

নারীদের শিক্ষিত করুন,
আগামি প্রজন্মকে শিক্ষিত করার জন্য।

নিষ্ঠা

যায়।...

বিবেকানন্দ

শালাদা নয়।

পাড়া-কাজকর্ম

র পায়ে দাঁড়বার

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নিষ্ঠা

SUMMARY REPORT

MAPPING INCREMENTAL CHANGE IN A COMPLEX SOCIETY

Working with Young People Confronting
Early Marriage in India

AMERICAN
JEWISH
WORLD
SERVICE

This report was written by Kat Watson. It is a summary of a larger report co-authored by Advanced Centre for Women's Studies Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Awaaze-Niswaan, Amra Padatik, Astitva, Azad Foundation, Bhumika, Bhartiya Gramin Adivasi Vikas Sanghathan (BGAVS), Feminist Approach to Technology (FAT), Humsafar, Jeevika, Kislay, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS), Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM), Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti (MJAS), Mohammad Bazar Backward Classes Development Society (MBBCDS), Nishtha, Praajak, Rajsamand Jan Vikas Sansthan (RJVS), Ruby Social Welfare Society (Ruby SWS), Sahajini Shiksha Kendra (SSK), Sahiyar, Sadbhavana Trust, Samvada, Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha (SANGRAM), Shaheen, SETU, Thoughtshop Foundation, Vanangana, Vikalp, Voice4Girls and American Jewish World Service.



Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences and American Jewish World Service. 2023. *Summary Report Mapping Incremental Change in a Complex Society: Working with young people confronting early marriage in India*. New York: American Jewish World Service.

COVER Girls in West Bengal march for gender equality. These girls are standing up for their rights in "collectives" run by Nishtha. *Photo by Sara Hylton*

RIGHT In Rajasthan, aspiring journalist Pooja Gurjar (left) interviews a woman in her community, using reporting skills she learned from Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti (MJAS). *Photo by Deepak Sharma*







THE SOLUTION TO THE POLLUTION

Handwritten notes on a yellow poster, partially legible.

Computer Rules

- 1. Computer को सुरक्षित रखें।
- 2. बिना अनुमति के किसी भी चीज को न हटाएं।
- 3. बिना अनुमति के किसी भी चीज को न स्पर्श करें।
- 4. बिना अनुमति के किसी भी चीज को न उधार लें।
- 5. बिना अनुमति के किसी भी चीज को न दे दें।
- 6. बिना अनुमति के किसी भी चीज को न बेचें।
- 7. बिना अनुमति के किसी भी चीज को न खरीदें।
- 8. बिना अनुमति के किसी भी चीज को न लें।
- 9. बिना अनुमति के किसी भी चीज को न दें।
- 10. बिना अनुमति के किसी भी चीज को न हार दें।

OPERATING SYSTEM - OPERATING SYSTEM SOFTWARE
OPERATING SYSTEM SOFTWARE है जो कि कंप्यूटर को चलाता है।
इसके बिना कंप्यूटर काम नहीं कर सकता है।
इसके बिना हमें काम नहीं कर सकता है।

INTRODUCTION

All too often, measurement frameworks are defined in a top-down manner and are closely linked to expectations that change happens along a standardized trajectory that can be quantitatively measured using “rigorous” methods over short periods of time. Underlying this is the impulse to aggregate change at national, regional and/or global levels, which requires change to be pegged to universally applicable indicators that may or may not resonate with grassroots organizations across contexts. While such indicators have their own role to play, a narrow approach that includes only such indicators does not afford space for organizations to report meaningfully on change as it is witnessed, nor does it allow for deviations from prescribed pathways that are needed to address backlash, negative impacts, reversals and unanticipated events (Tata Institute of Social Sciences [TISS], 2017). In their failure to account for how small, incremental shifts represent big wins, these approaches do not bring anyone closer to understanding how social change actually happens.

“There is also a constant pressure to measure positive change. The entire process of tracking change is viewed as reflecting growth and the good health of the development intervention and requires evidence of smooth progression. Over the years, there has been a tendency to use linear logic models to understand and conceptualize interventions, even though the reality is not linear or graphic but complex, messy, and not always predictable.” (TISS, 2017, p. 18)

Responding to these dynamics, American Jewish World Service (AJWS) and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences partnered with 29 grassroots organizations¹ across eight states to develop and implement a measurement framework for the changes affected by programs addressing the root causes of child and early marriage² in India.

