



IKEA Foundation



# Empowering Adolescents



by breakthrough



# Summary of **Situational Analysis** **on Adolescents** in UP

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Supported by: **IKEA Foundation**



## Adolescent empowerment program

Breakthrough has a long history and experience of working with young people. Youth constitutes an important constituency for all Breakthrough interventions ranging from interventions on early marriage; domestic violence; sexual harassment at public places etc. The focus on young people as change actors is deliberate. The youth are tomorrow's voters, decision makers and change actors. This focus sits well with the demographic dividend with 65% of India's population being young. Such a demographic advantage offers a significant opportunity for change.

Adolescents (10-19 years) constitute about 22.8% (232 million) of India's population. Adolescent girls between 10-19 years constitute close to half (111 million) of this population group<sup>1</sup>. Adolescence represents a critical stage of transition from childhood to maturity. The physical and emotional experiences, knowledge and skills acquired during this phase have important implications during adulthood.

Gender-related challenges such as restrictions on mobility, lack of schooling or dropping out of school, early marriage and violence persist in creating unfair disadvantages for girls within this large group of adolescents in India. Son preference and the marginalization of girls are widespread and reflected in wide gender disparities in education and workforce participation. Even though girls' school enrolment and gross school enrolment have increased in the last three decades, girls' enrolment in higher levels of education is still very low<sup>2</sup>. This is because increased female enrolment is compromised by persistently high rates of drop out and poor attendance of girls relative to boys.

In continuance of its organizational commitment to work with young people and their empowerment, Breakthrough with support from IKEA Foundation, is implementing the '*Empowering Adolescents*' project in seven districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh. The project seeks to engage and empower 400,000 adolescents with macro-level social, educational, health and economic multiplier benefits. Using an empowerment model as its conceptual and implementation tool, it will work with schools and with communities using media campaigns and community mobilization methods. It seeks to work proactively with community-based institutions like self-help groups, *NariSanghs*, *KishoriSanghs* etc. A Situation Analysis study was undertaken by its M&E partner, NRMC to provide inputs for finalizing the intervention strategy and activities, the criteria for selection of the Gram panchayats based on data, and indicators for the logical framework. Following is a summary of the findings of the study and key recommendations on intervention strategies.

## Grounding the project: The empowerment framework

The ability of adolescents - both girls and boys to make decisions about matters that affect their lives is a critical aspect of empowerment, but socialization that starts

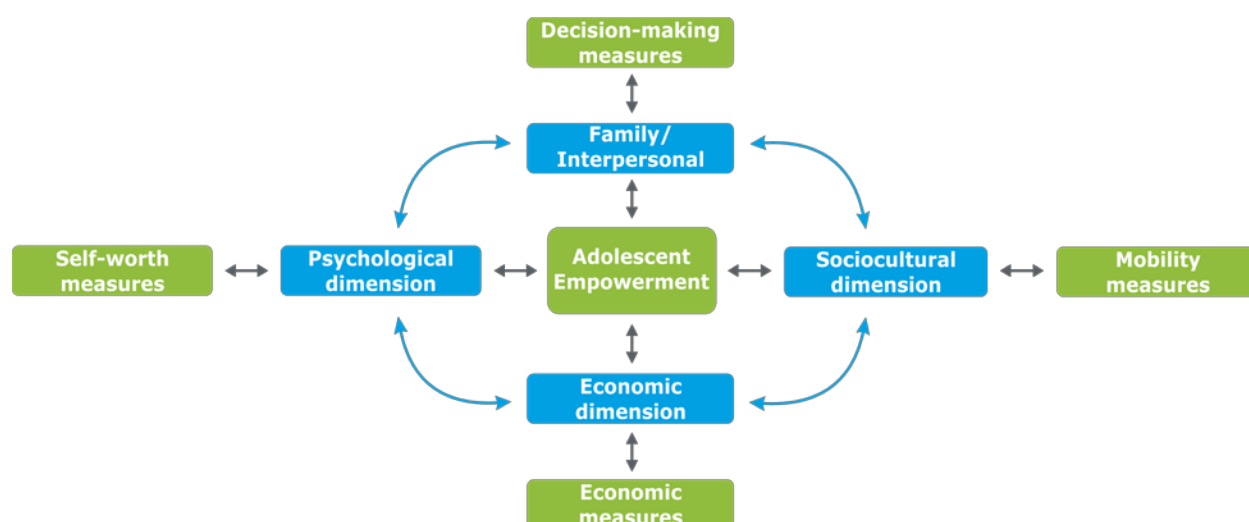
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<sup>1</sup> Adolescents in India, A Profile, UNFPA for UN systems in India, 2003

<sup>2</sup> M. Bandyopadhyay & R Subramanian, Gender Equity in Education: A Review of Trends and Factors, Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity, Pathways to Access, Research Monograph No. 18, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, April 2008

early in life and during the adolescent period with the influence of gender, religion and caste often poses a barrier for adolescents to make their decisions. For both boys and girls adolescence is a crucial stage - creating identity crisis, gender pressure, discrimination and violence, affecting the safe and healthy transition from childhood to adulthood.

Naila Kabeer refers to empowerment as expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Thus empowerment encompasses the context in which the person lives, the agency or ability to take decisions (process) and the achievements which is the outcome of choices<sup>3</sup>. Most published literature relates to the role of agency in defining empowerment. Agency at the individual level comprises of four broad dimensions: (i) socio-cultural, for example freedom of movement, (ii) familial/ interpersonal, for example, participation in domestic decision making, (iii) psychological, for example, self-esteem and self-efficacy and (iv) economic, for example, access to and control over own and family resources.



