

changemakers

THE GIRL EFFECT

Tip the scales in her favour



FUTURE PROSPECTS There are 113 million adolescent girls in the country. But a large chunk of this segment never realises its potential because of socio-economic

barriers. Development assistance has also historically bypassed adolescent girls. The Dasra Girl Power Awards, which were given on March 19, honoured three projects that seek to empower this marginalised segment

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NEW DELHI: The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women concluded its 59th annual session in New York on Saturday with an agreement by the members-states on steps to boost its efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. In fact, this is a special year for women: It's the 20th year of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women. The focus of the just-concluded session was on the Beijing Declaration, including current challenges that affect its implementation and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

While children aged 0 to 5 years have received great focus from the international community, donors and governments for decades, a "girl gap" still persists: Development assistance, says experts, has historically bypassed adolescent girls by grouping them with women or children, but not as a category of their own.

According to The Coalition for Adolescent Girls, which was established in 2005 by the UN Foundation and the Nike Foundation along with partners from the International Women's Health Coalition, International Center for Research on Women, and Population Council, adolescence is a critical period, when a girl's future potential and opportunities can flourish through education, economic opportunities, and psychosocial support. Or, that potential can be stunted and stifled by the irreversible effects of child marriage, early pregnancy, HIV, and other preventable hardships.

Fulfilling the rights of adolescent girls to health, education, and protection from violence and abuse ensures they have the chance to achieve their physical, emotional, and social potential, and can go on to become empowered women who can support their families, communities, and countries.

There are plenty of studies that show healthy women and children contribute to economic growth. According to the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, hosted at the World Health Organization in Geneva, every dollar spent on key interventions for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, empowering adolescent girls (by giving them the opportunity to stay in school, delay marriage and child birth), adds \$110 billion to the economy in the lifetimes.

The second edition of the Dasra Girl Power Awards, which were given in Mumbai on Thursday, focuses on driving greater corporate involvement towards adolescent girls' issues.

"We see huge potential for corporates to play a large role in solving the many problems adolescent girls face in India today," said Deval Sanghavi, founder and partner, Dasra. There are three reasons for it: Corporates have the resources, knowledge and expertise, which if invested in adolescent girls could provide exponential returns across a wide variety of social problems; second, adolescent girls form an important demographic for corporates, both as potential customers and employees. Third, globally, many corporates are taking up the cause of adolescent girls, creating a global momentum for the issue.

Moreover, the corporate social responsibility requirement in the Companies Act 2013 is estimated to release \$1-1.5 billion in new CSR spending in India each year. "Working with adolescent girls addresses many of the priority areas listed in the Companies Act for CSR investment and is a great investment option for CSR funds," added Sanghavi.

Adolescent girls in India are constantly denied opportunities to reach their potential. They face challenges such as forced early marriage, violence, poor nutrition, early childbearing and lack of access to basic services. There is an urgent need to invest in adolescent girls in order to enhance their capacities and break the inter-generational cycle of poverty.



Students at Lalgarh in West Midnapore (Jangalmahal) district of West Bengal.

SAMIR MONDAL/HINDUSTAN TIMES

WINNERS TAKE IT ALL

The Dasra Girl Power Awards is an initiative that recognises impactful and innovative programmes that work with adolescent girls in three distinct areas of interventions. The winner in each category received ₹5 lakh each, along with capacity building support from Dasra.

SAFETY AND MOBILITY

ARPAN
WWW.ARPAN.ORG.IN

Arpan's vision is to have a world free of child sexual abuse. The NGO equips school children with information and skills related to personal safety for preventing sexual abuse. It also provides therapeutic support to children who disclose their past experiences or ongoing abuse to help them heal from its psychological, social, sexual and physical impact. Arpan also works with adults to minimise the threat of re-victimisation and creates a safety net for children. "Reaching out to students is difficult. We go to schools and teach students personal safety skills," says Pooja Taparia (photo), founder, Trustee and CEO of Arpan. "We do about four to six lessons with different age groups. Then the trainer sits with each child and gives her a chance to reiterate the messages taught in the classroom".

