



# **AGENCY INDEX FRAMEWORK**

## **MEASURING ADOLESCENT GIRLS' ECONOMIC AGENCY**

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This document has been inspired by my many years of working in the development sector and, most importantly, by my close engagement with adolescents and young people, especially girls. Time and again, I have seen their courage, aspirations, and determination — often in the face of deeply entrenched barriers. Their voices and lived experiences have shaped the thinking that lies behind this framework.

Over the years, I have also worked alongside practitioners who dedicate themselves to empowering adolescents and youth, but who often lack a structured approach to measuring what truly matters: agency. While programmes have rightly focused on education, skills, and participation, the dimension of agency has remained difficult to define, track, and act upon.

The Agency Index Framework is an attempt to fill this gap. It is offered as a practical tool for practitioners, programme managers, and policymakers who want to ensure that their efforts not only open opportunities for young people but also build their ability to make choices, exercise voice, and shape their own futures.

I hope this document proves useful across the sector and sparks further dialogue, adaptation, and collaboration.

Susmita Mukherjee

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Agency Index Framework is a pioneering tool designed to measure and strengthen adolescent girls' agency as a pathway to economic empowerment. Grounded in feminist theory and development practice, the Index moves beyond access-based metrics to capture girls' capacity to make strategic choices and act upon them across key life domains.

## WHY AGENCY MATTERS?

While many programs focus on skills and resources, true empowerment requires agency—the ability to navigate choices, assert preferences, and resist restrictive norms. For adolescent girls, agency is deeply contextual, relational, and shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, age, caste, and geography. The Index offers a structured way to assess this invisible but critical dimension.

## FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

The Index comprises seven interlinked domains:

- Mobility
- Financial Autonomy
- Voice & Expression
- Bodily Autonomy
- Digital Access
- Aspirations & Goal Setting
- Norm Resistance

Each domain is scored on a 0–3 scale, reflecting levels of autonomy and decision-making. The tool is designed for both diagnostic and developmental use—guiding interventions, tracking progress, and amplifying girls' voices in program design.

## **THEORY OF CHANGE**

The framework posits that when girls are supported through enabling environments—safe spaces, mentorship, life skills—they begin to activate agency across domains. This activation leads to increased workforce readiness, economic participation, and resilience against gender-based constraints.

## **ETHICAL & OPERATIONAL INTEGRITY**

The Index is administered with strict ethical safeguards, including informed consent, trauma sensitivity, and safeguarding protocols. Facilitator guidance ensures respectful, consistent implementation, while visual aids (scorecards, flowcharts, domain maps) enhance field usability.

## **INTENDED USE**

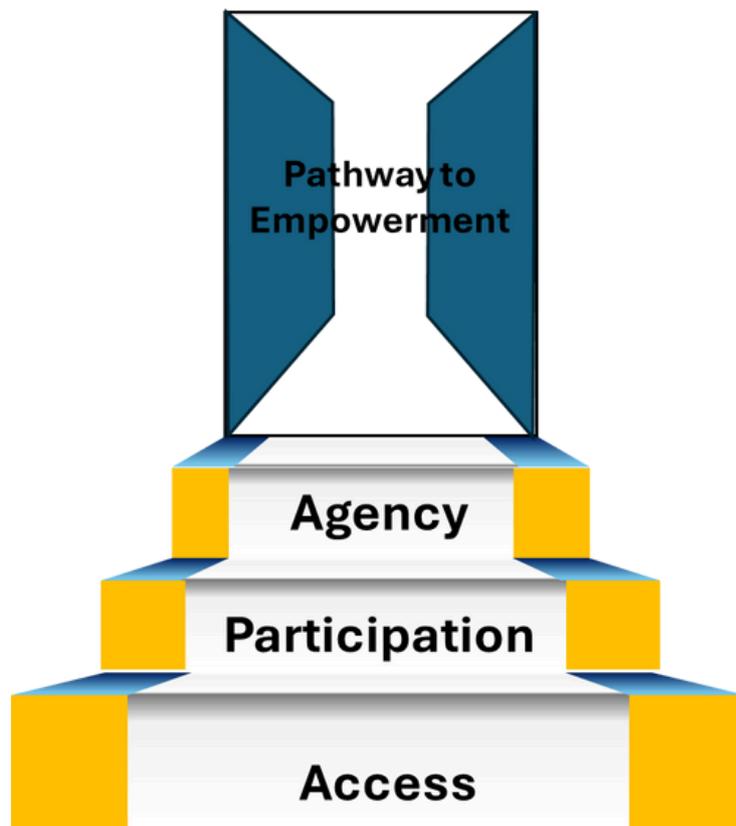
The Agency Index is intended for use by NGOs, government programs, and researchers seeking to:

