



© Sudheer Paloti for STRIVE

Sabala: Keeping adolescent girls in school

What is Sabala?

Sabala is a programme to improve the quality of life of adolescent girls from marginalised communities in northern Karnataka, India, by keeping girls in school, delaying marriage, and reducing entry into sex work. Reaching 3,600 adolescent girls from 1,800 families in 119 villages and 69 high schools, Sabala aims to increase the proportion of adolescent girls who:

- enter formal secondary education (from 7th to 8th Standards)
- complete 10th Standard
- delay marriage until after 10th Standard
- delay their sexual debut until after 10th Standard

Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) is implementing Sabala from July 2013 to 2017, in partnership with the Government of Karnataka and the World Bank. During this period, STRIVE partners KHPT and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) are evaluating Sabala's impact on adolescent girls' high school entry and retention, as well as on their vulnerability to HIV.

Context

Rates of HIV infection in northern Karnataka are among the highest in India.¹ Adolescent girls who do not complete their education are particularly vulnerable to HIV and other health risks. In northern Karnataka, many girls drop out of school as a result of poverty, early marriage, a tradition of sex work and the under-valuing of girls' education.

In 2006, 89% of households from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SC/ST) in Bagalkot and 42% of all households in Bijapur lived below the poverty line.² Among SC/ST girls, 53% in Bagalkot and 38% in Bijapur married before the age of 18.³⁻⁵ Over 70% of female sex workers from northern Karnataka are from SC/ST communities and enter into sex work before 18 years of age. Most are initiated into sex work as part of the *devadasi* tradition.⁶

Sex work ends these girls' education at an early age and fuels their migration to brothels in the neighbouring state of Maharashtra.⁷ Meanwhile, gender and social norms limit girls' mobility, aspirations, self-esteem and participation in decision-making.⁸

Rationale

Why design and test a programme to keep girls in school until 10th Standard? Evidence shows that girls who complete high school have better health and life options than those who drop out.

A GIRL WHO DROPS OUT OF SCHOOL ...

is more vulnerable to HIV infection and other health problems⁹⁻¹¹

will have a larger, less healthy family⁹⁻¹¹

earns less than better educated girls⁹⁻¹¹

together with all girls dropping out, costs India \$30 billion in lost annual growth¹²

lacks voice and agency and is disengaged from larger community issues



A GIRL WHO COMPLETES HIGH SCHOOL ...

is three times less likely to contract HIV¹³

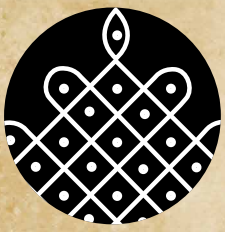
will marry at a later age, and have fewer, healthier and better educated children¹⁴

is better paid and more productive at work,¹⁵ and reinvests 90% of what she earns in her family¹⁴

increases the economic growth of the country¹⁴

is more involved in her community and better prepared for decision-making¹⁶





Barriers to girls' education

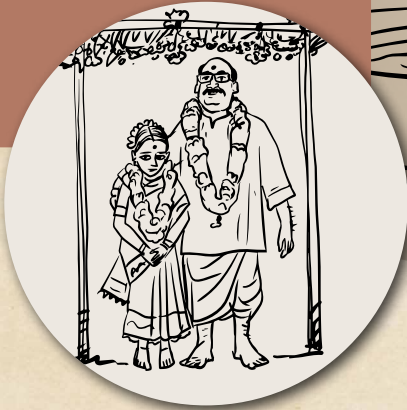
Girls' education is not valued

In northern Karnataka, 17% of rural parents said girls should study as long as they want, as compared to 35% for boys.¹⁷



Early marriage leads to girls' drop out from school

In 2006, 35% of adolescent girls in northern Karnataka dropped out of school because of marriage.¹⁷



Devadasi tradition pushes young girls into sex work

Most *devadasis* are from SC/ST communities and enter sex work at a mean age of 16 years.^{6,7}



Facing poverty, families tend to remove girls from school

In 2005–06, only 49% of girls, as compared to 59% of boys, attended secondary school.¹⁸



Boys' misconduct puts girls off school

Girls in Karnataka reported ragging by boys as the most unpleasant experience in school.¹⁹



Schools lack adequate infrastructure to encourage girls' education

For example, 69% of high schools in rural Bijapur had no useable toilets.²⁰



Many school committees are not addressing the needs of girls

In 2009–10, school development committees (SDMCs) were able to perform only 20% of their assigned duties.²¹

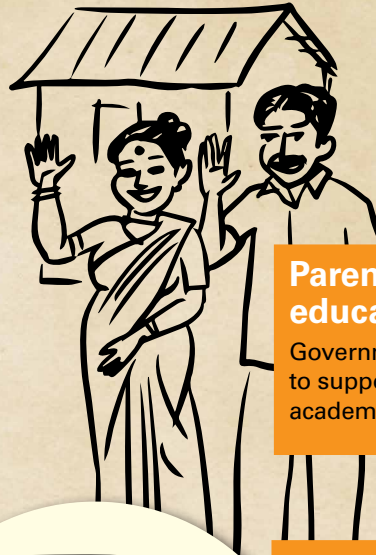


Enablers of girls' education



Girls gain confidence and leadership

Safe spaces for girls improve their self-esteem and life skills.^{8, 22}



Parents are involved in girls' education

Government incentives encourage parents to support girls' schooling and boost girls' academic performance.^{8, 24, 25}

