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WORKFORCE READINESS SKILLS FRAMEWORK

PREPARING ADOLESCENT GIRLS FOR MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN THE FUTURE ECONOMY

AND

A SYSTEMS-BASED APPROACH TO PREPARING ADOLESCENT GIRLS FOR ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

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Executive Summary

Adolescent girls represent South Asia's untapped economic potential. While women's empowerment has gained policy traction, most large-scale programmes engage women only after marriage or in adulthood. By then, restrictive norms, time poverty, and limited exposure have already narrowed their choices.

This Workforce Readiness Skills Framework shifts the focus to adolescence (10–19 years) as the critical window for building competencies, aspirations, and agency. It argues that preparing girls for the future of work requires not just technical training, but a holistic approach that integrates skills, social norms, and enabling ecosystems.

Why This Matters

- Unpaid care burden: Adolescent girls shoulder disproportionate domestic work, limiting education and skill-building opportunities.
- Skills mismatch: Education systems remain disconnected from labour market demands, particularly in STEM and high-value sectors.
- Gender gap in workforce participation: Despite rising education levels, India's female labour force participation remains at 37% (PLFS 2023–24), with rural-urban disparities and stagnation in quality employment.
- Opportunity for demographic dividend: With South Asia's youth bulge, workforce readiness for girls can directly influence economic growth trajectories.

The Framework

The model rests on four interconnected domains:

1. Life Skills & Agency — confidence, decision-making, negotiation, communication.
2. Technical & Vocational Skills — sector-relevant training, entrepreneurship, problem-solving.
3. Digital & STEM Literacy — coding, digital safety, online learning, tech exposure.
4. Financial Capability — budgeting, savings, credit literacy, financial independence.

A Competency Progression Model outlines how girls move from foundational exposure to applied practice and eventually to leadership.

Implementation Pathways

Change requires multi-stakeholder engagement across four routes:

- Education System Integration — embedding competencies into curricula and pedagogy.
- Community-Based Programming — safe spaces, mentoring, and norm change at the grassroots.
- Private Sector Partnerships — internships, apprenticeships, and inclusive hiring pipelines.
- Digital Platforms — scalable access to blended learning, credentials, and job-matching.

Enabling Ecosystem

Skills must be matched by supportive conditions: safe spaces, mentorship, family and community endorsement, access to opportunities (scholarships, internships), and essential services such as childcare and safe transport.

Measuring Impact

The framework introduces a multi-level assessment model, covering:

- Individual outcomes (skills, confidence, agency)
- Programme outcomes (completion, placement, satisfaction)
- Systems outcomes (labour market integration, leadership, norm change)

It also proposes a simple Agency Index Framework to measure shifts in decision-making power, mobility, and economic autonomy.

The Way Forward

- For Policymakers: Integrate workforce readiness into education and skilling policies; invest in safe spaces, transport, and digital access.
- For Practitioners: Embed the four-domain model, connect girls to real economic opportunities, and engage families to shift norms.
- For Employers: Build inclusive pipelines via mentorship, apprenticeships, and recognition of digital credentials.
- For Donors & Investors: Support holistic, adolescent-focused models and fund systemic ecosystem-building efforts.

Preparing adolescent girls for the workforce is not just a gender equity issue — it is a growth and resilience imperative for South Asia. Investing in this generation now will determine whether the region's demographic dividend is realised or lost.

Why Workforce Readiness for Girls?

Why This Matters Now: The Critical Intervention Window

Adolescence (10–19 years) constitutes a decisive developmental stage where biological, cognitive, and social transitions intersect. Research underscores three dynamics that make this period especially critical for workforce readiness interventions:

- Neuroplasticity and accelerated learning: Adolescence represents a phase of heightened cognitive receptivity, where complex skills — from problem solving to digital literacy — can be most effectively acquired.
- Norm crystallisation: Gendered expectations around roles, mobility, and responsibility become entrenched during this period, influencing long-term participation in education and the labour market.
- Pathway formation: Early exposure to vocational, digital, and financial competencies often shapes the trajectory of economic participation and life-course outcomes.

Failing to intervene at this juncture risks perpetuating a cycle of limited opportunities, constrained agency, and intergenerational poverty.