- Diagnose barriers to agency
- Tailor interventions to individual and community needs
- Monitor empowerment outcomes over time
- Advocate for gender-transformative policy and practice

By centering girls' lived realities and strategic choices, the Agency Index Framework offers a bold, evidence-based approach to advancing gender equity and adolescent empowerment in India and beyond.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENCY INDEX

When we discuss adolescent girls' empowerment, the conversation often centers on school enrollment, skill training, or workforce entry. But these markers don't answer a deeper question: do girls truly have the power to make choices about their own lives? Across communities, many girls may attend school or even earn an income. Yet, they often struggle to decide whether to continue studying, move freely, utilize their earnings, or express their aspirations. This gap between access and autonomy is where the idea of an Agency Index becomes critical.



# CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

The Agency Index is anchored in a rich lineage of gender and development scholarship that redefines empowerment beyond access to resources. It draws from three interlocking theoretical pillars:

- **Amartya Sen’s Capabilities Approach** Sen reframes development as the expansion of individuals’ freedoms—their real opportunities to lead lives they value. The Index adopts this lens by focusing not only on what adolescent girls have, but on what they are able to do and be. It measures agency as the capacity to convert resources into meaningful choices and actions.
- **Naila Kabeer’s Framework of Agency** Kabeer defines empowerment as the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them. Her emphasis on voice, choice, and control informs the Index’s structure, which captures both internal drivers (e.g., self-efficacy, aspirations) and external enablers (e.g., mobility, decision-making power). The Index operationalizes agency as a dynamic interplay between resources, agency, and achievements.
- **Gender-Transformative Approaches** These models go beyond service delivery to challenge and shift the structural power relations that constrain girls’ lives. The Index integrates this ethos by embedding indicators that reflect shifts in norms, roles, and relational dynamics—such as negotiating with gatekeepers, resisting harmful practices, and influencing peer networks.

Together, these frameworks guide the Index’s design as a field-ready, context-sensitive tool that captures the multidimensional nature of adolescent girls’ agency. It translates abstract concepts into measurable domains that can inform programming, track change over time, and amplify girls’ voices in shaping their futures.

# DEFINITION OF AGENCY

Agency refers to the ability of an individual to make choices, exercise control over their own life, and act upon those decisions. Agency is the capacity to make choices and act upon them. It's not a fixed trait but a dynamic process shaped by context, relationships, and access to resources. Agency is exercised—not owned—and is deeply embedded in social, cultural, economic, and political environments.

## AGENCY THROUGH THE ADOLESCENT LENS

For adolescent girls, economic agency encompasses decision-making power, mobility, voice, leadership, financial autonomy, and the confidence to shape their future. For adolescents, especially girls, agency is:

- **Contextual:** It's shaped by family dynamics, peer relationships, school environments, gender norms, and broader societal expectations.
- **Relational:** Adolescents often negotiate agency within interdependent relationships—balancing autonomy with respect for elders, community norms, and social roles.
- **Developmental:** Adolescents are in a transitional phase—developing identity, voice, and aspirations. Their agency includes imagining futures, resisting constraints, and making strategic life choices.
- **Constrained or Expanded by Systems:** Poverty, restrictive gender norms, lack of access to education or SRHR services, and policy environments can either stifle or support adolescent agency.

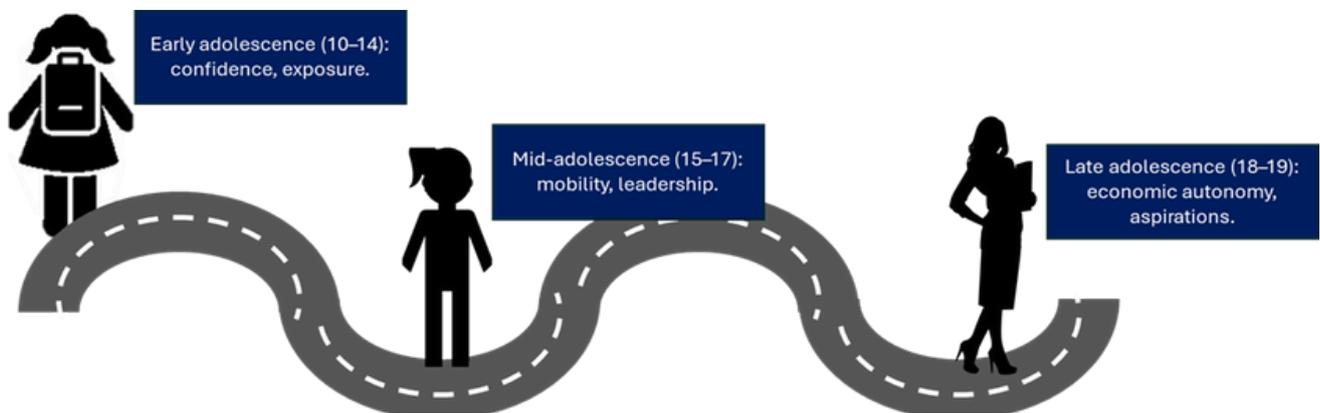
## EXAMPLES OF ADOLESCENT AGENCY

- A girl choosing to pursue vocational training despite familial pressure to marry early.
- A boy challenging peer norms around masculinity by expressing vulnerability.
- Adolescents co-creating community solutions through youth-led initiatives.

