More Power to Her

How Empowering Girls Can Help End Child Marriage

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ICRW International Center for Research on Women
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Acknowledgments

Introduction

There are nearly 70 million child brides in the world today, and more than 15 million girls marry each year. Around the world, there are a number of programs and many organizations that are working to prevent child marriage and provide support to married girls. In 2011, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) published a review of evaluated child marriage programs, identifying five promising strategies. Having made this initial assessment, ICRW and our partners wanted to know more about how these programs had worked in specific contexts. We particularly wanted to understand how approaches that focused on girls themselves led to positive change.

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To do so, ICRW collaborated with four organizations to conduct case studies of four promising programs that utilized, in whole, or in part, girl-focused approaches. Our overarching research question was: If and how did these programs empower girls, and how did this process of empowerment transform child marriage-related attitudes and practices? We reviewed the adolescent girl-focused components of the following programs: the **Ishraq** program, a joint effort between Caritas, CEDPA (Centre for Development and Population Activities), the Ministry of Youth, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), the Population Council and Save the Children, which prepares girls in Upper Egypt for re-entry into formal schooling using group-based programming; BRAC's **Social and Financial Empowerment for Adolescents (SoFEA)** program, which provides social and economic development opportunities for girls in Bangladesh using peer-led, group-based programming; Pathfinder International's **PRACHAR** program, a comprehensive behavior change program in northern India, which included a three-day reproductive health training for adolescent girls and boys; and CARE Ethiopia's Towards Economic and Sexual/Reproductive Health for Adolescent Girls **(TESFA)** program, which promoted sexual and reproductive health and economic empowerment for married adolescent girls in Amhara, Ethiopia using group-based programming and community mobilization activities. This paper presents the main findings from these four case studies, and shares recommendations for the field on how to build on these promising approaches.

Global Overview of Child Marriage

Child marriage — defined as any formal or informal union where one or both parties is below the age of 18 — is a human rights violation and an impediment to global development. The practice is perpetuated by a range of social, economic, cultural and political factors that vary significantly from one context to another, and is most common in rural and poor communities as well as within strongly patriarchal societies. And while every region of the world is impacted by child marriage, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are home to the majority of the world's child brides.

Although both girls and boys are affected by child marriage, far more girls are married as children: 720 million women alive today were married as children, compared to 156 million men. Around one in three girls in the developing world today is married before her 18th birthday, which amounts to more than 15 million girls every year.[i,ii]

For those girls, the consequences of child marriage can be profound. When girls are forced to marry, they are deprived of the ability to make an informed choice about a life-altering decision. This basic denial of their rights has far-reaching outcomes. With marriage, childhood ends abruptly and girls' choices for their futures contract. Girls' opportunities to play, to learn, to dream and to build the skills and knowledge for a healthy transition to adulthood give way to the responsibilities of being a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law. Child brides are much more likely to be married to older spouses than those married later in life, and that age difference often reinforces harmful inequalities within marriage.[iii] Child brides are more likely to experience physical and sexual violence.[iv] They also have less power to negotiate and make decisions about sex, family planning and allocation of resources. Early marriage leads to early sexual debut, which contributes to early and high-risk pregnancies.[v] It increases maternal *and* child mortality and morbidity, and curtails girls' and women's educational and economic opportunities.

Child marriage also has intergenerational and societal implications. When girls are deprived of opportunities to fully develop their potential, they will be less healthy, less productive and less empowered adults. It is no coincidence that child marriage is most common in the poorest and least-developed countries in the world, where girls and women participate less in post-primary education, in the work force, and in politics. The countries with the highest percentages of women

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married under 18 also rank among the lowest in terms of human development.[vi] Child marriage perpetuates poverty, gender inequality and poor health and development.

Background

Fortunately, there are a growing number of programs that seek to address child marriage. From 2010 to 2011, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) conducted a systematic review of evaluated programs that measured a change in marriage-related outcomes for girls. Through this analysis of published and grey literature, we identified 23 programs or policies that had a documented evaluation that assessed changes in knowledge, attitudes or practices related to the prevention of child marriage. The 23 programs were implemented between 1973 and 2009 (several are continuing through the present). Evaluations of these programs were published between 1991 and 2011. More than half of the evaluated programs had been initiated in the last decade, and the majority of the programs had been implemented in South Asia. ICRW published our findings in "Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the Evidence Shows," as well as in *Studies in Family Planning*.[vii]

This earlier study made an important contribution to the field of child marriage prevention and mitigation. Namely, it helped to expand the global discourse from defining why child marriage is a problem to describing promising practices that could help stem the practice. The five strategies that we identified were:

1. Empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks;
2. Educating and mobilizing parents and community members;
3. Enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls;
4. Offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families; and
5. Fostering an enabling legal and policy framework.

Having made this initial assessment of the state of the field, we wanted to know more about how these strategies had worked in specific contexts. We particularly wanted to understand how approaches that focused on girls led to change. These approaches draw primarily from strategies 1, 3 and 4 above: empowering girls with information, skills and support networks; enhancing accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls; and offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families.

In order to further expand the evidence base around how and why such practices work, particularly in empowering girls, ICRW conducted case studies that could provide greater detail and context for effective child marriage prevention work. The case studies focused on the following:

- *Ishraq:* Prepares girls in rural Upper Egypt for re-entry into formal schooling using group-based programming.
- *Social and Financial Empowerment of Adolescents (SoFEA):* Provides social and economic development opportunities for girls in Bangladesh using peer-led, group-based programming.
- *PRACHAR:* Provides group-based reproductive health training within a comprehensive behavior change program among adolescents and young couples in Bihar, India.
- *Toward Improved Economic and Social/ Reproductive Outcomes for Adolescent Girls (TESFA):* Promotes sexual and reproductive health and economic empowerment for married adolescent girls using group-based programming in Amhara, Ethiopia.

While most of these programs have additional goals beyond preventing or mitigating child marriage, and also used strategies other than girl-focused activities, our analysis focuses primarily on how group-based, girl-centered programming components enhanced observed marriage-related outcomes. In particular,

we wanted to understand if and how these programs used an "empowerment" approach, and if so, how this worked to transform attitudes and practices related to child marriage.

Methodology

To identify potential case studies, we scanned child marriage prevention programs, including those identified through our systematic review for the "Solutions to End Child Marriage" study and additional programs that had been documented since 2011. We narrowed our search to programs that utilized at least one of the five strategies defined in the "Solutions to End Child Marriage" paper; had some aspect of the program evaluated; had been implemented for a minimum of two years; and had ended no earlier than 2009. Additionally, we wanted to ensure we selected a set of case studies that reflected a variety of geographic contexts and some diversity in approach. We made the final selection of four programs based on relevance to our research question, availability of both data and program participants, and willingness of partner organizations to support the case studies.

Three of the four programs selected, Ishraq, SoFEA and PRACHAR, were reviewed in the "Solutions" paper, although the models have been adapted in some cases since 2011. In addition, we included CARE Ethiopia's TESFA program, which, unlike the others, is not a prevention program but rather a mitigation and support program for married girls. Because married girls are an important and underserved population, we wanted to also explore what strategies are effective in meeting their needs and why. Like the others, the TESFA program works directly with adolescent girls in group-based programs.

For each of these four programs, we first reviewed relevant background literature, published evaluations, unpublished reports, summaries, curricula and other program materials. In collaboration with the implementing partners, we developed more specific research questions for each program, as well a research protocol and tools designed to most effectively answer those questions.

ICRW collaborated with the implementing organizations, their local partners and local research consultants to conduct the fieldwork for the case studies. The research methods were qualitative, including participatory focus group discussions, in-depth interviews with current and former program

participants, mothers of current and former participants (Ishraq, SoFEA, PRACHAR), husbands of participants (TESFA only) and key informant interviews with staff and other program stakeholders. In three of the four case studies, we also interviewed comparable non-participant groups. In each setting, the implementing organization and their local partners identified and recruited participants, managed logistics and participated in discussions about the program. Following data collection, the interviews and focus groups discussions were transcribed and translated into English and analyzed in Atlas/ti (Version 6) qualitative analysis software. This synthesis paper summarizes some of the key insights we gleaned from across the different case studies.

Some limitations should be noted. First, because of the limited time and scope of our study, we focused only on specific aspects of each program; therefore, our findings do not necessarily reflect the program in its entirety. Our interviews focused primarily on the young, female participants, some family members and some of the key program staff and stakeholders. We conducted some FGDs with other groups, such as young men and fathers, but these voices were not as well-represented in the study. We relied on implementing organizations to identify participants. To limit social desirability bias (the risk that program participants would share only positive aspects of the program), all interviews were conducted by non-program staff, and interviews were designed to ask about the program only at the end of the interview. Finally, the timing of the case studies relative to participation in the program is an important consideration: for the TESFA, SoFEA and Ishraq programs, many of the respondents were still participating in the program and were still young, so the impact of their participation on timing and quality of marriage was still uncertain. For the PRACHAR adolescent reproductive health training, participants had completed the three-day training four to ten years earlier, and their recall of the training content and its impact on their lives was less reliable. However, interviewing these participants long after their engagement with the program yielded important insights about the durability of the program effects.

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About the Programs

As the program descriptions on pages 6 and 7 indicate, there are some important similarities and differences between the four programs featured in the case studies — SoFEA, TESFA, PRACHAR and Ishraq. The programs span South Asia, and Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa and vary in approach and duration. Most of the program components that we reviewed were aimed primarily at never-married adolescent girls; the exception to this was TESFA, which was exclusively targeted to ever-married adolescent girls.[1] All of the programs have a group-based, knowledge-building component for adolescent girls. In every program this included information on reproductive and sexual health, with this being the major focus of PRACHAR and one of the major foci of TESFA, while it was emphasized less in SoFEA and Ishraq. The SoFEA and TESFA programs both facilitate girls' access to financial assets, but in different ways.[2] TESFA primarily facilitated group-based savings and loans, while SoFEA encouraged individual savings, and offered individual micro-loans. Both programs included livelihood training. Ishraq was the only program among these that provided literacy and numeracy training and was geared toward linking participants to the formal school system. Every program aimed to empower its girl participants, although the emphasis on individual empowerment varied across programs. The PRACHAR and TESFA programs had the strongest community mobilization elements of the four programs.

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[1] The PRACHAR program had extensive programming targeted to young married women and men; however, our case study did not look at these activities.

[2] The newer version of the Ishraq program (Ishraq Plus) includes an economic empowerment component through which they provide girls with financial literacy training and give them a small loan to start a business of their choosing. Additionally, the program provides financial support to participants' mothers by also teaching them financial literacy and connecting them with access to financial services (e.g. banks, savings groups, loans). Our study did not look at this enhanced version of Ishraq Plus.

