Milaan Foundation

RISE FOR HER

ANNUAL REPORT 2021
Girls’ education has an intergenerational impact.

When a girl is educated, she creates a cascading effect on her family, community and nation.
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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

DHIRENDRA PRATAP SINGH

The world as we were used to it, changed in many ways in the COVID-19 era. At one end, we experienced the pain of losing loved ones and were forced to watch the loss of decades of commutative progress towards a more gender-equal world. And at the other end, we experienced the unheard resilience of communities to bounce back to build better. COVID-19 had a disproportionate effect on the lives of women and girls; they were also the ones at the centre of almost every rebuilding effort one has ever heard of.

Our COVID-19 Relief and Resilience Project championed our efforts by bringing inclusiveness into the vaccination program by working closely with the government’s health infrastructures to vaccinate 2,50,000+ people in socially and economically marginalised communities of Uttar Pradesh. Additionally, we supported over 2,000 families with ration supplies for over a month, most of whom were not covered under the social welfare schemes of the state.

Our project team brought stories from the ground about the effects of the pandemic on the lives of young girls from vulnerable families. To address the need to act “Here and Now”, we started a hostel for 100 girls who otherwise would have become victims of child marriage or trafficking.

For us at Milaan, 2021 was a year of reflection as we challenged our perception of boundaries and capacities to push ourselves towards making bold commitments in our efforts to work with and for girls.

The committed network of Girl Icons that Milaan built within communities over the last decade inspired us to commit to strengthening and scaling our work with 1,00,000 adolescent girls from vulnerable communities in India by 2025.

We’ve invested in building our organisational capacities in various areas by integrating technological tools, driving more data-driven organisational transformation initiatives and sailing into new waters such as working with men and boys as allies, working with women community leaders and deepening our work on violence against women and girls.

Our flagship, the Girl Icon Program, tested its re-engineered program delivery, a hybrid – online-offline model, with 6,000+ girls in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. The pilot’s success created the foundation to scale the program to 40,000 girls within our existing three geographies in 2022. The program’s impact was recognised by the prestigious Girls Opportunity Alliance by Obama Foundation, further reinforcing our goals to strengthen grassroots girl leadership.

I hold deep gratitude for everyone who stood by us in the difficult times and motivated us to move forward towards our commitment – the donors for their generosity, the team for their resilience and belief in Milaan, and the girls who taught us to always be ambitious for change.

I hope the report will bring you hope and stories from the heartlands, and inspire you to take action. Girls have the potential to build a better future for humanity.

Enjoy the read!

Warm Regards,
DHIRENDRA PRATAP SINGH
Chief Executive Officer and Board Member
ABOUT US

Milaan is a non-profit, social impact organisation working with and for girls with a vision of an equal and inclusive world where every girl is educated, healthy and safe. Our work is driven by the core values of integrity, inclusion, empathy and execution excellence.

In the last 15 years, the organisation, through its innovative and evidence-based programming, has worked with over 42,000 children, 90% of whom are girls creating pathways for them to access knowledge, skills, and social networks critical to explore their full potential.

Our current interventions in three states of India, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka, aim to push for systemic change by challenging the barriers to girls’ education by elevating their agency, leadership, and voice at all levels. We have developed and deepened engagement with various State Government departments to drive convergence, advocacy, and access to entitlements.

Our primary work is focused on working with young women between 12-18 years of age from socially and economically marginalised communities, irrespective of their being in school or out of school, their caste, religion, sexuality, region, race, and physical abilities. Milaan aims to empower adolescent girls by addressing four dimensions we have identified as critical for their well-being:

- **Completion of Secondary Education**
- **Access to Knowledge and Services on Adolescent Health and Well-Being**
- **Prevention of Child Marriage**
- **Prevention of Gender-Based Discrimination & Violence**
MISSION

Empowering girls to stand up for themselves by advancing their skills, rights, and opportunities to unlock their voice, choice, and potential.
OUR LEARNINGS FROM THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Strengthening Local Communities and Existing Structures

COVID-19 pushed low-income communities further down the vulnerability ladder by creating unique social and economical barriers for them to access resources critical to their survival. Our efforts nurtured partnerships with multiple stakeholders and structures on the ground, such as Health Officers at District Hospitals, Women Health Workers, District Officers and Village Prachans to devise local solutions within existing structures for a rapid, impactful and sustainable response. We have learned to always keep ourselves rooted to the ground by nurturing local community leadership and engaging with existing community leaders and structures by design.