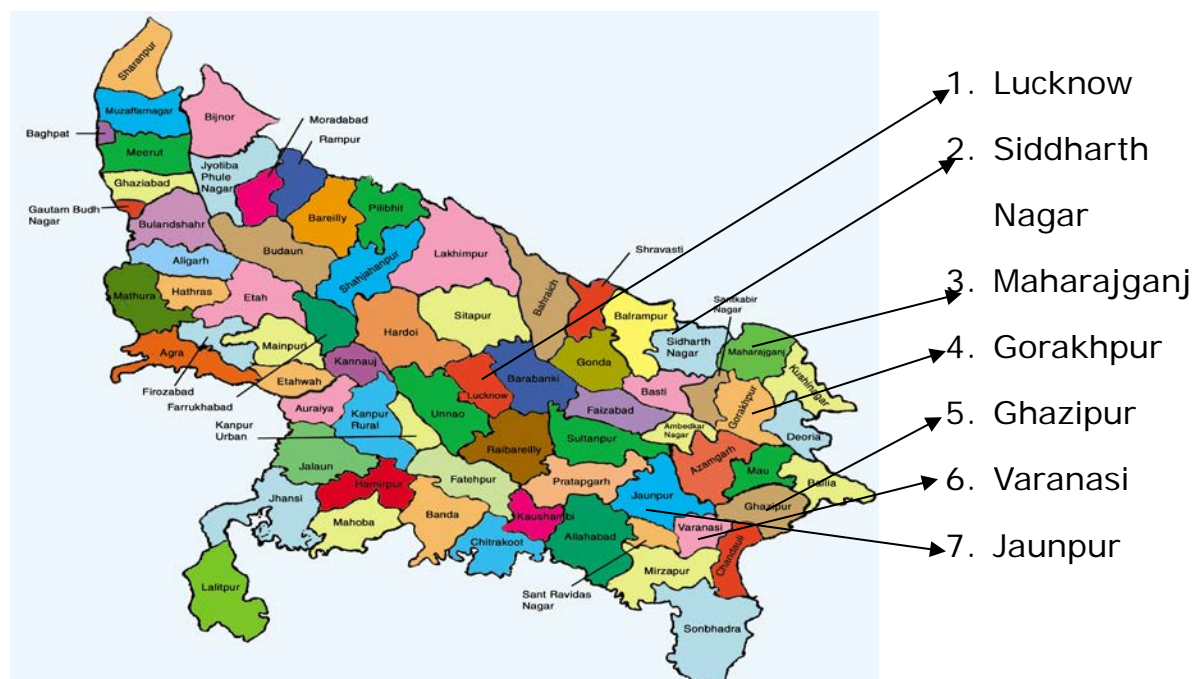
*Source: Understanding Adolescent Empowerment: A Qualitative Exploration, Population Council & UNICEF, July 2014*

For the purposes of the project, the Empowerment Framework was adapted to provide a robust conceptual tool to ground programme work with adolescents. Socio-cultural empowerment was articulated as (i) freedom to use cycle for increased mobility and (ii) freedom to use mobiles for communication by the adolescents in the project area. Familial or interpersonal empowerment was articulated as participation in domestic decision making around (i) whether and what to study (ii) whom and when to get married, and (iii) whether, when and what work to take up. Psychological empowerment was described as challenging the gender stereotypes at various levels. Resource or economic empowerment, was determined as access to and control over own and family resources such as (i) use of the bicycle, mobile, earnings/ money and (ii) non-discrimination in domestic work leading to control over one's own time.

<sup>3</sup> N. Kabeer, 'Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment' in *Discussing Women's Empowerment-Theory and Practice*, Sida Studies No. 3, Stockholm, 2001

## The study methodology

The situation analysis was conducted over two phases. In the first phase, the study was conducted in one district (Lucknow) and based on the top-line findings and suggestions; the second phase was rolled out in the remaining six districts of Uttar Pradesh.



The study was qualitative in design and covered a range of primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders. One block per district was covered in each of the seven districts. A summary list of the stakeholders is presented below:

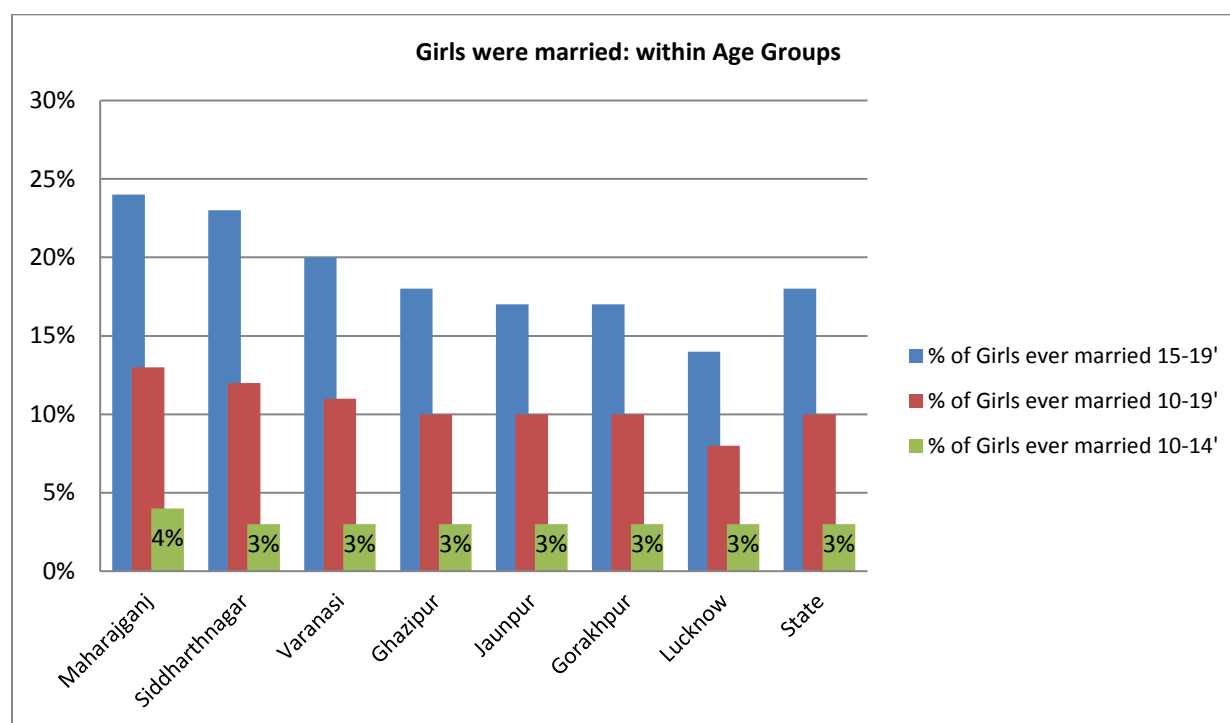
Stakeholders (approx. number)	Details
<b>Adolescents (450)</b>	Girls and boys 10-19 years in school; class 7/8/9/11; out of school in SC, minority habitations, <i>Kishori Sanghs</i>
<b>Gatekeepers (80)</b>	Mothers/ Fathers/ In-laws
<b>Duty bearers (60)</b>	PRIs, Police, Doctor, BEO, CDPO, ANMs/ ASHAs, Teacher/ Principal, AWW
<b>CSOs/ NGOs (75)</b>	SHG members/ NGOs

The study collected qualitative data around key gender and development indicators that are relevant to the lives of adolescents and have long-term implications on their life choices. A summary of the data is discussed below.

