

LESSONS FROM PLAN-IT GIRLS: EVIDENCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING



Girls filling out forms during a discussion session | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

Women's labor force participation (LFP) has been recognized as both a driver and a result of economic growth, with lasting positive impacts for local and national economic indicators and for women and their families. Thus, the stagnant and even declining rate of women's LFP in India is a cause for concern, as is their frequent relegation to informal, unskilled jobs where they are poorly paid, denied social protection and other benefits and permitted few opportunities for advancement, mentorship and promotion. Harmful and inequitable gender norms, poor linkages between education and productive, fulfilling employment and a school and home environment that do not support girls' aspirations and transition to work mean that adolescent girls are disproportionately denied access to the labor market.



Girls participate in a career fair | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

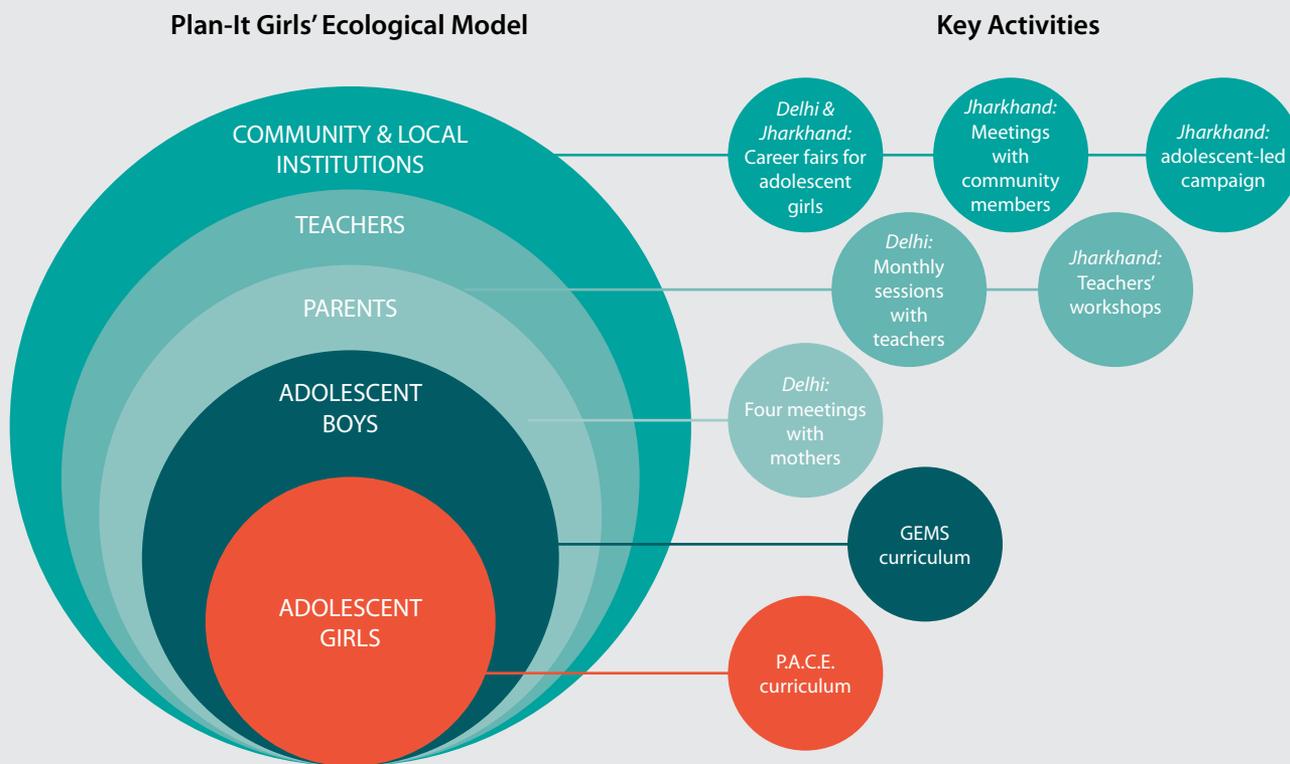
KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The ecosystem approach and gender-transformative model of the Plan-It Girls program successfully shifted select empowerment and employability indicators for adolescent girls in Delhi and Jharkhand but impacts varied by age and location.
2. The model improved girls' self-perception (self-efficacy and self-esteem) across cohorts.
3. Gender attitudes improved among girls in both age cohorts in the urban site.
4. Engagement with various stakeholders — male peers, parents, teachers and community members contributed in building a supportive environment for adolescent girls.
5. Facilitators with backgrounds similar to the participants acted as role models, which was important to the success of the program.