## WHY IT MATTERS?

Agency is central to empowerment, rights realization, and workforce readiness. It enables adolescents to:

- Make informed decisions about their bodies, education, and careers.
- Navigate risks and opportunities with resilience.
- Contribute meaningfully to their families and communities.



# THEORY OF CHANGE

The Agency Index is grounded in the belief that adolescent girls' economic empowerment is not merely a function of access to resources, but a dynamic outcome of agency—defined as the capacity to make strategic choices and act upon them. This framework posits that when girls are supported to develop voice, autonomy, and decision-making power across key domains of their lives, they are more likely to pursue education, engage in meaningful work, and resist harmful norms.

The theory of change follows a three-tiered progression:

## **Foundational Inputs:**

Girls are provided with enabling environments—safe spaces, mentorship, life skills, and digital literacy—alongside community engagement to shift restrictive norms.

## **Agency Activation:**

Through these inputs, girls begin to express preferences, assert boundaries, and make decisions in domains such as mobility, finances, education, and relationships.

## **Empowerment Outcomes:**

As agency strengthens, girls demonstrate increased workforce readiness, economic participation, and resilience against gender-based constraints.

The Agency Index serves as both a diagnostic and developmental tool—capturing where girls are in this journey and informing targeted interventions to accelerate their empowerment.

# INTENDED USE

The Agency Index is designed as a practical, field-ready tool to measure and track adolescent girls' economic agency across diverse programmatic contexts.

It supports implementers, facilitators, and researchers in:

- Assessing baseline agency to inform program design and targeting
- Monitoring progress across key empowerment domains over time
- Amplifying girls' voices through participatory reflection and feedback
- Generating evidence for advocacy, scale-up, and donor reporting

The Index can be administered at multiple points in a program cycle—baseline, midline, and endline—and is adaptable for use in both rural and urban settings. It is intended to complement qualitative insights and community engagement strategies, not replace them.

# WHY AN AGENCY INDEX?

The Agency Index is dedicated to all practitioners to really understand the effect and influence of their intervention on adolescent girls. The agency index is a lightweight, adaptable tool designed to measure whether adolescent girls are building the core dimensions of agency that underpin long-term economic independence.

It is flexible enough to be:

- Programme-level monitoring tool (tracking shifts in agency across interventions).
- Girl-led self-assessment tool (enabling reflection and ownership).
- Policy advocacy metric (moving beyond job participation stats to empowerment outcomes).

# OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

The strength of the Agency Index lies not only in its conceptual clarity but also in its adaptability to different programme settings. For practitioners to use it meaningfully, it is important to outline how the tool can be administered, when it should be applied, and who should be involved in scoring.

## **Administration**

The Index can be applied through multiple formats depending on programme needs and the literacy levels of the girls involved:

- Surveys provide structured, comparable data and work well when programmes need aggregate statistics for donors or government reporting.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) allow facilitators to probe more deeply into how girls experience decision-making, mobility, or autonomy. These are especially useful to understand why scores are high or low.
- Self-assessment diaries put the tool directly in the hands of adolescents. Girls reflect on their own confidence, decisions, and aspirations over time, which strengthens both accountability and self-awareness.
- Pictorial or visual scorecards can be used with younger adolescents or low-literacy groups. Icons (e.g., a closed door vs. an open door for mobility) make the tool accessible without relying on text.

Many programmes find value in combining methods – for example, pairing a simple survey with a follow-up FGD to validate results and uncover nuance.

## **Frequency**

Agency is not static; it shifts as adolescents encounter new opportunities and constraints. Programmes should therefore plan for multiple points of measurement:

- **Baseline:** to establish starting levels of agency before an intervention.
- **Midline:** to detect early shifts and course-correct programming.
- **Endline:** to assess overall impact at the close of a cycle.
- **Annual or ongoing check-ins:** for long-term programmes, yearly data helps track how agency develops as girls move through adolescence.

The key is to balance rigour with feasibility: too few data points miss change, while too many can burden staff and participants.

