

Adolescents-First Approach

India is home to 254 million adolescents, making it one of the youngest countries in the world. Poised to set the standard for the world, **India can become the global model for adolescent health and well-being. Investing in ensuring adolescents are healthy, safe, educated, and empowered can fuel multi-generational impact and can propel poverty alleviation and growth for the nation.**¹ However, adolescents² (particularly girls) in India remain vulnerable and marginalized. Existing solutions have been devised with limited true participation from young people resulting in them continuing to face issues of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, school dropouts, and child labor – leaving India with some of the highest rates globally.

A community-led approach that unifies multiple stakeholders who propel young people to be front and center through active participation is a vital need. 10to19³ is set to answer and achieve this need for **urgent, collective action**. Its past experiences and efforts have led it to develop a youth-centric, participatory, and repeatable approach that identifies and brings together relevant sector actors to build demand for and the usage of adolescent-centric services. It is called the **Adolescents-First Approach**. By formalizing adolescents' participation in government systems, it enables decision-makers to work directly with them to develop and generate relevant solutions to real-life problems that improve implementation of schemes, both at the hyperlocal and policy levels – with the ability to effect actual change and policy impact. 10to19 has witnessed transformations in programmatic reach, responsiveness, relevance, and efficacy as well as shifts in design, implementation, and monitoring of existing programs because of this model. Thus, the Adolescents-First Approach has the potential to transform India's developmental ecosystem as it bridges the gap between Indian youth and existing, formal systems to bring about positive change in the life of adolescents.

10to19's Adolescents-First Approach

10to19 seeks to share its experience of innovating and implementing a dynamic, multi-stakeholder approach within the adolescent sector as only through shared knowledge can the sector collectively grow, learn, effect change, and mature. It is hoped that this document is treated as a public good: discussed and vetted by readers so that it becomes a living model with on-going feedback and inputs from the sector.

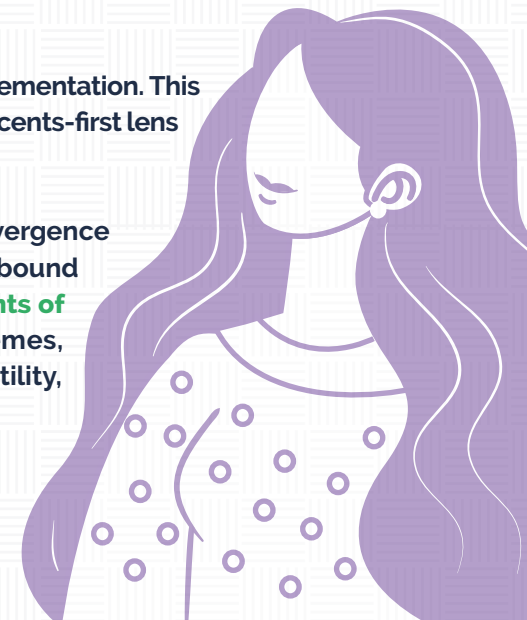
10to19's **ethos** is its differentiator: adolescents are always included, involved, and inducted into every aspect, at each level of implementation. This approach extends beyond just young people themselves into prioritizing other civil society organizations (CSOs) that have an adolescents-first lens as well as to nurturing policy makers and funders to prioritize adolescents.

The success of the Adolescents-First Approach was due to a few factors: 1) it is easily replicable and customizable, 2) its convergence of various and diverse partners enabled relevant issues to be strategically addressed, and 3) it is a time-bound and outcome-bound approach, meaning all stakeholders work towards finite and tangible goals. The deconstruction next highlights the **six core components of the model**. By disaggregating these elements, any combination of them can be pooled together for use by various programs, schemes, initiatives, and organizations. This model allows for continual growth and progress while demonstrating the adaptability, versatility, and integration of these elements.

¹ Chandra-Mouli, V., Greifinger, R., Nwosu, A. et al. Invest in adolescents and young people: it pays. *Reprod Health* 10, 51 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1742-4755-10-51>

² The target demographic is referred to interchangeably as 'young people/youth' (aged 15-24) and 'adolescents' (aged 10-19).

³ The 10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative (10to19) is a pioneering, high-impact platform conceived in 2017 that unites various stakeholders across the adolescent ecosystem to transform the sector of adolescent health and well-being in India.