Stakeholder engagement under the Plan-It Girls program | Photo credit: Restless Development

Figure 1: Program Strategy and Activities

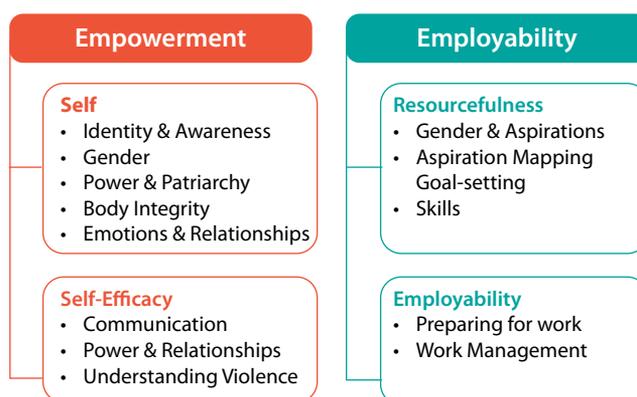


The Plan-It Girls program utilized a gender-transformative approach and an ecological model to improve adolescent girls' agency, equip them with the attitudes, skills and aspirations and build a gender equitable environment around them to enable them to confidently enter and stay in the labor force and make decisions related to education and employment. The program was implemented over two years in partnership with Restless Development and Pravah in two sites in India: Delhi and Jharkhand. Ten schools were selected for participation in Delhi and in two districts of Jharkhand: Deoghar and Pakur.

The Plan-It Girls' ecological model placed girls at the center and implemented key curated activities for girls themselves but also for other actors, including adolescent boys, teachers, mothers (in Delhi) and community members (in Jharkhand), as depicted in **Figure 1**. Adolescent girls in Classes 9 and 11 attended weekly sessions on gender, life skills and employability

skills, following the P.A.C.E. Curriculum developed by ICRW for Gap Inc. Transacted over 34 hours, P.A.C.E. includes two domains: empowerment and employability. **Figure 2** details the core components of the P.A.C.E. curriculum.

Figure 2: P.A.C.E. Curriculum Components





Girls at the Youth Resource Center in Deoghar, Jharkhand | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

In total, 5,744 girls and 5,253 boys in secondary schools in India received Plan-It Girls programming, transacted by a total of 47 youth facilitators. Plan-It Girls engaged 25 teachers in Jharkhand and over 100 teachers in Delhi, including continued, intensive training with around 40 teachers and over 2,000 mothers of adolescent girls in Delhi. Nearly 200 community events in Jharkhand reached more than 18,000 people over two years of programming.

Research Goals and Design

Between 2017 and 2019, ICRW conducted a mixed-methods program evaluation, which included a quantitative, qualitative and costing component. The quantitative quasi-experimental impact evaluation

followed a longitudinal cohort and used ‘difference-in-difference’ analysis with secondary school girls. Girls were divided into four class cohorts: younger adolescents (beginning the program in Class 9) in Delhi; older adolescents (beginning the program in Class 11) in Delhi; younger adolescents in Jharkhand and older adolescents in Jharkhand. The goals of the impact evaluation were to test the program’s effect on key empowerment and employability indicators and to measure improvement in girls’ perception that their schools, families and communities supported their ambitions (**Table 1**). It was not intended to compare the four groups of girl participants but rather to understand how the program works for girls in different contexts—specifically, older and younger adolescents and girls in urban sites (Delhi) and in rural sites (Jharkhand).

Table 1: Indicators — Quantitative Impact Evaluation

	EMPOWERMENT	EMPLOYABILITY	ECOSYSTEM CLIMATE
INDICATOR	Self-esteem	Career decision-making self-efficacy	School climate
	Self-efficacy	Economic self-efficacy	Family support
	Self-assertive efficacy	Preparation for work in the future	Number of safe spaces
	Gender equitable attitudes		Perceived family support for education and work
	Mobility alone		Enlisting family support for education and work
	Decision-making — self		Perceived teacher support for education and work
			Enlisting teacher support for education and work
			Perceived peer support for education and work



In 2020, ICRW conducted a qualitative study, which included in-depth interviews and workshops with girls and boys aged 14–22 years who had participated in the program, youth facilitators who had been responsible for curriculum transaction, and teachers and heads of schools. We also conducted focus group discussions with mothers and community members who had participated in stakeholder engagement activities. The goals of the qualitative study were to understand how the Plan-It Girls program had influenced the lives of program participants and community members and to assess the experience of program participants and youth facilitators.

