

GIRLS



# EMPOWERING HER VOICE

Adolescent Girls Learning Communities



EMpower

Enriching young lives in emerging markets



# GIRLS LEAD CHANGE

## EMpower's Investment in Girl Leaders

### The Impetus

Young people in emerging market countries are filled with energy and potential, yet many face immense challenges – from poverty to violence – that prevent them from transitioning to healthy, productive adulthood. To address this issue, EMpower – The Emerging Markets Foundation strategically invests in vital, local organizations in 15 emerging market countries that strengthen at-risk youth through key pillars of development: education, livelihoods and health and well-being, providing them with the tools and resources to transform their futures. In India, EMpower saw a need—and an opportunity—to develop unique programs and support systems tailored specifically to adolescent girls.

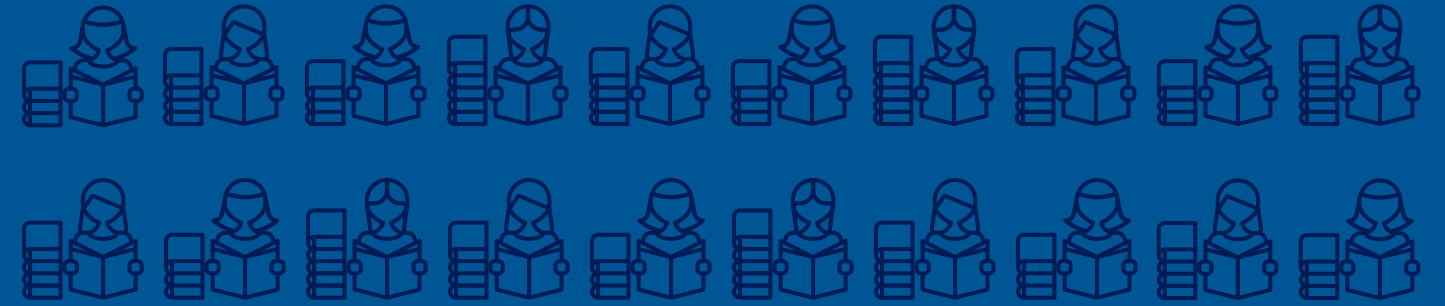
### Why Girls?

India has 120 million adolescent girls, accounting for nearly 10% of its population. While adolescence for boys generally brings greater freedom, girls in India are bombarded with traditional and restrictive messages from their families, schools and communities that limit their mobility, participation in community life and self-expression. Further restricting their life choices, girls do not have the opportunity to develop leadership skills or address the issues that challenge them daily. In India, as in many parts of the world, girls also face a high level of sexual harassment and are often at risk of physical and sexual violence. Nearly four out of five women in India have experienced some form of harassment or violence in public, according to a 2016 ActionAid UK survey. EMpower believes that to alter this reality, girls can be — and should be — seen as experts on their own lives, capable of directing and leading change.



### Our Idea

EMpower sought to create a space that nurtured and empowered girls as leaders. In 2012, EMpower conceptualized and initiated the first Adolescent Girls Learning Community, located in Mumbai. In 2017, a second Adolescent Girls Learning Community was established in Delhi. As vibrant groups comprised of local grantee partner organizations, mentors and girls, the Learning Communities position and support adolescent girls as change-makers. Each Learning Community is coordinated by a local grantee partner: Vacha Trust in Mumbai and Swechha – We for Change in Delhi, and is supported by EMpower through funding, thought partnership and capacity-building.



**EMPOWER  
BELIEVES GIRLS  
CAN BE SEEN  
— AND SHOULD BE —  
AS EXPERTS ON  
THEIR OWN LIVES,  
CAPABLE OF  
DIRECTING  
AND LEADING CHANGE.**



# INTRODUCING THE EMPOWER LEARNING COMMUNITY



## VISION



Through joint action and support for girl leadership, the Adolescent Girls Learning Community empowers girls to overcome the barriers that keep them from reaching their potential.

## MISSION



To empower girls to become decision-makers and advocates on issues that are critical to their lives, including speaking out against restrictions on their rights, confronting gender-based violence and improving their mobility and public safety in their communities.