Prevention during COVID-19 Toolkit. Used the experience of training 433 young amplifiers across 7 states to create a clear toolkit on "How to be a COVID-19 Youth Champion"

Key Examples

Ab Meri Baari Charter. Condensed all the findings across 85+ villages into only 10 recommendations which facilitated government decision-makers to adopt the suggested improvements

ACTIONABLE OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Creates tools and resources that draw on adolescents' experiences to generate recommendations that highlight the needs, gaps, and priorities that require to be addressed
- Makes data simple, digestible, and usable to enable clear action by all stakeholders

MULTI-MODAL, MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACH

- Addresses adolescent needs and challenges by leveraging adaptive, responsive, and flexible methods and pathways to generate on-ground traction and mobilize adolescents & community members for the sector
- Garners several catalytic multi-stakeholder partnerships and facilitates strong interlinkages, alignment, and intent between various ecosystem actors, to enable an increase in young people's role in decision-making

Key Examples

Prevention during COVID-19 Toolkit. Launched a toolkit with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on "How to be a COVID-19 Youth Champion"

Ab Meri Baari Charter. Developed a charter of recommendations for policy- and decision-makers that outlined needs of girls and their communities based on social audit findings

STRATEGIC MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

- Capitalizes on support from traditional and non-traditional communication to reach a wide, diverse audience
- Amplifies activities and issues to build greater support and ownership from local communities and beyond
- Legitimizes and increases visibility of youth voices within public domains to build their confidence and agency
- Bridges the gap between on-ground realities and broader local and global audiences by using digital tools, traditional, and modern media campaigns

Key Examples

Ab Meri Baari Bus Tour. Amplified girl champions' voices through an on-ground bus tour across Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, that mobilized over 1,500 people, in which the girls showcased and put forth their demands to surrounding communities

Ab Meri Baari in Media. Published 70+ articles in both national and regional media, which ensured charter recommendations were shared with a wider audience

ADOLESCENTS-FIRST APPROACH: Key Features

ADOLESCENT PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT

- Leverages youth participation at every level and step
- Youth offer recommendations to authority figures so interventions and decisions are useful
- Builds new skills and capacities of youth to engage with their environment to showcase their viewpoints and exercise agency

Key Examples

Ab Meri Baari Girl Champions. Strengthened the capacities of 300 girl champions, mobilizing them to conduct social audits in 85+ villages. This built their ownership and led to recommendations and suggestions being spoken directly by them to policy makers

Mobikaar Youth. Trained 100 young people to master mobile journalistic skills and supported them in expressing their opinions on social issues

RESEARCH AND DATA BASED

- Continuously validates and supplements programs with experts and existing knowledge
- Uses evidence at local, district, state, and national levels to influence change with decision-makers at all levels
- Ensures cost- and resource-effective planning and action, enabling positive impact at scale
- Contributes to a body of shared knowledge for the field of adolescent health and well-being

Key Examples

Ab Meri Baari Social Audit. Assessed 85+ villages to understand ground reality of adolescent sexual and reproductive health from which findings were analyzed and collated into a charter of recommendations

COLLABORATIVE & COLLECTIVE ACTION

- Works with partner strengths to mobilize a sector-wide shift towards social and behavior change
- Optimizes partner expertise for seamless on-ground facilitation and implementation
- Showcases youth perspectives and innovative approaches via collective learning and sharing

Key Example

Ab Meri Baari Partners. Worked with 25+ on-ground partners to enable successful on-ground performance and operations

The Adolescents-First Approach was developed and innovated over the span of three programs:

1

The first, most intensive, and extensive was the **Ab Meri Baari (ABM)** campaign in 2019. It was a nationwide campaign to create normative change and drive strategic engagement by providing adolescents and youth with a platform to support and amplify their voices. The **objective** was to bring about an increase in the agency of adolescents – especially girls between the ages of 10-19 – and impact their decision-making and understanding on education, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and early marriage. A localized, state-based narrative in Rajasthan and Jharkhand to empower adolescents with the tools and channels needed to amplify their voices to decision-makers was created which was bolstered by a national narrative that ultimately reached around 10 million adolescents across the country.

2

The second campaign took place during the global pandemic in 2020. **Prevention of Stigma and Discrimination during COVID-19** helped to counter stigma and misinformation against frontline workers and doctors using youth champions. The **objective** of this program was to leverage communication tools for public mobilization and behavior change through youth-driven participatory pathways as well as to meaningfully engage youth to make them a part of solving social issues and enhance their digital advocacy skills. The youth amplifiers and partner organizations created over 1,200 social media posts that received over 8.5 million impressions across major social media platforms. All the training and social media work with adolescents led to the creation of a toolkit “*How to be a COVID-19 Youth Champion*” that was launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

3

The third campaign, the **Mobikaar Program**, focused on journalistic skills in 2021. The first phase of the program was launched in Jharkhand with 60 young people. It was designed to engage and train adolescents to increase their understanding on social issues, to support them in expressing their opinions, and to master journalistic skills using mobile / smart phones. The larger **objective** was to provide a platform to advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights in their communities. Through an online series of 12 sessions, young people learned directly from field experts. In partnership with CSOs, this new-age journalism for social impact led to a completion certificate for the young people as well as the chance to publish their work on some premiere websites and platforms.

The campaign's impact was cited by the **Lancet**: “In 2019, *Ab Meri Baari* (It's My Turn Now), a campaign launched by the 10to19 Adolescents Collaborative, helped girl champions to present a charter of ten bold recommendations to government representatives, frontline health workers, community leaders, non-profit organisations, and peers to improve adolescent health and well-being.”⁴

OPERATION MODALITIES

10to19 achieved success in this model by harnessing the following operation modalities:

Build cross-stakeholder capacity and collective ownership for youth prioritization.

