

THE FIFTH ESTATE

VOL III

NGOs Transforming Rural India
in Environment, Health and Education



HCL

SHOWCASE
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मतदाता का
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 SEHGAL
FOUNDATION

TRANSFORM LIVES
ONE SCHOOL AT A TIME

TOGETHER
WE EMPOWER
RURAL INDIA

www.sehgal.org

S M Sehgal Foundation



Founded by Dr Surinder (Suri) Mohan Sehgal and Edda Sehgal in 1999

The Sehgal Foundation strives to strengthen community-led development initiatives to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change across rural India. It seeks to create sustainable programmes for managing water resources, increasing agricultural productivity, and fortifying rural governance, interlinking each initiative with women's empowerment. Through its efforts, there has been a marked positive impact, especially through the digital literacy programme for which it has applied for the HCL Grant. The statistics are significant among students: awareness about the Right to Education Act increased by 83.1 per cent. 21.4 per cent no longer think cooking is a girl's job. 48.4 per cent now know how to use a computer. The Foundation has a strong presence in Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra.

Engaging the community at every level

VILLAGE SAKRAS. A group of girls knock on each door. Their aim is to convince sceptical and superstitious parents that immunization is good for their children. By the end of the drive, the girls wear triumphant smiles. They have managed to bring 17 children back into the immunization process, and motivate 68 other families to have their children immunized. These girls are members of the digital literacy and life skills education project run by the Sehgal Foundation in their area. One of the girls, Kiranvati, sums up the programme beautifully. 'It has served as a platform for us to put on our thinking caps, look at the world from a different perspective, understand who we are and what we want to be, and plan how we can bring about positive change. The components of life skills, good governance, and digital literacy are all very important.'

The digital literacy programme is part of the rural good governance strategy of this NGO, which focuses on three thematic areas, namely – social justice, food security, and water security. When it started in the very isolated Nuh district of Haryana, the organization focused on a model they called Integrated Sustainable Village Development (ISVD), encompassing water management, agriculture development, family life education, and rural health. Over the years, it began to understand that none of its initiatives were sustainable without the component of rural governance. It then redesigned its thinking.

Today, its programmes cover agricultural management, water management, and good rural



Transforming lives through positive peer support



Gender empowerment at the forefront

governance. The slant is towards empowerment of women and girls, and the participation is paramount. Says Dr Suri Sehgal, founder of the NGO, 'Our definition of success is when the community takes ownership of the projects and can say, "We have done it ourselves".' Village level institutions like Village Development Committees (VDCs), women's collectives, and capacity building of panchayat members all contribute towards this participatory process where the community is engaged at every level, from project initiation, to implementation, completion, and sustained follow-ups. Besides partnerships related to funding, the organization has consolidated relationships and collaborations with other agencies, universities, Government departments, and technical experts.

An integral part of the Sehgal Foundation's work centres around children and students. After training in digital literacy and participatory sessions on life skills education and governance, students are able to voice their concerns, take collective action to address

governance issues, and use their knowledge to help themselves, their families, and communities by accessing and availing their rights and entitlements. The centres provide a platform for them to come together and develop a positive peer culture, share their experiences, and develop comradeship, which was so far missing in their life, especially among the girls. Their perspective on gender roles is enhanced. Some of the sessions imparted are on self-identity, goal-setting, emotions, communication skills, interpersonal relationships, values, and gender equity.'

A truly transformative process for young minds.

HCL Grant Project Title: Project Roshni

Beneficiaries: Rural youth from the most backward districts of India, between 13 and 25 years old

Location: Muzaffarpur, Bihar; Nuh, Haryana; Karauli, Rajasthan; Ramgarh, Jharkhand