



ACTION REACTION II

NARRATIVES OF BACKLASH AGAINST ADOLESCENT
EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS IN INDIA



DASRA ADOLESCENTS COLLABORATIVE

10TO19: ADOLESCENTS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The 10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative is a high-impact platform that unites funders, technical experts, the government and social organizations to reach 5 million adolescents, and move the needle on four outcomes key to adolescent empowerment. These are:

- DELAYING AGE AT MARRIAGE
- DELAYING AGE OF FIRST PREGNANCY/BIRTH
- COMPLETING SECONDARY EDUCATION
- INCREASING AGENCY

The **10to19 Adolescents Community of Practice (CoP)** was formed in 2017 as part of these efforts to drive adolescent health and well-being. It is a community of stakeholders across the country working to ensure that adolescents are educated, healthy, and empowered to make positive life choices. The CoP includes non-profit organizations, funders, experts, academicians, and adolescents themselves who work collaboratively to drive scalable impact for adolescents in India.

We are grateful to the David and Lucile Packard Foundation for supporting this study on understanding and overcoming backlash against girls' exercise of agency in India.

To learn more, write to us at **10to19community@dasra.org**



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FOREWORD

Dasra strongly believes that the magnitude and complexity of India's current development challenges necessitates collaboration between multiple stakeholders – funders, non-profits, government, academics, and media – at a scale greater than ever before. Over the last two decades, we have strived to build powerful, trust-based partnerships to accelerate social change, while placing the lives of communities at the center of all that we do.

To this end, our work with the 10to19 Community of Practice for Adolescents is focused on fostering alliances and facilitating peer learning and collective action, in order to strengthen the ecosystem of stakeholders working for adolescent health and wellbeing in India. *Action Reaction II* is a joint effort between Dasra and members of our Community of Practice. It is the second in the series of research studies that addresses the issue of backlash faced by adolescent empowerment programs in India– a subject unanimously agreed upon as being pertinent, complex and critical for the success of adolescent programs. This report is ultimately an attempt to respond to the needs and priorities of adolescents, and drive a deeper understanding of backlash for both a researcher and practitioner.

The report describes backlash as instances of ostracism, forced seclusion, withdrawal from school, forced marriage, and violence. Despite the scale and extent of backlash experienced by women and girls whose attitudes and behaviours challenge traditional gender norms, few studies, especially in India, have explored the nuances of the issue. Findings from *Action Reaction I* indicate that 85% of responding organizations had experienced at least one unmistakable incident of backlash against girls who display agency or defy traditional gender norms.

Following the first report, which is an exploratory study into the extent and forms of backlash faced by adolescents in India, we have undertaken this second report to dig deeper into the dynamics and triggers for backlash faced by adolescents and organizations that work to empower adolescents. *Action Reaction II* is an investigation into the narratives and lived experiences of organizations working on adolescent empowerment programs, and the various strategies they have developed to prevent and mitigate backlash against their interventions. In addition to promoting a shared understanding of best practices for dealing with backlash, this report emphasizes the value of collaboration between different stakeholders such as non-profits, experts, funders towards backlash management. The report also highlights clear and actionable steps for sensitizing funders on the prevalence and severity of backlash as an issue.

.....a living document

Action Reaction II is a living document that will be used to convene stakeholders, drive discussions and spark in-person or online conversations on the subject. We are constantly looking to further deepen and enrich our findings, and encourage organizations to provide us their thoughts and feedback.

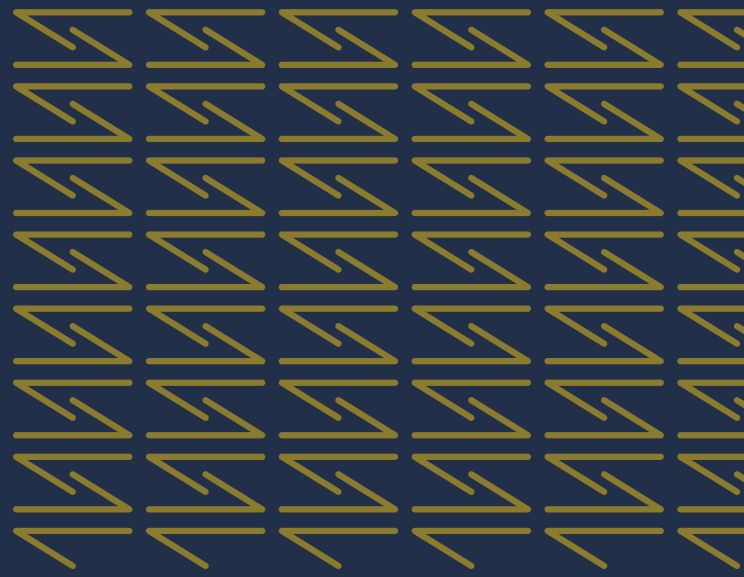
In the future, we will continue working on the issue of backlash by studying some of the critical areas that have emerged through this report, such as the need to work with men and boys as well as frontline workers to effectively manage backlash. We look forward to your continued interest and support through this journey.

The report has been made possible by the participation, support, and trust of the nine non-profit organizations that were part of the extensive focus group discussions (FGDs) organized for this study. I also acknowledge the support of the 73 non-profit organizations that participated in the exhaustive survey which preceded the FGDs. I am grateful for the considerable time and effort the participating organizations spent speaking to the Dasra research team, and the openness with which they shared their experiences, successes and challenges. I am also grateful to Dr. Shireen Jejeebhoy (Senior Advisor to the 10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative) for conceptualizing the first study, which laid the ground for the second report.

We hope that this report will foster greater reflection and learning about the nuances of backlash, and is a stepping stone towards building an ecosystem that can proactively manage and solve for the issue, while ultimately achieving its goal of adolescent empowerment.

DR. PRITI PRABHUGHATE

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND DISSEMINATION | DASRA



GLOSSARY

ASHA	ACCREDITED SOCIAL HEALTH ACTIVIST
AWW	ANGANWADI WORKER
BDO	BLOCK DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
CAG	COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP
CBO	COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATION
CMO	CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER
CSO	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION
DC	DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
DSE	DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION
DSWO	DISTRICT SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICER
FGD	FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
FLW	FRONTLINE WORKERS
GBV	GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
MOU	MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
PRI	PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS
SC	SCHEDULED CASTE
SDG	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
SHG	SELF-HELP GROUP
SRHR	SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS
UN	UNITED NATIONS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report^[1], at the current pace of progress, it will take 108 years to ensure complete gender equality across the globe. Worldwide, the biggest hurdles to closing the gender gap are linked with economic and political empowerment; if we don't accelerate efforts today, the number of years needed jumps to 202 and 107 years respectively.

India's future trajectory towards gender equity and equality is long drawn. The Global Gender Gap Index ranks India at 108 out of the 149 benchmarked nations.^[2] Its large population has a significant bearing on how soon India will be able to close its national gender gap, and progress towards truly sustainable development.

A key step in this direction is for India to focus on gender equality and the empowerment of adolescents. Adolescents not only constitute 19.1% of the country's population^[3], but also offer a critical window of opportunity to influence future gender and development outcomes for the country. Over the next decade, as India strives to achieve its UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, these adolescents will become increasingly important development partners, who can make this equal and sustainable development a reality for themselves, and for the families and communities they influence. More specifically, the continued engagement of adolescents will be essential to trigger lasting change, thereby achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.^[4]

Over the years, the Indian government has made a concerted effort to initiate empowerment schemes and pass legislations that promote gender equality for women and girls. This includes the central government's flagship initiative, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, as well as initiatives such as the Kishori Shakti Yojana, Stand Up India, and Mahila Shakti Kendra.^[5] While these efforts are a cornerstone in India's quest for gender equality and equity, civil society organizations (CSOs) have played a key role in bridging gaps in and accelerating the implementation of these schemes to the last mile.^[6] CSOs have been able to facilitate sustainable change by holding governments accountable, improving service delivery, generating research, building thought leadership.^[7]

At their core, several CSO interventions that address adolescent empowerment tackle the deep-rooted power imbalance and social norms that perpetuate the cycle of gender inequality. While this active disruption of the status quo is extremely challenging and time-intensive, research suggests that this is essential to strengthen women's and girls' agency in the long term.^[8] Consequently, it is no surprise that the CSOs initiating and leading this process of change often face strong resistance to their programs.


Across interventions and geographies, organizations face opposition from local communities and families, and are forced to confront these obstacles. This opposition is defined as backlash – **“a negative reaction by gatekeepers of the status quo towards efforts aimed at changing the status quo.”**^[9] Backlash often penalises individuals who demonstrate positive deviance from a harmful practice or norm.^[10] Over their life spans, these positive deviants face significant barriers such as threats of violence and social ostracism.^[11] Therefore, considering the enduring role of backlash in determining both the course and success of any empowerment program, its importance cannot be underestimated or overlooked.

ACTION REACTION I & II

Given the paucity of literature on backlash globally, Dasra published Action Reaction I – an exploratory study into the extent and forms of backlash faced by adolescents in India. As part of the research, we conducted an online survey analysing responses from 73 organizations working with adolescents across the country. The data revealed that both adolescents as well as implementing CSOs face backlash from gatekeepers within the community, with over 85% of organizations reporting at least one instance of backlash against their programs and participant girls.


