



Empowering Adolescent Girls.
Transforming our Nation.

An Empowered India. A Transformed India

Through the empowerment of adolescent girls, our entire nation can be transformed. Empowered adolescent girls are those potential change agents who can change their immediate environment, including their families, neighbourhoods, and eventually the entire country. It is, thus, critical to improve their health, provide them with an enabling environment and quality education that can lead to employment opportunities, financial independence, and instill confidence in them so that they can manage life situations successfully.

The need of the hour, thus, is to keep adolescent girls at the centre of all transformation solutions.



The Dream and the Hard-Hitting Reality

SP madam, our family forbids us from leaving the house. We want to go out and study. Tell me what we should do. After completing the eighth grade, we get married, and all our dreams are dashed. After marriage, we continue to do nothing but housework...

- An adolescent girl from a remote aspirational district in Odisha asks a young Superintendent of Police

While the Sustainable Development Goals envision gender equality, India is currently home to millions of out-of-school teens, with adolescent girls making up a disproportionately large portion of this population. Many of them are denied their rights and are unable to realize their full potential. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation by increasing the risk of early marriage, pregnancy, poverty, human trafficking, and violence for adolescent girls.

Startling Figures



23mn

girls drop out of school annually due to lack of proper menstrual hygiene management facilities

(‘Spot On’, 2014)



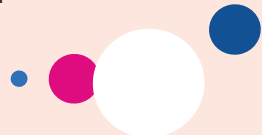
102mn

girls are wed before the age of 15
(UNICEF, 2019)



56%

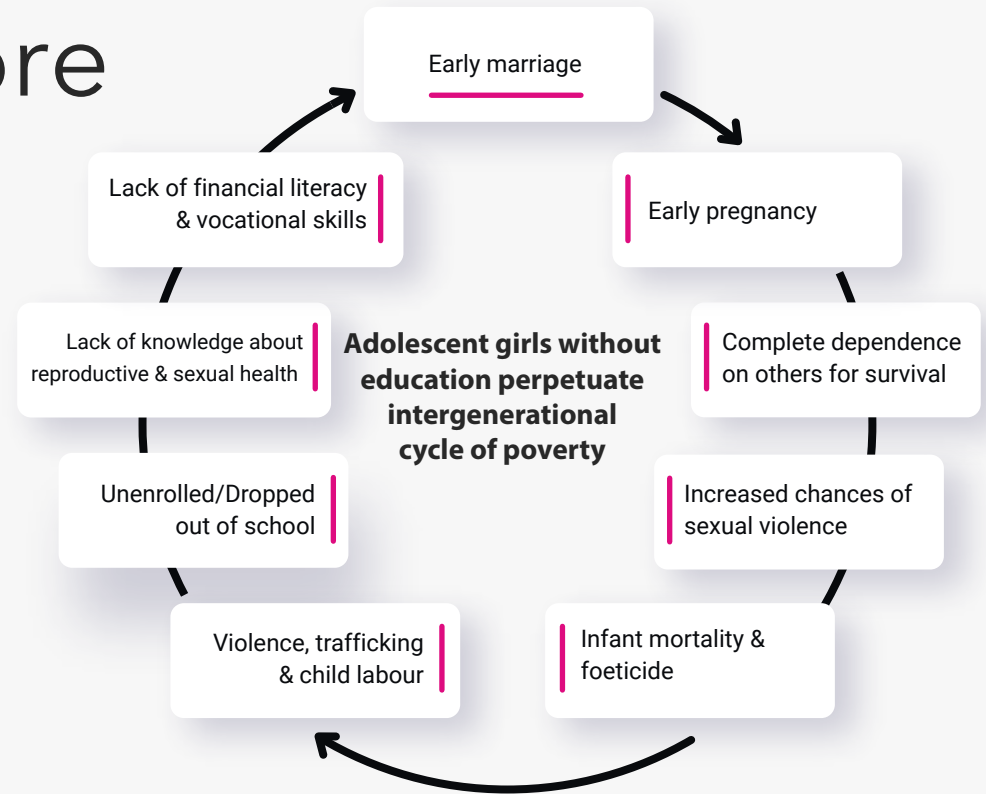
Prevalence of anaemia in adolescent girls (15-19 years) (NFHS-3)



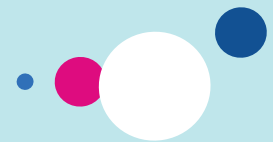
Problems Galore

Many adolescent girls, particularly those from rural areas or underdeveloped states, are unable to realize their dreams due to barriers that do not affect boys of the same age.

