

Enabling Choices for **Rural Youth**

Fostering aspiring communities, encouraging
informed decision-making.





CONTENTS

1	Message from the founder	6
2	About us	7
3	Our programs	8
4	Geographical outreach	10
5	People we work with	11
6	Our contribution toward youth development & community resilience	15
7	Our ecosystem of change	17
8	Our tenets	18
9	Monitoring, evaluation & learning	21
10	Our team & partners	22
11	Achievements in 2024–25	25
12	Stories of impact & inspiration	28

MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER

This year was not just about numbers or milestones. It was about possibilities.

Young people in rural Odisha dared to dream differently. Families and communities stood beside them. We witnessed not just change, but ownership.

At Social Shapes Foundation, we are deeply grateful. Grateful to parents, mentors, and village institutions who believed in us—and in the youth.

This year, over 220 young people moved into education or careers of their choice. More than 200 cleared competitive entrance exams. 24 former school dropouts—some after 2 to 8 years of migrant work—returned to learning. 56 tribal youth received government scholarships. Over 400 completed basic digital literacy training.

Some also secured jobs in the government and private sectors. Our programs are now co-owned. Former participants lead as community mentors. Village Development Committees co-monitor progress. More than 10,000 parent interactions strengthened trust.

We expanded to 68 villages and four residential schools. We launched Maargdarshan, a new mentorship program for schools. Our partnership with Gram Vikas helped us grow with depth and integrity. Together, we are shaping a more resilient aspirations ecosystem in remote rural Odisha.

At the heart of all this are young people. They are not just recipients. They are the drivers of change.

Every story reminds us why this work matters. And we remain committed—to youth agency, to equity, and to a better future for all.

We sincerely thank our donors, government agencies, technology partners, academic institutions, technical support organizations, and our friends and mentors. Your support has made our work possible.

With gratitude, I share the Annual Report for 2024–25.

Zeeshan Ali Arfi

Co-founder and Managing Director



ZEESHAN ALI ARFI

Co-founder and Managing Director



ABOUT US

Social Shapes Foundation empowers young people to navigate their education, careers, and life choices with confidence and clarity. Our holistic approach weaves together career guidance, digital orientation, emotional well-being, real-world exposure, and active engagement with parents and the wider community.

VISION

Founded in 2019, the Social Shapes Foundation, a Section 8 non-profit organization, envisions a world where every young person has an honest and equal opportunity to shape their future.

MISSION

Our mission is to empower youth to overcome barriers, make informed decisions, and build resilient communities. We work with marginalized youth aged 10–24 from rural and tribal communities.

“

We empower youth to overcome barriers and achieve success in their chosen paths. By transforming individual lives, we aspire to create a ripple effect, building stronger, more resilient villages and communities. ”



OUR PROGRAMS

Vikalp

Our flagship program, Vikalp, is a tech-enabled mentorship initiative designed for marginalized adolescents and young adults aged 10 to 24 years in remote villages. Through trained local mentors, we create safe learning environments that foster meaningful dialogues, provide career guidance, and offer exposure to various opportunities.

Challenges addressed:

Boys and girls from marginalized communities, especially first-generation learners, face significant barriers to a better quality of life through education:

- Limited awareness and exposure to future opportunities,
- Inadequate career guidance and digital awareness, and
- Lack of safe spaces for emotional expression and support.

Approach:

Vikalp takes a learner-first approach at the community level with active participation of parents and resource persons, through:

- Safe spaces for peer learning and emotional expression,
- Bi-weekly sessions for self-awareness, digital orientation, and career guidance,
- Resource centres for digital access and job/education support,
- Mentorship and exposure activities to broaden aspirations,
- Involvement of parents and village leaders to foster community partnerships, and
- Tech for impact with real-time monitoring.