Education–Employment Disconnect

Despite notable progress in educational attainment for girls in South Asia, the transition from school to secure and remunerative work remains weak. This reflects a structural market failure driven by:

- Skills mismatch: Curricula and training are often misaligned with evolving labour market demand, leaving young women underprepared for emerging sectors.
- Gendered occupational segregation: Girls are disproportionately channelled into low-return or “safe” sectors, reducing access to high-growth areas such as technology, renewable energy, and finance.
- Capability constraints: Investments in technical skills are frequently undermined by deficits in agency, voice, and community support, limiting the ability of girls to exercise new competencies in practice.

Towards a Holistic Framework

- Addressing this disconnect requires a comprehensive approach that integrates four domains of skill development — life and agency, technical/vocational, digital/STEM, and financial literacy — while simultaneously engaging with the social norms and structural barriers that shape girls’ opportunities.
- Such a framework is not only central to advancing gender equality; it is also an economic imperative. With South Asia’s youth population at a historic peak, equipping adolescent girls with the skills and agency to participate meaningfully in the workforce represents a critical pathway to inclusive growth and resilience.

Theory of Change

The Workforce Readiness Skills Framework is premised on a simple but powerful proposition: skills alone are insufficient unless embedded in supportive ecosystems. The pathway to adolescent girls' meaningful economic participation rests on an integrated approach that combines capability development with enabling conditions.

Core Proposition

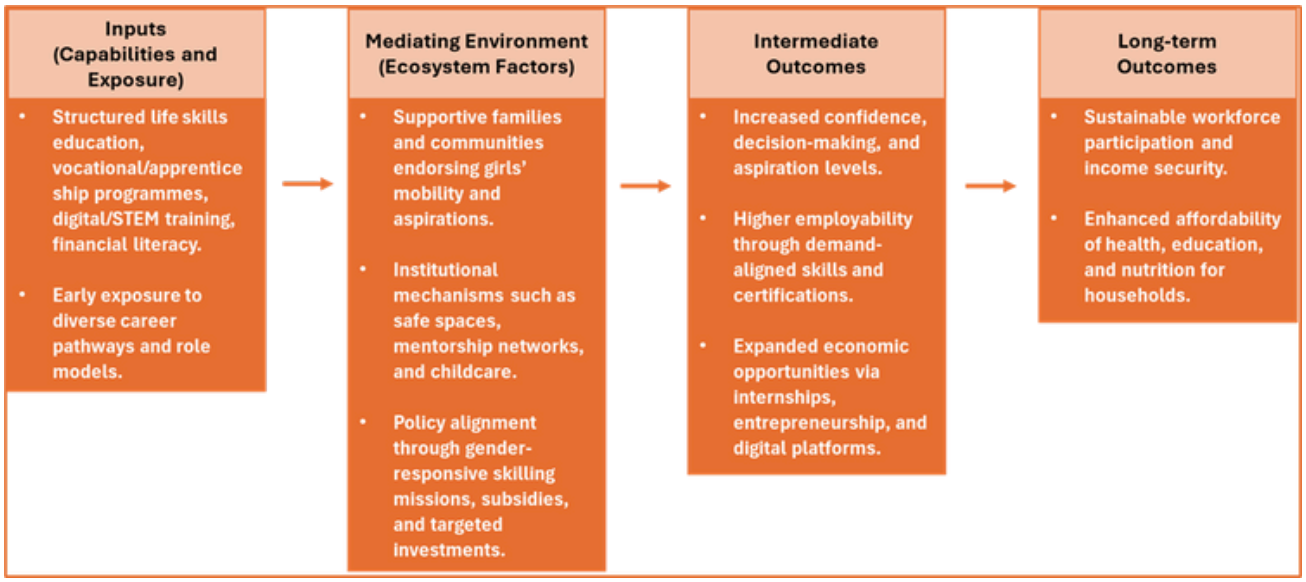
If adolescent girls:

1. Acquire integrated competencies across four domains — life and agency, technical/vocational, digital/STEM, and financial literacy; and
2. Operate within supportive ecosystems that reduce barriers, shift norms, and expand access to opportunities;

Then:

They will demonstrate enhanced economic agency, translating into higher workforce participation, more secure livelihoods, and greater leadership within households, communities, and markets.

Causal Pathways



What does this mean?

- Workforce readiness cannot be pursued as a standalone skilling intervention; it must be situated within broader gender-transformative programming.
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential: schools for foundational skills, NGOs for norm change and safe spaces, private sector for apprenticeships, and government for policy convergence.
- Monitoring must capture not only participation rates but also shifts in agency, aspiration, and intergenerational outcomes.

Evidence Snapshot: Where Do We Stand?

