

Project Progress Report 1

Please use this form to summarize the project's progress at its midpoint. IDS will use this information in a blog post about your project. This report is due by June 30, 2025.

Noncompliance with IDS reporting and photo requirements will result in the suspension of your project's IDS funding. Please contact your IDS Project Coordinator if you have questions.

Name of NGO:

Charkha Development Communication Network

Project Manager:

Ayushya Singh, Jasmine Grover

Name of Project:

Project Abhivyanjana

Amount of IDS grant in 2025:

1. Please provide a brief summary of the project's accomplishments so far (no more than a few lines).

During the last two years, Charkha has focused on strengthening the leadership of adolescent girls through an experiential education approach. Each workshop has become a space for transformation, where shifts in the girls' body language, confidence, and voice are increasingly visible.

Building on this foundation, in March 2025, we organised a workshop titled 'Development, Gendered Spaces and Ultimate Frisbee workshop' in a region where the mobility and agency of girls and young women are deeply restricted and constantly policed. To be able to write about their experiences in gendered spaces and how they are restricted in spaces like sports, the workshop aimed at both real experiences and theoretical concepts for girls to be able to express the discrimination that they face.

This workshop initiated powerful conversations around bodily autonomy, freedom of movement, and the right to claim public spaces—topics rarely discussed with or by adolescent girls in these areas. 22 girls participated, including returning members engaged for over a year, and several newcomers. Among them were three married girls, one of whom had been married twice. Representing a diverse mix of caste, class, and religious identities, they came together to challenge deeply ingrained social norms—using sport as their expression.

By openly sharing everyday realities like "हमारे खेलने के लिए जगह नहीं है", "खेलने के लिए परिवार का समर्थन नहीं है" and "जगह तो है, पर स्कूल, कॉलेज या कहीं भी हमें मौका नहीं मिलता" - the girls had already begun to push back against the status quo. Many had never been encouraged to run, jump, or move freely. But that began to shift on the field—when dupattas got in the way, they set them aside; when salwars restricted movement, they switched to track pants. The transformation was visible. They weren't just playing—they were reclaiming their right to move with freedom, confidence, and joy.

One girl said, "चिल्लाने में मज़ा आ रहा था," capturing the joy of moving freely without fear. Another shared, "शादी के बाद खेलना लोगों को अच्छा नहीं लगेगा," a quiet reminder of how strongly social expectations

still shape their lives. Something had started to feel new. A girl who once said she wasn't interested in sports now smiled and said, "पहले मेरा खेलने में इंटरैस्ट नहीं था, लेकिन अब बहुत बन गया है।" And a first-time participant added, "हमें पहले कभी खेलों के लिए सराहा नहीं गया। अब हम अपने गांव में एक टीम बनाएंगे और दिल्ली जाकर टूर्नामेंट में हिस्सा लेंगे।" So far, 13 of these girls have started playing regularly with 53 others from their villages.

It was the close and continuous engagement of Charkha's Volunteer Trainers, working hand-in-hand with the Delhi team, that made the careful identification and mobilisation of participants possible, and ensured their full participation in the workshop. Volunteer Trainers—local young women leaders—conduct monthly meetings in the community and maintain regular contact with the girls and their families through phone calls and home/community visits. In the last six months alone, they have facilitated 24 such meetings, discussing local socio-economic issues such as early marriage, dropout rates and access to digital tools.

As a result of consistent capacity-building workshops and mentorship by Volunteer Trainers, 16 adolescent girls are now leading peer groups within their villages. These groups meet regularly to talk about gender and caste-based discrimination, freedom, and personal aspirations. In one workshop, the girls explored the concept of "safe spaces" in their lives and communities. Later, in a follow-up call, two girls from Makrasar and Kankarwala—villages located approximately 50 km and 86 km from Bikaner—shared that they had initiated such spaces in their own communities, where girls now feel free to express themselves without fear or judgment. The ripple effect of their leadership is visible. Girls who once hesitated to speak are now confidently articulating their views in their peer groups.