## **Who Scores**

A critical question is whose perspective counts in assessing agency. The Index is designed to be flexible:

- **Girls themselves:** self-scoring promotes reflection and strengthens ownership of change.
- **Mentors or facilitators:** adults who work closely with girls can provide observational insights, especially in areas like leadership or participation.
- **Trained enumerators:** bring consistency and neutrality, especially for donor-driven monitoring.

Ideally, programmes should triangulate across these perspectives. For instance, a girl might rate her mobility as “high,” while a facilitator might note she still requires family permission for travel. Discussing such differences helps uncover hidden barriers and ensures a more accurate picture.

# DIMENSIONS OF THE AGENCY INDEX

## 1. Decision-Making Power

- Ability to decide on continuing education or skill training.
- Participation in household financial or everyday decisions (purchase of school supplies, mobile/data use).
- Confidence voicing career aspirations to parents/teachers.
- Influence over personal choices (friendships, extracurriculars, clothing).

## 2. Mobility & Exposure

- Permission to travel alone to school, market, or training centers.
- Participation in exposure visits, field trips, or community trainings.
- Access to safe and reliable transport (bike, bus pass, shared vehicle).
- Confidence navigating new spaces (towns, digital platforms, work settings).

## 3. Voice & Leadership

- Active participation in school councils, girls' clubs, sports teams, or community groups.
- Confidence to speak in public/peer gatherings.
- Leadership roles held in class, clubs, or peer networks.
- Perception that their views are respected by adults/peers.

## 4. Economic Autonomy

- Access to personal savings account, digital wallet, or savings group.
- Engagement in income-earning activities (apprenticeships, internships, small business).
- Confidence in handling money independently (budgeting, digital payments, savings).
- Ability to use income without needing permission.

## 5. Digital Agency

- Access to mobile phone or digital device.
- Confidence in using digital tools for learning, networking, or income generation.
- Safe navigation of online spaces (awareness of cyber risks, ability to block/report abuse).
- Independent decision-making on digital use (e.g., what apps to use, online learning).

## 6. Bodily Autonomy & Safety

- Knowledge of rights related to marriage, sexuality, and bodily integrity.
- Ability to refuse early marriage or unwanted proposals.
- Confidence in seeking help/reporting if experiencing violence or harassment.
- Freedom from coercion in health/reproductive decisions.

## 7. Aspirations & Future Orientation

- Clarity about career or educational goals.
- Optimism about future opportunities.
- Perception that family/community supports her ambitions.
- Willingness to take calculated risks to pursue aspirations (e.g., moving for study/work).



# DOMAIN DEFINITIONS

Each domain in the Agency Index reflects a distinct dimension of adolescent girls' agency. Together, they capture both internal capacities and external enabling conditions.

Domain	Definition	What It Captures	What It Excludes
<b>Aspirations &amp; Future Orientation</b>	The ability to imagine and articulate a desired future	Career goals, educational plans, hopefulness	Current achievements or status
<b>Skill Confidence</b>	Belief in one's ability to apply practical skills	Digital literacy, vocational readiness, and problem-solving	Formal certification or training completion
<b>Access to Resources</b>	Availability of tools, spaces, and support systems	Safe spaces, mentors, and learning materials	Ownership of assets or income
<b>Decision-Making Power</b>	Ability to influence personal and household decisions	Choice in education, mobility, and peer interactions	External decisions made without consultation
<b>Mobility &amp; Negotiation</b>	Capacity to move freely and advocate for oneself	Negotiating movement, permissions, participation	Physical safety or infrastructure barriers
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	Internal belief in one's ability to act and succeed	Confidence, initiative, resilience	External validation or praise
<b>Norms Resistance</b>	Willingness to challenge restrictive gender norms	Rejecting early marriage, questioning stereotypes	Passive non-compliance or silence
<b>Peer Influence &amp; Leadership</b>	Ability to lead, support, and mobilise peers	Leading clubs, mentoring, and group facilitation	Popularity or social status alone
<b>Gatekeeper Engagement</b>	Interaction with adults who shape girls' choices	Influencing parents, teachers, and community leaders	Compliance without agency or voice

# MAPPING THEORY TO SCORING DOMAINS

The Agency Index is not just theoretically grounded—it is structurally designed to reflect the lived realities of adolescent girls. Each scoring domain draws directly from foundational frameworks, ensuring that measurement is both meaningful and transformative.

