

CHAPTER: 13

CATALYZING CHANGE: BAL RAKSHA BHARAT'S JOURNEY TOWARDS EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Diving into the transformative narrative of Bal Raksha Bharat's (BRB) journey in empowering AG&YW through their Integrated Empowerment Programme, this chapter navigates the program's evolution, dissecting its core framework and delving into the compelling evidence synthesized from key projects – Marriage No Child's Play, Sashakt Kishori, and New Horizon Plus. Unveiling insights into next-level programming, it culminates with a synthesis of learning and explores the profound programmatic and policy implications derived from these impactful initiatives.

Keywords: Adolescent girls, Empowerment, Programme impact, Inclusive development, Bal Raksha Bharat, India

INTRODUCTION: IMPERATIVE FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN INDIA

Nitu Kumari, a 19-year-old from Bihar's Gaya district, transformed from a girl in a village plagued by child marriage and limited opportunities into a United Nations Volunteer Awardee (2019). Identified through Marriage: No Child's Play- Ananya project, she advocated for life skills and sexual and reproductive health and rights, led campaigns and facilitated workshops for girls as a discussion leader. She was pursuing her graduation, while actively monitoring her village for potential child marriages, preventing them with timely reporting (Save the Children-India, 2020). In her words, 'It wasn't simple for me to persuade my family, come out of my house and speak out for myself. For someone who had never

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imagined stepping out of the village, to be able to go to Delhi (the national capital) and receive an award from the Minister of Sports and Youth was nothing less than a dream. It also made me believe in dreams and beyond that it gave so many other girls like me hope and the courage to dream.'

In India there are millions of Nitu's who are waiting for facilitators and catalysts to transform their lives. Adolescent girls and young women⁸ (AG&YW) make up approximately 15% of India's total population, a substantial portion that accounts for one-fifth of the world's total population (MoSPI, 2022). This demographic cohort holds great potential as demographic dividend, with the ability to significantly contribute to India's economic growth and development. Additionally, these young women play a vital role, as prospective mothers of next generation. To harness their potential, it is imperative to fulfill their health, education, protection and nutrition needs and equip them with necessary skills and knowledge. However, in many parts of India, their transition to adulthood witness's obstacles like poverty, limited access to social services, and harmful social norms, hindering their socio-economic progress. (Das, Mishra, Mohanty and & Sahoo, 2016; Chant, Davies and Ramalho, 2017; Jejeebhoy and Kumar, 2021; Save the Children, 2021). Adolescent girls, in particular, face significant disadvantages within a patriarchal society, which often compels them to leave school prematurely, marry at a young age, and bear children (Santhya et al., 2015).



Figure 13.1: Nitu receiving award from Cabinet Minister Mr. Kiran Rijiju, GoI

The experiences of boys and girls during adolescence in India are starkly different While boys experience greater freedom, girls grapple with profound limitations in mobility and decision-making, perpetuated by gender discrimination, social norms, biased behaviors, and entrenched mindsets. This exposes them to risks like child marriage, teenage pregnancy, exploitation, violence limited education healthcare, and decent employment opportunities. (Save the Children, 2022) (Soumya, 2012). Available data illustrates the profound challenges they face, with statistics revealing that a significant percentage (23.3%) of young women are married before the legal age of 18, and a notable percentage (6.8%) of girls aged 15-19 experience early pregnancy (IIPS, 2019-21). Furthermore, only 33.65% of AG aged 18-19 completed secondary education or above (PLFS, 2021-22) (UDISE+, 2021-22). A substantial number of

⁸ AG&YW- 11 years to 24 years of age group;

young women in both rural and urban areas are not part of the labor force, and a significant percentage of young individuals, particularly women, lack access to vocational training (PLFS, 2021-22). The situation is even more alarming in certain identified states where socioeconomic factors can lead to distressed migration to urban areas or early marriage, making young individuals vulnerable to trafficking (Das, Mishra, Mohanty and Sahoo, 2016; Chant, Davies and Ramalho, 2017).