LEFT In Delhi, Feminist Approach to Technology (FAT) empowers girls to develop their leadership skills and pursue studies in science, math, engineering and technology. *Photo by Sasithon Pooviriyakul*

“The initiative also emerged from the belief that, as feminists have long averred, marriage is an institution governed by its foundation in diverse social structures—such as patriarchy, caste, sexuality, religion, family, and class—that need to be considered when judging the success or failure of community-based interventions.”
(TISS, 2022, p. 9)

The project—entitled “Mapping incremental change in complex societies”—shifted the focus from traditional age-based child marriage indicators to measuring deeper, meaningful transformations in girls’ lives that center their agency. Operating from the perspective that those closest to the issue are best placed to define success, the organizations selected their own unique progress markers, accounting for the complex realities of their respective contexts. From analysis of the shifts—whether big or small—documented by all 29 organizations, a framework emerged that captures the complex, nonlinear nature of social change as well as discernible pathways through five “domains of change.”

This brief provides a summary overview of the project’s process and findings, the full breadth of which can be found in a comprehensive report published by TISS in 2022.

¹Awaaze-Niswaan, Amra Padatik, Astitva, Azad Foundation, Bhumika, Bhartiya Gramin Adivasi Vikas Sanghathan (BGAVS), Feminist Approach to Technology (FAT), Humsafar, Jeevika, Kislay, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS), Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM), Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti (MJAS), Mohammad Bazar Backward Classes Development Society (MBBCDS), Nishtha, Praajak, Rajsamand Jan Vikas Sansthan (RJVS), Ruby Social Welfare Society (Ruby SWS), Sahajini Shiksha Kendra (SSK), Sahiyar, Sadbhavana Trust, Samvada, Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha (SANGRAM), Shaheen, SETU, Thoughtshop Foundation, Vanangana, Vikalp and Voice4Girls.

²In Indian law, “child marriage” refers to marriages that involve a girl below the age of 18 and/or a boy below the age of 21. However, common usage of this term is different from its legal meaning. Typically, “child marriage” is used to refer to marriages that occur when one party or both parties is a young adolescent (under the age of 15), while “early marriage” is used to refer to marriages of those aged 15 to 17. Given the resonance of these two terms in the context of India, the melded term “child and early marriage” is used for this brief.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in three phases. In the first phase (2014–2015), TISS worked with 16 grassroots organizations with which AJWS had partnered to address child and early marriage in India, primarily to train them on the outcome mapping methodology. Together, they developed a monitoring framework and data collection tools. In the second phase (2016–2017), an expanded group of 29 grassroots organizations put the framework and tools to use over the course of a year of program implementation. In a final phase (2018 onward), TISS worked on analyzing, meaning-making and writing up the results of the study. Over the three phases, at least eight convenings were held to learn, share and dialogue with the entire cohort of participating organizations. Due to disruptions at university campuses across India followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the final report was not published until early 2022.

All 29 grassroots organizations were implementing programs to address the root causes of child and early marriage (especially gender inequality, control over girls' sexuality and the compulsory nature of marriage in India), although with different entry points relevant to their respective contexts. Half (15) of the organizations were women's rights groups focused on empowerment, and some of these had expanded their focus to girls recently with the support of AJWS. Three organizations had a specific focus on girls/young women, while six organizations worked with both young women and young men. Another five organizations worked in the community with a focus on labor and workers' rights. While each of the 29 organizations had their own strategic focus, they all worked through collectives³ in their targeted communities.

Outcome mapping was chosen as the primary methodology for the study given its sensitivity to social complexities and the ability to chart change

³The term “collective” refers to a group of regular members who come together for activities that may include, inter alia, education, perspective building or activism. Collectives take various forms depending on the context and programming; for example, they can be community groups or groups brought together regularly in schools or workplaces for training.

through processes in a graduated manner. Outcome mapping as a methodology relies strongly on the *contribution* of actors within a larger system to a particular issue or objective, rather than focusing on *attribution*. Within the process of outcome mapping, *outcomes* are defined as “changes in the behavior, relationships, activities, or actions of the people, groups, and organizations that a program works with directly.” (TISS, 2017, p. 19) Progress markers—a term used interchangeably with “indicators” —are divided into three levels that reflect the likelihood of change occurring: 1) changes that organizations would *expect to see*, which reflect the results of organizations' core efforts; 2) those that they would *like to see*, which are slightly more complex in nature; and 3) changes that they would *love to see*, which display a greater degree of complexity and lead more directly to the attainment of the outcome challenge (TISS, 2017).

The outcome mapping process consisted of four steps. The **first step** was the design of an outcome mapping framework, which was grounded in feminist theories of social change and reflective of the work of grassroots organizations. Drawing from the diverse experiences of a variety of stakeholders and consensus generated through workshops, an outcome mapping framework consisting of six outcome categories and a “menu” of progress markers was developed at the organization and collective levels (TISS, 2017). **Next**, each of the 29 organizations customized their own set of outcomes and progress markers in a manner that was representative, realistic and based on their location, history and vision for change. TISS provided one-on-one support through field visits and workshops with each and every organization.

