



SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T

“Supporting Adolescent Transition To Adulthood: What Works and What Doesn’t”

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SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T

Enabling empowerment of adolescents through evidence-based programming: reducing child marriage, improving secondary education access and learning, and easing the transition to labour market opportunities.ⁱ

WHAT? INVEST IN ADOLESCENTS NOW TO HARNESS THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND FOR INDIA

- The world's largest population (approximately 253 million, 20% of the total population of India) is a huge opportunity for India to invest in its prosperity.ⁱⁱ
- Sustained and coordinated investment in the socio-economic development and wellbeing of adolescent girls and boys so they can become a skilled workforce and a game changer for India's future socio-economic growth and development.
- By investing in adolescent girls and boys, the Government of India can lift millions out of poverty, achieve SDGs and achieve NITI Aayog's 3 year agenda.

WHY? AN AGE OF GREAT OPPORTUNITY, BUT ALSO VULNERABILITY

- Adolescence is a critical period to build on early childhood investments and support them to transition into healthy, productive and empowered adults, who give back to society. Investing in adolescence offers a second chance to those who may not have received the requisite support during early childhood.
- While adolescence is an age of opportunity, it is also a time of vulnerability. Adolescent girls may be vulnerable to child marriage and dropping out of school, gender based violence at home and in public spaces and fewer opportunities to transition into paid, formal work. Adolescent boys may be vulnerable to paid child labour and consequently dropping out of school.
- Government interventions are needed to ensure that all adolescent girls and boys receive socio-economic programmes that effectively respond to their vulnerabilities.



20–24-year-old women in India were married before 18

(NFHS, 2016)



Female labour force participation rate in India

(ILO LFEP, 2017)



Gross enrolment ratio at the senior secondary level in India

(NUEPA, 2015-16)



Youth aged 15–29 years of age in India are not employed, in school, or in training

(OECD, 2017)

HOW? CRITICAL GAME CHANGERS FOR ADOLESCENTS IN INDIA—THE UNICEF APPROACH

- In order to break the vicious cycle of inter-generational poverty, critical game changers include programmes that focus on: Ending child marriage; Empowering girls and boys with equal access to resources and opportunities and preventing paid and unpaid child labour; Providing access to quality education and skills opportunities; and Supporting transition to workforce participation.
- Social protection, including through ‘cash plus’ (cash transfers + complementary services) can deliver results by providing adolescent girls and boys and their families economic incentives along with related complementary services to continue and complete secondary education, delay marriage, participate in skills training, and eventually transition to workforce.
- Currently several ministries are implementing and investing in programmes which focus on the multiple dimensions of adolescent life. Having one vision and coordinated efforts will bring a powerful strategic link to government investments and equal opportunities to adolescent girls and boys, and enable India to harness its demographic dividend.

ⁱ The brief summarises evidence from impact evaluations (randomised evaluations, and where not available, quasi-experimental evaluations, pointing out the necessary caveats) that have examined the effect of social protection programmes on child marriage, secondary education, and labour market outcomes for adolescents. This review extends beyond impact evaluations led by J-PAL affiliated researchers.

ⁱⁱ For details, See Statistical Table 11 of UNICEF’s State of the World’s Children 2011, Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity. Available on line at: <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/statistics.php>

Game Changers

- Ending child marriage, empowering girls and boys with equal opportunities and resources, generating better education opportunities and supporting their ability to participate in paid, formal work as adults.

Strategies

- Empowering girls and boys with information, skills, networks, confidence and support in fulfilling their rights;
- Educating and mobilizing parents and community members on the rights of adolescent girls and boys;
- Near universal uptake of equitable, inclusive, universal, gender-sensitive quality education for girls and boys;
- Offering economic support and cash transfers for adolescent girls and boys and their families;
- Linking cash transfers to complementary governmental services;
- Skilling adolescent girls and boys and linkages with workforce participation;

Impact

- Reduction in child marriage;
- Completion of secondary education with appropriate learning outcomes for girls and boys;
- Equitable and stronger workforce and equitable labour force participation;
- Increased participation, decision-making leading to equal resources, voice and agency for girls and boys;
- Better economic growth and development of India.

Harnessing the Demographic Dividend for India;

Attainment of goals of SDGs and NITI Aayog 3 year Action Agenda.

Equal opportunities for girls and boys



PHOTO: © UNICEF/INDIA/PRASHANTH VISHWANATHAN

POLICY PATHS

DELAYING MARRIAGE

1. Use regular and recurring cash or in kind transfers over a period of time to incentivise girls and families to delay marriage.

Cash or in-kind transfers conditional on staying unmarried and in secondary school may help girls and their families delay marriage. The timing, amount, and disbursement medium may have a large impact on their effectiveness—for instance, a stream of regular and recurring cash transfers is more effective than a large one-time cash transfer.

2. Explore incentives for out-of-school girls to delay marriage and bring them into the education and skills system.

Unlike transfers conditional on girls staying in school, an incentive conditional on staying unmarried has the potential to benefit out-of-school girls—a group among the most vulnerable to child marriage. A potential path to explore in the Indian context would be providing cash transfers to these target beneficiaries along with complementary services like skills training and rigorously evaluating the impact of these interventions.

3. Account for the decision-making demographic in empowerment programmes.

It is important to keep in mind that in India, families often control decisions such as the time of marriage and the choice of spouse; future empowerment programme need to be designed keeping this power-holding demographic in mind. There is also a need for more rigorous evidence of the impact of such programmes.

4. Enable women and girls to take a stronger/prominent role in communities and enhance the achievement of their aspirations to contribute to society.

Legislation aimed at reserving seats for women in village council elections and the subsequent presence of female leaders in villages showed an increase in parents' aspirations for their daughters.

IMPROVING SECONDARY EDUCATION

1. Reduce costs of education.

Cash transfers, waiving fees and small complementary costs like uniforms, and decreasing non-monetary costs like travel time to school are effective in improving enrolment/attendance of adolescent girls and boys.