To address these challenges, the central government and state governments have introduced various policies and social protection schemes and services aimed at enhancing the well-being of adolescent girls, however, these initiatives face significant challenges. Though schemes such as Scheme for Adolescent Girls, Rashtriya Kishori Swasthya Karyakarm, Rasthriya Bal Swasthya Karyakaram, National Programme for Youth and Adolescent Development, Menstrual Hygiene Scheme, , School Health Program, Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana, and National Scheme of Incentive to Girls' Education exist (Centre for Catalyzing Change, 2019), they encounter supply and demand gaps and often fall short in terms of reach and impact. These schemes also lack integration and are fragmented, which diminishes their overall effectiveness (Soumya, 2012) (Mahobia and Choudhari, 2022) (Praxis and Save the Children, 2022). Additionally, flagship skill-building programs, while available, have limited access in rural areas, with reach and program quality being key concerns. (Pathak, 2016)

Realizing the need, Bal Raksha Bharat (Save the Children-India) addresses the imperative by implementing an integrated Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Program. This chapter outlines the program's evolution, its framework, evidence synthesis and policy implications from three key projects- Marriage No Child's Play, Sashakt Kishori and New Horizon Plus.

The Evolution of BRB's Integrated Adolescent Girls and Young Women Empowerment Programme

Established in 2008, Bal Raksha Bharat has impacted children and youth across 20 states and 3 union territories in India. With a focus on health, education, child protection, humanitarian response, disaster risk reduction, livelihood, and social protection, the organization has worked to bring transformative change to millions of lives, with over 50% being girls and young women. (Bal Raksha Bharat, 2023)

With AG&YW, BRB's has been working since its inception through its various thematic interventions. A notable BRB project was centered on reducing the prevalence of adolescent girls and children working as domestic help within Kolkata and other metropolitan areas through formal education or job-oriented vocational training. Started in 2008, this project illuminated the significance of economically empowering child domestic workers, predominantly adolescents and young girls, by working with parents, employers, community and duty bearers to reduce child protection issues. The insights from this project led to the development of a Skill Building and Employment Generation programme named "New Horizons," which focused on enhancing the economic status of youth, especially young women. The results of this project underscored the importance of economic empowerment in fostering agency, building confidence, and addressing child protection issues, including child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and trafficking. (Ray, Mohsin, Saha and Dutta, 2023)

Another project that was initiated in 2012, focused on Strengthening Maternal, Newborn, Child Health and Nutrition Services in India through capacity-building initiatives, governance and accountability measures, and evidence-based advocacy with the government. This project operated across five states – Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Telangana and made substantial towards enhancing capacities of Frontline Health Workers, their supervisors, training institutions, and community groups for effective MNCHN service delivery and monitoring. However, it also recognized the imperative to extend its focus to adolescent girls. This realization stemmed from the understanding that addressing the health and malnutrition issues of young mothers during their adolescent years, before marriage, could significantly improve the MNCHN landscape in India. BRB conveyed this learning in various platforms (Save the Children-India, 2015) and similar learning was also shared and substantiated by myriad studies (Ramakrishnan, et al., 2012; Bijli & Tewari, 2015). All these learning contributed to the formulation of the Maternal, Newborn, Child Health and Nutrition with Adolescents (MNCHN+A) initiative, and subsequently, the conceptualization of RSKS program (Desai, 2017). This intervention underscored the imperative of addressing MNCHN issues through empowering adolescent girls and fostering an environment, from family to state levels, to regulate and diminish early marriages. Though, key internal and external learnings emphasized the necessity for an integrated framework for AG&YW, however, these two pivotal projects by BRB played a significant role in shaping the Integrated Adolescent Girls Empowerment Programme.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF BRB'S INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

To facilitate the dreams of AG&YW in India and empower them to make informed life choices, BRB has evolved the given framework:

- a) The first part of the framework focuses on—agency building by promoting decision-making, leadership, and collective action. It aims to enhance the capacities of AG & YW through comprehensive knowledge and training- including financial literacy, life skills, technical skills for decent jobs or entrepreneurial ventures, rights awareness, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and transparency and accountability tools.
- b) The second part of the framework aims to create a supportive, protective and gender-sensitive environment at household and community levels to empower AG & YW. The organization works with parents, boys, brothers, caregivers, in-laws, partners, community leaders, local government representatives, and religious leaders. Addressing power dynamics by actively engaging with men and boys is key element of the strategy. The strategy works to promote positive practices to nurture enabling environment for AG&YW to survive and thrive.
- c) The third part of the framework focuses on supporting AG&YW and their families in accessing Social Protection Schemes and Services (SPSS). The strategy envisages to increase awareness of available SPSS options, reducing opportunity costs in accessing SPSS and bridging communication gaps between service providers and service seekers. The organization focuses on schemes that directly benefit adolescents, such as scholarships, and those which indirectly benefit family income, like widow pensions. This contributes to building household resilience, ensuring a continuous flow of resources through social protection, and mitigating adverse coping

mechanisms like child marriage or school dropout. d) The final part of the framework is to evolve AG&YW and their groups into collectives that drive change at the community, state, and national levels. The strategy promotes young leaders who not only voice their issues but also which serve as role models. Youth collectives aim to advance youth-led action in education, social entitlements, livelihood, and employment. The strategy ensures participation in local governance, youth-led monitoring of services, and advocacy efforts to evolve them as active citizens for life.