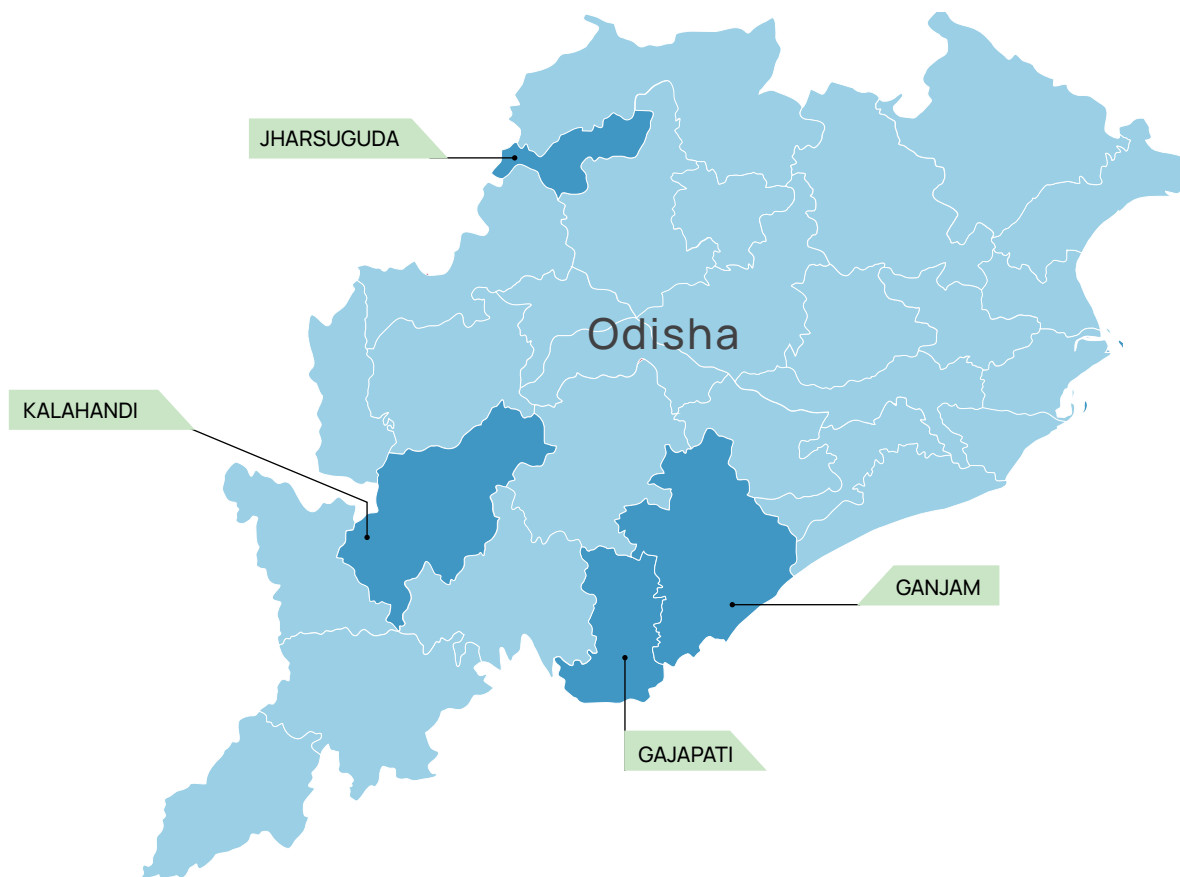


Maargdarshan

Maargdarshan is a school-based mentorship initiative, designed to support the transformation from school to work for tribal students in rural residential schools. It equips adolescents with the confidence, skills, and guidance they need to successfully transition beyond Class 10, reduce dropout risks, and pursue higher education and meaningful careers.



GEOGRAPHICAL OUTREACH



Vikalp Outreach (F.Y. 2024-25)				
Particulars	Jharsuguda	Gajapati	Ganjam	Total
Gram Panchayats	2	3	2	7
Villages	18	30	20	68
Learning Groups (LG)	25	31	24	80
Active Scholars	198	321	175	694
Average LG Meeting Attendance Rate	92%	95%	96%	95%
Youth Members	361	549	240	1150

Maargdarshan Outreach (F.Y. 2024-25)		
School Name	Location	# Students
Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School, Koinpur	Gajapati, Odisha	63
Gram Vikas High School, Kankia	Ganjam, Odisha	95
Gram Vikas Sikshya Niketan, Thuamul Rampur	Kalahandi, Odisha	37
Gram Vikas Vidya Vihar, Rudhapadar	Ganjam, Odisha	67
Total		262

PEOPLE WE WORK WITH

The population of Odisha in 2020 was about 4.7 crore, out of which 1.2 Crore were 10–24-year-olds. Of these, 60 lakhs are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). They require structured guidance and exposure to work toward pursuing a meaningful career or life goal, and contribute to India's growth.

Despite being the demographic engine of India's future, children and youth (10–24 years) in rural areas—particularly those from tribal and backward regions—face deep-rooted, interlocking challenges that hinder their ability to lead healthy, productive, and aspirational lives.

Educational Exclusion and Low Aspirations

- **Weak foundational learning:** A significant proportion of students in grades 5–10 lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. Many read at levels below their grade, leading to early disengagement.
- **High dropout risk:** Youth, especially aged 13–17, are at elevated risk of dropping out due to academic underperformance, economic pressure, or household responsibilities.
- **Limited parental support:** Most young people are first-generation learners. Parents, often daily wage workers, migrant workers, or subsistence farmers, are unable to provide the educational guidance or decision-making support their children need.
- **Aspirational gaps:** Exposure to diverse careers is minimal. Many youth have never interacted with professionals or travelled beyond their blocks, and struggle to set realistic and motivating goals.
- **Caste and gender-based restrictions** further narrow pathways for girls and children from marginalized communities.