South Asia has made remarkable progress in closing gender gaps in education over the last two decades. Today, girls' enrolment in secondary education often matches or exceeds that of boys in many countries. Yet, this achievement has not translated into equivalent labour force participation.

The Paradox

- **India**: Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) improved from 23.3% in 2017–18 to 37% in 2023–24 (PLFS 2024), yet remains among the lowest globally.
- **Bangladesh**: Women comprise 36% of the labour force, but participation is concentrated in low-wage garment work.
- **Nepal**: Women's LFPR stands at around 42%, but mostly in subsistence agriculture with low productivity and earnings.
- **Sri Lanka**: Despite high female education levels, LFPR remains under 35%, reflecting social norms, limited childcare, and sectoral exclusion.

This data reveals a structural disconnect: education ↑, but meaningful economic participation ↓.

Persistent Barriers

- **Skills mismatch**: Curricula are not aligned with growth sectors (e.g., technology, renewable energy, finance).
- **Time poverty**: According to India's Time Use Survey (2019), women spend 7.2 hours/day on unpaid care work, compared to 2.8 hours for men — limiting time for paid work.

- **Digital divide**: Girls and women are less likely to own or access mobile phones, internet, or digital tools, constraining opportunities in emerging sectors.
- **Social norms**: Restrictions on mobility, early marriage, and expectations of "safe" occupations curtail choices.
- **Limited institutional support**: Inadequate childcare, transport, and safe workplaces disproportionately affect women.

What does it tells about workforce readiness?

These patterns suggest that education alone is insufficient; without deliberate skill-building and enabling ecosystems, girls' school achievements will not translate into secure, dignified livelihoods.

Workforce readiness interventions must therefore address:

- Competency gaps across life, technical, digital, and financial domains.
- Structural barriers rooted in norms and care responsibilities.
- Policy alignment with national skilling, education, and livelihood missions.

In short, South Asia is at a crossroads: failure to act risks wasting its demographic dividend, while timely action could unlock unprecedented growth led by young women.

Practice Gaps and Emerging Efforts

Over the last two decades, South Asia has seen significant investment in women's economic empowerment through self-help groups, cooperatives, and livelihood missions. However, a closer look reveals a striking gap: very few programmes are designed specifically to prepare adolescent girls for workforce participation.

Most large-scale initiatives — such as SEWA in India, Kudumbashree in Kerala, or dairy cooperatives in Gujarat — have focused primarily on adult women, often after marriage or once household responsibilities are established. While these models have been effective in enhancing livelihoods and collective agency, they have not directly addressed the formative stage of adolescence where aspirations are shaped and career pathways are set.

This omission is critical. Adolescence is precisely the period when interventions can have the most lasting impact on skills, confidence, and mobility. By the time women reach adulthood, many of the social and economic barriers to participation are already entrenched.

Emerging Efforts

Despite the gap, some initiatives in South Asia have begun experimenting with adolescent-focused approaches:

- Hume Badhna Hai (India): Piloted integrated career counselling and holistic guidance for adolescent girls, linking aspirations with education choices and exposing participants to a wider spectrum of career pathways.
- Adolescent Development Clubs (Nepal): Supported by UNICEF and partners, these clubs combined life skills, leadership development, and economic futures discussions alongside health and empowerment modules.
- Girls in ICT Initiatives (Sri Lanka): Annual campaigns and coding bootcamps introduced adolescent girls to digital careers, highlighting opportunities in the ICT sector, though still limited in reach and duration.

Initiative	Geography	Focus	Key Features	Insights	URL
Hume Badhna Hai (PCI India)	Jharkhand, India	Career counselling for adolescent girls	Holistic counselling combining life skills and exposure to non-traditional careers	Demonstrates how career guidance at adolescence can expand aspirations of adolescent girls.	PCI India – Hume Badhna Hai
Saksham (Population Foundation of India pilot)	Uttar Pradesh, India	Career counselling for adolescent girls	Integrated modules on life skills, digital literacy, and SRHR and Peer educator model	Shows that addressing both life skills and health barriers strengthens readiness for work.	Population Foundation of India – Saksham
Project Manzil (Smile Foundation)	Rajasthan, India	Life skills and vocational exposure for adolescent girls	· Vocational training through school and community-based models · Exposure to sectors like IT, healthcare, retail, and more	llustrates how integrating skill-building into existing adolescent programs boosts employability and delays early marriage.	Smile Foundation – Project Manzil
Girls in ICT Day Initiatives	Regional (Nepal, Sri Lanka)	Digital/STEM orientation for adolescent girls	One-day bootcamps introducing coding, robotics, and digital safety and Mentorship by women in tech	· Highlights how short, low-cost exposures can ignite interest in high-value sectors.	ITU – Girls in ICT Day

These efforts remain fragmented, small in scale, and poorly integrated into national skilling or education systems. Nevertheless, they signal an emerging recognition that workforce readiness must begin during adolescence — not after marriage, not after higher education, and not as a remedial measure in adulthood.