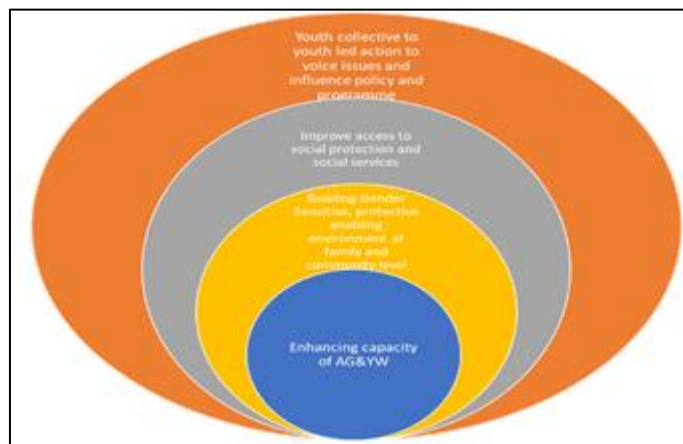


Figure 13.2: BRB's Integrated framework for AG&YW empowerment

EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS FROM BRB'S KEY PROJECTS

Project-1 Marriage No Child Play

The MNCP program engaged a comprehensive approach, operating across sectors and levels to address the complex issue of child marriage. Implemented in India (specifically Jharkhand, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Odisha), Mali, Malawi, and Niger, the program aims to empower girls, raise awareness on child marriage risks, improve access to SRH services, and promote social norms favoring girls' education and agency in marital decisions. The key six focus areas include empowering at-risk adolescent girls through life skills, SRHR information, and peer support; enhancing education opportunities and retention for girls; facilitating access to economic opportunities for girls and their families; improving child protection systems; increasing access to youth-friendly SRHR services; challenging social norms perpetuating child marriage; and influencing legal and policy frameworks. The peer support process to reach out to AG&YW is quite comprehensive and also in line to the design and implementation of Rashtriya Kanya Swasthya Karyakaram (NHM, 2023). The program is tailored to each context, treating communities either with the full MNCP package or no intervention. This section highlights data from Bihar, Rajasthan, and Odisha, where Bal Raksha Bharat took charge of implementation. The impact spans over 40,000 adolescent girls and their families in BRB's implementation geographies.

The MTBA design evaluated community-level changes at baseline (2017), midline (2018), and endline (2020). Employing difference-in-differences (DID) methodology, the study compared intervention and comparison areas regarding marriage, education, livelihood, and SRHR-related knowledge and

behaviors. The baseline sample consisted of 2982 adolescent girls and 2958 at endline. (Melnikas, et al., 2021). The evaluation of the MNCP in India reveals significant positive impacts in various key areas.

Table 13.1: Synthesis of key indicators in MNCP project in BRB project locations

Indicators		Marriage No Child's Play				DID	P- value
		Intervention		Control			
		Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline		
% of Currently Married (all)	All states ⁹	14.8	4.5	12.4	9.6	-8%	0.001***
	Bihar	16.0	7.6	11.0	10.3	-7%	0.108 NS
	Odisha	8.9	0	6	2.17	-5%	0.062 NS
	Rajasthan	8.4	2.1	6.5	9	-9%	0.006**
% of Currently married (15-19)	All states ¹⁰	26.4	7.9	22.4	16.4	-13%	0.001***
	Bihar	32.0	13.5	21.7	15.6	-12%	0.115 NS
	Odisha	15	0	10	4.7	-10%	0.030*
	Rajasthan	14	3.2	11.6	14.1	-13%	0.007**

Source: Melnikas, et al., 2021

NS – Non significant, * $p < 0.05$; ; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

The program effectively addressed child marriage, showcasing a decline in the proportion of currently married girls in intervention areas. Educational attainment also saw improvements, with increased school enrollment in MNCP intervention areas compared to no change in comparison areas. (Melnikas, et al., 2021). While the program demonstrated positive effects in various domains, some challenges persist, such as limited impact on increasing the proportion of girls who have ever worked and mixed results in improving gender-equitable attitudes (Melnikas, et al., 2021). The results on education, health and livelihood have shown changes, however, they weren't statistically significant. Nevertheless, the MNCP program significantly influenced girls' participation in clubs or groups, showcasing its impact on building social connections. (ibid) Drawing from the learning of MNCP, the subsequent projects focused more on four broad areas rather than six to make it comprehensive framework to execute.

