

PLAN-IT GIRLS **A MULTI-LAYERED PROGRAMMING APPROACH TO ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY**



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Cover Photo: Girls interacting during an engagement session as part of Plan-It Girls

Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

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Abbreviations & Acronyms

ASHA:	Accredited Social Health Activist
BMGF:	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
DEO:	District Education Officer
DoE:	Directorate of Education
EVGCB:	Educational, Vocational, Guidance and Counseling Bureau
FP2020:	Family Planning 2020
GBSS:	Government Boys Senior Secondary Schools
GEMS:	Gender Equity Movement in Schools
GGSS:	Government Girls Senior Secondary Schools
GNCT:	Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi
HOSs:	Heads of Schools
IGS:	Indian Grameen Services
ITI:	Industrial Training Institute
KGBV:	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
NSDC:	National Skill Development Corporation
ODI:	Overseas Development Institute
OECD:	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
P.A.C.E:	Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement Program
P.A.G.E:	Planning Ahead for Girls' Empowerment and Employability
PEs:	Program Executives
PRADAN:	Professional Assistance for Development Action
PRIs:	Panchayat Raj Institutions
RD:	Restless Development
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
SHGs:	Self-help Groups
SMCs:	School Management Committees
YFs:	Youth Facilitators
YRC:	Youth Resource Center
WGCD:	Women and Girls at Center of Development

Executive Summary

Plan-It Girls: Empowerment and Employability for Adolescent Girls

Plan-It Girls is a multi-level and multi-stakeholder program to build the agency of adolescent girls and promote gender equality to support their aspirations. The program design accounts for the ecosystems of girls' social environments, including their peers, families, schools and broader communities and places the girls themselves at the center. Over a two-year period, girls in Classes 9 and 11 were equipped with a gender perspective and life and employability skills to help them transition from school to work. Stakeholders like male peers, parents, teachers and community members were engaged to create an enabling environment for girls to reach their potential. The program was implemented in 10 secondary schools in Delhi and in 10 schools in two districts of Jharkhand — Deoghar and Pakur.

Scope of the Process Document

The Plan-It Girls program was conceptualized as an integrated model that provided inputs to girls, along with their male peers in the classroom, while simultaneously engaging with all the other critical stakeholders to create an enabling environment. While the overall strategy remained similar, owing to the contextual and geographical differences, the activities undertaken in Delhi and Jharkhand varied. This process document details the strategies and related activities that the program undertook. This documentation will support practitioners working with adolescent girls to design and implement a program using the ecological approach. The document

provides the rationale and detailed process of each of the strategies. It also highlights the challenges and mitigation strategies and learnings from the Plan-It Girls program.

Recommendations for Key Program Components

In a multi-level and multi-stakeholder program such as Plan-It Girls, it is critical to have specific strategies and defined activities for each of the program stakeholders. For each of the key program components, following are the high-level recommendations:

Youth Facilitators: Young men and women in the age group of 18-28 years who anchored the program in schools and communities. The Youth Facilitators (YFs) came from similar communities and socio-economic backgrounds as the adolescents and were responsible for the curriculum transaction in schools and implementing the community engagement component of the program.

- Investing in high-quality concept, content and facilitation skills training;
- Providing consistent handholding and support;
- Promoting cross-learning and facilitating access to other opportunities for exposure;
- Pre-empting high attrition and devising strategies to address the same.

School-based Curriculum Implementation with Girls and Boys: Consisting of curriculum transaction with girls and boys — the Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement (P.A.C.E.) curriculum with girls and the Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) curriculum with boys — including a career fair at the culmination of the program.

- Starting the in-school curriculum transaction early;
- Developing and implementing a consistent engagement strategy with Heads of Schools (HOSs);
- Positioning the YFs as the face of the program in schools;
- Planning for school implementation while allowing for flexibility and readjustments;
- Initiating industry engagement early on.

Teachers' Engagement in Jharkhand: Consisting of building teachers' perspective on gender and need for investing in adolescents.

- Designing the engagement strategy to respond to the needs of the teachers and to align with the program's objectives;
- Incorporating continuous interaction and engagement through regular meetings and participatory workshops.

Youth Resource Centers: Physical spaces that act as a community resource for all stakeholders.

- Developing Youth Resource Centers (YRCs) as physical spaces that can act as resource and activity hubs for the program stakeholders.

Community Engagement: Consisting of mothers' meetings on issues of adolescents in Delhi and community campaigns and sensitization of Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) members in Jharkhand.

- Adopting a structured and layered approach in line with the local geographical and socio-cultural context.

Sustainability and Scale-up of Plan-It Girls: Activities and products were planned to sustain the program impact beyond the project timeline. This included handholding support to girls to continue education and link them to training and employability opportunities, developing employability docket as reference material for students and teachers and a reference guide for teachers on creating gender-responsive classrooms. In addition, following recommendations must be considered while scaling up the program:

- Gender-transformative Programming;
- Gender-integrated Curriculum;
- Supporting girls beyond school;
- Integrating the program into the school system;
- Building allies within the household and the community;
- Building ownership among institutional stakeholders;
- Investing in the program team.

Girls preparing for community campaigns as part of Plan-It Girls program in Jharkhand | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia



Context

Women's labor force participation is recognized as a critical driver and outcome of economic growth and development that pays long-term dividends for families, communities, countries and women (Verick, 2014).¹ Yet women often end up working in the informal economy in unskilled jobs that are poorly paid, lack benefits and opportunities for advancement. The declining rate of female labor force participation in India has been attributed to inequitable gender norms, poor access to education, lack of skilling opportunities and poor linkages for productive entry into the labor market. Despite improvements in school enrolment rates, girls are left out of economic participation, which is pivotal to achieving empowerment and gender equality. It is critical to intervene during adolescence and ensure girls have access to education and skills necessary to obtain and retain quality employment, along with shifting norms.

The decision and ability of women to participate in the labor force is the outcome of various socio-economic factors including educational attainment, age of marriage and social norms determining the role of women in the public domain (OECD, 2008).² A growing body of evidence shows that girls' education and professional skill development are closely correlated with improved

empowerment indicators such as smaller family size, more decision-making responsibility and higher income (Aslam, 2014).³

Longitudinal studies have established that aspirations during adolescence in combination with educational attainments, identity formation including agency and skills and enabling environment has an impact on the occupational development of young people (Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Bynner, 1998; Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2016; Mann et al., 2020).^{4,5} A World Bank study in Jharkhand found that almost all girls want to complete higher secondary education and 86 percent girls want to work for pay outside the home. The analysis established that girls' educational and employment aspirations are determined by their self-efficacy and mental health, which are considered critical elements of 'human capital'. The study also found that enabling and supportive environment is an important correlate of self-efficacy (Roy et al., 2016).⁶

A 2016 report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) identified ten enabling or constraining factors for the economic empowerment of women including education, skill development and training, access to quality decent

- 1 Verick, S. (2014). Female labor force participation in developing countries. IZA World of Labor 2014: 87 doi: 10.15185/izawol.87
- 2 OECD. (2008). Gender and Sustainable Development—Maximising the Economic, Social and Environmental Role of Women. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/social/40881538.pdf>
- 3 Aslam, M. (2014). Empowering Women: Education and the Pathways of Change, Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Reference No. 2014/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/0, UNESDOC Digital Library, accessed on March 25, 2020.
- 4 Schoon, I. & Parsons, S. (2002). Teenage Aspirations for Future Careers and Occupational Outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. Volume 60, Issue 2, Pages 262-288. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0001879101918676>; Bynner, John. (1998). Education and Family Components of Identity in the Transition from School to Work. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*. 22. 29-53. 10.1080/016502598384504. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232444408_Education_and_Family_Components_of_Identity_in_the_Transition_from_School_to_Work
- 5 Kashefpakdel, E. T. & Percy, C. (2016). Career education that works: an economic analysis using the British Cohort Study. *Journal of Education and Work*. DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2016.1177636. Retrieved from: <https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Career-education-that-works-an-economic-analysis-using-the-British-Cohort-Study.compressed.pdf>; Mann, A., Denis, V., Schleicher, A., Ekhtiari, H., Forsyth, T., Liu, E. & Chambers, N. (2020). Dream Jobs? Teenagers' Career Aspirations and the Future of Work. OECD. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/berlin/publikationen/Dream-Jobs.pdf>
- 6 Roy, S. & Morton, M. H. & Bhattacharya, S. (2016). Hidden Human Capital: Psychological empowerment and adolescent girls' aspirations in India. *Policy Research Working Paper Series*. 7792. The World Bank. Retrieved from: <https://ideas.repec.org/p/wbk/wbrwps/7792.html>

work and gender norms.⁷ The literature establishes that self-efficacy, aspirations, skills and enabling environment are the key factors to the economic empowerment of adolescent girls. ICRW's 2013 scoping study also revealed that the programs for adolescent girls need to integrate gender lens and create an enabling ecosystem along with ensuring market linkages to be able to create livelihood opportunities (Nanda et al., 2013).⁸

The Plan-It Girls program was conceptualized in response to this urgent need for comprehensive life and employability skill programming for adolescent girls.

Plan-It Girls Program Design

Plan-It Girls is a multi-level and multi-stakeholder program to build the agency of adolescent girls and promote gender equality to support their aspirations. The program uses an ecological framework with adolescent girls at the center. It equips girls of Classes 9 to 12 with a gender perspective to build an understanding of gender, power, patriarchy and how it impacts their day-to-day life and their ability to access opportunities and resources. It also builds life skills and employability skills to help them in their transition from school to work through a two-year gender-integrated curriculum, including a career fair. The program also engages with significant stakeholders like male peers, parents, teachers and community members to shift gender norms and create an enabling environment for girls to reach their potential. The program was implemented in 20 secondary schools (10 girls' schools and 10 boys' schools) in Delhi⁹ and in 10 co-educational secondary schools in two districts of Jharkhand — Deoghar and Pakur. The diversity of these sites allowed for testing the model in both urban and rural setting.

The program was implemented by the Student Partnership Worldwide, popularly known as Restless

Development (RD) at both program sites of Delhi and Jharkhand, while the teachers' engagement component of the program was implemented by Pravah in Delhi.

