Baseline Survey Report

Bridging the Internet Literacy Gap and Promoting Life Skills Education among Rural School Children in Mewat District, Haryana

Supported by ORACLE and CAF India

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1. Introduction

The 'digital divide' has been traditionally understood as gaps in physical access to computers and the Internet among various identity groups. The 'divide' referring to difference in access rates between one or more groups (Gorski, 2003). In recent years, concerns over 'digital exclusions' are increasingly finding mention in debates about 'social exclusions' with 1990s witnessing the initiation of mainstream political discussion over 'information haves' and 'information have-nots', and 'information and communication poverty' (Selwyn, 2004). Internet is now seen as a powerful tool for addressing socio-economic marginalization. At the inauguration of 2nd phase of Kerela's total e-literacy program, Vice President of India mentioned Internet as "a means of overcoming social exclusion by providing a "digital bridge" out of poverty." Also adding, that "in rural areas, the internet can provide a powerful equalizing tool allowing people to receive access to key information and to connect with each other, overcoming social and geographical boundaries"

In India, one of the earlier programs focusing on digitization and e-governance was the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) formulated and approved by the government in 2006. India's economic agenda, as laid out by the present government, largely focuses on economic revival and inclusive growth aiming to carry these out by financially empowering citizens, focusing on industrial development and reducing subsidies through use of digital technologies. Technology being the key enabler here. To this end, the government has also initiated the Digital India program, centered on three key vision areas. One of the areas – digital empowerment of citizens - aims to provide universal digital literacy to empower citizens to use digital platform/ devices. Digital literacy is broadly understood to mean knowing how technology and media affect the ways in which we go about finding things out, communicating with one another, and gaining knowledge and understanding.

'Digital India' aims to empower citizens to avail services more easily and to conveniently interact with the government. India is seeing a dramatic growth in the number of online transactions involving citizens and the government. The number of such e-transactions has grown by more than 200% in 2 years: from 840 million in 2013 to 2580 million in 2015 (Deloitte, 2015). 'Digital India' program aims to target digitally dispossessed citizens whose entitlements are denied due to poor governance and opaque mechanisms of service delivery. It is argued that the greatest obstacles to rural development, large distances and inadequate infrastructure, might be obviated by instant access to virtual institutions that provide banking, education, health care, neonatal information, agricultural advice and so forth (Sood, 2001).

It has been simultaneously argued that the potentials of e-governance can be realized only if the programs are accompanied by essential capacity building; that the "programme might end up as a one-sided endeavor offering better opportunity for e-commerce businesses to access rural markets rather than for the people to take tangible advantages of the internet revolution." As the new budget also allows manufacturers to sell their products directly through e-commerce platforms without extra approvals; they are unlikely to work in a vacuum without training the panchayats, elected representatives, lower level government functionaries and the ordinary users to use IT-enabled tools (Mudgal, 2014). As summarized succinctly in 'E-governance for Mewat' by Kapoor and Makhija, 2014 – "the potential is vast, challenges many, and the willingness of the community, many being first generation learners, to adopt technology is very forthcoming."

One of the strategies to reap benefits of digitization and e-governance initiatives that is currently gaining momentum is involving youth in the local governance processes. The scholars also have highlighted many constraints other than information poverty that prevent such participation. For example, in the context of Mewat, a district of Haryana predominantly populated by '*Meos*' where agriculture and allied activities are the main occupations, it has been argued that '*Izzat*' (respect), a socio-cultural norm, is the most popular tagline that prevents youth from participating in the local decision making process. Due to increased respect towards elders, youth in the village do not speak during Gram Sabha. Their participation in the governance process is minimal. Such cultural practices hinder participation disallowing youth to raise their voice in front of elders." It has also been pointed out that mainstreaming of youth to a large extent involves gender mainstreaming within the governance processes (Bastola, 2013).

For any program aiming to increase social participation of a group by digitally empowering its members, in governance processes or otherwise, within local contexts or beyond, the fact that the same groups are historically and presently disenfranchised by the social, political, economic systems around them cannot be ignored (Gorski, 2003). Digital divide or any other forms of gaps in access to resources are merely symptoms of such disenfranchisement. In the same manner, providing rural youth with digital literacies, without addressing their concerns and needs as 'youth' or without building the necessary life-skills that enable them to reflect upon their positions in society and give them confidence to negotiate those positions, has limited potential to bring much change in behavior patterns of young people.

It is with these potentials and constraints of the landscape that Sehgal Foundation is planning to start the project to impart Internet literacy and life-skills education to rural youth with the broader objective of bridging the digital divide between rural and urban youth.

1.1 About the Project

The project, initiated by S M Sehgal Foundation with support from ORACLE and CAF India, will target rural school children in Mewat district, Haryana. It aims to a) bridge the awareness gap between rural and urban children, b) improve participation of rural youth in governance, and c) build their confidence by promoting internet literacy and life-skills education.

The project, spanned across the duration of one year, will provide training to 200 young people of Mewat from four[1] government schools[2] (roughly 50 students per school will be trained under the project). Each student will receive training for five months. Given the socio cultural constraints in the region, young men and women will be coached in separate classrooms that will be held on alternate days with sessions taken by a male and a female teacher, respectively. Students will be made aware of hardware and software basics of computers and will gradually move to basics of Internet and Internet uses. Life skills education forms a crucial component of the program with a focus on the development of social and emotional skills; knowledge on health and sanitation; and government programs, schemes and rights.