Theoretical Framework	Core Concept	Aligned Scoring Domains	Representative Indicators
<b>Amartya Sen – Capabilities Approach</b>	Real freedoms and opportunities to pursue valued lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Aspirations &amp; Future Orientation</li> <li>· Skill Confidence</li> <li>· Access to Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Ability to articulate career goals</li> <li>· Confidence in digital or vocational skills</li> <li>· Access to learning tools or safe spaces</li> </ul>
<b>Naila Kabeer – Agency &amp; Empowerment</b>	Ability to define goals and act upon them; voice, choice, control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Decision-Making Power</li> <li>· Mobility &amp; Negotiation</li> <li>· Self-Efficacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Ability to negotiate movement or participation</li> <li>· Confidence in expressing opinions</li> <li>· Role in household or peer decisions</li> </ul>
<b>Gender-Transformative Models</b>	Shifting power relations and challenging norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Norms Resistance</li> <li>· Peer Influence &amp; Leadership</li> <li>· Gatekeeper Engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Challenging harmful practices (e.g., early marriage)</li> <li>· Leading peer discussions or clubs</li> <li>· Influencing parental or community attitudes</li> </ul>

# SCORING AND INTERPRETATION

## SCORING METHODOLOGY

Agency is not a binary state – it grows in steps. The scoring methodology offers a simple, transparent way to track this journey, showing how girls move from restricted choices toward greater confidence, autonomy, and leadership.

The Agency Index can be applied at two levels:

- Individual self-assessment (girl scores herself).
- Programme monitoring (enumerators/mentors collect data through surveys, FGDs, or participatory tools).

## STEP 1: DEFINE SCALE

Each indicator is scored on a 0–3 ordinal scale, with clear anchors:

- 0 = No Agency → Girl has no access, control, or decision-making in this dimension.
- 1 = Limited Agency → Girl has some access/opportunity but limited control; decisions mostly made by others.
- 2 = Partial Agency → Girl is able to exercise agency in some contexts, but still constrained by norms, safety, or resources.
- 3 = Strong Agency → Girl consistently exercises independent choice, control, and confidence in this dimension.

(For example: “Mobility – ability to travel alone to market”: 0 = never, 1 = only with escort, 2 = sometimes alone, 3 = freely and safely.)

## STEP 2: DIMENSION SCORES

- Each dimension (Decision-Making, Mobility, Voice, Economic Autonomy, + optional dimensions) has 3–5 indicators.
- Take the average score per dimension.

## STEP 3: OVERALL AGENCY INDEX SCORE

- Aggregate the dimension averages into one composite score (0–3).
- This can be expressed as:
  - 0–1.0 = Low Agency
  - 1.1–2.0 = Emerging Agency
  - 2.1–2.5 = Moderate Agency
  - 2.6–3.0 = Strong Agency

## STEP 4: DISAGGREGATION

Scores should be analyzed by:

- Age cohorts (10–14, 15–19)
- Schooling status (in-school, out-of-school)
- Location (urban, rural, remote)
- Socio-economic or caste/tribe groups

*This reveals intersectional differences in agency.*

## STEP 5: USE IN PROGRAMMES

- Baseline → Endline: Track shifts over time to see if agency strengthens.
- Girl-led reflection: Use pictorial scorecards or diaries for adolescents to mark progress.
- Community dialogue: Share anonymized aggregate results to spark discussions on how norms are shifting.

This framework shifts success metrics from access to autonomy, from presence to power. By measuring agency, we recognize that the real transformation is not only about girls entering education or work – it is about whether they can shape their own lives.

# WEIGHTING & AGGREGATION

One of the most important design choices in any index is how much weight to give each dimension. The Agency Index offers flexibility so that it can be used both as a universal measure of empowerment and as a programme-specific tool.

## **Equal Weighting (Default Approach)**

By default, each dimension of the Index – decision-making, mobility, voice and leadership, economic autonomy, and the optional domains – is given equal weight.

This means that all aspects of agency are considered equally important to a girl's overall empowerment.

- Advantages: simple to calculate, easy to explain to community stakeholders, and ensures no domain is undervalued.
- When to use: in broad-based programmes or policy reviews where the aim is to track overall shifts in adolescent agency.

## **Custom Weighting (Context-Responsive Approach)**

In some cases, programmes may want to emphasise certain dimensions more heavily than others, depending on the goals of the intervention.

For example:

- A financial inclusion project might assign greater weight to economic autonomy and decision-making around financial resources.
- A digital skills initiative may give higher weight to digital agency and aspirations, while keeping other domains as supporting factors.
- A programme focused on child marriage prevention could weight bodily autonomy and mobility more strongly than economic indicators.

This approach requires clarity and transparency: programmes must explain why certain dimensions are weighted more heavily and how this reflects their theory of change.

## **Aggregating the Scores**

Once each indicator is scored (0–3) and averaged within dimensions, the next step is to create a composite Agency Index score.

This can be done in two ways:

1. Unweighted aggregation (default): simply average across all dimensions.
2. Weighted aggregation: apply different weights, then calculate a weighted mean.

For instance, in an equal-weight system, decision-making and mobility count the same. In a custom-weight system, decision-making might be weighted at 30%, while digital agency counts for 10%.