Program Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Improve girls' self-efficacy and employability by implementing an in-school curriculum, P.A.C.E., adapted from Planning Ahead for Girls' Empowerment and Employability (PAGE) curriculum that was implemented and tested with girls in Delhi.
- **Objective 2:** Reduce the risk of resistance to girls' success by fostering gender-equitable norms among male peers, families and communities through intentional engagement with boys in schools and with families and others in community settings.
- **Objective 3:** Motivate teachers to support and subsequently implement the program by supporting them to become champions and change agents and linking them into a network of like-minded professionals.
- **Objective 4:** Create and document pathways to employment through innovative and mutually reinforcing relationships with local businesses that will offer exposure and mentoring. Plan-It Girls seeks to take girls from the acquisition of skills to their application in practice.
- **Objective 5:** Institutionalize and sustain the program through evidence-informed financing. Leveraging our strong links to the government education sector and industry, Plan-It Girls will capitalize on the current appetite for social responsibility (supported by the Government's Corporate Social Responsibility law) and growing interest in empowering women and girls, to incentivize the creation of a public-private partnership that can fund the program into the future.

7 Hunt, A. & Samman, E. (2016). Women's economic empowerment: Navigating enablers and constraints. London: Overseas Development Institute. Retrieved from: <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/10683.pdf>

8 Nanda, P., Das, P., Singh, A. & Negi, R. (2013). Addressing Comprehensive Needs of Adolescent Girls in India: A Potential for Creating Livelihoods. New Delhi: International Center for Research on Women.

9 Government Girls Senior Secondary Schools (GGSSS) and Government Boys Senior Secondary Schools (GBSSS) run in shifts in the same school premise and use a common school building. Plan-It Girls was implemented in 10 GGSS schools and their corresponding 10 GBSS schools, thus being implemented in 20 schools in Delhi.

Program Activities

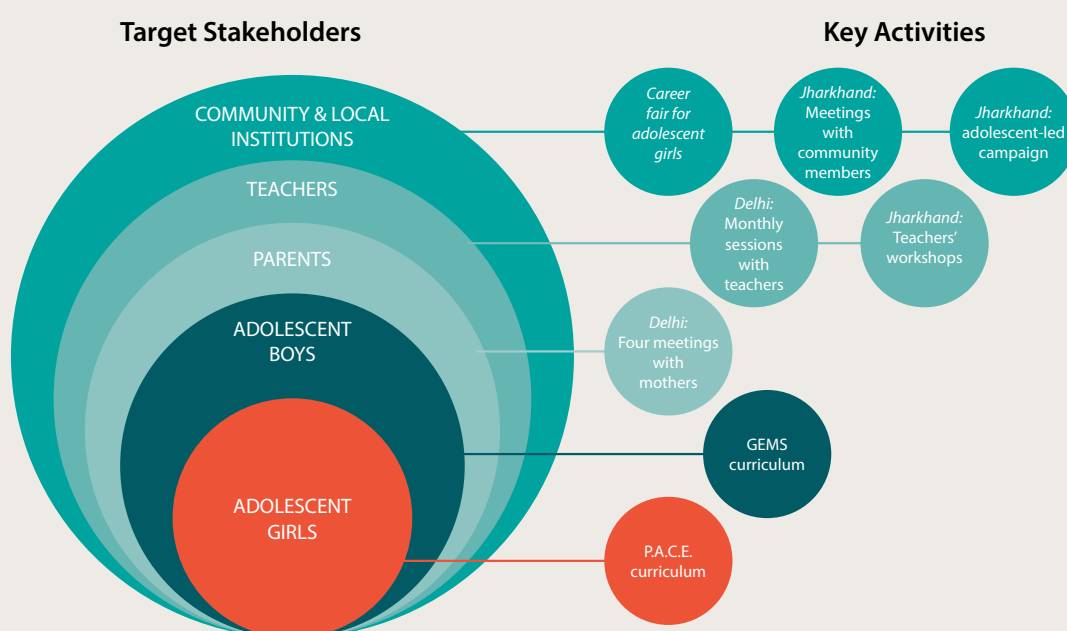
The program planned to achieve the key objectives through participatory activities. **The P.A.C.E. curriculum** focuses on equipping girls with concepts related to identity, gender, power, patriarchy and its influence on day to day lives, emotions, relationships, communication, violence and the gendered nature of work and aspirations, along with skills to map aspirations, set goals, develop resumes, prepare for interviews and manage work, stress and money. As a part of the ecosystem approach, the **GEMS curriculum** was transacted with adolescent boys (male peers of these girls) in Delhi and Jharkhand.

In Delhi, weekly meetings with mothers' groups were conducted over four weeks to discuss the value of the girl child, her education, issues related to early or forced marriage and an interaction between mother and daughter about the daughter's aspirations. Monthly sessions with teachers were held to discuss issues related to gender, adolescence, learning styles and creating a safe space for girls. The teachers also undertook individual action projects such as gender auditing of textbooks and engaging with girls and their parents to better understand their needs.

In Jharkhand, girls and boys participating in the program also led community campaigns. They held rallies, door-to-door campaigns and role-plays focusing on issues related to girls' education and employment, and early and forced marriage. Meetings were held with community stakeholders such as parents, Panchayat leaders and other local government officials to make Panchayat commit to actions that they can undertake to support education of adolescent girls. For teachers, a series of three workshops was held on understanding the needs of adolescents, gender and related issues, and familiarization with the curriculum for girls. The program activities with respective stakeholders are highlighted in the figure below (Figure 1).

This report outlines the processes undertaken for the program activities as a part of implementation at both program sites of Delhi and Jharkhand. The report lays out the process and critical components pertaining to the YFs, the YRCs, school implementation, community engagement and teachers' engagement in Jharkhand¹⁰. The report also shares insights on challenges and recommendations for respective processes and highlights the best practices.

Figure 1: Plan-It Girls: Program Activities and Stakeholders



¹⁰ Teachers' engagement in Delhi used a different strategy that is available as a separate document titled 'Plan-It Girls: Process Documentation for Teacher's Intervention.'

Youth Facilitators

Rationale

Plan-It Girls program worked with adolescent girls and boys in schools along with other stakeholders in a girl's ecosystem — mothers, community members and teachers. ICRW's experience of past programs with adolescents such as PAGE has showcased the pertinence of young people transacting skill-based programs with adolescents. Also, the program implementation partner, RD, worked with the Peer Educator Model that advocates for engagement with young people.

The experience of both, ICRW and RD, demonstrated that the model leverages young people's influence over one another to positively impact each other's lives. The model is based on the premise that young people are more likely to share their concerns with and be receptive to information and support from individuals they perceive to be their peers (similar age and profile) as opposed to older adults and people from different backgrounds.

YFs in the age group of 18-28 years from similar communities and socio-economic backgrounds as the adolescents were expected to build a faster and stronger rapport with both adolescents and communities. Similarly, it was expected that adolescent girls and boys are more likely to identify and relate with them better.

Since the program on the ground had to be largely implemented by the YFs, it stood to reason that the YFs from selected communities at both program sites of Delhi and Jharkhand were chosen to transact the program and ensure effective implementation of the program as well as sustainability of the program.

Identification and Recruitment

The program envisaged YFs as peer mentors who could directly connect with the adolescents and be their role

models and mentors within the community. Thus, YFs were identified and recruited from the geographical communities located near the selected schools, where the program was to be implemented in Delhi and Jharkhand. A community-focused approach was adopted and a recruitment pack including a job description was developed and circulated. Restless Development also leveraged their existing networks of local NGOs to circulate the advert in communities close to the implementation schools.

While the program had planned a rigorous process of training, handholding and feedback on various program components and other skills for YFs, it was critical to identify potential candidates with specified characteristics, skills and experience. The team looked for candidates who were between the age group of 18-28 years, were from similar backgrounds as the program participants (geographically), and had good communication and leadership skills along with proficiency in spoken and written Hindi. The candidates who had experience of conducting meetings with young people and other community stakeholders, risks and needs assessment, and participatory rural appraisals were preferred. Potential candidates were invited for the selection process that included a written test and a group discussion followed by a personal interview. The recruitment team assessed the potential candidates on the above-mentioned skills, motivation to become a part of the program team and their proficiency in Hindi.

After the process of identification and recruitment, a total of 26 YFs in Delhi and 16 YFs in Jharkhand were selected to implement the program along with two Program Executives (PEs) in Delhi and three in Jharkhand.

As intended, the selected group of YFs came from the same communities as the program participants and some of them studied in the schools they were assigned to transact the program.

Table 1: Number of Youth Facilitators and Program Executives

	Delhi			Jharkhand		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Youth Facilitators	20	6	26	11	5	16
Program Executives	1	1	2	2	1	3

Note: At the time of recruitment, the program team also maintained an ongoing waiting list for both program sites to account for any attrition.

Capacity Building of Youth Facilitators

After a thorough selection process, based on the program requirements it was critical that the program invested in building the capacity of YFs. Since the program intended to equip adolescent girls with life skills and employability skills and create an enabling environment, the trainings were planned in a phased manner to build gender perspective, conceptual understanding of the curriculum content and equipping them with skills including life skills and facilitation skills. The team also provided them a detailed understanding of the program strategy and activities along with their roles and responsibilities. After the training, the program team provided handholding, feedback and supervised regular practice sessions for curriculum content. Before the program was initiated, the program team of RD also underwent conceptual trainings (thematic areas of gender, power, patriarchy and violence) along with an overview of the curriculum content to be able to further train and handhold the YFs.

Foundational Training

Before program initiation, the YFs underwent a five-day residential foundational training to build gender perspective and provide an understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the program. The foundational training content was developed by ICRW and RD covering various topics as a part of the first comprehensive training:

Roles and Responsibilities of YFs' in undertaking program activities:

- Conducting curriculum sessions with girls and boys in schools;
- Community outreach and engagement;
- Identifying, operating and maintaining YRCs;
- Facilitating teacher engagement.

Perspective Building on concepts related to gender, power and patriarchy.

Policies including organizational policies of RD such as anti-fraud and anti-bribery policies, general code-of-conduct, and anti-sexual harassment policy.

YFs filling out forms during a discussion session as part of Plan-It Girls | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia



Concept Trainings

Since the YFs themselves came from similar socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds as the program participants, it was essential for them to develop an intrinsic understanding of concepts around gender. This would enable them to learn and relate to the concepts, reflect on their own lives and assimilate the conceptual understanding to transact the gender-integrated curricula - both the P.A.C.E. curriculum for girls and the GEMS curriculum for boys. Hence, it was crucial that before transacting the curriculum, the YFs go through their own journeys to identify and reflect on the inherent gendered attitudes and biases so as to ensure curriculum fidelity and address any questions/concerns of the participants in this regard. For this, the YFs at both program sites went through bi-yearly trainings during the two years of program implementation on thematic concepts (including refreshers) of gender, power, patriarchy, sexuality and violence.

Special training sessions on facilitation skills were also organized to equip the YFs with the requisite skills to conduct sessions with adolescents and work closely with community members.