Defining Empowerment

As our central question concerns whether and how individual girl-focused aspects of programs "empower" girls' marriage-related outcomes, it is important to first review what we mean by empowerment. The conceptualizations, programmatic applications and measurement of empowerment vary considerably. Below, we articulate the particular definition of empowerment that we draw from for our analysis, with a focus on the individual experience. We also draw attention to some specific considerations when examining the empowerment process for adolescent girls, as compared to adult women.

The Components of Empowerment

Fundamentally, empowerment implies an expansion of an individual's power to influence her environment. We draw on the work of Naila Kabeer, who has written extensively on women's empowerment both from a theoretical and empirical standpoint. Kabeer defines em-powerment as the expansion in people's "ability to make strategic life choices where that ability was previously denied to them."[viii] Indeed, empowerment is a dynamic process rather than an outcome or result; it is the process through which an individual increases her capacity to control resources and make informed choices.

According to Kabeer, as well as other scholars and practitioners, **resources** and **agency** are among the basic components of empowerment.[ix] Resources and agency enable individuals to reach **achievements** that they would not otherwise have been able to, which Kabeer describes as a third component of empowerment.

Resources

Resources are the pre-conditions necessary to catalyze the process of empowerment. Many empowerment programs provide or facilitate access to such resources.[3] These are more than just material, such as food, shelter or financial assets; they also include information and social resources, which can be accessed through various institutions such as the family, friends, the school, the market and the broader community.

Agency

Kabeer defines agency as "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them." Agency is fundamental to empowerment; according to Malhotra *et al* it is

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[3] These are similar to what are often called "assets" in the adolescent girl literature. See: Austrian, K. and Ghati, D. (2010). *Girl-Centered Program Design: A Toolkit to Develop, Strengthen and Expand Girl-Centered Programs*. New York: Population Council.

the "essence of empowerment."[x] For resources to be empowering, an individual must have the freedom and ability to choose to utilize these resources to achieve desired outcomes.

To be an agent of change requires, at a minimum, self-awareness. To have agency, one must first discover and prioritize self-interests. Often, this entails a shift from passive acceptance of socially dictated expectations, toward a more active and critical reflection of one's preferences, desires and rights. Agency is not just about actions that are externally observable; more importantly, it is about the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, or "the power within."[xi]

The psychologist Albert Bandura clarifies that having agency also requires intentionality and forethought, which includes setting goals and anticipating challenges in order to intentionally make things happen by one's actions — rather than by luck or by the largesse of another.[xii] The defining trait of agency, according to Bandura and other scholars, is **self-efficacy**, a conviction that one has the ability to make and act upon strategic life choices, even in the face of obstacles. Self-efficacy is the foundation of agency, and agency is the foundation of empowerment.

Achievements

One's achievements are the outcomes of the empower-ment process. Examples of achievements could be staying in school, utilizing health services, voting, delaying marriage until adulthood, or influencing household decisions, when such achievements would have previously been unattainable.

Simple evidence of an individual's achievement, however, is not sufficient if the person was not an active agent in reaching that achievement. For example, the act of a girl completing school in a setting where her parents and community expected and supported her to complete school is not necessarily one that resulted from a process of empowerment. However, a girl who completes school in an environment where she was not expected or supported to do so, but set out to do so despite this, would be more indicative of an achievement resulting from a process of empowerment.

Kabeer also emphasizes the indivisibility of resources, agency and achievements — the three components of empowerment. To put these ideas into more concrete terms, imagine an adolescent girl who resides in a setting where she has never been taught that she can

Ishraq

Target Population:
Out-of-school girls ages 12–15 in Upper Egypt

Program Activities:
Prepares girls for reentry into formal schooling through:
- Safe spaces
- Group-based learning
- Life skills
- Sports
- Literacy, numeracy, English language

These activities are aligned with the version of Ishraq that was implemented from 2001-2003 and was evaluated by Population Council in 2007

Scale & Duration:
- Implemented in three phases from 2001-present. Cumulatively reached over 3,321 girls and 1,775 boys in 54 villages, as well as over 5,000 girls' parents, boys, and community leaders
- 2 year program duration, meets 4-5 times per week

Published Results (selected):
The percentage of girls who reported a preference to be married under 18 decreased with program exposure; the percentage of girls who said that family members should select a girl's husband also decreased with program exposure (Brady et al 2007).

Implementers and Partners:
Caritas, CEDPA, the Ministry of Youth, NCCM, the Population Council and Save the Children

Sources: Brady, M., Assaad, R., Ibrahim, B.L., Salem, A., Salem, R. & Zibani, N. (2007). *Providing New Opportunities to Adolescent Girls in Socially Conservative Settings: The Ishraq Program in Rural Upper Egypt*. New York, NY: Population Council.

EGYPT

Legal age of marriage:
18
for women and men

Nationwide child marriage prevalence:
17%

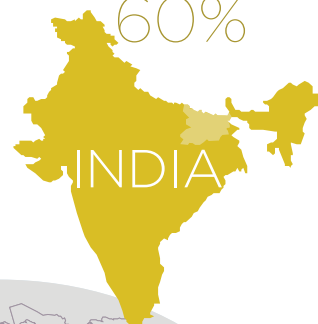Upper Egypt child marriage prevalence:
24%

INDIA

Legal age of marriage:
18   21
for women   for men
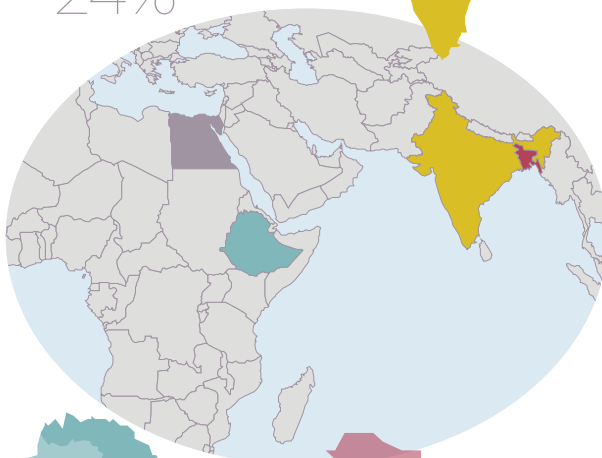
Nationwide child marriage prevalence:
47%

Bihar child marriage prevalence:
60%

PRACHAR

Target Population:
Adolescent girls and boys and young couples in three districts of Bihar, India

Program Activities:
Comprehensive behavior change approach that included interpersonal communication, training programs, home visits, street theater, wall paintings, puppet shows and information education and communications (IEC) materials. Unmarried adolescent boys and girls (ages 15-19) participated in three-day reproductive health training.

Scale & Duration:
Implemented in three phases, from 2001 to 2012.
- Phase I (2001-2005): 3 districts, 552 villages, 17 intervention blocks, population: 636,803, implemented through local NGOs
- Phase II (2005-2009): 5 districts, 444 villages, 13 intervention blocks, population 453,478, implemented through local NGOs
- Phase III (2009-2012): 1 district, 1,175 villages, 10 intervention blocks, population 1,381,606, implemented through public-private partnership

- Adolescents reached with 3-day training during phases I and II: 70,193

Published Results (selected):
Young women exposed to PRACHAR interventions in Phase I were married about 2.6 years later than women who were not exposed to PRACHAR. Median age at marriage 22.0 years vs. 19.4 years (a statistically significant difference), controlling for age, education and caste.

Implementers, Partners and Donors:
Pathfinder International, Government of Bihar, local partners, UNFPA, Packard Foundation

Sources: Pathfinder International. (2013). *PRACHAR: Advancing Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in India.* www.pathfinder.org
Daniel, E. & Nanda, R. (2012). The Effect of Reproductive Health Communication Interventions on Age of Marriage and First Birth in Rural Bihar, India: a Retrospective Study. *Research and Evaluation Working Paper*. Watertown: Pathfinder International.

TESFA

Target Population:
Ever-married adolescents ages 14–19 in Ethiopia's Amhara region

Program Activities:
TESFA worked to improve economic and sexual reproductive health outcomes, building on CARE's Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) model. Participants received some or all of the following program components:
- Group-based Village Savings and Loan Associations
- Financial literacy and budgeting skills

- Sexual and reproductive health training
- Negotiation and communication skills
- Community mobilization with husbands, in-laws of participants and other community members

Scale & Duration:
- 2 districts in the Amhara region; reached 5,000 child brides
- 1 year program; participants met every 2 weeks

Published Results (selected):
Improved communication between the young wives and their husbands and decreased levels of gender-based violence. Participants of TESFA reported improved mental health and knowledge as well as use of sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning. In addition, findings showed increased investment in productive economic assets.

Implementers, Partners and Donors:
CARE Ethiopia, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Birhan Research and Development Consultancy (BRDC), Nike Foundation, Packard Foundation

Sources: Edmeades, J. & Hayes, R. (2013). *Evaluation Report for the TESFA (Towards Economic and Sexual Reproductive Health Outcomes for Adolescent Girls) Project*. Washington, DC: ICRW.
CARE Website: http://www.care.org/our-work/womens-empowerment/child-marriage/tesfa

ETHIOPIA

Legal age of marriage:
18
for women and men

Nationwide child marriage prevalence:
41%

Amhara child marriage prevalence:
56%

BANGLA-DESH

Legal age of marriage:
18   21
for women   for men

Nationwide child marriage prevalence:
65%

Chittagong child marriage prevalence:
58%

SoFEA

Target Population:
Girls ages 11-21 within 1 kilometer radius of SoFEA club

Program Activities:
Multi-faceted program that provides social and financial information and skills through peer-education in safe spaces (clubs), included mothers in life-skills training and informal club activities. SoFEA builds off of two previous BRAC programs: the Adolescent Development Program (ADP) and the Employment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) program.
- Life-Skills Training: 27 modules including child marriage, dowry, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence
- Livelihood Training: Catered to feasible income-generating activities in the local context (e.g. poultry or dairy cow raising, hydroponics, tailoring)
- Savings, Credit and Loans: Encouraged savings behavior and offered access to flexible loans
- Financial Literacy Training: Provided basic training toward sustainable and profitable income-generating activities
- Edu-tainment: Dancing, singing, study partners, and other forms of socializing with peers

Scale & Duration:
- 5 districts in Bangladesh with a total of 360 clubs (approximately 14,000 beneficiaries)
- 5 year program duration; clubs met 3-5 times per week.

