What Works for Teachers to
EMPOWER GIRLS
Findings from a qualitative research in India

A POLICY BRIEF

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Education is the most significant and strongest tool that can help achieve empowerment for girls. Various policy frameworks and programs are now set in this direction, and demand creating a positive environment for girls.

Government of India's strategeis (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan[2] and Kasturba Gandhi Ballika Vidyalaya[3]) have improved access to girls, especially for those coming from disadvantaged communities, but have had limited impact as they do not necessarily address the web of patriarchal social practices, gender stereotypes, attitudinal barriers, and other socio-economic constraints.

This raises a pertinent issue—**how should education be designed to ensure it is empowering for girls? To what extent do teachers have a role to play in this process, and what would enable teachers, in turn, to play that role more effectively?** These questions constitute the genesis of this qualitative research, the findings of which have informed this policy brief.

"If you educate a woman, you educate a family;

if you educate a girl, you educate the future."[1]

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[1] Quote from Queen Rania of Jordan: involved in advocacy work in education, health, community empowerment, youth, cross-cultural dialogue and micro-finance

[2] Government of India scheme aimed at the universalisation of elementary education, making free and compulsory education to children between the ages of 6 to 14 (estimated to be 205 million children in 2001).

[3] Scheme for setting up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging to the SC, ST, OBC and minority communities, implemented in educationally backward blocks having female rural literacy below and gender gap in literacy above the national averages.

About the Study

This qualitative research studied three residential and non-residential approaches to empower adolescent girls from disadvantaged communities in three different geographies in India. Three different contexts, tribal, urban and Dalit, include non-governmental approach in Uttar Pradesh and Government run KGBVs in Jharkhand and Rajasthan.

Primary and secondary sources for data collection involved literature review, a varied set of instruments such as school profile, interview schedules, focus group discussion, classroom observation schedules and case studies.

KEY FINDINGS

Education programs, with provision of all basic facilities, enabled girls' access to education

Access to safe and secure school and the all found support (uniforms, toiletries, food, medical care and a regular stipend) were motivating for girls from underprivileged communities to enroll and complete education.

In isolated geographies, residential schools provided security to girls, freed them from family responsibilities and support their full attention to their development.

- *Convenient school timings were essential to facilitate regular attendance:* With wage-earning being a necessity for most girls, particularly in urban slum, afternoon school shifts facilitated girls to attend school regularly.

- *Financial support made education affordable for girls:* Need and merit based scholarships provided girls a sense of security. Savings and interest free loans to continue higher/professional education were motivators.

- *A sensitive teacher impacted retention:* Girls acknowledged that they stayed in school because the teachers were familiar with their home backgrounds, related teaching to social and geographical context, listened to their experiences, encouraged questioning, and used participatory methods.

- *Vocational training provided future aspirations:* Girls recognized co-curricular and vocational activities instilled in them confidence and a sense. Self-defense, archery, mushroom cultivation, career counseling and mentoring gave an informed direction to girls' aspirations and future.

- *Gender-focused curriculum and critical feminist pedagogy broke gender stereotypes:* This empowered girls to move beyond mere education related challenges and take on larger societal issues of gender differentiation that persisted in their communities.

- *Platforms for Life skills development contributed to leadership and empowerment:* Children's cabinet, Adolescent collectives, Legal Literacy clubs developed confidence, communication skills and leadership qualities in girls, making them conscious of oppressive social norms, gender relations, unequal power structures, and prepared them to exercise their own life choices.

- *Close Community School relationship was a positive variable for girls' empowerment:* Influencing parents and community on critical gender issues and making them socially aware, supported girls to complete their education and pursue careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Ensuring the Seven Principles

What works for teachers highlights the need to nurture and strengthen teachers empowerment as a prerequisite to girls empowerment, It identifies seven key principles that education systems can adopt to enable teachers in India to be effective agents of social change and architects of girls' empowerment.

1. **Create a sense of a community engaged in a common mission of social transformation.** Teacher development programs and teacher management processes must shift focus from mere knowledge acquisition, pedagogical skills or disciplining measures, to evoke a sense of larger purpose and a social mission to empower girls in India.

2. **Move beyond literacy and numeracy.** This approach moves beyond academic skills to life skills, where teachers provide mentoring and support to girls to develop their self-esteem, confidence, and sense of optimism in being able to exercise their own agency. This approach has more significance than classroom lectures in girls' capability to determine their life's choices.

3. **Develop an empowering curriculum.** This curriculum embeds social reality of girls, and demands situating intensive teacher-student interactions within and outside classrooms that challenge existing power structures and relationships.

4. **Ensure teachers are sensitive to social and gender norms.** The teacher development programs must prioritize gender sensitization across training of administration, School Management Committee members to ensure a supportive environment for the teachers.