2. Create visibility and knowledge on and linkages with the existing schemes.

Addressing perception gaps and making the benefits of education more salient (e.g. informing students about the availability of scholarships, the returns to education, and presenting examples of future job opportunities) may improve student participation at a low cost.

3. Address barriers that disproportionately affect girls.

Barriers of distance to school, costs, misperceptions, and information gaps are often more significant for adolescent girls than boys. Removing such constraints help girls as much as, or even more than, boys.

4. Apply pedagogical solutions to impact learning

In addition to improving overall quality of teaching-learning transactions, pedagogical solutions such as supplemental remedial instruction or computer adaptive learning are important. More research is needed to understand what increases student learning at the secondary level.

5. Understand the challenge of comprehensive impacts.

Improving education quality may—but does not always— increase student attendance by increasing the perceived benefits of education, at least in the short term. Analogously, increasing time in school does not necessarily improve learning. This lesson is critical for policy design.

FACILITATING TRANSITION TO WORK

1. Integrate technical and non-cognitive (life skills) competencies for better transition to work.

For coping with the dynamic market needs, integration of technical and non-cognitive (life skills) competencies, as complementary to each other, in job trainings is most important.

2. Link training programmes to tangible workforce opportunities.

Successful job training programmes include those that incentivise participants to get trained for skills that are in-demand by the private sector, or for specific job opportunities, in apprenticeships or internships. Programmes should work closely with the private sector to develop the curriculum addressing their needs for specific skills, so that job placements post training are better facilitated.

3. Address needs of women to prepare for a stronger workforce.

Women often face additional constraints to access and complete trainings (the burden of unpaid care work in the home, lack of safe transport, and, more broadly, security concerns, etc.); gender gaps persist post training too. Additional provisions for women must be made for them to avail an equal training experience.

4. Include adolescents in training programmes as potential workforce where appropriate.

Most central and state training programmes currently target youth. New approaches and future programming that is designed to meet the specific needs of adolescents must be tested to ensure that these programmes will effectively prepare adolescents for a smooth transition to work opportunities.

5. Provide information on market opportunities.

Providing targeted information about labour market opportunities is an important, cost-effective way to help youth adjust their expectations, prepare for, and find jobs.



PHOTO: MARCO SAROLDI | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time when critical decisions must be made—for example, decisions about marriage, schooling, careers, and fertility—that can dramatically impact the growth and development of individuals and their future trajectories. Investing in the future human capital of India’s adolescent population has the potential to reduce poverty well into the future through better skilled, healthier, and more active labour market participants, reduced fertility and lowered disease burdens. According to India’s 2011 census, 253 million people in the country—nearly a fifth (19.1 percent) of the country’s population—are adolescents aged 10–19 years.

Adolescent empowerment can be positively influenced through multiple dimensions, including supporting access to education and skills, as well as delaying age at marriage. This brief specifically focuses on **evidence from social protection interventions across the world which are aimed at improving adolescent outcomes related to secondary education, reducing child marriage, and facilitating transition to work, while also exploring the linkages between these outcomes** (Figure 1).

Causal evidence indicates that **increasing education for girls can reduce child marriage** and conversely, that postponing marriage increases schooling. Similarly, **more schooling is associated with a higher probability of employment** and higher wages. Globally, each additional year of schooling typically raises an individual’s earnings by 8–10 percent, with larger increases for women.ⁱⁱⁱ There is also some limited **evidence that improved labour market prospects for young women can reduce child marriage and/or increase education for girls** (which may have an indirect impact on the age of marriage). For instance, in Bangladesh, the arrival of garment factories in an area lowered the risk of early marriage and increased school enrolment for girls within commuting distance of these factories.^{iv}

ⁱⁱⁱ World Development Report, 2018

^{iv} Mobarak, AM, Heath, R. 2015. “Manufacturing growth and the lives of Bangladeshi women”. *Journal of Development Economics* 115: 1-15.

However, designing interventions to improve these outcomes is often complicated by the **existence of cross-cutting barriers—for instance, social and financial—which may interact with each other**, operating simultaneously to produce undesirable outcomes. Socio-cultural norms, especially those pertaining to gender, may inhibit adolescent empowerment. For example, harmful patriarchal norms related to the lower value of girls than boys in the family, or norms preventing adolescent girls from attending schools outside the village, may reduce attendance and achievement. Similarly, the practice of child marriage is a social norm, whereby those deviating from this norm may be criticised or ostracised. In certain districts in India, child marriage is not highly correlated with income, suggesting there are factors other than monetary drivers.^v

With respect to economic constraints, direct costs of education such as tuition fees and school supplies, as well as the opportunity cost can be substantial at the secondary level. Financial costs may be associated with dowry for a girl's marriage, as well as supporting unmarried daughters living at home, particularly if they are not earning an income. There may also be a

pro-male bias in intra-household education investments between siblings given limited budgets.^{vi} Labour market opportunities for girls could relieve the economic constraints households face and may also increase girls' agency over marriage.

Social protection measures can potentially mitigate these barriers and have a strong cross-cutting impact on supporting adolescents to prevent child marriage, improve retention in secondary education, and transition to a productive adulthood. Social protection is defined as policies and programmes aimed at reducing the economic and social vulnerabilities of children, women, and families in order to ensure their access to a decent standard of living and essential services.^{vii} (See Table 1 for the different types of social protection instruments.) Cash transfers are the most familiarly seen social protection measure used by governments in the last decade. There has been significant and consistent global evidence on the effectiveness of cash transfer programmes in promoting outcomes related to education, health, and protection, which are highly relevant to the adolescent age group. In recent years, however, there has been a move towards the concept of cash plus services.

FIGURE 1. COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ADOLESCENT TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD



TABLE 1.