## OBJECTIVES

### Empower Girl Leaders

Adolescent girls from the member organizations are trained in leadership and project planning skills to tackle priority issues they, and other girls, face.

- Fund work to empower girls to speak out in their local environments.
- Enable girls to design, lead and implement community interventions and activities.

### Train Mentors

Each organization selects one to two female staff members, under the age of 30, who get extra training on leadership, project management and mentoring skills.

- Develop female staff from the member organizations as mentors to support the girl leaders' activities and interventions.
- Strengthen the mentors' leadership and monitoring and evaluation capabilities within their own organizations.

### Provide Space for Networking

Creating a community where ideas are shared and tested, and organizations and individuals feel supported, is key to the Learning Community's success.

- Provide member organizations with the tools and resources they need to build networks and become more effective in supporting and advocating for adolescent girls.

## A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF A LEARNING COMMUNITY

The Learning Community runs on a one-year to 18-month cycle, with the Learning Community in Mumbai starting its fifth cycle in 2018 and the Learning Community in Delhi beginning its second cycle in September 2018. The following is a sample year of activities from the Learning Community in Mumbai.

### MONTH 1

#### PRE-PLANNING:

Each Learning Community member organization recruits a cohort of adolescent girls and mentors from their organization.

#### MENTORS TRAINING:

Mentors attend workshops to increase their mentorship and project planning skills and to share progress, ideas and challenges with each other.

### MONTH 2

#### ENCOUNTER WITH GIRLS:

The girl leaders gather to choose the priority issues that they wish to tackle, like sexual harassment and lack of mobility, and develop a work plan.

#### LEADERSHIP TRAINING OF GIRLS:

Girl leaders attend a variety of workshops to build their agency and self-efficacy, and to gain practical skills for implementing community interventions.

#### MONITORING & EVALUATION WORKSHOP:

Mentors enhance their monitoring and evaluation skills to track each girl leader's personal transformation, the changes within the grantee partner organizations and impact at the community level.

### MONTHS 3-10

#### IMPLEMENTATION PHASE:

Girl leaders implement their own initiatives and activities. Actual interventions in Mumbai have included a city-wide survey on mobility and public safety for girls, a "sports day" where girls reclaimed public spaces to play cricket and a grassroots festival where girl leaders presented their Declaration of Girls' Rights.

### MONTH 11

#### SHARING MEETING:

Girl leaders present on the activities they implemented throughout the year and discuss successes, challenges and community impact.

### MONTH 12

#### YEAR END EVENT & WAY FORWARD:

A graduation ceremony is held for the girl leaders at the close of the year, which is attended by community leaders, the media and other stakeholders. Next steps and priorities for the coming year are discussed.



# HOW DOES IT WORK?

## Mumbai as a Model

### Start with Building Girls' Agency

The EMpower Learning Community concept is driven by a commitment to nurture girls to become empowered and engaged. Girls are the decision-makers on all levels: they are the drivers of the target issues, the idea generators, the planners and the public face of the community. Girls are the leaders in actively pursuing solutions to the barriers that hold them back.



*“[In India], you don’t get a stage where you can clarify your doubts,” says girl leader Sarah. “The Learning Community is a platform where we can clarify our doubts and ask the questions that are in our minds. But in our own community we can’t do that. They say, ‘How can you talk about these issues? You are a girl. How can you talk about rape? You don’t have the right to talk.’ But we DO have the right. The Learning Community is a place where we can talk freely about all things.”*

In Mumbai, the girls chose to advocate for girls’ safety, mobility and equal opportunity. Taking the lead in the Learning Community was a tough proposal, however, for many of the girls who were not yet decision-makers in their own lives. In the beginning, many girls felt unsure about venturing out into their communities and did not yet realize their full potential. For example, during a baseline survey, girls were asked to finish the sentence, “I can do these...” A typical answer was, “I can do household chores.”

To transform how the girls saw themselves, the Learning Community helped the girls gain the confidence and self-efficacy skills they needed through implementing activities, or “interventions,” to influence change in their communities, which they conceptualized and brought to life.