Skilling Challenges and Poor School-to-Work Transition

- **Lack of career guidance:** Youth often make life-altering decisions about education or jobs based on hearsay rather than informed advice. There are few formal channels for mentorship, counselling, or skills matching.
- **Low motivation and retention in vocational training:** Even when youth access skill development programs, many drop out due to poor wages and living conditions, reluctance to leave their communities, or unclear career growth prospects.
- **Under-, disguised employment:** Many youth are engaged in informal jobs which offer little upward mobility.

Poor Digital Access and Technological Disconnection

- **Widening digital divide:** Many villages lack access to devices, reliable electricity, or mobile networks. Where smartphones exist, boys tend to dominate usage, leaving girls further behind.
- **Lack of basic digital skills:** Absence of structured digital learning environments leaves rural youth ill-equipped for online education, job applications, or virtual interviews—key tools in today's job market.
- **Parental mistrust of technology:** In many households, use of phones is viewed as wasteful or even dangerous, restricting access to digital learning altogether.

Health and Mental Wellbeing Struggles

- **Neglected mental health:** The emotional well-being of rural youth is rarely discussed. Feelings of anxiety, low self-worth, and hopelessness are common, especially among dropouts and unemployed youth.
- **Lack of safe spaces:** Most schools, homes, or public spaces do not offer youth-friendly forums for free expression, peer support, or emotional guidance.
- **Early exposure to hardship:** Many adolescents are forced into adult roles—such as caregiving, farming, or labour—far too early, which impacts their physical and psychological development.
- **Nutritional insecurity and substance exposure:** In tribal belts, nutritional deficiencies and normalized substance consumption among adults increase risks for children and adolescents.



Disconnect Between Systems and Realities

- **Policy-program gaps:** While Odisha has made commendable strides in governance—offering more scholarships, youth development schemes, and a dedicated online portal—these opportunities remain out of reach for the most marginalised. The challenge lies in the inaccessibility due to low awareness, poor digital illiteracy, and procedural complexity. Despite the state government's strong efforts, uptake is limited, particularly among tribal and rural youth, who struggle to navigate digital systems and access timely information.

- **Non-contextual pedagogy:** Skill training and educational programs fail to align with the lived realities, aspirations, and constraints of rural youth, resulting in poor uptake and impact.

Children and youth in Odisha's remote villages from marginalised communities face layered disadvantages that go far beyond surface-level access to services. The barriers they encounter stem from a complex web of historical marginalization, geographic isolation, economic precarity, and systemic neglect. These factors, when combined, entrench generational cycles of deprivation—gravely affecting the productive potential of adolescents and youth aged 10–24 years.

Geographic Isolation and Infrastructural Gaps

- Many tribal villages are located in hilly, forested, or remote terrain, several kilometers from the nearest school, college, or health facility.

- Transportation is sparse, and students walk long distances, deterring regular attendance and limiting time for study or extracurricular activities.
- Poor digital infrastructure and unreliable electricity further restrict access to modern learning tools, virtual education, or health information.

Socio-Economic Vulnerability and Intergenerational Poverty

- Tribal and mining-affected families are typically engaged in subsistence agriculture, daily wage labour, or informal work. Income is seasonal and uncertain.
- Economic insecurity forces adolescents to leave school prematurely to contribute to family income. In Rayagada block of Gajapati district, nearly 45% households have reported at least one family member migrating for daily wage work in the past decade. This reflects

both economic vulnerability and limited access to stable local livelihood opportunities, disrupting children's education and transition of youth into productive adulthood.

- For Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) and families displaced by mining, loss of land, cultural displacement, and environmental degradation further compound their vulnerability.

First-Generation Learning Without Support Systems

- Most young people from these communities are first-generation learners. Their parents are unable to support them academically or guide education or career-related decisions.
- There is a lack of educated role models, mentors, or informed peer networks in the village to help youth navigate complex education or job systems.





- Parental aspirations remain modest, albeit hopeful, due to limited exposure; even talented children are steered towards traditional roles or immediate income-generating activities.

Social Marginalization and Identity-Based Discrimination

- Caste, tribal identity, and language intersect to marginalize youth in school and skill training environments. Discrimination and lack of cultural inclusion discourage retention.
- Girls from tribal families face dual burdens—early marriage, caregiving roles, and limited mobility—further reducing access to learning or employment.
- Among PVTGs, traditional knowledge systems are often overlooked in mainstream education, leading to alienation and dropout.

Disrupted Childhood and Early Adult Responsibilities

- Many children, particularly in mining-affected areas, grow up witnessing unstable family conditions, health risks, and environmental pollution.
- Alcoholism and addiction are common, leading to unsafe home environments and emotional trauma for children.
- Adolescents are treated as economic contributors, taking care of their households at the cost of education or personal development.

Fragmented Service Delivery and Low Institutional Trust

- Government schemes for scholarships, health, and skill training exist, but information rarely reaches the last mile. Application processes are digital or bureaucratic, excluding those without literacy or digital access.

