

“School protects girls”

Dear Friends,

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected over 180 countries globally and is particularly challenging for India because of its population density and stressed public health systems.

Education in the time of Coronavirus

According to Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, the closing of schools around the world could cause a generational catastrophe calling the coronavirus pandemic 'the largest disruption of education ever, a cataclysm of illiteracy'. As of August, 1.53 billion learners are out of school and school closures are impacting 87% of the world's enrolled learners. Getting students back in the classroom must be a top priority. "Prolonging that pause could waste untold human potential, undermine decades of progress and exacerbate entrenched inequalities"

Much of the progress of recent years could be wiped out in a short space of time.

The situation in India

India is the hardest hit country by the coronavirus. According to Basharat Peer in an article for the New York Times, *"the lockdown, the largest in human history, hit India's poor like a hammer"*.

Rural regions such as the Thar Desert where the Veerni Project is active, are now being seriously affected. In the words of Dr. Jain, a public health expert in India, "the disease accelerated in such locations with the risk causing mayhem" as only 20% of doctors are based in such settings". The Indian government spends 1% of GDP on health care, one of the lowest in the world. As of March, there was one hospital bed for 1.826 Indians and one doctor for 11.600 patients.

Another challenge for the Veerni villages and the local population, apart from the loss of income aggravating poverty, is the serious lack of health care resulting in untreated illnesses; the shortages of food. Additionally, the return in large numbers of migrant workers on daily wages from the major cities of India who have lost their jobs. This migrant population all male is creating additional concerns not only of spreading the disease, but causing safety concerns for young girls who are vulnerable in villages settings.

According to the National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB). Rajasthan has the highest number of rapes in the country. This is not helped by the feudal mindset of the desert villages "where women are treated as objects". This is the battle Veerni fights every day for the courageous Veerni girls.

As a result of the above, the local population of the Veerni villages is facing serious hardship. Crucially, the closure of schools will take a high toll on girls.

The social implications of Covid for girls

Rajasthan is one of the worst performers regarding the literacy of girls according to a report by the National Statistical Office. Many girls in villages will not go back to school.

Additionally, girls in village settings are increasingly in danger of becoming child brides. which could undo decades of work done to reduce child marriage. In some Veerni villages where the custom is still rife, parents could send their daughter to her in-laws or could organize marriages for them as it is one less mouth to feed.

However, child marriage issues are not in the mission of the Veerni Project as it cannot be seen to involve itself in cultural mores. This is particularly relevant to the latest rules governing NGOs which are increasingly strict and will lead to the closures of many NGOs. The mission of the Veerni Project has to remain secondary education for girls.

It is important to note that the trust the Project has developed over the years in villages is key to parents discontinuing this practice. Veerni has observed that parents particularly fathers of the Veerni girls are increasingly supportive of their daughters. They want their daughters to continue their studies and are protective of them.

Hence, all the more important reason for the Veerni Project to keep girls engaged in their education. The parents can then attest that their daughters are involved in their studies and cannot agree to such marriages.

The Veerni Project is playing a vital role in helping rural girls access education in the time of coronavirus.

The Veerni Project had a 100% pass rate in the final exams in 2020.

Graduated girls: Information about last years' graduated girls:

A total number of seven girls graduated from the Veerni institute. Their details are given below: -

| S. No. | Girl's Name | Stream |
|--------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 01 | Ranu | Science Biology stream |
| 02 | Durga | Science Biology stream |
| 03 | Krishna Raj | Science Mathematic stream |
| 04 | Sagar | Arts stream |
| 05 | Durga | Arts stream |
| 06 | Hem Kanwar | Arts stream |
| 07 | Durga | Arts stream |

All seven girls have visited the Veerni office for further guidance. Due to Covid-19, currently, all the colleges are closed but whenever the colleges resume, all of them will be enrolled for further studies.

RECENT NEWS OF THE VEERNI PROJECT

According to the new guidelines, the date of the reopening of the schools has been extended by the Indian government and the reopening date has not yet been announced. However, the Veerni Project is ready to reopen both the program at the Veerni Institute and Veerni Balika when the time comes.

The following are the measures taken by the Veerni project and the Veerni team.

Meeting with School Administration

On 24th August, the Director of the Veerni project, Mahendra Sharma, called a meeting with the administration of the Modern Senior Secondary School. The future planning of online education was discussed with the management of Modern School. The emphasis was made to provide easy and interactive lesson to the girls so they would take more interest in digital education. At the same time, Veerni needs to provide quality education contents to the students. The school management has set up a digital studio in the school to provide quality study material to the girls, which is appreciated as very few schools in Jodhpur have set up this kind of amenity.



New Admissions at the Veerni Institute:

For the academic year 2020-2021, seven new girls have been selected in classes 6 and 7. The academic documents of girls have gathered from the parents of the girls. All the new girls have been enrolled in the modern senior secondary school. It is worth mentioning that this year, there were 191 applications received for the seven vacant places at the Veerni institute. The school kit contained, books, school bags, notebooks, stationery, and subject wise study material prepared by the school, have been distributed to the newly enrolled girls.

The Veerni program in the time of Coronavirus: How will Covid impact the education of the Veerni girls.

The Veerni initiative: Veerni has started online education.

This was carried out in two phases:

Phase one: In the month of July, Veerni started online education. The Veerni team along with a teacher have distributed study material to all the girls and have been monitoring the girls' progress on a regular basis as well as collecting their homework and issuing new lessons. All the girls are participating well in this program.

Phase two: the second phase of distance learning will be started this month. Veerni will distribute tablets. In these tablets, all the study material will be installed. Classes 10 to 12 will be covered in this phase. Classes 8 and 12 are "board" exams, crucial to their graduation.

Currently, all arrangements have been confirmed and within the next two weeks the tablets will be ready for the girls.

The above programs are only made possible by the introduction in 2018 of computer training and a well-equipped computer lab in the Veerni Institute. This program was introduced thanks to a generous grant from one of our long time Veerni donors. As a result, the girls are tech trained and this will allow them to follow their studies through distance learning. This training is key to their future.



Veerni Initiative for Distance Learning

School at Doorsteps



No girls left behind is the motive of the Veerni Project

It is vital for Veerni to keep all the girls engaged with education during this challenging time of a pandemic



Veerni project has started an initiative called School at Doorsteps for the Veerni Girls

Study materials have been developed and distributed to all the Veerni girls for all the Veerni



The Veerni team have been visiting the girls in the villages along with a teacher to monitor their progress. Veerni staff have been solving the girls problems, collecting homework and distributing new lessons to them



Visiting deep rural villages with no proper roads is challenging but the Veerni team has been doing it with lots of dedication



Jacqueline de Chollet and Mahendra Sharma