The survey was able to illustrate the prevalence and severity of backlash in adolescent programs. It began a conversation around an otherwise under-addressed subject, while simultaneously highlighting areas that required further exploration, such as the triggers of backlash and its varied manifestations across geographies and cultural contexts.

Given the need for a deeper understanding of the subject, Action Reaction II undertakes a qualitative study that documents instances and triggers of backlash faced by CSOs working towards adolescent empowerment. A detailed description of the methodology and tools employed in this research is available in Appendix 1. The report identifies the various approaches and practices deployed by implementing CSOs to mitigate and address backlash. It also emphasizes the impact backlash has on funding and policy – thereby making a case for backlash management to be included as an essential component of adolescent empowerment programs.



CHAPTER 2

DYNAMICS OF BACKLASH



Organizations have stated numerous benefits of working with various stakeholders. However, they have also described instances of backlash perpetrated by them.

Given their sensitive target demographic, adolescent-focused programs are required to interact with various stakeholders across the ecosystem surrounding the adolescent. This includes parents, families, community groups, socio-legal institutions, and others. Our research suggests that engaging and sensitizing these gatekeepers is an innate part of program design. While organizations described the numerous benefits of working with these stakeholders, they also shared instances of backlash faced from these stakeholders over the duration of the program.

This chapter will map the various individuals and institutions that influence adolescents' lives and lay out the reasons and nature of backlash faced from various stakeholder groups. It will illustrate how the nature of backlash experienced is determined by numerous factors such as the type of intervention, stakeholders engaged, and socio-cultural context. It emphasizes the importance of taking a holistic view while understanding and addressing backlash.

THE DIAGRAM AND TABLE ILLUSTRATE THE VARIOUS INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS WITHIN THE ECOSYSTEM SURROUNDING ADOLESCENTS

THIS ECOSYSTEM EXISTS WITHIN DEEP-ROOTED GENDER AND SOCIAL NORMS.



EXAMPLES OF STAKEHOLDERS [PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS AN INDICATIVE LIST]

FAMILY

Mothers, Fathers, Husbands, Older and younger male siblings, Grandparents, in-laws, other male family members, extended family

COMMUNITY

Panchayats, self-help groups, advisory councils, shopkeepers, local factory owners, bus drivers, ASHA workers, journalists, community leaders, religious leaders, male community members

INSTITUTIONS

SCHOOLS : Teachers, Headmasters
HEALTHCARE : ASHA workers, Doctors
LEGAL SYSTEMS : Police, Judicial officer
LOCAL GOVERNANCE : BDOs, other district level officials
GOVERNMENT : Department of Education, Health, Ministry of Women & Child Development [WCD], Skill development, etc



REASONS AND NATURE OF BACKLASH FROM VARIOUS STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

INSTITUTION

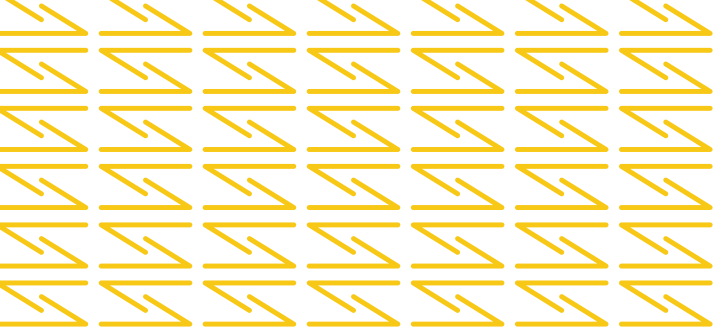
- Programs that combat gender-based violence (GBV) are at high risk of facing institutional backlash
- Within the educational system, Teachers play a crucial role in the lives of younger adolescents and often pose as a significant source of backlash

COMMUNITIES

- The community and its leaders are gatekeepers of traditional norms and need to be consciously engaged to support adolescent empowerment programs.
- Topics such as SRHR and child marriage invite significant backlash from the community, especially from religious leaders, as they deal with sensitive, stigmatized issues

FAMILIES

- Patriarchal culture and power dynamics within the family necessitate the need to engage the family to prevent backlash.
- Mothers are a critical stakeholder to the management of backlash.
- Perceived and actual pressure from the community significantly shape the family's receptiveness and response to empowerment programs.
- Economic empowerment programs for adolescent girls and women attract significant backlash from men and boys in the family



REASONS AND NATURE OF BACKLASH FROM VARIOUS STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

.....● [1] FAMILY ●.....

a] Patriarchal culture and power dynamics within the family necessitate the need to engage the family to prevent backlash

The family is the primary unit responsible for the socialization of adolescents in both urban and rural areas. Therefore, members of the family are key gatekeepers influencing adolescent participation in empowerment programs. Male family members, including brothers, fathers, grandfathers, and in the case of married girls, husbands and their families, hold disproportionate decision-making-power with regards to their daughters and daughter-in-law. In addition to male members, grandmothers, by virtue of their age and position of relative power within the family, also influence decisions pertaining to adolescents. The manner in which each of these familial stakeholders influence adolescent participation in empowerment programs differs.

For instance, one of the organizations indicate that both older and younger brothers see it as their “responsibility to keep an eye on” their sisters. They do so by monitoring their cell phones, telling them how to dress, and preventing them from going outside alone. This behavior stems from intense social pressure on both adolescents, and their families, to conform to traditional gender roles. The nature and extent of backlash faced by adolescents within the house is dependent on the familial stakeholders and the adolescent’s age and gender.

“

This [restriction on going outside] is true not only for daughters, but also for daughters-in-law [in the community]. Especially if she is very young and doesn't have any children, she usually isn't allowed to join our meetings [addressing menstrual health and hygiene]. If she already has a few children, then she may be allowed to go outside. There are fewer chances that she will run away then, as she has her children to take care of, and is unlikely to leave them behind or stay without them.”



b] Mothers are a critical stakeholder to the management of backlash

Many organizations have stated how mothers' attitudes are shaped by their experiences, which in turn leads them to resist adolescent empowerment interventions that challenge gender norms. This reluctance frequently stems from mothers' inability to see the purpose of interventions or from fear that the program staff may undermine their own knowledge and lived experiences.

For example, most parents do not allow their sons to participate in household activities. Parents only expect their daughters to do chores, such as washing clothes and cooking. Meanwhile, boys are only allowed to mop or sweep the floor and nothing else. Mothers often resist any deviation from these practices.

“Education will make no difference to my girl's life, whatever I am compelled to do today, all this housework, cooking and cattle maintenance, she will have to do it tomorrow. What difference will it make?”

In cases where mothers do advocate for their children to participate in empowerment programs, they face the risk of significant backlash themselves, both from their family and the community. According to one of the organizations, there was one instance where a mother wanted her daughter to pursue secondary education, but was beaten by her husband when she tried to convince him to send their daughter to school. Eventually, the girl's education was withheld, and the mother could do nothing.

Nonetheless, mothers are primary caretakers of their children in most households and have high proximity to their adolescent child's daily life. While instances like the above are not rare, mothers do have the potential to influence decision-makers over a period of time, making them a critical stakeholder to engage with in the prevention and management of backlash.

c] Perceived and actual pressure from the community significantly shape the family's receptiveness and response to empowerment programs

“Parents of most adolescent girls want their girl child to study, but do not allow them to, due to fear of society. The same goes for cases of early marriage. They have reduced in number, but due to the influence of society, parents often get their daughters engaged at the age of 16 or 17.”

Across all the FGDs, field workers have seen that backlash to the program stems from the family's fear of scrutiny, fear of loss of reputation or honor, or fear of breaking traditions. One of the organizations additionally stated that the understanding of family honor as a direct reflection of male members' power within the household prevents them from allowing their daughters and wives to join programs.

According to one organization with a long history of working in a migrant slum community in Mumbai, young girls are consistently denied permission by their fathers and older brothers to attend outdoor or sports programs. Upon further examination, the program staff found that male family members believed that these programs endanger the girls, exposing them to lewd comments from men and boys in the neighbourhood. As a result, the male gatekeepers resist girls' participation in the program, as well as the organization's entry and sustained work in the community.

In cases where assault does occur, male family members are reluctant to report such cases due to the shame and social stigma associated with the subject. Fathers and husbands often prevent their wives and daughters from interacting with program staff who can help with filing reports, and pressurize them to remain silent as a way to “maintain family pride.”

d] Economic empowerment programs for adolescent girls and women attract significant backlash from men and boys in the family ●●●●●●●●●●

According to the organizations we spoke with, there are two main reasons for this. First, an economically independent girl or woman subverts the dominant narrative of women staying at home and being dependent on male providers of the family. Encouraging a woman to work is seen to reflect poorly on her husband/father to provide for her. In order to prevent such speculation, women often stay at home, even when the family needs their financial support. Fathers and husbands discourage a shift in status quo, for fear of losing their position in the family and community. According to one of the organizations

A woman earning is seen as a poor reflection on her husband's ability to provide for the family. The neighbors make fun of them, and it is seen as a challenge to the man's ego."

