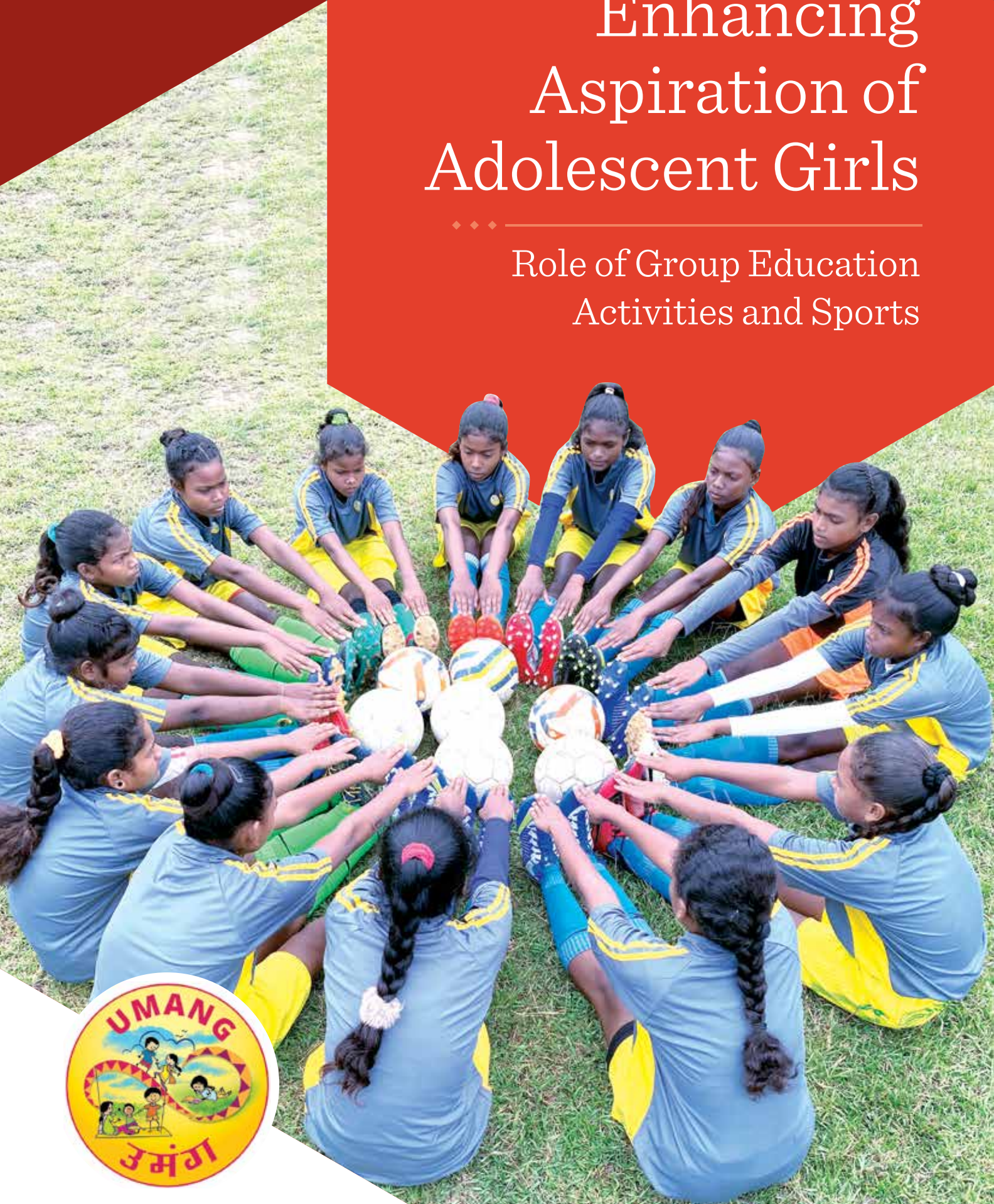


Enhancing Aspiration of Adolescent Girls

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Role of Group Education
Activities and Sports



Enhancing adolescent girls' educational and economic aspirations are critical pathways for achieving significant outcomes such as school continuation, reduction in child marriage, and increased labor force participation.

UMANG, a multi-layered, multi-stakeholder adolescent empowerment program, has focused on enhancing aspirations and agency among adolescent girls. Conceptualized by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and supported by the IKEA Foundation, the program aims to enhance the retention of girls in school and reduce the prevalence of child marriage in Godda and Jamtara districts of Jharkhand. It employs a socio-ecological framework and gender-transformative approaches on multiple levels, including the individual (adolescent girls), family (parents, siblings), community (men,

boys, women, and other community members), and system (schools, local governing structures like PRI, child protection mechanisms, etc.). ICRW implemented this program in partnership with SATHEE, Badlao Foundation, and PCI and in close collaboration with the government of Jharkhand.

Group education activity (GEA) and Sports are two major components of the UMANG program designed to enable adolescent girls to recognize and challenge gender inequity and violence, aspire for higher education and employment, and acquire the requisite skills to achieve them.