With an increase in the ability to access relevant information through technology accompanied with knowledge of self and of their rights and entitlements, it is expected that the participation of youth in community development and local governance will increase. The life-skills education component of the program is also expected to bring increased health awareness among the enrolled youth along with an enhanced decision-making capacity.

1.2 Study Objectives

The study was conducted with an objective of a) assessing the needs of the young people for internet literacy in terms of current levels of familiarity with digital devices, and b) understanding the perceptions of youth about themselves and about the socio-political spaces they inhabit along with generating an understanding of how much control they exercise over these spaces.

The report is broadly divided into three sections. Section 1 provides an introduction to the study and the project along with discussing the broad study objectives. Section 2 provides a detailed description of the results garnered from data analysis that is further subdivided into four sections. Section 2.1 focuses on capturing the demographic profile and education status of the participants with the aim of illuminating the impact of socio-economic and political status of participants on their ability to access educational opportunities such as the internet literacy and life skills education program on which the current study is based. Section 2.2 captures the level of empowerment among youth by attempting to understand their self perceived decision-making abilities, mobility, perceptions about self, and aspirations. Section 2.3 focuses on

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[1] Students from two schools are enrolled in May, 2016 batch and from remaining two schools will be enrolled in batch starting in October, 2016

[2] Names of Schools: Government High School, Bhadas; Government High School, Mandikhera

gauging the knowledge level of enrolled students about issues in local governance and their participation in the same by exploring their awareness about existence and functioning of select village level institutions. Section 2.4 captures the awareness and usage levels of computers and Internet among youth. Section 3 summarizes the major findings of the study relevant to the future direction of Internet and digital literacy programs targeting youth in rural contexts while at the same time enumerating the various limitations of the present study.

1.3 Area of Study

The study was conducted in two villages – Bhadas and Mandikhera of Nagina block of Mewat, Haryana. Haryana is a landlocked state in Northern part of India surrounded by Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Rajasthan. Within the state of Haryana lies Mewat district that came into existence in the year 2005 when it was carved out from Gurgaon and Faridabad as the 20th district of Haryana. The geographical location of the region is such that it falls at a distance of around 30 kilometers from Gurgaon (Saxena, 2013).

However, despite the proximity, Mewat is untouched by development and lags behind other districts in the state on almost all indicators of growth and development. In terms of several vital socio-economic parameters, Mewat district falls way behind other parts of the country. Majority of the district's population (95 percent) resides in rural areas. The education statistics reveal that merely 37.6% of the females are literate as against 73% of literacy among males (Census 2011). In Mandikhera, male literacy stands at 76.1 percent while female literacy rate was 49.6 percent. In Bhadas, Male literacy stands at 70.3 percent while female literacy rate was 28.9 percent (Census, 2011).

1.4 Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected using a structured questionnaire administered on all students enrolled in the two centers run by Sehgal Foundation. The questionnaire comprised of three sections capturing responses on a) factors that impact respondents' participation in social life, b) respondents' current level of knowledge about functions, roles and responsibilities of select village level institutions, and government acts and initiatives, and c) knowledge of basics of computer and internet, respectively. Quantitative data was then analyzed using basic statistics to shed light on gender specific and region specific differentials in knowledge and perceptions of youth. Qualitative responses of the participants were also captured and synthesized to further develop an understanding regarding the major thrust areas of the project.

2. Results and Discussion

The major findings of the study are detailed in the following sections. Section 2.1 captures the background information about the participants, section 2.2 discusses the perceived level of empowerment of respondents on varied aspects related to decision making and articulation, section 2.3 and 2.4 summarizes findings on awareness about local governance, rights and entitlements, and knowledge of internet and computers, respectively.

2.1 Background Characteristics

2.1.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Basic demographic information of enrolled students including gender, religion, and age was recorded to gain an understanding of the background that will help overlay interpretation of other results. This information is seen to play a crucial role in determining who has access to educational spaces.

In Mewat, the sex ratio of children attending school in the age group of 6-17 years is 720 girls per 1,000 boys as compared to the national average of 889 girls per 1,000 boys (Mewat at a glance, Mewat Development Agency, 2016). Inhabitants of Mewat do not prioritize educating girls due to the patriarchal nature of the society. Community beliefs and traditions such as custom of early marriage, restricted mobility for adolescent girls and preference to religious education over formal education for girls are some of the factors that limit educational opportunities available to girls (Godyal and Makhija, 2012).

Despite these multiple barriers and historical disadvantages, the number of females enrolled in the Internet literacy and life skills education centers are slightly more than the number of males (Table 2.1). This slight excess is indicative of the interest among females for gaining skills that they perceive will afford them better opportunities in future and also the changing perceptions of community about girls' education and their mobility. Enrolment of more girls than boys in Bhadas center (Table 2.1) where female literacy stands at mere 28.96 percent (census, 2011) is indicative of this change.

In Mewat, girls do not have distinct identities and are largely dependent on others for taking important decisions of their lives (Saxena et. al,, 2009). While a comparatively higher enrolment of girls can also be attributed to the design of the program which provides for separate classes for boys and girls, it is also important to note that classes are scheduled to be conducted after school hours and thus entail a higher commitment and trust from the community which traditionally perceives it riskier for girls to be outside of home during evening hours.