Published Results (selected):
Beneficiaries of ADP better able to identify risks associated with early marriage and legal minimum age for marriage; had improved attitudes on women's rights and gender equality. Beneficiaries of ELA married at a later age than controls.

Implementers, Partners and Donors:
BRAC, Nike Foundation

Sources: Kabir, M., Afroze, R & Aldeen, M. (2007). *Impact assessment of Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) of BRAC*. BRAC Research Report. Dhaka, Bangladesh: BRAC.
Ara, J.& Das,N.C. (2010). Impact Assessment of Adolescent Development Programme in the selective Border Regions of Bangladesh. *Working paper No. 14*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: BRAC.
Shahnaz, R. & Karim, R. (2008). Providing Microfinance and Social Space to Empower Adolescent Girls: An Evaluation of BRAC's ELA Centres. *BRAC Research & Evaluation Division, Working Paper No. 3*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: BRAC.

*Data on child marriage prevalence (% of women 20-24 married before age 18) is sourced from the most recently available Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) during the period 2002-2011.
*Data on legal age of marriage is sourced from the most recently available U.S. State Department Human Rights Report.

have a say in key decisions that shape her life, such as the timing of her first child. To move from this state to achieving control over her reproductive choices, she would need both resources (information, services, skills, social support) and the ability to decide when and how to utilize those resources. In addition to these resources, she would need to recognize that she should be entitled to an opinion and rights; develop the explicit intention to want to control the timing of her fertility behavior; and begin to plot a course and consider the pros and cons of that course through forethought and goal-setting. Finally, and most significantly, she must believe that despite her position in society, she is capable of making a change in her life. She is then more likely to have a role in deciding if, when and with whom she has her first child.

Considerations for Empowering an Adolescent Girl

The primary focus of our analysis is on adolescent girls in poor, socially conservative settings. Because of their age and developmental status, as well as their legal and social status, adolescent girls have needs, constraints, and capabilities that are different from those of adult women. Complete autonomy is neither feasible nor desirable for most minors, who should be supported and protected by parents or guardians, teachers and other duty bearers in society. At the same time, adolescents have vast potential, and the decisions that they make during this critical time can significantly alter the course of their lives and future opportunities as they transition into adulthood.

In considering what empowerment can mean for girls, it is critical to be mindful of both the specific constraints and opportunities that girls encounter in their environments. For our analysis, we therefore adjust Kabeer's definition of empowerment slightly to account for the present and future perspectives of girls' empowerment and define it as **the expansion of girls' current and future ability to make and act on strategic life choices.** Girls are on a "journey" of empowerment, one that can start in childhood or adolescence, and continue throughout their lifetimes. During adolescence, as girls are making transitions to adult roles, they are expanding their resources and agency which will be fully exercised later.

Because of these additional considerations, it is helpful to describe a few additional components to the empowerment process that are of particular relevance to adolescent girls' empowerment, especially forms of "relational agency."

Relational Agency

While we have described gains to agency and empowerment as individually-driven internal processes, it is important to emphasize that agency also can be experienced relationally, either through others, or as the property of a group. These relational forms of agency are particularly relevant to adolescent girls, who often lack the legal authority or social standing to act alone on their self-interests. Bandura defines two forms of relational agency — proxy agency and collective agency — which are useful for our analysis.

• *Proxy agency* is a socially mediated mode of agency, by which "people try by one means or another to get those who have access to resources or expertise or who wield influence and power to act at their behest to secure the outcomes they desire."[xiii] Adolescent girls often have less direct control over the conditions and practices in their environments and must often rely on others to make decisions on their behalf. For example, the girl who wishes to stay in school and delay her marriage, especially in an environment where secondary school is not compulsory, knows that she alone cannot manifest that choice. She must influence her parents, who have the legal, social, and moral authority to make choices for their daughters. For married girls, relational agency is also extremely relevant: a married girl (or woman) often depends on her husband and her in-laws to make or help make important decisions that affect her life.

• *Collective agency* pertains to groups of people and their "shared belief in their collective power to produce desired results," according to Bandura. More than the sum of individual attributes, collective agency operates at the group or systems level with the belief that this group can achieve an intended end.[xiv] For example, a group of adolescent girls, who may not think they are capable of delaying their own individual marriages or choosing to stay in school, might feel that by using their collective agency, they can work together to achieve this goal, and thus will cooperate to tenaciously advocate for their rights. Girls may enhance their collective agency by aligning themselves with supportive adults or other influential people in the community.

Process of Individual Empowerment
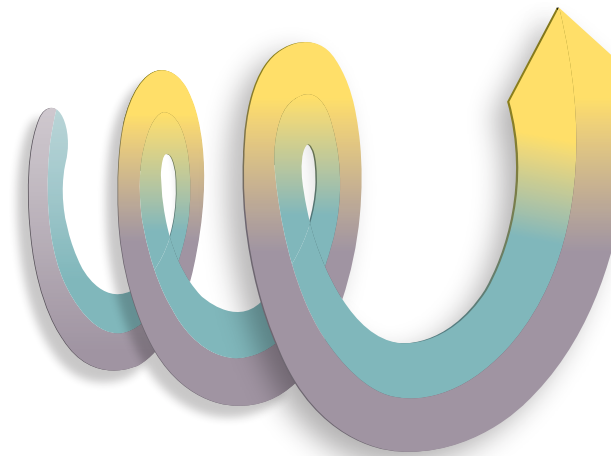
This figure illustrates that achievements resulting from gains in resources and agency toward an increased capacity to make and act on important life choices are likely cumulative and compounding. This conceptualization suggests that for those who are particularly disempowered, initial achievements may be small, but with sustained resources and opportunity for increases in self-efficacy, these can grow and provide the basis for a girl to transform her life as well as the lives of other women and girls.

The Role of Programs in Advancing Empowerment for Girls

ICRW's original 2011 study, "Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the Evidence Shows" identified "**empowering girls with information, skills and support networks**" as the strategy that had the greatest number of evaluations and the strongest evidence of impact. Eighteen of 23 programs reviewed had a component that directly supported girls at-risk for early marriage, and they were typically group-based, non-formal educational programs, delivered in a safe space. The content and format of the curriculum varied, from sexual and reproductive health information to livelihoods development to general life skills to human rights and more. Often, these programs had a gender component, through which participants were taught to think critically about gendered social norms. The programs also emphasized both individual agency and group cohesion.

The "Solutions" paper also identified two other "girl-focused" strategies: **enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls** and **offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families**. The schooling-based strategy is distinct from the first strategy, because of its focus on enhancing access to and quality of formal schooling. These programs are not necessarily characterized by implementers as "empowering" girls, nor do they necessarily have a primary focus on delaying marriage. While many group-based girls' programs include a livelihoods or financial literacy element, the economic support and incentives

strategy is distinctive because of its more well-developed linkages to economic opportunities, which are often also provided to parents or guardians of girls at-risk for child marriage. Chronic poverty and/or economic shocks are some of the most pervasive and pernicious drivers of child marriage. Such programs attempt to offset these financial drivers of child marriage.

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Findings from Case Studies: Main Pathways to Delayed and Improved Marriage

When taken together, the four case studies provide insight on "pathways" through which successful programs expand girls' current and future abilities to make and act on strategic life choices, particularly regarding their marriage. In this section, we describe three inter-related pathways that emerged from the case studies. We begin by describing how a program triggers an internal transformation within the girl herself. We then describe how the program facilitates alternatives to marriage or additional opportunities beyond what have been previously available to unmarried or married girls. Finally, we describe how a girl's enhanced capabilities can influence the way that girls are seen and the extent to which she can control decisions that affect her life.

Not all of these pathways or the components within them apply to each program we reviewed. Rather, we derive insights from each to generate overarching observations about how these programs can reasonably be expected to impact girls' lives. While we separate these into three distinctive pathways in order to explicitly explain how these programs work, it is important to note that these pathways are interrelated and interdependent.

Self-Transformation

SELF-TRANSFORMATION

Self-Awareness   Self-Efficacy   Enhanced Aspirations

Pathway 1: Self-Transformation

One of the most distinctive qualities of girl-focused programming is that it can enhance, or even transform, the way that girls see themselves. For girls who have limited opportunities to learn about themselves and their environments, to think critically, talk openly with peers and have social support outside of the family, such experiences can be revolutionary. Self-transformation is a critical process that triggers and enhances the other two pathways. Below we detail some of the components of the pathway toward self-transformation.

Enhanced Knowledge and Skills
Adolescent girls in these program settings are often out of school or attend lower-quality schools. They are also frequently socially isolated, which limits their exposure to information from peers or supportive adults. All of the featured programs educate girls about important topics, including at least one of the following: their sexual and reproductive health, human rights, financial literacy, life skills, and services and opportunities that are available to them. This information is imparted in various ways, such as through training sessions by adult facilitators, peer education sessions and curriculum-based instruction. Even the format of these sessions can be revolutionary; for girls who are accustomed to rote learning in a hierarchical school environment, experiential learning through games, sports, debate and other forms of interaction are novel and effective learning strategies.

Girls who participated in the four programs reported that they gained valuable information about their bodies, health and the world around them. That knowledge provided them with a foundation to understand themselves and their environments better, including how child marriage negatively affects individuals and societies.

Sexual and Reproductive Health Information
The PRACHAR adolescent reproductive health training covered a range of reproductive health topics, including child marriage, healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies, contraceptive methods, HIV and sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse and responsible marriage and parenting. Adolescent girls in Bihar receive little to no information about these topics in their schools or homes, so the information they received and the way it was delivered was novel and for many, made a long-lasting impression. Most of the former participants of the PRACHAR adolescent reproductive health training could recall, five to ten years after the training, what they learned about the human body, health and hygiene, and the legal age of marriage as well as the correct timing and spacing of pregnancies, contraceptive methods and human rights. In part, this is likely due to the teaching methods used. Many of the participants discussed that the format of the training was both fun and appealing: "In these trainings, things were discussed openly and in details as a result of which I got educated and had more knowledge about these issues."

PRACHAR participants emphasized the importance of the training for learning "so many new and very important things," according to one participant. "If I had not been there, I would have known nothing," one young woman said, which echoed what many others said. "Like, age of marriage, childbirth, gap between two children and so on. I got to know all this from the training." Another young woman recalls a training session that reinforced her observations of the consequences of child marriage and early child bearing in her community: "I did observe around me that if a girl becomes a mother before the age of 21, it does lead to health problems for her. We were taught that girls have to face lot of hardships if she becomes a mother before the right age." Having this information gave them a basis for negotiating with others, including their parents, husbands and in-laws. The mother of a participant also reinforced this; when asked about whether the training had made any difference in the lives of the girls, she said, "if they wouldn't have gone, how would they have known about such things?"