It is into this gap that the Workforce Readiness Skills Framework seeks to intervene: providing a structured, holistic approach that integrates skill development with supportive ecosystems, tailored to the unique realities of adolescent girls in South Asia.

Comprehensive Skills Architecture

Four Domain Competency Matrix

1. Life & Agency Skills, 2. Technical & Vocational Skills, 3. Digital and STEM Skills and 4. Financial Literacy & Independence

Domain	Core Competencies	Sub-Skills	Assessment Indicators	Industry Relevance
1. **Life & Agency Skills** (Builds voice, leadership, and agency; equips girls to navigate norms and workplace challenges.)	Communication & Negotiation	• Public speaking • Conflict resolution • Stakeholder engagement	• Presentation delivery scores • Negotiation simulation outcomes • Peer feedback ratings	Essential across all sectors
	Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	• Systems analysis • Data interpretation • Creative ideation	• Case study analysis • Problem-solving assessments • Innovation project outcomes	High-value knowledge work
	Self-Confidence & Resilience	• Goal setting • Stress management • Adaptability	• Self-efficacy scales Stress response assessments • Goal achievement tracking	Leadership and entrepreneurship
	Mobility & Decision-Making	• Strategic planning Risk assessment • Resource optimization	• Decision-making scenarios • Strategic planning exercises • Resource allocation tasks	Management and consulting

Four Domain Competency Matrix

Domain	Core Competencies	Sub-Skills	Assessment Indicators	Industry Relevance
2. Technical & Vocational Skills (Provides direct pathways into employment or self-employment; increases employability)	Sector-Specific Training	• Manufacturing techniques • Service delivery • Quality control	• Technical skill assessments • Industry certification • Performance benchmarks	Direct employment pathways
	Applied Learning	• Apprenticeship completion • Project-based learning • Industry mentorship	• Supervisor evaluations • Project portfolio • Mentor assessments	Skills validation
	Entrepreneurship Foundations	• Business model development • Market analysis Financial planning	• Business plan quality • Market research projects • Financial modeling accuracy	Self-employment pathways

Four Domain Competency Matrix

Domain	Core Competencies	Sub-Skills	Assessment Indicators	Industry Relevance
3. Digital & STEM Skills (Prepares girls for the future of work, particularly in growing IT, services, and STEM sectors)	Digital Fluency	• Software proficiency • Digital communication • Online collaboration	• Software competency tests • Digital project completion • Online collaboration metrics	Future-focused sectors
	Computational Thinking	• Programming fundamentals · Data analysis Algorithm design	• Coding assessments •Data visualization projects · Problem-solving algorithms	Technology and analytics
	Emerging Technologies	• AI/ML awareness •IoT applications · Digital security	• Technology application projects •Security protocol knowledge · Innovation challenges	High-growth industries

Four Domain Competency Matrix

Domain	Core Competencies	Sub-Skills	Assessment Indicators	Industry Relevance
4. Financial Literacy & Independence (Strengthens economic autonomy and reduces vulnerability to exploitation)	Personal Finance Management	• Budgeting and planning •Investment basics · Insurance understanding	• Budget creation and tracking •Investment simulation outcomes · Financial decision scenarios	Economic autonomy
	Formal Financial Systems	• Banking navigation •Credit understanding · Contract literacy	• Banking task completion •Credit assessment knowledge · Contract analysis skills	Economic participation
	Economic Agency	• Wage negotiation •Rights awareness · Economic planning	• Negotiation simulations •Rights knowledge assessments · Economic goal achievement	Workforce empowerment

Framework Principles

1. **Holism over silos:** Preparing girls requires integration across all four domains — not standalone skilling.
2. **Early exposure:** Interventions during adolescence build aspirations before restrictive norms harden.
3. **Contextualisation:** Skills must be aligned with local economies and labour demand, not generic training.
4. **Agency at the core:** Technical skills are necessary but insufficient without self-confidence, decision-making, and supportive ecosystems.