Recently, 7 girls participated in a community discussion on digital literacy. They spoke about the challenges they face in ensuring regular engagement with their peer groups, the strategies they use to overcome them, how they are encouraging other girls in the village to learn digital skills, and why this is crucial for their futures. Their articulation, clarity, and presence inspired not just their peers but also representatives from other local organisations working in the area.

Through Charkha's integrated approach—combining development communication tools, sports, theatre, and sustained mentorship—the adolescent girls are not only becoming more aware of the issues that affect them, but are emerging as confident leaders. They are pushing back against societal norms that limit them and are beginning to imagine and shape a different future for themselves and for the girls who come after them.

2. Describe how the IDS funds have been used. Be as specific as possible, relating the use of the funds to your original grant request. Please summarise in less than 500 words.

The IDS funds have been instrumental in deepening our work with adolescent girls from remote villages in the Lunkaransar block of Bikaner district, Rajasthan. They enabled us to **strengthen the ongoing efforts of our Volunteer Trainers**, who regularly engage with girls, their families, and the wider community. Through consistent follow-ups and peer meetings, the trainers have nurtured safe, vibrant spaces where girls share their stories, aspirations, and speak openly about early marriage, education, and discrimination.

It was through these engagements that participants were identified for the **5-day Development, Gendered Spaces, and Ultimate Frisbee workshop** held from 04th to 08th March 2025. We brought together **22 girls from 10 villages**—many of whom experienced playing a sport for the first time. For them, running, jumping, and moving freely became a way to reclaim space and open up powerful conversations around bodily autonomy, mobility, and gender norms.

The funds supported key workshop expenses, including travel, boarding and lodging for both the team and participants, workshop materials, and honorariums for facilitators. The module, grounded in experiential learning, combined physical activity with critical reflection, encouraging girls to question past experiences and challenge restrictive social expectations. Inputs from Volunteer Trainers, field learnings, and relevant literature helped shape a context-sensitive and meaningful curriculum.

Additionally, **IDS support covered salaries for the Charkha Team and stipends of Volunteer Trainers, along with essential administrative and operational costs.**

Together, these efforts are supporting girls to lead, take up space with confidence, build confidence, and reimagine what's possible for themselves and their communities.

3. At this point, how many people have been helped by your project? Please also give a detailed report of how many men, women, and children were helped.

2.5 Years. 77 Adolescent Girl Leaders. 2 Volunteer Trainers (at present). Across 23 remote villages.

This is the heart of the project—**adolescent girls from the Lunkaransar block of Bikaner district stepping into leadership and creating ripple effects in their communities.** With the consistent support of two local grassroots leaders—our Volunteer Trainers—these girls are not only participating in workshops, they are emerging as facilitators of change.

Through **6 in-depth workshops introducing 3 different development communication tools** (writing, theatre and puppetry), the project has focused on strengthening leadership through critical thinking, storytelling, sport, and dialogue. Girls have explored themes often left unspoken—gender-based discrimination, violence, the male gaze, caste, rights, body movements, and bodily autonomy.

As a result, **16 leaders are leading peer groups**, creating safe spaces in their villages where others can speak freely. These girls have helped

- **School dropouts re-enrollment for 86 girls,**
- **Push for sanitary napkins in schools, impacting 186 girls,**
- **77 girls have voiced their communities' needs using writing as a tool, and openly spoke against child marriage and atta-satta practices.**

Not only this, some have found the courage to delay or refuse their own early marriage. Others now dream of jobs, college degrees, and becoming the first earning women in their families.

4. What do you see as the impact of your work? If you have outcome data, please provide it.

Over the last two and a half years, our work with adolescent girls in the remote villages of Lunkaransar block, Bikaner, has led to a visible transformation—from quiet participation to confident leadership. This shift is evident not only in how they engage during workshops but also in the choices they make beyond those spaces—in schools, homes, and peer group meetings.

