

POLICY BRIEF

December 2018

Mainstreaming gender equality and empowerment education in post-primary schools in India

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Acknowledgements

This document has emerged from the contribution of many people whom I would like to acknowledge. First of all, I would like to thank Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) team—Ruchita Brajabasi, Heather Kehlahan, Isabel Polon, Sandra Herrera, and Van Anh Nguyen—for their valuable efforts in helping me write this policy brief. I am also grateful to David Batcheck for his valuable comments and insights. Finally I would like to thank Anand Chitravanshi and my assistant Samarth Shukla for their assistance in editing and proofing this document.

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Brookings gratefully acknowledges the program support provided to the Center for Universal Education by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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OVERVIEW

Both globally and in India, the discourse around girls' education is particularly charged. There is an urgency as it is now understood that developmental promises cannot be fulfilled unless gender equality is taken seriously. Generally, a complete, high-quality secondary school education for girls is seen as a vital pathway to achieving gender equality. The term “empowerment” is widely used in international development discourse in close conjunction with girls' education and gender equality, and implies a necessary correlation of girls' education with their empowerment. Many scholars and researchers have challenged this assumption noting that simply getting girls into school and ensuring that they finish is not enough. There should be a focus on process, content, and curricula that critically address inequitable social norms and structures. This policy brief supports this view and recommends a policy commitment that includes gender studies as an official part of the curriculum along with proper pedagogies, processes, structures, and teacher training.

Status of Girls and Women in India

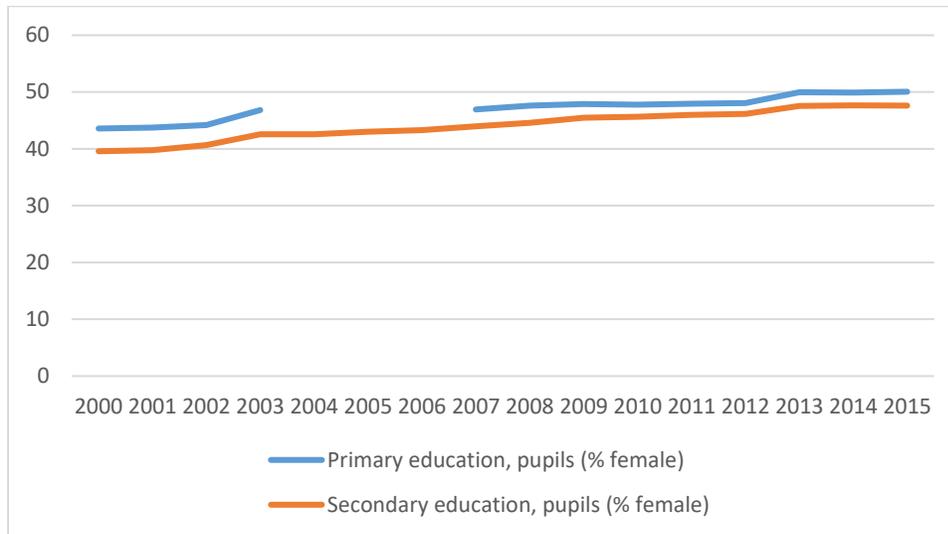
The historical legacy of gendered discrimination in India is clear from the very beginning of a girl's life. Nationally, there are 940 females for every 1,000 males. This ratio tends to be more extreme in North India, as seen, for example, in Uttar Pradesh's rate of 912 females for every 1,000 males (Government of India 2011). This low sex ratio signifies social conditions adverse to women that manifest as violence throughout women's lives. Communities with abnormally low female sex ratios tend to exhibit other forms of violence against women, including wife beating, rape, trafficking of women, bigamy, sexual abuse, and dowry deaths (Dagar 2002; Verma et al 2016).

According to some estimates, approximately 100 million girls worldwide and more than 11 million in India are killed as a result of sex-selective abortions (Population Research Institute; Population Research Institute 2018). Furthermore, in India, girls between one and five years old are more likely to die than boys the same age because of poor nutrition, female infanticide, and sheer neglect (NFHS-3 2005-06). More than one-third of the world's 15 million child brides are in India, which is second to only Bangladesh in child marriage rates (UNICEF 2014). Of Indian women aged 20–24, 47.5 percent are married by age 18, and of these 16 percent start bearing children (NFHS-3 2005-06). National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) crimes against women statistics show a long-term increasing trend; there were 337,922 cases of violence against women registered by the police in 2014, as compared to 309,546 recorded in 2013 (Verma et al 2016).

Furthermore, domestic violence rates in India are high (Ghosh 2007; Sahni 2012), as are rates of sexual abuse. An Action India survey of 90,000 women in 2004 reported that 40 percent of Indian married women experience physical assault and 56 percent of them justify it. A survey carried out by RAHI, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports that 76 percent of their sample of 600 women stated that they had been sexually abused during childhood or adolescence and that 46 percent of the abusers were men within the family, such as an uncle, cousin, father, or brother (RAHI 1998; Sahni 2012).