TYPES OF SOCIAL PROTECTION INSTRUMENTS	EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC INSTRUMENTS
Social transfers —long-term predictable transfers and safety net/humanitarian response	Cash transfers (including pensions, child benefits, poverty-targeted, seasonal); Food transfers; Food & fuel subsidies; Nutritional supplementation; Public works
Ensuring economic and social access to services	User fee abolition; Social health insurance; Exemptions, vouchers, subsidies; Provision of ARVs; Birth registration
Social support & care services	Family support services; Home-based care
Legislation and policies to ensure equity and non-discrimination in children and families' access to services and employment/livelihoods	Minimum and equal pay legislation; Employment guarantee schemes; Childcare policy; Maternity and paternity leave; Removal of discriminatory legislation/policies affecting service provision/employment

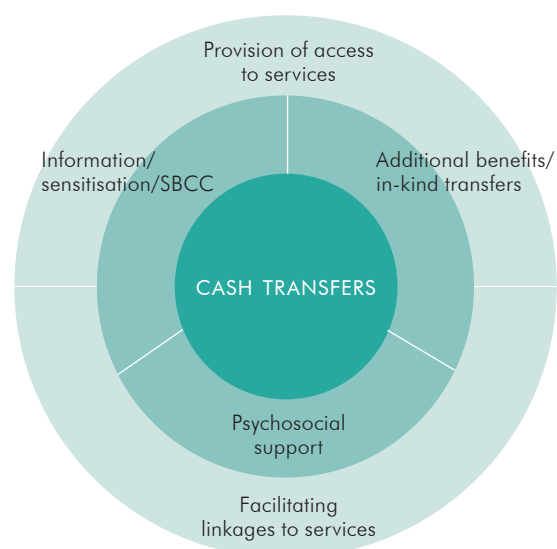
Source: UNICEF Social Protection Strategic Framework, 2012

Cash plus can be characterised as social protection interventions that provide regular transfers in combination with additional components or linkages to augment income effects. This is done by creating an enabling environment for social and behavioural changes, creating and transforming social norms, and tackling supply-side constraints. The concept of cash plus and its linkage to cash transfers is set out in Figure 2. The types of complementary support can consist of:

- i. components that are provided as integral elements of the cash transfer intervention, such as through the provision of additional benefits or in-kind transfers, social and behaviour change communication (SBCC), or psycho-social support.
- ii. components that are external to the intervention but offer explicit linkages to services provided by other sectors, such as through direct provision of access to services or facilitating linkages to services.^{viii}

The term cash plus is gaining considerable traction because of its potential to complement cash with additional inputs, service components, or linkages to external services that, in combination, may be more effective in achieving the desired impacts and ensuring their sustainability than cash alone.

FIGURE 2.



Source: How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors, Innocenti Working Paper 2017-10, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2017

EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS

This evidence synthesis consists of global evidence for cash transfers for the adolescent age group along with the evidence on potential 'cash plus' complementary services that can be linked to cash transfer programmes to increase their effectiveness. This brief is structured under three sections that look at results from global evidence on social protection measures with respect to 1) delaying marriage, 2) improving secondary education, and 3) facilitating work transition for adolescents. The brief is aimed at setting out new paths to inform policy thinking for adolescent empowerment in India.

^v UNICEF, 2016.

^{vi} Sahoo, Soham. 2016. "Intra-Household Gender Disparity in School Choice: Evidence from Private Schooling in India". *The Journal of Development Studies*. 1-17.

^{vii} UNICEF Social Protection Strategic Framework, 2012

^{viii} How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors, Innocenti Working Paper 2017-10, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2017



PHOTO: © UNICEF/INDIA/ANITA KHEMKA

DELAYING MARRIAGE

India has a high rate of child marriage with the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2016 showing that **27 percent of 20–24-year-old women were married before 18 years of age**, which is the legal age of marriage (32 percent in rural and 18 percent in urban areas). Nearly 8 percent of women aged 15–19 years were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey.^{ix} Child marriage rates vary significantly across the country: states with a 30 percent or higher rate of child marriage are: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tripura, and West Bengal.

The Government of India has initiated several types of social protection measures to tackle child marriage. In fact, compared with its South Asian neighbours, India has the longest experience with government-led policies to address the problem of child marriage. The first major policy was the 1992 Girl Child Protection Scheme in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, which adopted a financial approach to addressing child marriage. Inspired by the Tamil Nadu experiment, other Indian states pursued the strategy of using financial aid to delay marriage among girls.

Prominent examples include the Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD) programme of the Government of Haryana (1994), Ladli Lakshmi Yojana in Madhya Pradesh, the Dikri Bachao Campaign in Gujarat, the Girl Child Protection Scheme in Andhra Pradesh, the Ladli Scheme in Haryana (2005) and Delhi (2008), and the Laadli Laxmi Scheme in Goa (2012). The latest addition is the Kanyashree Prakalpa programme launched by the government of West Bengal which provides annual cash transfers to adolescent girls linked to their retention in school between the ages of 14–18 years of age.^x

Globally, there have been different social protection measures which have been utilised to tackle the issue of child marriage. A synthesis of the global evidence around such social protection measures along with new potential programme paths for India are set out below.

^{ix} International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2017. "National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), India, 2015-16." Mumbai: IIPS

^x This programme recently won the UN Excellence in Public Service Award in 2017.

1. LEGISLATION

Minimum age legal requirements are one of the most widely adopted approaches to tackle child marriage, and Indian legislation imposes sanctions on parents who marry their daughters before the age of 18. Descriptive evidence from India suggests a limited public awareness of the law and a weak enforcement of it, undermining its potential to curb child marriage. Despite long term legal bans on the practice in nearly every country, **legal prohibition alone has not resulted in a major change in the practice of child marriage.** If marriage age laws were effective we would expect to see a bunching of marriages at age 18, but a recent multi-country study shows that this is not the case.¹

Certain types of legislation could, however, influence gender attitudes and aspirations by addressing and transforming harmful social practices and norms to positive ones. For example, an evaluation in West Bengal of the 1993 constitutional amendment that reserved one third of village council leader positions for women found that adolescent girls in twice-reserved villages were more likely to want to wait until after age 18 to marry.² The presence of a female leader in their village increased parents' aspirations for their daughters, as well as the girls' own aspirations.