Curriculum Content Trainings

In order to effectively transact the curriculum content — the P.A.C.E. curriculum for girls and the GEMS curriculum for boys — it was crucial that the YFs underwent comprehensive training on the curriculum content, were comfortable transacting the curriculum and were able to answer the questions of adolescent girls and boys. For this, weekly training sessions during the two years of the program were organized. The content training schedule for YFs was aligned to the schedule of the curriculum sessions to be transacted in the schools and YFs were provided training on

regular basis. The trainings provided a platform for the YFs to clarify their doubts, discuss the questions raised by the participants, share their experience, practice by conducting mock sessions and receive feedback from the team.

Handholding, Feedback and Supervision

In addition to concepts, curriculum content and facilitation skill trainings, during the two-year program period, YFs were also trained on reporting and enhancing communication skills (including use of email and social media), goal setting and time management. These trainings were designed to enhance professional skills that would also enable the YFs to plan for their careers after the completion of Plan-It Girls program. During these trainings the YFs had the opportunity to discuss professional growth plans, exchange ideas and learn problem solving and risk mitigation skills. Handholding support to the YFs was provided throughout the program period through review meetings and regular individual feedback sessions. The YFs also received regular inputs and feedback on their performance as facilitators in the classrooms based on the monitoring by the program team.

YFs were also kept abreast with various regional, national and international events and conferences, which they were encouraged to apply for and attend. During the course of program implementation, the program provided a platform for YFs to be exposed to professional development and other opportunities such as meeting international delegates as part of the Women and Girls at Center of Development (WGCD) Meeting and visit of the Her Majesty the Queen of Belgium, where they prepared and presented a short skit on the Plan-It Girls program. The YFs in Delhi also participated in the Mega Career Conclave organized by the Directorate of Education, Delhi and attended Youth **Adda**¹¹ or Youth Hangouts during the program period.

11 Youth Adda or Hangouts for young people were jointly organized by Pravah, RD and United Nations Volunteers every three months in the years 2017 and 2018. Youth Adda brought together young people from diverse backgrounds to learn and discuss the SDGs, and the role of young people in advancing and achieving these targets.



Youth facilitators conducting a classroom session in school | Photo: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

Journey of the Youth Facilitator

YFs were the group of young women and men who implemented the program and received continuous inputs. Their individual journeys also reflected the transformation they underwent as a part of the program. The qualitative research study conducted at the end of the program found that unanimously all YFs, across Delhi and Jharkhand, shared that the Plan-It Girls induction and capacity building process had been an exponential learning curve for them. Topics related to identity, gender inequality, power, patriarchy, different forms of violence amongst several others were the ones that they themselves had never thought about before the program. The trainings equipped YFs to reflect upon the deep-seated socio-cultural and gendered conditioning in their lives.

YFs realized that they had the potential to use their own stories of learning, growth, change and perseverance to continue with education and find employment. This enabled them to develop a strong rapport with the students and become local role models for girls and boys in the community. The YFs felt that they could relate to the program content, as they knew that the girls were fighting the same battles at home and in the community. This was stated to be one of the reasons for the girls being open with the YFs and addressing them as *didi* and *bhaiya* (elder sister and elder brother), sharing their thoughts and concerns with them. There were several instances mentioned by YFs where girls have sought their support because of unsupportive parents and family in terms of permitting them to complete schooling or enroll in college. In the words of a female YF

from Jharkhand, "I am from the same community, so I know about the discrimination. It is etched in our minds from the beginning what a girl can or cannot do. I have faced similar situations."

YFs reported that the Plan-It Girls program had been an unprecedented experience of their lives that enabled them to shed their own inhibitions, biases and navigate discomfort in tackling issues they themselves had never addressed in the past. During the course of the program, they developed soft skills like collaboration, communication and negotiation, as well as professional skills like public speaking, making presentations, creating and maintaining databases and reports. The YFs also shared their personal journeys of negotiation within their families ranging from sharing household work, finances, relationships and marriage, and credited the learnings they had while working with the program.

Post program, most YFs have continued to work within the development sector in the field of education, including development programs and schools. In Delhi, few of the YFs and the PEs were retained in another program focused on Youth-led Accountability for Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) and Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) commitments, while in Jharkhand, a majority of them were recruited by Indian Grameen Services¹² to work on a World Bank-supported program called *Tejaswani*. The YFs and the PEs are also engaged with RD as alumni and continue receiving regular information on opportunities to participate in various national and international forums. Few of them have also secured jobs in the hospitality sector and are working as trainers.

12 Indian Grameen Services (IGS) is a not-for-profit company, registered under the Section 25 of the Companies Act. IGS was promoted by Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) in 1987, to extend a variety of commercial services, necessary for promoting livelihood opportunities for a large number of rural producers.



YF's preparing for the classroom sessions | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

Insights from the YFs

Delhi

"I learned that there are some steps we can take at a personal level. I want to be an example for my own family and community and want to educate people about the importance of gender equality. I have witnessed change within my own community and have learnt that raising awareness and community engagement can have a direct impact on young people's lives."—Male YF, Delhi

"Now (after the program) we have formed a mindset that girls and boys can do anything; there is no separation in work. The parents have also changed a lot...now if we have to say no to our parents about something, we do it politely. We negotiate for everything." — Female YF, Delhi

Jharkhand

"My family was against me getting a job, but now they have reached a compromise with me. In my village, I am the only girl who had completed Class 10 in 2006-2007. Before that nobody had done matric, now people are inspired by me and, now every year, 10 girls appear for matric in the village."— Female YF, Deoghar

"I help my wife in cooking or cleaning also. She is also working and when we come back home then I help her in cooking earlier I was not doing all these tasks. In the village, it happens that first, the husband would eat, then the wife would eat, and I don't follow all these things. I tell her (my wife) that we will eat together."— Male YF, Deoghar

*"The best training was the one I got on gender and **satta** (power). There was one game wherein there is a girl and a boy and if they need to go to the market at night then we had to tell who would go to the market. In our society, everybody prefers to send the boy to the market."*— Male YF, Pakur

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Challenges	Mitigation Strategies
One of the key challenges in the process of recruitment, training and handholding of YFs during the program was the high attrition rate. A number of YFs dropped out of the program during the two-year period.	Since YFs are in the age range that is expected to be mobile, it is essential to pre-empt and plan for high attrition. An evolving database of potential candidates was maintained and they were on boarded as and when there were dropouts. The new YF candidates were immediately taken through a comprehensive induction and training plan to build their understanding of key concepts and skills needed to transact the program.
Learning and navigating through the concepts of gender in their personal and professional life.	Plan-It Girls was a gender-integrated life skills and employability skills program, thus necessitating building gender perspective before initiating the activities. However, the team provided constant handholding, as the YFs themselves negotiated with the gender norms in their family and community and colleagues at work.

Recommendations

- Investing in high-quality concept, content and soft-skills training:** In a program like Plan-It Girls, the team of YFs forms the basis and the face of the program in the schools and communities. Hence, it becomes imperative that they are able to accurately represent all aspects of the program while building trust and rapport with all program stakeholders. For this, it is highly recommended that the programs invest in intensive and comprehensive training covering all aspects of the program including key concepts on which the curriculum/ program content is based. It is equally essential to have regular refreshers to ensure that the YFs understand, internalize the concepts, including the rationale of the program and the expected outcomes for the stakeholders. Regular trainings also create a platform to voice all questions and concerns, thus ensuring that they are supported and heard.
- Providing consistent handholding and support:** In a program like Plan-It Girls that adopts a gender-integrated and ecosystem approach whereby the YFs are addressing and challenging deep-seated patriarchal norms, they are expected to navigate through gender norms in their professional and personal lives, which include push-back and constant negotiation. It is therefore highly recommended that they have access to handholding support from the program team to cater to their professional and emotional needs during the program. The program should also seek to invest in building leadership skills amongst YFs. Mentorship, guidance and work delegation are the key factors in this context. In Plan-it Girls, each team of YFs at Delhi and Jharkhand sites were supported by the PEs who in turn were supported by Assistant Project Coordinators and Project Managers. Having a clear line of support can be crucial in keeping up individual and team morale.
- Promoting cross-learning and facilitating access to other opportunities:** In order to build the capacity of YFs and provide them exposure and learning opportunities, they were encouraged to participate in activities outside the program. This enabled them to think of their individual career progression and effectively plan for their future. For example, the YFs in the program attended various youth events being organized by other organizations at both program sites.
- Pre-empting high attrition and devising strategies to address the same:** As mentioned earlier, high attrition amongst YFs came up as a key challenge in the program. However, it was expected as young people are in the stage of exploring new opportunities. To address the same, it is recommended that program plans for maintaining and periodically updating a ready roster of potential candidates who can be hired in case of dropouts. Also, the program must plan for the training of new recruits. The above recommendations on investing in YF trainings, providing them with regular and consistent handholding and support and opportunities for cross-learning become critical.

School based Curriculum Implementation with Girls and Boys

The school-level implementation of the program aimed to address the two key objectives of the program:

- Improving adolescent girls' self-efficacy and employability by implementing an in-school curriculum, P.A.C.E. for Adolescents;¹³
- Reducing the risk of resistance to girls' success by fostering gender-equitable norms among male peers by implementing ICRW's GEMS curriculum.

The Plan-It Girls program was aimed to build the agency of adolescent girls in the age group of 14-17 years, to equip them with life and employability skills. The program intended to create a pool of adolescent girls who had the 'life skills and employability skills' to make the transition from school to work. Since the program was designed for implementation in schools, it was envisaged that the girls from Classes 9 and 11 would be provided inputs over two years and followed through Classes 10 and 12 respectively. Thus, the curriculum was designed as 30-40 minutes group sessions to be delivered in the classroom through YFs. The P.A.C.E curriculum is a 34-hour curriculum focusing on two domains and each domain had two modules as listed below:

Domain 1: Empowerment

- **Module 1- Self** – Identity and Awareness, Gender, Power and Patriarchy, Body Integrity and Emotions and Relationships
- **Module 2- Self-Efficacy** – Communication, Power and Relationship and Understanding Violence

Domain 2: Employability

- **Module 3- Resourcefulness** – Gender and Aspirations, Aspiration Mapping and Goal Setting, and Skills
- **Module 4- Employability** – Preparing for Work, Work Management and Entrepreneurship

The group sessions were based on the principles of experiential learning. In addition to the sessions, the girls also received P.A.C.E workbooks – one for each module with related session activities to highlight and reinforce the key messages and generate discussion at home.

Since the program intended to facilitate school to work transition, at the end of the sessions, career fairs were organized to provide exposure and information related to locally available training and job opportunities with a special focus on non-traditional livelihoods.