Gender Inequality and Education

In 2009, the Government of India (GOI) passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), which guarantees every Indian child from 6 to 14 the right to enroll and to complete eight years elementary schooling. This policy push, along with global school enrollment campaigns, has helped increase enrollment of girls by 17.4 million (from 10.7 million to 28.1 million) between 2000 and 2014 (Government of India 2014). The upward trend in access of girls to education at all levels is reflected across the GOI's enrollment statistics. Between 2013-2014, the enrollment of girls as a percentage of total enrollment in primary education has increased from 43.8 percent to 48.2 percent, while the enrollment of girls as a percentage of total enrollment in upper primary education increased from 40.9 to 48.6 percent (ASER 2015). Additionally, the percentage of female pupils in primary and secondary classrooms has increased since 2000 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Pupils (% female)

Source: World Bank Data Bank data.worldbank.org

Despite the significant gains in female enrollment in primary and secondary education mentioned previously, indicators of educational outcomes continue to favor male students. According to the 2011 Census of India, the literacy rate amongst females age 7 years and above is 65.5 percent, as compared to 82.1 percent of the comparable male population. This shows a 16.7 percent gap in male to female literacy rates, down from the 21.6 percent gap recorded in the 2001 census. Girls continue to drop out of school at higher rates than their male counterparts. Many students drop out of the formal school system during the transition from primary to secondary, and the lack of proximate secondary schools is one of the most common reasons cited by rural households (Mukhopadhyay & Sahoo 2016).

Even as educational outcomes for girls continue to improve, female labor force participation appears to be dropping. According to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Global Employment Trends Report, India's labor force participation rate for women fell from just over 37 percent in 2004-05 to 29 percent in 2009-10 and 24 percent in 2009-2015. Out of 131 countries with available data, India ranks 11th from the bottom in female labor force participation (ILO 2016).

Plan International's nine-country study, which sought to identify the reasons why adolescent girls dropped out, summarizes its findings: "What emerges from the data is that girls are identified with their sexual and domestic roles, while boys are seen as providers and household heads. In our research, a girl as future wife and mother carries little value. She is a demeaned person not seen as worthy of rights. This demeaned identity remains a key barrier to girls accessing their right to education." (Mukhopadhyay, quoted by Plan International 2012)

Existing Policy and Legal Mandate to Address Gender Inequality through Education

For many years, the Government of India has recognized women's empowerment, gender equality, and access to education as central to its social policy agenda. This commitment is reflected in a variety of national policy documents, from the 1950 Indian Constitution to the 2009 Right to Education Act.ⁱ India has also taken bold steps at the international level, confirming its commitment to promoting gender equality as a signatory to The Dakar Framework for Action, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

ⁱText from national-level policy established by the Government of India that support a mandate to provide education and promote equality across all sectors of Indian society are included in the Appendix.

(CEDAW), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in addition to other international agreements (United Nations Children’s Fund 2014; United Nations Girls Education Initiative 2010; United Nations 1966, 1981, 1989, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2016). International and National policies alike, India has affirmed gender equality to be (1) a core value of a democratic India and (2) a social policy priority for the central government. Together these commitments form a robust policy mandate that supports the integration of gender equality and empowerment programming in post-primary education in schools across India. However, these overarching policy goals have failed to translate into concrete implementation plans that address gender inequality through education.

For example, India’s 1986 “National Education Policy” took an enlightened view and brought the issue of gender and girls’ education center stage, stating:

“Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of woman. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favor of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering...” (National Education Policy 1986).

While it linked education of women and girls to their empowerment, it went a step further and defined the goal of education broadly, also stating, “education should be a transformative force, build women’s self-confidence, improve their position in society, and challenge inequalities” (Bordia RTE Report 2010). This statement acknowledges that education currently is not necessarily a transformative force leading to women’s empowerment; instead, it recommends that education should be such. This is a welcome and well-intentioned move, but it needs elaboration.

The Indian National Education Policy (NEP) serves as a comprehensive framework to focus the development of education policy throughout India. The policy has undergone multiple iterations, and the most recent NEP, developed in 2016, remains in draft form. Within its articles, the new policy acknowledges the existence of several imbalances, including gender disparities (Art. 1.2.9). In addition, it mentions that current interventions to bridge these gender and social gaps need to be strengthened, and that more focused strategies need to be implemented for the effective inclusion and participation of girls and other special category children (Art.3.5.36) in the education system. It remains unknown exactly how the government will incorporate and implement these policies within the existing education system (Government of India 2016). It needs to go a step further and describe what an empowerment-focused education would look like and recommend relevant changes in curricular content, pedagogical practices, institutionalized processes, and organizational structures (Patel 1998; Sahni 2017).

Existing Laws and Schemes on National and State-Level to Promote Girls’ Educational Access

India, motivated by the belief that inclusion of girls will lead to gender equality, has worked in a multipronged way through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Education for All campaign, to enhance access and retention of girls in school. They do this through ensuring that there is a school available at every kilometer of each inhabited area, by giving free textbooks to all girls up to class 8, by providing girls-only schools at the upper primary level, separate toilets for girls, recruitment of 50 percent female teachers, and gender-sensitive textbooks. In addition, two focused interventions especially for girls—the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level, and the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya—have been launched to reach out to girls from extremely marginalized social groups, girls from lower castes, and families living below the poverty line.

In addition, the following schemes and policies demonstrate the Indian Government’s commitment to promoting education access, quality, and the necessity of targeting girls’ education in particular:

- National Scheme for Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education: Launched in 2008 by Government of India, it has the objective to reduce dropouts and promote the enrollment of the girl child belonging mainly to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) communities.
- Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education: Enforced in 2010 by the Indian Government, it provides children aged 6 to 14 the right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school.
- Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY): The SSY account is meant to provide a small investment for the girl, which is to be used to facilitate payment of education and marriage expenses.
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao: Launched in 2015 by the Indian Government, the scheme aims to improve the efficiency of welfare services for girls. It addresses the issue of declining child sex ratio and aims to improve it by eradicating female feticide.
- Bicycle Schemes: States such as Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh have "bicycle schemes" where eligible female students are provided funds to purchase a bicycle. The students are required to show a bill of purchase. Rajasthan provides girls with travel vouchers if the distance between their school and village is too long.