Competency Progression Model

Stage	Life & Agency	Technical & Vocational	Digital & STEM	Financial Capability	Illustrative Outcomes
Exposure (Ages 10–13)	Basic confidence, self-expression, awareness of gender roles	Awareness of different career pathways, exposure visits	Basic familiarity with digital devices and safe internet use	Understanding money as a concept, simple saving habits	Curiosity and aspiration-building; girls begin to see work as part of their future
Foundational (Ages 13–15)	Goal-setting, communication, negotiation	Short-term vocational tasters (school clubs, crafts, STEM fairs)	Core digital literacy (typing, search, apps)	Savings accounts, pocket money management	Increased self-belief; basic skills in multiple domains
Applied (Ages 15–17)	Leadership in peer groups, critical thinking, decision-making	Structured vocational training, internships, apprenticeships	Coding basics, STEM projects, digital tools for learning	Budgeting, mobile banking, digital payments	Girls begin practising skills in real contexts; confidence to explore opportunities
Advanced (Ages 17–19)	Advocacy, public speaking, mentoring younger peers	Certification in sector-specific skills (healthcare, IT, trades)	Advanced STEM/digital application (data handling, entrepreneurship tech)	Credit literacy, insurance, microenterprise finance	Workforce entry readiness: employable, entrepreneurial, and financially independent

Key Features of the Progression Model

- **Age-responsive:** Skills are introduced at appropriate developmental stages.
- **Layered learning:** Each stage builds on the previous one, moving from exposure → practice → mastery.
- **Integration:** Life skills and agency underpin technical, digital, and financial competencies at every stage.
- **Scalability:** The model can be embedded into school curricula, NGO programmes, or national skilling missions.

Implementation Guidance

- Operationalising this progression requires alignment across institutions and stakeholders. The Framework cannot succeed if delivered in isolation; it must be mainstreamed into education, skilling, and community structures.

Who Does What?

Actor	Roles in Implementation
Schools/Education Systems	Integrate career counselling and life skills into curricula; introduce digital/STEM clubs; partner with industry for exposure visits.
NGOs/Community Platforms	Provide safe spaces, mentorship, gender-transformative dialogues with families; pilot vocational and financial literacy clubs; track girls' progression.
Government (Education, Skill, Labour, Women & Child Departments)	Align national missions (e.g., Skill India, NRLM, Samagra Shiksha) with adolescent workforce readiness; finance vocational/apprenticeship pathways; mandate gender-responsive skilling.
Private Sector	Offer internships, apprenticeships, role models, and mentoring; invest in school-to-work transition programmes as part of CSR/DEI commitments.
Donors/Philanthropy	Fund innovative pilots, evaluation, and scaling; build evidence base for adolescent-focused workforce programming.

Implementation Priorities

1. **Start Early, Stay Consistent:** Introduce exposure at ages 10–13; sustain learning through adolescence.
2. **Converge with Existing Platforms:** Use schools, SHGs, and adolescent clubs to deliver layered competencies.
3. **Invest in Safe Ecosystems:** Ensure transport, childcare, and community buy-in to reduce dropouts.
4. **Measure Agency, Not Just Skills: T**rack decision-making, mobility, and aspiration shifts alongside technical outcomes.
5. **Build Public–Private–Community Partnerships:** Pool resources and expertise to scale beyond pilot