“The participatory and dialogic mode—iterative field visits, introducing the method of outcome mapping, implementing the tools to capture change—enabled change to be documented as people experienced it. Change was not inferred or construed by those in more powerful situations, even the researchers.”
(TISS, 2022, p. 10)

Who decides about
marriage?
WE decide, WE
decide !



Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM)

In Maharashtra, a community rally organized by Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM), aims to sensitize the community against child marriage, dowry and domestic violence. Shital Waikar (pictured with sign), is one of the youth leaders. *Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik*

The **third step** was data collection. Over the period of one year, the 29 grassroots organizations collected data using two methods: 1) a journal for monthly recordings of activities and quarterly reports on their chosen outcome areas; and 2) a storytelling tool to capture stories of change. Journal entries and stories of change were shared with TISS each quarter. **Lastly**, TISS undertook exhaustive analysis of the data from all 29 grassroots organizations. An analytical framework and codebook were developed to classify the various types of changes that had been documented by organizations using a “root cause approach.”

A FEMINIST FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

From the analysis, overlapping and intersecting themes emerged in relation to the pathways to change taken by the grassroots organizations that helped them to challenge the root causes of early and child marriage in India. These were aggregated into five broad “domains of change”:

1. Creating of safe, dialogic spaces
2. Developing critical perspectives for transformation
3. Bargaining with patriarchy
4. Empowering young girls economically
5. Building feminist solidarity and networks

These domains are broad areas of change within which organizations were able to observe shifts—large and small—in relation to the social structures that uphold child and early marriage. While interconnected, these domains do not follow a linear logic; however, addressing them all was imperative to the incremental processes of social transformation that all 29 organizations aimed to achieve, regardless of location or programmatic focus.

The richness of what emerged from this project lies in the space afforded to grassroots organizations to define, measure and observe changes in ways that made sense to them. Using the changes observed by organizations and collectives as a starting point, the domains of change emerged as patterns that help make sense of the complexity inherent in transformative programming. While not a blueprint for

future measurement frameworks, the domains act as a reference for such frameworks and for understanding how, in complex societies, change occurs in nonlinear, non-universal pathways. Indeed, a feminist approach to incremental change is almost certain to include pathways of change that cut across all five of these domains. See page 15 for a visual summary of the framework.

CREATING SAFE, DIALOGIC SPACES

“Women and girls in particular crave a safe and separate space where they can talk about personal choices, desires and aspirations, share experiences of violence and think of how to negotiate and resist them.” (TISS, 2022, p. 36)

One of the most enduring feminist strategies is mobilization through the creation of safe spaces wherein groups of people can share experiences, access support and build friendships and solidarity. Within these spaces, relationships grow out of the one-to-one interactions with young women and girls, as well as followup when they do not attend meetings, and connections made with other girls. Over the long term, safe spaces have the potential to transform into dialogic spaces, where young women and girls can speak their minds freely, critically reflect and seek support; eventually, they serve as launchpads for collective action.

“It is not only about creating physical spaces that can be deemed ‘safe’—a strategy that has received much traction in work on girls’ empowerment. It is also about creating the dynamics within that space for the dialogue, conversation and critical thinking that are crucial to propel change.” (TISS, 2022, p. 34)

Safe spaces provided girls and young women a respite free of the restrictions and surveillance they face at home; nurturing these spaces required both tangible (creating physical space) and intangible (fostering belonging) strategies implemented intentionally and continually over time by organizations. The physical spaces utilized were very context- and resource-dependent. Some organizations repurposed existing

Figure 1: Pathway toward transformation of a safe space into a safe, dialogic space.



Blue circles indicate creation of tangible elements; pink circles are intangible elements

Example: VOICE4GIRLS

In the Voice4Girls camp, in which 1,200 students participated during the project's first quarter, the organization's journal entry referred to discussion on gender equality and gender roles within the family. A similar camp organized in the second quarter incorporated information on sexual and reproductive health, mental health, gender identity and sexuality. The journal reflected a change in the young girls' confidence, from talking about aspirations of financial independence in the first quarter to showing willingness to negotiate with family and overcome challenges (gaining autonomy, respect and control over their bodies) in later quarters. Girls were also interested in learning more about the LGBT community after they came to understand the difference between sex and gender during the camps.

Photo courtesy of Voice4Girls



spaces for use; for example, Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha (SANGRAM) established a safe, physical space for sex workers which also served as a tuition center for their children. While for some, the safe spaces were always in the same location—such as Feminist Approach to Technology (FAT)’s study center—others rotated the location of their safe spaces to wherever they were conducting their case work, workshops or meetings. Some organizations gathered girls and young women under trees or in other public spaces.