## Early marriage

Being the most populous state within India, Uttar Pradesh (UP) ranks first in terms of adolescent population in the country. As per the Census 2011<sup>4</sup>, in Uttar Pradesh, around 2 million adolescent girls, i.e. 9.2 percent of all girls of ages 10-19 years were married. Around one million children, highest in India in absolute terms, were born to these adolescent girls in Uttar Pradesh and 10.1 percent of those babies died.

An analysis of prevalence of ever married adolescent girls in the age groups: 10-14 year old and 15-19 year (Census 2011) in seven project districts shows some worrying trends. While early marriages among adolescent girls of age 10-14 years in the project districts were low at 3-4 percent, the percentage rises significantly in the age group of 15-19 years. This age group also coincides with the onset of puberty. While Maharajganj and Siddharthnagar had the highest proportions – 24 to 23 percent, who were ever married, Varanasi at an average of 20 percent showed a higher prevalence too.



Source: Census 2011

The remaining four districts had 14 to 18 percent, who were married, with Lucknow having the lowest proportion. In terms of absolute numbers, among 10-19 year old

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/indias-13-million-child-brides-their-6-million-children-71955>



adolescent girls, Jaunpur had the highest number of girls who were ever married (50,695), followed by Gorakhpur, Ghazipur, Maharajganj, Siddharthnagar, Varanasi and Lucknow (15,351).

A further analysis of the census data reveals that the prevalence of early marriage is higher in Scheduled Caste (SC) as compared to non SC communities. The proportion of ever married adolescent females of age 15-19 years, among SC communities ranged from 19 to 33 percent, while the same range among non-SC communities ranged from 17 to 24 percent. It will be important to note that overall, SC communities also fare low along other social economic development indicators of education, employment, poverty etc.

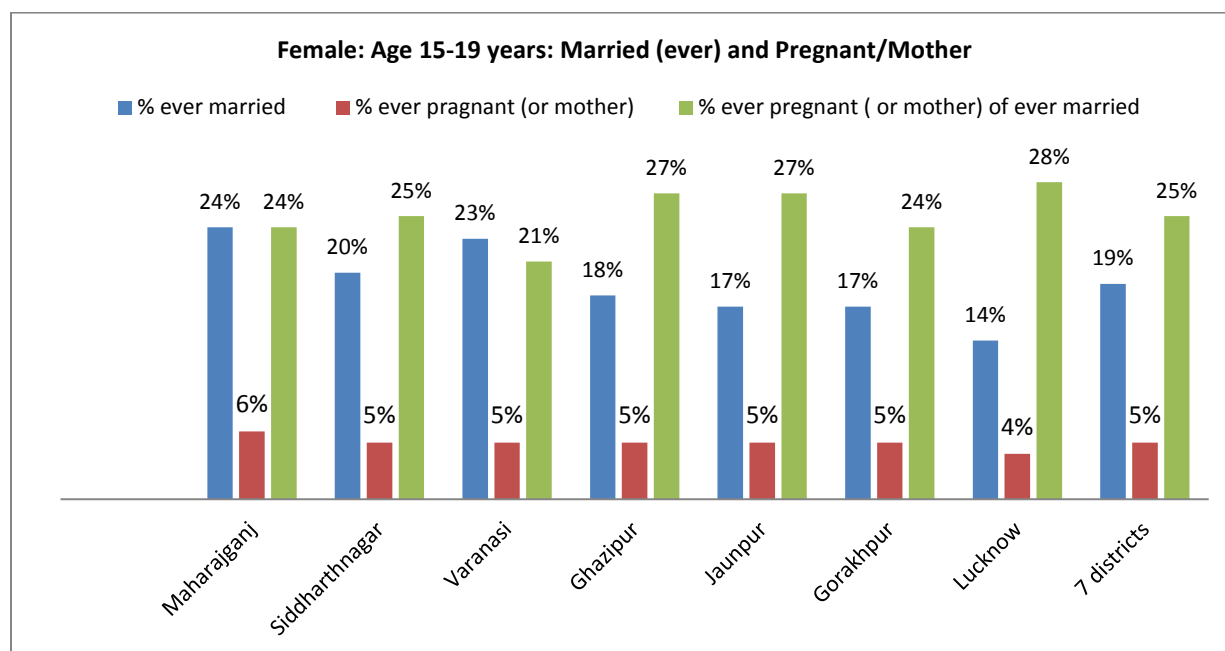
The discussion held with key stakeholders as part of the study corroborate the existing evidence that prevailing unequal gender norms and gender practices continue to place a low value to women's role and contribution to society, which lead to the continued practice of early marriage. The discussion with household members clearly affirms this fact. Girls were primarily seen to have a reproductive and domestic role; as future prospective mothers and working domestic workers who would relive all other members in the family of their domestic chores and responsibilities. During the discussion, some of the members even noted that ***"as soon as girls dropped out of school, their her grooming to get married and perform duties of an ideal daughter-in-law accelerates and she becomes eligible for marriage, within a year or two"***. Poverty and the ever-increasing demand for dowry were other reasons cited for early marriage.

In addition, discussion at the community level highlighted how patriarchal values translate into controlling women's and girl's reproductive and sexual rights. The fear of family 'dishonor' through sexual assault on a daughter or an elopement was cited as a reason for marrying daughters early. What was particularly striking was the insecurity of parents and guardians and their fear that the girls of the household could 'choose their own life partners' which would bring dishonor to the family.

Discussions held with the younger cohort (adolescent boys and girls) indicate some worrying trends and builds a stronger case for continuing to work with these populations. Many of the adolescent boys expressed strong opinions about early marriage: they did not want to marry early to strengthen their educational and employment prospects, while at the same time wanting their sisters to marry early. Similarly, while adolescent girls express the need for daughters studying further, they primarily saw the role of the sister in law as someone who would relive her (the daughter) of household responsibilities. Similarly, while her status as the daughter in the family would rise automatically, inversely the daughter in law would then be placed at the lowest rung in the social/familial hierarchy within the household. Such contradictions in perception indicate the pervasive internalization of patriarchal and gender unequal norms and behaviors. It is critical to continue to work with young cohorts to alter these norms.