- Poverty
- Poor education
- Health challenges (anaemia or menstrual hygiene)
- Early marriage
- Social norms
- No access to life skills



When a 16-year-old school dropout with chronic anaemia and other health issues is forced to marry a much older man, she is likely to have a child with a higher morbidity rate. The situation is worse if she has a daughter. Patriarchy places her and the child at the mercy of her husband and his family. She is also subjected to domestic violence, discrimination, and a lack of opportunities, all of which affect the child. Consequently, the vicious cycle of poverty persists for generations.



Transforming Lives

We have pledged to transform the lives of adolescent girls in 112 aspirational districts over the next three years. This can happen only when the intergenerational cycle of poverty that they are trapped in is broken and they are provided with enabling opportunities. We are empowering adolescent girls by focusing on these areas:



Health



Education



Skill development



Gender equality



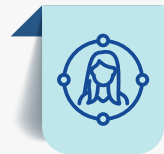
Our Five-pronged Approach

We have initiated a holistic strategy to improve the life chances of adolescent girls by addressing society's most deep-rooted problems.



Patriarchy to equality

Co-opt progressive men and boys in our programme



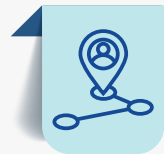
Disillusion to belief

Present hyperlocal young women as role models



Alone to collective

Provide support and recognition to adolescent girls in sanghas*



Fragmented to convergent

Build capable, motivated service providers of last-mile workers



Disempowering to empowering media

Develop an image of empowered women and enabled men in the media

*Sanghas are clubs of like-minded women/girls and men/boys attempting to overcome societal barriers and challenges.



Health is Wealth

The foundation for a healthy life is established during adolescence. Nonetheless, the situation of adolescent girls in several parts of the country is dire.

According to the 2018 TAG Report,

- One in two adolescent girls suffers from anaemia.
- 46% girls use unhygienic materials during menstruation.
- 40% girls still defecate in the open.

Our Intervention

- ✔ To ensure that girls remain strong and ahead of the curve, we are persistent in our efforts to raise awareness about anaemia and emphasize the importance of proper nutrition, menstrual hygiene, sexual practices, family planning, and Covid-19 vaccination
- ✔ We also make girls and their parents aware of various government programmes, such as 'Poshan Abhiyaan', 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao', and 'Anemia Mukht Bharat', so that they may avail them for their benefit.



Education Unlocks Many Doors

Education is essential for the holistic development of every person, regardless of gender. However, girls continue to be at a disadvantage.

Data indicate that

- Approximately 43% of girls do not complete their secondary education. (UNICEF Report, 2019)
- Nearly 39.4% of girls aged 15 to 18 drop out of school or college across the country. (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights' Report, 2018)

Our Intervention

- ✓ We identify and enroll girls who are not currently in school, and monitor those who are at risk of dropping out
- ✓ We also ensure that adolescent girls in aspirational districts gain a solid grounding in academics, acquire age-appropriate skills, become accustomed to blended learning, and have complete knowledge of government programmes designed for their advancement



Making Girls Future-Ready

Adolescent girls in India are... among the most economically vulnerable groups who typically lack access to financial capital and have more limited opportunities to gain the education, knowledge, and skills that can lead to economic advancement.

- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights' Report, 2018



Our Intervention

- ✔ We empower adolescent girls by helping them learn life skills such as self-awareness, critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, collaboration, stress management, and interpersonal relationships.
- ✔ We also introduce them to the fundamentals of financial planning, money management, banking, insurance, and microfinance.



Soaring High with Gender Equality

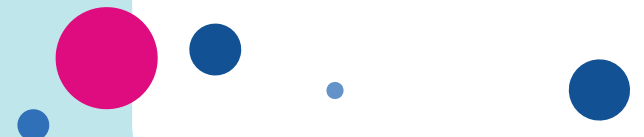
In India girls and boys experience adolescence differently. While boys tend to experience greater freedom, girls tend to face extensive limitations on their ability to move freely and to make decisions affecting their work, education, marriage, and social relationships.

- UNICEF Report on 'Gender Equality', 2019



Our Intervention

- ✔ We educate young girls and boys about discrimination, gender-based violence, and men's role in empowering women.
- ✔ We also instill gender equality in girls and boys at a young age as it can go a long way towards creating a more egalitarian society.



We Are Doing It. When Will You?

A gradual but long-lasting shift in people's behaviour and attitudes towards girls is required to eradicate the widespread inequality that continues to exist in many parts of the country.

Women empower girls

By setting an example for adolescent girls, young women can encourage them to pursue vocational training, postpone marriage, and lead a dignified life by attaining financial independence.



