

Vast Foundation

In today's article, we will explore the achievements of the Vast Foundation, established by journalist Tejas to address gaps in medical care and education in tribal areas of Maharashtra. The Foundation's initiatives include providing financial support for higher education, organizing career guidance programs, and upgrading vocational training institutes. With a commitment to enhancing practical skills and career prospects for youth, the Vast Foundation is making strides towards bridging educational gaps and preparing students for a successful future in a rapidly evolving job market.

Shramika
Mahila Mandal

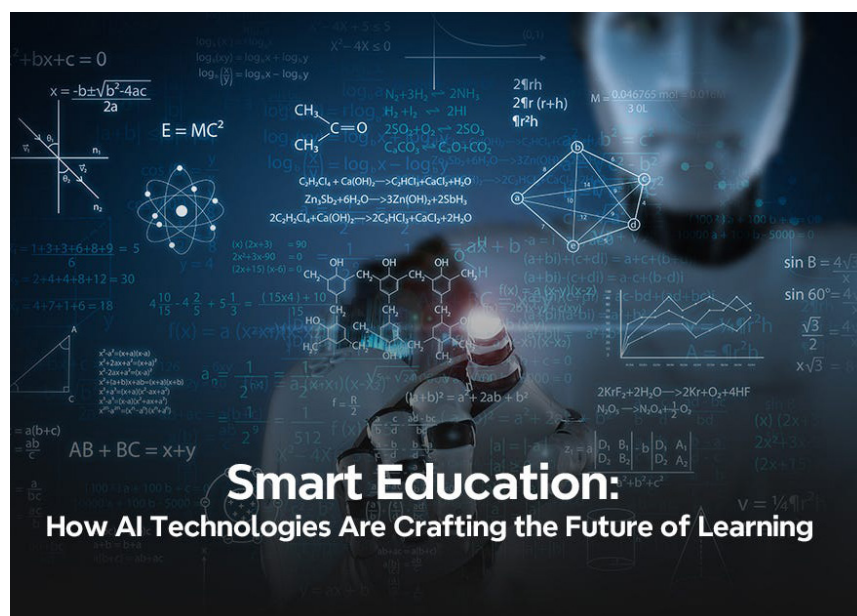
In this article, we will highlight the impactful work of Shramika Mahila Mandal, an organization founded by Ms. Manisha to uplift women and children from underprivileged backgrounds. Since its inception in 2007, Shramika Mahila Mandal has focused on empowering women through skill-building programs and vocational training, transforming their lives and fostering economic independence. By creating opportunities for women to engage in crafts, tailoring, and small-scale entrepreneurship, the organization has made significant strides in improving education and self-sufficiency in their communities.

AI in Education: Widening chasm of Inequity is a serious threat to society

In this article, we will explore the essence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), its potential impact on societies and education, and whether it could lead to an irretrievable digital divide or help reduce inequity. This issue transcends national borders and economic classes, presenting a global challenge that threatens the very foundation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the intelligence exhibited by machines or non-human entities. In simple terms, intelligence is defined as "the ability to acquire information and apply it for knowledge or skills." When this capability resides in a machine, it is known as AI.

AI can be categorized into several types, each with distinct functionalities. Machine Learning (ML) involves enabling machines to process information and produce insights or actionable outcomes. For instance, machine learning algorithms can categorize emails into social, promotions, important, and spam. Deep Learning allows machines to process large amounts of unstructured big data, such as language, images, audio, and videos, to produce targeted outcomes through prompts, questions, or simple conversations. An example of this is the recent versions of ChatGPT, which are built around Large Language Models (LLMs). Other types of AI include Natural Language Processing (NLP), Robotics, and Expert Systems.

Smart Education:
How AI Technologies Are Crafting the Future of Learning

Learn more about these stories on page number 3 & 4.

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The impact of AI on education has been profound, particularly with the introduction of tools like ChatGPT, Co-Pilot, and Gemini. These AI tools have revolutionized the educational landscape, especially in higher education. Within a few years of their initial release, next-generation AI models have achieved scores higher than the average of their human counterparts in university exams. This directly supports the hypothesis that students with access to AI-based learning tools will perform better academically. However, this also raises concerns about widening the existing digital divide, as students without access to these tools, particularly those in public or government schools, may be left behind.

The potential of AI to either bridge or widen the digital divide is a crucial consideration for policymakers and educators worldwide. On one hand, AI has the capacity to democratize education by providing personalized learning experiences and resources to students regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic status. On the other hand, without equitable access to AI technologies, there is a risk of exacerbating existing inequalities. Addressing this challenge requires a concerted effort to ensure that AI technologies are accessible and beneficial to all students, thereby supporting the broader goals of sustainable development and social equity.