Male family members are fearful of giving women the tools to economic empowerment and financial literacy. This is because these programs focus on building autonomy for women and enabling them to be vocal, and to stand up for themselves. There is also a fear that these programs make the girl "too independent" and defiant of social norms, or that it will be harder for her to get married – especially if she is educated or employed, or it will allow her to interact with young men, giving her opportunities to elope. One of the organizations stated that this is a recurring cause for men to prevent their sisters and daughters from participating in empowerment programs.



.....● [2] COMMUNITIES ●.....

a] The community and its leaders are gatekeepers of traditional norms, and need to be consciously engaged to support adolescent empowerment programs

Our data repeatedly shows how communities have the ability and power to pressurize organizations into altering or ending programs that threaten their long-standing cultural practices. The nature of backlash from the community is often determined by the type of interventions and the range of community stakeholders that the non-profit engages with during implementation. For instance, key community stakeholders (such as religious leaders) can negatively

influence the perception of a program and play a significant role in perpetuating backlash against the program and its staff. These severe and lasting consequences highlight how engaging with the community is an essential component of empowerment programs.

Many organizations also spoke of how when parents allow their children to deviate from social norms, they are at the receiving end of backlash from the community. This backlash pressurizes parents into propagating social norms, even if they do not necessarily agree with them. A common manifestation of this is the dominant narrative around the characteristics of “good” and “bad” girls, wherein girls that play sports with boys or speak up to their mothers about menstruation practices are labelled as “dirty”. This narrative sets a precedent and provides a framework through which backlash perpetrated by community members is amplified. The family experiences backlash from the community in various forms. Often it is in the form of subtle pressure exerted by the community on parents and adolescents to conform to pre-existing social norms, pressure from community leaders, social ostracism or being forced to leave the village. According to the organizations that we spoke to, this backlash is targeted more specifically towards adolescent girls than boys.

b] Topics such as SRHR and child marriage invite significant backlash from the community, especially from religious leaders, as they are sensitive and stigmatized issues

In most communities, SRHR remains a taboo subject. It is side-lined both in formal education systems and at home, subject to scrutiny because of its linkage with menstrual health and hygiene, and prone to social and religious taboos across communities. The widespread stigma associated with the subject, creates immediate and lasting resistance from parents, community members and religious leaders. Parents and community members are hesitant to let their daughters participate in SRHR programs because they will be “corrupted”. Community members are also afraid that SRHR awareness will enable adolescents to make non-traditional choices about sexuality and sexual health, such as choosing to be sexually active before marriage.

Backlash to SRHR programs takes many forms. Organizations spoke of how adolescents have been prohibited from attending their programs, or physically assaulted by religious leaders because the program’s course material is seen as being defiant of traditional religious values and “bringing disgrace to the community.” In extreme cases, non-profits stated that they have been prevented from entering the village altogether.

According to organizations we spoke with, programs addressing child marriage also attract significant backlash from community stakeholders. In many communities, families face extreme pressure to marry their daughters at a young age, and community members feel that programs addressing child marriage are trying to alter their long-standing traditions. Multiple non-profits have described instances of program staff experiencing verbal abuse, and threats to their life and safety when stopping cases of child marriage. As a result, organizations have had to pause or shut their programs in the region, temporarily or permanently.

[3] INSTITUTIONS

While all programs addressing GBV are at risk of experiencing significant backlash from the family and community, the extent and nature of backlash faced from institutions depends on the organization's specific approach and type of intervention. Our data suggests that nonprofits that provide legal support and advocacy face a much higher risk of receiving backlash from institutions as compared to organizations that work on education, life-skill training and generating awareness on how to identify and prevent abuse.

These institutions include those which the organization has to engage with in order to garner support for their programs or address specific cases of GBV. This includes law enforcement organizations, legal, medical and educational institutions and, in some cases, local political bodies. Backlash from these institutions is perpetrated by the individuals who work in or are a part of these systems—including medical personnel, teachers and principals, lawyers and legal aid personnel.

a] Programs that combat gender-based violence (GBV) are at high risk of facing institutional backlash

When an issue such as domestic violence came to light, we faced resistance from the women who had faced it. They felt that it was quite natural, and there are no signs of domestic violence. It was a shocking and awkward experience for us as the women for whom we were working were not ready to accept it as an issue."

Programs that combat gender-based violence are at high risk for institutional backlash owing to the sensitive nature of the subject matter. The status quo of men holding and abusing positions of power has been normalized to the extent that gender discrimination is not considered an issue within many vulnerable or marginalized communities.

According to one organization, in the communities in which they work, violence is seen as an expression of a husband's love. According to another organization, gender based violence is not a priority issue within the slum dwelling communities in which it works and the community is more concerned with issues such as access to water and sanitation, garbage disposal and proper healthcare. As a result, nonprofits trying to tackle gender-based violence are explicitly faced with severe resistance not just from perpetrators of abuse, but also from survivors.



SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE FACE IMMENSE BACKLASH

One of the organizations surveyed works on supporting survivors of gender-based violence through the provision of legal aid and advocacy. The organization enables survivors to report cases and rehabilitates survivors by providing them with tools for economic empowerment and financial literacy, and social and emotional support.

In order to better deal with such cases, the organization has developed strategies to protect survivors, as well as their program staff, against backlash. For instance, the field staff works closely with survivors and their families to record details of crime and legal proceedings. This includes training them on legal terminology, protecting them from pressure from the perpetrator, and finally, rehabilitating survivors and their families in the aftermath of the trauma.

Survivors of assault face severe backlash from their communities. Staff members from the organization have described instances where survivors were denied education, forced to stay indoors, and denied access to legal recourse. In cases where the survivor reports an assault, she is socially ostracized by the community, forced to pay fines, or compelled to leave the village. The consequences of this backlash extend to the family of the survivor as well, where the perpetrators of violence, and the community, pressurize the family to seek an out-of-court settlement or withdraw the case.

Survivors of assault also face backlash from the police, medical professionals and legal bodies in the form of resistance to filing reports, generating false reports and denial of essential medical services. Therefore, while the program is focused on empowering survivors through the process of legal redressal, in many cases, it can also unwittingly cause more backlash towards both the survivor, and the program.

Members of the non-profit also work with advocates and local barefoot lawyers^{a]} in order to gather solid evidence for cases, and prevent tampering of information. Program staff are trained to maintain the survivor's anonymity and protect their organization's name while on field. This includes practical solutions such as working in pairs, using live location features to ensure safety, and ensuring that they do not work in the same place multiple times.

The organization also works on building working relationships with local law enforcement and judicial bodies. It conducts sensitization trainings for these institutions in order to garner support when cases of backlash do occur, and prioritizes advocacy by working with local media to raise awareness for the issue.

b] Within the educational system, teachers play a crucial role in the lives of younger adolescents, and often are a significant source of backlash

Since teachers are uniquely positioned to engage with adolescents, parents, and school authorities, their buy-in is vital for programs to be successful. However, our data suggests that for many reasons organizations often struggle to get buy-in from teachers and experience significant backlash from them to programs. One reason for this is teachers feeling that their coursework is being deprioritized because of the program's curriculum. Another reason is teachers' own lack of exposure and sensitization towards the programs' topics which leads to resistance.

In one school, where we were implementing comprehensive sex education modules, one of the senior teachers observed a session on family planning for grade 9. He got so angry about the subject matter that he fought with the headmaster to have the content removed from the curriculum. Following this, we were not allowed to implement the program in that school. Even after negotiation and arguments with the teacher and the headmaster, we were only allowed to conduct life skills classes after the objection was raised."

^{a]} Barefoot Lawyers are trained community paralegals, that work on making legal aid more accessible at the grassroots level. They provide civic education, pro-bono legal services and work with citizens to pursue legal procedures.

CASE STUDY

TEACHERS AS A SOURCE OF INSTITUTIONAL BACKLASH

Over the last 16 years, an organization has worked with both rural and urban communities across India to implement vocational training, life skills, and education programs in schools. The organization collaborates with existing institutions such as municipal schools to implement its skilling and vocational training programs. Given the systemic and institutional neglect that is often found in schools, having teachers' buy-in is critical to program longevity and success. Over the course of the program, the organization's staff interacts closely with teachers and engages them wherever possible. As a result, they are also able to provide adolescent boys and girls with counselling sessions in order to build trust.

Working with teachers has posed numerous challenges for this organization. Given the systemic and institutional neglect faced by the adolescents in slum communities, having the teacher's buy-in is crucial to the program's longevity and success. In many cases, teachers not only actively dismiss the organization's work as "irrelevant", but also

“Although the day, date, and time for our session are decided, we don't get an empty class for our session. It sometimes comes to a point where we [program staff] are willing to carry a broom, and we tell them [teachers] that we are ready to sweep the room clean before our session if we have to. We just want them to give us one room.”

discourage students from participating in the program. In other cases, teachers have abdicated their responsibility for the students entirely, expecting the NGO's staff to care for them and discipline them during the school day.

The teachers view the program's coursework as being less important than schoolwork. Given their own limited resources and the pressure to meet targets and complete the syllabus, teachers feel that the additional effort required to work with program staff to implement counselling and empowerment programs is not important.