Men play a key role

Progressive men and boys must emerge as vocal advocates of the fundamental rights of adolescent girls in their communities.

Others join in

There should be a concerted effort by all other key stakeholders to empower girls and ease their transition from adolescence to adulthood.



Leading by Example

Our 'Saksham Bitiya Abhiyaan', which was introduced to reduce dropout rates among girls with the help of an innovative curriculum, has already created ripples of change in various aspirational districts. It has not only empowered young women but also led to the holistic development of numerous adolescent girls.

Volunteering with Piramal Foundation has taught me that I should not turn down any opportunity



Saulomi Kundu (21), an SBA volunteer, is optimistic about her future.

From now on, there will be no turning back... Teaching children has also taught me a great deal about myself



Shahinuri Begom (26), an SBA volunteer, is receptive to new life lessons.

I want to serve as a role model for girls in order to empower them to grow into powerful women



Jayeda Khatun (27), another SBA volunteer, is empowering others in her community.



Piramal Foundation has enabled us to touch lives and reach out to girl children

Shahjad Ahmad

from Happy to Help Foundation in Balrampur (Uttar Pradesh) recalls the horrifying impact of school closures in the wake of the Covid-19 lockdowns.



In the News

सक्षम बिटिया अभियान के तहत नूंह जिले में संगिनियों को डीसी ने किए टैब वितरण

ताबडू 21 अप्रैल (विजय कोंकी) उद्युक्त अजय कुमार ने कहा है कि संगिनियाँ अपने एवं अपने समाज के हित में कार्य करते रहे, ताकि इसका लाभ अन्य को मिल सके और शिक्षा का प्रचार-प्रसार हो सके। उद्युक्त अजय कुमार वीरवार को राजकीय प्राथमिक अष्टाक्षक प्रशिक्षण संस्थान फिरोजपुर-नमक में सक्षम बिटिया अभियान के तहत संगिनियों को टैब वितरण करने के उपरांत समारोह में बोल रहे थे। उन्होंने कहा कि किस तरह संगिनी टैब के माध्यम से तकनीकी रूप से जुड़कर इस अभियान को और बेहतर रूप दे सकती है। उन्होंने बताया कि किस तरह वह अपने समुदाय के बच्चों को नए-नए तरीकों से, खेल-खेल में, संगीत और पढ़ा रही है। उन्होंने बताया कि सबसे पहले हमें बच्चों के भावना पर काम करना चाहिए जिससे हम उनसे भावनात्मक रूप से जुड़ पाए व उन्हें समझ पाएँ और स्वाभाविक, भावनात्मक एवं नैतिक संवेदना इसमें उनकी किस तरह मदद कर रहा है। एसडीएम सलोनी शर्मा ने संगिनियों को संबोधित करते हुए कहा कि ये सभी बच्चियाँ अपने समुदाय के प्रति जागरूक हैं और बेहतर समाज के लिए काम कर रही हैं। जिला प्रशासन, नूंह और कैम्पल एजुकेशन फाउंडेशन/पिरामल फाउंडेशन ने टैब कम्प्युटेशन के सहयोग से नूंह जिला में सक्षम बिटिया अभियान के तहत नूंह के दो खंड नूंह एवं ताबडू की सभी 5% संगिनियों (काल्टियर) का टैब आवंटन का कार्यक्रम आयोजित किया गया। इससे पहले नवीना में पुनर्ना, फिरोजपुर-

जिला एवं नवीना खंड का टैब वितरण कार्यक्रम किया जा चुका है। बालिकाओं को प्रोत्साहित करने सक्षम बिटिया अभियान शुरू किया गया है। आकांक्षी जिलों में



शामिल नूंह में शारदा शर्मा के नीति आयोग व पिरामल फाउंडेशन के सहयोग से बालिका शिक्षा एवं चतुर्मुखी विकास के लिए विशेष अभियान चलाया जा रहा। इसी क्रम में जिले के शिक्षा संचालित आकांक्षी जिला कार्यक्रम आयोजित किए जा रहे हैं। विशेष कर स्वास्थ्य, पोषण एवं शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में कार्य किए रहे हैं। इस अवसर पर जिला मौलिक शिक्षा अधिकारी मुकेश कुमार नूंह खंड के खंड शिक्षा अधिकारी अद्वुल मजीद मौजूद रहे।



“Through the empowerment of adolescent girls, an entire nation can be empowered within this decade. We need to change deep-rooted practices that act as barriers and focus all our efforts on a movement in their favour that resonates with the government’s call for ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’.”¹³



Dr. Swati Piramal
Vice Chairperson, Piramal Group
Neelima Pandey
Director, Piramal Group

Read more >>>

GUEST VIEW

The health of adolescent girls is a vital aspect of our growth story

We must change deep-rooted practices and converge efforts to assure them of the agency they need



SWATI PIRAMAL & NEELIMA PANDEY are, respectively, vice-chairperson, Piramal Group, and director, Piramal Foundation.

