



GIRL RISING INDIA

WOMEN AND GIRLS PROSPER

Breaking gender stereotypes in tea estates of Assam through powerful storytelling

Girl Rising (GR) is a global campaign for girls' education and empowerment. Having initially begun as a film, GR today leverages powerful storytelling tools to inspire action, shift attitudes, and change behavior in the way the world values girls. With a presence in twelve countries across the world, GR imagines a future devoid of any stereotypes and discrimination where opportunities are decided by potential and not by gender, where both girls and boys are encouraged to dream big for themselves.

To take this mission forward and build a movement for gender equality in the country, GR launched in India in 2015 with a salient partnership with Ministry of Women and Child Development. Since then, GR has successfully implemented on-the-ground initiatives and curated several school-based curricula and training modules - all to build voice and agency and to inculcate gender-responsive and equitable attitudes among adolescents.

Overview: Tea estates and gender-sensitization

Assam is the second largest producer of tea in world¹, employing one million women in its tea estates. However, these women are marginalized twice over – first, owing to their socio-economic backgrounds and then because of their gender. The tea estates are plagued with high prevalence of child marriage², gender-based violence³ with low levels of education; especially for girls⁴. As the division of labor in the households within the tea estates are based on traditional gender norms; household chores are typically assigned to women and girls. This gendered division of labor creates a dual burden on them– working both inside and outside of homes; often leaving little to no time for school coursework or skill building. The acceptance of such norms further contributes and perpetuates discriminatory gender behaviors, which adversely affect agency, sense of self and empowerment of adolescents, particularly adolescent girls. Their aspirations and dreams are often molded by these stereotypes and norms. These challenges present an urgent need for gender-sensitization in tea estates such that both girls and boys are equally motivated and encouraged to realize their full potential.

Women and Girls Prosper: the intervention

Girl Rising with support from the Starbucks Foundation embarked on a unique project in 2019 to cultivate life skills of adolescents between the ages of 10-15, especially girls—in the two tea estates of Hathikuli and Sessa in Assam. Implemented in partnership with [Barefoot College International](https://www.barefootcollege.org/) (BCI), the two-year project, Women and Girl Prosper (WGP) developed a tailor-made 16-week gender-sensitization curriculum⁵ to build agency of adolescents and help them break away from traditionally accepted gender

¹ https://www.indiatea.org/tea_growing_regions

² <https://www.thebetterindia.com/14394/battling-child-marriage-assams-tea-gardens/>

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/global-safety-framework-in-rural-spaces-influenced-by-tea-sector-compressed.pdf?la=en&vs=4245>

⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/india/our-partners/etp>

⁵ The curriculum included 4 modules delivered through weekly sessions of 45 minutes each

stereotypes prevalent in the state. This curriculum was created after hosting consultations and discussions with a variety of stakeholders including adolescents, parents, community members, and tea estate managers. Anchored on four Girl Rising stories, the curriculum brought together expertise of both the organizations to spotlight issues such as access to education, poverty, child labor and gender-based violence, early and forced child marriage, early pregnancies, menstrual health and hygiene. With over 20 participatory activities, the curriculum led to several key discussions and deliberations among adolescents prompting them to reflect on prevalent societal norms, while honing their cognitive and socioemotional skills.

COVID-19 pandemic and project adaptation

Owing to COVID-19, the thematic focus and the implementation model of the project expanded to accommodate on-ground realities. In addition to discussions on gender, the project also emphasized on the varied aspects of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) to generate awareness on the pandemic and encourage safe hand washing practices.



"I was so inspired by Ruksana's story in the Girl Rising film during the gender sessions. These sessions became a safe space for me in Hathikuli where I could voice my opinions and think freely!"

Rajni Thakur, 13 years, Hathikuli



The project was adapted to directly reach of 300 adolescents and 300 community members keeping in mind the state issued- COVID-19 guidelines at the time. While, 1200 adolescents formed the indirect project reach and were engaged through worksheets with activities to help them spot and stop the manifestations of gender-based discrimination. These worksheets were disseminated through government schools, tea-estate managers, line chowkidars and

community members with the trainers supervising the process.

Impact assessment

To capture the shift in knowledge and attitudes, pre- and post-intervention surveys were leveraged for both adolescents and parents. These surveys included questions on WASH, knowledge and understanding of gender stereotypes among others. The evaluation included a total sample of 60 adolescents and 60 parents from the two tea-estates. Key findings revealed:

- An increase of **50% in awareness** about the preventative measures to combat the COVID-19 virus among adolescents and 20% in community members.
- The adolescents **felt more confident in expressing their views** on child labor, the importance of education, gender-based violence and its repercussions on their lives.
- The project helped adolescents become cognizant of gender roles within the society with an **increased awareness of 40%** noted at end-line.

Way forward

Through the course of this project, Girl Rising had the opportunity to understand more deeply the issues that adolescents – especially girls – face in and around tea estates. Like many other states, the challenges and realities of Assam are unique thereby calling for interventions that are hyperlocal. With instances of gender-based violence being widespread in the state, there is a need for a systematic and long-term intervention that empowers adolescents and those around them to counter instances of violence and pursue education. The use of storytelling tools, in our experience, was instrumental in stirring solution-centric conversations both within adolescent groups and among parents and tea estate managers. To offset COVID-19-related consequences on enrolment rate, it is imperative that such initiatives wherein the value of girls' education is spotlighted are scaled-up across communities.



"I am inspired to become a changemaker just like Amina from the Girl Rising film. I want to advocate for the cause of gender equality and end discrimination to uplift the women in my community!"

Sushmita Kisan, 14 years, Sessa