To track this change, we have conducted internal assessments using baseline and endline forms as part of our pre- and post-workshop processes. Since May 2024, we have used these tools across four workshops to capture growth in knowledge, confidence, and leadership across themes such as gender, bodily autonomy, safe spaces, development, and sport.

- At the first level, where we introduced concepts like gender and development: by the end of the workshop, approximately **96% of the girls reported they could articulate the concept of gender, understood the difference between sex and gender, and could define development**—a significant shift from the baseline, where these terms were largely unfamiliar.
- At the second level, which focused on internalised beliefs and concepts like the male gaze and safe spaces: out of 17 participants, approximately **88% said they could now identify and explain the concept of the male gaze**—a theme explored through theatre and reflective discussion.
- At the third level, which focused on storytelling: out of 23 girls, **approximately 96% shared that they understood how puppetry can be used to talk about rights**, and plan to use it to reflect on gender, caste, and mobility through their own stories.
- At the fourth level, which focused on sports and movement: approximately **90% of the girls expressed interest in Frisbee as a sport. Of these, 13 girls are now actively playing in their communities** and have brought along 53 more girls, expanding the circle of participation and visibility for girls in public play spaces.

Beyond numbers, the girls' post-workshop reflections offer deeper insight into change:

- After the Level 1 workshop on development and gender, early signs of leadership began to emerge—approximately 9 girls began viewing development from the perspective of others in their communities, 15 became more aware of gender-based violence around them, and 11 shared that they had initiated conversations on these topics with peers and family members.
- Following the Level 2 workshop, 22 participants reported a broadened horizon of thought. Thirteen of them shared that they felt more confident expressing themselves and participating in group discussions.

For girls in Lunkaransar, leadership no longer looks like someone else stepping in—it looks like a 16-year-old forming a peer group, a 17-year-old delaying marriage, or a girl walking onto a field for the first time with her dupatta tied around her waist, ready to play. That's the impact we see.

5. Do you feel you are reaching your goals? If not, why not?

Yes, we believe we are steadily moving towards our goals—because the girls are.

Our work is grounded in a **vision to challenge the root causes of gender inequality** by strengthening information, knowledge, and leadership among adolescent girls from some of the most marginalised regions of Rajasthan. The themes we work on - **Gender, Intersectionality, Child Rights, Gender-Based Violence, Bodily Freedom, Safe Spaces, Access to Public Spaces, and Rural Development**, are not just ideas we introduce in workshops. They are everyday realities in the lives of the girls we work with.

Through creative expression, open dialogue, and consistent mentoring, these girls are beginning to **name their experiences, reflect deeply, and take action**. Their journeys are filled with decisions that were once unimaginable in their contexts—and yet, they are making them.

The fact that girls are speaking about the **male gaze**, performing plays on **child marriage**, questioning **access to sanitation**, and exploring **freedom through sport**—in regions where they are still expected to remain silent—is itself a milestone. These acts mark progress. They show that the conversation has shifted, that the foundation is strong.

Over the past two years, we've seen this in the courage they show, the solidarity they build, and the shifts they spark:

- **Krishna**, who once feared speaking up about harassment, filed an FIR and now lives safely with the support of her family and trainers.
- **Mamta**, who raised her voice against a child marriage, didn't stop the wedding—but helped shift the course for others. That girl's mother now sends her younger daughters to school.
- **Pooja Meghwal**, from Kaalu village, postponed her own marriage, completed her digital training, and now teaches computers to school dropouts. With her support, 27 girls have applied for open board exams.
- **Bhagyashree**, once silent in sessions, now dreams openly of pursuing her Master's.

In March 2025, when girls participated in an Ultimate Frisbee workshop—many for the first time—they weren't just learning a sport. They were reclaiming their bodies, their right to public space, and their right to joy. “हमारे खेलने के लिए जगह नहीं है,” they said—and then made space for themselves.