In order to ensure that the girls do not face resistance from their male peers, the GEMS curriculum was implemented with boys to promote gender equality and reduce violence by engaging students in critical thinking and self-reflection. The curriculum includes 24 sessions on topics of gender, violence, bodily changes, relationships, emotions, communication and conflict resolution. Similar to the P.A.C.E. curriculum, sessions include a range of activities to keep participants engaged, including role-play, games and debates. These sessions were transacted by YFs with boys who studied in the same school and class as the girls.

The administration and the schools in both Delhi and Jharkhand specified that they would allow only female

¹³ The first draft of P.A.C.E. Curriculum for Older Adolescent Girls was developed by ICRW as part of an intervention research project, *Planning Ahead for Girls Empowerment and Employability* (PAGE), supported by MacArthur Foundation. The curriculum was revisited and reviewed through learning circles with Youth Facilitators. The curriculum was further adapted for Gap Inc.'s P.A.C.E. for Adolescents Curriculum by ICRW. ICRW is a licensed partner of Gap Inc. and used the curriculum as part of Plan-It Girls program.



Adolescent girls at school | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

facilitators for girls' sessions and male facilitators for boys' sessions. Even in co-ed schools in Jharkhand, sessions were held separately for boys and girls. Based on this information, the school implementation strategy was designed for both the program sites.

Curriculum Implementation in Delhi

After receiving the requisite administrative permission from the Department of Education at the state level – Delhi and Jharkhand, it was critical to develop a shared vision with the key stakeholders within the school that includes HOSs and teachers, before initiating the curriculum transaction with adolescents. The program was introduced as a part of orientation meetings conducted with HOSs and a group of teachers for each of the schools. As a strategy, in order to build the program's identity through YFs, it was decided that all the three partner organizations would participate in all the meetings along with YFs. The YFs led the coordination and organization of these meetings, which ensured that they became the face of the program and were accepted within the system. This also helped in ensuring that the program sessions were integrated into the school timetable as regular sessions. The continuous and systematic engagement with HOSs helped in forging a very strong relationship with almost all the schools despite reservations and intermittent push back.

Since the Government Senior Secondary Schools (GSSS) in Delhi run in two shifts — girls study in the morning shift

(GGSSS) and boys study in afternoon shift (GBSSS) in the same school premise and use common school building, female YFs were assigned to girls' school and male YFs to boys' school as agreed with the administration. For effective classroom transaction of sessions, two YFs were paired together to ensure that one leads the session, while the other supports in managing the class and organizing the session.

The P.A.C.E curriculum transaction was initiated with girls in Classes 9 and 11 in year one of the program and followed the same cohort in year two when the girls were in Classes 10 and 12. Hence, the curriculum was transacted with girls, whereby each girl in Classes 9 and 11 in year one and subsequently in year two, attended one Plan-It Girls session in a week.

While the girls' schools provided the required support, there was a resistance from the Heads of boys' schools. Reasons such as boys' misbehavior and aggression, need to use force to get them to study were often cited for not extending the support for the program. Despite the requisite permission, they did not allow the program to be initiated in year one. It was only after persistent advocacy and negotiation by the team and feedback from Heads of girls' schools that they allowed for the sessions in the second year, however, still did not provide regular classroom time for conducting the sessions. The team circumvented this challenge by devising a strategy to administer the GEMS curriculum with boys through a two-hour workshop session conducted every fortnight.



Adolescent girls at school | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

Table 2: Total Number of Participants in Delhi

Program Sites	Year One: 2017			Year Two: 2018		
	Class 9	Class 11	Total	Class 10	Class 12	Total
Delhi: Girls	4520	2601	7121	2272	1978	4250
Delhi: Boys	-	-	-	2312	1338	3650

Insights from the Program Participants

"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 as men and they can achieve so only if they're willing to fight for it." — Adolescent girl, Delhi

"Out of all the sessions delivered to us, there was one session on being a 'Mard', which taught us the meaning of the word 'Mard' and what it's like to be a man. I had a very different perspective on this in the beginning, but this session has helped me change my thinking." — Adolescent boy, Delhi

Curriculum Implementation in Jharkhand

The school implementation in Jharkhand was similar to Delhi. However, the key difference was that the program was implemented in co-ed schools in Jharkhand, which meant that the girls and boys study in the same classroom. In Jharkhand, permissions by the state government could only be acquired toward the end of year one of the program, which meant that the session transaction could only be initiated in the second year of the program, i.e., when girls and boys were in Classes 10 and 12. Implementation of the P.A.C.E. curriculum was led by trained female YFs and the GEMS curriculum was led by male YFs and the sessions were planned simultaneously. While waiting for the government's permission, the program team continued with capacity building of PEs and YFs and to build a strong relationship with the school administration. Since all the schools agreed to allocate time to Plan-It Girls sessions at least twice a week, the team was able to make up for the lost time in year one of the program.

In Jharkhand, the school attendance was found to be low. The baseline study that was conducted with girls when they were in Classes 9 and 11 revealed that on average, girls missed school for 14 days in a month. To address this challenge, the team worked with HOSs to send information to girls and also conducted meetings at the Panchayat-level to mobilize girls to attend school. Despite the improvement in attendance, it was observed that regular student turnout was low due to various reasons including lack of teachers, preference to go for private tuitions, distance from school and seasonal floods.

In Jharkhand, besides conducting P.A.C.E. and GEMS sessions with girls and boys respectively, the program also organized events like quiz, debate and drawing competitions and role-plays on issues of child marriage and the value of girls' education. These events also proved to be very crucial in raising awareness about the program and mobilizing girls and boys for youth-led community campaigns. The events were very well received in the schools by both teachers and students. These activities also helped in improving the interaction between girls and boys and garnered teachers' support.

Table 3: Total Number of Participants in Jharkhand

Program Sites	Year 1: 2017			Year 2: 2018		
	Class 9	Class 11	Total	Class 10	Class 12	Total
Jharkhand: Girls	-	-	-	997	497	1494
Jharkhand: Boys	-	-	-	1047	556	1603

Insights from the Program Participants

"I learnt a lot from lessons delivered on the impact of gender on us and body integrity. Gradually I am becoming confident to raise voice against social evil that prevails in our society. I used to talk to my mother about the learnings we gain from sessions, though she is uneducated, but after detailing she told me that it is necessary to learn these things." — Older adolescent girl, Pakur, Jharkhand

"I really like all the sessions that I have attended. I feel that 'who am I' and 'power walk' lesson was quite useful for me." — Younger adolescent girl, Pakur, Jharkhand

"I was a bit shy during Classes 9 and 10, and I did not speak to people so much. Now I do speak to my friends. I even made new friends." — Older adolescent girl, Deoghar, Jharkhand

At both program sites of Delhi and Jharkhand, the workbooks provided to the girls as part of the program came in handy for them to do the exercises at home and reinforce the messages from the curriculum sessions. They also acted as a tool to initiate a conversation at home with siblings and parents.

Career Fairs in Schools

As the program was intended to provide girls with skills and information for school-to-work transition, career fairs were planned as a part of the school implementation process. The fairs were a necessary step toward providing information and exposure related to potential future education and career options, thus creating pathways to employment for girls whereby they could interact with local industry partners and gain a sense of potential opportunities in different sectors.

Career fairs were organized after completion of the employability module that included sessions on gender and work, mapping own aspirations, setting goals, planning to achieve goals, learning how to prepare for work, creating a resume, work management, time and stress management. Career fairs were planned as a culmination to the completion of the curriculum to ensure that the girls receive information and exposure to non-traditional livelihood and training opportunities that are available locally.

Career fairs provided an opportunity for girls to be introduced to various organizations and agencies providing skilling opportunities and representing diverse traditional and non-traditional sectors including retail, healthcare, hospitality, information technology. NGOs and civil society organizations focusing on livelihood programs, educational institutes, training institutions provided information about career options to the girls.

The team mapped and reached out to local skill training centers/institutes and NGOs offering privately funded and government-supported training for different job roles across various sectors. The process of organizing and conducting career fairs at both program sites has been delineated below.

Career Fairs in Schools in Delhi

Career fairs were conducted to provide girls with locally available skilling, training and job opportunities that were also non-traditional in nature, along with information on potential options for higher education. The opportunities presented to the girls had to also align with their interests and skill sets. For this purpose, the team collaborated with the Educational, Vocational, Guidance and Counseling Bureau (EVGCB) of the State Education Department which had conducted a psychometric assessment of the students to assess their career interests. The team received inputs from EVGCB experts on girls' interest areas and aspirations.

For setting up the career fairs in Delhi, a five-step process was followed:

- 1) Mapping, identification and selection of prospective Skill Training Centers/ Institutes/ NGOs/ Foundations;
- 2) Meeting HOSs to finalize the dates of the career fair aligned to the schools' schedule
- 3) Meeting EVGC Bureau, Directorate of Education Delhi (DoE), Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCT) and ensuring participation and allocation of two professional counselors per school for career fairs in respective schools;
- 4) Briefing of finalized agencies to provide them clear information about the purpose and expectations of the career fair and logistical planning;
- 5) Planning and deployment of respective YFs to ensure smooth rollout of the career fairs.

Prior to the career fairs, the program team at RD leveraged several opportunities such as career conclave organized by Delhi Government and **Rozgar** Mela organized by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to garner government support and create linkages with the government agencies in run-up to the career fairs. A total of 10 career fairs, one each for every intervention school, were conducted.



Girls huddle together to interact with YFs at a career fair organized at their school as part of Plan-It Girls | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

Insights from the Girls and Participating Industry Partners

"I wanted to be a doctor, but I study Arts. So, I was worried that how I would be able to get into the medical field through the Arts stream. The career fair organized by Plan-It Girls program taught me about the career options available in the medical field through the arts stream. I know I have Healthcare sector as an option."— Older adolescent girl, Delhi

"I learned so many things from the Career Fair conducted in my school, such as; how to choose a career and what are the different sectors I can apply to."— Older adolescent girl, Delhi

"The career fair proved to be very useful for students. It was an amazing experience representing Unnati Foundation at the fair. It gave us an opportunity to interact with youth who are in need of jobs. We are getting good response from them enquiring about admissions/opportunities"— Unnati Foundation (Participating Agency)

"Career fair was a good platform to reach out to young people looking to make their career in different sectors. It helped us to connect with our target beneficiaries and it is a great tool for mobilization for the NGOs, involved in running various vocational training and placement programs and the girls also get multiple options for their career."— Etasha Society (Participating Agency)



Adolescent girls at a career fair in their school organized as part of Plan-It Girls | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

Career Fairs in Schools in Jharkhand

In Jharkhand, the district teams in both Deoghar and Pakur conducted a detailed mapping exercise to identify the relevant agencies, centers, organizations and relevant government functionaries and initiate the necessary dialogue for setting up the career fairs.

