closed, but thanks to the internet, I am able to continue my education," said sixteen-year-old Neha from Godda beaming with confidence. Digital learning has managed to put a smile on Neha's face.

During the lockdown in India in March 2020, about 1.5 million schools were shut down and 2.86 billion children stopped going to school. To respond to the situation, the Jharkhand Education Department came up with a unique solution—Digi-Sath. From May 2020 onward, educational material has been made available to children through WhatsApp. Now, teachers are connecting with children through WhatsApp and assigning them homework. Google meet and Zoom are being used for conducting classes. An 80-minute lesson session is being conducted for two subjects every day.

An ICRW survey highlights that the adolescent girls in 209 villages of Godda and Jamtara (development blocks) do not possess individual phones. They have access to phones through family members, but for a limited time. In this situation, Digi-Sath has emerged as a useful alternative. Ruby, a class 10 student from Jamanipahad, said, "Without Digi-Sath, our education would have been completely disrupted."

The State Coordinator for Holistic Education, Jharkhand Government, Abhinav Kumar shared, "We are able to reach 35 percent of children. In May 2020, 1 million children connected with Digi-Sath, and today 2 million are connected through WhatsApp and Doordarshan. Through teachers, we tried to encourage parents who have televisions sets at home to involve other children as well in Digi-Sath classes telecast on Doordarshan. Wherever Panchayat centers have televisions, children are being encouraged to attend classes by the Panchayat head."

"Lockdown was the time for introspection. To face this challenge, the department adopted digital learning methods," said Abhay Shankar, District Education Officer.

Under the ambit of the UMANG program, a survey was conducted across 68 schools of Godda and Jamtara for implementing Digi-SATH and efforts underway to increase its reach. The survey revealed that adolescent girls face various challenges in accessing education.

"The global pandemic, Covid-19 has had an adverse effect on education. To deal with these challenges, the school education and literacy department, Jharkhand is facilitating lessons for students through Doordarshan, Digi-Sath-Shiksha Portal, WhatsApp and other alternative mediums, so that there is no discontinuity in the learning process."

Jata Shankar Choudhary
Director, Secondary Education
Jharkhand

Loss of livelihoods has worsened economic conditions of families and led to an increase in domestic violence. Various surveys have predicted that in the near future, there will be an increase in the number of girls dropping out from school compounding the risks of child trafficking and child marriage. This makes strengthening and effective implementation of Digi-Sath a priority.

The UMANG team is working to make it a success, so that girls like Ruby and Neha can continue their education and realize their dreams.



Dear readers,

Hope you and your loved ones are safe and keeping well!

I am happy to share the first anniversary edition of UMANG Vani with you. We thank you for your constant feedback and guidance in its publication.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed several challenges to the learning process. Digital communication means are now being used widely and we need to take this change in our stride. Teachers and children are connecting through digital media to continue educational activities. Various digital tools, such as Power Point presentations, video presentations, online trainings, and connectivity platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams are being preferred these days. These tools and platforms have made learning more interactive for children.

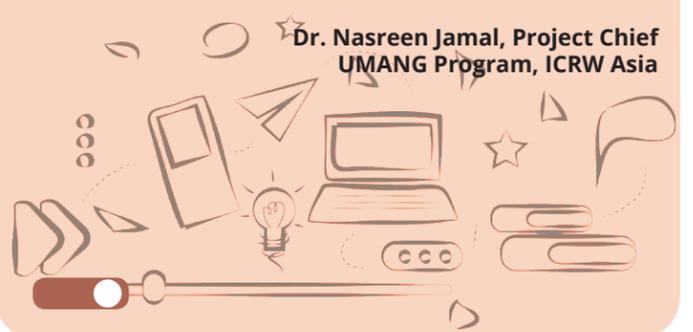
Today, we live in a society dominated by technology. Children begin using the internet and are exposed to digital media at a very young age. While children continue using digital means to develop their skills and knowledge, we need to ensure that they can guard themselves from online hazards. It is our responsibility to make them aware of the benefits as well as the risks of using digital technologies, and to teach them about safety in digital spaces as well as in everything else they do.