Program Impact: Findings and Evidence

IMPACT ON EMPOWERMENT

Research Question 1:
What is the impact on girls' self-efficacy and gender-equitable attitudes in an urban and rural setting?



Youth facilitators conducting a session in a school
Photo credit: Restless Development

In Delhi, girls who participated in the intervention showed a significant increase in self-esteem and gender equitable attitudes across age cohorts.¹ In Jharkhand, girls in the younger but not the older cohort experienced a significant increase in self-esteem, but in neither group did we observe a significant change in gender equitable attitudes.²

Table 2: Difference in Difference (DiD) in Key Empowerment Indicators

Indicator	Delhi		Jharkhand	
	Class 9	Class 11	Class 9	Class 11
Self-esteem	1.552***	1.315**	1.118*	0.166
Self-efficacy	0.413	-0.153	1.726**	1.467*
Self-assertive efficacy	-0.339	-0.421	0.636	0.560
Gender equitable attitudes	4.585**	2.733*	0.188	1.819
Mobility alone	-0.339	-0.258	0.142	-0.030
Decision-making — self	0.001	0.296	0.156	0.378

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Coefficient represents adjusted difference-in-difference from panel mixed model

Model controlled for key socio-demographic characteristics at baseline: age, caste, religion, father's education, mother's education, father's occupation, mother's occupation, number of siblings, having a male sibling and wealth tertile

Highlighted cells indicate relevant effect sizes: Cohen D≥0.3

¹ In Delhi, self-esteem scores of Class 9 girls increased by a mean of 0.35 standard deviations and gender equitable attitude scores increased by a mean of 0.45 standard deviations. Among Class 11 girls, self-esteem increased by a mean of 0.30 standard deviations and gender equitable attitudes increased by a mean of 0.29 standard deviations.

² In Jharkhand, the program significantly impacted self-efficacy and self-esteem of Class 9 girls by a mean of 0.22 and 0.23 standard deviations respectively. Among Class 11 girls, the program had a significant impact on self-efficacy, which increased by a mean of 0.21 standard deviations.

On the other hand, both age cohorts in Jharkhand experienced an increase in self-efficacy, which we did not observe in Delhi either in Class 9 or Class 11 (Table 2). Discussions with girls involved in the qualitative research suggest that girls across cohorts have developed an understanding of their own identity and expressed a desire to separate their identity from that of their fathers or husbands, lending credence to the improvements we observed in self-esteem and self-efficacy. As an older adolescent girl in Delhi mused, “Earlier I used to think that this is my name and my name is my identity, because I thought of myself as only a daughter... Now I know I can be a teacher or a lawyer, my identity can be according to my work.”

The girls themselves, as well as their teachers, mothers and community members agree that the girls have developed more confidence and the ability to express their wishes and negotiate for themselves. According to one mother in Delhi, “Girls these days have become very confident; they can say what they feel like to us. We are like friends. In our childhood, we could never imagine talking so freely to our parents. Girls want to study more, and they want to have a say in their future.” However, in many cases parents retain the power of the final say—that is, while they may be willing to listen to their daughters and take into consideration what they say, the final decision on matters like education, work and marriage still rests with the parents. This may help to explain the nuanced findings around these empowerment

indicators, and why we were not able to measure statistically significant changes in girls’ decision-making power.

Similarly, interviews with girls and boys who participated in Plan-It Girls suggest that both groups have grasped key gender concepts such as patriarchy and power. These interviews point to improved gender attitudes, including a heightened understanding of and ability to articulate various forms of gender-based violence. Said one younger adolescent boy in Jharkhand, “I now stop my friends when they abuse or comment on girls. I told them that it is torturous for girls. I do not know whether they are following it or not. But I always give respect to girls because I think both boys and girls are equal.” However, these interviews revealed that many adolescents, especially boys, have retained gender biases, particularly around women’s roles and household responsibilities.