Table 2.1: Distribution of Students by Gender						
	Mandikhera		Bhadas		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female	32	50.0	32	50.0	64	100
Male	31	50.8	30	49.2	61	100
Total	63	50.4	62	49.6	125	100

Although, an almost equal number of boys and girls have enrolled in the program, the number of boys who come from neighboring villages to attend the course is considerably higher than the number of girls in program who come from a neighboring village. In Mandikhera center, as high as 64.5 percent of boys do not belong to the same village and stay after school hours to attend the class. The corresponding number for girls is only 12.5 percent. Table 2.2 gives the center wise percentage of boys and girls who belong to a neighboring village. While gender might not be a constraining factor for girls from the village where the center is located, it definitely has implications for girls from neighboring villages, who might want to enroll for the course but cannot do so because of the perceived risks and corresponding costs of the commute.

Table 2.2: Percentage of Students Belonging to a Neighboring Village		
	Mandikhera	Bhadas
Female	12.5 %	12.5 %
Male	64.5 %	23.3 %

The religious composition of Mewat makes evident the predominance of Meo-Muslims across all blocks, with a particularly high percentage in Nagina (64 percent) (Census, 2011). Despite the predominance, overall, an equal number of students following Hinduism (50.4 percent) have enrolled in the program. There is a comparatively higher percentage of Muslim students in Mandikhera center with 60.7 percent of students following Islam. Conversely, there is a higher percentage of Hindu students in Bhadas center. Table 2.3 outlines the distribution of students by religion in each center.

Table 2.3: Distribution of Students by Religion					
	Mandikhera		Bhadas		Total
	n	%	n	%	n
Islam	37	60.7	24	39.3	61

Hinduism	25	39.7	38	60.3	63
Total	63	50.4	62	49.6	125

The identified target population for the program is the youth of Mewat, largely defined as individuals falling within the age group of 15-35 years (Saxena, Godyal, & Gandhi, 2012). The project is to be implemented with the support of local government schools that will be the sites for the Internet literacy and LSE centers. As implementation of the project will be through schools, majority of the enrolled students fall within the school going age range with average age of students in Bhadas and Mandikhera being 15.3 years and 16.4 years, respectively. Figure 2.1 gives the percentage distribution of students by age group.

Figure 2.1: Percentage Distribution of Students by Age-Group
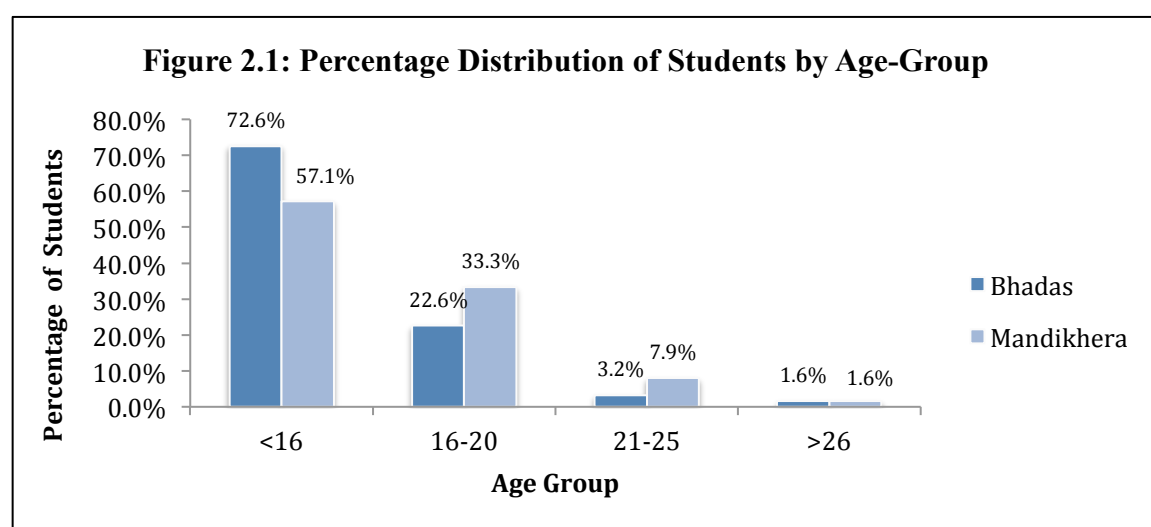
Dominance of relatively younger students (92.8 percent below age 20) is expected to give educators an opportunity to work with students who are first generation digital learners and thus, display a greater desire to adopt technology (Kapoor, & Makhija, 2014). This also provides a fertile ground for the life skills education intervention as learnings in these formative years go on to shape the personalities and future decisions (Saxena, Godyal, & Gandhi, 2012).

2.1.2 Education Status of Respondents

One of the eligibility requirements for enrolling in the program was identified as completion of elementary education i.e. the student must be a 8th grade graduate. It was based on an understanding that to successfully impart Internet literacy, students need to be comfortable with reading and writing and have workable understanding of English language. For this purpose, 8th grade was identified as the qualifying level. This requirement combined with the strategy of project rollout through schools meant that majority of students are currently enrolled in grade 9 or above. 89.6 percent of the students are currently enrolled in formal schooling programs while the remaining 10.4 have dropped out of education after grade 8, grade 10 or after gaining a bachelors degree.

Figure 2.2 and 2.3 gives the percentage distribution of students by current enrolment status for boys and girls, respectively.

