

# ImpactIndia

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## *Spotlight on Girls* **Meeting the Challenge of Educating Girls** By Pakzan Dastoor

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## Meeting the Challenge of Educating Girls

EDUCATE GIRLS IS HELPING MORE THAN ONE MILLION INDIAN SCHOOLCHILDREN.

By Pakzan Dastoor

*"The fact that in most parts of India a goat is seen as an asset and a girl is seen as a liability is infuriating."*

—SAFEENA HUSAIN

**S**afeena Husain is the founder of Educate Girls (EG), a nonprofit

focused on improving educational opportunities for girls who live in the Indian state of Rajasthan. In Rajasthan, only 44 percent of women are literate, whereas 76 percent of men are. The state also has a high rate of child marriage: 15 percent of girls there get married before they are

10 years old, and 68 percent get married before they are 18.

EG helps girls enroll or re-enroll in government-run primary schools and also works with administrators and teachers to strengthen the quality of the education the girls receive. Begun in 2005 with a pilot program in 50 schools, EG has grown rapidly; today, it has a presence in 8,500 schools. Over the past ten years EG has helped more than 80,000 girls who had dropped out return to school. Its efforts have increased the attendance of girls and boys in schools by 25 percent and improved 390,000 students' learning outcomes by 35 to 65 percent.

Educate Girls has helped more than 80,000 girls who had dropped out return to school.

Husain attributes the organization's growth and success to rigorous, ongoing impact assessment, in particular to a framework with four iterative stages: Blueprint, Validate, Prepare, and Scale. This article offers a look at each of those stages.

### STAGE ONE: BLUEPRINT

*"I started with a broad statement of purpose: to provide opportunities for girls and women to achieve their full potential. But very soon I realized I would have to dig deeper. What exactly was I trying to achieve? What*



*path do we choose to reach our goal? Basically, what is our theory of change?"*

—SAFEENA HUSAIN

During the Blueprint stage, EG's journey began with a pilot program in 50 of the poorest-performing government schools in Rajasthan's Pali district. Initially its mission was wide ranging. It included sending girls to school, preventing them from getting married early, ensuring that they were physically healthy, and making them economically independent. But Husain and her colleagues soon determined that honing their focus would enable them to make a bigger difference in the long run, and so they decided to concentrate on ensuring that marginalized girls receive good-quality primary education.

That more tightly defined mission helped EG's leaders develop success indicators and identify the scope of its accountability early on. For example, activity-based indicators, such as

the number of girls enrolled and number of schools with improved infrastructure, would serve as baseline data. These were intentionally simple and easy to document, and they could be used to track progress over time. Though basic, these measures proved useful in demonstrating the efficacy of the model to the state government, which then supported EG for a larger-scale pilot involving 500 schools across Pali.

#### **STAGE TWO: VALIDATE**

*"We always knew that partnering with the government would be crucial to our model. Being able to do that was a significant step forward for us. By 2008, we knew we were on the right track because girls were coming back to school. But were we making a real difference? What aspects of our model were working? [It is] important to know that the work you are doing is making a difference. Because if it is not, there is no point in scaling it."*

—SAFEENA HUSAIN

For EG to gain the necessary insights at the Validate stage,

its field staff needed to view data as more than just a set of numbers to be collected. And so they made reflection on the data a regular part of progress review meetings. Not only would staff members analyze data and identify issues, they would also suggest corrective steps.

For example, data showed that despite the success of large community mobilization drives that boosted enrollment in the short term, the number of girls who stayed in school until the end of the academic year remained low. In response, EG introduced new learning techniques and ensured installation of girl-friendly infrastructure, such as separate toilets and walls around the playground. Once the data demonstrated that those changes worked, EG formally incorporated them into its model.

As EG's work expanded, the program added more outcome-level indicators to the data it was monitoring, such as the number of girls who stayed in school and the amount of improvement in learning levels. EG moved from paper-based data collection to a

simple Microsoft Excel-based information management system. Husain and her team also eliminated metrics that were not essential to decision making.

Being willing to analyze and act on its findings at regular intervals helped EG learn and react quickly, keeping the cost of change low. As the organization refined its model, it was able to convince larger institutional funders, such as LGT Venture Philanthropy and Dasra, to provide support. Increasingly convinced of the credibility and scalability of EG's model, the government again asked EG to expand its work—this time to 3,100 schools in two districts.