A safe space went well beyond its physical location to encompass the “intangible sense of comfort, strength and trust that is built up among the girls and women.” (TISS, 2022, p. 37) Organizational leaders built trust through a variety of modes, including counseling for girls, home visits and/or informal discussions. Commonly, organizations provide opportunities for girls’ and young women’s learning to foster a sense of belonging to the collective. While some organizations help girls and young women reenter formal schooling and/or pay school fees, others run sporting events, youth fairs or vocational training. Some of the learning opportunities provided were transformative in and of themselves; for example, playing football in some contexts represented freedom and resistance, inspiring girls and young women to explore what freedom means in other areas of life.

As girls and young women developed a sense of belonging to the collective, opportunities for dialogue opened up and organizations used a variety of discursive entry points to question patriarchal norms and practices, as well as to foster intersectional understandings, or how identity and location compounded experiences of marginalization. The ability to discuss gender and sexuality became a key marker of the transition from a safe to a dialogic space for organizations.

Many organizations engaged in discussions with girls directly on marriage, including on whether there is an ideal time to marry, the compulsory nature of marriage, the connection between marriage and gender roles and the way in which marriage is prioritized over girls’ education. Others focused the dialogues on autonomy,

exploring the different circumstances under which girls do and do not marry by choice in their context. Still others, such as Bhumika, MASUM, KMVS and Shaheen, focused on violence against women or questioning patriarchal norms within households, including the gendered division of labor, unpaid work, right to property and care work within marriages. Sahiyar mobilized young women and girls from Muslim communities into local collectives and, in these spaces, introduced discussions on issues of gender and sexuality at the outset.

These conversations grew over the yearlong implementation period to the point that collective members were comfortable discussing taboo topics such as friendships with boys, love and experiences with forbidden relationships, as well as domestic violence and gendered household roles. With time, collective members started participating in protests and public campaigns.

DEVELOPING CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

“Influenced by their learning in the collective and from peers, and emboldened by a new support structure, girls are able to negotiate better at home regarding delaying marriage, convincing parents about further education, being self-dependent, looking for jobs and having the mobility to move freely.” (TISS, 2022, p. 55)

Education is crucial to being able to question the status quo and imagine how life could be organized differently for girls and young women. Grassroots organizations create multidimensional learning opportunities for girls and young women from resource-poor backgrounds—many of whom are not in formal schooling—that serve not only to enhance their earning potential but also to reflect on the power structures that influence and constrain their lives. Through the learning opportunities presented to them, girls and young women develop critical awareness of their social realities. This process of conscientization emboldens young women and girls which, together with the support provided by their collectives/organizations, paves the way for individual and collective bargaining and social action.



Vikalp workshop. Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik

Example: VIKALP

“Vikalp assisted girls who had dropped out [of school] in accessing, completing and submitting application forms for open schools and counseled them concerning higher school education and other opportunities. In the first quarter, they started ‘Khushi [Happiness] Centers’ that prepared students to enroll in the open school. In the second quarter, they organized campaigns, such as ‘Aapni ladli ne school bhejo abhiyan’ (‘Send your dear daughter to school’) and staged rallies on the Right to Education Act in villages, which, by bringing together young boys and girls who had dropped out of school, proved an effective way to raise awareness. In the Meri Khushi (‘My Happiness’) camps, participants discussed immediate issues around education, gender discrimination and their rights. In the third quarter, Vikalp helped school dropouts in 10 villages complete application forms and provided them the needed fees. They also organized workshops with parents to talk about the importance of education. In the fourth quarter, Vikalp spoke to teachers in schools seeking their support for girls who had dropped out and were now seeking readmission. They also organized Girl Child Day, an event that kept up the momentum of their educational efforts.” (TISS, 2022, p. 50)

Organizations used a variety of strategies to keep girls and young women connected to formal education or to an informal mode of learning. Awaaz-e-Niswaan, for example, provided coaching classes to girls as well as spaces to read and study. Sadbhavana Trust initiated technical education and skills-development programs, in which *chikan* (an embroidery pattern specific to the city of Lucknow) embroidery workers were trained in marketing skills. SSK delivered a “bridge course,” preparing young girls who had dropped out of school to reenroll, while at the same time creating space for girls from marginalized and Dalit communities who otherwise had no opportunity to join a collective. Other organizations, including Ruby SWS, Shaheen and Awaaz-e-Niswaan, provided material support such as school fees or supplies to allow girls to return to formal schooling. Beyond this, organizations also employed innovative models of learning for girls and young women through the use of technology, sports, residential camps, youth *melas* (fairs) and festivals that integrated content on gender equality. MBBCDS, among others, engaged girls in sports such as volleyball and football. All of these initiatives had

dual objectives, seeking to provide young women and girls with learning opportunities while also building their leadership and autonomy.