Similar lessons were emphasized from SoFEA program participants. One participant described the details of what she had learned and how it stood in contrast to the status quo:

> Look, the guardians and parents are not aware of the consequences that an early marriage brings in a girl's life. ...But when [a] girl becomes pregnant at the age of 14, she is in great danger. Her child and her health are risked severely. .. As the girl cannot finish her education, she becomes a helpless, dependent creature and a burden for both the families.

Most SoFEA participants recounted that learning about life skills was among the most important of the program components, and many further insisted that they intended to put this new knowledge to use, and now wished to avoid early marriage and pregnancy. As a participant explained when being asked how she intended to delay childbirth within her future marital household:

> If the in-laws continue to persuade my husband and me, then I will try to convince them. I will start with my husband. I want to control my married life. What my mother didn't understand during her times about early pregnancy, I will not make the same mistake.

In northern Ethiopia, girls who participated in the TESFA program had very little basic knowledge about birth control and sexually transmitted infections at the start of the project. TESFA aimed to improve their knowledge and increase their access to contraceptives and health services. By the end of the program, more girls were able to identify the correct number of recommended antenatal visits, were more knowledgeable about modern contraceptives and more knowledgeable about how to prevent sexually transmitted infections.[xv]

Access to Social Support
For girls who are often out of school and socially isolated, group-based programs provide a critical resource of social support. Programs expose girls to peers, to role models, and to supportive adults, which seems to enhance their confidence as well as their social capital.

Girls in various programs reported that they greatly value the friendships they developed through their participation, and that friendship gave them sources of new confidence and support. When SoFEA

participants were asked to describe what aspects of the program they most enjoyed, most reported that it was the time spent with other club members, including chatting, reading books, singing and dancing, or studying with the support of their friends at the club. For some, the time spent with other peers was what they reported as being the most important component of the program.

One out-of-school SoFEA participant stressed that belonging to the club improved her overall well-being, because it gave her the opportunity to "share our feelings, emotions, problems with each other." Within the context of this program, girls who had left school were also much more likely to mention fellow club members as their closest friends, while in-school participants identified classmates as their closest friends. In-school girls found the study partner component to be an important facet of the SoFEA program, because it gave girls the opportunity to do schoolwork together outside of the classroom. By sharing time together, participants also united on ideas around girls' roles in deciding the timing of their marriage and tried to protect their peers against child marriage, which was an important component of collective agency, described more fully below.

Similarly, Ishraq girls reported that through the program they had an opportunity to interact more with other girls their age and in the process, learned how to communicate and collaborate effectively. Participants discussed problems together, shared life experiences and relied on each other for advice — all of which equipped girls with the confidence that they could solve any challenges they face. "The existence of my friends in my life," one participant said, "made me a stronger person and more confident about myself."

The support network girls built also included Ishraq facilitators; according to one participant:

> Before Ishraq no one cared about my condition, now I know the facilitators are looking out for me. [My teacher] is like a sister to me, I can tell her everything; I even bring her my good grades from school so she can see how I am succeeding.

Overall, the confidence and resources girls gained through their expanded social networks helped to facilitate a transformation in their vision of what is achievable for their futures and also enhanced the support they had to fulfill new goals.

Increased Self-Awareness and Self-Efficacy

Many participants across these four programs developed a consciousness of their own individuality, desires, preferences, and rights — including those regarding the timing and circumstances of marriage. The extent to which the programs developed these qualities varied, and seemed to depend at least in part on the length of the program.

Many of the Ishraq staff described a process by which the participants realize that they are individuals, capable of forming their own opinions and ideas. Ishraq challenges girls to think critically about the world around them and engages participants in discussions in which they must explain their opinions on a subject with their classmates. They build their capacity to be self-directed, and are better able to process information and make their own value judgments. One of the Ishraq participants described this transformation:

> Now I have a stronger personality and am more confident in myself. I now have a mind to think with and an opinion that is respected by others.

Many of the Ishraq participants described a transformation from just doing what they were told, to having and expressing an opinion. This sense of entitlement to their own opinions created a striking contrast to the girls who did not participate in Ishraq. When asked questions about what type of marriage and life they would like to have, the non-participants had a difficult time coming up with an answer, often stating that they had never thought about it before.

A PRACHAR adolescent reproductive health training program participant describes the transformation that she observed in her group over the course of the three days.

> They would feel shy, even I would feel shy, but if I feel so shy, how can I learn new things in life. If I feel shy, I will always remain in the dark and never learn important lessons in life. So on the first day, we all felt a little odd, but then if we would not learn these important things, how would we know how to lead our lives when we grow up and get married one day. So the training has given me a lot of information and has changed my thoughts too.

One SoFEA participant's remarks reflected a sentiment shared by others regarding a gain in confidence through her participation in the program. When asked what improvements she had noted in herself, she said, "Me?

Allison M. Glinski

Now I am a lot more confident after getting into the club. I can meet new people, introduce myself and I am more extroverted than before."

Enhanced Aspirations

Participants expressed that their participation in the programs had enhanced their aspirations for their futures, both expanding their visions of what they wanted their marriage to be like as well as their ideas for how they would lead their lives in addition to being a wife and a mother. Ishraq girls came to prioritize education and expressed that they wanted to complete their schooling before becoming wives. In comparison, girls who had not participated in Ishraq had trouble answering questions related to their thoughts and dreams about their futures. When Ishraq girls were asked to think about their futures, most of them stated that they wanted a good, educated husband with a job, a good job for themselves, and a healthy family, and that they realized that the best way to achieve these goals is to have an education.

> I want to marry an educated man who has a job and is about the same age as me. I want my husband to be decent and caring. I want to have an independent life and live in our own house, not with his parents, and raise two beautiful children.

Another participant explained, "My idea about marriage has totally changed. I don't want to marry at a young age, but want to wait until after I have finished my education. Then I will be able to get a better husband, one who has a good job, instead of marrying an illiterate farmer."

One PRACHAR participant's aspirations for marriage changed after she learned more about how different circumstances — including age of marriage, childbirth and education — can influence girls' futures. She stressed that educated girls who have a job and who wed when

they're 22 years or older "will have a good marriage." When asked if she had always had these views, she said, "It changed since we got the training where we were taught these things." Asked to elaborate on "what things," she said, "That we must not get married very early. We must study well and then look for a job before marriage...child should come after two years of marriage...gap between two childbirths should be at least three years." When the interviewer asked her if this was because of school or because of the training, she said, "I was just in class 10 so we hardly knew anything... so whatever I knew, it was because of the training where *didis* (trainers) told us about all this," emphasizing the power of knowledge to transform aspirations.

A few of the TESFA participants also described how the program influenced their attitudes about early marriage and their hopes for their younger siblings. For example, one participant said, when asked if her attitudes toward marital life had changed:

> Yes. Previously it was our parents' decision. Although we wanted to pursue education, they refused. Now, I do not want my younger sisters to pass through what I passed through. If my parents prefer to send her for marriage, I will bring her here and she can go to school and she can be educated.

Overall, participation in these programs can trigger an internal transformation by enhancing a girl's capabilities, including her knowledge, her interpersonal skills, her social capital and her confidence. Exposure to new ideas and role models can heighten her aspirations and her resolve in meeting her goals. However, girls have few resources to transform the environment around them without having accessible and socially acceptable alternatives to marriage and enhanced social support outside of the program itself, both pathways that we explore more fully below.

Pathway 2: Enhanced Opportunities and Alternatives

In environments where child marriage is prevalent, girls often lack access to alternatives to child marriage, such as school, employment or other enrichment opportunities. Barriers include cost, physical inaccessibility of schools or other institutions, concerns for girls' safety, and normative barriers that prioritize investments in boys over girls. If girls and parents have safe, viable and socially acceptable alternatives to marriage, they may be more likely to delay marriage until adulthood. For child brides who are expected to have only domestic responsibilities, having alternative ways of spending time and building resources can be socially and financially enriching.

Programs themselves can provide activities that are acceptable alternatives to marriage, at least for a limited time. Other programs go beyond filling girls' time to facilitating their access to enriching and empowering alternatives. This pathway often operates alongside pathway 1; as girls gain knowledge and self-efficacy, they are better-equipped to pursue such alternatives.

Below we describe in more detail how these programs facilitated access to alternatives.

Opportunities for Education Enhance Girls' Skills, Confidence, Aspirations and Opportunities
Ishraq, which focuses on girls who have dropped out of school, is the only program of the four reviewed

that directly facilitated girls' connections to the formal education system. The keys to Ishraq's success in getting girls back in school seem to be increasing their knowledge and skills, increasing their self-efficacy and enhancing their aspirations for education.

Knowledge and Skills: Through individualized attention in small groups, the program equips girls with literacy and numeracy skills to help them pass re-entry tests back into preparatory or lower secondary schools. Creating a solid foundation of literacy and numeracy skills enables girls to not only pass the exam and enroll in school, but to also do well in school. This is an important distinction since many girls reported that they had previously dropped out of school because of poor performance. Traditionally, teachers provide a minimal amount of information in class, and require that students pay for private tutoring to receive a more complete education. Students whose families cannot afford or do not see the benefits of private tutoring, are left with an insufficient education. This can also perpetuate a harmful cycle where students are unable to grasp new concepts, perform poorly, are berated by teachers, and lose self-esteem. Girls also discussed this maltreatment from teachers as a primary driver of school drop-out.

Not only do the academic and intellectual skills gained through Ishraq help girls to overcome these challenges, but the social and emotional skills also provide a shield to the multi-dimensional challenges they face. Girls in the program were provided with a safe space where they could meet and interact with peers, which allowed them

to grow more than they might have in a regular public school setting. The evaluation published in 2007 found that the majority (92 percent) of those who took the government literacy and numeracy exam passed; and 69 percent of Ishraq graduates entered or re-entered the formal school system after completing the program.[xvi]

Self-Efficacy: The original evaluation of Ishraq found that Ishraq participants reported higher levels of self-confidence than non-participants.[xvii] This was substantiated by our study. Ishraq graduates reported they now have the confidence to stand up for themselves and not let negative comments undermine their self-confidence. Even girls who have graduated from the program expressed confidence that they would be equipped to navigate difficult situations in the future. "I believe that I will be able to handle formal schooling and that there will be no obstacles that can stand in my way," one participant said. "My efforts and the assistance of my Ishraq instructors will enable me to fulfill my educational ambitions."