Taparia would like to reach out to more children. "We plan to work with another 46,000 children over the next three years. The plan is to build long-term alliances with people who are already running schools so we can train their teachers. These teachers can then implement this plan in their schools," added Taparia, who has over 8,000 hours working in the voluntary sector, mainly investing her time, expertise and resources with educational institutes.



SANITATION

VATSALYA
WWW.VATSALYA.ORG.IN

Vatsalya's mission is to build capacities through health package training to basic health workers belonging to different NGOs, Indian system of medicine doctors, traditional birth attendants and other service providers at the grassroots level so that they can serve better with adequate knowledge and accordingly ascertain the continuity of these services more appropriately, thereby facilitating sustenance of health services. "We want menstrual hygiene to become part of the water sanitation and hygiene programmes. We also want to provide knowledge about proper disposal of menstrual material," said Neelam Singh (photo), chief functionary of the Lucknow-based NGO.

Vatsalya's Breaking Silence project is an initiative to empower women and adolescent girls for reproductive health by addressing menstrual hygiene management. The project has been developed through a partnership of WaterAid and Vatsalya and targets adolescent girls and women. The NGO has set up community outlets that act as resource centres run by women that provide safe hygienic menstrual material and useful information about menstruation to adolescent girls. "Now, we want to expand this programme across the state," added Singh, an alumni of King George Medical College.

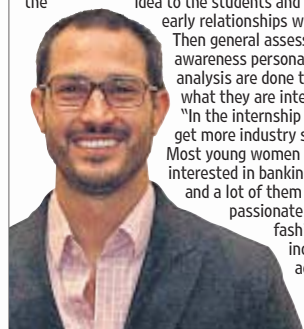


EMPLOYABILITY

MEDHA FOUNDATION
WWW.MEDHA.ORG.IN

Medha is a social enterprise with a mission to better prepare youth for life after school. It supports college students with employability training, career guidance, and placement services and aims to change the employability training paradigm in the country by integrating their approach into the existing public sector education system. The organisation works in collaboration with three key stakeholders — employers, students, and academia — to close the skills gap between education and industry.

"The girls we work with face a number of challenges. Most of them come from low-income agricultural families and primarily from the outskirts of Lucknow. Most of them face opposition from the parents when it comes to their careers, especially if they go for those in the private sector," explained Christopher Turillo (photo), who started Medha. The programme begins with one-on-one counselling. It's like selling the idea to the students and developing early relationships with them. Then general assessments, self-awareness personal swot-analysis are done to find out what they are interested in. "In the internship stage. We get more industry specific. Most young women are interested in banking jobs and a lot of them are passionate about the fashion industry," added Turillo.



DASRA AWARDS: BEHIND THE SCENES

In 2013, Dasra, a Mumbai-based strategic philanthropy foundation, launched a five-year, \$14-million initiative in collaboration with USAID and the Kiawah Trust, which seeks to achieve change by fostering innovation, improving outcomes and reaching scale to empower adolescent girls in India. The second edition of the Girl Power Awards focused on driving greater corporate involvement towards adolescent girls' issues. Here is the link to the organisation's several reports on the issue: <http://bit.ly/1hHje77>

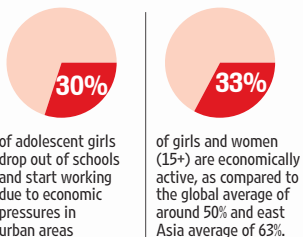
THE SELECTION PROCESS

Dasra reached out to over 8,800 NGOs to encourage applications for the Awards through its outreach partner GuideStar, as well as through its NGO partners and online and social networks. The shortlisting process lasted over four months. Dasra received 151 applications from organisations working in 20 states. The organisations were evaluated on the basis of predefined criteria, which included programme impact, financial sustainability and organisational credibility and management strength.

NUMBERS DON'T LIE: HER STORY SO FAR

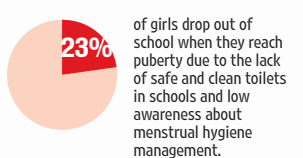
Millions of girls in India don't get opportunities to live out their true potential. Here are some of the challenges they face. Investing in adolescent girls helps break cycles of poverty

EMPLOYABILITY



■ If as many girls as boys were part of India's future workforce, the country would see an estimated 4.4% increase in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

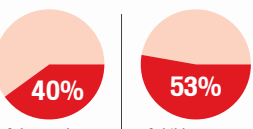
SANITATION



63 million girls in India live in homes without toilets.