#### **STAGE THREE: PREPARE**

*"We were clear that we wanted to build a strong model that was creating real impact on girls' lives. By 2012, seven years since we began EG, we were convinced that we had. The question now was, did others believe it too?"*

—SAFEENA HUSAIN

During the Prepare stage, EG chose to put its program through an external impact evaluation. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) can be expensive, but Rebecca Thornton, a professor at the University of Michigan (identified through EG's network of contacts) agreed to design an RCT pro bono. The data analysis at the end of two years showed that EG's activities were significantly improving girls' enrollment, retention, and learning outcomes. This stamp of approval gave EG the confidence it needed to plan and fundraise for scaling up to new districts.

Soon, though, it became







**Educate Girls works closely with parents to help Indian girls excel in school.**

clear that program staff could not simultaneously collect and analyze data, and manage programs and operations. So EG restructured measurement as a distinct function, and built a monitoring and evaluation team focused on analysis and reporting, while the program team continued to collect field data.

As EG expanded to a third district and the burden of data collection on field staff increased, Husain and her team also decided to transfer some data collection and measurement activities to the girls and communities that benefited from the program, thereby reducing staff workload and simultaneously improving the engagement and ownership levels of the communities it served.

By the end of 2013, EG was working with about 5,500 schools in three districts. Having demonstrated its strong culture of continuous improvement and impact on the ground, EG attracted grants from organizations such as the World Bank's India Development Marketplace and the British Asian Trust.

#### **STAGE FOUR: SCALE**

*"What you can see with your eyes when you are working in one school, you cannot when you have*

*grown to a couple of thousand schools. How do we know what is happening on the ground? And how do we build an organization structure and systems that support the organization's continuous growth and scaling ambitions? We cannot be satisfied with reaching only a fraction of the eligible 3.7 million still out-of-school girls in the state."*

—SAFEENA HUSAIN

By the end of 2014 EG had entered the Scale stage. It was working in more than 8,500 schools and with more than 1 million children in six districts. To manage the organization it needed a more sophisticated system of monitoring. Still relying on its Excel-based data collection system, managers were struggling with poor access to real-time data, limited visibility into staff and school performance, and delays in data analysis.

To overcome these challenges, EG turned to mobile technology. The transition was not entirely smooth. As Husain says, "If you cannot feed data back to the frontline users, it is hard to get the data entered in the first place." As the mobile tool evolved, however, the process improved. Managers could see school-level indicators in real time and correct course promptly. Data from the phones are also aggregated and analyzed by the monitoring and

evaluation team in a monthly dashboard shared with EG's leadership, to track performance against set targets at the school, village, and district levels.

#### **NEW GOAL**

*"From a few hundred dollars to almost 5 percent of our annual budget, our investment in impact assessment has gone up considerably. But had we not adopted such a rigorous process, we wouldn't have gained support from large institutional partners to continuously push the boundaries of scale."*

—SAFEENA HUSAIN

EG's next goal is to reach almost 4 million children in 30,000

schools by 2018. To help meet that goal, EG received a development impact bond with the UBS Optimus Foundation as the private investor, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation as the outcome payer, and Instiglio as the project manager coordinating the stakeholders. Under the terms of the bond, EG will be paid only if it achieves the desired impact, measured against some stringent parameters. Because of its attention to impact assessment, Husain is confident that the organization is up for the challenge. ■

**Pakzan Dastoor** leads the Advisory Research and Diligence team at Dasra. She was previously a curriculum developer and teacher at The Akanksha Foundation.

## Empowering India's Girls

SOMETIMES COLLABORATION IS THE MOST DIRECT ROUTE TO IMPACT.

By Rachita Vora

Lynne Smitham was en route to a Chennai slum where the nonprofit that she was volunteering with, Nalamdana, was performing street theater for the local kids. Weaving through a labyrinth of pedestrians, street vendors, cars, and the occasional buffalo, the old bus she was riding in ducked into a narrow alley piled high with rotting, putrid garbage. Hundreds of children soon emerged through the mess, hurriedly approaching the bus. This was the venue for the play, where more than 800 ragpickers assembled to watch Nalamdana enact the story of a soon-to-be

child bride seeking freedom. At the end of the play the girl rose, literally and quite poetically, from a heap of dirt, triumphant in defying the oppressive, centuries-old practice.