- Existing public services are often linguistically or culturally disconnected from the needs of tribal youth.

Without meaningful interventions that acknowledge and respond to these structural inequities, these youth in Odisha risk being left behind in India's growth story. These underlying barriers continue to disconnect marginalized youth from pathways of dignity, opportunity, and inclusion.

The challenges faced by rural youth in Odisha require solutions rooted in local realities. Our interventions are designed after in-depth scoping studies, a year-long pilot, and lived experience across tribal and mining-affected geographies. It responds to the specific needs of marginalized communities—Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), Adivasi youth, and mining-affected households—with a flexible, community-led approach.

OUR CONTRIBUTION TOWARD YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Tailored Features that Solve Real Barriers

Doorstep Learning Groups: Sense of Belongingness and Access Without Judgement

- We set up village-level learning groups (8–15 youth each), led by trained local mentors called Learning Group Officers (LGOs).
- These groups meet twice a week within the village itself, reducing mobility challenges. These platforms provide structured support in education and career guidance, self-awareness and confidence-building, exposure, future orientation, and emotional well-being.

- They serve as safe spaces for young boys and girls from marginalised communities, who lack peer forums and face restrictions on digital or physical mobility, to listen, share and learn without judgement.

Tech-Enabled Guidance and Progress Tracking

- Through our Vikalp Tech platform, every youth is onboarded with a digital profile, and learning progress, exposure activities, and counselling inputs are tracked over time.

- Scholars get access to Gram Panchayat level Resource Centres for learning digital skills, and online application support—bridging the digital divide for first-generation learners.

Real Exposure to Aspirations and Career Possibilities

- Youth who had never stepped beyond their blocks now visit universities, training institutes, science museums, local places of historical and cultural significance and interact with role models from their own communities.



- These real-world experiences reduce fear, build confidence, and help youth visualize future pathways.

Reintegration of Dropouts & Support for School-to-Work Transition

- Vikalp offers individualized, customized mentorship to bring dropouts back to mainstream learning including options such as distance education.
- 30+ dropped-out youth have been re-enrolled into education, and many supported in securing jobs through competitive exam preparation (SSC, Agniveer, Odisha Police).

Parent and Community Involvement

- We run Parent-Community Education Programs, conduct home visits, and issue performance report cards to build informed, supportive ecosystems around youth.

- Our process begins with village-level consent and launch events, treating every intervention as a community effort, not an external imposition.

Gender and Equity Focus

- Activities are designed to provide equitable access to girls, who have limited voice, lower digital access, and fewer mobility options.
- LGOs ensure that all group members get equal attention, and feel heard and supported in all interactions. They are trained to carefully and gently navigate any gender and caste biases.

Low-Touch Graduation Model: Sustainability by Design

- As groups mature, they graduate to a low-touch engagement model, where groups continue to exist and operate as youth-owned entities requiring minimal external facilitation.

- This model fosters self-reliance ensuring program gains are sustained—even after completion.

Local Context, Local Leadership

- We recruit LGOs and Saathis from the same community, ensuring cultural understanding, trust, and role modelling.
- In FY24-25 alone, over 50% of village expansion happened on community demand, underscoring program's organic acceptance and on-ground relevance.
- Village institutions and community leaders regularly advise us on pressing issues faced by youth. We address these issues collaboratively through structured quarterly meetings.
- Insights from these community dialogues directly inform our curriculum. Based on jointly identified priorities, we adapt our offerings to stay relevant and responsive to local needs.



OUR ECOSYSTEM OF CHANGE

Our work is rooted in Odisha, across Gajapati, Ganjam, Jharsuguda, and Kalahandi districts. We partner with Gram Vikas, Village Development Committees (VDCs), schools, and local mentors to create a robust ecosystem of support. The program's design emphasizes decentralization, youth-led delivery, and community-driven scale. Learning Groups are facilitated by trained local youth who understand the aspirations, fears, culture and language of their peers. Parents and Village institutions are engaged as collaborators, not just observers. Technology enables consistent quality and real-time data monitoring across locations.

Our interventions address a critical yet overlooked gap in the youth development ecosystem—what comes before higher education, skill training, and employment. In rural and tribal communities, where schools and vocational centers rarely offer early mentorship, career exposure, or confidence-building support, our programmes provide structured, community-based guidance that helps young

people make informed, future-oriented decisions. Doing so not only prevents dropout and disillusionment but also enables better uptake of government and non-government policies and schemes such as scholarships, secondary and tertiary education enrolments, distance education, and job applications—strengthening the last-mile delivery of private, state and central initiatives.

At their core, our programs try to bridge the divide between aspirations and action. They transform scattered dreams into achievable plans by blending motivational support with practical tools like digital literacy, peer mentoring, relatable role models, and contextualized education and career pathways. Deeply embedded in village life and powered by local mentors, our flagship program, Vikalp, is not just complementary to existing systems—it enhances them. It is scalable, sustainable, and most importantly, owned and led by the very youth it serves.