Thus, the choice of weighting signals what programmes and policymakers consider most important. Equal weighting protects the holistic nature of empowerment, while custom weighting allows for sharper alignment with programme priorities and donor expectations.

## **INTERPRETATION & ACTION**

The Agency Index is not designed as a scorecard for its own sake. Numbers alone do little if they are not linked to practical action and programmatic learning. The real value of the Index comes when results are interpreted thoughtfully and then used to shape interventions that strengthen girls' empowerment.

### **From Scores to Meaning**

- A score is not a judgment about an individual girl, but a snapshot of her current context and opportunities.
- Low scores highlight areas where structural barriers, norms, or service gaps are limiting agency.
- High scores suggest that enabling factors – supportive families, safe schools, accessible services – are in place and can be leveraged further.

## **Linking Results to Program Response**

Different dimensions of the Index point to different kinds of interventions:

- Low mobility scores → focus on providing safe transport, negotiating with families and communities for freer movement, and expanding opportunities for exposure visits.
- Weak economic autonomy → introduce or strengthen financial literacy, savings groups, or pocket money schemes; partner with banks and digital finance providers to create access.
- Low voice and leadership → invest in girls' clubs, debating/public speaking spaces, mentorship programmes, and opportunities to take visible leadership roles in school or community forums.
- Low bodily autonomy & safety scores → expand access to SRHR services, create safe reporting mechanisms, and run norm-change campaigns with families and communities.
- Low aspirations scores → organize career counseling, role model exposure, and structured opportunities for girls to dream and plan their futures.

## **Turning Data into Dialogue**

One of the most powerful uses of the Index is to spark conversations. For example, when aggregate scores are shared with communities or adolescent groups, they can:

- Challenge stereotypes (e.g., showing parents that many girls aspire to STEM careers).
- Provide evidence for advocacy with local governments (e.g., demonstrating the need for safe transport).
- Motivate girls by showing them how their own agency has grown over time.

## **Ensuring the Cycle of Change**

By embedding the Agency Index into programme cycles, data moves beyond monitoring and becomes a driver of transformation:

- Measure → Reflect → Act → Measure again.
- This ensures that interventions remain responsive, adaptive, and accountable to the lived realities of adolescent girls.

In short, the Agency Index helps programmes move from data collection to data for action, ensuring that every number contributes to meaningful change in girls' lives.

# DATA DISAGGREGATION

Agency is not experienced equally by all adolescent girls. Two girls of the same age may have very different levels of freedom and voice depending on their location, schooling status, caste, income, or community norms. Without disaggregated data, these differences remain invisible – and programmes risk designing one-size-fits-all interventions that unintentionally leave the most marginalized behind.

## Why Disaggregation Matters

- It helps identify hidden inequities. For instance, average scores may look promising, but when broken down, tribal girls in remote areas might score far lower on mobility or voice.
- It allows programmes to target resources where the need is greatest, ensuring interventions are equitable.
- It supports intersectional analysis, showing how gender interacts with age, caste, poverty, or geography to shape girls' agency.

## Key Disaggregation Categories

- Age groups: Compare younger adolescents (10–14) with older ones (15–19). Younger girls may have higher restrictions on mobility but greater optimism about the future. Older girls may have more decision-making power but face sharper marriage pressures.
- Schooling status: Girls in school often report stronger voice and aspirations, while out-of-school girls may score higher on economic autonomy if they are working. Both groups need tailored support.
- Location: Urban girls may score better on digital agency but still face restrictions on bodily autonomy; rural or remote girls may have less exposure but stronger community solidarity.
- Socio-economic, caste, or tribal identity: Structural inequalities deeply affect agency. Caste or tribal status often intersects with poverty to create compounded barriers to mobility, leadership, and economic independence.

## **How to Use Disaggregated Data**

- Programme design: If rural, out-of-school girls show consistently low scores, tailor interventions toward bridging exposure and mobility gaps in those areas.
- Advocacy: Share findings with policymakers to argue for targeted schemes (e.g., transport subsidies for rural girls, scholarships for tribal adolescents).
- Equity monitoring: Use disaggregation as a safeguard to check whether interventions are reaching the most marginalized, not just those already advantaged.

## **Principle**

Disaggregation is not just a technical exercise – it is an equity commitment. It ensures that the Agency Index does not present a single average story but reflects the diverse, intersecting realities of adolescent girls, so that no group is left behind.