As the program was being implemented in co-ed schools, both the girls and boys from Classes 10 and 12 participated in the career fair. Girls were given first priority and got adequate time to visit each stall, followed by boys from the same class. Students from Classes 9 and 11 also had the opportunity to

visit stalls after the program participants. For most of the girls, it was their first-ever exposure to an event that exclusively provided them information on locally available education and career options.

In Pakur, schools' computer labs were used to screen videos related to women empowerment and changing trends in women employment followed by a discussion around various career options for girls after passing out of school.

A total of 20 agencies and skilling partners participated in career fairs across 10 intervention schools.

Insights from the Girls and a Participating Industry Partner

"The major takeaway for me from the career fair is girls can achieve anything and can earn money. Girls and women who are unemployed should earn and gain self-respect."— Older adolescent girl, Pakur, Jharkhand

"I really like the industrial training institute (ITI), nursing, stitching training information provided during the career fair. I want to achieve something in the future. Information related to ITI was useful for me." — Older adolescent girl, Deoghar, Jharkhand

"Organizing a career fair is one of the effective steps taken by the program. It is useful for students to do their career planning for the future. Career fair gives students an opportunity to make informed decisions about their career by continuing education." — An Industry partner, Pakur, Jharkhand

Employability Dockets for Delhi and Jharkhand

While the information on various courses and job opportunities was shared by the industry partners during the career fairs, the team considered it imperative to provide this information in schools for girls and teachers. The docket was designed as a sustainable information resource for girls to be able to access information and plan for their careers. These dockets compiled information on locally available courses (in-person and online) in Delhi and Jharkhand. The dockets had information on all possible career options for various subject

streams, degree courses, diplomas, courses offered by ITIs and other local institutes and were shared with schools at the time of program culmination.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

The following table delineates the challenges faced and respective mitigation strategies adopted during the school implementation process (including organizing career fairs) as a part of the program.

Challenges	Mitigation Strategies
Despite the Government's permission in Delhi, schools were reluctant to allow the implementation of the curriculum for adolescent girls and boys.	Regular school visits and meetings with school heads were undertaken by the program team from all three partners - ICRW, RD and Pravah — in order to develop a strong relationship and rapport with the school authorities helped in mitigating this challenge. As the YFs led these orientation and rapport-building meetings, this helped in garnering support of the school authorities toward the YFs transacting the program and building the program's identity.
Especially the Heads of boys' schools did not see value in implementing a curriculum for boys in a program that focused on girls. There was also resistance from one of the girls' schools in providing dedicated time periods for Plan-It Girls sessions.	In the boys' school, the team negotiated for two-hour slots every two weeks to transact the GEMS curriculum in workshop mode. After initiating the sessions, the team of YFs was able to negotiate better, as they were able to win the trust of the teachers and heads. Some teachers also monitored the initial sessions and provided positive feedback to the HOSs.
Furthermore, the schools were also averse to the appointment of YFs who were expected to transact the curriculum in classrooms with girls and boys.	The resistance from one of the girls' schools was also owing to the fact that the school had two new heads within a period of four months and the teacher-in-charge felt that NGO programs were not useful for girls. To mitigate this challenge the team created an exigency plan in which on the last working day of the month, while teachers were engaged by the Pravah team, as a part of the teacher engagement component in Delhi, the YFs conducted two-hour workshops to transact the curriculum.
Lack of adequate teachers in schools in Jharkhand led to lesser turnout of students. Irregularity of attendance was also another major concern especially during festive and harvesting seasons, as students would not attend school during this period.	To mitigate this challenge, the team worked closely with school authorities on sensitizing them toward the program. Besides this, the YFs conducted door-to-door visits and addressed this issue during community meetings, encouraging parents to send their daughters to school.
	The teacher sensitization workshops conducted in both the districts with sessions on understanding adolescence also worked well in encouraging teachers to be more supportive toward their students.



Adolescent girls participate in a Plan-It Girls classroom session | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

Challenges	Mitigation Strategies
<p>In some schools in Jharkhand, due to lack of teachers or infrastructure, curriculum transaction with Class 12 was significantly affected as no formal classes were being held and hence, this adversely impacted attendance of the students who preferred to take tuitions to complete the academic syllabus.</p> <p>In such a scenario, school heads requested the YFs to teach part of the academic curriculum emphasizing the fact that Classes 10 and 12 had board exams.</p> <p>The time in schools to transact the sessions was much less than envisaged. This was often due to extra-curricular activities, unplanned holidays and other academic engagements. Despite receiving allotted time slots within the timetable, the sessions had to be postponed as the Plan-It Girls sessions were accorded a lower priority as compared to completion of the academic syllabus. This was true for both Delhi and Jharkhand.</p>	<p>Selected YFs (with strong academic credentials) facilitated some portions of the academic curriculum in order to support the schools. This also resulted in an increase in attendance of students and improved teachers' response toward the Plan-It Girls Program.</p> <p>Certain sessions of the P.A.C.E. curriculum were also repeated with students who had missed out the session transaction in the schools.</p> <p>To make up for the paucity of time, sessions were also transacted in the zero periods (assembly period).¹⁴</p> <p>With limited time to complete the P.A.C.E. curriculum transaction with girls, the team devised a strategy to rework and club sessions, while ensuring that the key messages were shared and highlighted through the activities. This was also accompanied by session-themed handouts, which the girls were oriented on and could take home with them.</p> <p>Another factor that helped mitigate this challenge was the distribution of workbooks as a part of the curriculum. Since there were four workbooks corresponding to each of the four modules of the curriculum, highlighting the key messages of each session, the girls also had curriculum material to go through on their own outside the classroom.</p>
<p>The career fairs for Delhi and Jharkhand were planned as culmination events to the completion of the P.A.C.E. curriculum with the last module on employability. As the girls would be taken through the last module with sessions on how to create a résumé, find a job and work management, career fairs were to offer a logical transition for girls to explore various options to plan for their future education and careers.</p> <p>However, given the last quarter of the year— from October to December, it was challenging to convince school authorities to allow for conducting an event like a career fair given the festive season and upcoming pre-board exams (which were advanced due to the elections). Also, it was imperative that the P.A.C.E. curriculum transaction be completed before the career fairs.</p>	<p>To circumvent this challenge, the team employed multiple strategies from combining curriculum sessions with handouts and workbooks to ensure completion of curriculum transaction in time for consistent and continuous engagement with school authorities to garner their support for conducting the fairs.</p> <p>The team conducted a series of meetings with the HOSs and negotiated for time allocation for concluding the program delivery before the second week of December. This allowed for successful completion of the P.A.C.E. curriculum.</p> <p>Also, the HOSs were assured of the value of career fairs for girls and the fact that they would be professionally organized without causing any distractions or interruptions to the school infrastructure or timetable and that garnered support of the school authorities.</p>

¹⁴ Delhi Government schools have a zero period that takes place during assembly time and is meant for teaching specific subjects for Classes 10 and 12 students who are due to appear for their board exams.

Recommendations Based on the Process

- **Starting the in-school curriculum transaction early:**

The program was planned as a two-year intervention starting in Classes 9 and 11 and following the same cohort through Classes 10 and 12 respectively. However, despite being integrated into the timetable, the team had to constantly negotiate with teachers to continue the sessions, as the emphasis was on preparing the students to appear for Classes 10 and 12 board exams, which are critical to academic success. In Jharkhand, this additionally meant that in schools where there was a lack of teachers, the students did not come to school, rather utilized the time for private tuitions. Also, the drop out after Classes 8 and 9 is highest as the girls are unable to keep up with the academic requirements and also often do not comprehend the need for education. Therefore, it is recommended that the program should be initiated earlier than Class 9 so that the girls can be equipped with information and skills before they reach Classes 10 and 12. Since the program aims at facilitating school to work transition, the program could build a light-touch approach to support girls in Classes 10 and 12.

- **Developing and implementing a robust and consistent engagement strategy with HOSs:** For a school-based adolescent girls' program, based on the experience and best practices followed as part of Plan-It Girls, it is recommended that the program reaches out to HOSs and teachers from the onset of the program. While the program had procured formal permissions from the state governments and worked closely with the district authorities, it was imperative to work with the school administration to ensure support and smooth roll-out and implementation of the program. From the onset, program orientation meetings were conducted in schools with HOSs followed by monthly meetings as a part of the strategy and quarterly meetings with district administration. This helped to understand school authorities' expectations from the program and also sharing regular updates with them and seeking their inputs regularly. The systematic and consistent engagement

with the school administration helped in forging a strong relationship with almost all the schools ensuring continued support for the program.

- **Positioning the YFs as the face of the program in schools:**

Since YFs were the foundation of the program and were to transact the in-school curriculum with girls and boys and coordinate with teachers for the school time table and the teacher engagement component at both the program sites, it was critical to ensure that YFs were accepted by the schools and the communities as the face of the program. Thus, they were introduced by the team as central to the program during the orientation and were given the responsibility of coordinating and organizing the periodic meetings with school authorities. They also provided regular updates to the teachers and the HOSs. The strong positioning of YFs within the school and their good rapport with the students also helped strengthen their position as local role models for girls within the classroom and the community. It is therefore recommended that in a school-based program with a peer educator model, the peer educators are kept central to program design and positioned as the face of the program within schools thereby also facilitating credibility within the community.

- **Planning for school implementation while allowing for flexibility and readjustments to respond to the school timetable:** While the program was integrated within the schools' academic timetable, there were unforeseen and unpredictable developments on the ground that warranted an urgent change and recalibration. For example, in year two of the program in Delhi, the pre-boards for Classes 10 and 12 were held a month earlier than planned, which meant that the Plan-It Girls sessions had to be redesigned and clubbed toward the end to ensure smooth program completion. Similarly, often the session plan in schools would have to be reworked due to unplanned activities and holidays for annual day, picnics, sports days, election duty, etc. Thus, it is recommended that for the school-based programs keep space to adjust to the needs and demands of the schools.

- **Initiating industry engagement early on as a part of the program:** While, in Plan-It Girls, the career fairs were planned as a culmination to the program in schools, it would bode well to plan for a more integrated industry engagement component. While the girls learned employability skills as a part of the program curriculum, they were only exposed to industry partners at the end of the program. A more

sustained engagement with industry partners would offer more time and options for girls to decide and plan for their future career choices. The program would therefore need to create linkages and partnerships with the industries from the onset of the program. A more sustained engagement could also include mentorships, financial assistance and apprenticeship for girls.