OUR TENETS



Parents and Communities

Our work is grounded in the belief that change happens when families are involved. Most parents in our communities are daily wage workers or subsistence farmers with no formal education. Despite their limitations, like every parent, they deeply care for their children and are hopeful for a bright future for them. Through biweekly Parent Information Cards, quarterly report card meetings, and home visits, we have built trust. Parents now attend exposure visits, support girls' aspirations, and help prevent dropouts. Community elders and VDCs are instrumental in enrolment, retention, and dispute resolution.

Mentors as Changemakers

Many local youths, including former program participants, now serve as Learning Group Officers (LGOs). Their lived experience adds authenticity to the mentorship they

offer. They facilitate sessions, support job and college applications, and mediate family issues. Udaan scholars in several villages voluntarily mentor Neev groups and host online meetings for youth who have migrated. This pipeline of youth leadership ensures that the program is deeply rooted and continuously evolving.

Digital Inclusion and Learning

500 youth participated in digital literacy modules covering basic computer operations, navigating and controlling the mouse pointer, Google tools, typing practice, and internet safety. 280 youth can now fill out job and college forms online, create CVs, and appear for virtual exams. Many touched a laptop for the first time in their life and slowly got over their fear of this "strange-unknown" device. Gram Panchayat-level resource centers have become hubs for digital access, especially for girls who face mobility restrictions at home.





Re-Enrolments and Educational Continuity

We support school dropouts to return to education. Many youth drop out of school due to poverty or social pressures and migrate for work. This year over 200 youth enrolled in higher education or distance learning with guidance and support from LGOs.

Partnerships and Collaborations

Our collaboration with Gram Vikas, local schools, Village Development Committees, local institutions, and implementation partners has been essential. Gram Vikas lends institutional strength and deep community presence. Aam Digital and LeapX enable our tech integration. Local professionals—including police officers, teachers, firemen, and health workers—volunteered to conduct mentorship talks and career workshops, making aspirations relatable and achievable.

Program Expansion and Community Demand

Community demand is the engine of our growth. Parents, youth, and village leaders are our biggest advocates. We plan to reach 100 villages and 3000 youth annually by 2026, using the low-touch model for scalability.

Integrated Monitoring Systems and Digital Tools

- Vikalp Tech Platform enables end-to-end digital management of field operations. It tracks onboarding, attendance, learning sessions, assessments, and performance via a centralized system.
- Aam Digital Platform has been adopted for monitoring key front-end operations including customized dashboards, real-time attendance, and progress tracking of field events.

Structured Data Collection and Evaluation

- Detailed onboarding and short profiling of every participant captures demographics, educational status, employment status, and aspirations, feeding into the central database for longitudinal tracking.
- Regular assessments are conducted at various stages (e.g., youth and parent interviews, hope maps, performance report cards), ensuring personalized tracking and feedback loops.

Feedback-Driven Program Design

- The program began with a pilot study and year-long scoping exercises, with continued iteration of the curriculum and field processes based on field insights.
- Parent and community feedback is systematically captured and integrated via bi-weekly information cards and quarterly community meetings.

Regular Reviews and Quality Control

- Monthly, weekly, and even daily planning and debrief calls are conducted across field teams.
- Dedicated Quality Control protocols include random audits of learning group meetings, review of consent forms, and report cards, ensuring program fidelity and documentation standards

Quantitative and Qualitative Impact Metrics

Some output-level indicators we track

Number of active scholars and % of regular attendees in learning group meetings

% of scholars willing to apply/applying to better / higher education institutions, by courses

% of program participants enrolled into a higher education stream of their choice

% youth willing to apply/applying to suitable and productive job opportunities

Number of youth attending in career awareness and work-profile building workshops

Number of scholars participating in exposure visits outside their villages and mentorship talks

Number of dropouts re-enrolled into mainstream education system

Number of students availing scholarships for higher / continued education (government, non-government)

Number of youth-owned and self-driven groups / entities formed by youth beyond learning groups (such as study circles)

Number of youth engaging in community development activities on a regular basis

MONITORING, EVALUATION & LEARNING

We have developed a robust, multi-layered monitoring, evaluation and learning system that is both tech-enabled and data-driven, combining structured quantitative tracking with community-centered qualitative insights. This positions the organization strongly in terms of accountability, adaptability, and long-term impact measurement across all aspects of its work.

Integrated Monitoring Systems and Digital Tools

- Vikalp Tech Platform powers end-to-end digital management of field operations. It enables centralized tracking of participant onboarding, session attendance, learning assessments, and overall performance.
- Participant Profiling is conducted during onboarding, capturing each individual's demographics, education level, employment status, and aspirations. This data is used for longitudinal tracking and impact analysis.
- Continuous Assessments—including youth and parent interviews, hope maps, and report cards—ensure personalized progress tracking and support timely feedback and course correction.