These are not isolated stories. Girls like **Tamanna** now teach computers in their village, pursue their studies, and lead quietly by example. **Nidhi** successfully resolved her family's ration card issue and now helps others navigate public systems. **Poonam** is raising issues like menstrual hygiene in schools, bringing previously silenced concerns into public conversation. Meena, after her training, now works with URMUL Setu organisation and mentors girls in her village.

They are not waiting for someone to bring change—they are forming peer groups, creating safe spaces, and raising a collective voice.

So yes, we feel we are reaching our goals, because more and more girls are questioning the barriers, pushing back, and leading others to do the same. Their voices, actions, and dreams are the clearest signs that we are on the right path. This was our goal

6. Have you experienced any challenges in carrying out the work?

Yes, we did experience challenges, particularly in May 2025, when heightened tensions and incidents of cross-border firing between India and Pakistan created an atmosphere of anxiety in the region. Given that many of the villages we work in are located close to the border, these events led to a real and immediate concern for the safety of adolescent girls and their families.

This directly affected our plans, especially around workshops and community gatherings. Sessions had to be delayed or adapted, and mobility in certain villages was restricted for several days. We even had to cancel our travel plans.

During this time, our Volunteer Trainers, who are themselves from the same communities, played a crucial role in maintaining continuity. Their regular phone calls and local engagement ensured that our connection with the girls remained intact, even in a moment of fear and uncertainty.

While the disruption was significant, it also reminded us of the fragile and often unpredictable contexts in which this work takes place and reinforced the importance of designing programs that continue to centre adolescent girls, not just as participants, but as active leaders shaping development in their own communities.

7. If IDS support were to continue next year, would you follow the same format, or do you see a change?

The coming months will be important for us to pause, reflect, and chart the way forward. As we approach the end of this phase in December 2025, we've already begun internal conversations—acknowledging what has worked well, and exploring how to deepen our engagement.

At the heart of this reflection are a few key questions: How do we stay connected with the girls who have been part of this journey since 2023? How can we continue strengthening the trust, critical thinking, and leadership that's already begun to take root? And what should the next phase of our work look like?

We are planning a culmination workshop in December 2025—bringing girls together across villages to reflect, share their stories, and co-imagine what lies ahead.

In addition, we'll undertake a short review process next year—similar to the one we conducted at the project's outset—to understand what has shifted, and what support the girls now seek. This will offer us deeper insight into the impact of our work and help shape the road ahead.

In short: yes, we would carry forward the core of the current format—with its emphasis on long-term engagement, relational trust, and consistent dialogue—but with thoughtful changes that reflect both our learnings and the leadership the girls are stepping into.

8. If you have any inspiring personal stories of beneficiaries to share, please share those with IDS. (Feel free to attach additional pages if necessary.)

In the remote blocks of Lunkaranasar, Bikaner—where early marriage, restricted mobility, and limited access to information continue to shape the lives of adolescent girls—Charkha with strong support from IDS has spent the past two years with the core aim of strengthening their leadership skills using Development Communication tools, so they live free from violence, with the freedom to explore and make their own decisions.

Through workshops, consistent mentoring, and sustained community engagement, girls from marginalized backgrounds are articulating their aspirations, asking questions, supporting one another, and taking visible steps toward continuing their education and building their own paths toward work and independence. These shifts are becoming visible in how the girls express themselves, challenge restrictive norms, and influence the choices of their peers and families.

The stories that follow offer a glimpse into how these transformations are unfolding—through the leadership of the girls themselves.

Tamanna: Teaching, Earning, and Leading on Her Own Terms

Tamanna might never have imagined that she would be the one teaching computers. Before taking up her current role at a computer centre, she rarely stepped out alone, and the idea of holding a paid job was completely unfamiliar.

She became associated with us as part of Cohort 1 in 2023. Since then, she has been learning development communication tools through Charkha's workshops and has also undergone digital training through one of Charkha's parallel skill-building initiatives. Now, Tamanna has a peer group of 33 girls in her own community whom she teaches computers to, and she also works at a nearby computer centre. She travels independently, continues her studies, earns an income, and manages her own expenses.

