

# RECOMMENDATIONS ON GIRLS' EDUCATION



The state conference 'Keeping Girls in Secondary School: Successes and Challenges', organised by Karnataka Health Promotion Trust, brought together policymakers, civil society members and adolescent girls to propose measures to improve adolescent girls' secondary school attendance and completion. Shri Kimmane Ratnakar, Minister for Primary and Secondary Education, Government of Karnataka inaugurated the conference and Shri Basavaraj Horatti, Member of Legislative Council and former Minister for Education, and Shri Jagdish Shettar, Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly closed the event. The conference was held from 20 - 21 June 2015, in Dharwad, Karnataka.

The conference noted that adolescent girls' development is priority area cutting across sectors. As such, efforts to combat child labour and marriage should combine with measures to improve water, sanitation and hygiene practices in schools, reaching out-of-school girls and better delivery of education and health services.

Interventions to **improve adolescent girls education** must be guided by policies, implemented at the school and community levels, and enforced by law.

## 1. Design a multilevel and multi-stakeholder response

Several factors in and out of school prevent girls from completing school. Hence, comprehensive interventions require galvanising support from various actors involving girls, families, school administrators and teachers, village community and institutions and local government. Likewise, a multilevel framework that integrates gender perspective into school plans and teacher training, promotes the girls' right to education within the community, creates targeted responses to low enrolment of girls' and incentivise education for girls from poor, rural, disadvantaged communities need to be put in place.

## 2. Implement norm change interventions

Expansion of education opportunities for girls must invest in and include interventions that

facilitate the creation of new gender norms towards increasing equality and agency for girls. Gender norms embedded in social structures manifest within households and families, communities, schools and the wider society to maintain the discriminatory social order often producing inequitable outcomes for girls and women. Activities should aim at individual and household level change, engaging communities, engendering schools, and working with boys and men to reducing violence against women to increase the value of the girl child and remove the restrictions on girls' education.

## 3. Create girl friendly and safe schools

Learning environment influences the academic performance and well being of the children in school. This is especially the case for girls, who often face violence from boys and men on their way to and at times, within school thereby negatively impacting their school experience and increasing their chances of drop out. Hence, facilities, teacher-student and student-student interactions within schools need to cater to girls' specific needs including separate toilets, water availability, empathetic teachers, violence redressal mechanisms and supportive peer groups.

## 4. Provide gender and comprehensive sexuality education in schools

Comprehensive sexuality education that recognises human rights and gender equality and provides the essential life skills to help children make responsible choices about their social and sexual relationships will enable both girls and boys to understand and question social norms and practices. It gives them a better understanding of their adulthood, improves their sexual and reproductive health and enables them to take advantage of educational opportunities that can improve their wellbeing. Hence, school based programmes from primary to secondary that have gender and human rights at their core need to be developed to address adolescent girls' vulnerabilities.

## 5. Increase the compulsory age of education under the Right to Education (RTE) Act

Policy frameworks need to be strengthened by legislative reform that enhance girls' access to and retention in school such as raising the age at first marriage, sanctions against the withdrawal of girls from school and increasing the compulsory age of education. In India, the RTE Act 2009 makes free and compulsory education a fundamental right only to children in the age group of six to fourteen years i.e. for the first eight years of schooling.

The 2001 Census of India puts the total number of children between 14 to 18 years, the adolescents, at 88.5 million. Given that the provision of secondary education in India is not legally mandated, it leaves this large group unsupported by law to access their right to education. Hence, the RTE Act needs to be amended to mandate state obligation to develop free and accessible secondary education for all children. In addition, monitor the implementation of RTE guidelines stipulating a student teacher ratio of 30:1 to fill vacancies for teaching positions and increasing the ratio of female teachers in schools.

## 6. Improve convergence, coordination and linkage between various sectoral programmes

Multi-sectoral programmes become key as problems to girls' education lie both within and outside of the education system. Therefore, there needs to be improved collaboration between the Departments of Education, Women and Child Development, Backward Classes and Minorities, Social Welfare and Rural Development and Panchayathi Raj. Lack of convergence means that different departments run parallel programmes that address the same issues or that some schools receive funds to create adequate facilities while others remain persistently uncovered by any of the departmental programmes. There is a need to streamline the process for better synchronisation of different departmental programmes at the field level. This can not only avoid duplication of initiatives and investments but also allow for pooling and better utilisation of resources for improved impact.

## 7. Allocate higher capital investment in education to northern Karnataka

The Karnataka Human Development Index (HDI) 2005 show wide regional imbalances between southern and northern regions of the state. The general living standard of the poor was found to be low in northern Karnataka. The regions lagged behind in rural housing, sanitation, female literacy, malnutrition, anemia and development of scheduled caste and tribes (SC/ST). Some of the lowest HDI and gender development index (GDI) are in north Karnataka districts such as Bijapur with a HDI of 0.589 and Bagalkot with a GDI of 0.571. Disparities in human and gender development negatively impact girls' education. Hence, there is a need to allocate higher investments to the region to mitigate the impact of deprivations arising out of a comparatively higher socio-economic backwardness of the region.

## 8. Build partnerships with non-governmental organisations working on adolescent girls' issues

The primary responsibility for financing of education lies with the state. However, partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can help the government to address the prohibitive indirect costs, such as family reliance on daughters for their labour contribution or for child care, that prevent girls from staying out of school. In education, NGOs can assist the government to map who is not in school, provide gender training for teachers, build capacities of School Development Management Committees (SDMC), create safe school plans and influence and empower communities to tackle barriers that keep girls from school. Systematically mapping factors of adolescent girls' vulnerability to school drop out can help design better tracking systems to prioritise and monitor vulnerable girls.

## 9. Revitalise existing platforms for children's participation in governance

A 2007 order of the Karnataka State Government mandated the constitution of *Makkala Grama Sabha* (MGS) and *Makkala Panchayats* (Children's Village Committees (CVC)) to conduct an annual meeting of children from the age group of 5 to 15 years in all *Gram Panchayats*. Modify the processes of MGS and CVCs to mandate proportionate participation of girls, include children up to 18 years and out of school children in the village so that girls' realities inform the decisions of these meetings. Activate the committees formed under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). Strengthen girls' participation in these committees so as to gather timely information of potential child safety issues such as early marriage, unsafe school experiences or trafficking.

## 10. Revive and invest in successful programmes such as Kishori Sanghas or Meena

The state should continue to invest in programmes that have proven successful in the past in empowering adolescent girls. Few of them including the Kishori programme, from Mahila Samakhya, to bring adolescent girls, between 11 to 18 years, back into mainstream education and enhance their life skills, and Meena clubs that promote active participation of girls in school activities and bring back out of school children, are particularly significant in the context of adolescent girls' education.