Build demand for and supply of public welfare services through a balanced, collaborative approach with youth, CSOs, and government.

Document knowledge and lessons learned.

Create public good tools and resources to build evidence base and body of sector knowledge, maximize replicability and learning, and prevent future siloed efforts to address similar issues.

Enable policy action.

Prime the government to the need for and utility of adopting community-led solutions and then share youth-led resources with them, thereby strengthening the implementation of schemes at the state and national level.

Support an approach of sustainability and longevity.

Develop an easily replicable and customizable model that is adaptable to several thematic areas which may be as broad or as issue-specific as required.

GOALS

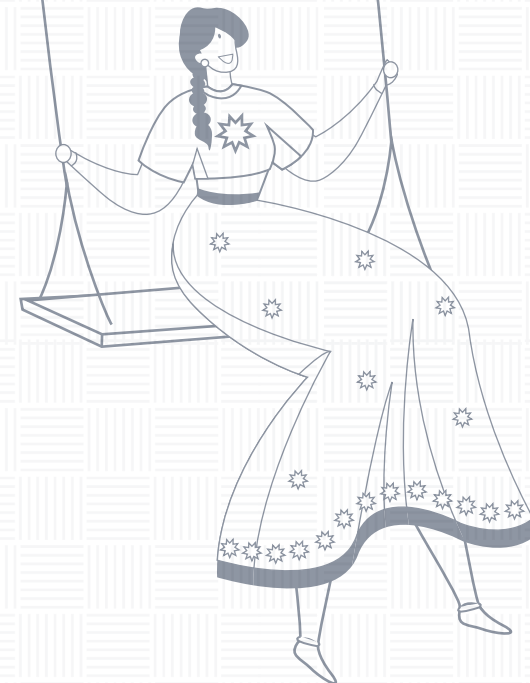
The goals that 10to19 set out to achieve were to:

Build a cohort of capable youth champions

to identify and generate solutions to on-ground challenges - which range from the creation of operational guidelines to generating best practices and problem-solving tools - and to hold systems accountable.

Enable multiple system shifts

that improve reach and implementation of youth-focused government schemes, transform first-mile delivery of health services, increase championship and awareness for prioritizing adolescents' welfare, generate a positive impact in the lives of young people across India, and create an enabling environment for youth participation.



Lessons

While there have been many successes in the Adolescents-First Approach, it is important to share the implementation challenges that 10to19 encountered as well.

1 Matching metrics to the model of 10to19. It is critical to have a robust set of metrics which articulates indicators that directly link to activities that enables tracking of systems-level change. This need emerged from the absence of an initial measurement framework for some activities. To account for the qualitative, quantitative, and often intangible shifts that constitute social and normative change, 10to19 is in the process of shaping various contextual frameworks that may be adapted to measure and monitor the progress and efficacy of its approach.

2 Changing priority lens of adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Adolescent SRH is a low priority for the government, even within the health agenda. 10to19 learned that the topic, particularly sex education, needs to be positioned in a palatable way to diverse audiences. *Ab Meri Baari* found success in using the lenses of education, health, and safety in discussing and disseminating information on SRH.

4 Dealing with pressure on CSOs for immediate pandemic relief. With mainstream attention shifting to COVID-19, CSOs faced pressure from funders and local governments to divert all their efforts towards emergency relief. While most delivered this aid, it was often done at the cost of their regular efforts for adolescents, making it challenging to engage CSOs on topics beyond immediate pandemic relief. Also, on-ground implementation was delayed indefinitely with staff working from home and scopes of planned activities being realigned, which led to changes in working methods as well as restricted some types of work.

3 Aligning unique roles of diverse partners and experts. Aligning the various interests, skills, and contributions of partners, while building consensus and co-creating many aspects of the campaigns along with intensive handholding and project management proved to be challenging. Thus, a significant lesson taken from the *Ab Meri Baari* campaign was the magnitude of resources required to steer collaboration in the sector. Another was to involve and communicate with political leaders and government functionaries from inception to have them be part of the collaborative efforts. A third, was to keep partners present with girl champions at all times during public engagements so as to ensure their safety and well-being.

-  **PRE-PANDEMIC**
-  **DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS**



The Way Forward

10to19 hopes to further increase the momentum of partnerships, engagement, and conversations around adolescent issues as swiftly as possible to build a more mature ecosystem in the future. It aspires to create a receptive environment in which young Indians can raise their voices. As a field builder, 10to19 wants to invest efforts to propel forward the field-level outcomes and targets using a holistic solution to solve critical issues young people in India face. Therefore, it is forging ahead with its bold and ambitious goal of prioritizing adolescent health and well-being across programming, policy, and investment in India so adolescents can thrive and achieve their full potential.