Other national initiatives include the Scheme for Construction and Running of Girls' Hostels for students of Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools, which was launched in 2008 and implemented from 2009-2010, with the objective of increasing girls' secondary school completion rates. In 2008, the Indian Government launched "Dhan Laxmi," a conditional cash transfer scheme for the girl child. Specific sums of money are provided to the family of the girl when conditions are met, including the registration of birth, following the immunization schedule, school enrollment, and delaying marriage until the age of 18.

Although these efforts are a step in the right direction, they operate under the false assumption that access to and completion of secondary education are sufficient to ensure girls' empowerment and gender equality. Thus, despite all these interventions at both central and state-levels, girls' education, and women's marginalization and disempowerment remains deeply problematic (Jandhyal 2003; Bordia RTE Report 2010).

EDUCATION AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT

The belief that simply providing girls with access to primary and secondary education automatically results in gender equality is not uncommon. In development discourse, "women's empowerment" is often used in close conjunction with girls' education and gender equality, suggesting that the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women will result from the removal of gender disparity in primary and secondary education (UN 2000, MDG 3). Education and empowerment are equated in the international development discourse as though they are necessarily related, leading to greater agency of women and, with that, an improvement in their own well-being and that of their children and society (Herz & Sperling 2004). Gender equality is often framed as the organic consequence of achieving universal primary and secondary education. With an equitable share of girls gaining the same literacy, numeracy, and other academic skills as their male counterparts, women's economic and social empowerment becomes more attainable, but it is by no means a guaranteed outcome of educational attainment. Higher rates of enrollment and completion of formal schooling have not and will not translate directly into gender equality and empowerment on the individual or societal level (Afridi 2010; Halim et al 2016).

The World Bank cites evidence that agency, a key component of empowerment, is an area in which gender equality is still lagging far behind in most developing countries: "Gender gaps have not narrowed in women's control over resources, women's political voice, or the incidence of domestic violence" (World Bank 2012). The report asserts that, despite the narrowing of gender gaps in physical assets and human capital, when it comes to access to education, there still remain significant differences in the agency of boys and girls—and men and women—which results in differing life outcomes for men and women. Plan International cites the cases of both

Latin America and the Middle East, where increased levels in female education have not led to corresponding equality in the workplace or at home. Girls and young women emerge from school still struggling with the idea that they are second-class citizens. The organization's 2012 "Because I Am a Girl" report states: "If girls are to play an equal part in society, once they finish their education, that education must be truly empowering and equip them with the capacity and determination to challenge the discrimination they will inevitably face" (Plan International 2012).

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) 2010 meeting in Dakar emphasized the urgency of putting a "rights-based empowerment framework" at the center of all educational effort and making gender equity the "center of transformative, quality education, supported by gender-responsive curricula and teacher training" (UNGEI 2010). Thus, education does not necessarily lead to empowerment or gender equity—unless there is a focus on process, content, and curricula that critically addresses inequitable social norms and structures (Sahni 2017).

Fostering Transformative Education through Critical Feminist Pedagogy: A Theoretical Framework for Guiding Policy

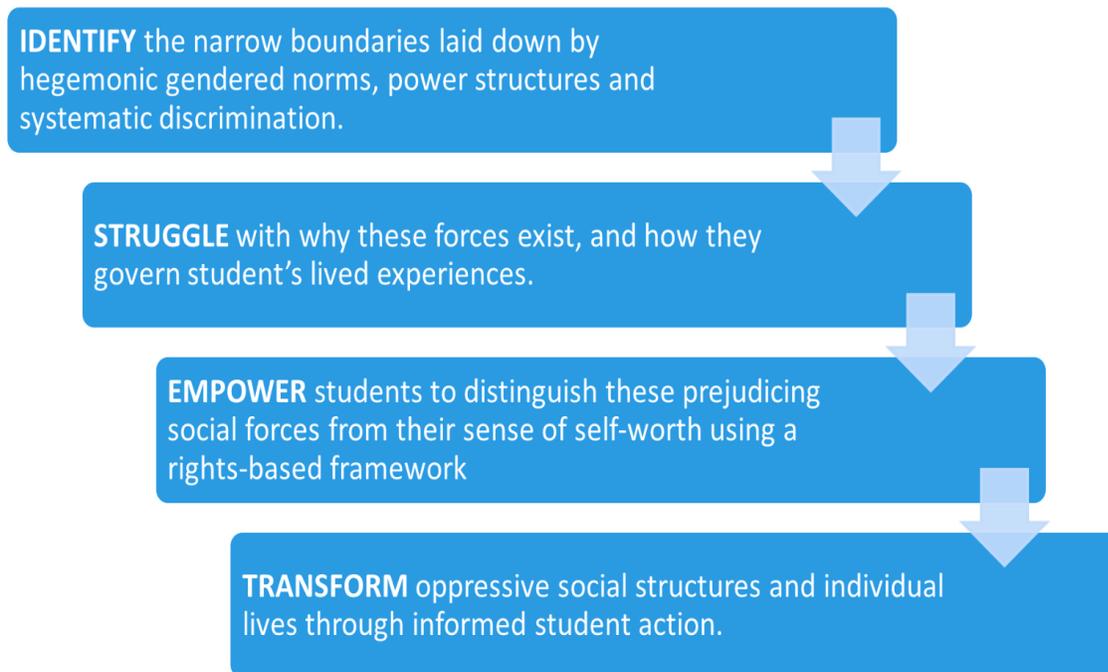
The process of empowering education can transform marginalized students' concept of society; it can transform their sense of self; and eventually, it can transform unequal social structures through their actions.