Enhanced Appreciation for Education: Through their participation in Ishraq, girls also gained a greater appreciation for the benefits of an education, citing that it would lead to better jobs, more opportunities and the ability to improve their status in the marriage market. With higher levels of education, girls could also put conditions on the type of groom they would accept. When a girl is educated, she "will be able to marry an educated man with a good job, not just a farmer," focus group participants told us.

Economic Opportunities Enhance Girls' Ability to Negotiate
Two programs — SoFEA and TESFA — use economic empowerment approaches. SoFEA works to enhance the self-sufficiency of unmarried girls, while TESFA develops in married girls effective saving behavior, effective negotiation and communication strategies around economic issues, financial literacy, and income generation capabilities.

Self-Sufficiency: The SoFEA program included financial literacy and livelihood training, a savings program, and access to small amounts of credit. For out-of-school girls, the program facilitated more permanent livelihood opportunities, such as apprenticeships with tailors located in public markets, which provided them a visible, sustainable livelihood. For in-school participants, the livelihood skills were meant to complement schooling. Contrary to some conventional wisdom, for these girls, their livelihood

opportunities did not seem to directly compete with their schooling. Rather, in-school girls described being able to fund their education through income-generating activities. "I can earn and spend money for my personal needs. As well as college fees and study materials," one participant said. "In fact, I can bear the entire bus rent for the whole month of my way to and return from college. It is quite expensive, you know!"

Another in-school girl also reported that she was better able to support her own transportation costs for school with money she was earning herself from the skills she had gained through SoFEA. Girls emphasized that by applying the newfound skills they were viewed as less of a burden on their families, and were moving toward achieving "self-sufficiency," both important concepts we elaborate on below.

As girls in the SoFEA program enhanced financial and job skills, they also became more self-sufficient. Almost all SoFEA participants described how central self-sufficiency was to how SoFEA had affected their lives, especially with respect to marriage. By self-sufficiency, participants were referring almost exclusively to achieving a certain earning level, to becoming financially independent, through entrepreneurship or a salaried position. Interviews and focus groups with the comparison groups validate that this concept is unique to SoFEA participants, one that they and their mothers described as a life stage in the transition to adulthood, falling between ending schooling and getting married. While this concept was taught within the context of the program, the extent to which it was absorbed by participants remains remarkable.

The financial literacy training in particular, instilled in girls the importance of becoming self-sufficient. In fact, participants often equated the training with learning about self-sufficiency, foremost, over specific skills, such as bookkeeping. The concept of self-sufficiency also had direct links to decision-making for many girls. As one girl succinctly put it: "I earn, I decide."

A number of participants reflected on how being self-sufficient could help them challenge obstacles to delaying marriage or how it could contribute to their own marriage decisions.

One 18-year-old in-school club leader mapped out the relationship between financial literacy training, self-sufficiency and marriage. She explained that the program "trained us how to start earning, how to be self-dependent, how to become independent or how

Enhanced Alternatives & Opportunities

ENHANCED ALTERNATIVES & OPPORTUNITIES

Education
Aspirations & Opportunities

Economic Opportunites
Self-Sufficiency, Decision-Making & Control Over Resources

to help in family income. As you know there are many families who think girls are a burden on the family income. So contributing money to the family often helps to delay the marriage. They don't even want... to spend money on their daughter's studies. Rather, they would like to spend that same amount only once on their daughter — marrying them off! This is a very common scenario here."

Importantly, the girl quoted above emphasizes that earning an income allows girls to be viewed as an economic asset, rather than a burden, to their families. That in turn can help prevent early marriage and school dropout. Other participants made similar observations about alleviating the burden on their families while also affording girls a certain amount of leverage. For instance, another participant said that at age 15 or 16, parents start to pressure their daughters to marry. When asked why and if that will be the case for her too, she said, "They consider girls as a burden. But if I start to earn, then I can force my father to stop that." "Now my family cannot pressurize me for anything," said the girl, whose income comes from raising poultry and a cow, "because I earn."

Many girls viewed earning an income and being financially independent as one of the most important ways to avoid early marriage. In one case, the parents of one participant had been refusing marriage proposals brought by matchmakers. When asked what she would do if in a few years if her father found a groom that she didn't like, the girl said her actions would depend on her job and earning capabilities at that time. "If I can establish myself as something, then I can strongly oppose regarding the choice of my groom. But if I can't, then I have to go by my father's decisions."

SoFEA girls reported some autonomy in how they use their earnings and it was clear that they view having an income as a means by which to delay marriage. However, this was not true for all girls. For instance, a 17-year-old participant who dropped out of school due to extreme financial pressures at home was working in order to save for her marriage. Her family had told her to do so, and that they will not find a groom for her until she's saved enough money. When asked how her family supports her and whether it is expensive to get married, she responded: "Yes. My family supports me to be self-sufficient and save by myself for my marriage."

Her case illustrates an unintended consequence of financial training. Her parents support their daughter working to finance her marriage — something out of reach for her very poor family — rather than to build

Ann Warner

self-sufficiency. That said, in addition to saving for her own marriage, she is also supporting the family's current expenses, and this brings her a sense of pride (and could contribute to her parents being in less of a rush to identify a groom).

Decision-Making and Control Over Resources: The TESFA program offers another example of the impact of economically empowering adolescent girls. TESFA relied on a group-based peer-education model drawn from CARE's Village Savings and Loans Association programming model. In group settings, married girls learned about saving money, financial literacy, how to negotiate and communicate around economic issues, and income generation strategies. ICRW's evaluation found more than 40 percent more girls were engaged in work for pay at the end of TESFA, than at the beginning of TESFA. [xviii]

This outcome was influenced by the program's approach: by design, girls interacted with each other often within their own groups or between groups, which expanded their exposure to a variety of income-generating activities. They also learned practical tips for how to establish their businesses and savings. "Before TESFA, we did not have any information. After TESFA project, they taught us about different income-generating opportunities," recounted one TESFA group facilitator. "They informed us about animal fattening (sheep and ox) and poultry. They told us how we can make changes even by saving a little and involving in selling items little by little from what we have."

In addition to improving their economic participation, there is evidence that TESFA also increased girls' control over their earnings, savings and loans. Among girls who were already involved in economic activities at the start of TESFA, their input into economic decisions in the households increased during their participation in TESFA. This was true except in the case of loans, where fewer girls felt that they should have sole control over how to use loans. [xix]

A few of the girls and some men went so far as to suggest that husbands had handed over decision-making regarding household finances to their wives following TESFA training, given she now had a better understanding of these issues than he had. Slightly more often, girls described having gained more authority or decision-making power with management of household funds as a direct result of their new skills through the TESFA program (and likely alongside gains in confidence and ability to speak up).

> For instance, previously it was him who would buy things and decide on things, he even was not willing to tell me about the amount of money he expended or he has but after I have learned from TESFA, I told him about what I learned, about saving, about discussion and other issues. Since he knows about what I learned in the TESFA project now he says, 'it is you who should buy things and manage the house.' So now, it is me who is buying things for our family and managing the house.

However, we must note that in many cases, when pushed, many girls revealed certain limits to their decision-making power. For example, some SoFEA participants indicated that although they may try to avoid a marriage, ultimately their parents (or other male kin) would make this decision. The notion of limited decision-making was also true for many of the TESFA participants, although unlike SoFEA girls, this was in the context of a marriage and managing a home.

Alongside internal transformations and increased self-awareness, access to alternatives to child marriage can serve to empower girls by providing them a more sustainable set of resources to enhance their abilities to make life choices that can delay marriage. Education and economic opportunities increase self-confidence, bolster girls' sense of independence and self-sufficiency, and finally, improve a girl's basis for negotiating the conditions of her marriage.

Pathway 3: Increased Influence over Others

Girls are part of a complex social environment that influences their decisions and their opportunities. These programs, and the information, skills and confidence they impart, can also help girls increase their influence over their environment. The influence is both direct and indirect: Indirectly, girls' participation in these programs seems to enhance the way that they are perceived by others. As they begin to participate more in community activities, express themselves more effectively and demonstrate their newfound knowledge and skills, the way their families and communities perceive them can begin to shift. This shift can encourage others to see new possibilities for their daughters, wives, sisters and neighbors. And more directly, as girls find and use their voice — that is, as they develop the confidence to have and express an opinion — they can use it to convince others to support their goals, or can work with a group of people, by way of the social networks they build through these programs.

Increased Mobility and Visibility Change the Way that Girls Are Seen
In these settings, girls' mobility is very limited and their actions are monitored closely. Unmarried girls seen "roaming around" their communities, for instance, risk tarnishing their reputation, many respondents told us. When girls participate in programs facilitated by respected and trusted organizations, it can protect them from the scrutiny they might otherwise face for being out in public in their communities.

Participation in longer-term programs, such as SoFEA, can also help give girls social protection to pursue activities of interest to them. For instance, an out-of-school SoFEA participant said that because she is earning money, she can more easily thwart the stigma associated with girls who refuse marriage proposals. "I always earn something, so my parents are not concerned about me going to work; they know I am not having an affair or not engaged in any offensive activities," she said. "So whenever the neighbors and society tries to charge any complaint against me, I always come clean as I am only earning and building my future." For this participant, being able to demonstrate that she is working toward her future has afforded her leverage to refuse current marriage proposals and still maintain good standing in the community.

Influence over Others

INFLUENCE OVER OTHERS

Mobility   Visibility   Voice

Participation in TESFA also seemed to change the way that participants were perceived. The act of going to public meetings, usually reserved for men, provided a basis through which husbands and in-laws came to respect what the girls were learning through the meetings. TESFA participants valued this experience greatly and spoke about the novelty and power of leaving their homes and participating in public meetings. According to one TESFA participant, "Previously, I did not get out from home and never attended public meetings," one participant said. "Now, I am participating in public gatherings without any fear and no one would prohibit me." Another girl recounted that before she participated in TESFA, "I was under my husband's control. Girls in our neighborhood who are not TESFA members are spending all days in their homes. I am participating in public activities." The appearance of young married women in public places has likely contributed to their being viewed differently by their family and community members, and also to their expanding pool of potential opportunities.

Voice and Self-Expression
Alongside the development of self-awareness and enhanced aspirations described more fully in pathway 1, participants described how they also were able to develop their "voice," that is, to express their opinions, ideas and preferences to others.

One of the most basic ways that programs facilitate this is by building participants' interpersonal skills. Learning how to communicate effectively and negotiate

for one's interests is a feature of all four of these programs, to some degree or another. Communications and negotiation skills are often reinforced by the group dynamic of the programs, where girls interact extensively with one another.