In Mumbai, many girls are not allowed to walk by themselves, play on playgrounds or occupy public spaces due to traditional gender restrictions and safety concerns for girls. To reclaim these spaces, girl leaders from grantee partner Vacha Trust conducted a number of activities. For a rally, they created more than 25 posters with messages like, “No More Sexual Harassment!” and “Enough! We Want Freedom!”. Through a street play, the girl leaders asked community members to fight against the culture of violence and rape, instead of placing restrictions on the girls. Vacha staff noted that leading these activities helped to increase the girls’ self-esteem: “Those who had previously feared to come out of their homes were now voicing their opinions in public.”

As part of the Learning Community’s commitment to monitoring and evaluating its impact, baseline and endline data was collected to measure changes in the girls’ levels of confidence and self-efficacy. At the beginning of the second Learning Community cycle, 52 percent of returning girl leaders had a high level of confidence, as compared to 16.7 percent of girls joining for the first time. The data reveals that the longer the girls stay in the Learning Community, the better able they are to develop their agency.

Evidence of this can be heard from the voices of the girl leaders. When asked how her life had changed after joining the Learning Community, Priti Gupta said: “I have gained a lot of confidence to speak in front of a large number of people. Now I can go outside to participate in rallies and street plays. I have learned that I can openly talk about the issues affecting me; I wish that every girl in this world can bring this change in herself.”



## Create a Supportive Network of Mentors

As the girls become visible through their community interventions, it becomes crucial for them to have a supportive network they can reach out to when confronted with safety issues or resistance from community leaders. Learning Community mentors, female junior staff members from each member organization, provide this support. Mentors work closely with the girl leaders to understand how they deal with challenges in their communities and what best practices can be adopted for use in the organizations.

The Learning Community blends mentorship training with pragmatic skills, enhancing both the young staff members' skill-sets as mentors and as staff members. This hands-on approach creates organizational impact and facilitates mentors' advancement within their organizations, as they bring their newly acquired skills to their day jobs.

**THROUGH SURVEYS,**  
**82%** OF MENTORS REPORTED  
**AN INCREASE**  
IN THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS, AND  
**73%** REPORTED AN  
**INCREASE IN THEIR**  
**PROFESSIONAL NETWORK**



THROUGH WORKING WITH THE LEARNING COMMUNITY.

“Before this experience, I never imagined I could coordinate with so many organizations and girls,” commented Shubhangi Bhang, a mentor from grantee partner Aangan Trust. “Through the Learning Community, I engaged and communicated with 80 girls and other mentors to design activities.”

## Gain Access to Community Stakeholders

Girl leaders engage their communities and influence change by speaking directly to community leaders about the problems they face, and the solutions they are developing to confront these issues.

In 2015, the Learning Community girl leaders realized that there was no data from girls or women about the accessibility of Mumbai's public spaces and the restrictions that girls experience. The girls jointly decided to undertake a community survey to gather this crucial information. They took to the streets to understand what types of restrictions girls face, where they occur, who imposes them and how these restrictions impact their basic rights.

Their voices then carried the legitimacy of statistics and experiences from a wide range of young people and adults.

Implementing the survey ignited a dialogue with stakeholders that continues as the girls now have tangible data to back up their demands of a community environment that expands girls' choices and mobility. This has resulted in real and important changes. For example,

 **GIRLS SUCCESSFULLY  
ADVOCATED  
TO MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS  
FOR STREETLIGHTS TO BE INSTALLED ON KEY ROUTES**

in their neighborhoods, making it safer for girls to attend school with less fear of being harassed on their way.

**COVERING GROUND AND  
KNOCKING ON DOORS, THE**

**80 GIRL  
LEADERS  
SUCCESSFULLY SURVEYED**

 **953  
RESPONDENTS IN  
10 WARDS**

**OF MUMBAI  
AND A FEW NEARBY VILLAGES.**

The process of designing and applying the surveys, analyzing the findings and disseminating the report to community stakeholders gave the girls unprecedented access to key adults in their local communities, including parents, teachers, local leaders and police.

*“When I see a girl being harassed in my community, I will call the police to file a complaint,” said girl leader Nousheen Ansari. “I no longer feel scared to reach out to the police and community members.”*





## Collective Action for Lasting Change

After becoming skilled in designing and implementing community initiatives and a city-wide survey, the Learning Community girl leaders decided to centralize their efforts into one campaign: The Time is Now (ab nahin toh kab), which continues their work advocating for a girl's right to safe and unrestricted movement in public. By banding together, the girls knew their collective power to engage decision-makers and influence change would be greater.