In order to counter this consistent backlash, the organization's staff now conducts teacher counselling sessions, as a way of giving teachers a chance to engage with the program staff. These counselling sessions have enabled a dialogue between the two stakeholders, and have been influential in mitigating backlash to a certain extent. While teachers are not completely agreeable to the program, they are more open to interactions, and in turn, contribute towards the effectiveness of the program.

The illustrations above dig deep into both the causes of backlash as well as specific elements of adolescent empowerment programs that trigger backlash. Programs focused on adolescents must be cognizant of these elements while planning even the least subversive interventions. Developing a deeper understanding of and accounting for these triggers and stakeholders can be critical while designing targeted mitigation and prevention strategies that address prevailing patriarchal norms. These strategies are explored in the following chapter.



CHAPTER 3

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS BACKLASH

Our research shows that organizations working in the space of adolescent empowerment acknowledge the critical role of backlash in determining program sustainability and achievement of program outcomes. We found that organizations response to backlash tends to take on one of two forms: prevention or mitigation of backlash. Prevention strategies refer to proactive actions taken by organizations, either before or during programs, in order to increase the acceptability of their interventions. Mitigation strategies are deployed during the implementation of the program, and fulfil specific objectives with respect to addressing cases of backlash that have emerged.

This chapter will outline the common strategies for dealing with backlash deployed by organizations, as well as shed light on specific tactics deployed by organizations working on more sensitive issues such as gender-based violence, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights [SRHR], and ending child marriage. These strategies are by no means exhaustive. Given the extremely sparse literature that currently exists on this topic, there is tremendous scope to further explore, understand, and document the different approaches and strategies deployed by adolescent-focused programs to deal with backlash.

TO REDUCE THE POSSIBILITY OF BACKLASH OCCURRING IN RESPONSE TO THEIR INTERVENTIONS AND PROGRAMS

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Across the spectrum of organizations surveyed, we found that building and maintaining trust with the community throughout the lifecycle of the program, lies at the core of numerous organizations' strategy to prevent backlash. Broadly, organizations work on backlash prevention at two different levels – at the ecosystem level, and within the organization.

1] ECOSYSTEM LEVEL

- a** Map, understand and address the entire ecosystem around adolescent girls
- b** Create structures within the community to support adolescent and young women's programs

2] ORGANIZATION LEVEL

- a** Adopt comprehensive community development program designs to prevent backlash
- b** Conduct risk-mapping as part of program design
- c** Recruit program staff from within the community and adequately invest in staff development
- d** Highlight positive role models
- e** Build conflict resolution skills in girls

ACROSS THE LIFECYCLE OF EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

TO EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS CASES OF BACKLASH WHEN THEY DO OCCUR

MITIGATION STRATEGIES

- a** Provide support to survivors and their families in the aftermath of backlash
- b** Seek support from community members to manage cases of backlash
- c** Set relevant organization processes and prioritize safety protocol for staff

1] STRATEGIES AT THE ECOSYSTEM LEVEL ●.....

a Map, understand and address the entire ecosystem around adolescent girls

In order to effectively map, and subsequently, address the entire ecosystem of stakeholders, many organizations incorporate a thorough **pre-implementation phase** into their program design, wherein they spend a substantial amount of time and effort understanding local context before implementing a new program.

Most surveyed organizations report that even though their program outcomes may be solely adolescent focused; they have found that engaging with various stakeholders in the adolescents' ecosystem is necessary for the uptake of interventions by adolescents themselves. While the range of stakeholders may vary greatly, depending on local context as well as the nature of the program, by engaging with the overall ecosystem, organizations are

able to create a supportive environment for adolescents in their communities and therefore decrease the likelihood of backlash. Data collection during the pre-implementation phase typically occurs through door-to-door surveys, community chaupals or speaking to other organizations that have previously worked in the region. Additionally, many organizations use the pre-implementation phase in order to begin building trust with important community stakeholders in order to gain acceptance towards the program. While Chapter 3 provides an overview of the stakeholders that organizations engage with, this section highlights the common strategies deployed by organizations to engage with actors who play an extremely crucial role in preventing the possibility of backlash.

.....● i] Partnering with families of adolescents

Organizations adopt various means of ensuring parental support and acceptance before starting a new program. Some of the methods for enabling this include, orienting parents to the program's objectives with recapitulations, obtaining formal prior consent from parents especially for programs concerning sensitive topics such as SRHR.

Organizations also emphasized the need to win parental trust by establishing a transparent, two-way communication channel where parents can share their fears and ask questions.

As described by an organisation, "We conduct home visits to talk to families about the fears that drive backlash. We then try to address the fears rather than using a single formula for every family. We keep communication transparent so that parents and spouses don't think we are lying or hiding information from them."

"Before starting our work, we obtain consent from the parents. This gives us an additional opportunity to interact with the parents on the benefits of joining such a program, and get community feedback on our programs as well as included topics. This ensures parental involvement, and prepares the parents to defend their daughters and the program, if challenged by the community."

Mothers play an important yet complex role in determining and influencing the extent of backlash against adolescent programs. Therefore, many organizations, especially those dealing with sensitive subjects, have clearly defined strategies to engage mothers for the prevention of backlash. One organization works very closely with mothers before implementing its intervention addressing menstrual health, hygiene and SRHR. They do so because they have observed that despite having had children, many mothers are unaware of reproductive health-related illnesses or issues that women may face after marriage.

As a result, mothers are not able to pass on the right information to their daughters, and instead perpetuate unhealthy cultural norms or practices to the next generation. The organization has observed this pattern over time, and thus regularly counsels mothers on health issues through its training sessions. Once the mothers agree to send their daughters and begin seeing the value of the program, the organization also leverages the same training sessions to educate adolescents on the risks of sexual abuse. They loop mothers into this process and help them understand the value behind their curriculum. Many organizations also integrate their specific strategies for engaging parents with the overall community engagement strategy.

ii] Working with community stakeholders, including men and boys within the community

Although parents are the most proximal to adolescents, members of communities are a significant source of backlash in programming for adolescents. Responding organizations noted that winning the trust and building confidence among community members, such as elders and religious leaders, among others, is crucial to achieving outcomes. This process involves repeated interaction with several community members.

A popular and effective way in which many organizations choose to involve the community is by collecting and presenting data on sensitive issues such as child marriage, drop-outs and violence gathered from the pre-implementation phase back to community members, in order to make a case for empowerment programs, and as a means for community mobilization. Organizations state that this method has proven to increase the responsibility, accountability and ownership felt within the community towards adolescent issues over time.

Additionally evidenced from an FGD indicates, “We have grievance redressal meetings at a community level. This provides a space for the community to express anything they may be unhappy with regarding our work. The practice generally allows us to solve problems in a win-win manner.”

An organisation has stated, “We organized periodic interactions with community members, in order to explain the various processes within our programs, and to seek their support moving forward with the same.” When working with communities, organizations also acknowledge the important role of engaging men and boys. One way in which organizations do this is by introducing men and boys to alternative roles both within the household and the community, which in turn helps them accept alternative roles for girls.

“

We recruited local facilitators with knowledge of the local culture and language to ensure better acceptance of the program. We used a unique capacity building approach called participatory learning and action to engage with the community. This strengthens community ownership as members collectively identify their problems and choose locally acceptable, feasible, and doable strategies for addressing the same. The process also involves the community's evaluation of its collective actions.

“

We took initial consent from the seniors, elders and key opinion leaders to ensure that they saw our work as non-threatening. Our subsequent interactions with adolescents were in open spaces where adults (parents, teachers, front line workers (FLWs), local government and PRI members, etc.) were encouraged to participate.”



CASE STUDY

USING CREATIVE WAYS OF COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is rampant in most of the communities that Organization B works in. Yet, community members were unwilling to accept it as an issue. The program staff knew they had to win the community's trust before helping them acknowledge the prevalence of sensitive issues such as child marriage and violence. Therefore, the program staff began by conducting field visits and documenting real cases of child marriage in the village. With the community's consent they then , created films based on real stories. These films were screened for the community through mobile video vans and people were pushed to accept both the prevalence and negative effects of child marriage in their village. Eventually, community members began raising a voice against child marriage.

However, this technique soon became monotonous as people got bored of watching real- life stories. Realizing this, Organization B shifted course to a medium called 'Picture Tank', which involved a novelty balloon theatre, seating 300 people. Through this medium, they screened up to three shows per day, including popular Bollywood films that address issues such as women's empowerment. Eventually, people from different religions, castes, classes, and age groups came for the screenings, which were followed by rich dialogues, discussions, and quizzes. This combination of education and entertainment excited the community, and allowed them to correlate their own experiences to the films' storylines.

"It was a gradual process, involving both our staff and community members that yielded fruit. It involved various processes, including conceptualization, conducting a baseline survey, formulating research, conducting research on mobile usage, compiling reports, deciding on the entry point and then implementing the intervention on field."