The qualitative research also focused on girls’ perceptions of and ability to make decisions about marriage. Girls were able to articulate the linkages between early marriage and restricted access to education and employment. The younger girls especially, strongly expressed a desire to delay marriage to continue their education. A younger adolescent girl in Jharkhand, said, “I will somehow try to convince my father... I will tell him that I can go out and study because I want to be something

Girls speaking about their aspirations at their school’s morning assembly | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia



in life and for that I need education. I will reject any [marriage] alliance that they bring.” However, many older girls and younger girls in Jharkhand, where underage marriage is more common, viewed marriage as inevitable and acknowledged that it was likely to influence their education and employment outcomes. Likewise, while some believed they might be able to negotiate for delayed marriage, especially by performing well in school, many thought that they would not be able to avoid marriage altogether or have control over choosing their spouse. In the words of one older adolescent girl in Delhi, “In case my father and brother [pressure] me to get married, I will try to say ‘no’ up to some extent. If it is unavoidable, then I will keep one clause that I have to complete my studies, so if you allow me to complete my studies then marriage is fine.” Like other decisions, girls could have input into marriage decisions but the final determination would be up to their parents.

Like the empowerment indicators discussed above, quantitative findings revealed differential impacts between girls of the four cohorts. In Delhi, younger girls showed increased economic efficacy and improved preparation for future employment,³ while in Jharkhand, older girls showed increased career decision-making efficacy.⁴ No statistically significant change was observed among older girls in Delhi or younger girls in Jharkhand on these employability indicators (Table 3).

In qualitative interviews, girls expressed educational and career aspirations, and a desire to achieve financial independence. In both sites, they articulated the pathways by which education can lead to greater decision-making and negotiating power, including related to marriage. “I want to earn on my own,” said a younger adolescent girl in Jharkhand, “so that... if there is any problem, then I will not have to bear [my husband’s] torture and stay with him.”

Participants in Delhi, especially younger girls, demonstrated that they had gained access to tangible, career-ready skills, like communication and financial planning, as well as writing CVs, filling out forms and applications for courses and jobs and creating email accounts. Younger girls also showed greater preparedness for work and concrete job planning. They were better able to map out academic and career plans than older girls, who more often expressed their aspirations and plans in more general and vague terms, while younger girls mentioned

IMPACT ON EMPLOYABILITY

Research Question 2:

Was the intervention successful in creating a pool of girls who have the life skills and employability skills and believe in their ability to transition from school to work?

Table 3: Difference in Difference (DID) in Key Employability Indicators

Indicator	Delhi		Jharkhand	
	Class 9	Class 11	Class 9	Class 11
Career decision-making efficacy	-0.594	-0.902	2.342	2.764*
Economic self-efficacy	1.288**	0.257	0.298	-0.350
Preparation for work in the future	1.366***	0.561	-0.054	-0.283

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Coefficient represents adjusted difference-in-difference from panel mixed model

Model controlled for key socio-demographic characteristics at baseline: age, caste, religion, father’s education, mother’s education, father’s occupation, mother’s occupation, number of siblings, having a male sibling and wealth tertile

Highlighted cells indicate relevant effect sizes: Cohen D≥0.3

³ In Delhi, a significant impact was observed among Class 9 girls on key employability outcome indicators – economic self-efficacy and preparation to work in the future, which increased by a mean of 0.19 and 0.34 standard deviations, respectively.

⁴ In Jharkhand, the program impacted career decision-making efficacy of the Class 11 girls significantly by a mean of 0.24 standard deviations

specific educational institutions, coursework and exams that would provide a path to their chosen career. In Jharkhand, the opposite was more common, with younger girls less able to define their aspirations and plans.

Younger girls in Delhi also indicated that they would make career choices based on their interests, while older girls expressed that they would make those decisions based on prioritizing household responsibilities which included need for flexibility in hours and working location, and permission from their future in-laws. One older adolescent girl in Delhi described how these considerations impacted her career choice, “I used to think of working in the nursing profession or becoming a teacher sometimes. So, I chose teaching after thinking about the working hours and the time I have to give at home. There are also part time jobs, where we can look after our home also.”

IMPACT ON THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Research Question 3:
Do girls perceive that their communities and schools are supportive of their choices?

We observed that the school climate improved significantly for older girls in Jharkhand⁵, but not for younger girls in Jharkhand or for girls in Delhi in either age group (Table 4). In Jharkhand, significant improvement was observed for younger girls in perceived peer support for education and work. Qualitative findings from Jharkhand do suggest that the program created a safe space for girls, who began to interact more with their peers, including male classmates, and also participated in extra-curricular activities. Teachers reported that the workshops they attended as part of the program gave them the skills necessary to support adolescent girls and helped them become more aware of their needs and aspirations.

Among both cohorts in Delhi, girls reported that family support had increased as a result of the program.⁶ Enlisting family support had increased among girls in the younger cohort. However, no statistically significant impacts were observed in Jharkhand related to family. Mothers, especially in Delhi, described a newfound relationship with their daughters, perhaps driven in part by girls’ increased ability and willingness to negotiate for themselves and take an active role in decisions regarding their lives. Mothers also specifically noted that the program helped them feel more comfortable having conversations with their daughters about menstruation.