Figure 2.2: Percentage Distribution of Female Students by Education Status

**Figure 2.3: Percentage Distribution of Male Students by Education Status**
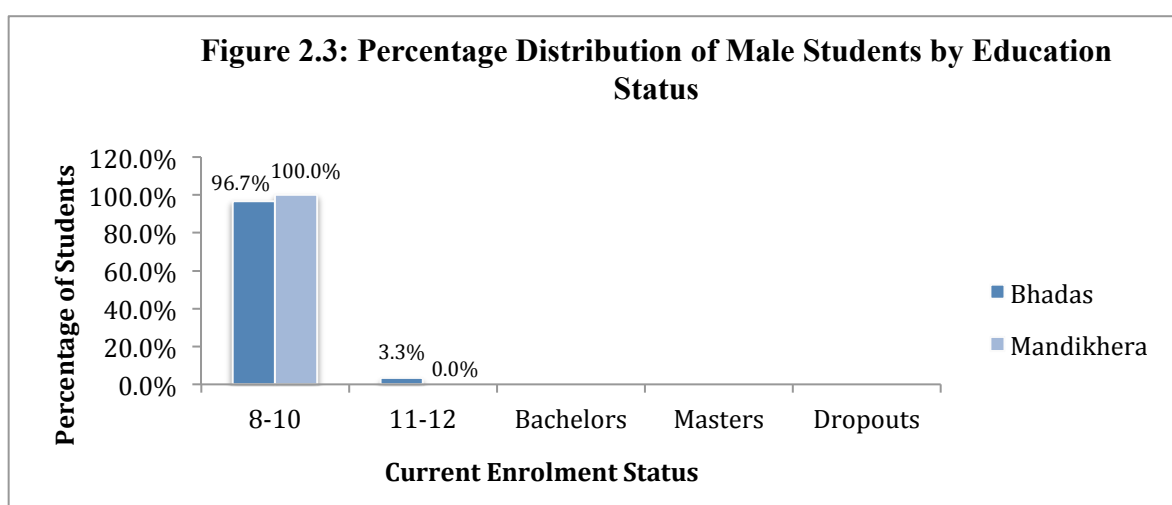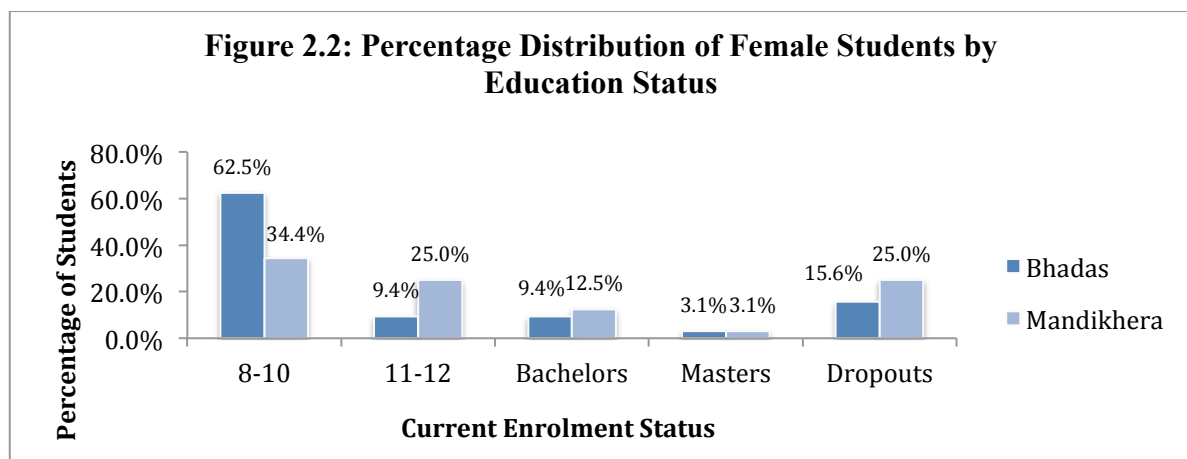
The gender differentials in educational attainment are clearly visible from the figures above. In case of boys, it was possible to achieve the desired batch strength by enrolling the primary target group of the program i.e. school going students from grade 8 to grade 10. Conversely, their female counterparts represent only 62.5 percent and 34.4 percent of the total batch size in Bhadas and Mandikhera, respectively. While the low enrolment of school going girls as compared to boys is a matter of concern, another crucial implication of this pattern of enrolment is the interest among non-school going girls for continuing education in this form. This can provide useful directions to the future of Internet literacy and life skills education programs.

2.1.3 Motivation for Enrolling in the Center

Experiments with minimally invasive education in computer literacy have provided evidence that children can proficiently acquire functional digital literacy if they are motivated enough to learn (Mitra, 2003). Based on a study of Sugata Mitra's experiments with Self Organized Learning Groups (SOLE) during 'Hole in the Wall' experiments, Smith, Cambridge, and Gush in 'Curiosity cure the knowledge gap' propose that children and young adults can teach themselves to use computers fluently. Going on to further suggest that the language, formal education and lack of formal supervision and instruction do not seem to have a significant influence. (Smith, Cambridge, & Gush, 2003). The key ingredient being the motivation to learn. As evident by the responses of participants in the study, the primary motivation for the youth to enroll in the centers was either "to learn about computers", "to learn about internet" or even "to learn something". Figure 2.4 summarizes the responses of the participants to the question – "why did they chose to enroll for the program?"