Adolescent girls at school | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia



Teachers' Engagement in Jharkhand

Rationale

One of the key components of the program's ecosystem approach is the engagement with teachers as one of the significant stakeholders in a girl's life to support her aspirations and ambitions. The aim was to create a network of motivated teachers who support the program and become gender champions and change agents in the school system. In Delhi, the teacher engagement was led by Pravah as the implementation partner.¹⁵ It was expected that the Delhi strategy will inform and share lessons for formulating the Jharkhand strategy, which was based on local context. Unlike Delhi, in most schools of Jharkhand, lack of teachers and absence of teachers' trainings on issues such as gender sensitization needed to be considered for the strategy. In consultation with the district-level officials and HOSs, two "champion teachers" from each intervention school were nominated for participating in a series of workshops through the program period.

Strategy and Process

The program planned three workshops, each one for two days, with the aim of building the teachers' perspective on the need for investing in adolescents and gender issues along with equipping them with skills and content that they could continue to use with their students to empower them and make them employable. The first district-level teachers' workshop focused on sensitizing teachers on adolescents, followed by a gender perspective building workshop and culminated

with the third and last workshop on creating safe space and familiarizing them with the curriculum content and activities.

A total of three sensitization workshops were conducted in Pakur at the district level during the course of the program with support from the District Education Officer (DEO). Since the DEO of Pakur felt that along with intervention schools, there is a need to work with the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBVs — residential schools for girls), teachers from KGBV schools were also included in the district-level workshop. Each workshop was attended by 15-20 male and female teachers from intervention and KGBV schools. Unlike Pakur, in Deoghar with the support from the outgoing DEO, the team conducted the first workshop, but in absence of the DEO, the remaining workshops could not be organized.

The design of the workshop incorporated sessions from the P.A.C.E. and the GEMS curricula with the vision of briefing teachers on sessions that were rolled out with students so that they could continue to conduct similar sessions with their students in the future.

The workshops had an interactive and participatory session design and addressed topics on understanding adolescents, their expectations, dreams and aspirations, the support they expect from teachers and the role of teachers in shaping the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the adolescents. The discussion topics also included what makes an ideal student and an ideal teacher, the role of teachers, the needs and challenges of the adolescents and how schools and teachers can act

¹⁵ The teacher engagement strategy in Delhi was implemented by Pravah. In the first academic year the program focused on conducting monthly meetings with 10-15 teachers from every school who taught Classes 9 to 12, with an aim to identify potential gender champions and build their capacity. In year two, monthly meetings were conducted with three-five teachers per school who were identified as gender champions. The teachers led action projects in their respective schools such as undertaking a gender audit of academic textbooks and creating a gender board in school. For more information, refer to Plan-It Girls: Process Documentation for Teachers' Intervention by Pravah.

as a support system, as most of the adolescent girls were first-generation learners in their families. They also listed the attributes one should possess as a teacher in order to support students in the best way possible. Teachers were briefed on the Plan-It Girls program and its objective of empowering adolescent girls by working with different stakeholders in their ecosystem. Key findings from the baseline report highlighting major sources of information for the girls, their challenges, self-esteem, career goals and the support received from teachers and the family was also shared with the participants.

Regular engagement with teachers through district-level teachers' workshops and meetings in Jharkhand helped teachers to understand the importance of the program, especially for students studying in government

schools in rural areas of Jharkhand. Most of the HOSs and teachers shared positive feedback on the program. They also motivated students to attend sessions regularly and encouraged them to be part of the career fairs. Teachers praised the career fair initiative and identified it as the first event where students got exposure to various career opportunities through professionally put up and managed stalls. Most of the teachers recognized their meaningful and valuable journey being part of the workshops and overall engagement during program implementation and translated the learning within their schools. Several teachers reported encouraging adolescent girls to organize and participate in school-level activities and programs, discussed and provided information related to career opportunities, and extended greater support to girls for academic and non-academic activities.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Challenges	Mitigation Strategies
Despite the formal permissions for implementation of the program, HOSs were unwilling to let the teachers go for a two-day workshop.	Continuous and sustained dialogue with relevant school administrations facilitated this process.
Engaging teachers through workshops was challenging — smaller schools that are run or led by one or two teachers would be closed if teachers attended the training workshops. The District Administration was therefore reluctant to allow teachers to participate in the workshops.	The team circumvented this challenge by conducting workshops during the school holidays including weekends. Another strategy that worked well in this regard was to co-create the workshop learnings so that the teachers themselves were active participants in the workshops. The teachers were also encouraged to be part of the sessions conducted with the students in order to familiarize themselves with the program content and be able to observe the impact of the curriculum first-hand.
In Deoghar particularly, teachers expressed hesitation and lack of active interest in attending the trainings due to the long commute to the workshop location.	The team mitigated this challenge by providing travel support to the teachers. Such travel support was also provided in Pakur.

Learnings and Recommendations

The teachers' engagement strategy in Jharkhand was designed based on consultations with teachers from the schools where the program was being implemented. It is recommended that the teacher engagement component is designed based on the needs of the teachers and

connect it to the program's objectives. Teachers' engagement must be designed and introduced from the beginning of the program with continuous interaction and engagement built-in through regular meetings and participatory workshops following the principles of experiential learning.



Teachers huddle together for an activity during the Teachers' Engagement Workshop as part of Plan-It Girls | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

Insights from the Teachers

"We used to see that when these sessions were being held, attendance used to be better and they did a great job. Girls' hesitation was gradually disappearing." — Female teacher, Pakur, Jharkhand

"It will be good if It(the program curriculum) becomes a part of the school curriculum then it will give better results. It will bring change in the mentality of the people and we will get better results." — Male teacher, Pakur, Jharkhand

"Students have started showing interest in education and getting jobs, this was seen in both boys and girls. They have started coming closer to each other and they talk to each other. If there was some sports event organized then it used to be mostly for boys and girls used to feel uneasy. But now it is not like that anymore, they all play together." — Male teacher, Deoghar, Jharkhand

Youth Resource Centers

Rationale

The YRCs were planned to create a community resource that could provide a community linkage to the program as well as a safe space for young people. Since the program planned to engage with all stakeholders in a girl's ecosystem including boys, teachers, parents (mothers) and community members, a strategic decision was made to establish YRCs at the key program sites — one YRC in Delhi and one each in the two districts of Jharkhand — Pakur and Deoghar. The YRC was intended to be a resource and activity hub for young people from the community including the program participants, thus creating an additional touch point outside the school. In addition, it became the workspace for YFs. Led and managed by the YFs, they acted as safe spaces for both the YFs and the people of the community, especially young boys and girls to engage in peer-to-peer interaction, seek advice and support, learning and access resources (such as internet, printers and computers), and conduct program activities including YFs training, mothers' meetings and events organized to observe significant days.

Identification of and Setting Up YRCs

One of the first program responsibilities YFs in both Delhi and Jharkhand were tasked with, was the identification

of strategic spaces and the setting up of the YRCs. The strategic locations for each of the YRCs were carefully identified by the YFs and Program Executives with support from the senior team and community members. The selected locations were accessible spaces in the communities and close to the intervention schools. All the shortlisted locations were assessed and finalized based on costs involved and considerations such as distance from intervention schools, accessibility for stakeholders (in order to maximize their visits to the centers), mapping essential indicators such as health and safety, risk factors and accessibility from main and arterial roads, as well as ease in obtaining government permissions to run the centers. A total of three YRCs were set up across program areas: one in Badarpur, Delhi, another in Jhikarhatti, Pakur and the third in Chulhiya, Deoghar, Jharkhand. Several YFs termed it a learning experience as most of them had never engaged with such a task.

Creating Safe Spaces through Youth Resource Centers

The YRCs were established in strategic locations in the implementation sites in Delhi and Jharkhand and were managed by the YFs and the PEs. Some of the expected outcomes from the YRCs included: safe spaces for boys and girls from the program to access various services after school including informal counseling and guidance

Insights from the YFs

"It (YRC setting up) was an entirely new experience and we had absolutely no idea how to go about it, but we still managed to learn, got through it and did it". — Female YF, Delhi

from the YFs on peer pressure, managing relationships, and prospective career choices. Since the YFs came from similar communities and backgrounds as girls and boys and had been trained during the program, they had the knowledge and capacity to guide girls and boys in the local contexts and available opportunities.

In Delhi, the YRC was used for conducting meetings, events and providing computer access to girls and boys who participated in the program. Some of the events organized at the YRC included theme-based discussions/debates, painting competitions on the International Day of the Girl Child (October 11), on the National Girl Child Day (January 24) and the International Women's Day (March 8).

In Jharkhand, the YRCs acted as a designated space for stakeholders from the community who had participated in the program to avail various services such as photocopying, e-services (checking admission results, jobs/vacancies search, rail ticket bookings) and reading newspapers.

During the course of two years of the program implementation at both program sites, groups of adolescent girls and boys visited YRCs to seek information on computer classes, accessing job opportunities, financial planning and enquiring about nearby Skill Training Centers.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Challenges	Mitigation Strategies
The biggest challenge in identifying and setting up the YRCs was finding the appropriate physical space for the program.	Before establishing the centers, a need assessment process was conducted by the YFs involving mapping out essential parameters for the YRC. These included keeping in mind possible health and safety risk factors, universal accessibility for the community and proximity to intervention schools. The YFs and PEs sought support from local community members and other NGO partners to facilitate the process. Their suggestions and support helped in narrowing down the possible locations and list of physical available spaces before finalizing the three YRC centers in Delhi, Pakur and Deoghar.

Recommendations

Based on the program experience, there is a great value in investing in physical spaces like the YRCs that can act as resource and activity hubs for the program stakeholders. Physical spaces like the YRCs help anchor the program for the stakeholders beyond engagement in the schools and communities. They provide the potential for a sustainable engagement model beyond different program

components and offer opportunities to cater to the needs of key program stakeholders including girls and boys from both urban and rural communities. Youth Resource Centers created a safe space that was easily accessible for girls and boys to seek advice, interact and engage on issues pertaining to their everyday lives, goals, education and work aspirations. It also provided legitimization to the program within the community members. Physical infrastructure like the YRC also enabled building trust with the community for the program.

Community Engagement

Rationale

One of the key objectives of the program as part of the ecosystem approach was to reduce parents' and communities' resistance to girls' success through intentional engagement and create an enabling environment. In a girl's life, her parents and the people in the community are often those who can either dictate, control, or influence her life choices, especially her future educational and work aspirations. Hence, it is imperative to work with these key stakeholders in order to build their sensitivity toward adolescent girls' needs and foster gender-equitable attitudes that would help in providing a more conducive environment for girls where they feel supported and can make their own informed choices about their futures.