Table 4: Difference in Difference in Key Ecosystem Indicators

Indicator	Delhi		Jharkhand	
	Class 9	Class 11	Class 9	Class 11
School climate	0.362	0.122	1.354	1.437*
Family support	0.171**	0.087**	0.007	0.115
Number of safe spaces	-0.456	-0.055	0.028	-0.375
Perceived family support for education and work	0.120	0.033	0.025	-0.034
Enlisting family support for education and work	0.159***	0.093	0.009	-0.035
Perceived teacher support for education and work	-0.003	-0.151	0.101	-0.074
Enlisting teacher support for education and work	0.024	-0.057	0.072	-0.024
Perceived peer support for education and work	-0.060	-0.078	0.119*	-0.033

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Coefficient represents adjusted difference-in-difference from panel mixed model

Model controlled for key socio-demographic characteristics at baseline: age, caste, religion, father’s education, mother’s education, father’s occupation, mother’s occupation, number of siblings, having a male sibling and wealth tertile

⁵ In Jharkhand, school climate improved significantly, by a mean of 0.26 standard deviations among Class 11 girls.

⁶ In Delhi, program impacted perceived family support significantly among girls of Classes 9 and 11 by a mean of 0.21 standard deviations and 0.11 standard deviations, respectively.



“This program has made me realize that gender inequality has been prevalent in our society since ages, but we often tend to disregard it and accept it the way it is. In order to bring about change, it is extremely important for every girl to understand that they deserve equal rights and opportunities...”

Older adolescent girl, Delhi

Implications for Future Programming and Research

The results of the quantitative impact evaluation and complementary qualitative study suggest that Plan-It Girls was able to improve adolescent girls' self-perceptions and develop awareness of key gender concepts, equip girls with the skills and aspirations necessary for transition to work and promote a safe and positive school, family and community environment in which girls can thrive. The lessons learned from this research can offer guidance to implementers of similar programs in the future.

Plan-It Girls successfully shifted select empowerment and employability indicators for adolescent girls in Delhi and Jharkhand but impacts varied by age and location. This suggests that the different contexts for and influences on younger and older adolescents and those in urban and rural areas affect how a program like Plan-It Girls is received and internalized and should therefore be carefully considered in program design. In Delhi in particular, the significant impacts on employability indicators suggest that **intervention for employment readiness and career aspirations can be more impactful during early adolescence than later adolescence.**

The ecosystem approach and gender-transformative model improved girls' self-perception across cohorts, including improvements in self-esteem (Delhi-9, Delhi-11 and Jharkhand-9) and self-efficacy (Jharkhand-9 and Jharkhand-11). Girls expressed a desire to cultivate an identity and sense of "self" separate from their families and developed the ability to communicate with confidence and negotiate for themselves.

Gender attitudes improved among girls in both age cohorts in Delhi but not in Jharkhand. This indicates that although in urban areas, like in rural areas, gender expectations and restrictions are imposed on adolescent girls, urban areas like Delhi may offer more opportunities and resources to challenge gender norms, while in rural areas, norms may be more difficult to change.

Plan-It Girls' ecosystem approach successfully engaged various other actors to support adolescent girls in their communities. Teachers, mothers, community members and adolescent boys were involved in the observed impacts on adolescent girls, including facilitating a supportive school (Jharkhand-11), family (Delhi-9 and Delhi-11) and peer (Jharkhand-9) environment in which adolescent girls can succeed. Program activities with each of these stakeholder groups created an enabling environment that supported girls. However, Plan-It Girls' experience in engaging stakeholders revealed challenges with timing and creating buy-in. For instance, sessions in schools needed to be timed so as to avoid conflict with exam periods and implementation was met with some resistance from boys' schools in Delhi; highlighting the importance of anticipating these challenges and working to overcome them.

Plan-It Girls employed male and female youth facilitators to transact the P.A.C.E. and GEMS curricula, respectively. **Using young men and women whose backgrounds were similar to those of the participants allowed them to act as role models, which was important to the success of the program.** However, this also necessitated youth facilitators being given time and space to address and shift their own gender biases and overcome discomfort with certain topics, including menstruation, before they could successfully implement the curricula and lead discussions within them. Likewise, facilitators too stressed the importance of regular training and teach-back opportunities to practice implementing these lessons.



Girls at an intervention school in Delhi | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

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