Girl leaders designed and coordinated multi-faceted activities to make their presence known in public spaces, including wall painting, rallies, street plays, protests, stakeholder consultations and dialogues with families and community leaders. The collective group also initiated a Facebook campaign for girls to share their stories and post photos of unsafe public spaces. One girl wrote, "When we take a selfie, we express ourselves completely, fearlessly. That is how we should express ourselves every time, everywhere."

**OVER 1,550 GIRLS**

were part of these interventions, reaching approximately

**26,000 PEOPLE**



across Mumbai. Expanding The Time is Now to academic spaces, in 2017, the girl leaders organized and put on a seminar, which brought together

**199 GIRL PARTICIPANTS FROM 19 NONPROFITS AND 13 COLLEGES.**



The seminar provided a platform for girls to share their experiences, perceptions and recommendations to make public spaces in Mumbai safe and accessible for everyone. These recommendations have proved to be effective tools for advocacy with government authorities. Surveys collected at the close of the fourth cycle show that girl leaders had vast improvements in their self-perception and capacity to influence after participating in the Learning Community activities.

**98% OF GIRL LEADERS SHOWED AN INCREASE IN LEADERSHIP SKILLS TO ADDRESS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE; 100% OF THE GIRLS IMPROVED THEIR ABILITY TO USE THEIR VOICE TO SPEAK OUT AND ADDRESS THE OBSTACLES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.**

## THE TIME IS NOW



In 2015, the Learning Community in Mumbai launched The Time is Now campaign. The following demands were made by the girl leaders to reclaim their right to safety, mobility and access to public spaces. The 'Declaration of Girls' Rights' was publicly released and displayed for community members at the CORO Grassroots Festival.

- Increase police patrolling near schools and colleges
- Set up functional chowkies (watchman/police posts) near bastis (slums), bus stops, street libraries and parks
- Install street lights in bastis (slums) and on roads
- Reserve seats for girls on public transport
- Reserve time in parks for girls and appoint security personnel to ensure their safety
- Construct girl-friendly public and community toilets
- Make toilets accessible and affordable for girls, women and marginalized genders
- Include the term "girls" in all brochures on women's safety
- Equip Public Call Offices (PCOs) with toll free police helplines near schools, colleges, bus stops, railway stations, banks and parks
- Implement anti-sexual harassment units in schools across Mumbai





# A JOURNEY OF GROWTH AND IMPACT

## CYCLE 1

## CYCLE 2

## CYCLE 3

## CYCLE 4

## CYCLE 5

### MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS



AANGAN TRUST  
AKSHARA  
VACHA TRUST  
VIDHAYAK SANSAD

AANGAN TRUST  
AKSHARA  
CORO  
DOSTI  
SMS  
VACHA TRUST  
VIDHAYAK SANSAD

AANGAN TRUST  
AKSHARA  
CORO  
DOSTI  
SMS  
VACHA TRUST  
VIDHAYAK SANSAD  
YWCA

AANGAN TRUST  
AKSHARA  
CORO  
DOSTI  
SMS  
VACHA TRUST  
YWCA

AANGAN TRUST  
AKSHARA  
BRIGHT FUTURE  
CORO  
SMS  
VACHA TRUST  
YWCA

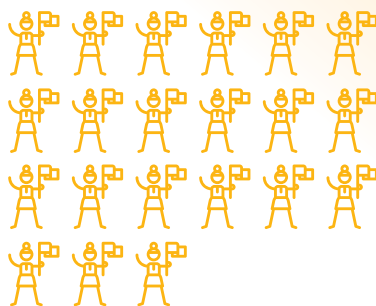
### MENTORS



12



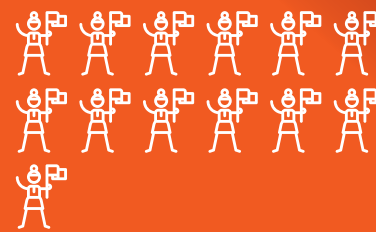
21



16



13



CYCLE 5 BEGAN IN  
MAY 2018 WITH  
7 MEMBER  
ORGANIZATIONS,  
AND WILL RUN  
FOR 18 MONTHS.