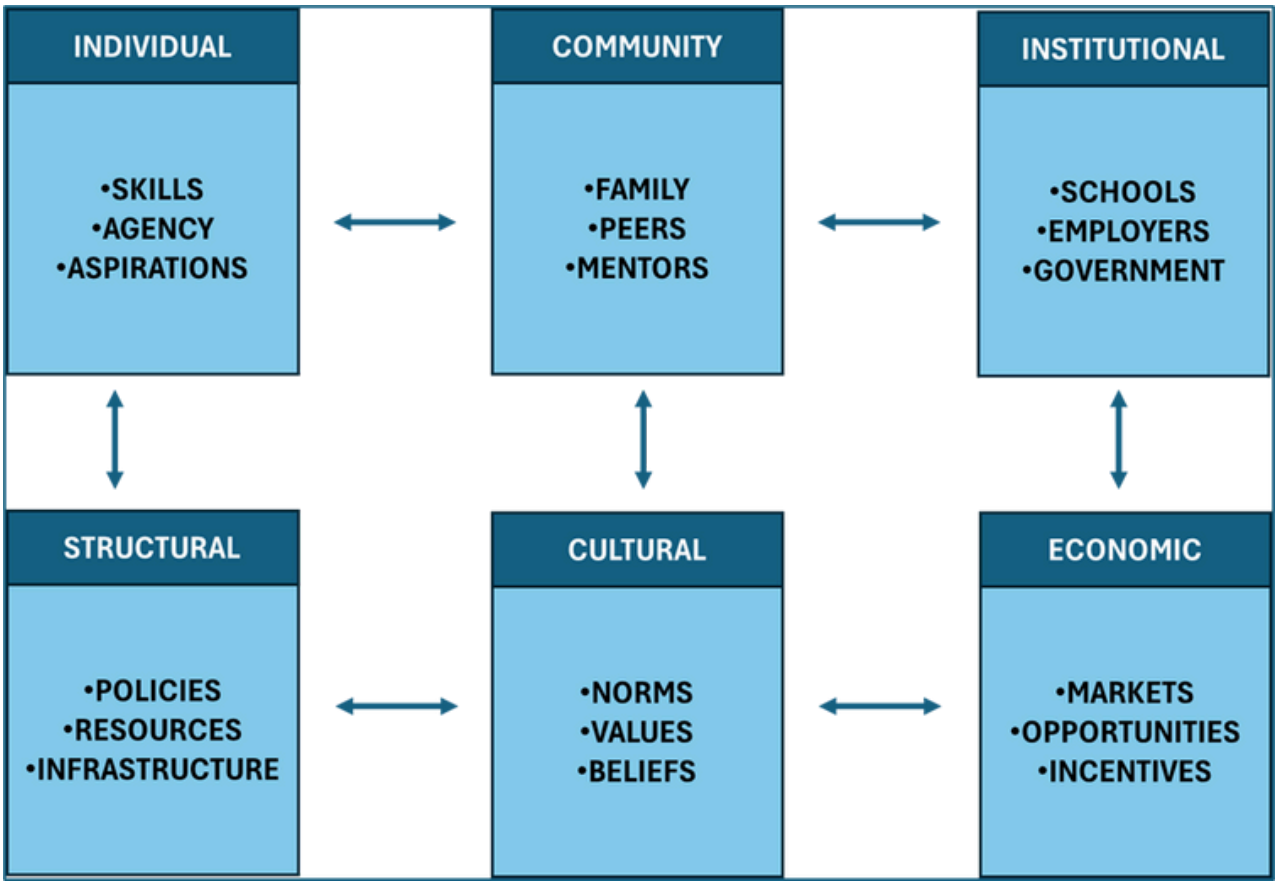
Enabling Environment (Beyond Skills)

Workforce readiness is not only about what girls learn, but also about the conditions in which they apply those skills. Without supportive ecosystems, even the most capable adolescent girls face barriers to meaningful participation.

Four enabling factors are critical:

- Safe spaces and mentorship: Role models, peer networks, and trusted mentors provide the confidence and guidance necessary to navigate new opportunities.
- Social norm change: Families and communities must endorse girls' aspirations, mobility, and workforce entry. Interventions that shift perceptions of girls' roles are essential.
- Access to opportunities: Scholarships, internships, digital platforms, and structured career counselling connect skills to real economic pathways.
- Support services: Affordable childcare, safe transport, and flexible pathways (particularly for young mothers) reduce dropout and exclusion.

Multi-Stakeholder Ecosystem Map



Implementation Pathways

Pathway A: Education System Integration

Target: Formal education institutions

Strategy: Curriculum enhancement and teacher training, Embed workforce readiness within curricula and pedagogy

Education systems are the most sustainable vehicle for reaching adolescent girls at scale. By integrating readiness competencies into curricula, schools can ensure that every girl graduates with a baseline of life, digital, technical, and financial skills.

Implementation:

1. Develop modular curriculum packages for each competency domain
2. Integrate life skills into school curricula
3. Train educators in gender-responsive pedagogy
4. Establish assessment and certification systems
5. Offer vocational training linked to local labour market demand.
6. Create industry partnerships for practical experience

Pathway B: Community-Based Programming

Target: Youth organizations and community groups

Strategy: Create safe spaces for skill-building and norm change
Community platforms offer trusted spaces where girls can practice skills, build agency, and challenge restrictive norms. These spaces are particularly vital for out-of-school girls and those in rural areas with limited institutional access.

