

## The Exemplar Effect

After 15 years, the Government of India has released the draft National Policy for Women. This is at a time when India finds itself below the 25th percentile on the Gender Inequality Index. Over the last 10 years, the ratio of females to males participating in India's workforce has fallen by more than 10 percentage points, despite positive economic growth trends over the same period. The new policy framework, to be tabled in Parliament, is an opportunity to include evidence-informed solutions for empowering women. Building on insights from rigorous impact evaluations, I propose a solution for expanding the number of women in the secondary school workforce to increase school-years of girls, at scale.

These insights are from randomised evaluations where the research population is randomly divided into two groups before the policy was implemented. A critical point is that characteristics of both groups were the same on average before implementation, the only difference was that one group received the programme being evaluated and the other did not. Therefore, differences in outcomes between both groups are accredited to the programme.

The public education infrastructure is a widely accessible conduit for girls across India to achieve a number of objectives laid out by the National Policy for Women. Two approaches found to be effective are: An increase in female teachers in government secondary schools for a role model effect to increase girls' participation in secondary schooling and in the workforce; and to show women and their families the value of local job opportunities for an aspiration effect. Solutions that are simple to expand across India are necessary to impact over half of India's 15-18-year-old girls who are not in secondary school education.

A randomised evaluation by Robert Jensen (2012) of a low-intensity recruitment programme targeted at young females in rural India found that families increased investment in girls' education when shown local employment opportunities, including the salary and application criteria details. The study found that girls had more years in school through this aspirations intervention. This same mechanism may increase years of schooling for girls if families are aware and given light-support for females to get jobs as secondary school teachers.

The impact of the role model effect, of increasing females in higher positions, for inspiring young girls was tested by a study in rural West Bengal, of increasing female legislators. Beaman et al. (2012) found that in villages where leadership positions were reserved for women, the gender gap in aspirations narrowed by 25 per cent for parents and 32 per cent in adolescents. Additionally, they found that the gender gap in terms of educational attainment was nearly removed, and girls were less likely to spend time on household chores. They identified the role model effect as the primary causal factor.

The draft National Policy for Women has recognised distance as a barrier to school access. The impact evaluation of the Bihar Cycle Programme using a quadruple difference-in-difference approach presents findings that providing cycles to girls, in Bihar in 2006, did close the gender gap in secondary schools. The evaluation found that the programme increased girls' age-appropriate enrolment in secondary school by 32 per cent and reduced the gender gap by 40 per cent. In terms of learning outcomes, there was an 18 per cent increase in number of girls who appeared for the secondary school certificate examination and a 12 per cent increase in the pass-rate for girls.

A scientific evaluation would show whether there is impact on years of schooling for females through combining better access (cycle programme), role-model effect (more female teachers teaching females) and raising aspirations (by showing females jobs in secondary schools). The

size of this issue demands a solution that can be applied at large scale and that is evaluated as cost-effective. Government-run secondary schools, 1,44,517 of them across 680 districts, are a widely available platform to address gender issues and shape aspirations of young girls. As the government draws up actionable items to implement through the National Policy for Women, an evidence-informed approach can be effective for empowerment of 95 million girls enrolled in India's elementary schools today.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com