

Innovation of the Week: Providing the Skills—and the Confidence—Needed to Improve Livelihoods

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Photo suggestion: http://www.monafoundation.org/admin/uploads_final/resize_1287563821.jpg

For most women living in rural and remote parts of India, the day begins as early as 3:00am. The flour for the day's meals needs grinding, livestock need to be fed, breakfast needs to be cooked, and water needs to be carried from wells, rivers, and streams. And that's all before the children—usually just the boys—head off to school for the day.

In general, in rural India women work more and sleep less than their male counterparts. And they have almost no access to education.

The [Mona Foundation's Barli Development Institute for Rural Women](#) in Indore, India is working to change that problem. The Institute provides education to young women in India in order to help them develop practical skills like reading, sewing, and horticulture—and more abstract ones like confidence and self esteem— they need in order to start businesses, produce food, care for their families, and improve their livelihoods.

Women attending the Institute are taught to read at a level that prepares them to sit for the National Open School theory exams. They are introduced to new methods of irrigation, composting and crop cultivation, and then taught to weigh their crops, assign value to harvests, estimate costs, count cash and give change. Women learn how to grow indigenous plants, prepare traditional meals and natural remedies for minor ailments, as well as how protecting trees, collecting and saving seeds, and using compost can benefit both the local environment and the farm. In rural India, 90 percent of births take place at home so the Institute also teaches students about prenatal health and care, as well as how to identify emergencies, prepare for birthing, and ensure a sanitary delivery. The school also provides classes on forming and running micro-credit groups and managing small businesses.

But just as important as the practical skills they gain, is the self-confidence young women need to put those skills to use. The Institute helps its students develop their leadership skills and recognize the important contributions women make to the community. Classes include lessons on problem solving, group discussion participation, and public speaking.

The Institute started its first classes with 19 students in 1985 and since then it has trained over 4,000 young women from the state of Madhya Pradesh and other parts of India. One of these young women is named Antari who, before attending the Institute, had dropped out of school three times. She was very shy and had trouble keeping up with her studies. But the Barli Institute catered specifically to the kinds of skills that Antari needed to earn a living and gain self-confidence. She learned sewing and embroidery and was soon helping to teach other students.

When Antari went back to her village she was able to start her own tailor shop and six months later she took the higher education exams. She did well enough to attend University where she eventually got a Bachelor of Education and a Masters of Philosophy in Education. Now she is a post-graduate student in Hindi Literature and working as a teacher.

From a young girl who would hide behind her classmates during lessons, Antari has grown into a poised, educated, and financially independent professional who is now helping to give back by helping other young girls gain an education and learn the value of their own potential.

To learn more about innovations that help to empower women for the benefit of the entire community, see: [Farming on the Urban Fringe](#), [Building a Methane Fueled Fire](#), [Women Entrepreneurs: Adding Value](#), [Women Farmers Are Key to Halving Global Hunger by 2015](#), [For Many Women, Improved Access to Water is About More than Having Something to Drink](#), [Feeding Communities by Focusing on Women](#), and [Reducing the Things They Carry](#).