

Vikalp

Enabling young people to
aspire and achieve

A life-situation-based support
model for young people in
remote rural Odisha



The Reality Facing Rural Youth

A girl pushed into marriage despite wanting to study. A boy preparing for an exam he is not eligible for. A first-generation learner missing a deadline because no one told him. A potential village leader leaving because there is no local platform to grow.

These stories may seem different, but they often stem from the same underlying challenges.

First-Generation Learners Navigate Alone: Many rural youth are the first in their families to navigate education, scholarships, entrance exams, and career choices. Families often lack the information and experience needed to guide them.

Critical Decisions Are Often Missed: A missed admission deadline, incorrect course choice, delayed application, or lack of information can permanently alter educational and livelihood pathways.

Life-Changing Moments Are Time-Bound: Decisions around education, migration, work, or marriage often arise suddenly. Without timely support, these moments can lead to educational exit, lost opportunities, and reduced future choices.

The challenge is rarely a lack of aspiration. More often, it is the absence of timely guidance, support, and opportunities at the moments when they matter most.

What is Vikalp?

Young people often need support not once, but repeatedly, as they navigate education, careers, family expectations, and life choices. The Vikalp programme brings together local mentors, peer networks, families, and community institutions to provide support at these critical decision points.

Village-Level Support Systems: Local mentors work with small peer learning groups, helping young people access information, explore opportunities, complete applications, and stay connected to support. Parents, teachers, village leaders, and community institutions are engaged to create an enabling environment around the youth.

Built Around Youth Situations: Young people face different realities. Some are first-generation learners, some are at risk of leaving education, some are working hard without direction, while others face social barriers or are emerging as local leaders. Support is tailored to these situations rather than delivered uniformly.

From Uncertainty to Informed Action: The focus is on helping young people take the next meaningful step - whether that is applying for a scholarship, choosing a course, returning to education, preparing for an entrance examination, or taking on a leadership role. Small and timely interventions help convert aspiration into visible progress.

Vikalp helps young people move from uncertainty to informed action.

Vikalp: Journey so far

Since October 2022, Vikalp has expanded from a pilot in Lakhanpur block of Jharsuguda district to 7 Gram Panchayats across Jharsuguda, Gajapati, and Ganjam districts of Odisha, building village-level support systems that help young people navigate education, skills, and work pathways.

Outreach

Reach	Number
Blocks	3
Gram Panchayats	7
Villages	68
Learning Groups	82
Youth Engaged	1150

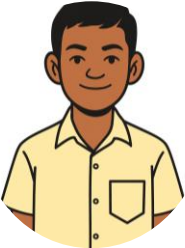
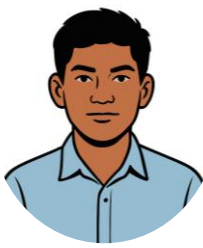
First Milestones

- 500 +** Young people moved towards higher education, vocational training, or jobs
- 50 +** Former dropouts and migrant youth returned to learning
- 200 +** Scholarships secured, often the first in their families
- 400 +** Youth independently accessing and applying for educational and career opportunities online

For many, these are the first visible milestones on pathways that previously seemed out of reach.

Five Youth Situations, Five Different Pathways

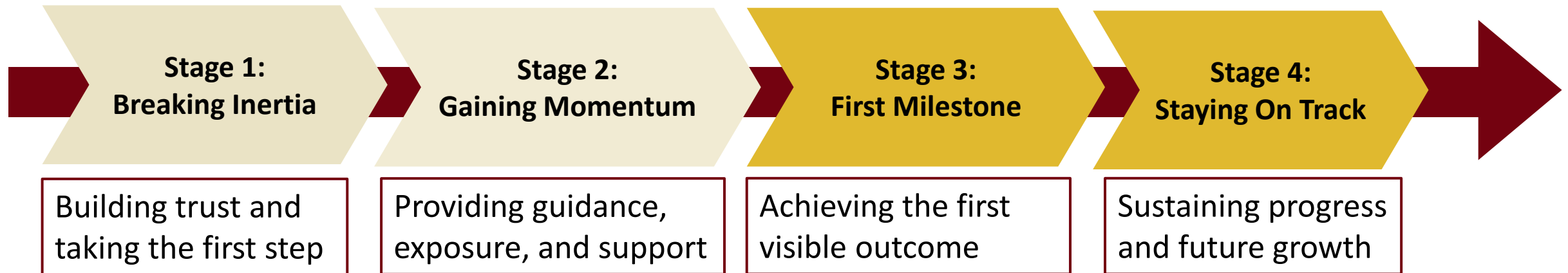
Over three years, Vikalp engaged with more than 1,150 young people across 68 villages in Odisha. While every young person’s journey is unique, recurring patterns emerged across villages and learning groups. These five situations capture the realities, risks, and opportunities most encountered.