Inclusive Technology Can Unlock Doors to Knowledge, Services and Networks

During the pandemic, digital technology and its tools kept the world operational and connected. For marginalised communities, especially an aspirational population of young girls, access to equitable technology can democratis access to knowledge, services and networks.

They can benefit from critical tools and resources such as educational materials, scholarships and social welfare programs they need to become future-ready. During the pandemic, we acknowledged the power of technology in empowering girls and invested in re-engineering our programs, using it to drive scale, impact and inclusion.

"Even after the pandemic is over, devising strategies for remote learning programs and platforms can help us increase our reach, especially in marginalised communities. Fueling access to digital infrastructures and technology-enabled systems across our programs, people, and processes will be a driving force for us towards another decade of action. We aim to create pathways for them to be future-ready and strengthen our movement by reaching the girl at the last mile."

Amit Pande, Director of Technology and Growth
Resilient Organisations Can Lead Resilient Programming

The pandemic has had a significant impact on non-profit organisations around the world, many of which have spent decades operating in resource-constrained conditions, thereby limiting their investments in enhancing organisational resources and capacities. Yet, they have implemented some highly effective programs and continuously focus on the needs of the communities.

The pandemic demanded the sector push its boundaries and, at the same time, survive within its limited resources. We are grateful for the incredible individuals and organisations who stood with us in difficult times; helping us not only survive but also emerge better and stronger for the communities we serve.

Early into the pandemic, we formed a leadership council and decentralised decision-making powers across organisational structures. We made a commitment to our team members of job security and a promise to our network of Girl Leaders and local partners of being in it together. Our leadership council held the organisation, listened to the voices from the ground and rapidly adapted solutions for effective, efficient and impactful programming.

As we emerged with learnings and reflection, together with our teams and stakeholders, we invested in designing and building organisational structures, capacities and resources to drive resilience inside-out towards future preparedness.
OUR APPROACH

Building a Network of Girl Leaders at Grassroots

Our learnings and evidence have shown that adolescent girls face myriad challenges at the intersection of their age and gender. However, they also show greater resilience and potential to overcome barriers and create local solutions.

Investing in building their leadership and capacity with knowledge and skills increases their agency, participation, and inclusion within their communities. When girls from within the communities evolve as leaders, they become role models, playing a critical role in shaping the aspirations and beliefs about the potential of girls and a gender-positive social narrative. Local role models also provide more easily imaginable visions of success and make the success experienced by them attainable and replicable in the minds of girls, their families and communities.

We are nurturing a network of girl leaders to be community leaders, role models and ambassadors for a more gender-equal world.

Working with Boys as Allies

Over the years, our approach towards gender-transformative programming has evolved to create meaningful participation with adolescent boys, acknowledging the potential of their role in both holding and changing gender-regressive norms.

We have experienced the potential of creating safe spaces for young boys to help them understand their gendered identity and unequal power relationship with the opposite gender. Using design tools for reflection and dialogue, the boys learn how dismantling patriarchal structures and systems that reinforce inequalities can create an opportunity for them to experience the power of relationships built on principles of equality, respect and aspirations.

Placing the Community in the Heart of our Gender-Centred Programming

Working with and for adolescent girls, especially within communities, demands an inclusive approach to engage with families, local influencers and community leaders. A call to challenge and change gender-regressive social norms could lead to a potential backlash against the girl leader. To mitigate such challenges, we work closely with the stakeholders to create an ecosystem by driving awareness and engagement with them. Our design enables the girl leaders and their peer groups to design, develop and implement social action projects unique to their communities and is supported by community leaders.

Over the years, we have experienced the trust and support girl leaders have earned in their communities by taking their community stakeholders along in their gender-transformative work.
**OUR PROGRAMS**

**Girl Icon Program**

The Girl Icon Program is a leadership-building program for adolescent girls between the ages of 12-18 years from socially, economically and politically marginalised communities. The program provides access to knowledge, tools and networks to build their voice, choice and potential for a more equal and inclusive world.

The program identifies girl leaders in their communities (via an application process) who are supported on a 12-month leadership journey where they receive comprehensive life-skills-based education. They are given support to create and sustain a collective of girls in their area at the grassroots level and mobilise these collectives for social norms to change through dialogue and action about gender roles and gendered drivers of inequity and violence.

The Girl Icons’ leadership pedagogy is that through the program, girls’ courage and confidence are strengthened to make their own decisions about their education, marriage, and safety. Empowered by information, they become role models in their communities and convene collectives with around 20 peers. These collectives can then lead social change and advocate for better outcomes for all girls in their communities; the group undertakes a social change project targeting at least 100 people in their communities.