Feedback-Driven Program Design

- Vikalp's curriculum and implementation strategy follows an iterative design process grounded in continuous learning from the field.
- Parent and community perspectives are integrated through structured tools such as Parent Information Cards and community meetings, ensuring the intervention remains relevant and responsive.

Impact Across Stakeholders

For Individuals: Over the past 2-3 years, Vikalp has transformed the lives of many rural youth by equipping them with digital literacy, career guidance, and growth opportunities. Many have moved beyond the boundaries of their villages, confidently pursuing higher education, preferred jobs, and professional aspirations.

For Families: The interventions have fostered a strong culture of encouragement within families. Parents, once unsure of the pathways available to their children, are now active supporters in their educational and career journeys, creating a nurturing and aspirational home environment.

For the Community: With the gradual handover of program ownership to local youth, the community has become the custodian of our mission. Young leaders are stepping up as mentors, sustaining the momentum of change. Village committees are co-owners of the interventions in their respective areas and actively support in the design and execution of youth-centric community-owned local solutions. This has led to the emergence of more resilient, self-reliant, and forward-looking communities.



OUR TEAM & PARTNERS



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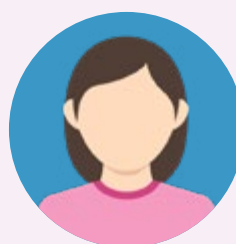


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OUR PARTNERS





ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024–25



Launching the Maargdarshan Initiative

We launched the Maargdarshan program in October 2024 for students from tribal communities studying in residential schools.

- The school-based mentorship initiative, run in partnership with the Gram Vikas Tribal Development Trust, is active in four Gram Vikas residential schools across Gajapati, Ganjam, and Kalahandi districts.
- It supports tribal and rural students as they explore their future options, maintain academic continuity after Class 10, and plan their education and career pathways.
- Through structured mentorship, Maargdarshan is building awareness of career possibilities, strengthening decision-making skills, and enabling informed transitions into higher education.

Progress Under the Vikalp Program

Vikalp continues to grow as a trusted, community-rooted initiative that empowers rural and tribal youth to build confident, future-ready lives. In FY 2024–25, the program deepened its presence across Odisha, expanded to new geographies, and strengthened its focus on education continuity, career readiness, and youth leadership. Grounded in community partnerships and driven by young people's aspirations, Vikalp is enabling transitions that are individual, collective and sustainable.

Expansion with Community Trust

- Vikalp program is active in 3 districts in Odisha – Jharsuguda, Ganjam, and Gajapati.
- It is now present in 65 villages across 7 Gram Panchayats, including Burataal (Ganjam) and Kerandi (Gajapati) added in FY 2024–25.
- 24 new villages included 10 on direct request of the respective Village Development Committees (VDCs).

Youth Engagement and Transition to the Next Stage

- 1,150 youth engaged; 700 active scholars (60% girls).
- >220 scholars transitioned to higher education or career pathways.
- > 30 parents reported greater confidence among their children and better academic performance.

Safe, Trusted Learning Spaces

- 82 Learning Groups were active during the year, including 14 Udaan groups catering to older youth (16 and above).
- Neev groups (ages 10–15) recorded average attendance of 91%, while Udaan groups (ages 16–24) had 86% average attendance.



Digital Transformation

- 80% of operations digitized, enabling real-time monitoring via a system co-developed with Aam Digital GmbH.
- Quality Control mechanisms and SOPs introduced for standardized, scalable delivery.

Future Readiness Training

- Each active scholar received 96 person-hours of training across themes of self-awareness, cognitive development, global perspectives, future orientation and, functional and digital skills.
- The curriculum has been upgraded and localized, informed by community feedback, parent discussions, and VDC inputs.

Strengthening Community Ownership

- 10,000+ parent interactions, supported by fortnightly Information Cards and quarterly Report Cards.
- 75+ VDC meetings conducted with systematic documentation and feedback loops using signed VDC Interaction Cards.

Education Outcomes

- 308 scholars prepared for competitive exams; 208 cleared admissions to education institutions such as Odisha Adarsh Vidyalaya (OAV), Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV), and Eklavya Model Residential School, and other institutions.
- 28 scholars enrolled in +2/degree colleges.
- 24 dropout youth (including migrant labourers) re-entered formal education.

Access to Financial Support

- 56 scholars received INR 5 lakh+ in post-matric scholarships.
- 150 families educated on government scholarship schemes and procedures.

Career and Employment Readiness

- 200+ families informed about job options; 60+ youth applied; 11 youth employed.
- Kabiraj Sabar cleared the Odisha Police Constable recruitment, inspiring many.