Box 13.1: Story of Dipti

Dipti, an eighteen-year-old girl from Kharshan village in Bihar, faced financial constraints that forced her to leave education. Despite wanting to support her family, societal norms discouraged her from leaving her home. Being a member of the Adolescent girl's group, Dipti discovered a platform offering life skills. Initially opposed by her parents, persistent efforts from the group members helped change their minds. Dipti became an active member, eventually becoming a Discussion Leader, focusing on issues like menstrual hygiene and sexual and reproductive health. The project also empowered her financially by providing a vocational training on beauty and wellness. Post, she started a parlour and contributed INR

⁹ This also includes data for Jharkhand-which Simavi another NGO was responsible for implementation.

2000-3000 monthly to her family's income. Her success evolved her as role model; is a testament to breaking societal norms and finding empowerment through education and vocational training. (Save the Children-India, 2020).



Project 2: Sashakt Kishori

The project Sashakt Kishori aimed to expand existing programs in Bihar's Gaya district. The three years' project (2018-2020) aimed to address socio-economic vulnerabilities, enhancing capacities, and creating a favorable policy environment for adolescent girls. In line to the AG&YW framework, the project operated in 41 marginalized villages, benefitted 47,298 including 4,835 girls and 2305 boys. The outreach also extended to PRI members and women Self Help Group (SHG) members, fostering a holistic approach to adolescent empowerment.

The study, using a mixed-method approach, surveyed 1,039 adolescents (685 girls, 354 boys) aged 10-21. Quantitative data employed systematic sampling, with 173 qualitative interviews/discussions at Endline.

Table 13.2: Change perceived in key variables in Sashakt Kishori Project

Indicator	Baseline	Endline	Change	P-Value
Mean Age of Marriage (years)	16 (N=481)	18.4 (N=465)	+2.4	< 0.001***
Mean Age (years) of Gauna/Cohabitation	16 (N=481)	18.6 (N=465)	+2.6	< 0.001***
% of Adolescent Girls Knowing about HIV, RTI, STI	41.2(N=481)	67.9 (N=465)	26.70	< 0.001***
% of Adolescent Girls Enrolled in Class 6th	78.4 (N=703)	85.1 (N=679)	6.70	< 0.001***
% of Adolescent Girls Enrolled in Secondary Education (Class 8)	63.2 (N=703)	74.4 (N=679)	11.20	< 0.001***
% of Adolescent Girls Linked with Apprenticeship Program	5.0 (N=205)	10.0 (N=300)	5.0	< 0.042*

Source: Sigma Foundation, 2022

NS – Non significant, * $p < .05$; ; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Box 13.2: Story of Poonam Kumari

Poonam Kumari, a 20-year-old resident of Bajukala village in Gaya district, became aware of the Sashakt Kishori project through her elder sister, who worked as a Discussion Leader. In 2019, Poonam joined the project, participating in training sessions and discussions on various topics, enhancing her knowledge of rights and entitlements. Inspired by financial literacy training, she applied and motivated her group to apply for Mukhya Mantri Kanya Utthan Yojna, a Bihar Government Scholarship programme for higher education. Poonam pursued vocational training in House Keeping in Bodh Gaya, provided by the project and secured a position in a reputed hotel in Rajgir, Bihar, receiving a monthly salary of INR 7000. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 disrupted her work, and despite the hotel providing accommodation and meals, the salary was discontinued. Poonam returned home in June 2020.

Utilizing the break, she decided to focus on her studies, completing higher secondary examinations and enrolling in computer classes. She used her saving for completing a computer certificate course. Although offered the opportunity to return to the hotel, Poonam was determined to finish her higher education and certification course before rejoining the workforce.