In the sixth year of its implementation, the Girl Icon Program scaled three times its impact in the last five years. We are proud to announce a cohort of 300 Girl Icons, further deepening our work in three geographies of India with 6,000 adolescent girls.

This year, the Girl Icon Program innovatively harnessed technology. We provided girl leaders with a smartphone, data allowances and training to navigate the device, apps and the internet to benefit from the tool. The design provided leadership training to the girls so they could use the phone and internet data to connect with other girl leaders and broaden their horizons with access to information, scholarship opportunities, networks, etc.

Our teams also engaged 500 parents and young men in the families and communities through behavioural change communication training every quarter.
Ensuring broad and equitable mobile and internet access proved to be a powerful and scalable way to help girls with access to information and networks essential to make informed decisions about their lives in areas ranging from health to education to employment and creating a cascading effect for their communities.

We launched the 'Back to School' campaign with Girl Icons to identify out-of-school children in their communities. Our change agents enrolled over 700 children across the three intervention geographies.

**OUR IMPACT**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Impact Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Of girls are continuing their secondary education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>Of girls prevented from child marriage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Of girls reported improved health with increased knowledge of their sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, and menstruate hygienically and with dignity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83%</td>
<td>Of girls recognise gender-based discrimination and violence as unconstitutional and against human rights.</td>
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13-year-old Pratibha, a 9th-grade student, joined the Girl Icon Program in 2021. Pratibha belongs to a small village in Uttar Pradesh, a state that accounts for the majority of school dropout girls in the country.

With support from her father, she advocated for girls' education from a young age and had already enrolled six girls in school before she joined the program. Determined to build Pratibha’s capabilities, her father helped her apply for the Girl Icon Program.

The Girl Icon Program built Pratibha’s knowledge and skills and gave her access to tools that enabled her as a grassroots girl leader to work with girls and her community at large.

She leveraged wall painting and community participation tools such as social action projects and the ‘Back to School’ campaign. **Her efforts led to the enrollment of fourteen girls in school.** Pratibha and her peer group collectively stopped a child marriage of a peer member, Radha. They persevered and negotiated with her family until the wedding was called off. Today, Radha is completing her secondary education.

"Girls can only achieve their goals by continuing their education. So, I want every girl to educate themselves and become self-reliant!" says Pratibha.

Inspired by her daughter’s resolve, Pratibha's 37-year-old mother decided to complete her schooling after a long learning gap of 17 years. Pratibha's mother is in 11th grade and is completing her senior secondary education.

Pratibha aspires to continue working as a change agent and become an IAS officer to bring a lasting impact on the status of girls' education and end child marriage.
Swarachna School

Swarachna School is a charitable K-12 school located in Kaintain village of rural Sitapur District in Uttar Pradesh. The school provides formal education to over 600+ first-generation learners while promoting the values of self-belief, empathy and leadership.

We re-opened our school after a year of disruption. It gave us no greater joy than to build back the normalcy for children and bring them back to where their childhood belonged. Our school team was trained on social-emotional learning tools to help children process the personal loss of family members and with activity-based learning tools to help them cope with grade-level learning loss. Along with regular classes, we started remedial classes for Maths, Science and English and introduced Smart Classes for grades 6th to 12th.

The school leveraged sports as a tool to restore normalcy for students and their physical, mental and emotional well-being. Along with enhanced sports activities, Swarachna School hosted its first-ever inter-school Sports and Literary Competition in December 2021 at its premises with 250 students from 7 schools. Swarachna School’s girls won the most medals among other competitive schools in a district-level athletic competition organised with the District Sports Authority of Sitapur.

We are thrilled to report that our senior students delivered a 100% pass result in grades 10th and 12th, a big celebration for us, our students and their families.

Free of Cost Hostel for Girls in Swarachna School

2021 will be an unforgetable year for us! We started a free-of-cost girls’ hostel on our existing school campus, giving us a lifetime opportunity to change the course of the lives of girls most affected by the pandemic. The hostel is a safe and nurturing space for 90 girls between grades 6th to 9th where they receive a formal education, nutritious meals, social and emotional learning education, sports facilities, mentoring and much more, enabling their aspirations and hope for an educated and dignified future.

11-year-old Neelu was identified by our team 200 km away from our school. A single parent, Neelu’s mother was the sole earning member of her family. After losing her job in a nationwide lockdown and living in a flood-affected area, she struggled to make ends meet, and the looming financial crisis made Neelu drop out of school. In October 2021, Neelu was invited to join our hostel and school in 6th grade to explore her full potential.
COVID-19 Relief & Resilience Building Project

In 2021, as the devastating news of the second wave of COVID-19 deaths unfolded, we knew we would need to be geographically focused to be the most impactful and strategically selected. Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh.