Figure 2.4: Motivation for joining the center
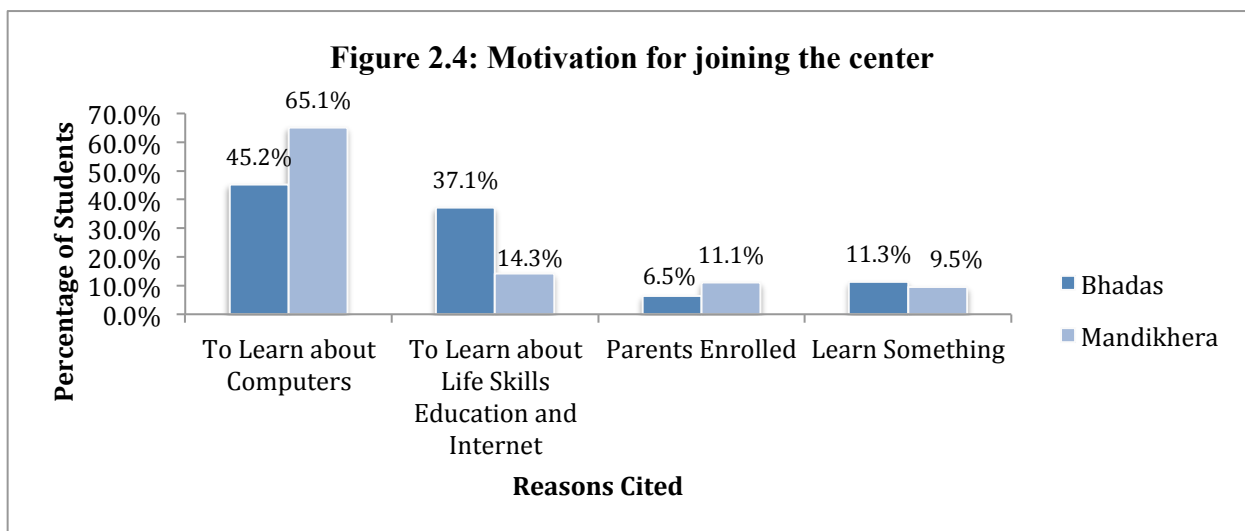
The well documented evidence of the desire to 'learn' that is not met by formal schooling programs combined with the dismal state of school education in rural India (PROBE, 1999) provides sufficient rationale for interventions that can meet the learning needs of young adults.

2.2 Empowerment: Decision Making, Aspirations, and Perceptions about Self

'Empowerment', a much used, theorized, and re-theorized term, has been defined in its broadest sense as the "expansion of freedom of choice and action" (Narayan, 2002). Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer, 1999). Karen Oppenheim adds that empowerment involves knowledge of their rights to exercise choice and capabilities (Mason, 2005). Appadurai defines empowerment in terms of developing a voice and a capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004). Jo Rowland's definition encompassing all of the above, adds two more critical dimensions – a belief in self-worth, self-respect and self-acceptance, and the ability to act with others to challenge discriminatory structures (Rowlands, 1997)

Young people are often stripped off their agency not only because they are frequently denied the right to take decisions concerning them but are also stereotypically portrayed as 'aggressive', 'irresponsible', 'prone to give in to peer pressure' and 'experimental' while at the same time expected to "act responsibly, take initiative and take control'. (Life skills education, grade IX-X, CBSE). Due to their age, they operate within norms set by their elders, norms of 'how to act' and 'who to be'. Thus, they are restricted to functioning and forming identities within the frameworks of acceptance or rejection of these norms, either as 'good' boys and girls or 'rebels'. Appadurai sees this as the less privileged oscillating between 'loyalty' and 'exit' (Appadurai, 2004). Furthermore, for girls, norms of gender ensure that they only have one option available to them i.e. being a 'good' girl and fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as good wives and mothers. The level of empowerment of participants in the study was assessed by exploring their a) level of confidence and participation in household decision making, b) educational and life aspirations, and c) perceptions of gender roles and gender based violence.