CASE STUDY

WORKING WITH MEN AND BOYS TO AFFECT FAMILIAL NORMS

Organization X works with adolescent boys, between the ages of 13 and 17, through a program that promotes gender-equitable behaviour. Program staff found that one of the outcomes of their program was that young men and boys become more engaged within the house and contribute actively towards household chores traditionally done by their mothers or sisters. This was usually met with mixed reactions from the boys' parents, who did not appreciate their sons undertaking domestic work or carrying out chores. Parents used this as rationale to restrict their sons' participation in the program.

To mitigate this backlash, the organization ensured that before the program began, staff members met with parents in order to lay down the framework of the program and emphasize the importance of letting their sons participate. Their backlash management model depended on carefully contextualizing their SRHR material and constantly reiterating the importance of the scientific approach with parents. Through this sustained effort, the organization was able to gain the acquiescence of key local stakeholders and continues to implement their program across cities.

iii] Partnering with local and state government in initiating programmes

Organizations unanimously reported the need to engage with local and state authorities to initiate programs. They articulated that partnerships with local and state authorities have helped them legitimize their programs in the eyes of the community, as well as increase acceptance and enabled them to advocate for adolescent issues at a systemic level, which reaps longer term benefits. Organizations working on sensitive issues such as child marriage or gender-based violence invest extensively in government engagement, despite potential changes in government program heads.

Below are some unique ways in which organizations engage with different government stakeholders:

As an organisation states, “We always meet with departmental heads, such as the Chief Minister’s Office (CMO), the Deputy Commissioner (DC), as well as the District Superintendent for Education (DSE) and the District Social Welfare Office (DSWO), before implementing any program.”

Another organisation also stated, “We work closely with Education departments in various states, to improve the learning outcomes for students in government schools. Multi-stakeholder engagements, using both top-down and bottom-up communication approaches have helped in systemically reducing backlash. Our team members also undergo intensive training on stakeholder management, building consensus and sharing constructive feedback.”

“For our school-based adolescents’ program in Jharkhand, we obtained government and political support at the state, district, and block levels. The program was implemented under a formal Memorandum of Understanding, and was launched by the Chief Minister. Copies of the curricula were circulated to all officials at the state, district, and block levels, as well as to the media. We provided supporting data/information to each department, regarding how to handle potential backlash in the state. We also organized district advocacy workshops with parents, media and other stakeholders.”

“

To support girls who may face backlash, we have held functions, attended by the Block Development Officer, District Administration authorities, and local Panchayat members, in which they have felicitated girls for protesting against harmful traditions or raising important social issues. Through this, community members are taught to value initiatives taken by girls”



b Create structures within the community to support adolescents and young women's programs

While most organizations work with existing stakeholder groups within the community, we found that there is a subset of organizations that have instituted new structures within the community, to support adolescents and young women. These structures are usually formed with a specific purpose, such as building the capacity of a certain stakeholder group, providing a safe space for discussions between program participants and the community, increasing participation and accountability among important community stakeholders, or enabling different actors to formally come together and engage in dialogue. Some ways in which organizations create and enable such supportive structures are:

“

We create specific survivors' forums as part of our programs. Here, survivors can talk openly about all the challenges they are facing. Usually, when they speak to the police or court officials, the conversation is confined to the details of the case. There are many other issues they face in their personal life, including significant mental trauma. They are often unable to express these feelings anywhere. In the survivors' forum, they can share all of these other issues openly - whether it is a strained relationship with their husbands or other family members, or the pain of being married early. Expressing this helps in alleviating their pain. It also ensures that they form strong bonds as a powerful advocacy group within the community.”

“

By instituting special women's groups, we provide mothers with an enabling system, that gives them the confidence to support their daughters.”

“

Our strategy involves forming a Community Action Group of women leaders in an area. The adolescent girls engaged with us are members of these Community Action Groups, and are mostly accompanied by a woman leader from the area.”



2] STRATEGIES AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

a Adopt comprehensive community development program designs

Organizations suggest that one important way of preventing backlash is adopting a holistic program design that does not isolate and target only one group in the community (such as girls), leading to potential negative reactions from other community stakeholders.

“Shared spaces (such as schools and vocational institutions where girls and boys are present together) need to have programs for both genders, as there is deep-seated resentment towards ‘girls only’ programs.”

“We are helped by the fact that we have a holistic community development approach (involving health, livelihood, education, citizenship, etc.) and not just a program to empower girls or women. The other areas of work lay the foundation for increased participation in our sensitive programs.”

b Conduct risk-mapping as part of program design

Some organizations undertake exercises to map risks in their intervention areas before launching programs. They develop risk mitigation plans, while also leveraging the results for stakeholder engagement and community mobilization. Some ways in which organizations undertake such exercises are illustrated below.

As a next step to the risk mapping exercise, many organizations dealing with sensitive issues also modify their program content to be culturally appropriate. Organizations emphasize the importance of culturally appropriate content that has been vetted by the community, to prevent backlash.

“We have developed a Gender and Youth Marker to monitor all our projects and assess their placement on the Gender Continuum^a. We also have a Do No Harm Framework (DNHF)^b in place to monitor all projects for any “unintended harm” and subsequent mitigation strategies when required.”

“We have a risk-mapping plan for different topics and a complementary risk mitigation plan. We take key stakeholders, such as Gram Pradhans into our confidence. Before we take any decisions on difficult topics, we go into the field and evaluate what the community’s response might be.”

a] Gender continuum is an umbrella concept, accounting for components beyond how a person identifies. These components include how one conforms to gender roles, expresses gender outwardly, and anatomical or biological characteristics one possesses.

b] The Do No Harm Framework (DNHF) requires humanitarian actors to endeavour not to cause further damage and suffering as a result of their actions.”

C Recruit program staff from within the community and adequately invest in staff development

Field workers form the core of any adolescent empowerment program since the responsibility of building trust with the community falls largely onto field workers. They are also at the frontline of response when instances of backlash occur within the community. It is therefore not surprising that most organizations consider their field staff essential for the success of any backlash prevention strategy. Our research strongly suggests that recruiting field workers from within the community has several benefits, such as sustainability of program outcomes, greater ownership by community members, and increased access to program participants.

Some organizations recruit over half of their field staff from the targeted communities. In addition to recruitment, many organizations emphasize the importance of properly investing in the training, sensitization and development of their field staff, not just at the beginning of the program but throughout its course.

"Our trainers are very hands-on at a grassroots level. The more visibility and respect they garner at a community level, the easier it becomes to work there. This is a long process and it takes several years to earn the trust of a group of people."

"65% of our program staff is from the community. We also make sure our girl mentors under the sports for development intervention are from the community."

"One way to prevent backlash is to ensure community members form a part of the implementing teams. This increases the community's openness to and ownership of issues as they see an insider leading the processes of social change. Organizations should definitely invest time and energy towards building a strong foundation in communities to prevent backlash not only against the program but also against participating adolescents."

d Highlight positive role models

Several organizations highlight the importance of leveraging positive role models from within the community rather than from outside. These local role models are more relatable, and help programs enlist greater support from families and adolescents in the process of normative change.

"Some people care a lot about what others will say. But we counsel them by giving examples of women and girls from within their community who earn a living or learn new skills outside the house. We cite examples of those girls who are already connected with our organization and participated in our skills trainings or formed self-help groups through us"

"We specifically counselled mothers using examples of the many girls being trained at our center who had not eloped. We talked to the mothers about how these trainings could help the girls earn a living for themselves and become financially empowered. After sustained counselling, the mothers understood the point we were making, and agreed to send their daughters to school."

"One of our strategies to address backlash is to plan inter-village exposure visits where positive support groups/individuals live."

e Impart conflict resolution skills to girls so that they can have respectful discussions with family members

Adolescent empowerment programs build the agency of girls, which enables them to assert their rights, negotiate their freedom with family members, and consequently, challenge the rigid norms imposed on them by their families and communities. Organizations therefore anticipate the potential backlash to be faced by girls while exercising their agency. To prevent this backlash, they focus on teaching girls how to communicate respectfully and effectively while talking about rights and negotiating for more freedom with their parents. Below are two examples of how organizations implement this strategy. By adopting the strategies described above, organizations are able to anticipate backlash and over time, develop a program design that both accounts for it and reduces the chances of backlash occurring.

"We prioritize the design of the program. Keeping a sensitive eye throughout, we focus on building necessary components such as leadership and negotiation skills (for the participants to negotiate with stakeholders from their family as well as the community) and conflict management techniques and stress management."

"We empower girls with information, and simultaneously help them understand the value of respecting their family's views, even when drastically different. We help girls develop the skills required to have conversations around sensitive topics with their families, while addressing each family member's fears."



.....• MITIGATION STRATEGIES •.....

Organizations note that despite all their efforts towards conceptualizing and implementing strategies to prevent backlash, cases of backlash do occur, especially when working on sensitive issues or in particularly challenging areas. Several of the strategies that organizations use to mitigate backlash are very similar to the ones deployed for prevention; the difference being pronounced in situations where the organization is mitigating ongoing verbal or physical backlash. Examples of such situations can be seen in cases where the organization is engaging with community members to arrive at an understanding or seeking the support of local and state government authorities to overcome resistance to change. During night meetings (Ratri Chaupals) in a few villages, our team was asked to stop encouraging parents to send young girls for higher education. Groups of middle-aged men in the villages claimed that girls who studied too much usually ran away or eloped. We listened to them carefully “with open ears.” Once they had finished, we asked them to give us details of the girls who were studying in higher grades and had eloped.