Girls explained that they used their newfound voice in positive ways, such as telling others about what they had learned in the program. More than half of the PRACHAR adolescent reproductive training participants that we spoke with said that they had shared the information they learned in the training with others, including their friends, mothers and later, their husbands. "It became easier for me to understand certain things and be more vocal and take decisions," one participant said, emphasizing not only understanding but also using that knowledge to influence others. Another used her newfound knowledge to convince her sisters not to have more children. "I learnt so much, I told my sisters about it and they didn't have more than two children once I explained [to] them why," she said. "Otherwise they would have had more children." Diffusion of these messages was also enhanced by the broader communications campaign, which included messages about child marriage and healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies in street theater, wall paintings, puppet shows and information, education and communications materials.

The case study that most strongly suggested changing perceptions of unmarried girls by family members was the Ishraq program. The Ishraq curriculum used a

learning approach that emphasized sharing opinions and respecting others' opinions as well as challenging others' assumptions in a non-confrontational manner. Many girls who said they had quarreled often with family members and did not know how to resolve a dispute calmly reported being able to communicate respectfully by the end of the program. By communicating better, they built new relationships with peers and enhanced their relationships with parents and family members. According to one Ishraq participant, "I respect others and others respect me... In the past I was always arguing and shouting, now I can deal with anything, I can negotiate and get along well with others."

For participants, being able to showcase their literacy, numeracy, English and social skills alters how they are viewed by their families and communities. People begin to see these girls as having potential. The way that girls communicate and express their ideas has changed the way they are seen by their family members. "At home, I am not considered as a servant anymore," one Ishraq participant reported. "Now my family takes my opinion and my advice in a lot of issues and we also share a lot of things together." Conversely, a girl who did not participate in Ishraq said that her family "never consults me or takes my opinion on any matter; it is because I am illiterate and I have no value within my home."

A staff member from the local implementing NGO described the effect of this "shift" in both appearance and self-expression, which has changed the way that she behaves and is treated by her family and by her community.

> Now girls are better... organized; they are able to express themselves. There has been a shift in the way that the girls interact with their fathers and brothers. When the father comes with the daughter to the parents' meeting at the youth center, he puts his arms around her... Girls are gaining a new sense of respect in the community. The community and neighbors are proud of her- now she is participating in Ishraq or going to school, even just carrying herself in a better way.

In the TESFA program, girls also developed important interpersonal skills. The curriculum emphasized communication skills, including problem-solving and negotiating. Many participants expressed feeling shy when they first joined these programs. That shyness, however, then gave way to confidence in having and

expressing an opinion. The experience of being with their peers in a supportive environment and discussing meaningful topics was instrumental in giving girls the courage to speak up not only within the confines of their group meetings with peers, but also more with family members, friends and community members. Girls who participated in TESFA reported that the program was instrumental in helping them to discover their voice. "Before TESFA, I was very shy and could not communicate with other people properly. Now, I can speak in front of people and do not feel shy," one of the married girls explained, succinctly capturing what many others expressed.

Enhanced Influence over Key Decisions
With enhanced resources in the form of skills and social support, and enhanced confidence and self-efficacy, girls can begin to influence key decisions in their lives. In most places around the world, marriage is a collective decision, one that is made for social, economic and cultural reasons. For the most part, in the four areas where these programs were implemented, decisions about when and whom to marry are not made by girls, but by their parents or guardians. Because their agency must be expressed through influencing others, it takes the form of "proxy agency," and when it is expressed through banding together with others, "collective agency." The knowledge, skills, support and confidence unmarried girls gained through these programs equipped them, to a limited extent, to influence decisions related to their future marriage. Married girls in the TESFA program used their new skills and knowledge to begin to influence their husbands or their in-laws on many of the key decisions that affect their lives.

Some PRACHAR training program participants recounted that they had developed skills to negotiate with their parents about the timing of their marriage. According to one participant,

> The *didis* (trainers) would tell us if we wanted to study, we would have to tell our parents that we would not get married soon. We would have to convince them. We could tell them that we would not have kids early, or that we could continue our studies even after becoming mothers since the grandparents are always there to raise them."

However, only one of the married participants said that she actually had significant input into the decision about her marriage. Two unmarried

PRACHAR participants did say that they expected to have significant input into their marriages, and that the training had provided them with information to help them convince their parents accordingly. One unmarried participant said that the training had helped her convince her parents to marry her later than her sister had married. One reason she had not married yet was because she spoke to her parents after the training: "They listened to me, before that they were not fully educated or aware. Now they know more." This same respondent said she also planned to share the information she gained in the training with her future husband.

SoFEA participants also recounted exerting an influence on others who have the power to make important decisions affecting their lives. For example, one participant described how she was able to turn down a recent marriage proposal, explaining that in order to stop it: "I shared with my mother, aunts to prevent or refuse the marriage. Even I stopped talking to my father. I forced him to agree with my view. ... I shared it with the club members too."

Collective Agency
The peer group aspect offered through the programs appeared to bolster girls' individual and collective agency, which led SoFEA participants, for instance, to band together to thwart early marriages.

Participating in the SoFEA club provided the girls not only with resources and networks to BRAC staff, as well as the *Thana Nirbahi Officer* (TNO)[4] and other important community leaders, but also instilled in the club members a shared philosophy or outlook that they can then draw upon together for collective action.

"Our club prevented many child marriages in the village," an 18-year-old club leader reported. "When the girl comes to us telling that she is not willing to get married so early, then we go to her parents/guardians to convince them. If not possible, then to the TNO, who comes along with a police force and breaks the deal." She connected the notion of a tight-knit network with the capacity to work together to help one another by drawing on other social resources.

Another club leader recounted a similar set of steps taken by club members to work together toward helping

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a fellow member avoid an early, unwanted marriage. While she described the club members approaching the parents of the girl, she also acknowledged the limits of what girls alone can do. When asked what the club can do to prevent child marriage other than calling the TNO and BRAC staff she said that members would go to the girl's parents to try to convince them. When asked if the parents listen, she said, "They won't, that is why we take the heads of the society with us. They are bound to listen to those important people."

A sense of unity in purpose, together with social capital in the form of the TNO and BRAC staff, can work to influence marriage. That said, it is not clear how sustainable a solution this is for any given girl; nor is it likely the case that every club member, upon learning of her impending marriage, would come to the club for help.

Some TESFA and PRACHAR respondents also indicated that participants and group facilitators had banded together to prevent early marriages from taking place by talking to family members or reporting such incidents to community authorities.

Enhancing Decision-Making and Communication within Marriage
As discussed in the section above, many TESFA participants began to influence more financial and other decisions within their marriage. The evaluation found that from the girls' perspectives, communication between husbands and wives improved across a number of dimensions. More of them discussed family

planning with their husbands. More of them felt that their opinions were taken into consideration. And more girls were involved in decisions about whether or not to have a child.[xx] This finding was supported by the qualitative data. Many of the participants as well as their husbands suggested that there had been changes in the extent to which couples discuss household decisions. In general, they reported that they spoke with, or mutually shared ideas about household decision-making with their husband far more than they had before TESFA.

According to one participant: "Yes, I and my husband discuss a lot about family planning and when to give birth ... I already knew about contraceptives before TESFA. However, TESFA helped me to discuss about it more and know about contraceptive methods and birth spacing more."

> My husband is also telling me that I am changed a lot since TESFA because I always tell him what I learned from TESFA. I also participate equally in decision-making processes. For instance, if he had any plan to sell any household assets I know it is my right to say that he cannot sell anything without our joint plan.

Another girl explained that she had begun to express herself more at home following the TESFA program, which had changed the way that her husband would see her: "My husband is also saying that I am managing the house better than before. Before my involvement in TESFA, he used to say that I did not have appropriate knowledge. Now, he has been appreciating my involvement in TESFA because I have started discussing how we can improve our life with him."

Husbands substantiated what the TESFA participants said. One man recounted how his wife now offers many useful suggestions for their household. He suggested that her ideas resulted from getting out of the home, meeting with others and learning from others - none of which were options for her before. "Because she participated in TESFA, she started to get out of the home and she is capable of participating in decisions," he said. "When we discuss, I cannot bring [as many] constructive ideas [as] she does. She always comes up with good suggestions."

Another husband echoed this sentiment, discussing how wives' roles have begun to change from the traditional expectations: "We used to use a proverb

that says 'women [for] the kitchen and men [for public].' After TESFA, women themselves started expressing their ideas openly in public. They have got courage; they are managing their home." This statement expresses the idea that women were not only participating more in domestic decisions, but also beginning to be seen as potential agents of change in the public sphere.

However, some girls, despite gains in negotiating and resolution skills, continued to defer final say and authority to their spouse. One TESFA participant said that after participating in the program, she and her husband "are deciding on all matters" together during conversations about how they may improve their lives. When asked what she would do if he disagreed with her, she explained she would defer to him. "I would say okay. What else can I do?"

Indeed, although discussions between husbands and wives had increased, the ultimate authority figure in the household has perhaps not changed. "After TESFA, I am involving in decision through discussion," one of the married girls said. "For instance whenever he proposes some business idea, I will agree with him because, he was a merchant and he knows business more than I do."

Other girls were more adamant about asserting themselves: "After TESFA I am able to communicate with my husband without problem," a participant stated. "Before, everything had to be done according to his decision. Before, I was confronting him instead of trying to discuss with him. Now we discuss many issues."

When asked what she would do if he didn't agree with her suggestions, she responded: "He cannot do anything that I did not agree on it. If he continues resisting my ideas, I will use my maximum effort to convince him. If I am not successful to convince him, I will use our families and friends to mediate between us."