Critical dialogue operationalizes transformative, empowering education through the teacher-facilitated practice of critical thinking in a safe, communicative educational environment. Through a rights-based framework, students are armed with the tools necessary to turn their social consciousness into social change and the opportunity for autonomous self-determination. Most importantly, critical dialogue aims to give voice to students' thoughts, to express their concerns and feelings, and to use their own experiences and feelings as a valid source of knowledge (Hooks 1994). By engaging one another in authentic critical dialogue, students collectively find ways of strengthening themselves, resisting forces of domination, and transforming their lives (Sahni 2017).

To prepare students for this task, critical pedagogy connects the societal level to the personal level by grounding the discussion in students' experiences. Acknowledging oppressive power structures is not enough; girl students and other subordinate groups need to critically examine these social and political conditions as they manifest in their own lived experience. Students learn to engage critically with the world around them by connecting impersonal intellectual concepts and theories to the reality of their lives and asking, why? Why are some people treated as equals while others are not? Why does society equate inferiority with certain categories of sex, gender, caste, and class?

By asking and answering these questions about their own lived experience, students learn that social and political ideas do not exist in a vacuum. The most consequential and complex social structures manifest in the context of daily life; students are much more likely to comprehend these ideas of patriarchy, discrimination, and hegemony when they are introduced and illustrated with the reality of their lived experiences (Sahni 2017; Hahn 2013; Sharma 2008).

Figure 2. The process of transforming social structures and individual lives through empowering education



In addition to developing social consciousness through critical thinking skills, socially and economically marginalized students require explicit conversations about their rights to translate their education into empowered action. For empowerment to derive from education, students' knowledge of their rights also needs to be operationalized by their aspiration to claim these rights. Formal education is an opportunity for marginalized children to feel and project the sense of self-worth they need to insist on equal treatment in this unequal world. Empowerment through education encourages students to see their education as a secure, personal resource. As equal persons, with choice and agency, empowerment education enables students to use their education as they see fit—to realize personal own aspirations (Purewal 2015; Sahni 2017).

Teacher as a Catalyst

The facilitator of this entire process is the teacher. Teachers' motivation levels, their engagement with the curriculum and with their students inform all dimensions of formal education. In order for the education process to take on a transformative character, teachers must progress beyond basic academic subjects of literacy and numeracy, and even the integral critical thinking skills emphasized thus far; they need to take on the task of being attentive caregivers who engage with their students as whole persons. They need to listen and develop an understanding of an individual student's life and aspirations beyond the classroom, so that teachers can empower students and guide them in acquiring the knowledge necessary to achieve their goals (Noddings 2003; Sahni 2017).

Prioritizing the time for individualized care is central to the empowerment process because teachers, as authority figures and caregivers, have a profound influence on their students' self-confidence, particularly in the formative years of primary and upper-primary education. How students construct their identity, and whether students see themselves as an equal and respected person are influenced by how they are treated and talked to by their own teachers. When treated with respect, students feel much more encouraged and recognize that they are equal people, as they feel acknowledged and valued by teachers (Sahni 2017; Harvey et al 2016; Roorda et al 2011). Therefore, it is crucial that the educational process help students change their perspective about themselves and their lives through their dialogue and interaction with teachers.

Critical dialogue provides a model for teachers to engage attentively with individual student perspectives and experiences. Through personalized informal conversations they foster between teachers and students, teachers become more watchful of their students' lives, encouraging them to be open about problems at home in the classroom and discussing how to address them. These dialogues are meant to result in actionable ideas, empowering knowledge, greater understanding and strong convictions, and development of voice and agency in girls (Sahni 2017).

In order to affect these changes in students, teachers first need to examine their own internalized notions of gender. They need to look closely at the processes of gendering in society, homes, and schools, and examine how these processes have constituted their understanding of themselves and of the world. Therefore, to build teachers' capacities to conduct critical dialogues to deconstruct gender norms in the classrooms, it is essential that teachers themselves first learn to examine and understand how gender is constructed and how it affects the lives of women and girls. By drawing upon teachers' own life experiences and by enabling them to examine these experiences critically through a gender lens, a crucial shift in teachers' understanding of gender can be achieved. This learning, from an examination of their own life, forms the knowledge pool from which teachers can draw as they facilitate a similar examination by the students.

Within this understanding of empowering education and role of teachers, the critical dialogues are key to cultivating these socio-political analytic capabilities. Feminist pedagogy requires the sustained application of an array of conceptual resources to guide students in identifying and understanding social hierarchies, biases, and power distributions that underlie modern societies. Formal educational environments can provide a platform for the sustained analytical development that critical thinking requires (Hahn 2013; Sahni 2017). Schools are particularly fertile environments to deconstruct dominant social power structures because of its centrality in the process of children's socialization.

Incorporating Dialogues on Gender in the School Day: Evidence and Lessons from the Field

This section highlights good practices in designing and implementing Gender Equality and Empowerment Education, providing examples of programs and organizations in Uttar Pradesh that excel in specific components. The macro-level directions for implementing a holistic empowerment education and the framework for scaling programs of this nature have been addressed by detailing the experiences and impact of (i) Perna Girls School, a K-12 school in Lucknow, that has successfully given official curriculum space to understanding gender and practices a critical feminist pedagogy to achieve its goal of improving life-outcomes and empowerment of girls and (ii) 'Aarohini,' the program scaling Perna's key features to 746 residential girls school in Uttar Pradesh through teacher trainings.

Perna Girls School—A Model for Empowerment Curriculum and Pedagogy

Perna School, run by Study Hall Educational Foundation (SHEF), is an all-girls K-12 school located in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. It was founded in 2003 with 80 students and four teachers, and has expanded to currently serve more than 1,000 girls from disadvantaged areas of society. Perna was established to help girls emerge as women with a perception of themselves as equal autonomous persons worthy of respect, having the right to equal participation in an unequal society, and to be equipped with the appropriate skills for such equal participation.