\$9 is added to the economy for every \$1 spent on sanitation.

SAFETY AND MOBILITY



of the total victims of rape in 2013 were girls below 18 years, says NCRB data

of children report having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse, and 2 out of 3 are physically abused

OTHER NOMINEES: KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

ASSOCIATION FOR NON-TRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN, www.anewindia.org

ANEW uses vocational training and counselling to impart young women and girls with the skills required to access livelihood opportunities. It mobilises girls and young women in municipal corporation schools, colleges and slums in Chennai and builds their awareness about career opportunities.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND COMMON WEALTH, www.nrmcw.org

NRMCW provides vocational training to out-of-school adolescent girls under the Union government's SABLA scheme. The scheme focuses on empowering out-of-school adolescent girls through a comprehensive programme that includes life-skill and vocational trainings.

SALT LAKE CITY PRAYASAM, www.prayasam.org

Prayasam's ONTRACK programme provides employability and life-skill trainings to youth from impoverished communities in West Bengal. ONTRACK is implemented in 10 communities and 260 schools and madrassas. Prayasam also trains youth to apply these skills by providing them with leadership positions.

KALINGA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, www.kiss.ac.in

KISS is the world's largest free residential educational institute for 25,000 marginalised, indigenous and tribal children from Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Assam. It trains 12,000 adolescents on sanitation, hygiene and menstrual management every year.

MILAAN, www.milaan.in

Milaan, headquartered in Lucknow, focuses on increasing access to quality education. Its Azadi Menstrual Friendly School programme undertakes a holistic approach to address the needs of adolescent girls during menstruation by educating numerous stakeholders including adolescent girls and boys.

POPULATION FIRST, www.populationfirst.org

Population First works with adolescent girls to promote behavioural change related to menstrual hygiene and sanitation. It also works with adolescents and their communities to create access to resources that allow adolescents to practice better behaviours related to menstrual hygiene and sanitation.

APNE AAP WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE, www.aawc.in

Apne Aap Women's Collective works in Kamathipura, one of Asia's largest red light districts in Mumbai. It works with the daughters of sex workers, offering them holistic set of services such as access to night shelters, job placements, and after-school tutoring for their development.

ASTITVA, www.astitvaonline.org

Astitva, a community-based organisation, works to promote gender equality and end gender violence in low-income communities in Dehra Dun. It's YouWah! programme supports youth to recognise and break the cycle of violence before they become victims and perpetrators of violence themselves.

SAFECITY, www.safecity.in

Safecity works to make public spaces safer and accessible to women and girls using data and technology. It runs a digital platform to encourage women and girls to record incidences of sexual harassment in order to analyse the scale and nature of the problem.

SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH AND ACTION GROUP, www.sadrag.org

SADRAG runs the Safe Noida initiative to address the issue of women's safety in Gautam Budh Nagar district, which was identified by the government as vulnerable to gender-based violence.

QUOTE-UNQUOTE

Adolescence is the critical period that can mean the difference between children transitioning to being employed, healthy adults or not. It is critical to create a sustainable ecosystem for girls to break the cycle of poverty.
LYNNE SMITHAM, Co-founder, Kiawah Trust

Adolescent girls are exposed to physical, psychological and cultural challenges. By uplifting these girls, their families and future generations can be transformed as well. It is important to sensitise males to have impact.
ADITI KOTHARI, EVP and co-head Marketing, DSP BlackRock

Empowering adolescent girls is essential for lowering maternal and child mortality. Technology-based interventions can play a critical role in reaching out to adolescent girls, including those living in rural areas.
PARESH PARASNI, Head, Piramal Foundation

The Awards are part of the Dasra Girl Alliance that has helped drive over ₹66 crore to 54 NGOs that work with girls, mothers and children. These funds will allow these scalable NGOs to do more.
DEVAL SANGHAVI, founder and partner, Dasra