### GIRL LEADERS



40



80



79



81



### REACH



**16** ACTIVITIES  
& INTERVENTIONS REACHED  
**202** YOUTH  
PARTICIPANTS AND  
**887**  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

**25** ACTIVITIES  
& INTERVENTIONS REACHED  
**887** YOUTH  
PARTICIPANTS AND  
**6,000**  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

**32** ACTIVITIES  
& INTERVENTIONS REACHED  
**879** YOUTH  
PARTICIPANTS AND  
**22,104**  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

**54** ACTIVITIES  
& INTERVENTIONS REACHED  
**1,568** YOUTH  
PARTICIPANTS AND  
**25,995**  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

**IMPACT**  
MEASUREMENTS  
TO COME



# IN HER OWN WORDS

Using the Moment of Change monitoring and evaluation tool, girls were asked about their lives before and after joining the Learning Community. Here are their answers, straight from three of the girls themselves.

GIRL PARTICIPANT 1

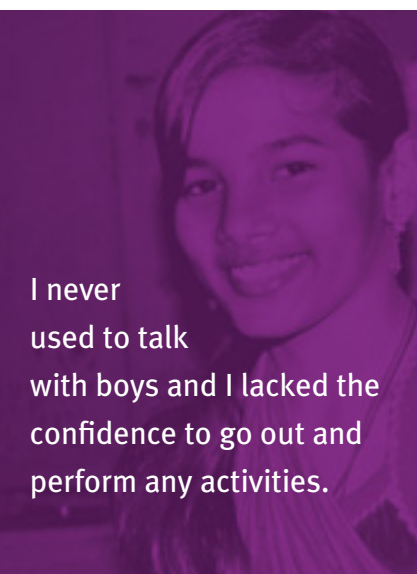
GIRL PARTICIPANT 2

GIRL PARTICIPANT 3

**What was your life like before joining the Learning Community?**

Before joining the Learning Community, I could not think about important things. Even if I did, I could never implement them. I used to see myself as an ordinary girl. I used to not be able to speak in front of people and if I did, I would worry over it all the time.

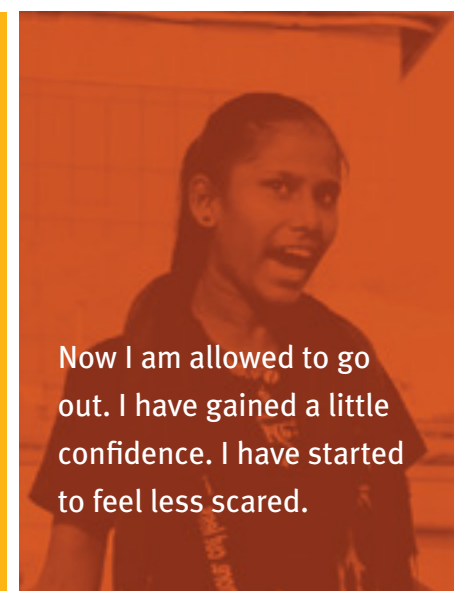
Before joining the Learning Community, I used to not be able to go outside. I used to feel scared to go and explore outside and feel scared to talk to new people. I was never allowed to go to the [public] playground.



I never used to talk with boys and I lacked the confidence to go out and perform any activities.

**What is your life like after joining the Learning Community?**

After I joined the Learning Community, I learnt to start travelling all by myself. Now, I can take up any task with confidence and do it without making myself tense. I consider myself a strong girl now.

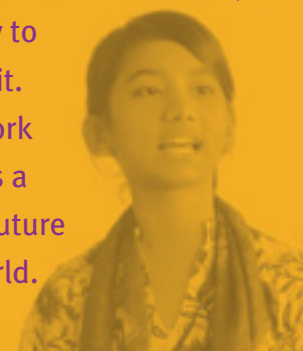


Now I am allowed to go out. I have gained a little confidence. I have started to feel less scared.