Parivaar Expands Mobile Medical Clinics to Serve More Tribal Communities



Last month, Parivaar launched two additional Mobile Medical Clinics in predominantly impoverished tribal areas. One clinic now operates in the Katthiwada block of Alirajpur district, home to the Bhil tribe, which has the lowest literacy rate in the country. The other clinic serves the Mehadwani block in Dindori district, where the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of the Baiga community resides. Each clinic covers 45 villages on a fortnightly schedule, providing free medical services and medication. A doctor and an assistant travel to the villages in a vehicle, ensuring that even those living in remote and often inaccessible areas receive essential healthcare. The entire cost per patient, including doctor charges, vehicle fuel, and medicine, amounts to Rs 54, making it an affordable and effective "doctor at your doorstep" service.



With the addition of these two clinics, Parivaar now operates 17 mobile clinics across eight districts, reaching a total of 792 tribal villages. This expansion underscores our commitment to bringing healthcare to the most underserved populations. However, to continue serving the poorest of the poor, we need your support. Your contributions will help us sustain and grow this vital service. To donate, please visit parivaar.org. Together, we can make a significant difference in the lives of those who need it most.

The Vast Foundation's Holistic Approach to Education in Tribal Maharashtra

Tejas, a practicing journalist, once encountered a pregnant woman in pain, desperately needing medical attention during his travels in one of the tribal areas of Maharashtra. This experience marked a turning point for him, leading to the founding of the Vast Foundation. He, along with his friends, initiated efforts to address the glaring gaps in medical care within these remote regions. Their initial focus was on providing immediate medical support, but it quickly became evident that a lack of education was a significant barrier to accessing professional medical care and understanding available government schemes. This realization led them to expand their mission beyond healthcare to include education.

The Vast Foundation's pivot towards education began with need assessments in the tribal communities. They identified that the lack of awareness about their rights and available schemes was contributing to the ongoing struggles faced by these communities. To address this, the Foundation started organizing career guidance programs for secondary school children in tribal areas such as Mokhada and Jawahar. These areas are geographically isolated from major urban centers like Thane, making access to quality education and career counseling even more challenging. The Foundation's workshops were designed to provide students not only with information about various career paths but also with practical advice on how to pursue these careers, thereby fostering a sense of ambition and direction.

The scope of their programs expanded as they began to understand the interconnected nature of education and career planning. Despite facing constraints related to funding and manpower, the Vast Foundation continued to work with eleven schools in Thane and several others in Jawahar and Mokhada. Their efforts included connecting local communities with relevant local organizations to support career guidance and training. These workshops were tailored not only for students but also for their parents, emphasizing the role of family support in achieving educational and career success. The Foundation believes that an organized and comprehensive approach to career guidance is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering long-term community development.

In addition to their core programs, the Vast Foundation has started integrating life skills and personal development workshops into their initiatives. Recognizing that career guidance alone is not sufficient, they aim to equip students with critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills. These workshops help students build resilience and adaptability, essential traits for navigating their future careers and personal lives. The Foundation's commitment to holistic education underscores their belief that empowering students with both academic and practical skills can significantly impact their future opportunities.

The Vast Foundation's work serves as a model for how grassroots organizations can address complex community issues through a multifaceted approach. By combining education, career guidance, and life skills training, they are creating a comprehensive support system for tribal communities. Their efforts exemplify how targeted, well-rounded programs can lead to substantial improvements in educational outcomes and overall quality of life. Looking ahead, the Vast Foundation plans to further organize and expand their career guidance and educational programs. They seek to increase their reach and impact by securing additional funding and building stronger partnerships with local and national organizations, ultimately leading to sustained socio-economic development.





Shramika Mahila Mandal: Empowering Women and Transforming Communities

Shramika Mahila Mandal is a testament to the power of grassroots initiatives in driving social change. Founded by Ms. Manisha in 2007, this organization has been instrumental in improving the lives of women and children in marginalized communities. Ms. Manisha, coming from a disadvantaged background herself, has channeled her experiences and passion into creating a platform for empowerment and self-reliance. Ms. Manisha's journey is one of resilience and determination. Growing up in a family and community struggling with financial and educational hardships, she developed a strong desire to work towards the betterment of women and children. After completing her graduation in social science and social service, she registered Shramika Mahila Mandal, aiming to address the issues she witnessed firsthand.



The community Ms. Manisha belongs to largely depended on garbage picking for livelihood, with some resorting to begging. Many children were unable to pursue formal education due to financial constraints. Recognizing these challenges, Ms. Manisha's first step was to gather funds to support skill-building initiatives for women. She formed a Bachat Gat (savings group) to instill confidence and demonstrate that women, despite early marriages and societal constraints, could achieve economic independence. Through the Bachat Gat, women identified their skills in crafts, tailoring, and other trades. Regular meetings fostered a dialogue that encouraged women to see beyond their domestic roles. They began small-scale activities such as stitching blouses, crafting, and making papad (crispy snacks). The first substantial investment was Rs. 4000, partly funded by the local government, which was used to purchase rolling pins and kitchen products for papad-making.