So unshakable was the experience that Lynne returned home to the United Kingdom resolved to do more to improve the lives of girls from disadvantaged communities. A year later, in 2004, Lynne and her husband Peter created Kiawah Trust (KT), a foundation focused on empowering adolescent girls.

"We live in a world where most girls are denied an education, cannot choose whom and



when to marry, when to have children, and how many,” says Lynne. “Every day, girls are sold, beaten, raped, traded, sacrificed, discarded, and discounted—just because they are girls. This is unacceptable.”

The KT model is researched, outcome- and impact-oriented, and feedback-focused. The trust’s approach has been shaped by Lynne and Peter’s collective experience. Lynne, having spent decades in management and organizational development, brings a nuanced sensibility about people and organizations. Peter, in complement, brings investment know-how from his three decades in private equity. He adds a global perspective on grantmaking from his 12 years on the board of Atlantic Philanthropies, the last four as chairman. (Atlantic Philanthropies was founded by Chuck Feeney and is among the world’s largest spend-down foundations, having made \$7 billion in grants through 2014.)

In its early years, KT made grants directly supporting nonprofits across India. The Smithams took this approach because they wanted to stay close to on-the-ground issues, build independent relationships with grantees, and trace the impact of their support and guidance. They worked closely with London-based advisors New Philanthropy Capital, but during this phase they didn’t fully realize the benefits that a local Indian partner could bring.

As the couple continued supporting nonprofits, they focused on learning as much as possible about other ways their resources could make the most difference. They read

## INDIA’S GIRLS, A FORGOTTEN GENERATION

- ✿ India has the world’s largest share of child brides; 47 percent of Indian girls marry before age 18.<sup>1</sup>
- ✿ Thirty percent of India’s 900,000 sex workers are girls under 14 years old.<sup>2</sup>
- ✿ India has the highest percentage of underweight (47 percent) and anemic (56 percent) adolescent girls in the world.<sup>3</sup>
- ✿ Only one in 100 Indian girls enters 12th grade.<sup>4</sup>

1 <http://www.dasra.org/research/filip/report/marry-me-later-full-report#features/7>  
 2 Adolescents in India: A Profile, United Nations Population Fund, 2003.  
 3 <http://www.icmr.nic.in/jmr/2009/november/1125.pdf>  
 4 <http://wbi.worldbank.org/developmentmarketplace/ready-to-scale-project/summary/3054>

extensively about girls’ issues; they commissioned two research reports on what it takes to empower girls, one from Copal Partners, a Delhi-based research firm, and one from Dasra, a strategic philanthropy foundation in Mumbai. By 2010, this research, along with their experiences over the preceding six years, helped refine KT’s philanthropic focus to work exclusively to improve the lives of adolescent girls in India.

At the end of the research phase and after spending time visiting nonprofits in India, they realized that the scale and complexity of the issues facing India’s 120 million girls demanded a collective effort. They recognized that the right local partner might bring what they couldn’t: its networks, an understanding of the social and political landscape, and knowledge about how to make effective grants in India.

For the Smithams, that partnership came in the form of the Dasra Girl Alliance (DGA), a \$14 million initiative created in partnership with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Piramal Foundation, both respected organizations in the development sector. Launched in 2013, DGA aims

to build a movement to empower India’s girls by galvanizing funding, building institutional capacity, and helping forge partnerships for organizations working with girls. Over the last two years, DGA has helped to build the capacity of organizations that improve girls’ lives, which collectively deploy \$20 million annually and serve 4.7 million people.

“The collaboration between a nonprofit, a government aid

agency, a family foundation, and a corporate [foundation] brings together complementary skills and diverse experiences to achieve a common goal; it demonstrates a modern approach to solving the issues faced by disadvantaged communities, of which India’s adolescent girls are a stark example,” says Peter. For every \$1 that DGA has spent, it has driven \$8 to the sector. Leveraged funding—getting more collectively than you put in individually—has transformed the Smithams’ thinking about the importance of coalitions and the impact they can have.

As Lynne says, “every girl who is educated, healthy, and empowered becomes the catalyst for change for her family, her community, and her nation.”

**Rachita Vora** leads the Dasra Girl Alliance. Previously, she was a manager in the Corporate Social Responsibility team at Godrej Industries.