In order to achieve this, it was crucial to develop a robust community engagement strategy that was specifically designed keeping in mind the unique geographical and sociocultural factors of the urban and rural program sites of Delhi and Jharkhand respectively. A comprehensive community mapping, based on the data shared by the schools was undertaken by the YFs to understand the spread of adolescent girls participating in the program across localities in Delhi and villages in Jharkhand, the availability of community-based resources and the presence of other organizations and programs. This exercise was critical in directing the community engagement strategies to be devised for each location.

Strategy for Delhi

The community mapping exercise in Delhi provided key insights into the geographical spread of girls who

attended the program. In Delhi, the intervention schools spread over a radius of eight to 10 kilometers who were reaching out to over 7,000 girls of Classes 9 and 11. The students were spread across several urban wards that comprise multiple localities — rehabilitation colonies, slum colonies also known as JJ Colonies and other low or middle-income localities. Some students of schools on the border of Delhi and Haryana also came from Faridabad.

Since the girls came from a wide geographical area, the community strategy for Delhi was reworked to reach out to parents of girls, however, it was soon realized that the majority of the fathers were not available during the day. Thus, a decision was taken to work closely with mothers of girls who participated in the program as opposed to reaching out to community members through campaigns and events.

Implementation

The mothers of adolescent girls were a mix of working and at home women. After the mapping and individual and group consultation with several mothers across localities, it was decided to have a short-term engagement strategy. The team recognized that it was not possible to reach out to the mother of each of the girls. Therefore, it was decided to identify pockets/colonies with a high density of girls participating in the program. The YFs made household visits to mobilize the mothers and formed multiple groups of 25-30 mothers. They also sought support from the members of School Management Committees (SMCs)¹⁶ who were oriented to the program as a part of the monthly SMC meetings. SMC members also provided support to the mothers' intervention in the community, however, the

¹⁶ When the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) mandated the formation of School Management Committees (SMC) in every government-funded school, it was to encourage community and more particularly, parental involvement. School Management Committee (SMC) comprises of parents, local elected representatives, educationists, and is convened by the head of school.

involvement of SMC members varied drastically, as not all SMC members were actively engaged with the parents.

After the initial planning of eight weeks of engagement with mothers, the teams realized that most mothers would drop out after first three to four meetings. Thus, the team decided to work with a four-week plan per group. Following topics were discussed with the mothers in these four weeks:

- Week 1 – Value of girl child
- Week 2 – Importance of education and employment for girls
- Week 3 – Early and Forced marriage
- Week 4 – Aspirations of girls – Mother-daughter interaction

In Delhi, the program reached out to a total of 2,198 mothers. The discussion with the mothers drew heavily on their own experiences and the ideal life they aspired to live. This helped them recognize the barriers in supporting their daughters. In the last session, the mothers were requested to bring their daughters along. This opportunity was used to initiate a conversation between the two around the aspiration of the daughters and enabled them to reflect on the fact that the daughters' aspirations could be very different from

mothers' aspirations for their daughters. The session would end with the mothers identifying ways in which they can support their daughters to realize their dreams.

Along with this, other platforms like Parent Teacher Meetings (PTMs) were leveraged to reach out to the parents. Although in most schools, not more than 40-50 percent parents participate in the PTMs, it helped the team to reach out to a greater number of parents. The schools supported this strategy by providing a space for a 15-20 minutes session in which the parents were familiarized with the program and a brief discussion on their role in supporting their daughters' education and employment-related aspirations. A total of 610 mothers were reached out through the PTMs. In addition, special days related to the thematic focus of the program were also observed (International Women's Day, International Girl Child Day, etc.). Overall, five such events /days were observed and 50 community meetings were held.

Strategy for Jharkhand

In Jharkhand, most schools are located at the block level and cater to villages of two to three Panchayats. This had an implication for the community engagement strategy as each school catered to almost 50-60 villages and the

Girls participate in the morning assembly session at school | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia



number of girls per village was less. Reaching out to parents or developing parent groups in these villages was not feasible.

In Jharkhand, the community engagement strategy, therefore, focused more on community campaigns and PRI sensitization. While initially SMCs were also envisaged as part of the strategy, it was found that SMCs were largely non-functional.

Thus, youth-led community campaigns were planned to reach out to the community at large. The team also decided to leverage the existing village-level institutions and mechanisms for community outreach. The team identified Panchayats in Pakur and Deoghar, and used platforms such as Gram Panchayat meetings and field-level functionaries such as **Gram Rozgar Sewak** (village-level employment functionary), accredited social health activist (ASHA) workers and self-help group (SHG) members to engage with the parents and community members at the village level about girls' aspirations, opportunities for them, and the role of parents and communities in realizing their potential.

Implementation

Community engagement in Jharkhand comprised individual and group meetings with PRI members and community campaigns led by the girls and boys who participated in the program. The engagement with community stakeholders aimed toward building their support toward delaying child marriage and creating an enabling environment for adolescent girls to complete their education. The idea was to provide the community with viable local alternatives to let their girls study and pursue work.

Engagement with Panchayat and Community Members

Panchayats were also engaged in an attempt to secure institutional support for the program. One Panchayat per intervention school was identified and targeted for

sustained engagement through sensitization meetings. After a series of individual and group meetings with the PRI members, members from the local Childline agency, skill development training centers, teachers from intervention schools, **Rozgar Mitra**, ASHA workers and Panchayat presidents were involved in the PRI sensitization meetings. The objective of these meetings was to inform PRI members of the various provisions that exist as a part of government policies and how they can be leveraged for the benefit of girls in the community. The meetings also focused on building a more nuanced understanding of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, as child marriage is a common practice in Jharkhand. Over 10 PRI sensitization meetings were conducted on child marriage, child protection, girl-child education and gender equality.

The last meeting that was held in the communities to culminate the program invited not only the community leaders and members but also schoolteachers, Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society's block-level officials, members of Childline, other local NGO partners and skill development partners. This was aligned to the strategy of building local buy-in and commitment for supporting girls' education and employability opportunities. The discussion helped identify critical barriers to girls' education and employability followed by a discussion on educational and skilling opportunities and the support Childline could provide to prevent child marriage. All the participants in the meeting together listed possible solutions and pledged to undertake those steps in their communities. This helped in creating community-level ownership among not only community members but also institutions that could provide required support post-completion of the program.

Youth-led Community Campaigns

In order to mobilize support for community campaigns, YFs reached out to community stakeholders — Panchayat members, ASHAs, **Rozgar Mitras** and parents of adolescent girls to request them to send the girls to schools regularly and allow them to participate in the activities. Several school-based competitions were also conducted to provide girls and boys an opportunity to



Girls and boys participate in a community engagement campaign as part of Plan-It Girls | Photo credit: Restless Development

interact and collaborate. This created a foundation for mobilizing program participants in their communities to conduct campaigns on two themes — education for girls and child marriage. The adolescent-led campaigns included door-to-door campaigns, rallies, observing significant days and role-plays in the community. These campaigns created an opportunity for girls to participate in activities in the community and increased their visibility in public space. The campaigns proved significant in garnering support from critical stakeholders at the community level including SHG leaders, Panchayat members and some parents. Celebrations around

important days such as International Women's Day and International Girl Child Day were also conducted in and around the YRCs to enable mass sensitization on the issues of child marriage, girl-child education and the value of girls in the community.

In Jharkhand, a total of 117 events in Deoghar and 67 events in Pakur were conducted during the two years of program implementation reaching more than 18,000 people through various activities as a part of the community engagement.

Insights from Female Community Members

"Child marriage is a growing concern in our areas. Our Panchayat is committed to work on the issues and sensitize community members. The community campaigns and sensitization meetings with various stakeholders are really helping us to create mass awareness among parents and elders in our community. I really appreciate today's efforts to promote an interactive dialogue with Childline and Skill Development partners in our community to address the child marriage issue through linking girls to employment generation activities. This will provide us more strategic guidance to work the cause." — Female community member, Mukhiya, KhasPeka Panchayat, Deoghar, Jharkhand (Panchayat comes under community intervention areas of program intervention school, Shashibhushan Ray +2 School, Simra)

"The efforts taken by a student of Hiranpur high school toward sensitization on child marriage is a good initiative. Such campaigns should happen because child marriage is still happening in our society and we all should raise a voice against it. I completely support such initiatives." — Female community member, Ward member, Kamalghati, Hiranpur, Jharkhand

"Such campaign on child marriage is really necessary. Both boys and girls should have right to decide about their marriage." — Female community member, Mukhiya, Jhikarhatti, Pakur, Jharkhand



Adolescent girls participate in a community engagement campaign | Photo credit: Restless Development

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Challenge	Mitigation Strategy
Devising a robust community engagement strategy in geography like Delhi schools with widespread communities proved to be challenging.	<p>In order to understand and mitigate this challenge, based on the spread of program participants across the catchment area, select communities were first mapped. The community engagement strategy was revised based on the mapping, consultations with parents and SMC members. The existing groups of SMCs and PTMs were leveraged to reach out to parents and raise awareness about the program.</p> <p>Formation of mothers' groups and conducting mothers' group meetings was a key component of the revised strategy. In the areas where it is not feasible to form groups, mothers were reached out through household visits.</p>
In Jharkhand, the participation of women community leaders in PRI intervention was low on account of the prevailing gender norms (Women were initially hesitant to speak in front of the male leaders.)	<p>Post-observation of low participation of women leaders in the first meeting, the team consciously modified the strategy. In the integrated meetings, the YFs made a conscious effort to incorporate feedback from women leaders. Women leaders were also encouraged to speak and participate in smaller groups.</p>

Recommendations

Since the ecosystem approach warrants a robust community engagement to ensure that girls feel supported and have a conducive environment at home and in the community, it is necessary to have a structured and layered approach to a) increase community's sensitivity toward girls' aspirations and b) to reduce the risk of any potential backlash. Based on the program experience, it is recommended that the

community engagement strategy be devised and revised as necessary keeping in mind the local-geographical and socio-cultural context. It is also a good idea to have a layered approach as in case of Jharkhand — through PRI sensitization meetings and youth-led community campaigns. It is also recommended that the community engagement strategy uses a collaborative approach by partnering with other local CSOs/NGOs, government officials and leverage government programs and policies for conducting the campaigns at a larger scale.

Sustainability and Scale-up of Plan-It Girls

Sustaining the Program

Plan-It Girls was designed and implemented to test a multi-level and multi-stakeholder integrated model for empowerment and employability of adolescent girls. Post program in schools and the end-line evaluation in early 2019, the team recognized the need to support the girls who were at the cusp of transitioning from school, especially for ensuring linkages with locally available education, training and career opportunities. In this section, we highlight some of the key activities that were undertaken to sustain the program's impact for over six months after the program completion in schools.