2. CASH OR IN-KIND TRANSFERS

Global evidence shows that transfers conditional on staying unmarried may directly incentivise girls and their families to delay marriage. For example, in rural Bangladesh, a conditional transfer programme designed to encourage parents to delay their daughters' marriage until the legal age of consent led to an increase in marriage age, a fall in child marriages and increased educational attainment.³ Every four months between April 2008 and August 2010, girls who remained unmarried could collect cooking oil by presenting their ration card to community volunteers at a distribution point in the community. The volunteers would then confirm the girls' marital status with other community members. The value of the oil was approximately US\$16 per year, an amount chosen to offset the amount by which dowry is estimated to increase for every additional year a girl remains unmarried. Child marriage rates among those eligible for the incentive for two years fell from 37 percent to 28 percent. The incentive conditional on marriage also postponed the marriage age for girls who were not enrolled in school. The randomised evaluation of this programme included an additional arm in which girls were eligible for both the in-kind transfer and an intensive, well-implemented empowerment programme (described in more detail below).

In India, over the past two decades the government has initiated multiple national and state sponsored conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes with the direct or indirect aim of delaying marriage among girls. For instance, the Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD) programme in Haryana, initiated in 1994, offered cash transfers at two different points: first, a small cash disbursement to mothers (INR 500) within fifteen days of delivering a daughter; and second, a savings bond in the name of the girl, redeemable for an expected INR 25,000 when the girl turned 18-years-old, provided she remained unmarried. A recent quasi-experimental evaluation, however, shows the programme had no effect on delaying age of marriage of girls to 18 years of age.⁴ The programme increased the likelihood of finishing class 8, but made no difference in finishing class 12. Further, it was seen that girls in the programme were more likely to marry exactly at age 18, suggesting that families delayed marriage to age 18 in order to receive the benefit. It should be noted here that there were no concurrent services in place to integrate the girls into skills based training or retain them in education systems. There was also little guidance or support for the girl beneficiaries and their families on utilising the lump-sum cash transfer given when the girl turned 18 years of age. This is seen in anecdotal evidence pointing to the parents' belief that this programme was meant to subsidise the cost of dowry.

Given the very different outcomes in Bangladesh and the ABAD programme in India, it is important to note that there may be a difference between lump-sum transfers (as in ABAD) and frequent individual payments (as in the Bangladesh programme). Moreover, along with conditional cash transfers, there is a **need for testing other layered approaches that challenge norms and help change parental attitudes and aspirations for girls.**

Cash transfers conditional on education can also lead girls to delay marriage. Programmes such as distributing free school uniforms in Kenya⁵ and secondary school scholarships for girls in Colombia,⁶ have led to reductions in cohabitation and childbearing in addition to improving school attendance. However, cash or in-kind transfers that focus on increasing access to education as a means to also prevent child marriage, need to find a way to bring into the education or the skills system, out-of-school girls, who are particularly vulnerable and may lack access to schools for a number of reasons. The effectiveness of conditional transfers vis-à-vis unconditional transfers in delaying marriage is also a pertinent area to look at. In Malawi, unconditional transfers delayed marriage and pregnancy by reaching the vulnerable out-of-school girls, while girls who

received cash transfers conditional on education showed no decline at all.^{7, xi} However, the drivers of early marriage in Malawi are quite different, and more research is needed to examine the effectiveness of this approach in the Indian context.

3. GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Empowerment programmes for girls seek to delay marriage by helping girls develop skills, which allow them to better negotiate their own choices and encourage independence.

The evaluation of one such training programme in Bangladesh (Kishoree Kontha) found no impact on marriage timing, but did lead to increases in education as well as improvements in mental health, health-related decision making, and income generation.³ The programme consisted of: (i) an education component on basic literacy, numeracy, and oral communication for both in-school and illiterate girls, (ii) a social competency component providing life skills, and nutritional and reproductive health knowledge, and (iii) a financial literacy component. A similar female empowerment programme, focusing more on vocational skills and aimed at slightly older girls compared to the above programme in Bangladesh, was evaluated in Tanzania and Uganda. While the Uganda study found reductions in risky sexual relationships and teenage pregnancy as well as positive labour market outcomes,⁸ the Tanzania study did not find any significant impact, which the authors conclude was probably due to weak implementation.⁹

Evaluations of Kishori Abhijan¹⁰ and the Balika¹¹ girls empowerment programmes in Bangladesh do show reductions in child marriage. However, the Balika study suffered from a high degree of attrition correlated with marriage outcomes and did not sufficiently take regional differences into account. The Kishori Abhijan evaluation only found outcomes on unmatched subjects. Similarly, the Berhane Hewan programme in Ethiopia implemented a combination of group formation, community awareness, and encouragement for girls to remain in school. Using a quasi-experimental design, researchers found a positive impact on delaying age of marriage. However, it is hard to discern which component of the programme contributed to this the most.¹² In India, the Deepshikha programme, implemented by UNICEF in Maharashtra, encouraged self-help group formation along with imparting life skills training to adolescent girls, with the dual aim of reducing child-marriage and re-enrolling girls who had dropped out of school.¹³ The methodological problems with the evaluations of such programmes, however, make it difficult to compare across these interventions.

Although the evidence of the impact of such programmes on delaying marriage is inconclusive, empowerment programmes may have long-term benefits in reproductive health outcomes or marital bargaining power later in life, especially in settings where women have more control over the decision to marry.

POLICY PATHS

- **Cash or in-kind transfers conditional on staying unmarried or in secondary school may help girls and their families delay marriage.** The design of these programmes—such as the timing, amount, and disbursement medium—may also have large impacts on their effectiveness, with some evidence showing that a large one-time incentive in years to come (like the Apni Beti Apna Dhan scheme) might be less effective than a stream of immediate and recurring incentives (like the cooking oil incentives) or cash transfers linked to education.
- **Unlike transfers conditional on girls staying in school, an incentive conditional on remaining unmarried has the potential to benefit out-of-school girls—a group among the most vulnerable to child marriage.** However, as the evidence from India shows, it is important that the cash transfer is not perceived as a dowry or payment of wedding costs. A potential path to explore in the Indian context would be providing cash transfers to these target beneficiaries along with complementary services like skills training, and rigorously evaluating the impact of these interventions.
- **There is not enough rigorous evidence of the impact of empowerment programmes alone in the Indian context.** It is important to keep in mind that in India, families often control decisions such as the time of marriage and the choice of spouse. Programmes need to be designed keeping this power holding demographic in mind.
- **Broad legislative approaches including minimum age requirements have not been shown to adequately address the socio-cultural norms around child marriage.** On the other hand, legislation aimed at reserving seats for women in village council elections, and the subsequent presence of female leaders in villages did increase parents' aspirations for their daughters.