“One of the learning centers in Vijay Nagar Ghaziabad faced resistance from the men in the community, as they felt the women were being brainwashed by project implementers. Therefore, we organized a separate workshop to counsel men from the community. We also selected some community members for intensive training, thereby creating positive peer pressure within the community.”

Fortunately, they had no examples to quote. We then had them interact with the girls who were enrolled in school through our project, and were doing well both at school and home. Their respective parents also praised our efforts. Also, we spoke to community members about the mindset of people who blame girls alone for any misdeeds, even though an eloping girl, for instance, does not elope alone. We wanted to discuss why, for example, the boy who runs away with her is not held responsible. We also pointed out that if education affects both girls and boys adversely, then boys should not be allowed to study in higher levels either.”

The following section outlines three categories of strategies organizations deploy to mitigate backlash against adolescent empowerment programs.

“Some girls were pulled out of school, and were not allowed to meet their teachers, field workers or classmates. In a formal way through school teachers, principal, the organization's representatives approached the girls' parents to address their grievances and bring clarity to the situation.”

a Provide support to survivors and their families in the aftermath of backlash

Organizations emphasize the need to help adolescents and their parents deal with negative reactions in the aftermath of experiencing backlash. Some of the ways in which organizations do this are listed below. Organizations also stressed the importance of support groups for both adolescents and their parents, in order to help them become resilient in the face of backlash.

“In one of our intervention sites, an adolescent girl was being bullied by the neighborhood for volunteering to educate girls and women about menstrual health and hygiene. People tried to make fun of her, but the program team stood by her, encouraging her to continue advocating and teaching. The staff counselled her regularly to show her that she was not alone. Eventually, she was able to overcome this situation and the community accepted her work as being important.”

“For one of our programs in Jharkhand, we recruited change agents from within the community (to enable safe migration). One girl's family was supportive of her becoming a change agent as they were happy to see her participate in such a movement. But the family received backlash from certain groups from the community, who had vested interests in maintaining the status quo. Through one-on-one interactions, we educated the family about the learning and leadership exposure their daughter would get and provided them with resources to deal with the backlash.”

“Mothers who choose to go against traditional norms are often criticized and marginalized by the family. The family is not invited by other relatives/community members for events. Being part of women's groups helps these women with an alternative support structure and builds their confidence to support their daughters even in the face of backlash.”



b Seek support from community members

In cases where backlash has occurred, most organizations rely heavily on support from community members to manage the case. Depending on local context, this can include a wide range of community stakeholders, such as organization staff, elected women representatives, SHGs or religious leaders.

When we began working in Manipur on sexual abuse, we faced a lot of backlash from the community, as it was not customary to report cases. The family and community tend to force the victim of abuse into marriage, to protect her from the shame associated with sexual abuse. To counteract that, we organized a program in the local church to gain access to the community, and explain to them that simply getting the girl married was not a solution to the problem. We also shared information about the services available to help survivors of sexual abuse."

"Our mitigation strategies start within the organization itself, where we leverage program staff from within the same community to speak to perpetrators of backlash. Our program also includes elected women representatives and local SHG groups, who are always a part of the backlash mitigation process."

"When undertaking work on family planning with adolescents, we had to move cautiously as this was a taboo topic within the community. We faced a lot of opposition from the community and were sent back. Then we took a religious leader (imam) into our confidence, by explaining to him the benefits of family planning. We used his support to get buy-in from the community."

C Establish organization processes and safety protocol for staff

Organizations understand that their work strongly challenges deep-rooted societal norms. To ensure they are well prepared to mitigate backlash when it occurs, organizations emphasize having strategies in place beforehand. This includes specific processes such as a protocol for program staff to escalate matters within the organization when incidents of backlash do occur. Other measures include having a rigorous safety protocol for program staff, in order to help them access support as required. Non-profits also emphasize the need to report or document such incidents as and when they happen. Since the process of normative change is incremental, CSOs highlight the need for sustained operations in order to enable long term change and reduce the occurrence of backlash within the communities in which they work.

"When cases of backlash happen, organizations shouldn't ignore it, which is what usually happens in cases of verbal abuse. Organizations should ensure that this does not go unreported, as you never know what it can lead up to. There also needs to be a system within the program to escalate such matters to senior management, as and when they happen in the field. Managers need to get involved when these incidents happen, in order to decide how to engage with the right actor (parents, certain individuals within the community, institutions/agencies) and to identify measures for mitigating backlash and continue the program."


"We had to shut down our office for a month [because of backlash towards stopping child marriage]. But during that time, we worked with government officials and community resource persons to build an understanding amidst the target groups. After a month, we restarted our operations and continued our efforts to create awareness. Through sustained efforts and working with community resource people, we gained more visibility and credibility. Eventually, our efforts were supported by the community."

"Safety and security protocols with emergency action are available for all team members. We work with community members right from the start, to help them feel that they are a part of the process. This also helps alleviate the risk of upsetting anyone and compromising on the safety of our program participants and staff."

A large, stylized number '4' is the central graphic. It is composed of a dark blue shape and a yellow shape. The dark blue shape forms the left vertical stroke and the bottom horizontal stroke. The yellow shape forms the upper right diagonal stroke and the bottom horizontal stroke, overlapping with the dark blue one.

CHAPTER 4

RECOMMENDATIONS



As we have seen through organizations' accounts of backlash, experiencing and dealing with it is not a linear process.

By sharing their challenges and strategies, NGOs have emphasized that managing backlash while simultaneously empowering adolescents is as much a process as it is an outcome. As stated in the previous chapter, by reframing backlash as a predictable risk within their programs, NGOs were able to reduce the likelihood of backlash occurring.

That being said, given the complexity and context-specific nature of backlash against adolescent empowerment programs, there is no singular solution that either organizations or funders can adopt to tackle backlash. There are a multitude of contextual, individual and programmatic factors that together play a role in defining backlash and have a direct bearing on the success and impact of adolescent empowerment programs. In order to enable adolescent programs to successfully acknowledge, anticipate, address, manage, and ultimately eliminate backlash, we cannot ignore the role played by the stakeholders involved. This especially includes funders, who play a key role in influencing and supporting adolescent focused organizations to deliver successful programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS OF ADOLESCENT EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

Our findings suggest that most funders may not completely understand the complexity of backlash as an issue, and therefore tend to underestimate its impact on adolescent empowerment programs. Often, this stems from funders having limited insight into the local context within which certain programs operate, or of the challenges field workers face.

1 Shift the focus from outputs to outcomes

For the many reasons described in the report, backlash can significantly hinder an organization's ability to meet its quarterly or annual program outputs. This is especially true when the NGO is implementing a new type of program addressing sensitive topics such as SRHR, GBV or when expanding existing programs into a challenging new geography.

In such situations, the pressure to deliver on short-term outputs can impede an organization's ability to effectively deliver on important long-term outcomes of the program. As one of the non-profit organizations explained:

A tangible way in which funders can prioritize long-term outcomes and indicators for behavioural or normative change is by shifting the focus from only outputs to identifying progress metrics that are more effective in assuring that the program is proceeding well towards the final outcomes.

As one organisation elaborates, "If it [funding] is not dependent on outcomes, it will be determined on the basis of outputs, and will therefore be counter-productive. Instead, we should be advocating for identifying progress metrics that are more effective in ensuring that the program is proceeding towards the desired final outcomes, encouraging funders to use these milestones to disburse funding instalments. These indicators need to be more relevant."

Especially in the initial stages of a program, organizations face immense pressure to meet targets and scale interventions immediately. This restricts non-profits' ability to focus on building trust with the community, which is essential to the overall success of the program.

This can be addressed through field visits and open conversations between NGOs and funders. Such an approach not only helps funders understand the complexity of backlash but also equips them to make more informed decisions on matters such as fund allocations, project duration, potential threats, risks, etc. The FGDs also highlight additional strategies through which funders can enable organizations to prevent and manage backlash effectively. Some of these strategies reinforce or build upon the funder recommendations listed in *Action Reaction I*, and are outlined below.

If, for instance, improving the quality of education for girls is the desired outcome, then the indicator should measure qualitative improvements in the girls' attendance/performance in schools since the start of the program."

Donor agencies should understand that the number of girls enrolled cannot be the only indicator for the success of our programs. Our ultimate aim is to create a sustainable change in people's attitude and behavior towards girls and women. This can only be brought about by involving the whole community. Therefore, the short-term indicators for these kinds of programs must also take this broader objective into account."

We feel pressured to meet our half-yearly targets for girls' enrolment so that our funders release the next instalment of funds on time. This restricts our field staff's ability to work on essential activities such as awareness building and community mobilization."

By providing non-profit organizations with greater flexibility, especially during the initial stages of implementation, funders can contribute to the program's long-term success. This will also enable organizations to actively prioritize normative change.

ii] Adopt a long-term view and budget for backlash in grants

Empowerment is a long-term socio-cultural process and takes time to achieve. Funders can be instrumental in creating sustainable change by adopting a long term view when they invest in adolescent programs. This includes supporting non-profit organizations with grants for a minimum of 4-5 years, and co-creating proposals that budget for the monetary costs, time and resources linked with effective backlash prevention and management.