Delhi

The girls who participated in the program had appeared for their board exams and were on the verge of either graduating school or transitioning to Class 11 where they would decide on the subject stream they would like to pursue. For some, it would not even be guaranteed, whether they would be allowed to continue their studies by their families. In such a scenario, the team decided to offer handholding support to girls by reaching out to their families and initiating communication with parents/guardians around continuing their education. The YFs conducted door-to-door visits during the summer vacations to have discussions around enabling girls to continue their education or pursue higher education or training options. The program aimed at linking girls from the community who had participated in the school-based intervention to the locally available and mapped skill training centers and career opportunities. During this period, the focus of the program was to understand the priorities of the girls, map their aspirations and work with their parents to seek their consent and support. The initiative undertook the following activities:

- Identifying girls in the community who participated in the program had passed Class 12;
- Conducting aspiration mapping exercise with the identified girls;
- Bridging the information gap among girls by providing them with exposure to locally available job-oriented training and job opportunities;
- Providing hand-holding support/assistance to the girls in making informed career choices and helping them to enroll in the select courses;
- Building networks and relationships with the locally mapped agencies/institutes to provide training/jobs opportunities for girls;
- Regular follow-up with girls for completing job-oriented courses/trainings.

Highlights of the Initiative

- Mobilized and counseled over 900 girls in South East Delhi who participated in the Plan-It Girls program;
- Mapped aspirations of over 321 girls and counseled more than 600 parents (including 200 fathers and 400 mothers);
- Conducted refresher sessions on the employability skills from the P.A.C.E. curriculum with over 400 girls;
- Facilitated enrolment of 300 girls in NSDC approved and Private Skill Training Center(s) of their choice and supported them in completing the training.

Through the schools to skills initiative, the team could bridge the information gap in a range of ways, especially since a lot of girls still were not clear, which courses to opt for. The initiative helped in building girls' understanding of various modalities around accessing government facilities related to skill development for women.



Girls participate in a Plan-It Girls classroom session at school in Jharkhand | Photo credit: Ketaki Nagaraju/ICRW Asia

Jharkhand

Similarly, in Jharkhand the YFs conducted door-to-door visits during the summer vacations to have discussions around enabling girls to continue their education or pursue higher education options and for those who had failed, helping them to fill out forms for compartment exams. After the reopening of schools, the team continued to offer support to the girls and reached out to approximately more than 350 girls and 170 parents in 49 communities in Jharkhand.

In both the districts, YFs reached out to the girls who participated in the program. While some girls were interested in finding out information about continuing their studies, the ones who could not successfully pass the exams had to be pursued to continue studies. The YFs helped them understand the process of filling out forms for the compartment exam and helped them re-enroll in the school.¹⁷ To provide accurate information on various existing higher education options to the girls, the YFs also engaged with schools and colleges to collect all relevant information about the admission processes. All the information has been collated in the form of Careers and Employability Companion that could be used by teachers and students as a comprehensive reference guide.

Insights from the Girls

"Yes, I was not interested in speaking to anyone two to three years back, but now I am interacting with everyone and I am conversing with unknown people too and understanding what is going on. Previously my world was very small but now I have a broader one." — Older adolescent girl, Pakur, Jharkhand

"I know I have to take commerce for graduation and prepare simultaneously for the bank exam. I can be selected as bank manager if I pass that exam." — Younger adolescent girl, Delhi

"They guide us about career and education. So, I felt that they should tell everything about the job, about the centers and the courses offered should be explained in detail, so that people don't sit idle and pursue it." — Older adolescent girl, Delhi

¹⁷ Compartment exam is for those students who have failed in one of the five main subjects in the board exam. The compartment exam is the option to reappear for the exam without having to repeat an academic year again.

Simultaneously, the program also shared the Careers and Employability Companion¹⁸ that was developed to provide comprehensive information on locally available higher education and training opportunities. This was shared with the schools along with a reference guide for teachers on creating gender-responsive classrooms in order to support them in their day-to-day teaching.¹⁹

Way Forward: Opportunities for Scale-up

Plan-It Girls was designed and implemented to test a multi-level and multi-stakeholder integrated model for empowerment and employability of adolescent girls. While the impact evaluation established the effectiveness of the program, it is vital to also assess the potential of the program for future scale-up.

A possible strategy to create a scale-up plan could entail developing a program scalability assessment framework (Annexure) based on inputs from the program team and participants. This would include a) researchers developing and evaluating the intervention, b) the implementing partners, and c) voices from the program participants as well as a larger ecosystem (adolescents, communities, and school and government systems). Incorporating a scalability assessment for Plan-It Girls would help tailor the intervention and implementation approach and may increase the likelihood of success at scale.

In order to scale-up a program, it is critical to consider various parameters of effectiveness, potential transfer and adoption, alignment with the strategic context and acceptability and feasibility.²⁰ Along with conducting a scalability assessment, for future scale-up of the

program, it will also be critical to understand the resource requirement for the program. A cost analysis study helps decision-makers while prioritizing and allocating the funds.²¹ Along with undertaking a scalability assessment and cost analysis, assessing the current funding landscape is equally important to support the scale-up.²² The integration of the program learnings, content and strategies in existing school-based programs being implemented by the government can be undertaken with financial support from private donors. Thus, developing a public-private partnership model where the scale-up can be achieved through institutional support from the government and funding support from the private sector.

Recommendations for Scale-up of Plan-It Girls

Plan-It Girls is a gender-integrated empowerment and employability program for adolescent girls, which has been found effective in both urban and rural areas, even though the impact varied with context and age.^{23,24} Thus, while planning for scale-up it is imperative that the following considerations are adhered to:

- **Gender-transformative Programming:** Plan-It Girls as a multi-level and multi-stakeholder program that aims to empower girls and equip them with employability skills. This is only possible if the onus of change is not alone on girls. A gender-transformative program entails change at the level of individual or collective agency, relations and structures. Plan-It Girls followed the ecosystem approach, which is critical in achieving program objectives.

18 Restless Development & ICRW. (2019). Plan-It Girls—Careers and Employability Companion – A Reference Book for Teachers and Students (**Delhi**). New Delhi: Restless Development and Restless Development & ICRW. (2019). Plan-It Girls—Careers and Employability Companion – A Reference Book for Teachers and Students (**Jharkhand**). New Delhi: Restless Development.

19 Pravah & ICRW. (2019). *Samvaad — Co-creating Gender Responsive Classrooms* — A Resource Book for Teachers. Pravah: New Delhi.

20 Please refer to Annex 1 for the Scalability Assessment Framework.

21 Please refer to **Plan-It Girls: Cost Analysis Report** for resource requirements. Visit <http://www.icrw.org>.

22 Please refer to **Plan-It Girls: Corporate Scoping Report** for understanding the current funding landscape. Visit <http://www.icrw.org>.

23 Kumar, P., Nuken, A., Datta, N., Vyas, A., Schaub, E., Achyut, P., Verma, R. (2021). Lessons from Plan-It Girls: Evidence and Implications for Future Programming. New Delhi: International Center for Research on Women.

24 Please refer to **Plan-It Girls: Qualitative Study Report** for detailed insights. Visit <http://www.icrw.org>.

- **Gender-integrated Curriculum:** The P.A.C.E. curriculum focuses on building girls' agency by building their understanding of gender, power, patriarchy and its impact on their day-to-day lives. This helps girls to view discrimination as a collective experience that is driven by the social structures and norms. The curriculum helps them see how gender as a social construction restricts their aspirations and roles and devoid them of their rights. The gender-integrated content forms the core of the empowerment and employability curriculum for girls.
- **Supporting girls beyond school:** While the curriculum forms the basis of the intervention with girls, the program acknowledged and catered to the girls' need to negotiate with their families for continuing education, re-registering in school, delaying marriage and participation in school and community-based activities. Also, YRCs that were established in the community provided them with a safe space. In addition, the program continued to provide information and linkages to higher education and skill training after the completion of the school-based intervention.
- **Integrating the program into the school system:** Plan-It Girls is a school-based program that provided regular inputs to the girls. Therefore, the need is to ensure that the program gets integrated into the school timetable to ensure regularity and sustainability within the school system that tends to prioritize academic curriculum. The integration of the program into the school system also created a safe space for girls within the school.
- **Building allies within the household and the community:** The ecosystem approach is not only to provide inputs to multiple stakeholders but also to build allies within the structures for them to be able to facilitate and support girls in their aspirations. The activities with mothers were conducted to generate a dialogue with their daughters, understand their aspirations and garner support for their aspirations. Similarly, parents and community members in Jharkhand were engaged through adolescent-led campaigns and activities to create a new normal

where girls were seen performing confidently in public spaces. This created space for the girls to engage in meaningful community activities without fear of backlash and received support and accolades from community members.

- **Building ownership among institutional stakeholders:** In a multi-stakeholder school-based program, meaningful engagement with stakeholders becomes a key to the success of the program. Within the education system, while permissions from the state and district level officials are essential, it is not a sufficient condition for the program to be implemented successfully. The HOSs and teachers play a crucial role not only in supporting the program but also in lives of adolescents. Thus, it is essential to ensure that the institutional approach is not in conflict with the program; rather efforts must be made to align the institutional approach for cohesive messaging.

Similarly, community institutions such as the Panchayat, village-level committees and self-help groups also play an important role in creating an enabling environment for the girls. While a strategy to engage with these institutions is vital, ownership and commitment of these institutions must be systematically developed during the program implementation.

- **Investing in the program team:** The program invested heavily in capacity building of the YFs. This entailed regular training workshops, refresher trainings and regular discussions on the content of the program. The inputs and investment in the program team were geared to support them through the transformative journey that each individual team member would go through as a part of the gender transformative program.

While implementing the program in other settings, it is important to reflect on the need for contextualization of the program model. It may help to address the need for contextualization based on cultural and geographical settings along with any other particular considerations that may be necessary for implementing the program in another setting.

Annexure

The scalability assessment considers various parameters of effectiveness, potential transfer and adoption, alignment with the strategic context, and acceptability and feasibility. The tool for assessment of scalability corresponds to the critical factors requiring consideration emerging from the evaluation of the intervention and includes the following questions:

Understanding the effectiveness of the model

- Is the model credible?
- How observable are the model's results?
- Does the model have a relative advantage over existing practices?

Assessing the potential for transfer and adaptation for a scale-up plan

- How easy is the model to transfer and adopt or adapt?
- How testable is the model?

- What is the likely reach of the intervention when scaled up?
- Is the context within which the original intervention was implemented comparable to that of the new environment in which the intervention will be scaled up?

Feasibility of scale-up

- Is funding likely to be available?
- Does the project have mechanisms for building ownership in the future implementing organization?
- What parts of the program, if any, will have to be adapted or combined in order to ensure successful scale-up of the program in a resource constraint setting?

Notes

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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