

Art for Change

By Shipra Baduni

With much debate going on about water scarcity and conservation, a small group of students of a government school in Indragarh, a village in Alwar, decided to take action to engage their community in water conservation. These students believed it was their innate responsibility to do so to help secure their own futures. Most of the students were girls, the group most affected by water scarcity. A shortage of drinking water in schools, and of water in toilets, had eventually forced a lot of girl students to drop out of school—a problem faced by many villages in rural India.



Tired of having to choose between education and health, the Indragarh students decided to take matters into their own hands. The launching of Sehgal Foundation's initiative, *Transform Lives one school at a time*, played a part in the students' empowerment. Under the project, proper rainwater harvesting systems are being installed in their school with connections to drinking water and toilets. Digital Literacy and Life Skills Education classes in progress gave the students an opportunity to learn how to use computers, the internet, governance processes, and important life skills. Through the classes, the students became more confident and, feeling empowered, they began an exploration on the internet to learn more about their biggest problem: water scarcity. They learned how water scarcity is a global phenomenon, and how innovative techniques, in addition to advocacy, were helping to tackle the problem on multiple levels. Wanting to contribute to the cause, and understanding their limited resources, the students chose expressive art as their tool to bring about some kind of positive change within their own community.

The students created a street play focused on the importance of water conservation in their village. They asked their Digital Literacy instructor to help guide them through the entire process. Government schoolteachers were also supportive of the students and the cause they were championing.

The students gathered all their community members, using door-to-door mobilization, and performed the street play for the whole community. Successfully spreading the message on water conservation and literacy, they inspired the entire village to take an oath together to conserve water within their own capacities.



Having seen the impact the street play had on community members, the school authorities decided that this street play had to be replicated in other villages as well. When the students then performed the street play for a nearby village, Moreda, a similar positive impact was seen there.

This seemingly small initiative taken by students had a profound effect on the community members. In addition, their influence did not stop here. News spread fast. The students enrolled in Digital Literacy classes in Dholdidhoop village, about 20 kilometers away from Indragarh, found out about the initiative. Having faced similar issues in their own villages and lives, they decided to replicate the same idea in their village. They were able to mobilize about hundred community members to come and watch them perform. The community members were inspired. Parents of the students felt proud of the students' initiative and supported them throughout the process. The entire village of Dholdidhoop took an oath together to conserve water in their communities.

The government school in Indragarh where students were inspired by the Transform Lives *one school at a time* initiative is in process, and the school infrastructure is due to be completed by the end of July 2018. This project was funded by philanthropic investors in Florida.

The principal of the school commented that she never could have imagined that this large a change was possible in their school and their village. She expressed her sincere thanks on behalf of all the schoolchildren.

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