Perna students come from neighboring low-income neighborhoods and slums, have an average family income of Rs. 8900 (\$136) per month, and an average family size of 7 people. Eighty-two percent of them come from lower castes and many are first-generation learners: 39 percent of fathers and 70 percent of mothers have no schooling. Domestic violence is a recurring problem for students, with 46 percent of them reporting an alcoholic father, and 98 percent of mothers and 88 percent of students reporting physical abuse at home. Due to their circumstances, around 43 percent of them work outside the home and therefore attend school during the afternoon (Sahni 2017).

The approach taken by Prerna acknowledges the importance of education as a tool for change, but understands that education will not empower and provide agency to girls if they do not learn *how to think critically about their circumstances and how to address them*. Based on Paulo Freire's theories on critical pedagogy, and motivated by the promotion of gender equality, the teachers and students practice "critical feminist pedagogy." This has the goal of raising the girls' consciousness of the oppressive social conditions and norms that affect them, the structures of power predicated on patriarchy, and the unequal gender relations that are a result of these practices. This pedagogical approach is incorporated in the school's official curriculum and timetable and aims to empower the students by building a sense of agency and enabling them to take action (Sahni 2012).

The school recognizes the importance of engaging closely with the community in order to make them partners in the endeavor to empower their girls. Since the process of empowerment, in order to be sustainable, must be accompanied by a shift in the girls' environments, teachers actively advocate for the girls' rights within their communities. Through regular meetings, dialogues with parents and guardians, awareness marches, etc., the parents are made aware of gender issues and gender discrimination that the girl faces.

Over 100 students have graduated from Prerna in the last eight years, most of them first-generation graduates. Of the students who completed tenth grade, 88.1 percent went on to graduate from the twelfth grade. Of twelfth grade graduates, 97.4 percent have progressed to higher education and are studying for, or have completed, a bachelor's degree; 9 percent have also progressed to a master's degree level. Only 15.7 percent of the Prerna alumnae are married—all of them after age 18. Prerna graduates' average age at marriage is 21.5 years.

The school over the last 14 years has successfully developed and perfected a model of rights-based empowerment education, and has condensed its curriculum and associated pedagogy in the form of an empowerment toolkit called "Aarohini Toolkit." SHEF has implemented the model in government residential girls' school of Uttar Pradesh, and has shown promising results. The next section details this scaling process and its impact in the schools.

Aarohini—A Model for Training Teachers on Gender, Critical Pedagogy, and Community Mobilizationⁱⁱ

Aarohini is a gender program run in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayasⁱⁱⁱ (KGBVs) across Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. As part of its effort to replicate its experience and innovations to different socio-cultural landscapes, SHEF has distilled Prerna's experience into a curriculum called 'Aarohini' and a comprehensive empowerment toolkit both of which have been introduced to KGBVs in UP and Rajasthan. The Aarohini program aims to raise the aspirations and self-perceptions of girls as equal, autonomous persons worthy of respect.

Aarohini is essentially a teacher-training program that aims to equip teachers and local leaders with the tools to engage adolescent girls in rights-based critical dialogues about how gender affects their lives. The initial training is a two-day residential program to introduce the concepts of Critical Feminist Pedagogy to the teachers, and engage them in critical dialogue on gender discrimination issues in India. After six months, a refresher training follows to reinforce the foundational concepts. The teachers are expected to implement the activities in their respective schools, helping foster critical thinking skills and an understanding of gender among their students. After the completion of the initial training, the progress of teachers is monitored through regular phone calls to identify and address specific issues that teachers face when implementing the program. This off-site support also acts as a forum to bring forward cases of child marriage, domestic violence, sexual abuse, dowry deaths, etc. In such cases, teachers are connected to the local support structures to help concerned students.

The Aarohini curriculum and toolkit is now being used in all 746 KGBVs in Uttar Pradesh (UP). In the first scaling attempt, in 2012, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) identified the pedagogy of Prerna, and

ⁱⁱFindings are based on 2017 program evaluation report by Start Up!

ⁱⁱⁱKasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya is a scheme launched by setting up residential schools for girls at upper primary level belonging to specified minority communities. <http://apkgbvs.in>.

invited SHEF to conduct training for 36 KGBVs. Later, in 2014, in collaboration with UNICEF Uttar Pradesh, the program expanded to 100 KGBVs. It was in 2016 that SHEF, after a year of struggling to push for reforms, entered into an agreement with Uttar Pradesh State Education Department that allowed SHEF to conduct trainings with 746 KGBVs. Since Aarohini's inception in 2012, over 2,690 KGBV teachers (in UP and Rajasthan), NGO members, police, and other stakeholders have been trained. They have conducted 83 trainings, reaching approximately 7,000 students directly and reaching over 78,000 students through teachers. Aarohini has thus far covered all 75 districts in Uttar Pradesh.

Scaling of the program saw considerable resistance from the government officials for a number of reasons. There was no motivation of the administrative staff and officers in initiating a gender program in school. The government often had no funds allocated for such a program and receiving permission to conduct trainings proved to be tough. It was difficult for most government officials to understand the difference in the various programs that are working with the girls. The government officers often confused health care and advocacy programs as empowerment programs. Despite such setbacks, Aarohini is successfully running in over 650 schools now because of eager adoption by the female teachers who connect to the goal of the program.

