

Conceptualising Identity as a Social Change Mechanism

Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative
Change

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND KEY PHRASES

LC	Learning Collaborative
RGSEAG	Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls
AGs	Adolescent Girls
AWCs	Anganwadi Centres

Introduction to the Programme

The following case study encompasses the role of group identity while driving social change through norm change. The study focuses on the work of a variety of government stakeholders in addition to Anganwadi Centres¹ in improving social, educational, and life skills of adolescent girls by increasing awareness in order to make them more self-reliant.

Overview of the Programme

Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) - SABLA² was launched in 2011 as an effort by the Government of India (GoI) to empower adolescent girls (AGs) by ensuring out-of-school girls could return to school, increasing their negotiation skills, harnessing their professional skills, and educating them about health seeking behaviours. SABLA emerged from the merging of two pre-existing government programs, Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls and Kishori Shakti Yojana, that were being implemented under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The programme aimed at AGs in the age group of 11 to 18 years, through engagement at Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). It was divided into two major components: nutrition component and non-nutrition components.

Objectives of the Programme

At large, the programme aimed at the holistic growth of out of school (OOSG) AGs by targeting improvement in their nutritional and health status, upgrading home skills, life skills, and vocational skills. Further, the programme promoted awareness about health, hygiene, reproductive and sexual health, family and child care. Lastly, the programme provided information about existing public services such as post offices, banks, police stations, etc. to increase awareness pertaining to services they could avail.

TARGET GROUP

In order to give age-appropriate attention for certain components of Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH), the target group was divided into categories: **11 - 14 years and 15 - 18 years**. Adolescent girls from 9 districts were selected for the programme.

An Adolescent Girls' Identity

Adolescence refers to the stage of transition from childhood to adulthood that is driven by social, physical, and physiological changes. However, in India, this defining stage of identity is further complexed for an adolescent girl due to social norms such as early marriage, lack of prioritisation of a girl child's education, and a woman's role in the household. The onset of adolescence for a

¹ Anganwadi is a type of rural child care centre in India. They were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services program to combat child hunger and malnutrition.

² *Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) | Ministry of Women & Child Development*. (2015). Retrieved 1 February 2021, from <https://wcd.nic.in/schemes/scheme-adolescent-girls-sag>.

female also comes with restricted mobility due to the societal expectations of a woman of marriageable age. While the Ministry of Women and Child Development has undertaken programmes that work to ensure a woman's needs, the needs of an adolescent girl differ, thereby making them a sub-group. In order for change to emerge at the grassroots level, the very identity of an adolescent girl and the challenges she faces needs to be conceptualized concretely.

SABLA has strengthened the recognition of adolescent girls as a group with distinct needs that may not have been prioritised otherwise. Focusing and contextualising previous programmes to suit the needs of AGs, SABLA created a distinct identity of AG – as part of a larger section of society in addition to their own personalized space within this society. By forming an absolute identity surrounding AGs, SABLA has emerged as a norm changing mechanism that views AGs as individuals that face social issues distinctly unrelated to those of women from other age groups.

Emergence of SABLA

The two major interventions that encompass SABLA were its nutrition and non-nutritional components. Under the scheme, AGs were provided counselling and collaterals to increase awareness of and adherence to vocational skills that would increase their chances of going back to school or empowering them to support their families.

Nutrition

The nutrition component included take home ration or hot cooked meals that adhered to the protein and carbohydrate intake required of an adolescent girl.

Non Nutrition

The non-nutrition components included IFA supplementation, regular health checkups, guidance of family welfare, ARSH³, child care practices, life skills education, and vocational training.

Under the scheme, Anganwadi centres in the village were the focal point of the implementation. The implementation, however, took place at five different levels, i.e., Central level, State/Union Territory level, District level, Block level, and Village level. In order to ensure effective delivery of interventions, the State involved MNGOs, NGOs, CBOs, and other institutions.

³ The National Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health strategy provides a framework for a range of sexual and reproductive health services to be provided to the adolescents. The strategy incorporates a core package of services including preventive, promotive, curative and counselling services. Effective implementation of policies and programmes has progressed from the past few years and has led to strengthening of Adolescent Friendly clinics and subsequently the outreach programmes.

Key takeaways

SABLA has proven its effectiveness in addressing the needs of AGs on a variety of platforms, including the public and personal spheres. AGs have not only returned to school, but also their skill-set has seen a dramatic increase in the professional realm, health-seeking behaviours are on a rise, and AGs have been found to be more confident in challenging their role in all domains.

While there is common consensus among stakeholders and the government that the programme proved effective in its goal to empower adolescent girls, a key takeaway is the reformation of an AGs' role and identity in society. By adapting a programme specific to their needs and further indulging in practices that aim to benefit AGs specifically, the formation and increased visibility of a new sub-group lays the foundation for changing the social norms surrounding a young woman's role. By no longer labeling an AG a 'woman', the girl takes power to avail education and nutritional health to further dismantle the social norm.

APPENDICES

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