## Early pregnancy

Associated closely with early marriage is the issue of early pregnancy. There is a high social premium on fertility, which is reinforced through cultural practices and customs. Most of adolescent fertility, which is many times a result of sexual violence or forced sex, occurs within marriage in India. High adolescent fertility contributes to an elevated risk of maternal death and disability especially in adolescent girls<sup>5</sup>. UP has one of the highest Maternal Mortality Rates (285) in the country as against 167 for the whole of India in 2013<sup>6</sup>.



Source: Census 2011

An analysis of census data for the seven project districts suggests that Jaunpur has the highest number of children born to adolescent girls, with the situation almost equally grim in Ghazipur and Gorakhpur. Around one out of four adolescent girls (15-19 years), who were ever married, had become pregnant at least once within the age range of 15-19 years. The qualitative data collected during the situation analysis study confirmed the known effects of early marriage and early pregnancy on the lives of adolescent girls, and the high social premium to prove fertility.

Interactions with mothers and daughters affirmed that there was tremendous pressure to ***'prove one's fertility within a year of marriage'***. This was true both for daughters in law and the married daughters of the family. Parents did not approve of delayed pregnancies. While adolescent girls expressed the desire to delay pregnancy, they also felt that as daughters in law in the family they neither had the voice nor the necessary information on contraceptives to delay pregnancy. Thus, they ***'would have to succumb to the pressure to bear children as soon as they are***

<sup>5</sup><http://medind.nic.in/ice/t13/i12/icet13i12p444.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>Office of the registrar general and census commissioner, India.

**married’.** Lack of access to information on appropriate use of contraceptives is a challenge that married adolescent girls face in the community. Discussion with participants in the field suggested that, front line workers including the ASHA or the *Anganwadi* workers (AWW) were not encouraged to meet newly-wed adolescent girls, until they entered late pregnancy. In addition, the frontline workers who are drawn from the local community (and thus reflect the same social norms and attitudes) do not perceive newly married young adolescent girls as their prime constituency. In very few cases, where girls reported having some knowledge about contraception, they did not have the ‘voice’ to discuss contraception with their partners including spacing children. They felt, discussions on prevention of STDs and HIV were completely out of their purview.

The low social status of the daughter in law particularly in the family hierarchy and community collectives is a notable feature. As a daughter in law, she faces severe restrictions on her mobility and her interactions with the outside world are closely controlled and monitored. Even outside the family, the ‘new’ daughter in law is conspicuous by her absence in community collectives like the Kishori Sanghs and the Mahila Mandals.

## Gender based violence (GBV)

Gender based violence (GBV) is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world. It knows no social, economic or national boundaries. It undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of people living with it, yet remains shrouded in a culture of silence. The impact of it is manifold – physical as well as psychological. Within the category of women, adolescent girls constitute an especially vulnerable group owing to many socio-cultural factors. In India, 39% of currently married women age 15-49 reported ‘ever experiencing’ any physical or sexual or emotional violence in their current marriage and 27% reported experiencing violence in the past 12 months.

The data at the national level is corroborated by state level data. According to the NFHS-3, 42 percent of ever-married women in Uttar Pradesh reported facing spousal violence. The state ranks third (after Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal) in crimes against women<sup>7</sup>.

Women are also victimized for marrying in other castes/ religions, rejecting an arranged marriage or engaging in premarital/ extra-marital relations. Given the highly patriarchal society and family norms, not surprisingly, the majority of crimes against women are committed by family members. Strong cultural norms governing masculinity, rigid beliefs about the place of women in relation to men, and socio-economic barriers to women's autonomy all contribute to the high frequency of violence against women in UP<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> National Crimes Record Bureau, 2009

<sup>8</sup> Centre for Health and Social Justice: Process Document on Supporting Men's Actions to Eliminate Violence in Uttar Pradesh 2009-2011.

Discussion with the participants in the field as part of the study, revealed the prevalence as well as acceptability of violence as a way of life. While respondents chose to speak about physical violence, there was complete silence around sexual violence. In marital relationships, violence meted out by a husband was considered very normal – something which needed to stay within the house and internally resolved.

The reasons for violence ranged from ***‘not preparing food properly’*** to ***‘not doing household work’***. As one of the participants in the community noted, ***“Therefore we prepare the girl child to do all household works so that she doesn’t have to deal with it. Nevertheless if she still faces domestic violence at her marital home, she has to bear it”***. The lack of natal support for women living with violence was apparent as both men and women in the community felt that a woman’s place after marriage was her marital home and that they ‘wouldn’t accept a daughter back if she leaves her marital home after she is married’.

Interestingly, the conversations with adolescent girls showed how violence was used to keep young girls within the household under control. While confirming the violence that they see within their own houses, adolescent girls narrated how they were beaten by their brothers for not ***‘listening to them’*** and for ***‘talking to boys’*** which would bring ***‘dishonor to the family’***. On the other hand, adolescent boys were beaten by their parents for ***‘not studying’***, while girls were beaten if they did not do the ***‘household work’***. Use of the mobile for ***‘talking to friends’***, ***‘listening to songs’*** or ***‘dressing inappropriately’*** by adolescent girls was another reason cited for use of violence by parents and brothers.

Recourse to formal redress mechanisms was limited with only some cases of elderly married women approaching the pradhan for redress. In extreme cases, where police complaints were filed, compromise or a ‘solution’ was the first option preferred by women and advocated by the police. Awareness on the availability of the Women helpline 1090 and the Child Helpline (1098) was extremely low.