BARGAINING WITH PATRIARCHY

“Often, in individual acts of agency, slight compromises sustain strength for larger battles. In this year of journal recording, what was evident in the lives of girls and women were the small trade-offs they made as they sought to negotiate marriage through various bargains with their families, communities, government and social forces.” (TISS, 2022, p. 91)

As girls and young women imagine different futures for themselves, they enter into bargaining processes with the social structures that sanction child and early marriage. Using their education and income-generating potential as well as new perspectives and skills built through collectives as “bargaining chips,” girls and young women bring their individual aspirations into literal and figurative dialogue with

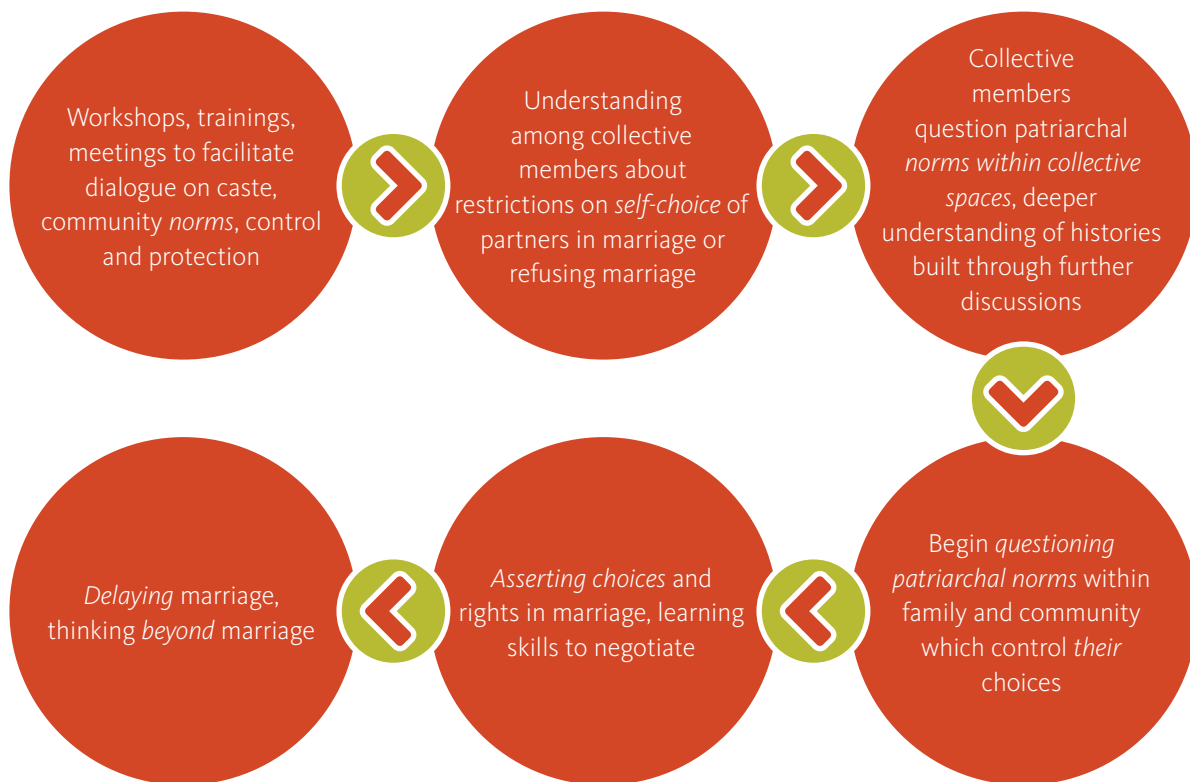


Figure 2: Pathway toward building critical understandings and bargaining with patriarchy.



Photo courtesy of Kislay

Example: KISLAY

At the outset, collective members agreed that the norm of marrying within the same caste and religion should be accepted and was preferred. Kislay used its collective space to initiate dialogue among members around patriarchy, endogamy and marriage. By the third quarter, younger collective members engaged in discussions on marriage with more openness, and Kislay noted that rigid attitudes had relaxed. These members questioned patriarchal and endogamic norms and accepted notions of choice and consent as important. In the fourth quarter, younger members opened dialogue around the dilemmas they would face in expressing their marital choices without antagonizing their parents. The evolution of these dialogues over a year illustrate how incremental shifts set the scene for deeper changes in the lives of women and girls.

prevailing gender norms in an effort to upend patriarchal expectations for their lives.