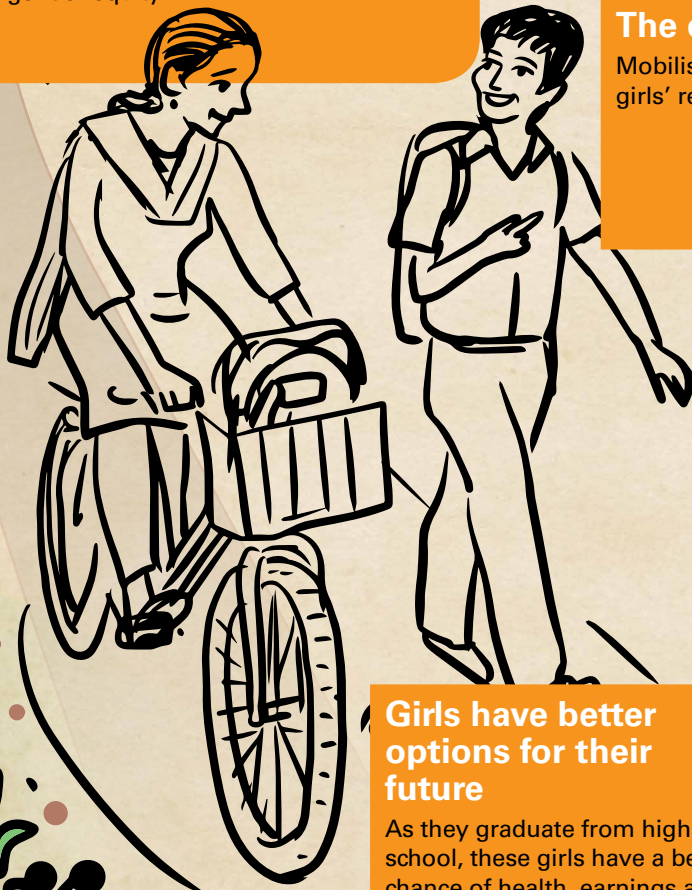
Schools cater to girls' needs

Trained teachers, well-functioning school committees (SDMCs) and improved school facilities and safety measures encourage girls to stay in school.^{21, 23}



Boys accept girls as equal classmates

Changing boys' attitudes modifies their behaviour towards girls and promotes gender equity.^{8, 24, 26, 27}



The community values girls' education

Mobilised communities and engaged local government track girls' retention and promote their education.^{24, 28, 29}



Girls have better options for their future

As they graduate from high school, these girls have a better chance of health, earnings and healthy future families of their own.¹⁴

Programme

To increase the numbers of girls who enrol in and complete high school, Sabala:

- provides special tuition, career counselling and leadership training to improve girls' academic success and broaden their aspirations
- establishes reflection sessions for girls to share experiences and build solidarity and confidence
- sensitises parents to value girls and recognise the importance of educating them
- links families to government schemes that provide incentives for educating girls
- uses sports to encourage boys to respect girls and appreciate their rights
- trains SDMCs and school staff to institute measures to increase girls' safety and academic success
- supports community structures to understand the importance of girls' education and take action.

In all these ways, Sabala challenges negative gender norms and promotes the adoption of positive ones.



© Annie Holmes for STRIVE

Evaluation

STRIVE partners KHPT and LSHTM are conducting a three-year, mixed-method, community randomised trial to assess the impact of individual programme elements and of Sabala overall. The study will show if, why and how these efforts increase the numbers of girls who enrol in and complete high school. The learning will give critical guidance for policies and programmes to improve the health, education and future of adolescent girls in northern Karnataka and beyond.