## Sexual harassment in public spaces

While there was absolute silence and resistance to discuss sexual violence within relationships, the community and family members seemed more comfortable to discuss sexual harassment. The fear of harassment was cited as a major reason for girls dropping out of school especially, if they had to travel alone to school. The fear of harassment was cited as a reason to justify restrictions on mobility of girls- especially adolescents. However, the attitude to harassment seemed almost lackadaisical- as something which was like an irritant rather than a major concern. Moreover, many of the community members felt that some girls ‘invited’ it by their ‘behavior’ and the ‘clothes’ that they wore. In addition, while use of bicycles by girls to aid access to schools is seen as an emerging success story in some states, in Uttar Pradesh it also highlighted the limitations on mobility. Young boys and community members noted that while girls using cycles in school uniforms were seen favorably

by the community, girls otherwise using bicycles (without uniforms) as a means of transport were frowned upon. Such girls were usually seen as 'spoilt' and wayward. Some young girls attested to the fact that they faced harassment on way to the school or to the farms. However, they refrained from discussing the issue with their parents on the fear that their education would be discontinued or they themselves would be blamed. Most noted that their coping strategy was to change the route to escape such harassment. While harassment was oft quoted for school drop-out rates by community members, on being probed further, they were unable to recall a recent incident or knew the survivor first-hand. It seemed to be used as an overt reason to restrict the mobility, communication and education of the adolescent girl, while the covert reason remained basic: control girls 'mobility and sexuality in an effort to prevent them from choosing their own partners.

## Adolescent education

National Family Health Survey-3 (NFHS) shows an inverse correlation between education and marriage: higher the education, lower the odds of girls aged 15-17 being married. Similarly, lower are the odds that girls aged 18-24 would have been married before age 18. Education has a direct link with child bearing too. The proportion of girls who have begun childbearing is about three times as high among girls who have no education as girls who have 10 or more years of education<sup>9</sup>.

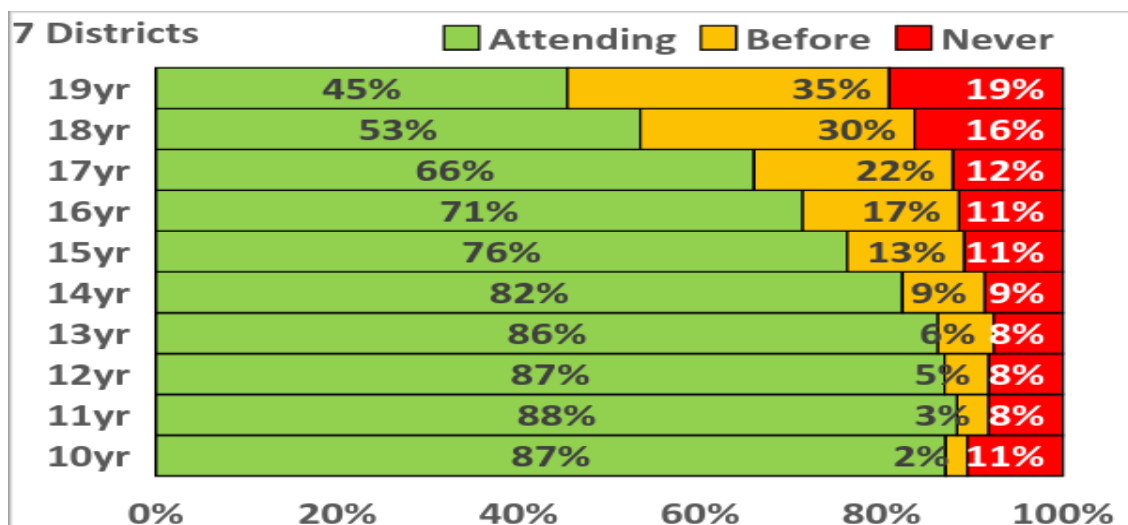
An analysis of the census data for the seven project-districts shows that around 80 percent of girls were attending an educational institution, in the age group 10-14 years. However, among 15-19 year old cohort, the proportion drops- varying from 75 percent to less than 50 percent across districts. The percentage falls further by 4 to 8 percent among SC populations. While Varanasi, Jaunpur, and Ghazipur fared better, Gorakhpur was at the lowest rung.

***Amongst the districts, Sidharthnagar fares very poorly with the percentage of girls out of school in the age 15 years being as high as 47%. This reiterates the importance of focusing interventions in Siddharthnagar.***

***The discussions with the parents and the community across the districts revealed deep seated gender bias and discrimination related to education of girls as compared to boys.***

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<sup>9</sup> Status of Children in 14-18 Years: Review of Policy, Programme and Legislative Framework 2012-2013, by National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) <http://ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lang=1&level=2&&sublinkid=300&lid=739>



The district wise data further indicates that the percentage of girls out of school increases with increase in age. Cumulatively across districts, the percentage of out of school girls in the age group 12 years is 8 percent which increases to 11% for girls aged 15 years. As can be seen for the graph below, the percentage keeps increasing as age increases.

In resource constraint settings and particularly in gender differentiated societies, parents make a rational decision to invest in the education of boys compared to girls. This is based on the premise that boys will provide old age support while girls would be married away. This rationale percolates down to all other decisions in the household which relate to resource division and allocation. While such rationale was cited by participants in the project sites, the fear that adolescent girls 'getting spoilt or eloping' was another major reason that seemed to restrict girl's continuance in school. This was also one of the reasons why girls going unescorted by a male, even if going with peer females, was not viewed very favorably by the community.

In addition, what was particularly striking across the districts was the low awareness on government schemes and facilities that promote education. While some of the participants including parents had knowledge about mid day meals, there was dearth of awareness on other affirmative schemes like Ragiv Gandhi scheme for empowerment of Adolescent girls (SABLA), Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) etc. This was true for duty bearers too.

On the supply side, DISE data for all the 7 districts for 2014-15 shows that the number of government schools that include Primary and Upper Primary were not many, which is one of the major reasons for children dropping out after class 5. There is also a shortage in the number of teachers in middle schools. Thus the availability of schools and the quality of education were areas of concern. The community perceived the quality of education to be better in private schools compared to government.



## Adolescent health

According to India Health Report<sup>10</sup>, 36.7 percent adolescent girls (15-18 years old) in Uttar Pradesh have low Body Mass Index (<18.5) and almost half of the adolescent girls (age 15-19 year) are anemic<sup>11</sup>. Also, 50.4 percent children under 5 years in the state were stunted, presumably an intergenerational impact of low health status of adolescents and women in general. While at the macro level, structural issues like nutrition security plague the owing to low coverage under mid-day meal and public distribution system<sup>12</sup>, gender inequity in household decision making (with regard to distribution of food and rest /leisure) tilts the balance in favor of boys as compared to girls.