The “bargaining” process often began with creating safe, dialogic spaces for girls and young women—as well as adult men and women—to think critically about gender and power within marriage. Entry points varied among organizations and collectives, depending on the context and members. Organizations expressed the dilemma of acknowledging young people’s agency while also wishing to protect them when they run away to marry; this highlights a churning within the organizations about young people’s sexuality that will potentially drive a less protectionist and more rights-based response to such cases.⁴ Generally, discussions revolved around prevailing norms and how these affect personal decisions with regard to the age at which to marry; the choice of partner; whether to marry or not; and whether or not to have children after marriage. Samvada, which is a youth-focused organization, used discussions of the Devadasi system⁵ as its entry point to allow for reflection on the history of marriage. Astitva, an organization that works with women from Muslim

communities, started with discussions and training on personal laws and legal rights. A third organization, Nishtha, used discussions on the adverse physical and mental effects of early marriage and the ways in which young women are deprived of their rights when married early.

Discussions around labor and economic freedom were another common entry point used by a variety of organizations. Ruby SWS worked with young women and girls to challenge the expectation that they do household chores after returning from long working hours in employment outside the home. Another organization, Azad Foundation, worked to challenge taxi driving as a traditionally male occupation; in this

⁴For further information on legal responses to young people’s decisions to marry, see: AJWS, Partners for Law in Development (2022), *A case for differentiated legal responses to child, early and forced marriage and unions*. Available at: https://ajws.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/AJWS_CEFMU_Lessons_from_India.pdf.

⁵A system whereby some girls are not allowed to marry because they are supposed to be dedicated to the deity.

way, challenging gender norms in one area of life opened opportunities to challenge them in relation to marriage.

Despite all of these efforts to challenge norms around marriage, for many they remained immovable, and in some contexts, girls and young women struggled to find viable alternatives and push back against rigid norms. As such, it remained important for organizations to continue to provide practical support for those experiencing hardship as they attempted to bargain with patriarchy. Strengthened by the critical perspectives built within the collective around gender and sexuality, Praajak felt empowered to support a young woman who was unmarried and pregnant after she had been rejected by her family. Similarly, RJVS helped a young woman in an abusive marriage understand the ways in which her rights were being violated and feel empowered in her decision to leave her husband.

In addition to their work supporting girls and young women to bargain about whether or not and when to marry, many organizations felt strongly that their work on bargaining with patriarchy also required challenging norms within marriage. Several

supported the collectivization of married girls and young women—a group that traditionally has been left out of interventions addressing child and early marriage—helping them to learn strategies for managing the challenges of marriage. MJAS and Jeevika supported girls in negotiating with their husbands and families about further educational and livelihood opportunities. Vikalp reconnected married girls with formal education by motivating them, speaking to their families and offering hands-on support in completing applications for exams through the open school system.

EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS ECONOMICALLY

Through access to education and livelihood options, girls and young women are empowered to delay marriages or negotiate better within marriages. Empowering girls and young women with an understanding of their right to undertake paid work and the value of their unpaid domestic and care labor results in small but significant shifts in personal aspirations that defied prevailing gender and caste-based norms.

Figure 3: Pathway toward empowering young women through livelihoods options.



Example: AZAD FOUNDATION

“Azad Foundation’s work to train women to be taxi drivers stemmed from the idea that they should occupy public spaces and subvert the gendered division of labor while asserting livelihood as a fundamental right for women. They undertook their various activities to reinforce within the community the importance of paid work for women, including nontraditional livelihood options ... Azad Foundation observed that their intervention had dispelled the myth that girls are only keen on soft skills, such as tailoring or beautician training. Strategically, they encouraged girls to build a perspective beyond gender stereotypes and imagine a world beyond gendered rules and regulations. Azad Foundation held other events in the community to involve the families of drivers so that they could showcase what their daughters and wives were doing. This instilled pride in them as well as appreciation for the unconventionality of the work and its long hours (TISS, 2022, p. 75).”



Azad training. Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik

Much of the work around economic empowerment centered on cultivating girls’ and young women’s identities as workers. For example, Azad Foundation’s training for women to become taxi drivers led to greater awareness of citizenship rights among the trainees, many of whom assembled their official paperwork to ensure that they accessed the social benefit schemes offered to them. Similarly, Kislay helped women union members develop a worker identity and consciousness of their rights. Shaheen helped collective members access information on government schemes and benefits, which led to one woman giving up her caste-based sanitation job to begin a tailoring business. BGAVS provided capacity-building training for its members in skills that would increase their employability and likely bring them wages higher than what they currently earned, as well as increase their business knowledge. These

efforts were crucial in developing a sense of self among collective members, reaffirming the dignity of marginalized people.

The work of several organizations saw the expansion of girls’ and young women’s consciousness of their economic rights in the public domain transposed into the private domain. Young women began to earn small stipends through internships, fellowships and vocational training. In Jeevika, for example, women started asserting emphatically that housework is work, while girls expressed a belief that boys should also work at home. Further, village women shared that they wanted their daughters to complete their education and become independent. Discussions also expanded to the political domain, with young women advocating for their increased political participation.