Implementation:

1. Establish girls' clubs with structured skill-building activities
2. Integrate life skills into youth clubs.
3. Recruit and train local mentors and role models
4. Facilitate family and community engagement sessions
5. Connect to economic opportunities and career pathways

Pathway C: Private Sector Partnerships

Target: Employers and industry associations

Strategy: Workplace readiness and talent pipeline development
The private sector can accelerate workforce entry by providing internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship while committing to inclusive hiring. Industry standards and diversity goals can create demand for adolescent girls as future workers.

Implementation:

1. Ensure gender-responsive skilling and entrepreneurship programmes.
2. Design apprenticeship and internship programs
3. Develop industry-specific skill standards and assessments
4. Create mentorship networks and career guidance systems
5. Establish hiring incentives and diversity targets
6. Run financial literacy workshops with banks/MFIs.
7. Fund workforce-prep interventions for adolescent girls.
8. Incentivise private sector apprenticeships and mentorships.

Pathway D: Digital Platform Solutions

Target: Technology-enabled delivery at scale

Strategy: Blended learning and digital credentialing
Digital platforms can bridge geographic and resource gaps, enabling girls to access learning, mentorship, and career opportunities at scale. With mobile-first design, even resource-constrained environments can deliver high-quality workforce readiness training.

Implementation:

1. Develop interactive online learning modules
2. Create digital assessment and certification systems
3. Build peer learning and mentorship platforms
4. Integrate with job matching and opportunity platforms
5. Build digital labs or partnerships with tech providers.

Assessment Framework

Multi-Level Assessment Strategy

Individual Level Metrics:

- Pre/post competency assessments across all four domains
- Portfolio-based evaluation of project work and practical applications
- 360-degree feedback from peers, mentors, and supervisors
- Self-assessment and reflection tools

Program Level Metrics:

- Skill acquisition rates and competency progression
- Completion and retention rates across different pathways
- Industry placement and employment outcomes
- Participant satisfaction and engagement levels

Systems Level Metrics:

- Labor market integration and wage progression
- Leadership and entrepreneurship rates
- Intergenerational impact and norm change indicators
- Economic return on investment and cost-effectiveness

Agency Index Framework — Measuring Adolescent Girls' Economic Agency

The Agency Index is a lightweight tool to assess whether adolescent girls are building the core dimensions of agency necessary for long-term workforce participation. It can be adapted for both programme-level monitoring and girl-led self-assessment.

Dimensions & Sample Indicators

Dimension	Illustrative Indicators (Adolescence-focused)
Decision-Making	· % of girls reporting ability to decide on education continuation · % of girls involved in household financial decisions (e.g., purchase of school materials) · % of girls who feel confident voicing career aspirations to parents/teachers
Mobility	· % of girls allowed to travel alone to school/market within village/town · % of girls participating in exposure visits, field trips, or skill training outside the community · % of girls with access to safe transport options
Voice & Leadership	· % of girls participating actively in school councils, girls' clubs, or community groups · % of girls reporting confidence to speak in public/peer settings · % of girls holding leadership roles in peer groups or clubs
Economic Autonomy	· % of girls with personal savings account or digital wallet access · % of girls earning from internships/apprenticeships/pocket allowances · % of girls confident about handling money transactions independently

Digital Credentialing System

Blockchain-Based Certification:

- Tamper-proof skill credentials
- Employer-recognized competency verification
- Progressive skill stacking and micro-credentialing
- International portability and recognition

Data Analytics Dashboard:

- Real-time progress tracking for individuals and cohorts
- Predictive modeling for at-risk participants
- Labor market alignment and demand forecasting
- Impact measurement and program optimization

Innovation Features & Competitive Advantage

Technology Integration

- AI-Powered Personalization: Adaptive learning paths based on individual progress and interests
- VR/AR Skills Training: Immersive technical skill development and workplace simulation
- Mobile-First Design: Accessible delivery through smartphones and tablets
- Gamification Elements: Engagement through achievement systems and peer competition

Cultural Responsiveness

- Local Contextualization: Adaptation to cultural norms and economic contexts
- Multilingual Support: Content delivery in local languages
- Community Integration: Involvement of local leaders and cultural ambassadors
- Flexible Delivery Models: Accommodation of different learning preferences and constraints

Gender-Transformative Approach

- Intersectional Analysis: Recognition of diverse identities and experiences
- Male Engagement: Programs for fathers, brothers, and male community leaders
- Safe Space Guarantee: Physical and psychological safety in all programming
- Agency-Centered Design: Girls as co-creators and leaders, not just beneficiaries

Low-Tech / No-Tech Innovations

While digital platforms are transformative, low-tech and no-tech approaches remain essential for reaching resource-poor and rural adolescents.