^{xi} With respect to schooling outcomes, however, unconditional transfers were less effective than conditional transfers.



PHOTO: ANDREY BAYDA | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

IMPROVING SECONDARY EDUCATION

With the gross enrolment ratio at the secondary (classes 9-10) and senior secondary (classes 11-12) level at 80.1 percent and 56.2 percent respectively, **access to secondary education is a pressing challenge for India's adolescent population.**^{xii} This is exacerbated by the dropout rates, which although have decreased overall, still remain high at 36.3 percent at the elementary level and 47.4 percent at the secondary level.^{xiii}

Both at the central and state level, India offers several education schemes covering adolescent girls and boys. Adolescents are covered under the three key education programmes of Right to Education focusing on 6–14-year-olds, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) focusing on classes 1–8, and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) focusing on classes 9–12. However, there are several options for policymakers to consider when endeavouring to ensure that children are in school and learning. The section below discusses rigorous global evidence on social protection programmes and complementary service programmes targeting to adolescents boy and girls^{xiv} to understand effective ways of empowering them through

improved school participation (enrolment and attendance) and improved learning.^{xv} This will help identify policy paths for India to consider when developing a cash plus services approach to adolescent empowerment.

1. REDUCING COSTS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

Subsidies, cash, and in-kind transfers

Evidence from different contexts suggests that **cash transfer programmes, both unconditional (UCTs) and conditional (CCTs), have had consistent and substantive positive effects on school participation outcomes.** It is of note that the impact on learning outcomes is less clear.^{xv} Given the general consensus on their effectiveness in increasing enrolment and attendance, it is more pertinent to understand implications for policy design from existing research. First, evidence has shown that **small changes in the design of CCTs can make them more effective.** In Colombia,¹⁴ postponing part of the transfer to a larger payout when school fees for the following year were due, increased enrolment without reducing daily



PHOTO: © UNICEF/INDIA/PRAZHANTH VISHWANATHAN

attendance, and students who received a large award upon graduation were more likely to enrol in a higher education institution. In comparison to the standard CCT, both of these modified versions were especially effective at improving the enrolment of the lowest income students and the students with the lowest participation rates. Second, evidence from Cambodia¹⁵ and Malawi⁷ shows that even small cash transfers can be just as effective. Third, **there is mixed evidence on the importance of conditionality**. A systematic review of the differential impact of UCTs and CCTs on schooling indicates that programmes with explicit conditions and strong monitoring have greater impacts on enrolment.¹⁶ Studies that have compared CCT and UCT treatments directly in the same evaluation merit mention. The above study in Malawi found that while CCTs were more effective than UCTs at boosting attendance, UCTs reduced rates of teen pregnancy and early marriage by reaching more marginalised girls who had dropped out of school. A study¹⁷ of the Tayssir programme in Morocco which gave cash payments to parents of 6–15 year-olds found similar effects for labelled cash transfers and CCTs.^{xvii} In Nepal,¹⁸ combining an unconditional scholarship to 10–16-year-olds vulnerable to child labor, with a stipend conditional on attendance, had more lasting impacts on increasing school attendance and reducing grade failure than a standalone unconditional scholarship.

Where school fees exist, eliminating them can lead to large increases in participation. A study in Ghana tested the impact of full secondary school scholarships to low-income, academically qualified students and found that after eight years, students who had received

a scholarship were more likely to have enrolled in and completed senior high school than students who did not.¹⁹ Evaluations of Colombia's PACES programme, which distributed vouchers partially covering the cost of private secondary school for students with satisfactory academic progress, found that voucher winners were more likely to have finished class 8 and scored higher on achievement tests. While effects for boys were almost entirely due to lower grade repetition, the effects for girls appeared to come from both reduced grade repetition and additional time spent in school.²⁰ In the long term, the PACES programme increased secondary school completion rates by 15–20 percent.⁶

^{xiii} Flash Statistics, 2015-16, NUEPA

^{xiiii} Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2013-14, MHRD

^{xv} Students at the upper primary/secondary/senior secondary level of education (Classes 6-12)

^{xvi} It should be noted that a large amount of the existing rigorous research in education focuses on programmes at the primary level. Much more research is needed to understand the barriers that adolescents, parents, teachers, and schools face as they progress to higher grades.

^{xvii} Snilstveit, Birte, Jennifer Stevenson, Daniel Phillips, Martina Vojtkova, Emma Gallager, Tanja Schmidt, Hannah Jobse, Maisie Geelen, Maria Grazia Pastorello, and John Eyers. 2015. "Interventions for improving learning outcomes and access to education in low- and middle- income countries: a systematic review." 3ie Systematic Review 24. London: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie).

^{xviii} A small cash transfer made to parents of school-aged children in poor rural communities, not conditional on school attendance but explicitly labelled as an education support programme.