First-Gen Aspirer	At-Risk Exiter	Misinformed Striver	Silent High-Potential Girl	Local Multiplier
				
Wants to study and progress, but lacks guidance and system awareness	At risk of leaving education due to poverty, migration, or family pressure	Motivated but pursuing unsuitable or poorly understood pathways	Academically capable but constrained by social norms and limited mobility	Emerging youth leader with influence and leadership potential
N=40%	N=20%	N=10%	N=25%	N=5%

These situations are not categories to label young people. They help identify where support is needed most and what kind of intervention can help them move forward.

Supporting Young People Through Critical Decision Points

Shifting a young person's life path does not always require large interventions. But it does require timely support, sustained engagement, and someone present at the right moment. Vikalp supports young people through four broad stages of engagement.



Different situations require different forms of support. The four stages help ensure that young people receive the guidance, encouragement, and opportunities they need at each step of their journey.

The Vikalp System: Mentors, Tools, and Community

Supporting young people requires more than information or one-time interventions. Vikalp combines local relationships, structured processes, and digital tools to create a support system that remains accessible throughout a young person's journey.

Local Mentors and Learning Groups

- Local mentors support youth within villages
- Peer learning groups provide guidance and encouragement
- Support available at critical decision points

Families and Community Institutions

- Parents, teachers, and village institutions engaged
- Creates a supportive environment around youth decisions
- Builds trust and local ownership

Digital Systems and Feedback Loops

- Aam Digital tracks participation and milestones
- Standardised processes support quality and consistency
- Regular feedback strengthens learning and accountability

Together, these elements create a village-level support system that helps young people access guidance, navigate opportunities, and continue progressing over time.

Different Youth Situations, Different Outcomes

Among the young people who reached a first milestone, different patterns of progress emerged depending on their starting situation and the barriers they faced.

Youth Situation	Youth Reaching a First Milestone	First Milestones Achieved
First-Generation Aspirers	201	Entered higher education, better schools, and scholarship pathways
At-Risk Exiters	84	Rejoined or continued education instead of dropping out
Misinformed Strivers	67	Shifted to more suitable educational and career pathways
Silent High-Potential Girl	143	Continued education, accessed scholarships, and pursued opportunities beyond their villages
Local Multipliers	20	Emerged as peer leaders, mentors, and role models

**Spotlight:
Girls' Education**

151 girls pursued higher education outside their villages

144 girls secured scholarships for further education, often the first in their families

131 girls continued their education beyond Class 10

48 girls gained admission to quality residential schools such as OAV, JNV, Eklavya, and BPAV

Beyond Individual Success

Vikalp begins with individual young people, but its effects extend beyond them. Each scholarship secured, each young person who re-enters education, and each emerging local leader helps make opportunities more visible and accessible for others.

Young People

- More informed choices and greater confidence
- Better access to education, skills, and livelihood opportunities
- Stronger ability to navigate future decisions independently

Families

- Greater awareness of educational and career pathways
- Increased confidence in supporting youth aspirations
- More active participation in key decisions affecting young people

Communities

- Local mentors and peer learning groups become sources of guidance
- Community institutions engage more actively with youth development
- Educational and career aspirations become a shared community concern

The long-term goal is not only to support individual young people, but to help create villages where aspirations are more likely to be realised.

Join us in Strengthening the Pathways

Expected Outcomes:

- 30% progress to higher education, skills training, or employment
- 15% return to education or skill development after disruption
- 4–5% emerge as peer leaders and community role models

We are looking for:

- Financial support to expand Vikalp to five additional Gram Panchayats and reach 1,500 young people
- Digital access support, including laptops, tablets, and connectivity
- Government and CSR partners to strengthen pathways and convergence
- Mentors and volunteers who can guide, encourage, and inspire young people



Potential is not rare. What is rare is someone who stays long enough to help it take root and grow.

Gram Vikas and Social Shapes Foundation



www.socialshapesfoundation.org

Established in 2019, **Social Shapes Foundation** works to level the playing field for youth from underserved regions by nurturing aspirations and building capabilities—guided by the belief that one young person’s progress can strengthen entire communities and systems.

Gram Vikas is a rural development organisation that has partnered with rural communities in Odisha since 1979, driving sustainable change and impacting the lives of over 5 million people in more than 8,000 villages.



www.gramvikas.org

For more information, please contact:

Social Shapes Foundation: Zeeshan Ali, zeeshan@socialshapesfoundation.org, +91 85848 70905

Gram Vikas: Thomas Sunil K, thomas@gramvikas.org, +91 75598 11684