# THE FRAMEWORK WITH THE SCORING ANCHOR

Dimension	Illustrative Indicator	Scoring Anchor (0-3)
<b>Decision-making power</b>	Ability to decide on continuing education/training	0 = No decision-making 1 = Rarely consulted 2 = Sometimes decides 3 = Freely decides
<b>Decision-Making Power</b>	Participation in household financial/everyday decisions	0 = No involvement 1 = Minimal (others decide) 2 = Some input 3 = Equal say
<b>Decision-Making</b>	Power Confidence voicing career aspirations to parents/teachers	0 = Not at all confident 1 = Very hesitant 2 = Somewhat confident 3 = Very confident
<b>Decision-Making</b>	Power Influence over personal life choices (friends, extra-curriculars, clothing)	0 = No influence 1 = Limited 2 = Moderate 3 = Strong influence
<b>Mobility &amp; Exposure</b>	Permission to travel alone to school/market/training	0 = Never 1 = Only with escort 2 = Sometimes alone 3 = Freely and safely
<b>Mobility &amp; Exposure</b>	Participation in exposure visits or community trainings	0 = Never allowed 1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Regularly
<b>Mobility &amp; Exposure</b>	Access to safe, reliable transport	0 = No access 1 = Limited/unsafe 2 = Somewhat reliable 3 = Safe and reliable
<b>Mobility &amp; Exposure</b>	Confidence navigating new spaces (towns, digital platforms, work settings)	0 = Not at all 1 = Very uncomfortable 2 = Somewhat confident 3 = Fully confident

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Illustrative Indicator</b>	<b>Scoring Anchor (0-3)</b>
<b>Voice &amp; Leadership</b>	Active participation in school councils, clubs, or groups	0 = Never participates 1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Actively participates
<b>Voice &amp; Leadership</b>	Confidence speaking in public or peer gatherings	0 = Not confident 1 = Very hesitant 2 = Somewhat confident 3 = Very confident
<b>Voice &amp; Leadership</b>	Leadership roles held in class, clubs, or peer networks	0 = Never holds roles 1 = Rarely 2 = Occasionally 3 = Regularly holds roles
<b>Voice &amp; Leadership</b>	Perception that their views are respected by peers/adults	0 = Never respected 1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Regularly respected
<b>Economic Autonomy</b>	Access to a personal savings account, digital wallet, or savings group	0 = No access 1 = Limited/shared 2 = Somewhat independent 3 = Fully independent
<b>Economic Autonomy</b>	Engagement in income-earning activities (internships, small business)	0 = None 1 = Very limited 2 = Somewhat engaged 3 = Regularly engaged
<b>Economic Autonomy</b>	Confidence handling money (budgeting, digital payments, savings)	0 = Not confident 1 = Very hesitant 2 = Somewhat confident 3 = Fully confident
<b>Economic Autonomy</b>	Ability to use income without needing permission	0 = No autonomy 1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Always
<b>Digital Agency</b>	Access to a mobile phone or digital device	0 = No access 1 = Shared/limited 2 = Some access 3 = Full access
<b>Digital Agency</b>	Confidence using digital tools for learning/networking/income	0 = Not confident 1 = Very hesitant 2 = Somewhat confident 3 = Fully confident
<b>Digital Agency</b>	Safe navigation of online spaces (cyber safety, block/report)	0 = No awareness 1 = Very limited 2 = Some awareness 3 = Fully confident
<b>Digital Agency</b>	Independent decision-making on digital use (apps, online learning)	0 = No say 1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Always independent

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Illustrative Indicator</b>	<b>Scoring Anchor (0-3)</b>
<b>Bodily Autonomy &amp; Safety</b>	Knowledge of rights (marriage, sexuality, bodily integrity)	0 = No knowledge 1 = Very limited 2 = Some knowledge 3 = Full knowledge
<b>Bodily Autonomy &amp; Safety</b>	Ability to refuse early marriage/unwanted proposals	0 = No ability 1 = Very limited 2 = Some ability 3 = Full ability
<b>Bodily Autonomy &amp; Safety</b>	Confidence seeking help if facing violence/harassment	0 = Not confident 1 = Very hesitant 2 = Somewhat confident 3 = Fully confident
<b>Bodily Autonomy &amp; Safety</b>	Freedom from coercion in health/reproductive decisions	0 = No autonomy 1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Always independent
<b>Aspirations &amp; Future Orientation</b>	Clarity about career/educational goals	0 = No clarity 1 = Vague 2 = Somewhat clear 3 = Very clear
<b>Aspirations &amp; Future Orientation</b>	Optimism about future opportunities	0 = No optimism 1 = Rarely hopeful 2 = Somewhat optimistic 3 = Very optimistic
<b>Aspirations &amp; Future Orientation</b>	Family/community support for ambitions	0 = No support 1 = Minimal 2 = Partial 3 = Strong support
<b>Aspirations &amp; Future Orientation</b>	Willingness to take risks for aspirations (e.g., moving for study/work)	0 = Unwilling to take risks 1 = Very hesitant 2 = Somewhat willing 3 = Very willing

# CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS IN USING THE AGENCY INDEX

While the Agency Index offers a structured way to track girls' empowerment, several challenges should be kept in mind:

## CONTEXT SENSITIVITY

Agency is shaped by cultural, social, and economic contexts. What counts as “mobility” or “decision-making” in one community may look very different in another. The Index should always be adapted locally.