Bridging the Digital Divide

- 550 youth received basic computer literacy training.
- 280 youth supported in online applications, interviews, and job searches.
- 3 learning groups transitioned to Online mode after youth members migrated for work.

Exposure and Mentorship

- 6 exposure visits with 251 scholars + 11 VDC members.
- 3 career workshops and 3 mentorship talks reached 376 youth from over 30 villages.
- 30 scholars created their first CVs.

Youth leadership from within and Program handover to the community

- 24 Learning Groups in Lakhanpur, Jharsuguda now run by community LGOs. 4 community youth, including 2 former scholars, became LGOs.
- These groups moved to a 'low-touch' model, ready to integrate into Gram Vikas' core operations.

STORIES OF IMPACT & INSPIRATION

From Gouri, a tribal girl from Gajapati who returned to school after 4 years, to Rajesh, who overcame social anxiety to interact with girls in a mixed learning group—our youth stories reflect courage and the power of consistent mentoring. One group of Udaan scholars collectively applied to state police and paramilitary services after a series of career workshops. Another group created a community newsletter to showcase local achievers. These stories represent transformation in action.

DARING TO DREAM:

KABIRAJ'S JOURNEY FROM RANJHASAHI TO ODISHA POLICE

In the quiet village of Ranjhasahi, nestled in the hills of Gajapati district, a young man named Kabiraj Sabar chose not to be defined by his circumstances. At just 21, Kabiraj carried on his shoulders his own dreams and the hopes of a family that worked relentlessly to make ends meet. With his parents, Nilambar and Malati, toiling as daily-wage laborers and his younger brother migrating seasonally to Andhra Pradesh for work, Kabiraj understood early that change wouldn't come easy—but it was still worth pursuing.

He faced a string of rejections—failing in the SSC-GD, the Forester exam, and even the SSC-CGL. But Kabiraj refused to let failure write his story. “Every time I failed, I gained experience,” he says, his words laced with quiet determination. It wasn't just knowledge he was accumulating—it was resilience, perspective, and the kind of wisdom that can only come from standing back up, again and again.

His turning point came with the Vikalp program. Through his local Vikalp Learning Group, Kabiraj found a mentor who not only shared job updates and study resources, but who also believed in him. This mentorship rekindled his confidence and gave him the structure and support he needed to persevere. Kabiraj's persistence finally bore fruit—he cleared the Odisha Police entrance exam and is now a Sepoy in the OSAP 3rd Battalion. This isn't just a job. It is a symbol of what's possible when hard work is matched with the right guidance, when a village stands behind its youth, and when dreams are allowed to grow beyond boundaries.

As Kabiraj says, “It needs consistent support and encouragement to build and improve a life. It takes time and a lot of patience.” His journey reminds us that change doesn't happen overnight—but with persistence and support even the most distant goals can become reality.



ALIBHA BHOI: **A SPARK OF COURAGE IN THE HEART OF COAL COUNTRY**

In the coal belt of Jharsuguda, where life often follows the shadows of mines and power plants, a young woman from Ainlapada village chose to carve a different path. At 23, Alibha Bhoi stands as a symbol of determination and quiet revolution. The second of four siblings, raised in a home that faced both financial hardship and health challenges, Alibha knew early that waiting for change was not an option—she would have to become the change.

Her journey began with the simple desire to support her family. Encouraged by her uncle, she enrolled in an ITI Electrical course in Hirakud after finishing school in Bhubaneswar. Alibha stood out not just for her academic performance but for her leadership—so much so that her instructors asked her to mentor younger students. This early experience as both learner and guide gave her the confidence to dream beyond conventional limits.



After completing her apprenticeship with the Aditya Birla Group and earning a short-term contract, Alibha joined the Vikalp program to build her interview skills, strengthen her self-confidence, and explore new opportunities. Through Vikalp and her network of mentors, she came across a job opening at the Odisha Hydropower Generation Corporation (OHGC). With focused preparation and quiet grit, Alibha cleared the selection process and joined OHGC as a Non-Executive Trainee – Electrical in January 2024. Today, she proudly works at their office in Anugul, setting an example not just for her community but for girls across rural Odisha.

But Alibha's story doesn't end here. She dreams of becoming a loco pilot—her sights set on even bigger goals. Inspired by her high school teacher and the unwavering belief of her father, she continues to push forward. Her younger sister, now pursuing a computer course in their village, looks up to her with admiration and resolve.

Alibha's journey is more than just a career milestone—it is a testament to what becomes possible when resilience meets opportunity.

SUSHANT SABAR: RECLAIMING DREAMS, ONE STEP AT A TIME

In the quiet, hilly village of Amarsing in Odisha's Gajapati district, lives a young boy named Sushant Sabar. At 20 years old, Sushant carries the weight of loss, uncertainty, and resilience in equal measure. A member of the Saora tribe—one of India's Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)—Sushant lost his father in the devastating 2014 cyclone. Since then, he has lived with his mother and brother, finding solace in a simple life shadowed by hardship. Like many tribal youth, his path was shaped not just by poverty, but by the absence of guidance and accessible information.