While male adolescents reportedly had more 'leisure time' at their disposal, either for play or rest or activity of their choice, female adolescents had hardly any 'time for rest', not even after coming back from school. Intra-household dynamics also play a role in health and nutrition of adolescent girls. It was noted that only when a sister-in-law, (brother's wife) was present at home, that the unmarried adolescent girls reported to have more time for rest or for the activity of their choice or leisure. The hierarchy in terms of time poverty clearly indicates that within a household, the adult males were at the top, the adult females lower, female adolescent girls yet lower and the lowest was the married adolescent girl. This bias was also clear in the distribution of food. While women and girls eating last was 'usual and normal to happen', even the quantity of food 'needed' by a man/boy and a woman/girl of the same age was skewed in favor of men and boys. In addition, discussion with parents, the adolescent girls revealed that the health needs of adolescents girls was clearly not a priority. General health complaints were either ignored or 'taken to an uncertified doctor in the village'. Parents rarely reported taking the girls to the government health facility for problems related to menstruation or adolescent health. Allocating resources for adolescent health was very low within the priority of needs for the family. Mothers hardly discussed sexual and reproductive health with their daughters. Most of the adolescent girls reported using cloth instead of sanitary napkin during menstruation.

Anaemia and leucorrhea were reported as key health needs of the adolescent girls. Anaemia was also reported as a health concern amongst boys. Factors contributing to poor health of adolescent girls were limited knowledge about - menstrual hygiene (hygienic methods of protection during menstrual period), sexual and reproductive health (contraception, HIV/ AIDS, reproduction) and applicable services through anganwadi or ASHA worker, various government schemes etc. While lack of knowledge posed a serious challenge, gender inequitable norms and practices further compromised the health of adolescent girls. Restrictions on mobility, low access to financial resources, low priority accorded to girl's health in family, were some of the underlying factors influencing poor health and access to health services among adolescent girls.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.transformnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/12/Uttar-P-Fast-Facts.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Also, half of the women population (age 15-49 year) are anaemic

<sup>12</sup> According to India Health Report, the coverage of Mid Day Meal Scheme among eligible children was 32.5% and only 24.4% households (rural and urban) reporting consumption through Public Distribution System.

## Testing the empowerment framework: What does the data show?

The Project has adapted the Empowerment Framework as a conceptual tool to guide and grounds its activities. The criticality of the Empowerment framework lies in centralizing the role of agency in defining empowerment. As indicated in earlier sections of the report, agency at the individual level is said to comprise of four broad pillars: **socio-cultural** (including freedom of movement and freedom of communication); **familial/ interpersonal** (including participation in domestic decision making or self-directing their life-course); **psychological** (including self-esteem and self-efficacy); and **resource/ economic** (including access to and control over own and family resources including funds/ property, food, material goods, work/ labour and time resources). The situation analysis study attempted to test the four dimensions of agency by collecting qualitative data from the project districts.

### The first pillar: Socio-cultural empowerment

- **Freedom of movement**

The onset of puberty marks the beginning of restrictions on mobility imposed by family on adolescent girls. Movements of the girls are monitored closely and as a rule they need to be accompanied by someone if going out of the house. Some of the girls noted that they were even escorted to the school by male family members. This was the case when girls needed to visit health facilities, the market/village fair. Going out of the house to meet friends was completely disallowed. This perhaps explains the reason as to why young girls as compared to boys are unable to build a social network which has implications on their personal as well as professional growth. Most of the community members and family justified the severe restrictions on mobility in the garb of 'safety'. However, what was particularly striking was the taboo attached to young girls using cycles other than commuting to schools. Most of the community members noted that such girls would be seen as '*spoilt girls in bad company*'.

Some of the best practices observed during the study, revolved around encouraging and providing support to women and adolescent girls to access government offices to claim their entitlements and rights. For example, the members of some *NariSanghs/ MahilaMandal* had visited the local District Magistrates' office several times during local *Tehsil Diwas*. What is important to note here is that there seems atleast some semblance of community approval of women and young girls accessing 'neutral' places like government offices. However, places like shops/mobile recharge centres and music downloads were completely out of bounds for young girls in particular.

- **Freedom of communication**

While there are several examples of how effective use of technology can aid access to information and knowledge even in settings where mobility is constrained, adolescent girls in the project districts do not seem to enjoy this advantage. This is because girls in the community do not have access to such technology. The use and reach of mobile has penetrated far and wide within the country, even surpassing the



TV and radio, but interactions with young girls in the community revealed that they have access to none of these sources. The mobile in particular was out of bounds for adolescent girls. For all the girls, the idea of owning and using a mobile was aspirational. Girls reported not being allowed to use or even touch the mobile phones at home. Mothers of the adolescent girls even opposed the idea of their daughters using mobiles for talking to their classmates for school work. The adolescent boys had similar views and felt that mobiles were not needed for girls. Some of the young boys also noted that the only time that their sisters could listen to songs was when it was being played by them (the brothers)- songs of their own choice. There was no question of girls listening to songs of their own will at their own preferred time.

## **The second pillar: Familial/ interpersonal empowerment**

- **Participation in domestic decision making**

Discussions with girls in the community affirmed that girls hardly had decision making power within their households- particularly over decisions that affected their own lives. Economic empowerment is often seen as providing a leveraging point for young women to negotiate their position and status within the family. However, young girls noted that even when women were earning; it did not necessarily increase their position within the family. While, it did increase women's own confidence and self worth, it did not necessarily translate into greater decision making. Young girls aspired for basic decision making abilities that affected their daily lives: visiting places outside home, meet friends, access health facilities as needed, use transport, access higher educational and skill building institutions.

- **Self-directing own life-course**

Closely related to decision making, is the ability of young girls to decide on their life choices. The discussion with the young girls revealed their fears and distress at not being able to decide on factors that determined their lives. Many of the young girls noted that they had no choice in deciding when and whom to marry; when and how many children to have as these decisions were taken by parents- the girls were never consulted. For some of the adolescent girls who had been married and had not yet been initiated into *gauna* (co-habitation), the prospect of abdicating all decisions into the husband's family was extremely distressing. All the girls expressed the need to be consulted by their parents in such important decisions that had an impact on their lives. However, given the low social status of the daughter and in particular the daughter in law, such abilities were severely restricted for the adolescent girls.