Critical Feminist Pedagogy and Empowerment Curricula is integrated into the KGBVs in 3 keys ways: Teacher Trainings, Critical Dialogue Sessions, and Community Action. Aarohini believes that to create lasting change, girl students must not only be empowered but the process of empowerment must be accompanied by a critical shift in their home environments. Driven by this core idea of transforming oneself and one's environment, teachers are trained to become advocates for girls' rights in the community. Teachers also mobilize parents to address gender discrimination within the home and in the community.

The 2017 evaluation report of the program states, "Aarohini's impact is intrinsically linked to the on-ground perceptions of the program, especially of the teachers who are its key change agents. According to the teachers, unlike other gender programs, Aarohini provides them with methodologies and tools for engaging with their students, the vocabulary to address gender issues, and the intrinsic personal connect to their own lives as women" (Start Up! 2017).

Emphasizing the crucial role of teachers in the successful implementation of any innovative educational program, the report says, "Aarohini's success relies on catalyzing the initiative and agency of the teachers who, despite their busy schedules and tremendous workload, have to be motivated to implement this program in their schools. Several other programs designed to address gender issues in schools such as Meena Manch (UNICEF) and Bal Sabha (Government of India) are operational in most of the KGBVs, and teachers from a majority of the schools have received the Mahila Surakshan Training (Government of India). It is worth noting that unlike Aarohini the implementation of these programs is mandated by the government, and take up most of the time allotted for activities on weekends. Despite this, Aarohini sessions, which are not mandatory, are conducted every Saturday in 9 out of 10 schools visited and appear to be deeply embedded into the culture of the KGBVs" (Start Up! 2017).

Teachers have identified the three key program components and processes that help them grow as changemakers and empower their students. Their quotes^{iv} below illustrate how these components enabled them to redefine their roles.

1. The Training

"Education is very theoretical these days. Aarohini is the only program that is closely related to our lives. Aarohini training has enabled me to talk to parents about gender discrimination openly, which was very difficult earlier."

2. Critical Dialogue Sessions

^{iv} Teachers' statements have been taken directly from the Program's Impact Evaluation Report conducted in the year 2017.

“Aarohini has created a non- hierarchical environment in the school. We don't wait for a child to come to us with their problems. We reach out to her.”

3. The Aarohini Teachers' Handbook

“Because of the Aarohini handbook, I am able to understand how I can start to approach a difficult issue with my students, what questions I should ask, and how I can encourage them to creatively express their stories.”

The comprehensive impact assessment of the program states:

1. Teachers and students are vastly more aware of a range of gender issues in Aarohini schools than their counterparts are.
2. Most teachers are making an effort to build empathy and reach out to students over and above their academic needs and students are responding by opening up and seeking help.
3. Most teachers are leading by example and challenging gender discrimination in their own lives and want to play an active role in the lives of their students.
4. Students are forming strong opinions about gender issues that affect them, can recognize when their rights are violated, and feel they can approach their teachers when in need of support.

Aarohini is an example of a teacher-training program that has evidently resulted in a change in perceptions of teachers of their own role. It thus demonstrates the possibility of transforming education by placing teachers at the center of the process.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides the policy recommendations to mainstream gender equality and empowerment education at post-primary levels. The policy recommendations are based on the experiences of mainstreaming gender education in Prerna Girls Schools and KGBVs across UP. The recommendations are based on the chief components of both the programs, that have enabled successful implementation of the program in past.

- **Introduce a new compulsory subject, Gender Education, aimed at developing a social and political understanding of gender in students' lives, as part of the official school curriculum (for both girls and boys) at the post-primary level in all state and central education boards.** Defining Gender Education as a standalone curricular area will create a stronger impetus for incorporating gender in the classroom. Explicit conversations and critical dialogues on gender bias should officially be made a part of the student experience.
- **Curriculum and teaching materials for post-primary levels should be developed by NCERT^v** (National Council of Educational Research and Training) in collaboration with NGOs (for example: Mahila Samakhya, SHEF, GEMS, Nirantar) working in the area of gender and education, and having past experience of developing and implementing curricular content and pedagogical practices for the same.
- **Place teachers as the key drivers of change.** Pre-service and in-service teacher trainings, and teacher education programs like Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Basic Training Certificate (BTC) should have 'Gender and Education' and 'Critical Feminist Pedagogy' as compulsory modules and subjects. This must be accompanied by intensive in-service training of teachers and professors of B.Ed. and BTC programs.

^v Refer to Table 1 for key responsibilities of NCERT.

- **SCERT^{vi}(State Council of Educational Research and Training) should develop Teacher-training materials and curriculum for B.Ed. and BTC** with the help of NGOs and experts with experience training teachers on gender and critical feminist pedagogy.
- **Train teachers to effectively engage with the community**, using School Management Committees, parent teacher conferences, and student-led campaigns as forums for conversation

Teacher Training Objectives and Design

As mentioned previously, teachers are the main actors and catalysts in the process of mainstreaming gender into the schools. The objectives and design of the recommended teacher trainings are as follows.

Enable teachers to recognize their own biases

This process begins with teachers identifying the role of gender in shaping their own lives and reflecting on the power structures and roles that gender norms have created around them. Since teachers come from the same patriarchal society as their students, they may often hold strong views about gender roles that they are likely to inadvertently perpetuate without this process of social bias recognition. Because such biases are both subtle and impactful, teachers must work to address them; this proposed teacher training is designed to give teachers the additional tools required for social bias recognition.

The objective of the training is to allow teachers to identify their own biases so that they can approach the classroom conversations in a genuine and credible way. It involves getting teachers to look at their own lives not as teachers—as women and men who encounter gender norms but have not reflected on the limiting consequences of these on their own lives. The purpose is to enable them to name their own realities first—as a precursor to building an understanding of the structure that oppresses women.

