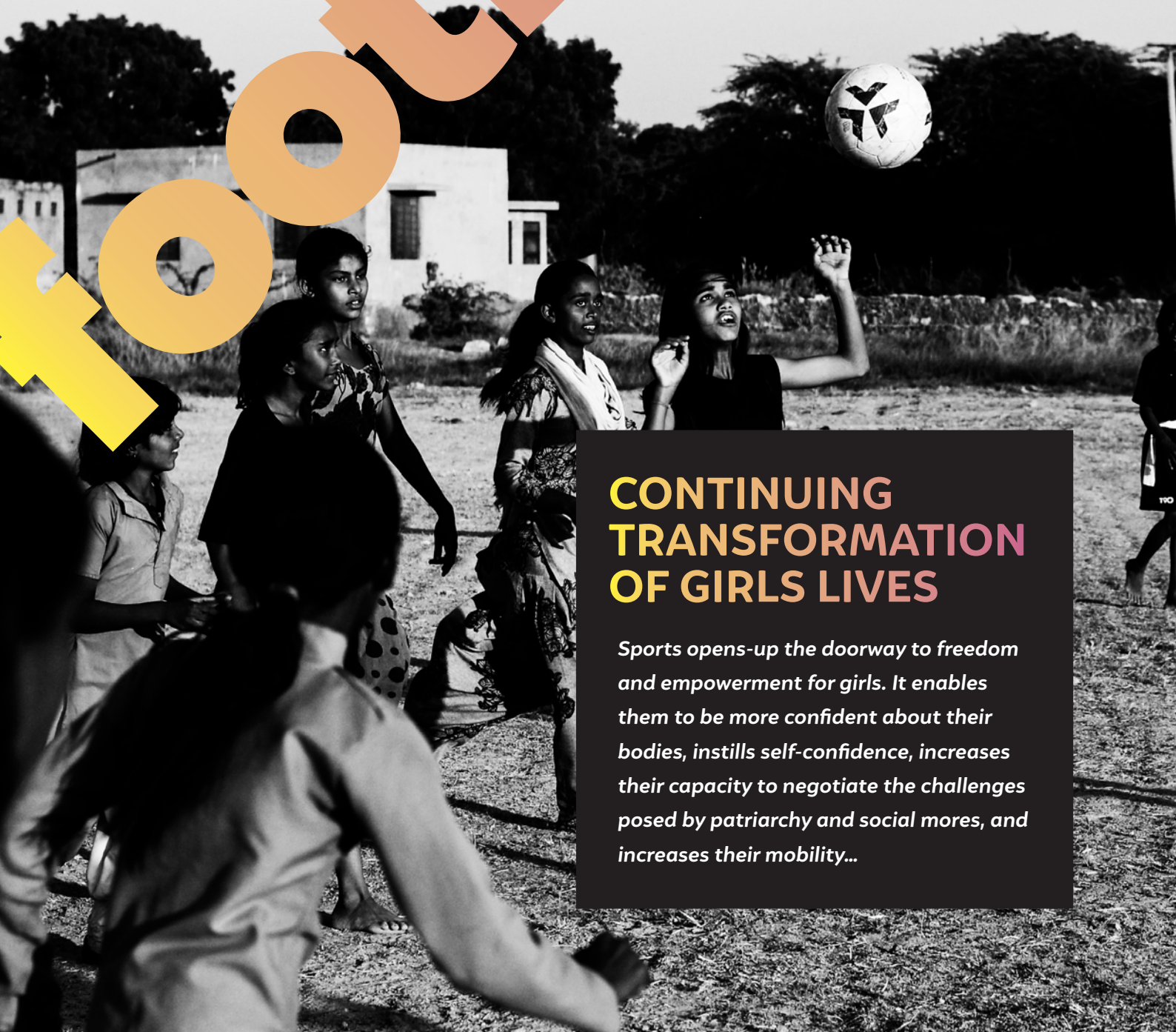




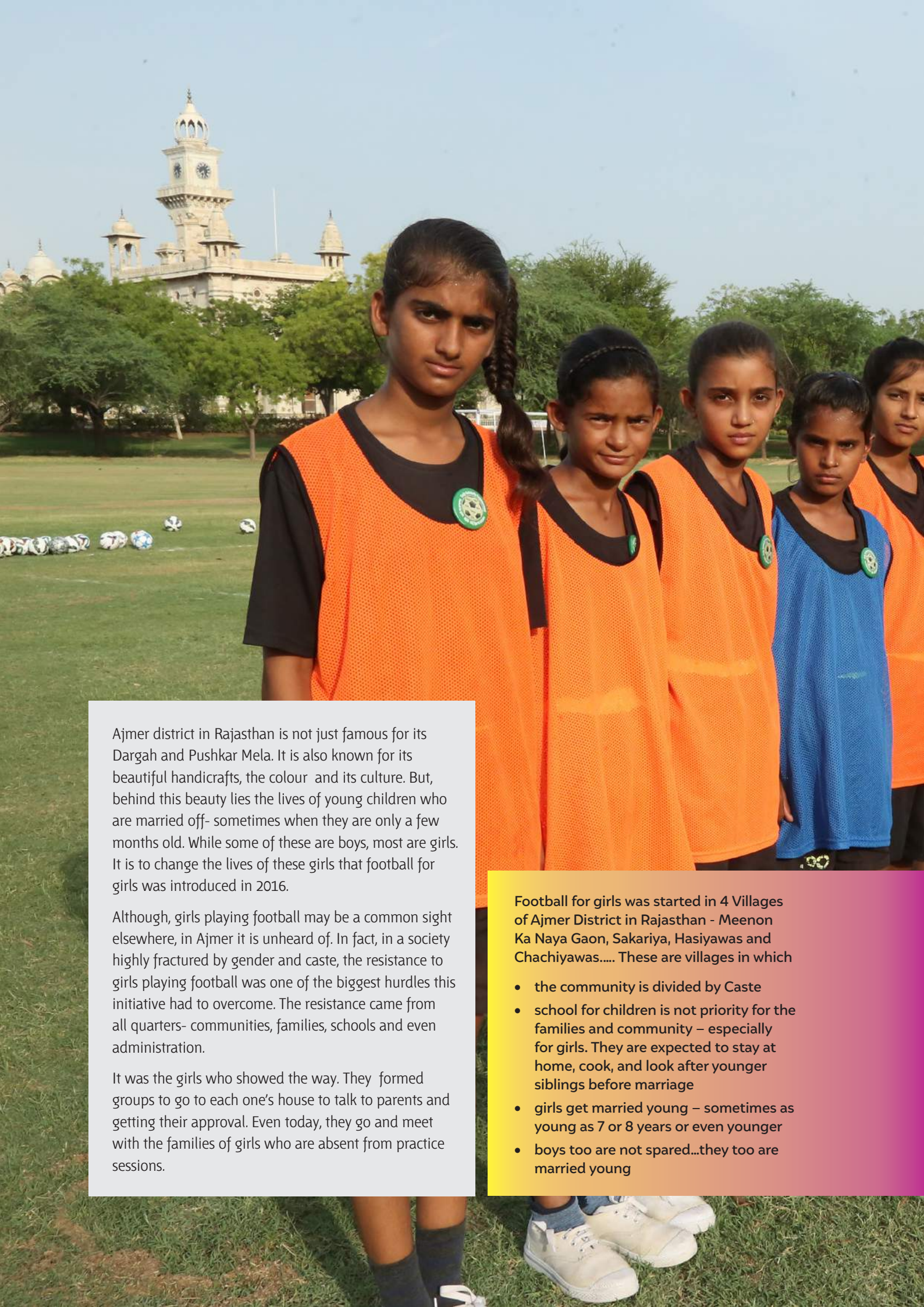
# Football

for freedom,  
unity and  
solidarity



## CONTINUING TRANSFORMATION OF GIRLS LIVES

*Sports opens-up the doorway to freedom and empowerment for girls. It enables them to be more confident about their bodies, instills self-confidence, increases their capacity to negotiate the challenges posed by patriarchy and social mores, and increases their mobility...*



Ajmer district in Rajasthan is not just famous for its Dargah and Pushkar Mela. It is also known for its beautiful handicrafts, the colour and its culture. But, behind this beauty lies the lives of young children who are married off- sometimes when they are only a few months old. While some of these are boys, most are girls. It is to change the lives of these girls that football for girls was introduced in 2016.

Although, girls playing football may be a common sight elsewhere, in Ajmer it is unheard of. In fact, in a society highly fractured by gender and caste, the resistance to girls playing football was one of the biggest hurdles this initiative had to overcome. The resistance came from all quarters- communities, families, schools and even administration.

It was the girls who showed the way. They formed groups to go to each one's house to talk to parents and getting their approval. Even today, they go and meet with the families of girls who are absent from practice sessions.