Sitapur is home to 5 million people, the 8th most populous amongst 75 districts in Uttar Pradesh. 84% of whom live below the poverty line. According to the NFHS-4, the district of Sitapur has more than 70% rural population, indicating its large majority is underserved and underdeveloped.

We collaborated with 17 Community Health Centres (CHCs) responsible for catering to almost 80% of the district’s population. With our team of 40+ local staff, we initially worked to equip the health workers with all essential and preventive gear like masks, gloves, sanitisers, thermal thermometers, oximeters, etc. We simultaneously supplied over 50,000 medicine kits to the health workers to be distributed to villages with symptoms of COVID-19.

It was becoming increasingly clear that vaccinating the population against COVID-19 is key to preventing deaths. But the challenges of vaccinating a large population in rural communities of Sitapur, coupled with illiteracy, lack of information, and widespread myths, become a formidable task for Community Health Centres and their workforce.

Taj Banu, an ASHA worker with 15 years of experience in Aladapur village, where not a single person got vaccinated during the two-day free vaccination camp, said, “Many rumours are going around about death and severe reactions after vaccination that make people fear for their lives. Even when I tell them that I am vaccinated, and I am well and alive, they are still not willing to believe in the safety of vaccines.”

We continued our collaboration with the CHC for the vaccination program by mobilising communities through behaviour change communication tools for COVID-19 vaccination, supporting the government health workers with documentation processes and providing logistical support. Over 2,50,000 people were vaccinated within six months from four blocks of Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh. Three of these four blocks were severely affected by floods along with the pandemic, which made them even more vulnerable. Milan provided ration kits to over 2,000 families to support a family of four for a month.

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**OUR IMPACT**

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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,50,000</td>
<td>Community members vaccinated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>BCC materials disseminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>Families in flood-affected areas supported with dry ration kits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>483</td>
<td>Community awareness meetings held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>Villages covered through a door-to-door survey on vaccination uptake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Health camps organised for adolescents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Under the supervision of the Community Health Centre (CHC) in Behta Block of Sitapur, Shihpur, a remote village lies approximately 100 km away. Situated on the other side of a high-current river, which was adversely affected by floods at the time, CHC had a growing concern about the grave challenges regarding reaching the village and its population devoid of vaccinations.

With the CHC Health Superintendent and ANM, we devised and developed a plan to organise a vaccination camp in the village along with risk mitigation strategies. Our team accompanied the ANM and left in the morning, taking 4.5 hours to reach Shihpur. Our team drove immediate efforts to set up the vaccination camp, and with the support of the village Pradhan, we mobilised community members. Our collective endeavour led to vaccinating one of the most hard-to-reach villages in Sitapur. The vaccination camp lasted seven hours, **vaccinating over 80% of the village population**.
New Initiatives

Unmukt - Where the Mind is Without Fear

Milaan, in partnership with Ford Foundation, launched a 3-year initiative in 2021 to prevent violence against women and girls in Uttar Pradesh.

Violence against women and girls takes place both in public and private spaces. The unfortunate truth is that for the majority of girls and women, violence and the fear of violence in public spaces result in a restricted or complete lack of access to rights and opportunities. The defining characteristic of violence against girls and women is that it is a daily experience, often made mundane and invisible. While several gruesome acts of violence against women and girls are widely reported, it is the everyday nature of violence and its normalisation, both within homes and outside that marks it.

The 3-year intervention started with developing a deeper understanding of the narratives on violence against women and girls in public spaces in rural areas, and the role of such patriarchal narratives in shaping the fear of gender-based violence in the lives of young women living in rural India. Based on this understanding and the use of design thinking tools, we designed a behaviour change communication tool/curriculum that would enable young women and men to challenge and change these social narratives.

In the coming year, we will directly work with over 3,000 young women and men and 20 women community leaders from socially and economically marginalised communities, ensuring diversity and inclusion. The implementation process would collectivise young people at the village level, build their knowledge on the issue of violence against women and girls in public spaces and create safe and inclusive spaces of dialogue within their circle of influence and with people in power.

We envision the intervention to evolve as a model for organisations to learn, adapt and make a significant contribution towards building a groundswell movement that uses data-driven constructive dialogue as a strategy to demand action against violence against women and girls.
In 2021, 23-year-old Girl Icon Alumna Rabiya started working in HR with the UK-based MNC in Bangalore, earning a secured income for herself and her family. She loves programming in Python and is pursuing Data Science with plans to complete a PhD in Computer Applications.