While the durability and longer-term impact of these shifts in perception on timing and quality of marriage are not clear, the evidence from these case studies suggest that girls' participation in programs, particularly longer-term programs in which others are engaged and involved, can help to open up small spaces for girls to delay marriage or improve their position within marriage. As girls gain small achievements, such as stating their preferences to their parents, or participating more in household decisions, they can gain more confidence and access new resources to make greater achievements.
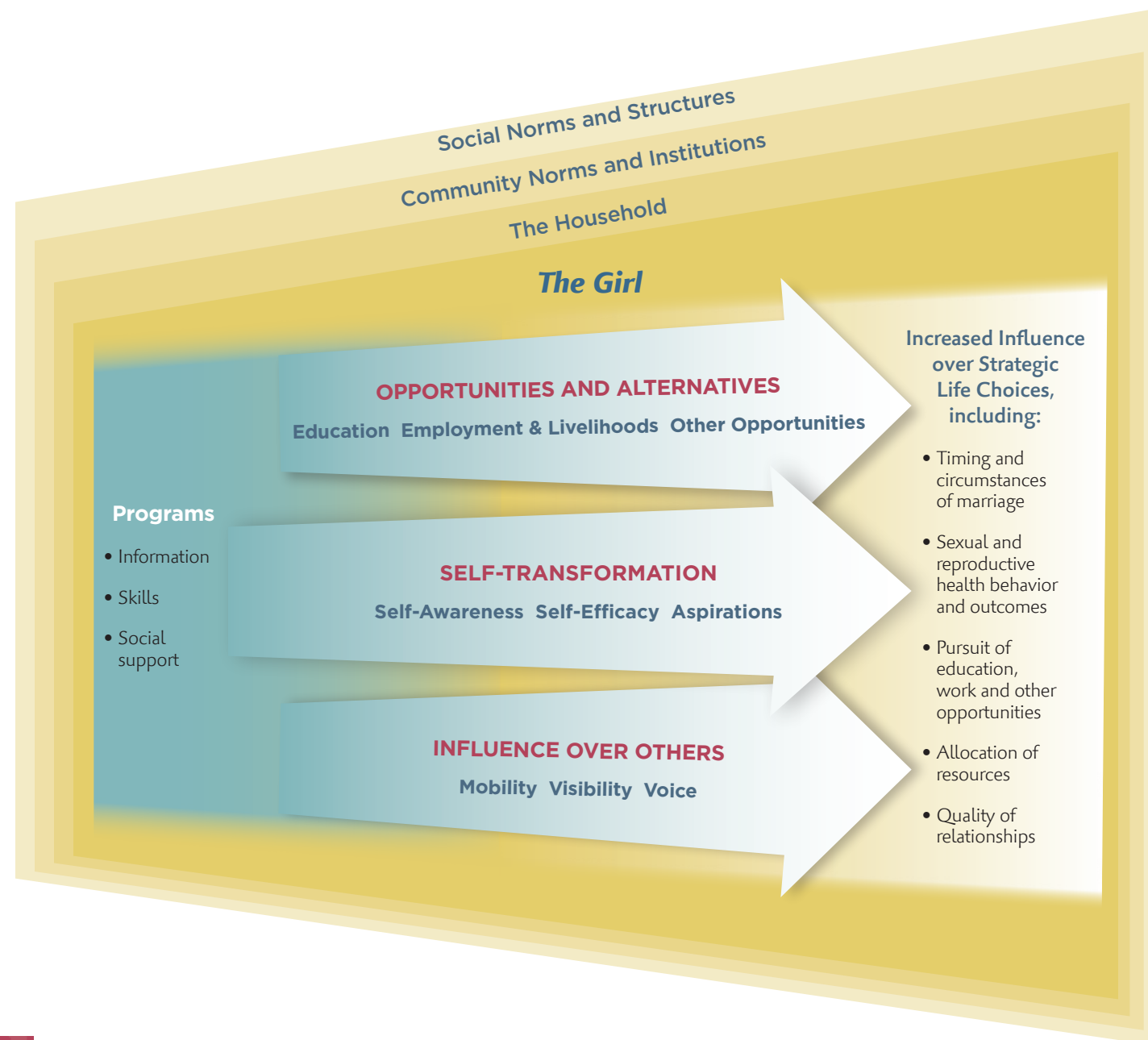
Summary of Pathways

These case studies demonstrate that programs can expand the girls' ability to make strategic life choices regarding marriage by increasing access to critical resources, such as information, skills and social support. The acquisition and adoption of these resources then serve as the catalyst for three interdependent pathways. The first and most fundamental pathway is an internal transformation in the girl participant, wherein she builds self-awareness about her rights to opportunities and alternative choices and absorbs new skills and information about herself and the world around her. This transformation is aided by a second pathway that provides access to alternatives to marriage, such as education or economic opportunities. Finally, through her internal transformation and by virtue of her participation in activities, she can act to influence others' perceptions about her (as well as about girls, more broadly), and can influence strategic decisions that will affect her transition to adulthood, such as the timing of her marriage.

Pathways to Empowerment through Girl-Centered Programs

Social Norms and Structures

Community Norms and Institutions

The Household

The Girl

Programs
- Information
- Skills
- Social support

OPPORTUNITIES AND ALTERNATIVES

Education Employment & Livelihoods Other Opportunities

SELF-TRANSFORMATION

Self-Awareness Self-Efficacy Aspirations

INFLUENCE OVER OTHERS

Mobility Visibility Voice

Increased Influence over Strategic Life Choices, including:
- Timing and circumstances of marriage
- Sexual and reproductive health behavior and outcomes
- Pursuit of education, work and other opportunities
- Allocation of resources
- Quality of relationships

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Taken together, the case studies suggest that as girls follow these pathways they are making multiple, successive achievements. Girls' preliminary achievements may appear modest, but still indicate significant shifts in their capabilities. For example, a girl who has never participated actively in household discussions may express her opinions to her parents. In doing this, she may gain confidence and may begin to change how her family members see her. As a girl builds her "power within" and gains more trust and respect from her parents, she positions herself to access more resources and enhance her self-efficacy, which allows her to achieve more ambitious goals. Her options, opportunities and aspirations expand as she progresses through cycles of empowerment. When programs support girls through this process, they help to promote the continual expansion of girls' capabilities. By formulating and acting on a series of progressively strategic choices as detailed along these pathways, girls can contribute to significant changes in their lives including improved relationships, increased educational attainment, increased financial self-sufficiency and control over resources, and even increased decision-making power in the timing of their marriages, or of other girls' marriages in their communities.

This individual process is not occurring in a vacuum. A girl is situated within multiple social structures, from her family to her neighborhood to her nation. As a girl's opportunities expand, she can increasingly influence individuals and institutions in the environment around her. As she gains resources and more agency, she can not only use these to improve her own life, but may be able to benefit her family and her community. Additional interventions at the household, community and societal levels surrounding girls are also critical to enhance their opportunities to continue to expand their achievements, as we address more below.

Beyond Individual Empowerment

As we illustrate in the figure on page 22, individual pathways to empowerment are situated in a broader socio-ecological environment. Girls rely on others with greater legal rights, capabilities and power to negotiate successfully for their own life goals. Marriage decisions, in particular, are based on a variety of economic, social and cultural systems, which are also evolving. Parents, too, often have limited options. Even when girls' capabilities are significantly enhanced, and they are able to influence the attitudes and behaviors of people in their lives, their ability to negotiate the decisions about if, when and whom to marry are extremely limited in the four settings in which these programs have been implemented.

Without concerted efforts to change the social, economic, cultural and political factors that largely govern individual preferences and decisions, the impact of girls' empowerment programs will be limited. Most of these programs do attempt to influence, to some extent, the enabling environment in which girls live. While our study primarily focused on the individual empowerment aspects of programs rather than household/community engagement components, we offer some insights on factors beyond the individual girl that emerged as particularly salient in these four contexts.

Socio-Economic Factors
Throughout the world, and certainly in these four settings, poverty and economic instability are major drivers of early marriage. In resource-constrained settings such as these, parents often have limited options to provide for their children and to secure their futures. In addition, due to broader discriminatory norms and structures, girls may be seen as providing less value to the natal household.

For example, in the PRACHAR program areas in Bihar, participants in focus groups explained that economic factors are among the most important factors determining the timing and circumstances of marriage. Financial insecurity can drive families to marry daughters earlier or later. If families lack resources to pay for a wedding and for the dowry, they may have to delay the marriage later than they would like. On the other hand, financial concerns can also drive the age of marriage downward, especially when parents have multiple daughters to marry. Dowry, paid by the bride's family to the groom's family, is often less for younger girls. These economic factors, perpetuated by the

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practice of dowry, limit the ability of girls to negotiate for their marriages. One respondent (a non-participant), married at age 19, explains why she was not asked, but rather told, about her marriage:

> See, we do not belong to a rich family. I was the eldest. If I had not married then, my family would be tense and my younger siblings' education would suffer. And my mother wanted time to get me married to a guy with a job. We realized if we would refuse then, two years later their demand would have increased and it would be hard for us to meet that.

According to this young woman, being able to influence the decision about marriage is a privilege of girls from wealthier families. This perception is echoed by another unmarried participant who expects to be able to articulate her own desires regarding her marriage, but recognizes that this is not the case for girls who come from extremely poor families.

> In many families, the financial situation is so bad that they have to marry the girl somehow, to anybody who comes their way. Nobody thinks about how the girl would lead her life if the man or his family isn't suitable. This is the problem in our society, nobody thinks of how the girl would manage.

Most of the programs we studied did not directly address the household economic insecurity or the financial transactions that perpetuate child marriage. While the SoFEA program did offset the extent to which girls are seen as financial burdens, this approach is unlikely to fundamentally improve the economic status of her household. More programs are being developed and evaluated to assess how transfers in the form of cash and other assets, for the girl and/or her household, may change the calculus for parents who are considering how to invest limited resources.[xxi]

Socio-Cultural Influences, Especially Gender Norms

Along with poverty, some of the most pervasive drivers of child marriage across contexts are gendered social norms that discriminate against girls and women. Marriage is one of the principal gendered institutions that organize and maintain relationships between women and men, often to women's disadvantage. While gender norms are manifested differently in diverse contexts, girls and women typically have less input into decisions regarding their marriage, and adolescent girls in particular also have less power within their marriage.

Our case studies show that girl-focused programming can only modestly influence such norms. At the individual level, these programs can encourage individual girls to think critically about and challenge harmful gender norms in their own lives. By extension, the enhanced empowerment of girls can change the way that their family and community members see and value them. However, it is unlikely that individual approaches alone will transform deeply entrenched gender norms.

Many of the respondents in our case studies discussed shifting gender roles in their communities, underscoring both opportunities and challenges. In Bihar, many respondents talked about girls' increasing aspirations and growing equality between girls and boys. In Comilla, Bangladesh, girls and their mothers described a transformation in just one generation, with respect to schooling and then employment expectations for girls as compared to boys. Families are increasingly interested in supporting their daughters' education alongside their sons toward decent work.

While social norms seem to be shifting in these communities, a girl's marriageability is still her biggest asset and opportunity in life. Because of these entrenched social, economic and cultural factors, programs that seek only to delay marriage do not *necessarily* lead to longer-term empowerment. In most cases, longer-term support is required to ensure that a delay is one that is advantageous for girls, and that allows them to acquire additional resources and agency to influence not only the timing and other circumstances of marriage, but also other strategic life choices that follow.