<http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk>

REFERENCES

1. NACO (2012, December) 'HIV Sentinel Surveillance in India 2010-11: A technical brief'.
2. Government of Karnataka 2004. *School Development and Monitoring Committee*. Research study by the Policy Planning Unit, Centre for Child and Law, and the Azim Premji Foundation. Bangalore. http://www.schooleducation.kar.nic.in/ssa/pdfdocs/SDMCStudyReport_2004.pdf
3. DLHS (District Level Household and Facility Survey) III 2008a. District fact sheet: Bagalkot. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. International Institute for Population Sciences: Mumbai. <http://stg2.kar.nic.in/healthnew/NRHM/PDF/Bagalkot.pdf>
4. DLHS (District Level Household and Facility Survey) III 2008b. District fact sheet: Bijapur. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. International Institute for Population Sciences: Mumbai. <http://stg2.kar.nic.in/healthnew/NRHM/PDF/Bijapur.pdf>
5. DLHS (District Level Household and Facility Survey) III 2008c. Fact sheet: Karnataka. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. International Institute for Population Sciences: Mumbai. <http://stg2.kar.nic.in/healthnew/NRHM/PDF/karnataka.pdf>
6. ICHAP (India-Canada Collaborative HIV/AIDS Project). 2003. *Female Sex Work in Karnataka: Patterns and Implications for HIV Prevention*. Bangalore: ICHAP.
7. Blanchard JF, O'Neil J, Ramesh BM, Bhattacharjee P, Orchard T, and Moses S. 2005. Understanding the social and cultural contexts of female sex workers in Karnataka, India: Implications for prevention of HIV infection. *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* 191(Suppl 1): S139-46.
8. Mallika B, Mohan HL, Soni S, and Raghavendra T. 2012. *Know Me: A Self-Exploratory Exercise To Understand Vulnerabilities of Adolescent Girls. A Northern Karnataka Experience*. Bangalore: KHPT.
9. Warner A, Malhotra A, and McGonagle A. 2012. *Girls' Education, Empowerment, and Transitions to Adulthood: The Case for a Shared Agenda*. Washington, DC: ICRW.
10. Herz B and Sperling G. 2004. *What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations. http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/councilforaff_Girls_Education_full.pdf
11. Malhotra A, Pande R, and Grown C. 2003. *Impact of Investments in Female Education on Gender Equality*. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/ImpactInvestmentsFemaleEdu.pdf>
12. Plan. 2008. *Paying the Price: The Economic Cost of Failing to Educate Girls*. Surrey, UK: Plan. <http://www.planusa.org/docs/PayingthePrice.pdf>
13. <http://www.basiced.org/basic/>
14. <http://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/why-educating-girls-makes-economic-sense>
15. <http://www.unicef.org/sowc96/ngirls.htm>
16. <http://www.girlup.org/assets/pdfs/girl-up-quick-facts-education.pdf>
17. Hallad J. 2011. Educational and Marriage Aspirations of Adolescents in North Karnataka, India. PRC Working Paper No. 57. Dharwad, Karnataka: Population Research Centre. <http://prcs-mohfw.nic.in/writereaddata/research/721.pdf>
18. www.unicef.org/india/The_Situation_of_Children_in_India_-_A_profile_20110630_.pdf
19. Leach F and Sitaram S. 2007. The sexual harassment and abuse of adolescent school girls in South India. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 2(3):257-277. doi: 10.1177/1746197907081262
20. KHPT (Karnataka Health Promotion Trust). 2013. *Taking Stock of Secondary Education in Bijapur and Bagalkot Districts, Karnataka: Findings of an Enumeration to Profile High Schools and High School Students for KHPT's Adolescent Girls Project*. Bangalore: KHPT.
21. CCL (Centre for Child and the Law). 2011. *A Study of the Role of SDMCs in the School Management and Supervision in Karnataka in the context of SSA*. Bangalore: National Law School of India University.
22. Baldwin W. 2011. *Creating "safe spaces" for adolescent girls. Promoting Healthy, Safe, and Productive Transitions to Adulthood*. Brief no. 39. New York: Population Council.
23. Page E. 2005. *Gender and the Construction of Identities in Indian Elementary Education*. PhD dissertation. London: Institute of Education.
24. Ashburn K and Warner A. 2010. *Can Economic Empowerment Reduce Vulnerability of Girls and Young Women to HIV? Emerging Insights*. ICRW. <http://www.icrw.org/publications/can-economic-empowerment-reduce-vulnerability-girls-and-young-women-hiv>
25. Epstein JL, Sanders M, Simon B, Salinas KC, Jansorn NR, Van Voorhis FL. 2002. *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
26. Achyut P, Bhatla N, Khandekar S, Maitra S, and Verma RK. 2011. *Building Support for Gender Equality among Young Adolescents in School: Findings from Mumbai, India*. New Delhi: ICRW.
27. Erulkar A, Apicella L, Ferede A. 2011. *Addis Birhan project: Working with boys and men to address young girls' social vulnerability. Promoting Healthy, Safe, and Productive Transitions to Adulthood*. Brief no. 6. New York: Population Council. http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/TABriefs/06_AddisBirhan.pdf
28. Akshara Foundation. 2009. *Assessment of Accessibility and Infrastructure Facilities in Higher Primary and High Schools*. Final Report. (Commissioned by the Karnataka State Planning Board.) Akshara Foundation: Bangalore.
29. Cooper LB and Fletcher EK. No date. *What Evidence Is There That Initiatives Aimed at Changing Social Norms and Formal Institutions To Be Less Discriminatory of Girls Are Effective? For Nike Foundation/Girl Hub*.

Written by Priya Pillai and Annie Holmes, with thanks to KHPT and STRIVE teams. Illustrations by Suresh Kumar. Design by Jane Shepherd.

The Sabala study and this publication are supported by the STRIVE research programme consortium, funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development. However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the department's official policies.