- **Invest adequately in safety and training of field workers, before and during program implementation**

For an empowerment program to be successful, the program staff must have a holistic and nuanced understanding of gender norms and sensitivities. They have to be well trained in risk anticipation and safety protocols, while also being well-equipped to communicate with all stakeholders in the ecosystem, in case of backlash. Funders need to appreciate the criticality of this preparation, and invest in it.

- **Allow separate budgets for community participation and awareness building**

This will not only relieve NGOs from the stress of allocating funds for these critical activities, but also help them plan activities in advance, while encouraging them to be creative with fund utilization for separate outcomes.

Advocacy is a critical element when it comes to addressing systemic backlash and ensuring long-term sustainability of program outcomes. Funders must acknowledge this and enable organizations to prioritize the same in their work. By doing this, funders can encourage cross-learning and build a stronger collective voice around backlash against adolescent empowerment programs; thereby contributing to more sustainable action in the larger ecosystem.

iii] Prioritize advocacy and partnerships

iv] Include space for backlash in reporting formats

Depending on their level of interest and appetite, funders can engage with their grantees more frequently to build trust with the NGO staff by promoting a culture of open discussion. Funders can also consider co-creating program budgets and targets in partnership with non-profit organizations. Since the experience of backlash is highly dependent on local context, it is important that funders do not have a one-size-fits-all strategy when finalizing program targets and budgets.

Many organizations find it challenging to explain the additional time required in achieving empowerment outcomes due to delays caused by backlash. By proactively offering a space for NGOs to report accounts of backlash, and the resulting delays experienced, funders can create a safe space that encourages transparency, allows for an immersive discussion on the program and to possible funder participation in co-ideation of responses to backlash.

v] Encourage open dialogue and have frequent touchpoints with non-profits

THE WAY FORWARD

CSOs unanimously conclude that an ecosystem approach, involving the community, is critical for effective implementation of adolescent empowerment programs. Thus, this report focuses on the role played by various community stakeholders in influencing and managing backlash against both adolescents and programs. Our findings from both reports align with existing literature, emphasizing the critical role of stakeholders in positions of power – such as men and boys – in perpetuating, minimizing, and addressing backlash. The findings further emphasize the importance of building trust with these stakeholders, which can be a long and arduous process, and is facilitated by consistent efforts of passionate and trained front-line workers.

In the next phase of our research, we hope to delve deeper into understanding the process behind designing, prototyping, implementing, and disseminating backlash mitigation strategies. We are also hoping to use this opportunity to further understand the role of men and boys in shaping, addressing, and mitigating backlash across geographies and communities in India. We will share these findings, in the form of actionable strategies, with both funders as well as non-profit organizations within and outside of the 10to19 Community of Practice for Adolescents.

We aim to leverage the learnings from these reports to bring stakeholders together, to document, and amplify the myriad strategies that implementing organizations use in order to manage and mitigate backlash. We hope these continued interactions will fuel further exploration into the subject of backlash – thereby driving larger systemic change. Our goal is to engage the entire adolescent ecosystem – funders, non-profits, government agencies, and experts – to address backlash as an issue and work collectively towards building adolescent programs that strive to eliminate this concern in the long-term.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

TOOLS

The study derives insights and draws data from two qualitative research tools, namely:

a] Online Survey

The study leverages data from 73 online survey questionnaires conducted for *Action Reaction I*.

b] Focussed Group Discussions

FGD FRAMEWORK

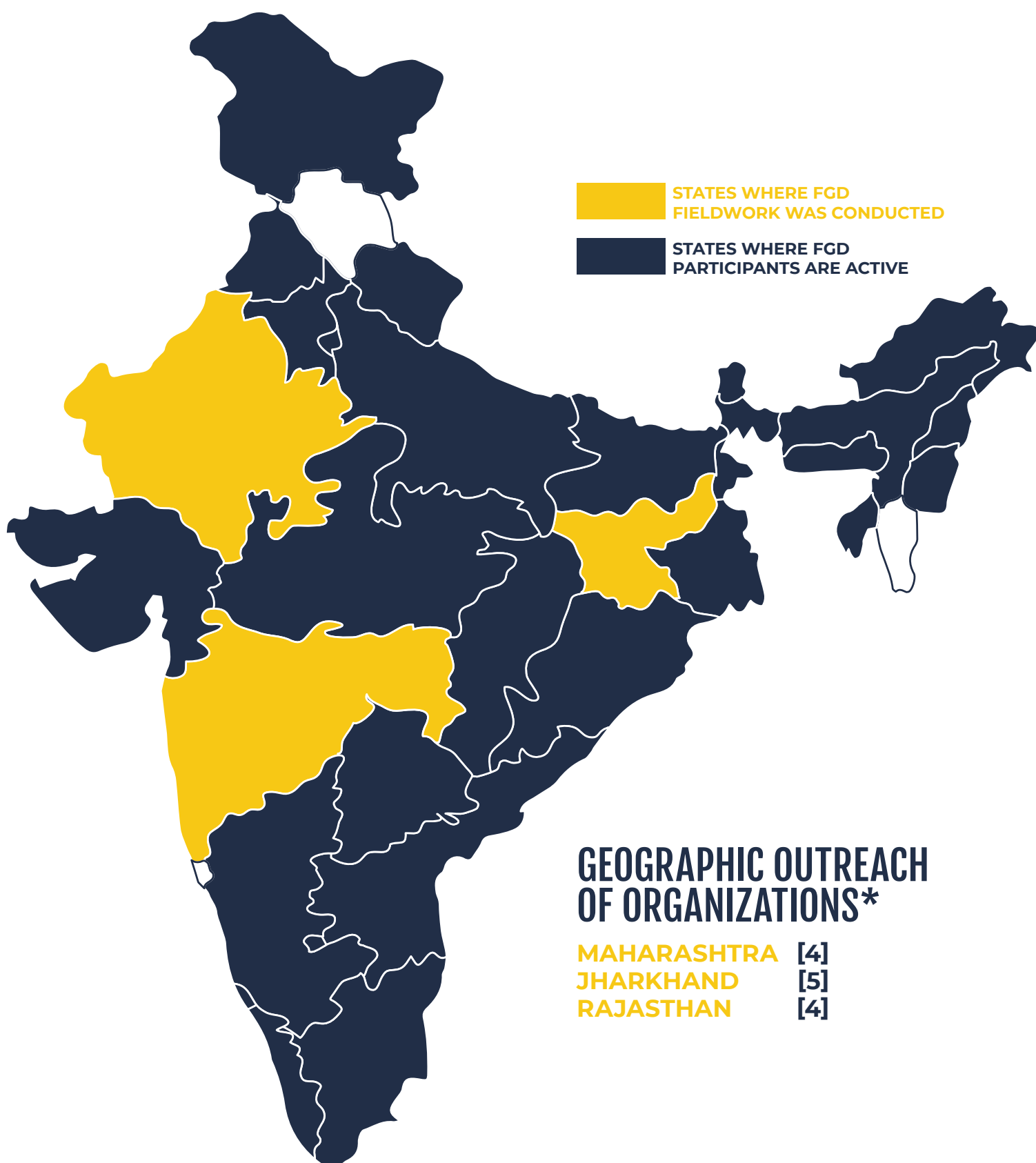
A comprehensive framework of inquiry was developed for the FGD guide. Basis the framework, the domains of inquiry were identified, as listed below:

- **Understanding the organizations, their programs, as well as local contexts of operation**
- **Identifying key gatekeepers who are crucial to the success of programs working with adolescent girls**
- **Examining instances of backlash, its triggers, and the roles of various stakeholders in these scenarios**
- **Recognizing the various backlash prevention and mitigation strategies used by the organizations**
- **Implications of backlash on different types of adolescent empowerment programs**
- **Strategic recommendations on managing backlash for stakeholders at various levels**

A detailed breakdown of organizational information is listed below, including target demographic, areas of intervention and geographic focus

The guide used to conduct the FGDs is attached in Appendix 2

ii] Profiles of the FGD Participants and Organisations



*OUT OF 9 ORGANISATIONS

YEARS OF OPERATION

YEARS OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF ORGANISATIONS
MORE THAN 40 YEARS	3
31-39 YEARS	1
20-30 YEARS	2
10-15 YEARS	3

AREAS OF OPERATION (URBAN/PERI-URBAN/RURAL)

AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF ORGANISATIONS
URBAN	2
RURAL	2
BOTH	5

PROGRAM FOCUS OF PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATIONS

AREA OF INTERVENTION	NUMBER OF ORGANISATIONS
SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH	6
MENTAL HEALTH AND DISABILITY	3
OTHER ASPECTS OF HEALTH	5
EMPOWERMENT	6
EDUCATION	6
LIVELIHOOD	4
NUTRITION	6
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE	7
LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION	7

TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS

TARGET DEMOGRAPHIC	NUMBER OF ORGANISATIONS [OUT OF 9]
GIRLS AGED 10-14	7
GIRLS AGED 15-19	8
BOYS AGED 10-14	6
GIRLS AGED 15-19	8
PARENTS	7
TEACHERS	5
COUNSELLORS	4
FRONTLINE HEALTH WORKERS	4
OTHERS [OTHER NGO'S, COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSTITUTIONS]	6

ORGANIZATION'S OUTREACH IN 2018-19

	NONE	1000-10000	10000-50000	>100000
ADOLESCENT GIRLS	1	4	2	2
ADOLESCENT BOYS	1	4	1	3

BREAKDOWN OF FGD PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

STUDY PARTICIPANTS		%
1	SEX	
	MALE	64
	FEMALE	36
2	AGE	
	16-24	16
	25-31	41
	32-38	25
	39-45	5
	46+	13
3	EDUCATION	
	< 10 TH STANDARD	1
	10 TH COMPLETED	8
	12 TH COMPLETED	12.5
	GRADUATE	26
	PH.D	3
4	MARITAL STATUS	
	MARRIED	63
	UNMARRIED	34
	WIDOWED	3
5	DESIGNATION	
	FOUNDER/BOARD MEMBER	1
	SENIOR MANAGEMENT	13
	MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	27
	JUNIOR MANAGEMENT	22
	GRASSROOTS WORKER	35

STUDY PARTICIPANTS		%
6	TENURE WITH ORGANISATION	
	< 1 YEAR	20
	1-3 YEARS	34
	4-6 YEARS	13
	7-9 YEARS	13
	10-12 YEARS	8
	13-15 YEARS	3
	16-18 YEARS	4
	> 19 YEARS	3

ii] Ethical Considerations •.....

Given the sensitive nature of backlash and the work carried out by participant organizations, informed consent was taken from all FGD attendees. Participants received detailed information regarding the purpose of the study, the manner in which their responses would be used, and the assurance of anonymity for both the individual and the organizations. Consent was explicitly collected through a consent form.

Participants also explicitly consented to the audio recording of the FGDs. These recordings were later used to transcribe and translate the conversations. The recordings were stored safely, and anonymized during transcription and translation.

iii] Analysis •.....

Two sets of data were analysed for the report. Qualitative responses collected from the Phase-I survey were analysed using the software ATLAS Ti. Simultaneously, the FGD recordings were transcribed and translated. Following this, a detailed thematic codebook was prepared, which coded and classified the information in both sets of qualitative data. The FGD data was coded manually through prudent reading of the notes, after which select themes were analysed to arrive at the conclusions detailed in this report.

iv] Limitations •.....

Given the limited amount of primary research that exists around the topic of backlash against adolescent empowerment programs in India, we acknowledge that our study is an exploratory exercise and has several limitations. The limitations listed below build upon the limitations already listed in our first report, *Action Reaction I*.

- We acknowledge the likelihood of a sample selectivity bias. The organizations selected for the FGDs were selected from the larger pool of 73 survey respondents. The main selection criterion was that organizations selected for FGDs must have primary operations in one of the three states from which we received maximum number of survey responses, i.e. Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Jharkhand. It is possible that selected NGOs that finally agreed to be part of the FGDs were those that were already familiar with incidents of backlash.
- Given the above constraints in selecting FGD participants, our findings on backlash faced by adolescent empowerment programs cannot be generalized at a pan-India level. While our research methodology does enable us to shed light on the differences in backlash faced by various types of adolescent programs (such as livelihoods, SRHR and awareness, sports for development, etc.); local norms can vary greatly across India and we acknowledge the limitations of the study with respect to generalizing findings beyond the three states covered.

APPENDIX 2

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) GUIDELINES

I Organizational Background

- What is the background of your organization? (Collect any relevant documents, including reports and case studies)
- What kind of work does your organization do with adolescent girls and boys? Could you describe some of your projects in detail? Probe for information on programs that focus on health, education, empowerment, skill-building.
- Can you describe the communities with whom you work? (Probe for details about the community's socio-economic background, religious affiliations, local cultural norms and practices)

II Backlash Faced by Adolescents

- How do you understand or define the concept of backlash?
- In your opinion, what are some aspects of empowerment programs that may invite backlash? Discuss the various programs conducted by the NGO/CBO to work with girls and young women, in order to identify potential triggers for backlash within each. Potential programs include:
 - Formal or non-formal education
 - Life skills training
 - Economic empowerment programs
 - Work to prevent child marriage
 - Sports for development programs
 - Livelihoods or skilling programs
 - Health and nutrition interventions
 - Sexual and reproductive health rights education
 - Legal advocacy and prevention of gender-based violence
 - Mental health awareness
 - Others
- What are the various forms of backlash that you have seen while working on empowerment programs? How does it manifest with different stakeholders (such as adolescent girls, boys, young women, mothers)? Probe for descriptions, including instances of verbal or physical abuse, control and denial of rights, denial of use of legal rights, contempt.
 - How does this occur manifest at the family and community levels?
- Who, in your experience, are key perpetrator of backlash? How do they cause it?
- What role does gender play in the experience of backlash? Do you feel that girls are disproportionately affected by it?
- What are the consequences of backlash, as experienced by adolescents and their families? Probe for :
 - Immediate outcomes
 - Short-term outcomes
 - Long-term outcomes

III Backlash Faced by Organizations

- What kind of backlash does your organization experience? How does this affect your program staff and field workers?
- What are the consequences of backlash, as experienced by your organization? Probe for:
 - Immediate outcomes
 - Short-term outcomes
 - Long-term outcomes

IV Mitigation Strategies for Backlash

- What are some mitigation strategies that your organization has adopted to deal with backlash?
- How to these strategies engage different stakeholders? Probe for details on how they work with
 - Adolescents
 - Parents and family members
 - Other key gatekeepers
 - Institutions such as law enforcement and medical officials
- Are there any mitigation and prevention strategies that your organization has put in place from the inception of the project? How were they developed?
- How effective have your mitigation and prevention strategies been in managing backlash? What are some elements that have worked? What are some that have not worked?
- What are some key points for NGO/CBOs to keep in mind while anticipating and managing for backlash?
- Could you share some of your organization's success stories of backlash management and mitigation?

APPENDIX 3

LIST OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Dasra would like to extend its sincere gratitude to all the organizations listed below, who made invaluable contributions to this report.

- AKSHARA CENTRE
- ANTARANG FOUNDATION
- APNALAYA
- AUROVILLE VILLAGE ACTION GROUP: ECO FEMME
- AVASARA ACADEMY
- AZAD FOUNDATION
- BHARTIYA KISAN SANGH RANCHI
- BREAKTHROUGH
- BRIGHT FUTURE (NEW RESOLUTION INDIA)
- CENTER FOR CATALYZING CHANGE
- CENTRE FOR NORTH EAST STUDIES AND POLICY RESEARCH
- CHILD IN NEED INSTITUTE
- CHILD RIGHTS AND YOU
- CHINTAN ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND ACTION GROUP
- COMPREHENSIVE RURAL HEALTH PROJECT, JAMKHED, MAHARASHTRA
- CORSTONE
- CREA
- DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM: LOVE MATTERS
- DOOSRA DASHAK: FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT
- DREAM A DREAM
- EDUCATE GIRLS
- EKJUT
- EKTA RESOURCE CENTRE FOR WOMEN
- ENGENDER HEALTH
- EQUAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
- ETASHA SOCIETY
- FXB INDIA SURAKSHA
- GRAMALAYA
- GRAMIN EVAM NAGAR VIKAS PARISHAD
- HAQ CENTER FOR CHILD RIGHTS
- HEALTH AND EDUCATION ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
- IBTADA
- IMPACT INDIA FOUNDATION
- INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
- INSTITUTE OF HEALTH MANAGEMENT PACHOD
- INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION
- INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN
- IPAS DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION
- JABALA ACTION RESEARCH ORGANISATION
- JAN SAHAS SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY
- JHPEIGO
- KALINGA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
- KARNATAKA HEALTH PROMOTION TRUST
- KHERWADI SOCIAL WELFARE ASSOCIATION
- LEARNING LINKS FOUNDATION
- LEND-A-HAND INDIA
- MAGIC BUS
- MAHILA HOUSING TRUST
- MENTOR TOGETHER
- MILAAN FOUNDATION
- NAV BHARAT JAGRITI KENDRA
- NAZ FOUNDATION
- NETWORK FOR ENTERPRISE ENHANCEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT
- PLAN INTERNATIONAL (INDIA CHAPTER)
- POPULATION FOUNDATION INDIA
- PRAVAH
- PRAXIS
- PROTSAHAN INDIA FOUNDATION
- QUEST ALLIANCE
- RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT
- SAATH CHARITABLE TRUST
- SAHAJ
- SEWA BHARAT
- SHELTER ASSOCIATES
- SNEHALAYA
- SOCIETY FOR NUTRITION, EDUCATION, AND HEALTH ACTION (SNEHA)
- SWAYAM
- TATHAPI
- THE YP FOUNDATION
- UDAYAN CARE
- VACHA CHARITABLE TRUST
- VIKRAMSHILA EDUCATION RESOURCE SOCIETY
- VISHAKHA

10to19

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