It is, however, important to remember that most children in rural areas face hurdles in pursuing education through digital mediums. There are multiple reasons for these challenges. However, this is changing rapidly. Children have a certain curiosity about digital technologies and are enthusiastic to explore them. They also feel a sense of pride using digital tools for their studies.

The Jharkhand Education Department has initiated classes for students and for teachers through a new digital platform — Digi-Sath. Many children are now using mobiles to connect with these classes. Availability of such platforms has allowed them to continue their education during the pandemic.

Digital education has now become a part of our lives. Equipping our schools and teachers with required resources and tools is key to forging a robust e-learning system for the future.

Dr. Nasreen Jamal, Project Chief
UMANG Program, ICRW Asia



Departmental work plan to address increasing child safeguarding issues

Rinki from Amarpur village of Godda district was saddened by her parents' decision to marry her off at the age of 13, when she should have been playing with her friends. She wanted to continue her studies, so she gathered courage and spoke to the group formed by UMANG program for adolescent girls' empowerment. The girls from the group, with the help of the group facilitator, spoke to Rinki's parents and convinced them to allow her to continue her education.

Rinki's marriage has been halted for now, but there are numerous girls like her who have become victims of child marriage or human trafficking due to the circumstances owing to the lockdown. There have been several newspaper reports on increasing instances of child marriage, child labor and child abuse during the pandemic. Given the situation, Godda's Block Development Officer reached out to UMANG team members. Team members informed them about the block child protection committees and shared that all key departments are represented in the committees, who can take cognizance of issues relating to children and adolescents.

Subsequently, the Godda Block Development Officer called for a meeting of the block child protection committee in collaboration with the UMANG team and the district child protection unit.

The meeting was led by the District Child Protection Officer, Godda, **Mr. Ritesh Kumar**, "who reiterated that the child protection committees have a significant role to play in ensuring the safety of children during the COVID-19 crisis. The district child protection unit, Godda, works in close collaboration with local organizations and

relevant departments so that the committees formed can be strengthened and children can remain within the safety net."

In the meeting, expressing concerns over the increasing cases of child marriage and child abuse, the Block Development Officer asked to strengthen the Village Child Protection Committee. For places where the committee has not been formed, it was suggested a notification be issued to constitute the committee without delay.

It is worth mentioning that under the UMANG program, it was ensured that regular meetings of the Village Child Protection Committees take place in the Anganwadis across all districts of the program's areas of intervention in 2019-2020.

Efforts have also been made to identify vulnerable children and share their details with the department. In the meeting held on June 23, 2020, the committee appreciated the activities of the UMANG team and took key decisions. It assigned the responsibility of creating a WhatsApp group for the block child protection committee members to the UMANG project coordinator from SATHEE. Apart from this, the responsibility of organizing meetings on the last Saturday of every month and preparing reports on the same was also assigned to the UMANG project coordinator.

We hope that with UMANG's initiative and through the vigilance of child protection committee, the dreams of adolescent girls will be fulfilled and they shall be free from the bane of child marriage.

UMANG collaborates with the Jharkhand Education

During the COVID-19 crisis, the UMANG team joined hands with the Education Department of Jharkhand and played an important role in preparing the education material to be sent across to the students under the Digi-SATH program. The UMANG team also contacted 1,218 teachers and 5,565 students from 71 schools in Godda and Jamtara districts and helped to connect them with Digi-SATH. UMANG team members also organized a digital session on COVID-19 with 92 teachers and outlined the ways to connect around 12,000 students with the program. Apart from this, re-enrollment of 224 dropped out girls was carried out and 67 eligible girls were sent to KasturbaGandhi Balika vidyalaya (Girls' residential schools) for enrollment.