Providing small, non-cash transfers linked to schooling such as free uniforms (Kenya) and school meals and take home rations (Burkina Faso,²¹ Uganda²²) can be effective in improving school participation, but does not necessarily improve learning. Class 6 students who received free uniforms in Kenya for two years were less likely to drop out after three years than their peers; the programme also reduced the incidence of teen marriage and teen pregnancy.⁵

Making schools more accessible

Evidence from Afghanistan²³ shows that **creating new schools where few schools exist is a very effective way to increase school participation and learning.** The “village-based schools” programme in Afghanistan improved enrolment rates among girls more than it did for boys, and was relatively more effective in promoting school attendance for older girls facing greater restrictions on mobility. Consistent with this, a quasi-experimental evaluation in Burkina Faso that built village schools and also added resources designed to encourage girls’ education led to gains in enrolment rates, especially for girls.²⁴ In Bihar, a quasi-experimental evaluation showed that giving bicycles to secondary school girls reduced travel time, leading to an increase in girls’ enrolment as well as the number of girls who passed the official state exam to complete secondary school.²⁵ In addition, gender-specific cultural barriers, such as restriction on girls’ mobility during menstruation, could also be a limitation on girls’ educational attainment. Researches evaluated a programme in Nepal that sought to improve girls’ attendance by providing girls in classes 7 and 8 with sanitary products. They found that, on average, menstruation was not a key barrier: girls only missed 0.35 days of school out of a 180-day school year due to their period, and although girls reported liking the product, it had no impact on closing this small attendance gap.²⁶

2. INCREASING PERCEIVED BENEFITS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION

Changing perceptions

Programmes that address perception gaps or make the benefits of education more salient can change behaviour at a low cost. For example, informing class 8 boys in the Dominican Republic of the average wages earned by people based on education levels²⁷ and giving information to low income students in class 8 about accessing financial aid for higher education in urban Chile,²⁸ increased school participation. However, studies from China,^{29, 30} show that when parents and children have an understanding of the benefits of education, or when financial constraints are not the main barrier to continuing in school, information on scholarships may

not have an effect. **Examples can also be powerful in changing perceptions.** There is evidence from India that examples of future career opportunities for women in the BPO industry³¹ and of female leaders² led parents and students to invest more in girls’ education, along with a change in girls’ aspirations regarding career and marriage. A recent study looked at the impact of an in-school, gender-equitable attitude change programme targeting classes 7–9 girls and boys in government schools in Haryana.³² Preliminary results suggest that the programme increased the gender attitude and gender-related behaviour index, but showed no impact on aspirations.^{xviii} While the change in attitudes was similar for girls and boys, the behaviour change was larger among boys, suggestive of barriers for girls to act in accordance with their own altered attitudes.

Increasing student motivation

Merit scholarships may address students’ own perceived costs and benefits of education and boost enrolment, attendance, and learning. A programme in Kenya that offered merit-based scholarships to class 6 girls who scored in the top 15 percent on district-wide exams increased attendance in the year prior to the final awards.³³ A follow-up survey when these girls were 17–21 years old found that the programme also helped improve girls’ transition from primary to secondary school.³⁴ In addition to raising test scores for girls enrolled in schools eligible for the scholarship, the programme led to positive learning externalities on the entire class.

Improving school quality: inputs and pedagogy

Consistent with the learning from primary school literature, studies at the post-primary level show that **inputs alone do not increase school participation or learning outcomes.** For example, simply installing refurbished computers under Colombia’s Computers for Education programme did not improve children’s test scores, attributable to the failure to incorporate the computers into the educational process.³⁵ However, **combining inputs with changes in pedagogy has been found to improve learning.** While there is a large body of evidence from different contexts on the positive impact of supplementary/remedial learning “Teaching at the Right Level” on learning at the primary

^{xviii}The Attitudes index focused on opinions and points of view associated with gender equality like opinions on working outside of village, equal opportunities for education for both girls and boys. The Behaviour index represented behaviour in domains where girls and boys traditionally act differently, such as comfort level while interacting with peers from opposite gender. The Aspiration index was used to estimate the impact of the intervention on student’s education and career aspirations

school level, there is little rigorous evidence on what types of curricula or pedagogies are most effective for adolescents at the post-primary level. A study in Delhi, looked at the impact of offering a voucher to middle-school students to attend an after-school computer-aided programme, which offered individually customised content based on the students' level and progress. The programme increased learning levels across all groups of students, and the relative impact was bigger for students who were in the bottom-third of the initial

test score distribution.³⁶ A review of programmes aimed at improving student learning shows that improving education quality can—but does not always—increase student attendance by increasing the perceived benefits of education, at least in the short term.³⁷ One reason that quality improvements may not translate into higher participation may be that parents and students find it hard to judge the quality of education in the short run.

POLICY PATHS

- Reducing costs of education by giving cash transfers, removing fees and even small complementary costs like uniforms, or decreasing non-monetary costs like travel time to school is effective in improving enrolment/attendance of adolescent girls and boys.** The majority of India's programmes, such as provision of free tuition, scholarships, school uniforms, books, improving physical access, etc., are designed to reduce costs associated with education. However, while education in government schools is free under RTE for early adolescents (11–14-year-olds), cost barriers exist from class 9 onwards, especially with private schools accounting for a large and increasing share of secondary and senior secondary schools. While many states in India run cash transfer schemes especially for girls, there are important lessons from global evidence on better designing these by tweaking the timing and incentive structure to make them both more effective and cost-effective.
- Addressing perception gaps or making the benefits of education more salient can improve student participation at a low cost.** Examples include informing students about the availability of scholarships, about the returns to education (e.g. wages), and presenting examples of future job opportunities. While there are a number of IEC campaigns especially around girls' education, the information conveyed can be made more specific and salient. Similarly, while most states provide financial scholarships at the secondary level, there is scope for increasing awareness about their existence and application process.
- Barriers of distance to school, costs, misperceptions, and information gaps are often more significant for adolescent girls than boys.** As a result, general programmes that seek to increase schooling for all by removing such constraints tend to help girls as much as—or even more than—boys. While the overall gross enrolment ratio for girls has improved, there is significant disparity in GER by gender in some states, and girls drop out more than boys after completion of elementary education. Programmes that reduce distance to school/address mobility issues for girls or raise parental and girls' aspirations for education and jobs are promising.
- Rather than increasing school inputs in a business-as-usual manner, pedagogical solutions such as supplemental remedial instruction or personalised computer adaptive learning programmes, are more likely to lead to improved learning for adolescents.** More research is needed to fill knowledge gaps on questions about pedagogy, the role of information communication technology, etc., to understand what increases student learning at the secondary level.
- Improving education quality can—but does not always—increase student attendance by increasing the perceived benefits of education, at least in the short term.** Whether increasing education quality on its own has a more consistent impact on student participation over a longer time period, when parents have longer to learn the benefits of improved schooling, has yet to be evaluated. Analogously, increasing time in school, for example, through CCTs, does not necessarily improve learning. This lesson is critical for policy design.