## SELF-REPORTING BIAS

Many indicators rely on girls' self-reported confidence or autonomy. Responses may be influenced by social desirability bias or fear of judgment. Triangulating with qualitative methods is advised.

## NORMATIVE BARRIERS

Even when girls demonstrate strong individual agency, wider social norms may limit their ability to act. Scores must be interpreted alongside an understanding of community attitudes and structures.

## NOT A STANDALONE MEASURE

The Index is not intended to replace education, health, or livelihood indicators. Instead, it complements them by highlighting whether girls can actually exercise choice and control.

## DYNAMIC AND EVOLVING

Agency is not fixed – it changes over time and across life stages. Programmes should view scores as a snapshot in a journey, not a permanent state.

# ETHICAL SAFEGUARDS

Given the sensitive nature of agency-related domains—particularly those involving bodily autonomy, violence, and social norms—the implementation of the Index must be guided by rigorous ethical standards. These safeguards ensure that the process of measurement does not inadvertently cause harm or reinforce vulnerabilities.

Key principles include:

- **Informed Consent:** Girls must be fully informed about the purpose of the Index, how their responses will be used, and their right to opt out at any point without consequence.
- **Confidentiality:** All data collected must be anonymized and securely stored. Identifiable information should never be linked to individual scores or shared externally.
- **Trauma Sensitivity:** Facilitators must be trained to recognize distress and respond appropriately, including pausing or skipping questions that may trigger discomfort.
- **Cultural Relevance:** The Index should be adapted to local contexts through participatory methods, ensuring that language, examples, and domains resonate with girls' lived realities.
- **Safeguarding Protocols:** Clear referral pathways must be established for cases where disclosures indicate risk or harm, including access to psychosocial support and protection services.

These safeguards are not optional—they are integral to the ethical integrity and credibility of the Index.

# REFERENCES

- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435–464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125>
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Interagency Gender Working Group. (2017). *Gender transformative approaches: Definitions and principles*. USAID. <https://www.igwg.org/resources/gender-transformative-approaches-definitions-and-principles/>

# **ANNEXURE**

# FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Facilitators play a pivotal role in administering the Agency Index with sensitivity, accuracy, and respect. Their approach can significantly influence how girls perceive the process and whether they feel safe to respond authentically.

Facilitators should:

- **Create a Trusting Environment:** Begin with rapport-building activities and emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers—only honest reflections.
- **Use Neutral Language:** Avoid leading questions or judgmental tones. Frame prompts in ways that invite openness and curiosity.
- **Observe Non-Verbal Cues:** Be attentive to signs of discomfort or disengagement. Offer breaks, skip questions, or rephrase as needed.
- **Encourage Reflection:** Where appropriate, allow girls to elaborate on their responses. This can deepen understanding and foster self-awareness.
- **Avoid Interpretation During Scoring:** Facilitators should not impose their own views or assumptions while scoring. The Index is designed to center the girl's perspective.
- **Debrief Respectfully:** After scoring, facilitators may offer a brief reflection session, helping girls understand their strengths and areas for growth—without labeling or ranking.

# SAMPLE SCORECARD TEMPLATE

Purpose: To record individual scores across agency domains and capture qualitative insights.

Title: Agency Index Scorecard – Individual Assessment

Domain	Score (0-3)	Description of Response / Notes
Mobility		
Financial Autonomy		
Voice & Expression		
Bodily Autonomy		
Digital Access		
Aspirations & Goal Setting		
Norm Resistance		
Total Score		

Scoring Key:

- 0 = No agency / No decision-making power
- 1 = Emerging agency / Limited autonomy
- 2 = Moderate agency / Partial decision-making
- 3 = High agency / Full autonomy and action

Usage Notes:

- Use one scorecard per participant.
- Encourage facilitators to add brief qualitative notes to contextualize scores.
- Can be adapted for group-level scoring by averaging across participants.



**This framework is more than a measurement tool. For me, its a beginning. The Agency Index has been developed to help practitioners, governments, and donors move beyond access and participation, and to recognize the central role of agency in shaping girls' futures.**

**I hope that this document sparks dialogue, experimentation, and collaboration across the sector. Whether you are designing programmes, shaping policy, or investing in change, the Agency Index offers a starting point – and I welcome your insights in strengthening and adapting it further.**

Lets keep talking:

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