After I joined the Learning Community, I have gained a lot of confidence to speak in front of a large number of people. Now I go outside to participate in rallies and street plays. Today I can stand proudly and say that I am a girl and equal to boys.

**What did you learn about yourself, your community or the world?**

I can support myself and other people in the community. If there is a problem in the community, I can try to handle it. I can work towards a better future and world.



I am able to write poetry now. I have started to express myself through poetry.



I have learnt that I can openly talk and wish that every girl in this world should bring this change in herself.



# GROWING TO DELHI

## These Girls Can!

In 2017, EPower established a second Adolescent Girls Learning Community, in Delhi. Taking cues and lessons learned from the Learning Community in Mumbai via collaboration between coordinating organizations Vacha Trust and Swechha – We for Change, the 25 girl leaders from five communities took up an array of community interventions against sexual harassment, starting with a community-level survey. Girl leaders from Swechha initiated a workshop on sexual harassment to educate themselves on the current Indian laws regarding sexual violence and to help girls handle situations in which they feel uncomfortable or threatened. Self-defense trainings were also organized and, taking to the streets, the girl leaders spray painted the number for the women's helpline in strategic public areas. "Our safety is in our hands and it is not based on the clothes we wear," commented girl leader Kajal. "That is why girls should learn self-defense."

In 2018, the Learning Community in Delhi launched its first social media campaign, Girls Can. Using the hashtag #ThisGirl, the Learning Community

girl leaders asked all girls to share how simple things like walking, talking and making decisions don't always feel possible for girls, and to tell the world that "girls can". Promoting the Girls Can campaign offline, the girl leaders organized an interactive festival called Azadi (Freedom) Unlimited, featuring stalls on public safety and activities on gender equality that attracted 250 girls from across Delhi. By dialoguing with peers and parents, both on- and off-line, the girl leaders collectively strategized to speak up against unequal gender norms and advocate for the free use of community spaces.

Now, with two Learning Communities in India, there is ample room for country-wide collaborations, activities and campaigns. Every year that the Learning Communities continue to run and grow, the stronger and more confident the girl leaders become, allowing them to think larger and reach higher. Their worlds are opening up like never before, and their collaborations have the potential to change their communities for the next generation of girls.

### CYCLE ONE

 **5** MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS (Chintan, FAT, JOSH, Swechha, The YP Foundation) **5** MENTORS  **25** GIRLS 

REACHED **326** youth participants **2,203** community members **100,000+** social media users

THROUGH **22 ACTIVITIES** ACROSS DELHI AND NCR

## OVERALL IMPACT

The Learning Communities have shown that adolescent girls and organizations, working in communities of practice, can amplify their messages and multiply their actions to improve the lives of girls. Through the Adolescent Girls Learning Communities in Mumbai and Delhi to date, a total of:

**305** ADOLESCENT GIRLS WERE **EMPOWERED** AS CHANGE AGENTS. **67** MENTORS HELPED SUPPORT THE GIRLS' ACTIVITIES, REACHING **3,862** YOUTH PARTICIPANTS AND **57,189** COMMUNITY MEMBERS. 

### WHAT'S NEXT?

#### MUMBAI

Building from the previous cycles, the Learning Community in Mumbai will continue to focus its efforts on safe mobility in public places. In the fifth cycle, girl leaders and peer mentors will strategically meet with government authorities to urge them to take

**TANGIBLE STEPS TO IMPROVE SAFE ACCESS TO TOILETS, STREET LIBRARIES AND PLAYGROUNDS FOR GIRLS.** 

The girl leaders will also raise awareness, mobilize other girls and community members and physically and fearlessly claim these spaces in 14 wards across Mumbai.

#### DELHI

In Delhi, the planning is underway for the second cycle of the Learning Community, with the goal to double the number of girl leaders.





# WHAT DID WE LEARN?

## Guidelines in Empowering Girl Leaders

EMpower and its grantee partners in India learned a lot about working with and supporting adolescent girls through the Adolescent Girls Learning Communities. Letting girls take charge, make mistakes and learn to become leaders in their communities can take more restraint and grace from nonprofit organizations than expected. The following are lessons EMpower and the Learning Community member organizations learned, as we stepped back to let girls step up.