5. **Ensure teachers' autonomy and flexibility with the curriculum.** Encouraging teacher autonomy to pace their own teaching-learning processes to accommodate a more holistic curriculum, and to create the

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES
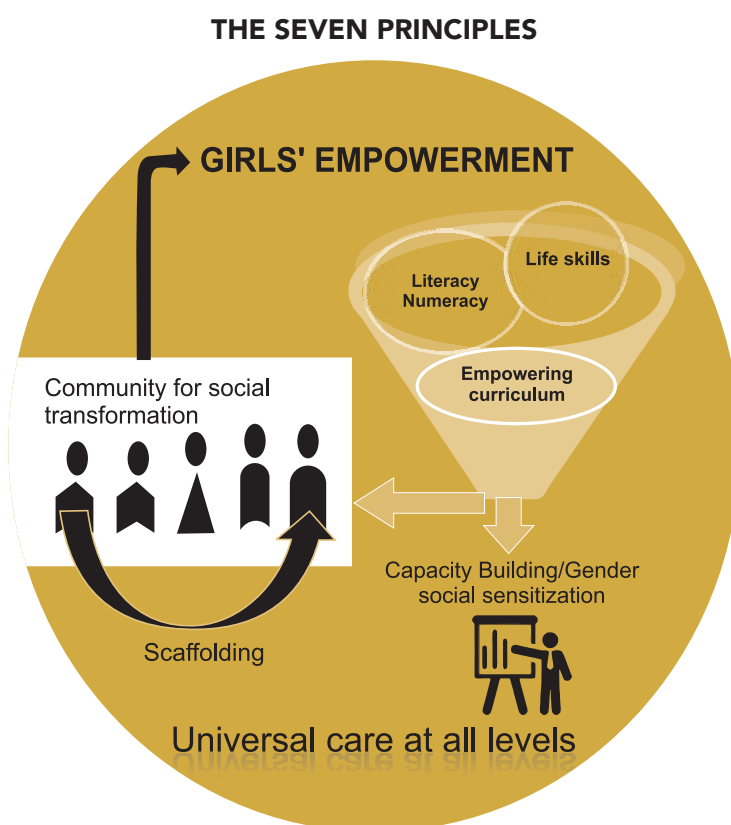
time, space needed for meaningful, and empowering dialogic activities with the girls.

6. **Ensure scaffolding for teachers through effective institutional provisions.** This requires a comprehensive teacher development strategy focused on strengthening teachers' agency through leadership, learning, training and ensuring their participation in decisions affecting their professional lives.

7. **Foster a universe of care at and across all levels of the system.** Nurturing non-hierarchical relationships built on trust, value, and compassion creates in teachers a sense of pride and ownership of the school program. Giving teachers' right to participate in determining school policies, exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach, influences their ability to influence change and affect student outcomes.
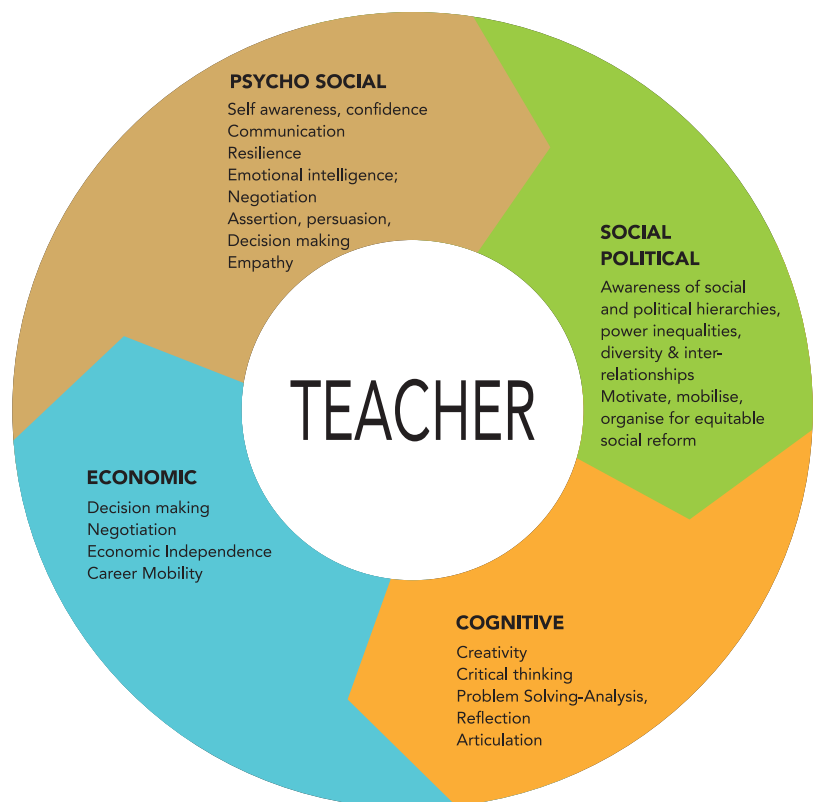
The above principles—based on equity, diversity, and rights—function together to empower teachers to play an empowering role for girls. As empowered role models, they can then touch the lives of girls in a number of ways and help them overcome challenges of marginalization, discrimination, and subordination.

GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT

The research proposes a conceptual definition for girls' empowerment, as: *Girl's agency or the ability to analyze, decide and act on decisions as a girl/woman in relation to the structures, norms and ideologies on gender relations.*

TEACHER EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

PSYCHO SOCIAL
Self awareness, confidence
Communication
Resilience
Emotional intelligence;
Negotiation
Assertion, persuasion,
Decision making
Empathy

SOCIAL POLITICAL
Awareness of social and political hierarchies, power inequalities, diversity & inter-relationships
Motivate, mobilise, organise for equitable social reform

TEACHER

ECONOMIC
Decision making
Negotiation
Economic Independence
Career Mobility

COGNITIVE
Creativity
Critical thinking
Problem Solving-Analysis,
Reflection
Articulation