At this point it would be relevant to bring in the discussion on aspirations of the youth. The discussion with the adolescent girls revealed that almost all of them aspired to be educated and finally independent. They clearly saw education and employment as routes to greater decision making within the house. They saw careers in tailoring, stitching, working in computer centres etc. One of the girls from the community who was employed at a marketing agency was referred to as a role model. The girls felt that the boys in the family enjoyed an advantage over them. They cited examples of how they were able to convince elders to send them for skill development courses

even in cases where there were limited resources. Parents preferred to invest in their sons rather than daughters- as the former would serve as their old age support. The boys saw a career in mobile repair; working in computer centres; etc and seemed to be better aware than girls on available government schemes that promoted skill development amongst the youth. While adolescent girls seemed to have almost no knowledge about such existing schemes, the boys in comparison seemed better informed, yet did not have full information. This builds the case for raising awareness about existing government schemes.

### The third pillar: Psychological empowerment:

- **Self-esteem and self-efficacy**

Discussions with young adolescent boys, girls, parents and community members revealed deeply embedded gender norms prevalent in the community. These norms create acceptable models of behavior for young boys and girls and a strong social pressure to conform to it. Such norms influence how adolescents perceive themselves; their aspirations; and their life choices.

Good Boys	Good Girls
<b>Expectations around household matters</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expected to earn for a living.</li> <li>• No other restrictions-given complete freedom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should be good at household work like cooking, cleaning, looking after children and elderly</li> <li>• If necessary, prioritize helping in the household over education</li> </ul>
<b>Marriage and Sexuality</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expected to earn well and be financially settled</li> <li>• Bear the burden of earning from an early age: sometimes even at the at the cost of education</li> <li>• Not to be friends with any girls</li> <li>• Control women after marriage.</li> <li>• Not talk about sex and sexuality</li> <li>• Marry soon after earning - however no freedom of choice in selection of partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be groomed as the ideal daughter-in-law by getting trained in household chores and skills</li> <li>• Not to be friends with boys</li> <li>• Should be sexually passive</li> <li>• Not talk about sex and sexuality</li> <li>• Marry early-however no freedom of choice in selection of partner</li> </ul>
<b>Relationships</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expected to avoid forms of violence and bullying.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expected to respect and obey elders</li> </ul>
<b>Mobility and Clothing</b>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No restriction on mobility.</li> <li>• No restrictions on what to wear (clothes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expected to stay within the four walls of the house, mobility is restricted, especially for married girls</li> <li>• Only wear 'modest' clothes</li> </ul>
<b>Education and Employment</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do well in school</li> <li>• Expectation to financially support their parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should be educated so that her marriage prospects increase vis a vis being married to an educated husband but not 'too educated' as that would make her a 'bad mother'</li> </ul>

While the social pressure to be a 'good daughter and daughter in law' were high on girls, young boys spoke about the pressures of being the 'provider' for the family. For the young boys, the pressure to earn and support the family starts soon after passing class XII. Many of the boys spoke of peers who discontinued their studies after class VIII, migrating to other cities in search of better employment opportunities. Major destination cities were reported as being Mumbai and Delhi, where the majority of male adults migrated annually and visited their families back in the villages for two months in a year. For the minority communities like Muslims, the major destination was reported as being Saudi Arabia, followed by Mumbai.

## The fourth pillar: Resource/ economic empowerment

### • Access to and control over own and family resources

*Access to bicycle:* It became apparent as part of the study, that even when a household had a cycle, on account of the government scheme (where girls were given cycles and encouraged to cycle their way to school), its' access and control was determined by the male members of the households. In addition, girls using cycles other than commuting to school was unfavorably seen by the community.

*Access to mobile phone:* While young girls aspired to own and use a mobile for leisure (listening to songs while they completed household work) and/or keeping in touch with their friends for school work, the girls had neither access nor control over it. Parents as well as young boys resisted the idea of young girls using mobiles. Many of the girls noted during discussion that they were not even allowed to touch the mobile at home and could pick up incoming calls only when there was no one around in the house. Discussion with the girls at both school and community level on the other hand brought forth the interest of girls in using and owning mobiles, both for the purpose of entertainment while doing household chores or leisure and for being in communication in times of need and networking. However, due to pressure both at household and community level they are not able to do so. Many of them reported that they are not even allowed to touch the mobile phones in their house unless they have to take some incoming call when there is no one around.

*Access to and control over own and family resource:* While adolescent boys seemed confident of accessing financial resources of the family, access and control over monetary resources seemed lacking for adolescent girls. This was also the case for girls who were earning. The use of financial resources (whether their own or provided to them by family) remained restricted to petty purchases (like bangles or *bindi*) and not strategic choices (like commuting to a place outside village etc.). “For buying even sanitary pads”, one of the girls narrated, “I had to ask for money and permission from the male members of the household”. Very few of the girls had savings and it seemed important for them to have some financial resources that they could use at their own behest. However, the inability of young girls who were earning to have a say in the family or their own generated income/resource raises important questions about relying on economic empowerment alone without concurrent changes in women’s position within the household as a strategy for empowerment.

*Control over own time and non-discrimination in work:* Girls belonging to the age group of 15-19 years clearly saw the discrimination meted out to them in comparison to boys in distribution of household chores and responsibilities. Many of the girls noted that they had to struggle to find the time to study as they had several household responsibilities, while the boys in the family even had the time to play. Leisure time or the ‘time to rest’ was aspirational for all the girls. Besides household chores, many of the girls reported going to work on the farms (the household’s own farm or as agriculture labourer) thereby contributing to the family income. Such work, while giving girls an opportunity to go out of the house, also increased their work load as they had to attend to household chores as well as work in the fields.

Many adolescent girls wished they had the time to rest when they came back, “like the boys, or the adults”. Reiterating the absolutely low position of the sister-in-law in the household, some girls even blamed the latter for not adequately ‘working hard enough’ to take the load off them (the daughters). Thus the daughter-in-law of the household was invariably placed at the lowest end of the pyramid in the family hierarchy having no control over work distribution and her own time.

#### **Adolescent empowerment: Key issues and key actions**

- Investing in adolescent girls to equip them with skills, confidence, and life options: through family, schools, technical and vocational education and training, and health, social and economic support systems
- Making infrastructure, services, and technology accessible to girls and effective in meeting their needs for mobility, connectivity and safety
- Continuing to advocate for making violence against girls and women visible and unacceptable both in private and public domains
- Engaging and involving boys and men to be advocates for young girls empowerment especially in their own families
- Building a unified advocacy agenda amongst civil society by pooling resources and expertise

## Testing the theory of change: What does the data indicate and where should efforts be invested?

The proposed Theory of Change (ToC) provides the roadmap for realizing the expected outcomes of the project. One of the key outcomes is to create a shared understanding amongst civil society on the condition and position of adolescents in the community: understanding their vulnerability to violence and inequity in important spheres of health, education and livelihood. It also seeks to create a network of organizations and relevant stakeholders working collectively to promote adolescent rights and empowerment in the state. The ToC (divided in three stages) provides important pathways on how the desired change can be achieved and the strategy to be adopted.