2.2.1 Confidence and Decision Making

Level of Confidence as indicated by the ability to voice opinions in front of parents and peers was found low among youth. Less than 50 percent of the participants expressed confidence in being able to speak their minds or approach strangers without hesitation and as high as 73.8 percent reported not participating in major decision-making processes of the household. Only 18.0 percent boys and 23.4 percent girls reported feeling confident in talking to parents.
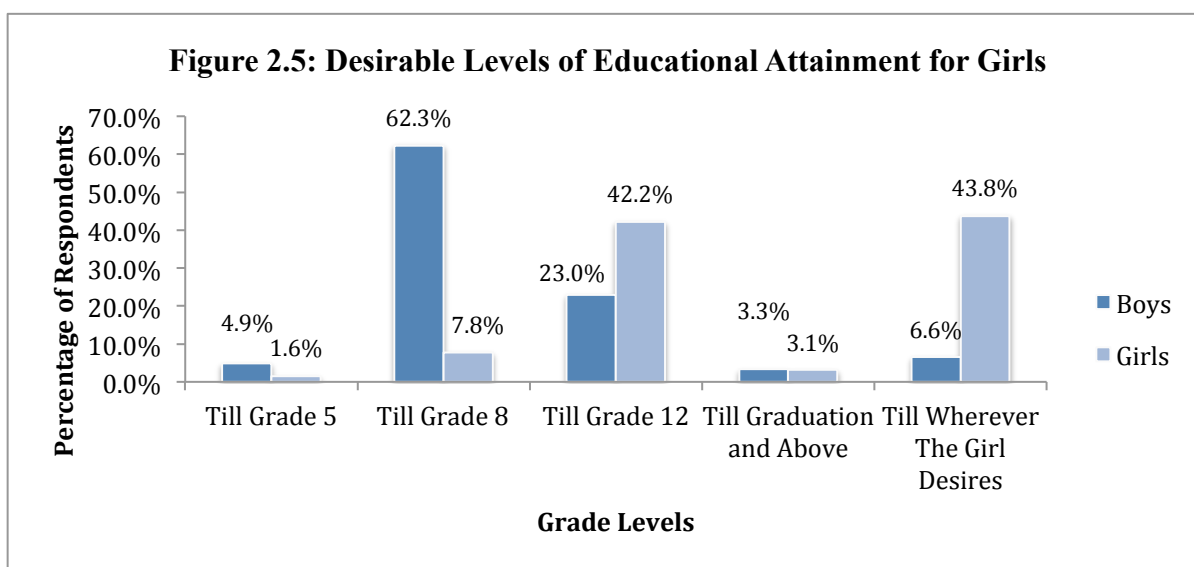
While across centers there are no significant differences in attitudes, there are marked differences in responses between girls and boys. 54.1 percent boys reported being unable to share their opinions with friends as opposed to only 12.5 percent girls. This can be understood as the result of performance of certain requirements of masculinity that inhibits young boys to share their problems with each other.
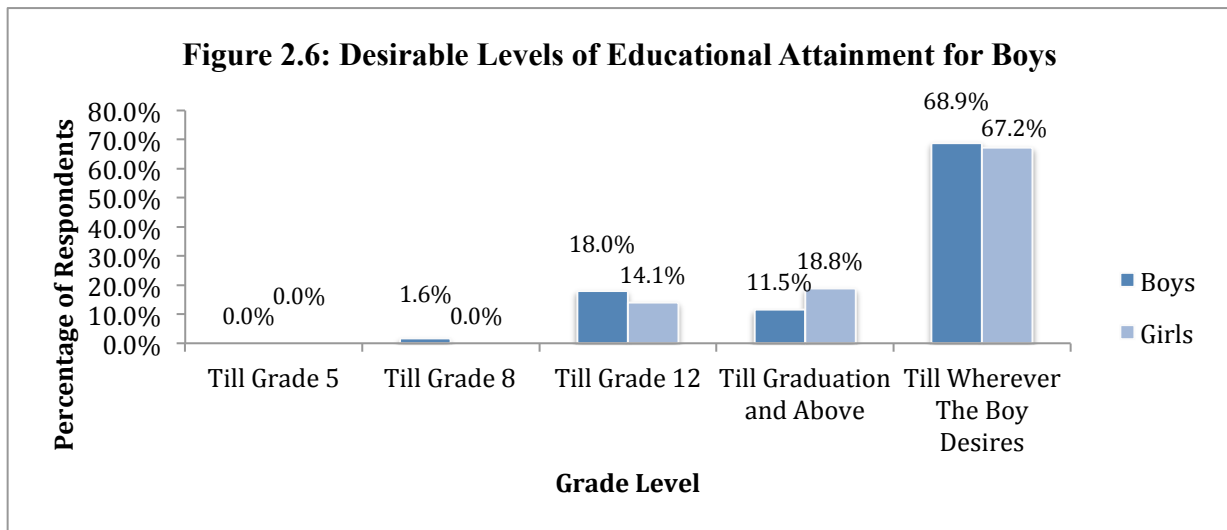
More interestingly, only 16.4 percent boys reported participating in major decision-making processes of the household. The corresponding figure for girls emerged to be 32.8 percent. It can be argued that the understanding of the term 'major decisions of household' can vary according to gender. As this is based on self-reported levels of participation, it cannot be denied that youth, irrespective of their gender, perpetually feel disempowered and are faced with lack of social spaces where they can share their opinions.

2.2.2 Capacity to Aspire

Youth's 'capacity to aspire' was also explored by recording their perceptions about education, their aim for future and knowledge of legal age of marriage. In contexts like Mewat, marriage plays an equally important role as the level of education in determining life trajectories of people, with child marriage meaning the end of education for most girls. The capacity to aspire in this backdrop has been understood as a cultural capacity whose fortification may accelerate building of other capacities and has the potential of changing the terms of recognition (Appadurai, 2004), thus leading to empowerment.

A large proportion of both boys and girls placed an upper limit on the desirable level of education for girls, with majority of boys (62.3 percent) placing it at Grade 8 (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Desirable Levels of Educational Attainment for Girls

Figure 2.6: Desirable Levels of Educational Attainment for Boys

Conversely, when it comes to boys' education, both boys and girls (68.8 percent and 67.2 percent, respectively) believed that boys should study till whatever level they desire (Figure 2.6).

The gendered social expectations from boys and girls seemed to further inform the life ambitions of participants. 100 percent boys were able to answer the question – "what do they want to become when they grow up?" with specific responses, as against 14 percent girls who responded to above question with "nothing", "do not know" or did not respond. Another 1.5 percent were not able to mention something specific but just expressed a desire to do a job. Young women are often socialized to derive their identities from men in their lives and do not learn to conceive of themselves as equal autonomous entities (Sahni, 2012). They are rarely confronted with the question of what "they" want to become as their identities are thought of as limited to becoming somebody's wife and/or mother. Thus, the absence of specific responses here is understood as result of a socialization process where girls are denied the 'capacity to aspire' i.e. one that not only places them in subordinate positions to boys but also limits their abilities to renegotiate such positioning.

One silver lining to the tale so far is the awareness among youth about child marriage. Above 95 percent of both boys and girls in both the centers reported the legal age of marriage for girls as 18 or above. 74 percent boys and 87 percent girls reported legal of marriage for boys as 21 or above. While the knowledge of legal age of marriage alone is not sufficient to enable youth to avoid or prevent child marriages, awareness is a crucial first step as becoming aware of the injustices happening to oneself and is the first step to empowerment (Sahni, 2012).