The project evaluation outlined significant improvement in educational attainment, increasing enrollment for older girls and reducing dropout rates. Despite challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic affecting school regularity, especially for girls engaged in household work, the program emphasized the importance of community engagement to overcome education barriers. The intervention positively impacted life skills and sexual and reproductive health and rights, enhancing adolescents' knowledge and perceptions. (Sigma Foundation, 2022) While there's increased awareness of early marriage risks, communication on contraceptive methods needs improvement. The program successfully influenced vocational skills, financial literacy, and employment outcomes. The project also moved a step forward to engage boys and men- with increased awareness among boys on importance of girls' engagement with apprenticeship and vocational training programs. The program's contribution to reducing biased perceptions among adolescent boys and girls demonstrated its potential to shape social norms. Additionally, it effectively raised awareness about social protection schemes during the COVID-19 period. The program's success stories, including skill development and networking, could serve as valuable evidence for policymakers to improve implementation processes and policies, showcasing its potential for lasting positive impacts on adolescent empowerment and social development. (Sigma Foundation, 2022)

Project 3: New Horizon Plus

The third project is New Horizon (NH) Plus project in West Bengal also aimed to enhance the well-being of most marginalized adolescents and youth by fostering a supportive socio-economic environment. The project New Horizon was initiated as skill development and economic empowerment in 2008-09, however, drawing learnings and need, in 2020 the project integrated adolescent health, nutrition and other components as "PLUS" element to make it more holistic and comprehensive. The three years' project, based on the AG&YW framework, was targeting the most vulnerable individuals both in rural and urban setting. During the project period (2020-2023), the project directly impacted 27443 individuals, including 2,731 adolescents and youth and 4151 family members.



Figure 13.3: Poultry initiative of a women

Box 13.3: Story of Maa Annapurna Poultry Farm

In pursuit of women's empowerment, Bal Raksha Bharat is championing transformative initiatives, exemplified by the Maa Annapurna Poultry Farm in Sagar Block. Led by resilient women—Maina Das, Mitali Das, Aparajita Ponda, and Menoka Ponda—this initiative transcends challenging circumstances. Maina, a survivor of child marriage, overcame poverty by joining the labor force. Mitali, too, worked early on to support her family. Aparajita and Menoka faced similar struggles. United by a vision for a better life, they established a poultry farm post-training, receiving a fully-equipped facility from Bal Raksha Bharat. With legalities in place, these women shattered gender norms, steering the farm to success. Now economically self-reliant, the farm has completed nine successful poultry cycles, generating over INR 15 lakhs in this period. Profit-sharing fosters financial independence, and strategic outreach efforts ensure sustainable growth, showcasing the impactful journey of these empowered women. (Bal Raksha Bharat, 2023).

The endline study employed a comprehensive mixed-method design. It utilized literature review, quantitative research via structured questionnaires, qualitative research including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to assess project impact.

Table 13.3: Change perceived in key variables in NH Plus Project

Indicator	Baseline	Endline	Change	P-Value
	Total	Total		
Percentage of AG&YW who are able to take informed decisions related to education	58 (383)	63.0 (374)	5.0	0.079 NS
Percentage of YW (18 or more) able to take informed decisions related to their choice of employment	56 (202)	69.0 (221)	13.0	.00286**
AG&YW who are able to take SRHR related decisions				
Can decide on their sex life like with whom and when to have sex or when to start co-habitation	50.7 (383)	92.0 (374)	39.3	<0.001***
Can decide when to become pregnant and/or have the first child	79.4 (383)	94.4 (374)	15.0	<0.001***
Able to take SRHR related decisions	22.2 (383)	49.7 (374)	27.5	<0.001***

Source: Ray, Mohsin, Saha and Dutta, 2023

Figures within the parenthesis are the number of respondents

NS – Non significant, * $p < .05$; ; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The NH Plus evaluation report shared that the project not only provided tangible economic benefits but also catalyzed broader societal shifts, promoting gender equality, improving community relationships, and fostering sustainable development practices. Its success lies in a multifaceted and holistic approach, generating positive ripple effects on individuals and communities (Ray, Mohsin, Saha, & Dutta, 2023). The project's skills training, particularly in agriculture-based livelihoods, substantially increased income for rural youth, breaking the intergenerational poverty cycle. Incorporating Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), financial literacy, access to social protection and life skills training was pivotal, challenging gender stereotypes and instigating transformative changes in perceptions and behaviors within communities. The project actively pursued gender transformative progresses, involving women in financial decision-making processes within their families to integrate them into community development. While progress has been achieved, there's recognition of the need for intensified efforts to fully realize gender transformative changes. (Ray, Mohsin, Saha and Dutta, 2023)

NEXT-LEVEL BRB PROGRAMMING AND SYNTHESIS OF LEARNING

The three projects, MNCP Intervention, Sashakt Kishori, and New Horizon Plus, cumulatively affected more than one hundred thousand AG&YW, their families and community members, collectively demonstrated a robust and multifaceted approach to addressing the intricate challenges of child marriage, adolescent empowerment, and their socio-economic development.