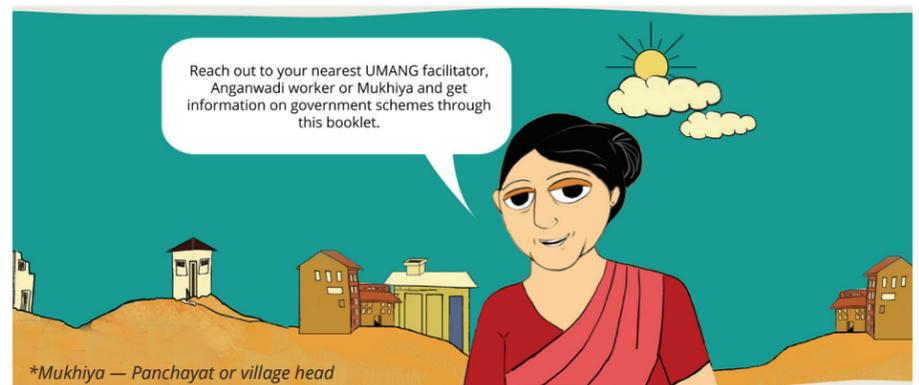
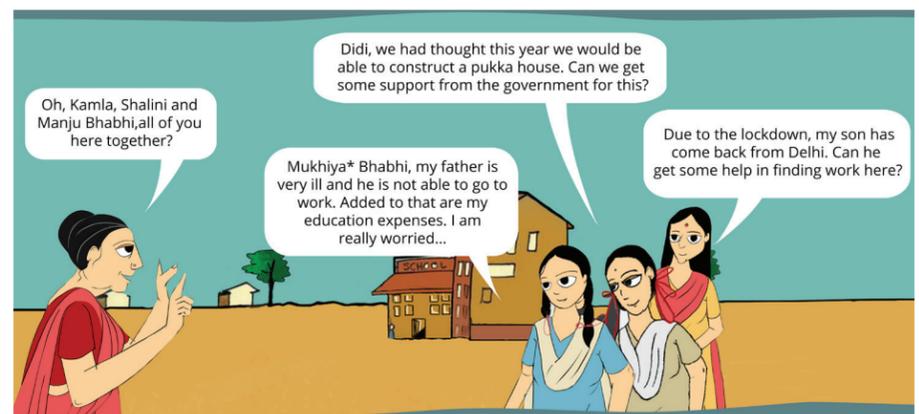
Digital Learning and Progress

UMANG team regularly trained its 132 field staff members through digital workshops, which helped in not only evaluating the work completed, but also in enhancing their efficiency. A digital survey conducted through field staff revealed the community's condition during the lockdown. The team gave detailed information on safety during COVID-19 to 13,665 adolescent girls while following social distancing norms. During this time, the team supported social works such as Didi kitchen, horticulture, excavation of a reservoir, leveling of playing fields, attaining job cards for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Act (MNREGA), etc. The team created a series of digital mass education sessions for men and for adolescent girls and boys, and compiled an information booklet on social security schemes.

Innovative solutions to complex problems

Women in rural areas have limited access to smartphones and Internet. UMANG's partners, Project Concern International (PCI) spread awareness about this gap among women with the help of Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS). The leaders of 260 self-help groups of Godda, Sadar and Nala block were trained through regular tele-meetings for four months on topics related to protection from and non-discrimination amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of the women's group were given information on subjects such as adolescent health, nutrition and menstruation during lockdown, subsequent lifestyle and discrimination on account of COVID-19. UMANG facilitators trained around 10,000 members of the groups and their families to protect themselves from COVID-19.

Come, Let Us Learn About Schemes!



UMANG's New Chapter — Gender Equity Movement in Schools

The UMANG program, working for empowerment of adolescent girls, has generated wide interest among stakeholders and created new opportunities for expansion of the program.