Approaches that use broader community education and mobilization components, such as the PRACHAR program did in Bihar and the TESFA program in Amhara, are more likely to influence changes in norms than those that are only focused on girls themselves. Insights can also be gained from Tostan's Community Empowerment Program, which uses a human rights-based community education curriculum to instigate community-led change toward the eradication of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage.[xxii]

Child marriage programs can be enhanced by integrating more gender-transformative elements, which are those that seek to transform gender roles and promote more equitable relationships. These approaches include but also go beyond work with individuals, toward "transforming the underlying social structures, policies and broadly held social norms that perpetuate gender inequality."[xxiii]

Institutional and Structural Inequality

Our earlier analysis of child marriage programs noted that many of them used "horizontal approaches," which employ multiple strategies to address child marriage and related objectives, with a focus on individual attitudes, practices and behaviors, with less emphasis on enhancing structures or institutions that currently exclude or discriminate against girls.

One particularly relevant institution for adolescents is schooling. When it is safe, accessible and of adequate quality, schooling is the ideal alternative to marriage for girls in most settings. Secondary school, in particular, provides important opportunities and empowerment-related benefits for girls, as reflected in discussions with girls, women, men and boys in all of the program areas. Both Ishraq and SoFEA supported girls' school-readiness and performance, and community outreach activities in several programs encouraged parents to send their daughters to school. While beneficial for these individual girls and families, broader efforts are required to ensure that schools adequately serve and empower all girls at-risk of child marriage and also help ensure that married girls and young mothers can stay in or return to school.

Also, girls' access to health services, particularly sexual and reproductive health information and services, is fundamental to their health and well-being before and during married life. However, girls lack access to even basic information about their health in all four of these settings. Each of these programs has sexual and reproductive health components, which are particularly emphasized in the PRACHAR adolescent reproductive health training program and the TESFA program.

Enhancing both demand, as well as availability and quality of sexual and reproductive health services, are critical for an effective response to child marriage.

Finally, child marriage tends to co-exist with other human rights violations, that are perpetuated by legal systems that discriminate against women and against children. It is important that along with changing individual attitudes, behaviors and practices, transforming norms, and enhancing alternatives for girls, that the broader enabling legal and policy environment is enhanced. This requires going beyond just creating better laws, and ensuring that the laws are implemented and enforced. In all four of these countries, the minimum legal age of marriage for girls is 18; nevertheless, a significant proportion of the girls in these countries are married each year. Our 2011 review identified "fostering an enabling legal and policy framework" as a key strategy for child marriage. It is an important component of a holistic and coordinated approach to ending child marriage, though insufficient on its own for changing practices.

Implications for Future Research and Programs

Over the last two decades, and particularly in the last five years, the number of programs to prevent child marriage and support married girls has grown significantly, providing a solid and expanding base of programs from which to scale, refine and asses our programming approaches. However, we have lacked a nuanced understanding of *how* programs work.

Girl-focused programming is a critical strategy, for both pragmatic and principled reasons. While entire communities are negatively affected by child marriage, girls bear the greatest burden of its negative effects. Girl-centered programming can redress the injustices that are perpetuated against girls and can also equip them to be positive agents of change in their own lives. While girl-focused programs have been better-evaluated than other approaches, there has been an absence of clarity on exactly if and how such programs empower girls, and if so, how this empowerment process leads to changes in attitudes and practices related to child marriage.

A single program can help to catalyze empowerment by providing resources that can transform girls' perceptions of themselves, facilitate meaningful alternatives and additional opportunities beyond marriage, and enhance girls' ability to influence others — all of which

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expand their current and future ability to make and act on strategic decisions that affect their lives. When girls are empowered to influence the timing and circumstances of their marriage, or to improve their status and relationships within marriage, they are better equipped to control a series of important life choices that follow. With these achievements, girls and women can potentially access other opportunities, such as higher levels of education, paid work, or public office, which will transform their lives and which are likely to positively influence their communities.

Based on our review of dozens of girl-focused programs, with a focus on the four programs featured in this report, the following have emerged as the core components of girl-focused empowerment programs:

- Providing information that will build knowledge of one's self and environment, including sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- Enhancing girls' critical thinking, interpersonal and communication skills, and other practical skills that will benefit her and her households both in the short and long-term;
- Providing ongoing social support through group-based programming in safe spaces;
- Promoting girls' agency by emphasizing goal-setting and self-efficacy;
- Facilitating alternatives to marriage, especially school and livelihood opportunities;
- Integrating girl-focused activities with those that enhance communication with and support from her family and community; and
- Using gender-transformative approaches, which seek to reshape gender roles and promote more equitable relationships among women, men, boys and girls.

It is neither realistic nor desirable that girls *alone* can transform their lives and change deeply entrenched norms and practices. Girls' empowerment activities should also be accompanied by other activities that engage and mobilize gatekeepers, shift norms, alleviate economic drivers of child marriage and improve institutions, laws and policies. Understanding how to foster safe, acceptable and empowering alternatives to marriage, how to most effectively engage parents, boys, men and in-laws in a collective process of change, how to address other legal, social, cultural and economic avenues for protecting children and empowering women and girls are all critical considerations.

There is no "one size fits all" program model that can be replicated in multiple settings, because the specific

factors that make girls vulnerable to child marriage are complex and variable. Understanding the specific social, cultural, economic, religious and political factors that contribute to the practice of child marriage and gender-based inequality is a critical first step for building effective programs.

Ending child marriage requires a long-term vision of success, which should go beyond merely addressing the age at which girls marry. While age is one marker of consent, and an indicator of multiple important outcomes, a slight shift in the age of marriage alone will not necessarily transform gendered roles and expectations within marriage, or within the broader community. In isolation, a delay in the age of marriage is an insufficient marker of meaningful and necessary progress for girls' empowerment or gender equality.

Girls Not Brides and its global members have developed a theory of change for ending child marriage that has an ultimate vision of "**a world without child marriage, where girls and women enjoy equal status with boys and men and are able to achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives.**"[xxiv] In order to realize such a vision, sustained commitment and coordination across human rights and development sectors are required. No single program will get us there; however, having this as the ultimate destination will help us design more ambitious and more effective programs.

If we want to better understand what works and why, we should invest in evaluations that track change in multiple dimensions over time. Our original systematic review identified only about two dozen child marriage programs that had been evaluated, and the rigor and quality of these evaluations is highly variable. This evidence base is growing, but it is still nascent. To continue to encourage new investments and increase their effectiveness, we should invest in rigorous, mixed-method evaluations that tell us what works, for whom and why.

The number of programs to address child marriage has grown significantly in the last five to ten years. However, this growth is still not keeping pace with the needs of the millions of girls who are at risk of child marriage every year, and the tens of millions of girls who are already married. The programs featured in this report demonstrate the encouraging potential of existing programs, and inspire us to do more to fulfill the immense potential of the girls and communities that they serve.

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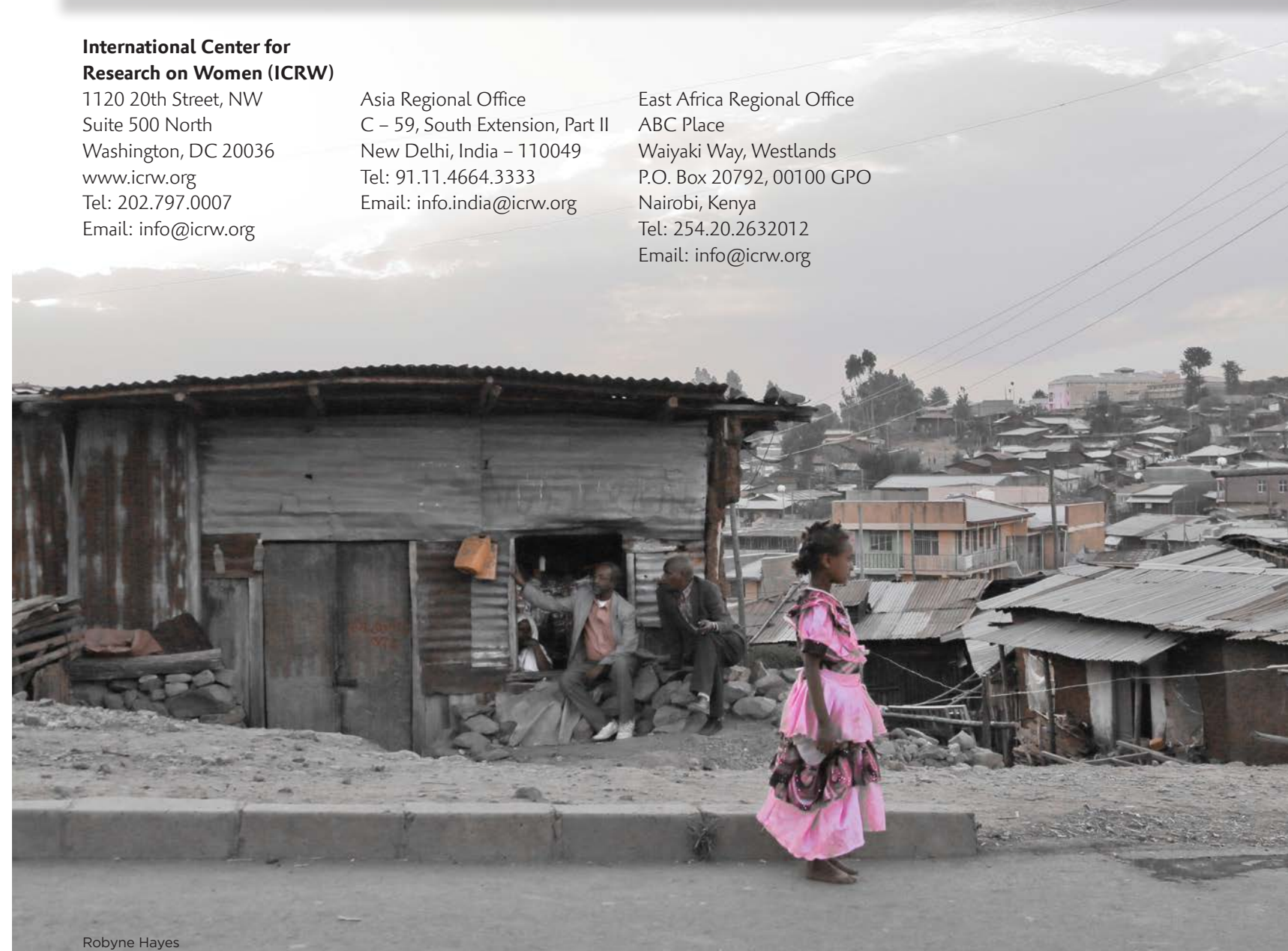
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