Football for girls was started in 4 Villages of Ajmer District in Rajasthan - Meenon Ka Naya Gaon, Sakariya, Hasiyawas and Chachiyawas..... These are villages in which

- the community is divided by Caste
- school for children is not priority for the families and community – especially for girls. They are expected to stay at home, cook, and look after younger siblings before marriage
- girls get married young – sometimes as young as 7 or 8 years or even younger
- boys too are not spared...they too are married young



## PROFILE OF THE GIRLS...

Over 350 girls participated in the first ever football camp. Today, over a 160 girls are not just kicking the ball in the village grounds, they are ready to play tournaments. What is more, 55 of them are either already married or engaged to be married. Eight girls who were school dropouts went back to school. That they have been able to break barriers of social norms to come and play football is a huge achievement! If supported, some can even become national level players.

						
		UNDER 12	UNDER 14	UNDER 16	16+	TOTAL
		70	52	32	13	167
EDUCATION	Class 6 /7	70	0	9	0	79
	Class 8	0	52	18	0	70
	Class 9+	0	0	5	13	18
MARITAL STATUS	Married	8	11	6	13	38
	Engaged	6	9	2	0	17



## BREAKING THE NORMS...

Our experience with Football for Girls has shown us that it breaks the notion of gender norms; gives the girls confidence and most importantly gives the courage to say NO to child marriage for themselves and to stand up for others. In the case of girls who are already married or engaged, football helps them to break traditional roles and enables them to negotiate better.

Football for Girls has not just transformed the lives of the individual girls... it has also transformed families and communities. What is more it has broken down deeply entrenched caste barriers. Girls who once refused to eat or share same rooms due to caste barriers, have become friends and support each other.

Football has broken caste barriers for these girls ...when a group of upper caste boys claimed the field on which the girls played, a Dalit girl stood her ground and asked them to leave...the boys said to her- "how dare you ask us to leave- you who lives on crumbs thrown by us". Pat came the reply- "No, I and my family do not live on your crumbs and your benevolence...we provide services that you need.. and you don't even pay us properly"...

## GIRLS PLAYING FOOTBALL: A GOAL AND A MEDIUM OF EMPOWERMENT



- Promote girl's participation in sports
- Break patriarchal barriers and gender norms, breaking the barriers for self - development
- Girls become leaders, role models, change makers for other girls and spread awareness using football as medium
- Football coaching opens employment opportunity for girls
- Prevention of child marriage and violence against girl children
- Community is made aware of the fact that girls too can play a game that is regarded as a "masculine sport"

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES ...

**"Why Football?",  
was the  
question asked.**

"It was not an easy task for us to encourage girls into sports due to strict control over them, their bodies, and minds by gender norms. We organised several dialogues, meetings, and activities for girls and their families to convince them to join football.

Everyone asked us, why football? 'Soft' or indoor games are more suitable for girls' bodies; sports, anyway, is a waste of time, we were told. According to the community, girls playing football -running and jumping in open field, will 'attract' people, especially boys or men. We were shocked to hear similar things from teachers, especially teachers of physical education.

Parents and girls breaking stereotypes of what girls can do has been a great challenge. During the process, we realised how sports enables girls to enjoy freedom, feel empowered, and develop greater confidence about their bodies."

**MJAS TEAM MEMBER**



## Finding a ground to play

Playgrounds existed in the villages. But, they were either encroached upon by villagers or over grown with wild shrubs. The land was unlevelled.

- The woman Sarpanch in Sankariya village got the panchayat to level the playground and collected ₹ 3000 through personal contributions for filling up holes in the playground.
- In village Chachiyawas, 26 girls started playing by preparing the ground on someone's private farm land. They then got together and went to the Chairperson of the Zila Parishad (District Elected Council) demanding a playground. The Chairperson urgently called his engineers to prepare the ground in the village and allocated ₹ 25000/- from the district council fund to the purpose.
- In Hasiyawas village, the school management committee took on the responsibility and organized voluntary work for clearing the ground.

## Shorts and Jersey – Overcoming the 'clothes' challenge

It was socially difficult for girls to wear shorts and jerseys. So, having been allowed to play football by their reluctant families, they began playing in salwars. The next step was to wear their shorts over their churidaars or tights.... then they began folding up their salwars or churidaars. Soon enough there were girls running around on the fields in their football kits.