Pranita Achyut, Director of Research, ICRW Asia, said "I am happy to announce that the Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) initiative under the UMANG project is being expanded to three additional blocks of Godda and Jamtara districts. Podayahat and Pathargamma blocks from Godda district and Narayanpur block in Jamtara have been selected for this school-based program."

GEMS will work in 201 middle, secondary and higher secondary government schools of these three blocks and will directly reach 30,000 students. It will also have indirect access to 60,000 family members. This work will be conducted under the leadership of teachers. For this, about 500 teachers will be trained to develop a deeper understanding on gender and gender equality.

GEMS is not new in Jharkhand. The initiative was successfully carried out in 80 schools in Ranchi and Khunti districts in 2014-16. Under the program, the gender-based curriculum was prepared with the help of teachers and students. Based on that experiences and learnings, GEMS will be implemented in 201 schools in Godda and Jamtara.

Under the program, training sessions will be organized for students from class 6 to 11 on topics, such as gender-discrimination, violence, education, employment, child-marriage, self-identification and effective dialogue. Apart from this, motivating

students for sports activities, building their leadership skills, encouraging girls to play in public places and enhancing their self-esteem and confidence will also be part of this program. Sports and picture competitions will be organized by conducting school-based campaigns. Apart from this, efforts will also be made to increase the capacity of the children's councils, to make the school management committees (SMC) more active and to make parent-teacher meetings (PTM) effective. Along with this, the use of forums such as 'Guru Goshtee' to promote girls' education will also be part of the program.

Student-led gender-audits will also be part of the program. Unsafe locations will be identified and the students will present findings from the audit to the school management committee for necessary action. ICRW, SATHEE and Badlao foundation will document and evaluate the program with the help of students and teachers.

This project will promote policies and actions for girls' education and gender equality. "It will further empower us and our partner organizations," shared **Pranita**, "We are very excited to bring about changes among girls, boys and community members in Jharkhand by conducting this program together with the government and local partners."

March on toward your goal!

Change yourself with the times, or learn to change the time itself, never give up to your limitations, learn to move forward in every situation.

My name is Dayavanti. I live in Daldalee Toyotola. My parents work as laborers. I was enrolled in Ghat Banka High School. At home, I had to take care of the cattle, so I used to miss out on school. Most of my time was spent in grazing cows. My father used to say, "What is the use of going to school? Feed the cows! Think about feeding yourself first. If everyone is well fed, that should be enough." I did not go to school because of their restrictions. I started to feel that there was nothing in my life other than doing house hold chores and grazing cows. When I saw my friends go to school, I felt that maybe I was not destined for school. After some time, UMANG began running classes in our village and all girls my age started attending the classes. I was hesitant to go. I used to think that everyone would make fun of me because I do not go to school. When I saw everyone playing after the classes, I also felt like playing. When I see them playing, sometimes I also go and play with them.



One day, seeing me play, a UMANG facilitator called me and told me that I play well but I should study too, as education is as important as sports to move forward in life. I started attending UMANG classes along with other girls and after the classes, we started playing football. It was a pleasure playing football. We were asked to wear shoes to be able to play. I had a pair of shoes for school. I would go to the ground with our cows, hiding my shoes in the bag. Then I would leave the cows in the field to graze and play football. One day, one of our cows fell into a pit and I was petrified that my father would punish me for my negligence. The UMANG team supported me and stood with me till the cow was rescued. That gave me the courage to come back on the following day.

The next day my father also came to see us play. While playing, I was frightened to see my father sitting there as I was scared that I would get punished for playing. When I shared this with my teacher; she told me to keep playing so that he could also see my talent. I kept playing and my father watched me play silently. I have now made up my mind to go to school again and continue to study. When I got ready for school, my father allowed me to go without saying anything and took the cows to the field himself. That day when I went to the school wearing a uniform, I met the UMANG teacher, who told me that she would want to see me in the class every day and went away smiling.

UMANG not only showed me the way to move ahead in life, but also awakened a dream within me. Today, I study and play football besides household work. Thank you UMANG for helping me move forward!