Introduce them to the critical dialogue methodology and provide required skills and tools

Critical dialogue methodology helps teachers to engage students and parents in conversations about gender in relation to their lives. This includes examples that reflect the gendered experiences of students, legal frameworks that protect their rights and guard against discrimination, and ideas for activities, such as theatre, that can help facilitate difficult conversations.

The objective is to familiarize the participants with the pedagogical structure of a critical dialogue by elaborating on the essential components and flow of a critical dialogue. It provides them with necessary training on how to engage children and how to facilitate a dialogue.

Provide a framework to assess the impact of their efforts, and avenues for addressing cases that emerge from the critical dialogues with students

Unless teachers have markers that allow them to identify the progress they are making in changing their students' mindsets, they won't be able to make a lasting impact. Additionally, it is likely that these conversations will surface cases of gender discrimination of various degrees of intensity, e.g., violence at home, physical or sexual abuse, or forced early marriages. Teachers need to be trained to handle these situations and should know whom to reach out for further help.

Training teachers to engage parent communities

By using parent-teacher meetings, and student-led campaigns as possible avenues, teachers can engage with parents in order to advance the conversations of girls' rights within the parent community. Often these

^{vi} Refer to Table 1 for key responsibilities of SCERT.

avenues are not utilized to their full potential and teachers are not effective in dealing with the parent community; a prior training helps in aligning their activities within the community with the overall aim of education. The objective is to enable teachers to view the community as a key stakeholder, without whose participation the goal of girls' empowerment will remain distant.

Implementation Roadmap for Uttar Pradesh and Mapping of Key Actors

This section identifies the key stakeholders that need to be mobilized to implement the recommended policies. Additionally, it maps the stakeholders to their role in the implementation process in order to incorporate policy into the school day, teacher training, community engagement, and monitoring and support.

As previously mentioned, India's constitution and laws demonstrate that addressing gender inequality is a policy priority. However, there are gaps in the implementation of these policies that leave adolescent girls and children unprotected or without access to basic services. In order to address this, many local and international organizations have introduced programming to reduce gender inequality and discrimination through education. The result is an extremely fractured landscape of public and private actors. These organizations have common objectives and overlapping methods, yet they work separately and sometimes in competition with one another.

Leadership by the Department of Education in UP and the rest of the country has the potential to transform this uncoordinated collection of actors into a cohesive network that addresses gender discrimination evenly and systematically across communities. By establishing a unified approach and taking advantage of the synergy it fosters, UP could set an example for states across the country in closing the gap between aspirational policies and on the ground realities for women and girls.

It is recommended that policies be executed in collaboration with the state Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) office, and a nonprofit that has experience in mainstreaming gender conversations in the classrooms, such as SHEF. Developing the program with SSA has three advantages:

- SSA centrally sponsors 60 percent of the state education budget, giving the State Project Director strong leverage on the state's education priorities.
- Structurally, SSA offices have positions exclusively dedicated to working on gender-based issues, e.g., there are SSA Educational Officers for girls' education at the state-level, as well as District Coordinators for gender in all districts. Additionally, they work extensively with Kasturba Gandhi Bal Vidyalaya (KGBV) schools and have institutional experience and a strong impetus for working on gender issues. They have also developed a 17-session module on Inclusive Education in collaboration with UNICEF that aims at addressing challenges faced by adolescent girls. It includes content on masculinity, health, and nutrition among other areas.
- Working with SSA allows for easier replication of the program in other states, since it is a centrally sponsored scheme and has similar objectives and institutions across the country.

Establishing Block Resource Centres (BRCs) as nodal offices for supporting teachers aligns with the official mandate of the office. They serve as primary center for teacher support, motivation, and monitoring. Emphasizing the role of the BRCs provides an opportunity to strengthen the monitoring knowledge and skills of the office which can be replicated in other spheres of their work.

Figure 3. Key stakeholders who need to be mobilized to lead policy implementation