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FACILITATING WORK TRANSITION

Ensuring a smooth transition to work opportunities for a productive adulthood is a key policy priority in India today. However, **India's female labour force participation appears to be declining** in spite of increases in education,³⁸ decline in fertility rates, and continued economic growth. This trend is concerning because it represents an unrealised ability of women to be productive citizens and contribute to their own financial well-being, independence, and growth. A 2015 McKinsey Global Institute report estimated that by fully bridging the gender gap in the workplace, India's GDP in 2025 could be as much as 60 percent higher. There is also a **strong relationship between women's economic empowerment and other development outcomes of interest**, including children's education, female age of marriage,³⁹ and girls' health.³¹ At the same time, the Government of India has focused significant attention on ensuring that it capitalises upon its demographic dividend potential—in which the female population could play an important part.⁴⁰

Recent research suggests a number of ways to improve labour market opportunities to ensure a productive adulthood for all. These approaches seek to address different labour market gaps including the mismatch of skills demanded for jobs and those possessed by adolescents and youth; information gaps on where jobs are located and how to access them; geographical gaps such as physical distance from jobs; and social gaps such as the lack of access to a beneficial social network, which may prevent youth from accessing employment opportunities.^{xix} There could also be gaps faced by recruiting firms, such as the lack of proper information on the quality of job applicants.

In the section below, we discuss rigorous global evidence on social protection measures focused on overcoming a few of these constraints that are especially relevant to the Indian context. Note, however, that the majority of the central and state schemes have targeted the youth, or those between 15–29 years of age, as defined by the

^{xix} Based on Peter Diamond, Dale Mortensen, and Christopher Pissarides's work on Search Theory



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National Youth Policy, 2014. While this group does encompass late adolescents (categorised by UNICEF as those between 15 and 19 years of age), there appear to be only a few labour market support programmes in India that focus solely on adolescent needs. Similarly, most of the global evidence is on programmes targeting youth generally.

1. SKILLS FOR JOBS

The skills needed and valued in the labour market may not always be those that adolescents possess.

These skills could range from cognitive or technical skills required to perform specific jobs to non-cognitive or soft skills such as leadership, conflict resolution, and the ability to work in teams. There is now a fairly large body of literature that assesses the impact of participating in vocational training programme on earnings and employment opportunities in developed countries.^{41, 42} The general conclusion from the United States and European experiences is that the impact of vocational training programme is generally modest, at best, and their effectiveness varies with the characteristics of the participants and the type of training imparted⁴³—although some studies in Germany and Colombia do find positive effects in the long run.^{44, 45} We do not know the reasons for this general lack of clear results, partly due to the fact that despite there being great heterogeneity among training programmes, —the effects of only broad categories have been evaluated.⁴⁶

Applying these findings to developing country contexts may be inappropriate as trainees are likely to start with very low or varying levels of formal education, skills, and full-time employment. Therefore, even with very

little rigorous evidence in developing country contexts, especially in India, there remains a need for cognitive and non-cognitive training to be a key component of youth labour market integration.⁵¹ However, it remains unclear what the most effective and cost-effective training programmes should look like and for whom.

The limited evidence from developing country contexts, such as Colombia, Argentina, Dominican Republic, Turkey, and India, has found such trainings to have some qualified success. For instance, an evaluation⁴⁸ of a programme that provided disadvantaged youth in Colombia a combination of in-classroom and on-the-job training significantly raised both employment and earnings among women (sustained over the long run),⁴⁹ but not among men. In contrast, a similar programme in the Dominican Republic had no significant impact on employment and only a modest effect on earnings. Design features that possibly led to the greater success of the Colombian programme include longer in-classroom training, more intense on-the-job training, stronger complementarities between the two, and a larger number of private partners. In India, a randomised evaluation of a subsidised vocational training programme in stitching and tailoring, targeting a slightly older group of women (18–39 years of age) in the slums of Delhi found that immediately after the programme (and eighteen months after), women were more likely to be employed, worked additional hours per week, and earned significantly more per month than those who did not receive the training.⁴⁷

Training content and design

Evidence from existing research suggests that programmes are more successful when the private sector is involved in developing the curriculum or training methods or in providing on-the-job training via internships or apprenticeships. Evidence from Colombia^{48,49} and the Dominican Republic⁵¹ suggests that programmes which include on-the-job training are somewhat more effective than those that focus entirely on in-classroom training. A quasi-experimental evaluation of the Adolescent Girls Employment Initiative (AGEI) in Nepal, which had active participation from the private sector (competitive bidding for selection of training providers, placement linked bonuses, etc.) showed a positive effect on employment, with an increase in the rate of participation in non-farm income-generating activities of about 16 percentage points.⁵² Similarly, non-cognitive skills programmes seem to positively affect labour market outcomes by changing youth behaviour, perceptions and expectations. A programme in the Dominican Republic that emphasized life skills and vocational training increased the probability of working in the formal sector for men and had a positive impact in improving youth perceptions about their current situation and their expectations regarding the future, which were found to be stronger for women and younger trainees.⁵³ However, it is important to factor in design particulars such as the optimum duration of such programmes that could impact the proper acquisition of such skills.

Women face additional constraints

Low take up of vocational training programmes and high dropout rates are a major challenge around the world, particularly for women due to reasons such as the burden of unpaid care work at home, lack of safe transport, and broader security concerns. Travel restrictions on young women are particularly severe in South Asia. An evaluation of a six-month women's training programme in the slums of Delhi found that a ten-minute increase in the time taken to walk to the training centre was associated with a 14 percentage point reduction in the likelihood of programme completion.⁴⁷ An ongoing evaluation of a government vocational training programme for young women in Pakistan demonstrated how take-up and dropout were highly related to distance to the training.⁵⁴ The programme is providing special single-gender transport to the training programmes to allow young women to attend.