BUILDING FEMINIST SOLIDARITY AND NETWORKS

“At the collective and organization levels, solidarity emerged from the creation of safe spaces and activities. When this was sustained at a larger level, with other initiatives and organizations locally or nationally, it aided in creating political networks of solidarity that fueled individuals, collectives and organizations to participate in social movement campaigns and in regional, national and international advocacy networks at diverse forums.” (TISS, 2022, p. 82)

Networking and collaborating build feminist solidarity, help organizations learn new strategies and enable deeper, intersectional understandings of sexuality, gender, caste and religion. Fostering a sense of common political purpose among members also facilitates connections with other organizations, collectives and movements, thereby creating a widening universe of support and, at the same time, building a solid base for collective action.

Work around building feminist solidarity and networks is largely related to widening and deepening webs of relationships within and outside of collectives. Within collectives, this was evidenced by collective decision-making and the emergence of young “second-line” leaders. In the Thoughtshop Foundation, for example, young leaders in the core group who received support to work as a team independently created a decentralized method of generating reports on their work—a sign of sustainability and inclusivity for that organization. Deep webs of relationships were also observed within Vanangana’s networks of Dalit women, from which a support structure emerged for survivors of violence; the network was able to quickly receive information about cases and respond. Internal shifts within organizations were also represented by an increasing recognition and acceptance of diverse gender expressions and sexualities.

Over the research period, these webs of relationships expanded outside of collectives, mobilizing families, communities and government entities while also connecting with larger networks for social justice. RJVS, for example, held workshops to influence

Figure 4: Pathway toward building feminist solidarity through diverse and sustained support.





Photo courtesy of
Amra Padatik

Example: **AMRA PADATIK**

Amra Padatik, an organization that works for the education and wellbeing of the children of sex workers, observed changes over the year of implementation in relation to community mobilization and the involvement of families in their work. In the first quarter, they undertook outreach to mothers to raise awareness and seek permission for their children to join their meetings. In the second quarter of the year, children learned dance through Komol Gandhar, the cultural collective of Amra Padatik. These children performed in the community, doing street corner plays and community meetings on child and early marriage. Toward the end of the year, children joined Komol Gandhar as members, thus deepening their engagement and opting for this over other forms of livelihood. Throughout the process, Amra Padatik also did outreach with a range of stakeholders, including schools, in the communities to garner support for the children of sex workers. This outreach helped them develop a web of support for the children and their mothers associated with the organization.

fathers in relation to their daughters' education and marriage. In their campaign for marriage preparedness, Samvada's youth members not only spoke up to other young people but also ended up having dialogues with teachers, principals, the media, family, community and the general public on marriage-related issues that youth experience. SETU made inroads with *panchayats* (village councils), supporting 40 women to be elected as members and initiate negotiations around basic infrastructure for their communities. Some organizations connected to other women's collectives in their communities to lend support and learn about their agendas; Humsafar, for example, invited a youth activist from the Pinjra Tod ("Break the Cages") campaign against discriminatory curfews on women in college hostels for a youth convention. Connecting to other social justice organizations and movements led to some organizations changing their own strategies, for example, about mixing genders in group settings and caste groups eating together. They were also connected to other events in the

public domain, with some organizations attending gay pride parades and protests related to citizenship rights and against sexual violence.

CONCLUSION

The "Mapping incremental change in complex societies" project was an experiment in feminist values-driven monitoring and evaluation inspired by the motto "what is done (with intentionality), gets measured"—a deliberate antithesis to the oft-quoted "what gets measured, gets done." Through this experiment, 29 grassroots organizations demonstrated that it is possible to create a community that learns together and co-creates alternative ways of defining success. Over just a year, the organizations observed and documented shifts that they considered crucial to their long-term goal of ending child and early marriage, including girls' levels of confidence, comfort levels discussing taboo topics, broadening aspirations, reentry into education, ability to empathize with

other marginalized groups and resolve to take action. In the years since the project, this work has been further deepened.

The feminist framework for social change presented in this report emerged from an attempt by TISS researchers to aggregate the complex, winding pathways taken by all of the grassroots organizations. It represented the diverse strategies and activities used by those organizations aimed at improving the quality of girls' lives above and beyond delaying the age at which they marry. In general, those pathways were messy—overlapping, intersecting and nonlinear; yet, from this, certainty emerged around a long-held feminist tenet: creating safe, dialogic spaces for women and girls is essential to work that attempts to transform gender and social norms. It is through these spaces that girls and young women are afforded the educational and economic opportunities that in turn empower them to bargain with patriarchal structures and realize aspirations beyond marriage for their individual lives. Girls' consciousness of their own social realities metamorphoses into deeper empathy for various forms of oppression and, more widely, an impulse to affect broader change in their communities and world.