## Learning Together

### A Toolkit for Monitoring & Evaluating Programs for Adolescent Girls

This EMpower-curated toolkit contains resources on monitoring and evaluating programs for adolescent girls, borne out of EMpower's work with the Adolescent Girls Learning Community in Mumbai. It is for use by anyone working with adolescent girls.

THE TOOLKIT IS COMPRISED OF INNOVATIVE, PARTICIPATORY TOOLS AND STRATEGIES DESIGNED TO:

- measure changes in girls' lives
- understand girls' situations in their communities
- measure the impact of a program
- showcase the value of girl-led interventions

Access these amazing resources for girl programming, as well as other Youth Development Tools, here: <http://www.empowerweb.org/youth-development-tools>



#### 1. GIRLS LEAD THE LEARNING COMMUNITY.

They are the decision-makers and identify the issues that they want to address.



#### 2. GIRLS ARE THE ARCHITECTS OF ALL ACTIVITIES.

They plan, design and implement all community interventions.



#### 3. GIRLS RUN THE SHOW.

They create the activity timeline, budget and monitoring and evaluation plan to measure the impact of their interventions in the community.



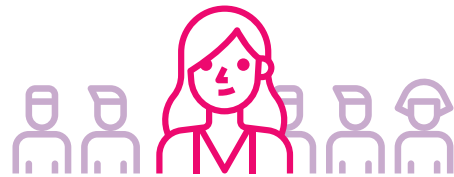
#### 4. GIRLS ARE LOCATION SCOUTS.

They decide where they will implement their interventions by selecting strategic locations in their communities.



#### 5. GIRLS ARE THE PRIMARY RESEARCHERS.

They prepare research questions and administer surveys, audits or focus group discussions to collect data about the issue they are addressing.



#### 6. GIRLS ARE THE FACE OF THE LEARNING COMMUNITY.

They approach relevant authorities and community members to obtain permission for organizing events and to negotiate community actions.



#### 7. GIRLS ARE EVENT PLANNERS.

They manage event logistics for collective actions, and are responsible for registration, moderating, coordinating details and showcasing their achievements during these events.



#### 8. GIRLS' VOICES ARE AMPLIFIED.

They represent the Learning Community in forums such as symposiums, press conferences, public consultations and expert panels.



#### 9. GIRLS ARE SOCIAL MEDIA SAVVY.

They develop the social media plan and provide inputs and stories for all communication products such as storybooks, yearbooks, social media posts and campaign materials.



#### 10. GIRLS ARE TEACHERS.

They share their learnings with each other and provide feedback about the Learning Community to the coordinating organization.



We celebrate the inspiring, determined girl leaders who are the driving force of the Adolescent Girls Learning Communities in Mumbai and Delhi. Our appreciation to all Learning Community member organizations, mentors and staff. Special thanks to coordinating organizations Vacha Trust and Swechha – We for Change.

This work is supported by a grant from the NoVo Foundation, which works around the world to end violence and discrimination against all girls and women.

Cover photo and page 6 photo by Lydia Holden. Text by Lydia Holden, Kahani Communications.

## Let's Get Social:

### EMpower



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### Learning Community in Mumbai



[www.facebook.com/  
Kishoripuchheabnahitokab](https://www.facebook.com/Kishoripuchheabnahitokab)

### Learning Community in Delhi



[www.facebook.com/pg/  
RokTokSeAzadi](https://www.facebook.com/pg/RokTokSeAzadi)



[@GirlsCan1091](https://twitter.com/GirlsCan1091)



[@GirlsCanCampaign](https://www.instagram.com/GirlsCanCampaign)

EMpower – The Emerging Markets Foundation is a global philanthropy focused on at-risk youth (ages 10-24) in emerging market countries. EMpower's global footprint includes offices in New York, London and Hong Kong, each with a dedicated Board of Directors, on-the-ground program staff presence in Delhi and Istanbul, and growing donor communities in India and Singapore.

Our partnerships with local, community-based organizations in 15 EM countries provide at-risk young people with the tools and resources they need to live healthy, productive lives, becoming our next generation of leaders.

[www.empowerweb.org](http://www.empowerweb.org)



# EMpower

Enriching young lives in emerging markets