## Teachers insisted playing football would affect academics

Initially teachers were not happy. Their main worry was around 'how they would control the girls if they became too forward'. Some warned that all girls will fail in exams. Several other teachers were witness to this incident but none said anything nor objected.

The 2017 academic results of the girls surprised everyone. All the girls had not only passed their exams but, improved their marks over the previous year. In 2018 most girls passed with good percentage, scoring more than 55-60% and 4 girls scored 80 to 85%.

**It was the first time ever in our lives that we wore shorts.... what a joy it was for us to shed the veils and don shorts and jerseys and run around with abandon, kicking the ball.**

**SMITA, CLASS 8 STUDENT**

**"No. My daughter will not wear knicker and T-shirt; neither will she play. What will people say about such a big girl playing in the open? "**

**RAMSINGH RAJPUT, SANKARIYA**

*Komal's father was apprehensive. A daily wage earner, he had stopped Komal's education due to financial constraints when she failed her class eight. After knowing that Komal was interested in playing and continuous persuasion by MJAS, he finally permitted her to play. Komal plays very well and had also applied privately to appear for the tenth class examination, in which she performed well.*



## THE PROCESS...

The girls now play in their villages. For specialised training, the girls are brought together for residential camps.

Two residential football camps were held in Ajmer – first was a six-day summer camp 2017 while the second was ten-day winter camp in 2017. The girls were selected based on their skill, willingness to stay away from home and the parents who were finally willing to give their consent in writing.

Residential camps are an opportunity for development of girls along with advanced football coaching. They are given training in:

1. Strengthening citizenship
2. Safety and security
3. Physical and mental health

A module called 'Saath- Saath' is used for strengthening citizenship and equality. It helps participants to deepen their understanding of rights and responsibilities. Training for safety and security is done using the 'Wenlido' techniques. It is a feminist way of preventing and resisting violence. They are also given inputs on how to address sexual violence, physical and mental health and menstrual hygiene.

### What the girls said after the residential football camp

Staying out of our homes was a different experience for us. We never felt such freedom before. When we ran on the field, throwing away our chunnies, it felt like we did not want to stop running.

In these camps they got a chance to meet with Minister of Women and Child, Education Minister, Chairperson of District Counsel, and other - district officials and visit to Legal Services Authority etc.

To bring the local communities on board, they are encouraged to contribute to the initiative. For example, villagers supplied milk to girls in the first camp for three days. Ajmer Dairy, a government cooperative gave free milk for another 10 day camp. A physical instructor of the school gave fruits daily. Mayo College of Ajmer provided their coaches, play ground and sports equipment to the girls.

Parents are invited to the closing event of coaching camps. This helps them to see the change in their girls and also they feel proud of their girls - who are performing confidently in grand events. It helps to change in their mindset and perspective towards girl children.



**"Trying to make a difference one football at a time. Nothing better than empowering women and girls through the sport."**

Our inspiring Ambassador  
**MS. TANVIE HANS**  
*A footballer and a creative soul.*

First woman from India to play for a Premier League Club | Ex-Tottenham and Ex-Fulham Ladies player | Head coach and Football Format Head at Cult (pan-India).

## WAY FORWARD

The stage has been set for football to be the medium for girls to exercise their autonomy, break social norms and develop in their own way. Girls are very enthusiastic to move forward, and parents are hoping their daughters would become stronger to face every situation in life. Now... the ground is ready for girls to move forward to the GOAL - what they decide for themselves with strength.

We need to continue this process...

## SUPPORT THE INITIATIVE

For the girls to be able to continue to play and grow, this initiative needs to be supported. The girls need kits and training. The camps need to be organized and the coaches paid. For all this, there is a need for support –which can be in cash or kind. The girls also need mentors – professionals who can inspire and guide them.



**HAQ: Centre for Child Rights**  
B-1/2, Ground Floor, Malviya Nagar,  
New Delhi 110017 INDIA  
T: +91 (0)11 26673599 / 26677412 / 41077977  
F: +91 (0)11 26674688  
E: [info@haqcrc.org](mailto:info@haqcrc.org)  
W: [www.haqcrc.org](http://www.haqcrc.org)



**Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti**  
46, Chitracoot Colony, Makarwali Road,  
Vaishali Nagar, Ajmer, Rajasthan,  
India 305001  
T: +91 (0)145 264 0275  
E: [mahila.janadhikar@gmail.com](mailto:mahila.janadhikar@gmail.com)  
W: [www.mjas.weebly.com](http://www.mjas.weebly.com)