A critical reflection on the ToC based on the emerging findings of the situation analysis point to the following recommendations:

### The first stage:

- Given the field realities and what is already evidenced by research: school drop-out rate increases with increase in age. Thus, efforts should be made to intensify direct intervention in younger age cohorts (class 6 to 8) who are more likely to be in school than older cohorts. In addition, there is increasing evidence to suggest that investing in younger cohorts as compared to older (even within the category of adolescents) is a more effective strategy to sustain change as younger cohorts are still in their formative years and more pliant to change.
- Older cohorts (15-19 years) who are not in schools are extremely vulnerable to marriage. Direct intervention with them could focus on intensifying work at the community level by engaging with existing spaces like the *Kishori Sangh*, *Anganwadi* centres, Village Health and Nutrition Day to prioritize adolescent education and health
- Engaging out of school boys poses significant challenges: they are more mobile, they migrate to cities in search of work and many existing government forums do not engage them effectively. However, in order to shift norms and for their own development and growth, boys need to be involved and engaged. Thus besides direct contact, indirect points of contact for boys could include
  - routing interventions through mobile recharge shops
  - attaching songs/ stories/ jokes with messages on recharge vouchers of mobile service provider of the area
- The Peer Educator model is a well established initiative in youth empowerment programmes. The peer educator could work in tandem with frontline workers (like ASHA and AWW) in community mobilization efforts, project implementation and monitoring of activities
- While families of adolescents can be reached through media (IVRS, messaging on phones, radio, TV etc.), direct face-to-face communication and meetings have their own relevance. SHGs, AWW, *NariSanghs*, VHND, farmers clubs wherever functioning can be leveraged to hold meetings. However, it would be

important to ensure that new married adolescent girls and their issues are represented in these forums

### **The second stage**

- Intervention in schools can be layered on the platform of *Meena Manch*, which though not very functional in the project area, does have the basic institutional arrangements in place like availability of trained teachers, radio, space for holding meeting etc. The interventions with teachers could be enrolled with teachers trained under *Meena Manch* as they would have the additional advantage of being trained and having some exposure to gender. The *Meena Manch* teachers could also be one of the conduits for IVRS intervention for adolescent girls and boys in school. Engaging school Principals in order to have their buy in would be critical
- Engaging fathers of adolescents is a critical area. While existing government forums engage mothers, fathers do not have a coinciding facility. Targeting meetings of Gram Sabha, public places where men congregate can be useful strategies to engage men. In addition, use of technology especially give's men access to it through use of IVRS, TV, mobile can be effective methods of reach out
- The situation analysis study clearly highlighted the social hierarchy within a family where a newly married daughter in law was at the bottom of the pyramid. Within the household, unmarried adolescent girls and boys (sister-in-law and brother-in-law, *nanad and devar*) can become key influencers in ensuring a better position for the daughter in law in the family
- Existing structures like SHG, *Nari Sanghs*, *Kishori Sanghs* can be leveraged and their capacities built to ensure discrimination free access to services and entitlements especially for adolescent

### **The third stage**

- Besides engaging young boys in the project activities, it is critical that young boys are sensitized and capacitated to take action against discrimination and violence within their own family. Iterative, reflective sessions on gender and sexuality need to be organized at regular intervals in order to enable boys to demonstrate such behavior
- Encouraging young girl's access to mobile phones to improve education and employment opportunities can alter community norms that restrict such use
- Disengaging mobility and the associated fears of harassment and elopement is critical to encourage young girl's access to education and other opportunities
- Promoting young girls access to cycle as a mode of transport is important to increase their mobility and the allocation of resources within the household
- It is critical to address the knowledge and awareness gap amongst adolescent girls on services and entitlements. Addressing this real need could provide an excellent entry point for engaging girls and boys
- Altering the attitude and practices of adolescent girls and boys towards other married adolescent girls within their household could be a critical



transformation changing the existing hierarchy of relationships within the household

## Project design and intervention types

### *Reach of the project*

The project proposes to reach out to 1,50,000 adolescents (boys and girls) through schools, *Kishori Sanghs* and community stakeholders. In addition, it proposes to reach 2,50,000 adolescent boys and girls through media, community mobilization and Gramvani. The project area includes seven districts, three blocks in each district, 22 Gram Panchayats (GPs) in each block and one school and four *Kishori Sanghs* in each GP. In total, the project envisages intervention across 462 Gram Panchayats spread across 21 blocks (three per district).

Based on an analysis of Census (2011), DISE data and information gathered from the field, the following recommendations emerge:

- In order to fully achieve the proposed reach of the project, it might be useful to expand the project to more than 462 panchayats across project locations. This is keeping the attrition from the community based intervention and school attendance pattern and drop-out rate in mind with
- The proposed intervention should continue to focus on saturating government schools in an effort to reach the most marginalized communities
- With a view to reach out to the most marginalized, it would be worthwhile to focus interventions amongst the SC community and out of school adolescents, where prevalence of child marriage is higher compared to other castes. In addition, the SC community also fares low on other socio-economic development indicators

## Conclusion

The proposed project seeks to fill an important gap in adolescent empowerment. While lack of knowledge and awareness amongst adolescents about their health and life choices poses challenges, gender related barriers pose significant constraints. The situation analysis study clearly identifies these challenges and its pervasive nature. There is a need to identify the root causes of adolescent disempowerment and design appropriate points of intervention. A comprehensive adolescent approach to adolescent empowerment necessitates the building of economic and social assets for girls, while engaging men and boys in promoting healthier gender norms and working with communities to create safer environments. Such an approach has the added advantage that it may help to prevent or delay early marriage, which is increasingly recognized as a form of gender-based violence.

While convergence of NGO led programmes with existing government initiatives is important, it is critical for civil society working on adolescent empowerment to come

together and amplify its voice and efforts. Building a common advocacy agenda, pooling resources and expertise of organizations working on adolescent empowerment and liaising collectively with the government can be the most effective grounding that the proposed project can aspire for and work towards.











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