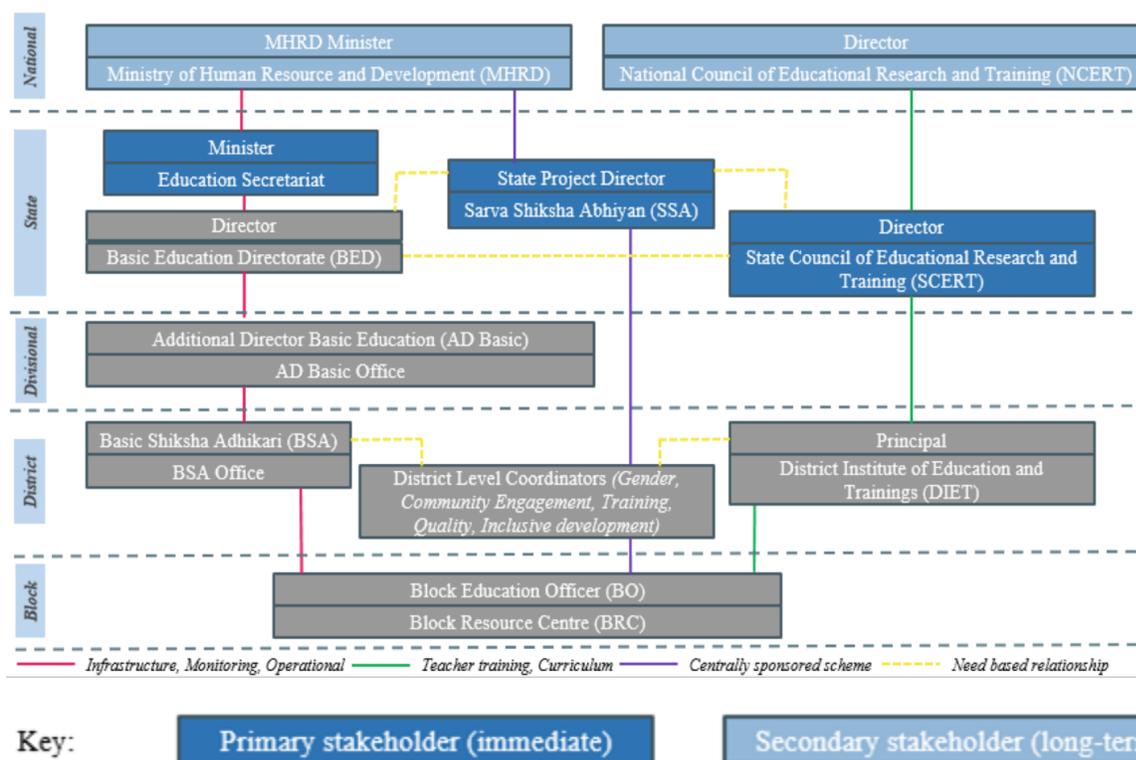


Table 1: Key Responsibilities of the stakeholders

Organization	Key Responsibilities
Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Draft national educational policy/schemes ● Fund and implement schemes
National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Draft national curricular standards ● Collaborate with states
Education Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plan and finance education plans and schemes in the state
Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Manage centrally sponsored schemes (schemes financed by the central government) ● Conduct teacher training workshops
State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Design and develop curriculum and content ● Design and develop teacher training curriculum and content ● Conduct pre-service and in-service trainings

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Train master trainers
District Institute of Education and Trainings (DIET)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lead in-service and pre-service trainings ● Submit training requests to SCERT
Basic Education Directorate (BED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Design and implement state-level schemes (funded by the state) ● Develop and maintain infrastructure in Primary schools ● Teacher transfers ● Monitoring and quality assurance
AD Basic Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement state-level schemes (funded by the state) ● Maintain infrastructure in Primary schools ● Monitoring and quality assurance
Block Resource Centre (BRC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement state-level schemes (funded by the state) ● Implement centrally sponsored schemes ● Maintain infrastructure in Primary schools ● Monitoring and quality assurance ● Identify teachers for trainings ● Train teachers and provide support
BSA Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure implementation of centrally sponsored schemes
District Level Coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitor school level implementation of SSA trainings and centrally sponsored schemes

CONCLUSION

Schools are powerful sites for change and social transformation, and are able to organize school structures, develop pedagogies, and curricula in ways that will empower students to realize their full potential. India's education policy recognizes this, but it is vital to translate policy into actionable curriculums, teacher training programs, and classroom practices. Achieving gender parity in school enrollment is an important first step toward gender equality, but it is of the utmost importance to consider carefully *what* we teach in school and *how* we teach it. It is crucial that we expand our vision of quality education and move it from a narrow focus on learning outcomes to a more holistic one of life outcomes. This policy brief attempts to show some directions.

APPENDIX: RELEVANT NATIONAL-LEVEL POLICIES

National Commitment	Policy Language Excerpt
The Constitution (1950)	<p>Article 46. <i>The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.</i></p> <p>Article 51A. It shall be the duty of every citizen of India - (e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic, and regional or sectional diversities; to <i>renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women</i> (Government of India 1950).</p>
National Curriculum Framework (2005)	<p>Executive Summary: <i>Special efforts are needed to ensure that girls receive as much attention in health and physical education programs as boys from the pre-school stage upwards.</i></p> <p>3.4.1 - The Proposed Epistemological Frame - <i>Gender concerns need to be addressed in terms of making the perspectives of women integral to the discussion of any historical event and contemporary concerns.</i></p> <p>Chapter 6 - “The formal approach, of equality of treatment, in terms of equal access or equal representation for girls, is inadequate. Today, there is a need to adopt a substantive approach, toward equality of outcome, where diversity, difference and disadvantage are taken into account... <i>Thus, in order to make it possible for marginalized learners, and especially girls, to claim their rights as well as play an active role in shaping collective life, education must empower them to overcome the disadvantages of unequal socialization and enable them to develop their capabilities of becoming autonomous and equal citizens</i>” (NCERT 2005).</p>
National Education Policy (1986)	<p>3.5.36 <i>The interventions which are currently being made to bridge these gender and social gaps need to be stepped up, and more focused strategies need to be worked out for effective inclusion and participation of girls and other special category children.</i></p> <p>3.2.9 Schools must help inculcate key qualities and attitudes like regularity and punctuality, cleanliness, self-control, industriousness and a spirit of entrepreneurship, sense of duty, desire to serve, responsibility, creativity, <i>sensitivity to greater equality, respect towards women</i> (NCERT 1968).</p> <p>4.2 Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of woman. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favor of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering. <i>Women's</i></p>

	<p><i>studies will be promoted as a part of various courses and educational institutions encouraged to take up active programs to further women's development</i> (Government of India 1986).</p> <p>2016 DRAFT: 9.3.3 Schools must develop in students, qualities like regularity and punctuality, cleanliness, good conduct, consideration for the elderly <i>and respect for women</i>. The process of education should inculcate a spirit of hard work and entrepreneurship, a respect for human rights and compassion for the disadvantaged sections of society. Every student should be made aware not only of his/her fundamental rights, but also of fundamental duties, laid down by the Constitution (NCERT 2016).</p>
<p>Right to Education Act (2010)</p>	<p>(c) ensure that the child belonging to a <i>weaker section</i> and the child belonging to a disadvantaged group are not discriminated against and prevented from pursuing and completing elementary education on any grounds (Government of India 2010).</p>

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