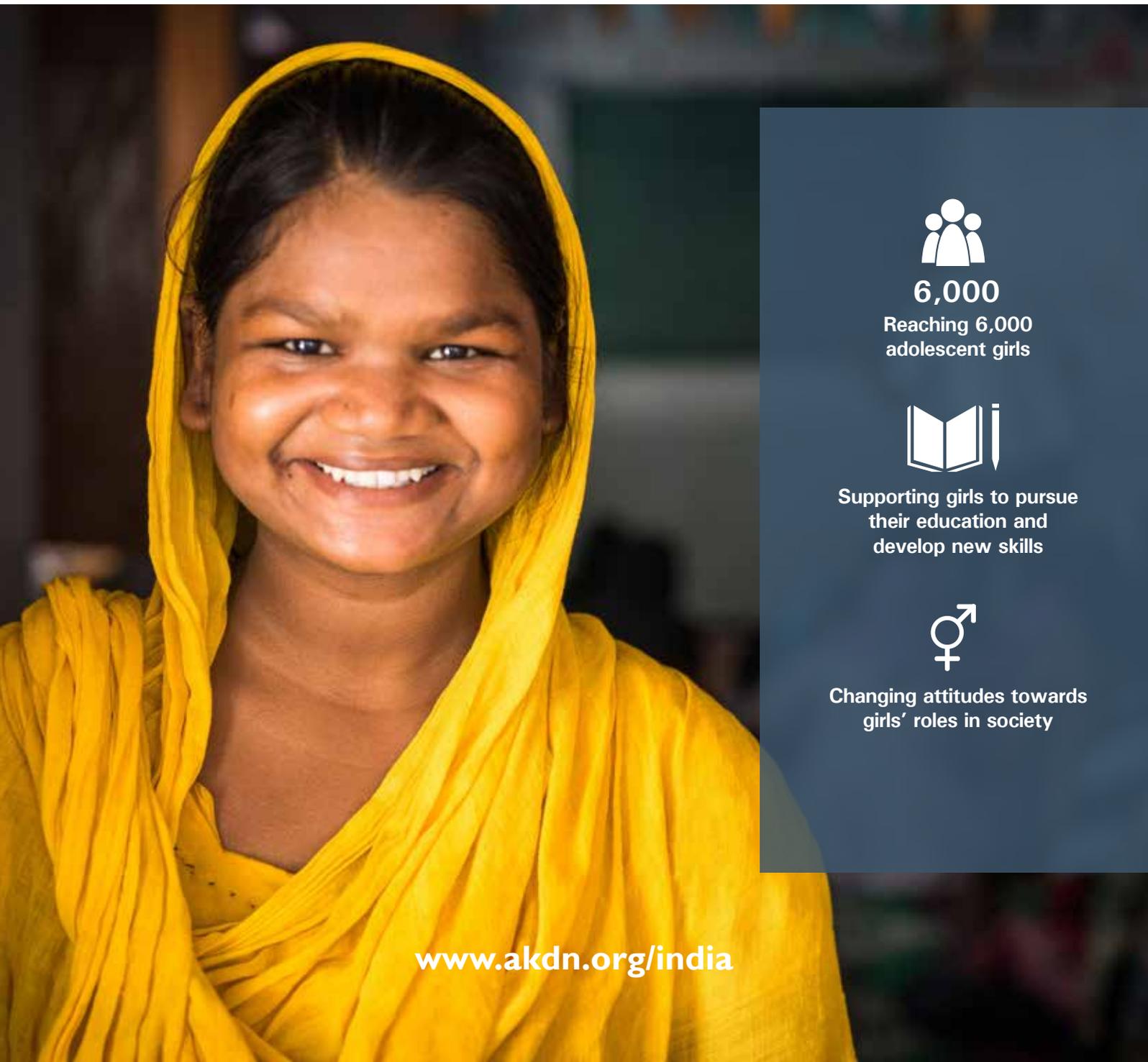




AGA KHAN FOUNDATION
An agency of the Aga Khan Development Network

Supporting the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls in India



6,000

Reaching 6,000
adolescent girls



Supporting girls to pursue
their education and
develop new skills



Changing attitudes towards
girls' roles in society

www.akdn.org/india

Supporting the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls

A key goal of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is to assist the poorest and most marginalised, especially women and girls, such that they achieve a level of self-reliance and improved quality of life. For the past 40 years that AKF has been working in India, it has sought to support the economic and social empowerment of women.

AKF's work on adolescent girls' empowerment seeks to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to help them interact effectively with the world, and contribute to society and have access to livelihood opportunities that would provide them economic well-being and dignity.

Context

As India's population has become younger, the rapidly growing proportion of young girls in the country (over 100 million per the 2011 Government of India Population Census) presents an immense opportunity for early investment in their learning and overall development. In addition, the socio-cultural and economic environment in India – where adolescent girls are often caught in a cycle of discontinued education, early marriage and repeated pregnancy – provides further impetus for investing in and developing programmes that address the multiple needs of adolescent girls. Despite efforts to increase the overall enrolment rates of young girls, the number of girls who drop out of school is higher than that of boys and increases in the higher school years (2017 Annual Status of Education Report). Furthermore, according to the 2016 National Health and Family

Survey, over 26 percent of young women ages 15-19 are married before the age of 18, of which 30 percent give birth before they are 20 years old. Early marriage and pregnancy have an adverse effect on the health of young mothers and their newborn babies and the poor diet of adolescent girls from disadvantaged communities also leads to malnutrition and anaemia; with anaemia rates as high as 90 percent and 70 percent for adolescent girls in the northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, respectively.