An adolescent girl from a remote district of Odisha asks a young woman police superintendent officer, “SP madam, our family does not allow us to go out. We want to go out, study. Tell me what should we do? We get married after Class 8, and all our dreams are over; after marriage also, we just keep doing household chores.” This is the story of millions of girls living in remote, rural and backward districts.

Inter-generational cycle of poverty: At 16, a school drop-out girl with chronic anaemia gets married to a much older man, becomes a teen mother, most likely with an infant with higher morbidity. It is worse if she delivers a girl child. Existing patriarchal family structures render her with no agency, leaving her at the mercy of her husband and in-laws to take care of her and her child. More often than not, this means she has no voice against domestic violence, discrimination and lack of opportunities, thereby impacting her daughter too. Thus, the vicious cycle of poverty is inherited by the next generation.

Grim numbers are a mute validation of this story: 23 million girls drop out of school every year when they start menstruating, 102 million girls are married off before the age of 15 (Unicef, 2019), and 51% adolescent girls, aged 15-19, are anemic, with a slightly higher incidence in rural areas.

Silver lining: With the capacity and

mandate to scale up, the government has launched various flagship programmes, such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Poshan Abhiyan and Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram, that focus on the education and health of girls and women. However, the focus of most schemes remains largely on welfare.

Sustainable solutions to address deep-rooted mindsets and discriminatory societal norms that result in violence against women and perpetrate the poor status of girls and women are not yet in sight. These issues can be solved only through collaborative, multi-pronged approaches.

One window, endless possibilities:

While the education offers many schemes and beneficial programmes, beneficiaries usually get stuck in the quagmire of multiple channels and cannot avail of what has been constructed for their benefit. Their reproductive health and access to microentrepreneurs resides with the National Health Mission, vocational skilling with the district’s skilling centre or some NGO running it under a public-private-partnership model, and education with the education department, with their leadership and safety almost nowhere.

The key to succeed in empowering adolescent girls is convergence, a one-window holistic programme that meets all their development and empowerment needs.

Hyper-local role models lead the way: Various non-government organizations and hyper-local NGOs in districts are innovating with ways to address gender discrimination and create role models of local young women to spark a mindset change within communities.

Young women from local communities can set new trends for adolescent girls, inspiring them to navigate their own life decisions, such as delaying marriage, accessing vocational skills and engaging in entrepreneurship. This can also assuage parental anxiety related to higher education, women being away from home for work and the likelihood

of their elopement, which is a common cause for early marriage, and instead position adolescent girls and women as active contributors to society.

To fast-track this shift, it is important to increase the participation of progressive men who want to come forward but lack the support of like-minded peers in a predominantly patriarchal society. Such men need to emerge within local communities as advocates of a woman’s fundamental rights, so that young women emerge with the agency to build lives for themselves, their families, and thus support the nation.

All key stakeholders in communities need to collaborate to ensure that their girls have a smooth transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Research matters: Research forms the bedrock of behaviour change programmes. Organizations like International Centre for Research on Women have been conducting research that inform solutions. The government and not-for-profit players can leverage research for behaviour transformations across India and implement focused interventions at the last mile. The media, with its power of influence, can also use such data to drive the narrative and push for action and change.

Future forward: Poverty and health are crucial factors that impact the economic growth of a country. The International Day of Action for Women’s Health on 28 May, with its focus on women’s health, sexual and reproductive rights and socio-emotional health, was a reminder that we must view a woman’s socio-emotional and physical well-being in tandem with the vicious cycle of inter-generational poverty for adolescent girls while looking for solutions.

Through the empowerment of adolescent girls, an entire nation can be empowered within this decade. We need to change deep-rooted practices that act as barriers and focus all our efforts on a movement in their favour that resonates with the government’s call for “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao”.

The Empowerment Kicks off in 112 Aspirational Districts



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About Aspirational Districts Collaborative

The Aspirational Districts Collaborative, a flagship initiative of Piramal Foundation and NITI Aayog, is transforming the lives of millions of people in 112 aspirational districts by addressing complex demographic, geographic, and socio-economic issues through hyperlocal collaboration with NGOs, youth, faith leaders, panchayat representatives, self-help groups, and media personnel. It focuses on sparking transformation through behaviour change.



Giving Adolescent Girls Wings to Fly