Common achievements across the projects included a significant increase in awareness about the risks of child marriage, improvements in educational attainment, and positive impacts on health indicators. Notably, the MNCP Intervention effectively delayed marriage and increased girls' participation in clubs, showcasing its impact on building social connections (Melnikas, et al., 2021). Sashakt Kishori, focusing on Bihar, successfully improved educational attainment, reduced dropout rates, and positively influenced life skills and sexual and reproductive health rights (Sigma Foundation, 2022). New Horizon Plus, operating in West Bengal, not only provided tangible economic benefits but also catalyzed broader societal shifts, promoting gender equality and fostering sustainable development practices (Ray, Mohsin, Saha and Dutta, 2023).

The projects shared a common strength in their holistic and tailored approaches, addressing various dimensions of adolescent well-being, including education, health, livelihood, and gender equality. The emphasis on life skills, vocational training, and social protection schemes contributed to a comprehensive strategy for empowering adolescents and youth. Furthermore, the engagement of communities, parents, and government bodies underscores the importance of a collaborative effort in driving positive change.

However, the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods and job security is a shared challenge for these projects. The pandemic disrupted regular school attendance, especially for girls engaged in household work, affecting educational progress. Despite these challenges, the projects emphasized ongoing

community engagement to overcome barriers to education. Additionally, the economic benefits provided by New Horizon Plus, particularly in agriculture-based livelihoods, became crucial during a time when livelihoods were under threat (Ray, Mohsin, Saha and Dutta, 2023).

The projects also acknowledge the importance of focusing on the 15-24 age group, recognizing that economic empowerment initiatives might not be feasible below 18 and 11-14 years fall under Right to Education Act. BRB's strategic emphasis on working with this age group aligns with the need to complete the cycle of empowerment, ensuring a comprehensive approach to adolescent development.

Bal Raksha Bharat's (BRB) focus on strengthening the economic aspect, especially in the next of Sashakt Kishori project (which is called as Yuwa Shaskitkaran (Bal Raksha Bharat, 2023), aligns with the broader trend of recognizing the importance of economic empowerment. By giving emphasis to economic opportunities for girls and their families, BRB acknowledges the interconnectedness of socio-economic factors in addressing the root causes of child marriage. Furthermore, BRB's efforts to strengthen youth collectives indicate a strategic approach to empowering young people to drive key aspects of program interventions.

Programmatic and policy implications of learning from BRB's projects

The key policy-level learnings from the discussed interventions emphasize the need for a holistic and integrated approach to address the multifaceted challenges faced by adolescent girls and young women (AG&YW). First and foremost is the imperative for the integration and convergence of efforts across various sectors, such as health, education, social protection, and skill-building, which are currently dispersed among different ministries (Soumya, 2012). The call for a single-window program at the grassroots level, exemplified by successful state-level interventions like Tejaswini project in Jharkhand, can significantly reduce the complexity for AG&YW and enhance their opportunities (The World Bank, 2023) (Jha & Biswas, 2020).

The second policy learning underscores the importance of improving learning outcomes. This involves a focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills, enhancing the quality of education, and implementing second-chance initiatives, particularly for young women (ILO, 2023). The National Education Policy 2020 provides a framework, but effective implementation requires innovative strategies and adjustments (MHRD, 2020). Financial support, the third policy learning, is identified as crucial for ensuring girls' education and attendance. Conditional cash transfers and scholarships, as seen in initiatives like Kanyashree Prakalp and Mukhya Mantri Kanya Utthan Yojana, offer promising models to incentivize education over early marriage (Nanda, Das, Datta, and Lamba, 2016).

Addressing accessibility challenges to vocational training, the fourth policy learning, emphasizes the need for establishing training facilities close to home and informing and supporting girls about non-traditional professions. It also highlights the importance of providing guidance on skill selection, incorporating supportive elements, and engaging in community outreach to familiarize people with available programs and career opportunities for girls (Nanda, et al., 2017; Ray, Mohsin, Saha and Dutta, 2023).

The fifth policy learning underlines the significance of involving families and communities to reshape social norms, with a focus on parenting support initiatives and efforts to engage fathers in particular (Save the Children, 2022). Finally, the acknowledgment and appreciation of role models emerge as the last policy learning, recognizing the power of positive examples in fostering leadership and inspiring behavioral change among peers.

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