My name is Manjoki Murmu. I live in Hijaljori village in Nala Block of Jamtara district. I study in class 6 in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya. There are nine members in my family. My mother and father work as laborers to make the ends meet. My elder sister was married off quite early. She could only study till the class 8. Due to the poor economic conditions of my family, I also discontinued my studies after the class 5. I wanted to continue to study, so I gathered courage and requested a UMANG facilitator to enroll me at school again. I want to become a teacher and wish that I could also educate other girls. I am always happy to attend UMANG classes as I get to learn a lot.

After my enrollment in Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya, three more girls enrolled after taking details from me and our teacher about the enrollment process. I am glad that now we can all complete our studies.



Everything was going well, but out of the blue the pandemic, COVID-19 struck. I had to go back home due to school closures. During the lockdown, my parents lost their livelihood and it became difficult to even manage two meals a day. For the first time my family faced such difficult times. In this crisis, the Jharkhand government started "Didi Kitchen" for poor families. We started getting food once a day, but had a lot of difficulty managing evening meals. My mother borrowed rice and some money from the people in our village and we managed to eat dry rice in the evenings. This is how we managed for some time. To repay the loan, my mother started working in people's homes and fields and I started taking care of the house.

During this time, my studies completely stopped. I was quite keen to continue studying, but I did not have a mobile phone. Then I started staying with a senior girl in the village. She helps girls in their studies. She allowed me to attend online classes through her mobile phone. I requested her to allow other girls as well and added three other girls to the online classes. In this way, we are all continuing our studies. I want to tell all adolescents that they should not lose courage in these difficult times and continue their studies by connecting online through friends who have mobile phones. We must find our own ways to achieve our goals.

Commendable initiative by Upgrade High School Sehardal Teachers

“My name is Viren Mandal. I am the Principal at Upgrade High School (UHS) Sehardal. It is true that we have never faced a crisis like COVID-19 in our lives. When the discussion of re-opening the schools started, the teachers were apprehensive. We started getting calls about how they would work in the school in this unusual situation. They feared more for their families than for themselves. Then, the Jharkhand government issued an order to implement Digi-SATH for students to continue their studies. We also wanted to do something for the students.



Initially, it seemed challenging to teach through digital classes as it was completely new for us. The task was to connect all the students who were enrolled in schools. Our teachers campaigned for this and all students were contacted over phone. However, most of the students or their parents did not have the

used to eat adequately. Now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone is being given some money along with rice. Children are getting midday meals in form of rice, but parents are not spending monetary aid received on children's nutrition. Our teachers are playing an important role in distributing midday meals to children and sanitary pads to adolescent girls. Going from village to village was quite risky and it still is. A key reason for this is that very few people in villages wear masks. Despite this, we considered it our duty to make people aware and ensure that children get their midday meals. The teachers at our school raised money through donations and distributed three quintals of rice among the needy.

At present, 25 students from our school have been contacted and have been given education kits. The kit consists of a notebook, pencil, pen, geometry box and school uniform. Our school management committee is playing an important role, it met twice despite school closures.



Our teachers are fulfilling their responsibility while facing all problems that have come their way.”

kind of phones required for online classes. Many parents had to be repeatedly told on how to join the online classes, but they could not understand the outline of the program. After a lot of effort, some students joined the program, but they were not getting the desired results.

Due to the closure of the school, there was also a decrease in interest and level of involvement among the students. In such a situation, preparing the content for education and sending it online was not a small feat for our teachers but they were not discouraged and faced all challenges. They went from village to village and talked to the students and their parents and motivated them to join Digi-SATH. Now, we can proudly say that our team has achieved some success in connecting their students to Digi-SATH.

I believe that the children have faced the adverse effect of not being able to get midday meal in schools. When midday meals were available in schools, children





This story is from the GEMS Comic Book, conceptualized and developed by the GEMS team. For more information about GEMS and UMANG, please reach out to ICRW Asia.

Acknowledgments

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