Her presence at the centre has encouraged other girls to join—especially those who had heard about the centre but never felt comfortable attending. Many girls who might never have considered joining a computer class are now doing so, simply because they see someone like Tamanna leading it. Tamanna's steady presence, growing confidence, and everyday actions show that new roles are possible—and that girls from their own village can step into them too. She is leading by example in her community.

Nidhi: Pushing Through the Maze of Red Tape

When Nidhi needed corrections made to her family's ration card, the process turned into a months-long runaround. At the DSO office, no one responded. She was sent from one eMitra centre to another, each time with no result. Even after repeated visits, she was told her request couldn't be processed.

But Nidhi didn't give up. She prepared a written application and went directly to the District Collector's office. The Collector signed the application and called the DSO on the spot. When she returned, the staff at the DSO finally processed her request—and began listening more attentively, not just to her, but to others who had been waiting.

Earlier, Nidhi would hesitate to speak—not just in government offices, but even during workshops or group discussions. But the sessions facilitated by Charkha, along with consistent support from the team, helped her understand her rights more deeply, especially when viewed through a gender lens. She began to see that asking questions, asserting herself, and demanding accountability were not acts of defiance, but necessary steps in claiming space in systems that often overlook young women like her. After receiving intense training in Charkha workshops supported by IDS, she has now been selected as one of 16 Saksham fellows (supported by APF) from across Charkha's intervention areas, and is working intensively to build youth collectives in her villages.

Today, she's someone others turn to when they don't know how to navigate a system or where to begin. Her clarity and persistence have shifted how girls like her see their role—not just as beneficiaries, but as active participants in public systems.

Mamta: Refusing to Look Away

When Mamta noticed that a 15-year-old girl from her learning centre had suddenly stopped attending, she sensed something was wrong. She soon found out the girl was being married off in an atta-satta arrangement—an exchange marriage involving her uncle.

Mamta decided to act. She visited the girl's home and tried to speak with the family, offering help. But the response was sharp and final: “सिर्फ दो दिन बचे हैं। अगर अब रोका तो इज्जत चली जाएगी।” (Only two days are left. If we stop now, we'll lose our honour.)

The marriage went ahead. But Mamta didn't stay quiet. She came home and told her father she wanted to file a complaint with the police. That led to tension. Her father warned her that if she pushed any further, he would stop her education altogether. So Mamta stepped back.

Weeks later, the girl's mother came to her, this time with regret. Her daughter was facing abuse in her marital home. “अब मैं अपनी बाकी दो बेटियों की शादी नहीं करूंगी,” she said. Those two younger daughters now attend the learning centre regularly.

Mamta may not have been able to stop the marriage. But by asking difficult questions, facing resistance at home, and still choosing to speak up, she created space for other girls to have choices.

Krishna: Found her Courage to Speak Up and Against Harassment

Before attending Charkha's training, Krishna had already been facing harassment from a boy in her village. She hadn't told anyone—not even her family. The pressure kept building, and eventually, she attempted suicide.

After the workshop, her mother came to know about the situation and reached out to one of Charkha's Volunteer Trainers. Together, they approached the Mahila Adhikarita Vibhag. When the harassment didn't stop, Krishna—this time with her father—went to the police and filed an FIR. Since then, she has been safe and supported.

Krishna's story is not just about one incident. It reflects a broader reality in many remote areas, where harassment is often normalised and overlooked. Her ability to speak up—and her family's decision to stand by her—was shaped in part by the safe space and information Charkha helped create.

These stories reflect a quiet shift taking place in Lunkaranasar, where girls are no longer just participating, but leading. Whether it's navigating public systems, standing up to injustice, or opening doors for others, each of them is making space for change.

Supported by IDS, this Charkha initiative aims at strengthening that leadership—to create safe, consistent spaces where girls believe in their voices and have the agency to use them. In communities where silence was once expected, these girls are showing that they have choices—and they're choosing to lead.