Transformative child and early marriage programming requires prolonged, deep investment in organizations and collectives that work directly with girls, young women and their families and communities. The work of changing patriarchal norms and practices

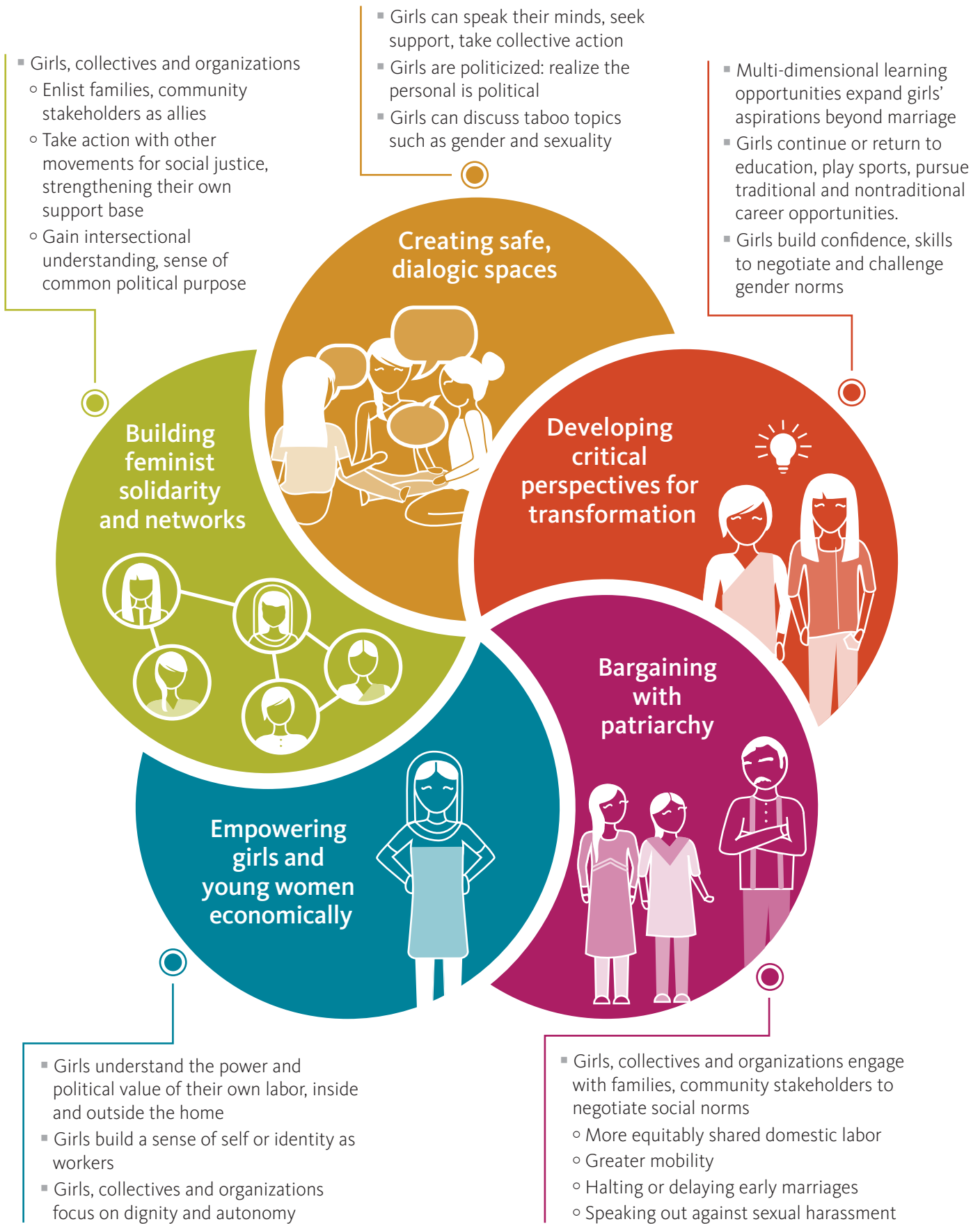
at the grassroots level is necessarily complex. What constitutes “significant progress” in one community may be irrelevant in another, and when progress is made in one area, it may wane in another. From these realities, a singular conclusion surfaces: Only grassroots organizations, with their fingers on the pulse, are best placed at any given moment to decide which are the next best steps to take. Through the implementation of these micro-level decisions, organizations carve their own winding pathways toward the universally held, macro-level goal of ending child and early marriage.

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Visual Summary: A Feminist Framework for Challenging the Root Causes of Early and Child Marriage



In Hyderabad, Shaheen trains adolescent girls from low-income Muslim communities to pursue jobs and careers that will radically expand their opportunities.
Photo by Christine Han



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