There is often a discrepancy between expected earnings for graduates in traditionally male-dominated trades (e.g. construction, mechanics, etc.) and traditionally female-dominated trades (e.g. beauty and tailoring).

A randomised evaluation in Kenya⁵⁵ found that providing simple, actionable information to girls on the relative returns of vocational training in male or female dominated industries increased girls' enrolment in trade school courses that prepared them for typically male-dominated trades and which yielded higher returns. A recent survey of the Ministry of Rural Development's DDU-GKY scheme trainees across seven Indian states highlighted gender differences post training too: female trainees were found to be less likely to receive job offers, accept those offers, and therefore be placed in jobs than males. **More research is needed to further understand these constraints faced by women and the mechanisms driving them in different contexts.**⁴⁰

2. INFORMATION, ASPIRATIONS, AND ACCESS TO JOBS

Variation in the availability of information among job seekers may account for a large share of the heterogeneity of labour market outcomes. **Providing targeted information about labour market opportunities can be a cost-effective way to help youth adjust their expectations, prepare for, and find jobs.** In rural Indian districts located 50–150 kms from Delhi^{xx}, greater knowledge of and access to business process outsourcing (BPO) jobs for young women (aged 15–21 years) increased their rate of employment outside of home and also delayed marriage and childbearing.³¹ Seeing these future job prospects for women, parents kept their girls in school longer (girls' school enrolment increased by 5 percentage points) and made greater investments in their nutrition and/or health (girls' Body Mass Index increased). Learning about greater employment opportunities for women could thus substantially change young women's career aspirations, and this could also be accompanied by delays in marriage and childbearing.

In developing countries like India, firms often hire through informal referrals, such as those from their existing work force. This potentially has adverse effects on the quality of job matches as it limits the pool of candidates⁵⁶ since current employees may refer close friends or family members rather than their most qualified peer.⁵⁷ An evaluation in Kolkata found that at least in certain settings, social networks may provide incentives to refer less qualified candidates. Firms must counterbalance these incentives to effectively use existing employees to improve the hiring process. Informal referral systems could also exacerbate inequity as they may disadvantage less connected groups, in particular, women who often

^{xx} In Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh

lack access to informal referral networks.⁵⁸ A recent study investigated the role of information asymmetries in the low-skill sector in South Africa. A simple intervention—encouraging job seekers to obtain a standardised reference letter from a former employer—led to substantial improvements in firms' ability to select job seekers of higher ability from the large pool of applicants. Women, who are excluded from many informal referral networks in South Africa, especially benefited from reference letters. This demonstrates that **reducing information asymmetries could be a step towards improving equity in labour markets, especially among women and disadvantaged job seekers.**

Job searching is often costly, and spatial barriers could affect this process. Young people in congested, fast-growing cities often get stuck in low-quality, informal jobs and are often geographically far removed from potential employers. Often they cannot afford the increased job search costs associated with increased travel to employer locations. In such contexts, **transportation subsidies have been found to help increase job search intensity and the likelihood of finding a job by reducing search costs.** For instance, a recent evaluation⁵⁹ in Ethiopia found large positive effects of such transport subsidies on the probability of finding stable and formal jobs.

POLICY PATHS

- **Most programmes under Skills India Mission adopt a modular approach to skilling youth, which focuses on vocational training for a given job role. Such trainings could potentially be combined with other kinds of support** such as non-cognitive skills training and/ or on-the-job training (in close partnership with industry), and rigorously tested for understanding the impact of individual training components.
- **Training programmes should also be designed to make additional provisions for women for enabling them to have an equal training experience.** In addition, providing information for trainees about how to prepare for various career paths and the returns to different training programme could serve as an important tool to help youth make better decisions about the training investments they make and reduce their dropout rates. Importantly, training programme should respond to the demands of the private sector. Successful models include programme that incentivise trainers to train for specific job opportunities, work closely with the private sector to develop the curriculum, or help place trainees in apprenticeships or internships.
- **Most central and state training programme currently target the youth (a category with some overlap with late adolescent age group, i.e. 15-18 years). There is scope for designing programme that cater to adolescent needs** for enabling a smoother transition to work opportunities. A few

efforts in this direction are already underway—for instance, encouraging vocational courses for classes 9–12 which are integrated with the school curriculum, and which look at the acquisition of skills through a continuum approach. Such initiatives can be further developed and tested.

- **Because of their age and lack of experience, youth may be especially disadvantaged by their lack of knowledge of the labour market. Information programmes can be simple and potentially cost-effective.** This evidence could inform how existing job information platforms and other tools (such as mobile-based technology and online job portals) could be leveraged to provide youth with quick and actionable information.
- **Further investments are needed in services that provide tailored counselling to young job seekers to help them improve the returns to their job search efforts.** Young job seekers are more likely to experience spatial barriers in their job search; as such, transportation subsidies can address this barrier by reducing the job search costs incurred by youth. Finally, we need both more evidence about the effects of social networks on the labour market integration, as well as more programmes to build networks or integrate youth into existing networks.



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CONCLUSION

Global evidence points to several approaches that can address barriers facing adolescent girls and boys in their transitions to productive adulthood. This synthesis shows that **cash transfers can help compensate for costs of education and delay marriage by addressing the economic constraints preventing adolescents and their families from making optimal decisions. Similarly, information and awareness programmes that target changing aspirations, especially for adolescent girls could impact multiple outcomes.** If norms can evolve through incremental changes in people's behaviours and expectations, then programmes effectively addressing behaviours can potentially contribute to larger shifts in creating and sustaining new norms. It is important that this is accompanied by an in-depth understanding of the local context and the specific needs of adolescents, particularly girls.

Designing programmes that look at multiple, inter-linked outcomes impacting adolescents will be key. One promising idea to explore is that of “cash-plus” programmes that supplement cash transfer programmes with complementary services (such as those that induce behaviour change or link to public services). Given that the evidence base of such programmes is limited, there is a need to develop and rigorously test such approaches in India. This would require **developing cross sectoral approaches involving multiple ministries and departments**, especially as the potential impact of such programmes may be greater than the sum of its individual components.

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