Intervention design and approach

A gender and life skills curriculum, leveraging learnings and contents from Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS), PAnKH, and Plan-It Girls programs, was developed to conduct GEAs. The curriculum used age-responsive content and activity-based participatory techniques covering various topics such as identity, gender-based discrimination and violence, assertive communication, goal setting, and resourcefulness to encourage discussions and reflections, find ways to question gender inequity, and aspire and plan to achieve the desired aspirations. Community-based peer educators were trained to lead and facilitate structured sessions with adolescent girls in group settings.

Girls aged 10-18 years were enlisted through home visits and invited to join community-based adolescent girls' groups and participate in the GEAs. Considering girls' developmental stages, needs, and comfort, separate groups were formed for 10-14 years and 15-18 years. Each group consisted of 15-20 girls from the neighborhood. To ensure parental support and

voluntary participation of girls, parental consent and assent from the girls were sought across 209 villages of 4 blocks of Godda and Jamtara.

Along with the GEA sessions, football coaching, and playing sessions were added to leverage the power of outdoor sports. The sports sessions were co-designed with adolescent girls. The sports activities served as a significant catalyst in encouraging girls to assert themselves in public spaces, challenging inequitable gender norms besides enhancing their agency, mobility, and confidence. In addition to playing within their villages, girls also participated in tournaments at block and district levels.

The GEA and sports components were implemented over a three-year period with interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, 28 GEA sessions, multiple football coaching and practice sessions, and one round of football tournaments were organized in each district.

Successes with struggles

The narratives shared by girls during the sessions highlight the skills and strengths they have developed to confront challenges and resistance. With support from both peers and educators, coupled with a deepened understanding of issues and the exploration of alternative possibilities, these experiences have instilled confidence in them to aspire and articulate their aspirations. Some of those narratives are presented here.

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Can girls dream?

“When Pooja, a sixteen-year girl, after a long silence, asked - *can girls dream?* I was shaken. Cut to 3 years, she is now in 10th standard and wants to become a police officer to serve the nation. During a conversation, she recalled a GEA session on identity - My Identity, My Dreams. She said the session prompted her to revisit many aspects of her life and search for her identity beyond her parents. It wasn't easy for her to think differently, find a language to communicate with her mother and father, and garner their support. Pooja shared that continuous conversation with friends (who were part of her group) and peer educators gave her the confidence and articulation to discuss those issues with her parents and siblings. In her words - *'Umang has made me dream high and work for it to fulfill it'*.

-Dr. Nasreen Jamal, Chief of Project

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Gains of joining UMANG...

“When I learnt about UMANG from my friends, I also wanted to join. At least to be with friends. I asked for permission from my father, but he was reluctant. He asked whether we would get anything in return. Then, I requested didi [peer educator] to talk to my parents. After significant persuasion, they allowed me to participate. I started talking with my parents and younger brother about the program and our discussions during the sessions. Slowly but surely, I started seeing change in them. They are talking about my education more than marriage [with laughter]. Definite gains...”

-Ms. Neha, UMANG participant,
Jamtara block, Jamtara



Football is not just a sport; it is our identity...

"I got the inspiration to play football from my father, who was also a football player in the past and is now a coach. But this game cannot be played alone or with just one or two individuals thus I was not able to play. In 2020, when I joined UMANG, a girls' team was formed, and that was the first time that I could meet girls in a group. Regular meetings started taking place under the UMANG project. Few days later, a football session was started as a part of the program, along with discussions on issues like gender, discrimination, and violence. However, not all the girls were playing. While some were getting full support from their families, other parents were not giving permission. They often argued that football is a boys' sport and not for girls. Gradually, we could explain and change the thinking of others.

We started playing regularly. We also received coaching to learn the nuances and improve upon our game skills. Then, we participated in the UMANG district tournament and reached up to the district level. It motivated us further, and now we participate in various tournaments. We have won several matches. Football has given us an identity as well as our village – *'where a girls' team plays'*. In the beginning, we used to wear the boys' uniform, but now we have our own uniform, and boots were provided during the UMANG tournament. With the money we win in matches, we buy football, go to other villages to play, pay for our commute, etc.

The best part is that the people who used to stop us from playing come to watch our matches."

-Ms. Purnima, UMANG participant, Nala, Jamtara

Intervention Reach and implications

According to the program monitoring data, approximately 28,000 adolescent girls have participated in the GEA sessions and sports activities, with around 500 participating in the football tournaments. Further, many girls expressed a strong determination to pursue education and career goals. Notably, over 1,700 girls ventured beyond their localities for higher education, and 34 girls successfully secured scholarships from the Government of Jharkhand for further studies. These program insights were corroborated by the evaluation results (refer to the Evaluation brief). Insights from monitoring and evaluation revealed that the combination of GEAs and sports, facilitated by peer educators with a gender perspective and necessary skills, provided spaces and impetus to adolescent girls to envision their future, identify dreams and aspirations, and use their interests and skills to forge pathways toward achieving them. Program data also emphasized the essential role of parental and community support in enabling adolescent girls to realize their aspirations.

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