AKF's Approach to Adolescent Girls' Empowerment

To address this, AKF has been working with out-of-school adolescent girls from poor and disadvantaged communities in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh and Patna, Bihar to prioritise their education, health and well-being so that they can achieve economic and social empowerment. Key to AKF's strategy is community engagement and building awareness amongst parents and community members of the importance of supporting girls to fulfil their potential.

AKF's approach to adolescent girls' empowerment is three pronged, comprising of scholastic support, vocational training and life skills education. The strategy supports out-of-school girls to build upon their education, whether through functional literacy training, remedial support and enrolment assistance with schools or the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

AKF trains girls in vocational skills to enter the formal job market and earn an income. The selection of



Left to right: Girls being trained in computer skills in one of the community-run centres in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh. A sewing centre run by Shradha, an adolescent girl in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh. Shradha was trained in tailoring and has now set up her own tailoring training centre in her home.



Life skills education is imparted to girls through creative and engaging activities. Assessments have found that 42 percent of girls who have participated in life skills education reported higher decision-making powers.

the vocations is on the basis of a thorough needs assessment of the girls and the choices available to them for meaningful livelihoods, keeping in mind contextual factors such as mobility. AKF also fosters entrepreneurship through innovative projects suited to the local context, like mushroom cultivation and the establishment of adolescent girl-led tailoring schools.

Cutting across the scholastic and vocational skills training is a focus on life skills development, which helps adolescent girls gain confidence and agency and understanding of how to successfully overcome the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives.

Key activities

Scholastic Support: AKF provides functional literacy trainings to girls who have never gone to school or dropped out very early. It equips them with basic reading, writing and numeracy skills, so that they are able to independently gain information and carry out interactions.

For girls who have dropped out of school later and have foundational learning skills, AKF provides them with remedial education in community-run centres to enable them to either re-join formal education or complete school through the open school system. Once the girls have completed the remedial course AKF also provides them with scholastic training on

specific subjects that are part of the Class 10 exams. An important component of the scholastic support is helping girls enrol either in school or with NIOS.

Vocational Skills Training: AKF provides vocational skills training to adolescent girls to support them to access livelihood opportunities and earn a regular income. The vocations that have been identified are options that the girls themselves want to pursue and which are suited to the local market. Three- to six-month long courses on tailoring and computer skills are available to the girls in community-run centres. In Patna, AKF has also partnered with local skill building institutes to enable the girls to access training opportunities in hospitality and retail skills.

AKF also recognises that it is important to help the girls develop entrepreneurship skills to provide them the option of setting up their own home enterprises. To foster this spirit of entrepreneurship, AKF provides hand-holding support and facilitates exposure visits and linkages for them. In Bahraich, a partnership with Usha to train girls in tailoring has directly resulted in girls setting up their own training centres from where they are training girls in tailoring and earning an income from the training fees. In Patna, home-based mushroom cultivation has emerged as a successful small enterprise option for adolescent girls unable to travel for work. Girls are now cultivating mushrooms and selling them in the local market.

Life Skills Education: All girls undergo life skills training that focuses on giving them the knowledge and skills necessary for them to manage their health better, voice their opinions, acknowledge the power of choice and be self-aware. A structured curriculum is used to train the girls in health, menstrual hygiene management and nutrition, effective communication and management of their emotions. Life skills education also builds the girls' understanding of their legal rights. AKF provides life skills education at community-run centres, which provide a space for the girls to discuss how they are feeling and the challenges they may be facing. Life skills education has initiated transformative change among the girls, helping them to grow in confidence, understand the emotional and physical changes they are going through, and manage their lives so that they can successfully pursue continued education or new livelihood opportunities.

Achievements to date

To date, over 6,000 adolescent girls have benefited from AKF's adolescent girls' empowerment programme. Assessments have found that 42 percent of girls who have participated in life skills education reported higher decision-making powers.

Other results of the programme have been the:

- Stopping or delaying of early marriage by the girls in order to continue their education or pursue livelihood opportunities
- Development of community change-makers from amongst the alumni of the life skills education training. These girls are advocating for better access to opportunities for girls in their



Girls are supported to re-start their education.

communities and encouraging other girls to join the programme.

- Shifting in community attitudes towards girls' roles in society and a growing awareness about the importance of education and the need for a supportive environment

Development Partners

- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- Canada Fund for Local Initiatives
- Tata Trusts

Support the AKDN

Partnerships

When the AKDN refines its development approach in a given area, it looks to partners to help expand the scale. A significant portion of the funding for its activities therefore comes from national governments, multilateral institutions and private sector partners. For more information, visit: akdn.org/partners

Individuals

Individuals can support the AKDN. For more information, visit: akdn.org/support

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About AKDN

Founded and guided by His Highness the Aga Khan, the **Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)** brings together a number of development agencies, institutions, and programmes that work primarily in the poorest parts of Asia and Africa. **It works in over 30 countries for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion.** A central feature of the AKDN's approach to development is to design and implement strategies in which its different agencies participate in particular settings to help those in need achieve a level of self-reliance and improve the quality of life.