## Improving Sanitation for Adolescent Girls

THE LACK OF TOILETS IN INDIA HAS A DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT ON ADOLESCENT GIRLS.

By Nitya Daryanani

**R**adha, 13, is the oldest of four siblings. She lives in a “non-notified” slum (one unrecognized by municipal authorities) in Wadala East, north of Mumbai, with no basic water and sanitation services—and no land security either. The government could claim the area at any time, and so Radha, her family, and others who live

in the community are not motivated to invest their scarce resources in their homes or in any sort of public infrastructure.

Critically, Radha, like 63 million other adolescent Indian girls, does not have access to a private toilet.<sup>1</sup> In fact, she does not even have reliable access to a community toilet. There is only one “restroom” within walking



distance of her house, located in a neighboring slum, across a busy road. The facility is always dirty, used sanitary napkins rot in the stalls, there is no electricity or water connection, and of the 16 seats that were originally built for women only 3 still function.<sup>2</sup>

Faced with such untenable options, Radha, like most residents in her community, uses the vacant land adjoining the slum for her toileting needs, despite acknowledging that there are many real disadvantages to open defecation. In Indian cities, it is so common to see someone squatting beside the road to relieve himself that most people living there wouldn't even look twice. For the majority of middle- and upper-class Indians, the country's poor sanitation infrastructure is a blind spot, even though more than half of India's population lacks access to a toilet.<sup>3</sup> Studies have found that 67 percent of rural households and 13 percent of urban households defecate in the open.<sup>4</sup>

The poor state of sanitation in India has a negative impact on the economy and on development indicators in sectors such as health, education, and gender equality. Ultimately, however, it is girls like Radha who are disproportionately affected. In urban slums and rural villages, when girls relieve themselves outside, or when they try to make their way to a public facility, they face intense embarrassment, catcalls, fear of peeping toms, the danger of being attacked by stray animals, sexual harassment, and even the risk of rape.<sup>5</sup>

To limit this harrowing experience as much as possible, girls often restrict consumption of food and water during the day.



India's government has committed to building 120 million toilets across the country by 2019.

They tend to hold their bladders for an average of 13 hours, raising the likelihood of urinary infections, constipation, and mental stress.<sup>6</sup> Is it any wonder that these practices are often cited as having a cumulative negative impact on girls' productivity and earning potential?

Unfortunately, young women also have the least ability within a household to allocate resources to improve sanitation.<sup>7</sup> This finding is echoed by sanitation practitioners in India, who find that adolescent girls desire access to better sanitation, and when they are empowered to advocate for themselves, they can be the biggest motivators for their families to seek change. Research conducted by Dasra for Bank of America has shown the great potential of programs that focus on empowering this sizable, yet often overlooked group.

Involving girls in the design and creation of sanitation

infrastructure in schools (as nonprofit Water for People India does, for example) has increased the success of sanitation programs there, and it has also improved attendance rates. Breaking the culture of silence around girls' bodies by educating their families—especially men—to understand the sanitation needs of their young daughters as they reach puberty (as the nonprofit Vatsalya has done) has also demonstrated success in improving sanitation habits for entire families. It is important to prioritize individual toilets over community toilets, as they offer young girls greater privacy and convenience. "One Home One Toilet," an initiative of the nonprofit Shelter Associates, has shown that individual toilets can be a practical solution for India's sanitation crisis, even in congested urban slums.

India's government has committed to building about 120 million toilets across the country by 2019, and that action has created a renewed interest in sanitation innovation countrywide.<sup>8</sup> Private sector support, through

corporate social responsibility initiatives, has brought increased rigor to the initiative, as well as a clear focus on results. Leading corporations in India, such as Bank of America, Reckitt Benckiser, and Tata Consultancy Services, have committed financial and professional resources to improving sanitation in India.

These activities hold immense potential. But there is much more to do. One way to accelerate the benefits of India's focus on sanitation is to support programs designed with the needs and preferences of key demographic groups—such as adolescent girls—in mind. Such a focus is more likely to generate interest and support than a broad call to action. ■

**Nitya Daryanani** is a part of the Advisory Research team at Dasra, where she has conducted research on and engaged organizations working in governance, tribal health, and water, sanitation, and hygiene in India.

#### NOTES

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