We met Rabiya in 2015; her cousin’s untimely death due to dowry and limited choice for girls and women in her community motivated her to drive change. For two years, Rabiya worked through the Girl Icon Program to change the status quo of girls and women in her community and advocate for equal opportunities.

“The Girl Icon Program gave me essential knowledge and confidence I needed to pursue my career and fulfil my dreams”, shares Rabiya.

On graduating from the program, Rabiya joined our thriving network of Alumni Girl Icons to explore pathways for higher education and employment. Our team supported Rabiya’s aspirations and gave her the opportunity to pursue a diploma in Software Engineering.

Determined to become economically empowered, Rabiya became the first girl in her village to complete an intermediate degree in Computer Applications and secure a job in a multinational company. Rabiya’s story is a testimony of the potential of girls to drive transformative action in their own lives and inspire more girls to follow towards an economically empowered and secured future.
The Girl Icon Leadership Summit 2021

Our second annual Girl Icon Leadership Summit, ‘Haq Hai Aur Hausla Bhi’, was held on 8th October and 26th November 2021 with our partners, Girls Not Brides, I-partner India and Khabar Lohariya.

The 2-day virtual summit focused on transformative action and bringing collective solutions to challenge the adversities of the pandemic in the lives of girls and women. United by the cause of gender equality, we brought together the voices of girls leaders and exemplary women leaders working in diverse sectors.

This year, we celebrated stories of resilience, perseverance and passion of adolescent girls, and their actions in helping their communities survive the pandemic. We launched a month-long video storytelling contest titled ‘Meri Kahani Meri Zubani’ and received an overwhelming response with more than 750 video stories from 8 states in India. Of these, 21 outstanding stories were selected, amplified and awarded smartphones. The top 3 winners were also awarded educational scholarships by India’s Women’s Hockey Team Captain, Rani Rampal.

We’re excited to report that the summit saw an exceptional response with rich insights, diverse voices and inspirational stories. The two-day event engaged with the Hindi-speaking belt of rural India and doubled its reach, garnering 12,000 live views on YouTube and more than 6,500 messages during its broadcast.

Uttar Pradesh Coalition to Empower Girls (UPCEG)

UPCEG is a coalition of 21 community-based organisations to collectively learn, share, collaborate and advocate for girls’ rights in Uttar Pradesh towards accelerating progress and improving gender indicators in the state.

In response to the pandemic, UPCEG focused on working with government departments through constructive evidence and recommendations to strengthen the implementation of government entitlements for adolescent girls in Uttar Pradesh.

We worked with over 2,300 adolescent girls to increase their awareness and access to two government schemes: Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram and Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangla Yojana. We’re proud to share with our collective efforts that 500 girls were enrolled in the schemes.

“It is important to understand that as important as education is, the means and medium of it today are equally important. We must talk and negotiate with family members and help them see the benefits and merit of the internet. Phones enable learning and provide a sense of safety and security. They are increasingly enabling financial transactions and banking, and are a platform for accessing employment and resources. These are some features we must highlight to counter the belief that mobiles will only ‘spoil girls’.”

Kshama Dhir - Leader, Strategy & Transactions, EY GDS
MOVING AHEAD

Three-Year Strategy

2021 has been a year of triumph for us. We broadened our existing services, deepened our programs and started new interventions in response to the pandemic.

In the face of the pandemic, the multifold success of the Girl Icon Program and the exemplary work of girl leaders further laid the foundation of our three-year strategy: a bold commitment of working with and for 100,000 adolescent girls by 2025, to ensure she is in school, healthy and safe.
## Financials

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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>INR 6,67,74,427/-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expenditure</td>
<td>INR 5,53,26,583/-</td>
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- **Administrative & Fundraising**: 13%
- **Unmukt - Addressing Gender-Based Violence**: 7%
- **COVID-19 Relief & Resilience Building Project**: 23%
- **Swarachna School**: 13%
- **Other Initiatives**: 6%
- **Depreciation**: 4%
- **Girl Icon Program**: 34%
OUR PARTNERS

Despite the challenges our world faces today, we have continued to rise and create transformational impact, with supporters and partners who have forged ahead with us to build a movement of educated and empowered young women in India.
Milaan Foundation is a registered charitable organisation as Milaan - Be the Change (NGO) with Registrar of Societies, New Delhi under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 as of 18th October 2007. The organisation is also registered under 12A, 80G under the Income Act Tax 1961 and is eligible to receive foreign donations under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The organisation is gold star certified by Guidestar.
Follow Our Journey!

www.milaanfoundation.org | hello@milaanfoundation.org

Milaan Foundation