



Girl's Parliaments

EGG's pioneering Girls' Parliaments are changing the face of education in India. EGG works in places where girls and women lead highly traditional lives, in patriarchal societies. Girls' mortality rates are unusually high, leading Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen to describe "missing girls." Violence against girls persists. Girls often eat last and get less health care. They have little say in whether they can go to schools or when or whom they will marry. Many will marry younger than the legal age of 18 and move to their husbands' families. Sons often care more for their own parents in old age. Son preference persists.

In this environment, EGG's India team, led by Anjula Tyagi, had a radical idea: empower girls themselves to work for their own education. Why would this work?

Essentially it is the missing link. Yes, commitment to education is growing. People are educating boys, often sending them to private schools as soon as they can. As understanding of returns to girls' education grows, governments and leaders of civil society are helping girls. But the need is huge, and Governments are strapped for resources and turn to communities to help, through School Management Committees. Yet communities are also strapped and, particularly where poverty is pervasive, traditions persist. So girls lag behind, especially in secondary school. Girls' Parliaments give girls a chance to come together, gain the confidence and skills to speak out, and make the case for their own education to parents, communities, and now government officials -- who have been astonished, delighted, and convinced to help more.

Girls' Parliaments now join with teachers and School Management Committees to improve education. They elect their own "Ministers" for academics, health, sport, safety, and other fields, consulting with teachers but choosing their own priorities. Given this chance, they set up teams and plan projects and carry through. Most dramatically, at first a few girls have spoken up in public to ask for better girls' education. Now hundreds do, through their Girls' Parliaments. Girls are plainly determined to learn. They seek more help from teachers. They urge SMCs to help buy books and computers, which do not stay locked up -- they are used. Girls' Parliaments seek training in "life skills" focused on self-respect and cooperative ways to work with other people. They run hand-washing programs and improve sanitation. They organize sports. They work with SMCs and police to improve crucial public safety and deter violence. One girl returned to her community and persuaded a couple not to marry off a six-year old daughter. That community now urges other communities to oppose child marriage. The Girls' Parliaments opened a door, and girls surge through, in ways that earn them the respect and support of their communities. Girls themselves join together to become agents of change.

In short, Girls' Parliaments give girls the chance to transform community views about girls' education and engage to help schools work. Learning gains are stunning -- 12th grade exam rates

now exceed 90 percent, up from 60. Girls learn advocacy and organizational skills that help them gain voice and choice as they grow up. They lead.

EGG develops Girls' Parliaments through local workers who visit schools monthly and offer training. Now some of those workers are EGG Fellows, who graduated from EGG program schools and attend college on EGG Fellowships, working part-time for EGG.