2.2.3 Perceptions around Gender Roles and Gender Based Violence

Patriarchal norms and gender based division and valuation of work produces differences in agency of men and women which then produce differences in the agency of boys and girls. Perceptions of participants regarding domestic violence, preference of a male child, and division of work were explored to understand the self-perceptions of youth as shaped by their gender identities.

A large proportion of participants mirrored the son preferring attitudes of society with 86.7 percent boys and 78.1 percent girls in Bhadas center considering it essential for a couple to have at least one son. The corresponding figure was 35.5 percent boys and 81.3 percent girls in Mandikhera Center. A higher percentage of girls expressing this view shows that people's allegiance to patriarchy is independent of their own gender identities. The distribution of power and privileges along the three main interlinked features of family structure - patriarchy (power distributed along gender and age hierarchies, but with adult men trumping older women), patriliny (property and name passing from father to son) and virilocality (wife

moving to the husband's home) - ensure that having at least one son is perceived necessary because it has implications for material well-being and continuation of family-name.

Similarly, the gender divide between 'work inside home' and 'work outside home' was also clearly visible along with the hierarchical positioning of the work outside home given more priority and importance over domestic work. For girls, the primary responsibility was relegated to doing domestic chores, often enlisting specific tasks like "cleaning clothes', 'cooking', 'cleaning utensils', 'helping mother', etc. For boys, primary responsibilities were listed in broad categories like 'taking decisions', 'responsibility of maintaining household', 'maintenance of family', etc. These responses were consistent across gender and across centers.

Above evident normalization of a situation where girls are unwanted and unequal is further exacerbated by perceptions about domestic violence normalizing the extent to which women are unsafe as well. An overwhelming 50.8 percent boys and 35.9 percent girls perceived it right for a man to beat a woman. Among the reasons that were considered justified for perpetrating violence against women, "talking to another man" (by 32.8 percent boys and 34.4 percent girls), and "spending money without permission from husband" (by 16.4 percent boys and 3.1 percent girls) were cited most.

2.3 Rights and Entitlements: Awareness about Village Level Institutions and Government Schemes

In recent times, several local governance institutions have started assuming the center stage in building people-centric, responsive, effective, efficient, decentralized governance. Yet, most of them suffer from democratic discrimination that takes place within democratic institutions (Drèze, and Sen, (2002). For an inclusive governance process, one of the strategies that have gained momentum in recent times is involving youth as active partners in the development process. The involvement of youth in local governance is perceived to develop young people's leadership skills and confidence, thus empowering them (Bastola, 2013).

Participants were asked questions about the major functions and entitlements accorded to various village level institutions in order to understand their awareness and level of participation in the local governance processes. Their knowledge of government programs and acts related to health, nutrition and education was also explored along with their knowledge of basic health related issues.

2.3.1 Health and Nutrition

The level of awareness about government schemes pertaining to Health, Sanitation, and Nutrition was found to be considerably low among rural youth. Figure 5.6 gives the center wise percentage of students who were completely unaware about various schemes and institutions operational at village level. More than 90 percent of the participants were unaware about Village Health Nutrition and Sanitation Committee (VHSNC) and about Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme. Awareness about Mid-day Meals Scheme was found to be highest (68 percent) with most students (61.6 percent) aware that government provides food to children under the scheme in schools while another 4 percent responded that the scheme provides for free ration to school going children.

Figure 2.7: Awareness about Government Schemes - Health and Nutrition
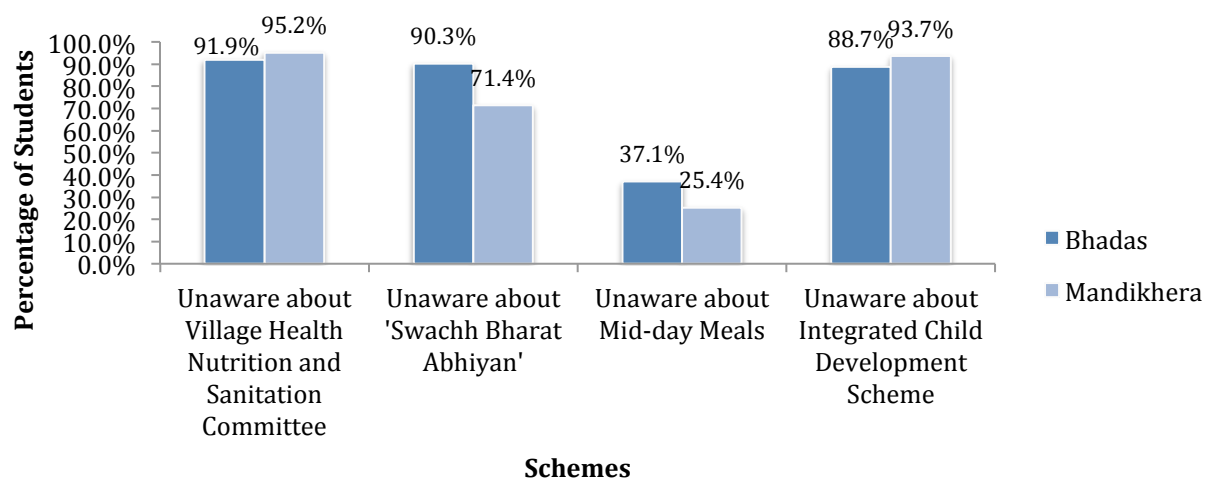
Among those who reported having heard about VHSNC (6.4 percent or 8 participants), 2 reported not knowing whether the committee is functional in their village and 5 reported that it is functional but did not know since when. Primary role of the committee was reported as making health related plan for the village (4 participants), implementation of the plans (1 participant), and dissemination of health related information (1 participant). Two participants reported that VHSNC played a role in cleaning and maintenance of roads in their village in the recent past. Four participants were aware about provision of financial help from the government but did not know the annual allocation for the same.