In 2022, Sushant failed his Class 10 math exam. Unaware of the possibility of a supplementary exam, he dropped out of school and began working with his brother as a casual laborer. His story could have ended there—like many others whose potential goes unrecognized. But in 2023, Sushant joined Vikalp, and a new door opened. During a Vikalp group meeting, Sushant first heard about the open schooling system. He was hesitant—confused by the unfamiliar process and unsure whether someone like him could even qualify. But with support from the Vikalp team and encouragement from the headmaster of Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School, he took the leap. He began preparing again, this time using guidebooks, curated YouTube channels, and computer lessons taught in the group sessions. In February 2024, Sushant sat for the exam—and passed. His score may have been modest, but for him and his family, it was a moment of quiet victory.

Sushant didn't stop there. He dreamed of going to college, something no one in his family had done. The online admission process, however, posed a new challenge—navigating forms, selecting appropriate colleges based on marks,

and uploading the right documents. With Vikalp's guidance, he applied thoughtfully and was admitted to a college in Gurandi. But just as hope was setting in, a misunderstanding about documentation—particularly a missing conduct certificate—nearly derailed his journey. Unsure of what to do and too shy to ask, Sushant kept his worries to himself.

When he finally shared the issue, the Vikalp team stepped in. They accompanied him to the college, helped him speak with officials, and clarified that open school applicants didn't need the certificate



in question. It was a small but critical intervention. One missing piece of information, one unsent form, or one unasked question—these are the quiet reasons so many young people lose their chance.

In August 2024, Sushant officially secured his admission. He is now a first-year +2 student at Minaketan Higher Secondary School in Gurandi. For his family, it is a moment of immense pride. For Sushant, it is the start of a future he once thought impossible.

GOURI KARJEE: A STORY OF GRIT, LOSS, AND UNWAVERING HOPE

In the remote hills of Gajapati district, Odisha, where life for many is shaped by survival and silence, a young girl named Gouri Karjee quietly chose to rewrite her story. Gouri belongs to the Saora tribe, one of the most vulnerable and isolated tribal communities in India. In 2020, while studying in Class 5 at a residential school in Lingipur, her life was turned upside down when her mother fell critically ill. Gouri left school to be by her side. A few months later, she lost her mother—the person she was closest to. She was only 13.

The grief was overwhelming. Her father, a migrant laborer in Andhra Pradesh, was rarely home. In early 2023, he remarried and began living separately. Gouri, emotionally withdrawn and uncertain of her place in the world, moved in with her aunt—whose financial hardship left no room for thoughts of Gouri's education. The dream of returning to school slowly began to fade.



That same year, the Vikalp program arrived in Lumudasing village. During one of the Learning Group meetings,

Gouri—quiet but determined—gathered the courage to express her desire to continue studying. Her voice was heard. The Vikalp team stepped in, guiding her through the complex admission process, helping her prepare for interviews, and supporting her in completing the necessary documents. With their help, and the cooperation of the Government High School in Rayagada, Gouri was granted admission into Class 7 under a special state scheme for orphan girls—entitling her to free education, lodging, and boarding until Class 10.

This scheme had never reached the ears of her village before, and even today, her aunt finds it hard to believe such support exists. But for Gouri, it is real. She now walks to school in her uniform with pride, her head held high and her eyes full of dreams. She wants to graduate one day—not just for herself, but to show what is possible when someone refuses to give up.

CHANDRA MUNDA: A BEACON OF HOPE

In the quiet village of Junian in Jharsuguda district, a young tribal woman named Chandra Munda is quietly transforming what possibility looks like for girls in her community. At 23, she has already become a symbol of resilience and hope. Despite the economic hardships that surrounded her, she became one of the few girls in her Gram Panchayat to complete graduation in 2019—a milestone that required both courage and the steadfast support of her parents.



But the path ahead wasn't easy. A degree in hand did not automatically open doors. Job opportunities were few, and navigating the formal employment system proved daunting.

That changed in 2021 when Chandra joined Vikalp. Through this programme, Chandra found not just guidance, but a renewed belief in her abilities.

With consistent mentorship and support, she learned how to build a CV, prepare for interviews, and manage the documentation required for public sector roles. These practical skills helped Chandra apply for and secure a position as an Anganwadi Worker—a role through which she now supports early childhood care and education in her village. Her success is more than personal; it is a proud moment for her parents and a source of inspiration for other girls watching her lead by example.

Yet, Chandra's dreams don't stop here. "I am grateful for the support of my parents and Vikalp. I aspire to become a high school teacher and am currently planning for it," she says with quiet determination. Her journey is far from over—and her commitment to growing, serving, and uplifting her community is only deepening.





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