This initiative not only provided an income stream but also cultivated an entrepreneurial spirit among the women. They sold their products door-to-door and to local hotels, gaining confidence in their ability to manage and expand businesses. The success of these activities encouraged more women from tribal areas to join the organization. Many women and children in tribal areas lived in makeshift shelters made of plastic and bamboo. With advocacy and support from the local government, they secured better housing made of tin sheets, significantly improving their living conditions. The organization also emphasized education, conducting street classrooms where women and children learned various subjects and prepared for graduation exams. Before 2007, the dropout rate among children, especially girls, was alarmingly high. Shramika Mahila Mandal's awareness campaigns and direct engagement with parents led to a dramatic reduction in dropout rates. Women, empowered by their newfound skills and confidence, took charge of their households and ensured their children received education.



Despite significant progress, challenges remain. The organization aims to organize more structured training sessions and tuition classes for community students. Over the next five years, Shramika Mahila Mandal plans to expand its programs, seeking more funding and support from local governments and larger organizations.

Shramika Mahila Mandal exemplifies how empowering women through skill development and education can transform communities. With continued support and expansion, the organization is poised to create even greater impact, fostering sustainable development and self-reliance among marginalized groups.

Member organizations of JEET

Vipla Foundation

www.viplafoundation.org

Activities : Education Initiatives, Skill Development Programs, Community Development

VKRCE Trust

[YouTube@MathsMadeSweet](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvKRCe)

Activities : Education, Digital Video Library, Training.

Ramakrishna Sarada Samiti

www.rkssngo.org

Activities : Education, Women's Empowerment and Health Camps

National Association for the Blind

www.nabindia.org.in

Activities : Prevention of blindness and low vision, Education, Talking books, Braille press, Vocational training, etc.

Bombay Community Public Trust

www.bcpt.org.in

Activities : Educational scholarships, medical relief, development of some training manuals and films, conducting NGO development activities and projects through NGOs

Shree Samarth Vyayam Mandir

<https://ssvmdadar.com/>

Activities : Sports Training & Certification and Yoga

MSP Foundation

<http://www.msp-edu.org/>

Activities : Educating, uplifting and strengthening through schools including the villages of Ambavade and Gursale, in Central Maharashtra.

Muktangan Education Trust

<https://muktanganedu.org/>

Activities : Seven Mumbai Municipal schools Integrated with a Teacher Education Center, Outreach through Collaborative Learning, Research and Advocacy

What Does the 2024 Budget Say About the Future of Education and Skill Development in India?

The Union Budget for 2024, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, introduces several transformative measures aimed at enhancing the education sector, particularly focusing on benefiting rural and underprivileged students. With a substantial allocation of Rs 1.48 lakh crore for education, employment, and skill development, the budget reflects a comprehensive strategy to address educational inequities and improve vocational training across the country.

One of the key highlights of the budget is the provision of financial support for higher education, with loans of up to Rs 10 lakh available for students pursuing degrees in domestic institutions. This initiative aims to ease the financial burden on students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, enabling them to access quality higher education without the constraint of high tuition fees. Additionally, the budget includes a new centrally-sponsored scheme designed to provide paid internships, with a stipend of Rs 5000 and one-time assistance of Rs 6000. This scheme, funded by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions, will facilitate practical training and enhance employability for one crore youth, thus bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world experience.

The budget also outlines a significant investment in vocational training, with Rs 1.48 lakh crore earmarked to upgrade 1,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and align course content with industry needs. This move is expected to address the skill gaps in various sectors and better prepare students for emerging job markets. By focusing on practical skills and industry-relevant training, the budget supports the development of a skilled workforce that can contribute to local economies and reduce migration to urban areas.

Furthermore, the budget's emphasis on career guidance programs for secondary school students is a notable step towards supporting rural and underprivileged youth. By providing structured career counseling and skill-building opportunities, the government aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to make informed career choices. This initiative is especially beneficial for students in remote and underserved areas, who may otherwise lack access to such resources.

However, the budget has also faced criticism for reducing funding for the University Grants Commission (UGC) by nearly 61% and reallocating resources to central universities. This realignment, while increasing the budget for central universities, has raised concerns about the potential impact on smaller institutions and their ability to support higher education standards. Despite this, the overall increase in funding for higher education reflects a commitment to improving educational infrastructure and expanding access to quality education.

The 2024 Budget represents a significant investment in the future of India's youth, particularly those from rural and underprivileged backgrounds. By enhancing financial support for higher education, expanding vocational training, and providing practical internship opportunities, the budget aims to create a more equitable and skilled workforce. While there are challenges to address, particularly concerning funding allocations, the measures outlined in this budget hold the promise of fostering educational and economic growth, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and prosperous society.