Out of 18.4 percent students who were aware about *'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan'*, only 6.4 percent knew that the campaign has provision for financial help for construction of toilets and 11.2 percent only knew that campaign is about keeping the village clean. Majority of the participants (80.6 percent in Bhadas and 88.9 percent in Mandikhera) reported having toilets in home.

Out of 7.2 percent who were aware about ICDS, 4 percent reported that the scheme provides for nutritious food for children and remaining were aware about the provision of vaccination. All of these reported that the scheme is operational in their respective village.

Participants' knowledge of basic health related issues was also explored. Table 2.4 summarizes their responses listing only the percentage of participants who claimed not knowing the answer and percentage of participants who responded correctly.

Table 2.4: **Awareness about Health Issues**		
	Did not know	Answered Correctly
Pentavalent Vaccination	82.4 %	0 %
No. of tetanus injections needed for pregnant woman	38.4 %	31.2 %
No. of iron tablets needed by pregnant woman	53.6 %	7.2 %
Causes of Diarrhea	79.2 %	10.4 %

2.3.2 Education

Level of awareness about School Management Committee was found to be very low among youth as 98.4 percent students in Bhadas and 90.5 percent in Mandikhera were unaware about SMCs. All of the 5.6 (7

participants) percent who were aware about SMC reported a functional committee in their villages. The major responsibility of the committee was identified as ensuring the provision of mid-day meal (4 participants), ensuring the adequate number of teachers in school (one participant), and raising awareness about education (one participant). While three participants were aware of provision of financial help from government, they had no knowledge of the amount of funds allocated for various purposes.

A small percentage of students (14.5 percent in Bhadas and 9.5 percent in Mandikhera) knew about the Right to Education Act and about provision of free education under the same (8 percent). 3.2 percent participants among these reported not knowing what the act is about.

2.3.3 Governance

There's a relatively higher level of awareness about roles and functioning of Panchayats as compared to other village level institutions. A large proportion were aware about reservations for women in Panchayats (42 percent in Bhadas and 65 percent in Mandikhera) though a majority of them did not know the exact percentage quota reserved for women (only 9.6 percent answered correctly). Among those who reported being aware about the work of Panchayats listed the major responsibilities of Panchayat to be 'resolving conflicts' (20 percent) and 'development of village' (29.6 percent). Approximately 85 percent students in both the centers correctly knew the frequency of Panchayat elections.

94 percent students in Bhadas center and 89 in Mandikhera were unaware about the Gram Sabha. Out of the remaining who had heard about it, only 2 participants correctly identified the constituent members of Gram Sabha and only 4 correctly reported the prescribed minimum number of meetings to be held within a year.

2.4. Knowledge about Computer and Internet

As pointed out earlier, the advantages of e-governance initiatives can only be reaped if they are accompanied by necessary capacity building. As the project aims to increase access to information and technology by imparting computer and Internet literacy, questions regarding basics of computer and Internet were asked to understand the current knowledge level of participants.

Only 19 percent students (15.6 percent girls and 23 percent boys) had ever used a computer before. 4.8 percent reported knowing how to open Internet and 6.4 percent reported knowing about paintbrush. A majority of these (12.8 percent) did not know how to make a folder, save a file, or copy a file.

88.7 percent students in Bhadas and 85.7 percent in Mandikhera did not know about Internet. The tiny percentage that had heard about Internet mentioned to have used it for viewing examination results or filling exam forms (8 percent). Two participants mentioned using 'Google' stating that it gives information about whatever is typed on the website. Only two participants had heard about online ticket booking facility but had never booked a ticket online. None of the participants had knowledge about Internet banking, social media or e-commerce. One participant reported having an email account and was able to provide the email address for the same.

3. Conclusion

The significantly low level of information awareness among young people about the basics of their educational and health rights, and little knowledge of workings of local governance institutions combined with low levels of confidence clearly stress the need for comprehensive interventions in life-skills education to improve youth participation in community. The content of the life-skills education curriculum and pedagogical practices will play an important role in this regard, especially for young females enrolled in the program. This would mean recognition and critical examination, in the classroom, of the significant obstacles that young people (especially young females) currently face while trying to participate socially, politically and economically.

Although, the small sample of the study is hardly representative of young population of Mewat as a whole, even limited data clearly illuminates the stronghold of patriarchal norms on young people's perceptions of self and others. The roles, responsibilities, and aspirations of each gender is overarchingly shaped by these norms. In this regard, the idea of a separate curriculum for boys and girls is worth exploring. This would need an evaluation of various life-skills programs currently operational in similar contexts.

Given the low levels of computer and Internet access, it is not surprising that very few participants knew about these technologies. The accompanying desire in youth to learn about the same can serve as one of the strongest factors determining the success of the program. Since the program is designed for just six months, it is recommended that the focus of the program is placed on imparting functional digital literacy. Since continuation of Internet usage is dependent on ease of access and level of interest among students, attempts should be made to connect students from different geographies to each other in order to sustain the motivation levels.

Lastly, an integrated life skills education and internet literacy project can be a crucial step in understanding how young people from rural contexts, mostly first generation learners, would constructively use internet in their daily lives.

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