Examples of scalable, inclusive innovations:

- **Community Radio:** Broadcasting role model stories, financial literacy tips, and career talks in local languages, accessible even in remote areas.
- **Peer Theatre & Street Plays:** Engaging adolescents in performing skits about girls' education, aspirations, and workforce participation; effective for shifting social norms.
- **SMS Nudges:** Simple reminders on training schedules, savings goals, or motivational messages, effective in contexts where smartphone penetration is limited.
- **Interactive Voice Response (IVR):** Toll-free numbers offering audio lessons, quizzes, or information on career options, accessible from basic phones.

These approaches are low-cost, accessible, and culturally resonant, and can be integrated alongside digital innovations for maximum reach and inclusivity.

Potential Success Indicators

- **Skills Acquisition:** % of participants demonstrate competency gains across all four domains
- **Confidence Building**: % of participants report increased self-efficacy and career aspirations
- **Network Development**: % of participants establish meaningful mentor relationships and peer connections
- **Family Engagement**: % of families of participants show increased support for girls' economic participation
- **Economic Participation**: % of of participant graduates engage in formal employment or entrepreneurship
- **Wage Premium:** % wage premium of participants compared to non-participants
- **Leadership Roles:** % of participants assume leadership positions in workplace or community
- **Norm Change:** Measurable shifts in community attitudes toward girls' economic roles
- **Career Progression**: % of participants advance to supervisory or management positions
- **Entrepreneurship**: % of participants launch successful businesses or social enterprises
- **Intergenerational Impact**: Participants' children show improved educational and economic outcomes
- **Systems Change**: Integration into national education and economic development policies

Quality Assurance & Continuous Improvement

Evidence-Based Practice Standards

- **Research Integration:** Regular review and incorporation of latest research findings
- **Data-Driven Decisions:** Use of comprehensive data analytics for program optimization
- **Participatory Evaluation:** Involvement of girls and communities in assessment and improvement
- **External Validation:** Independent evaluation and certification processes

Adaptation and Innovation Protocols

- **Local Customization Guidelines:** Systematic approach to cultural and contextual adaptation
- **Technology Integration Standards:** Protocols for incorporating emerging technologies
- **Partnership Quality Criteria:** Standards for selecting and managing implementation partners
- **Feedback Loop Systems:** Mechanisms for continuous learning and improvement

Conclusion & Way Forward

The evidence is clear: adolescent girls in South Asia remain on the margins of economic opportunity. Despite decades of investment in women's empowerment, most large-scale interventions engage women only after marriage or in adulthood. By then, restrictive norms, time poverty, and limited exposure have already narrowed their choices.

This Workforce Readiness Skills Framework responds to that gap by emphasising adolescence as the critical intervention window. By integrating four domains of competency — life & agency, technical & vocational, digital & STEM, and financial capability — and embedding them within supportive ecosystems, we can re-position girls not as future workers but as active economic agents from the start.

Key Imperatives for Action

1 S**hift the Focus to Adolescence**

Policymakers and practitioners must treat ages 10–19 as the foundational stage for workforce readiness, not as a waiting room before higher education or marriage.

2. **Adopt a Holistic Skills Approach**

Interventions cannot silo technical training. Girls need layered skills — confidence, decision-making, digital fluency, and financial capability — to convert opportunities into agency.

3. **Invest in Enabling Ecosystems**

Skills without supportive environments lead to attrition. Safe spaces, norm-change programming, affordable childcare, and transport solutions are as important as training curricula.

4. **Operationalise Through Multiple Pathways**

Education systems, community platforms, private sector partnerships, and digital delivery are all needed. No single pathway can meet the scale or diversity of adolescent girls' needs.

5. **Measure What Matters**

Beyond counting certificates or placements, we must track agency, aspiration shifts, and intergenerational impacts. The proposed Agency Index Framework provides a starting point.

Call to Action by Stakeholder

For Practitioners

- Adopt the four-domain competency model in programme design.
- Implement multi-stakeholder partnership strategies.
- Utilise digital assessment and credentialing systems.

For Policymakers

- Integrate framework elements into national education and employment policies.
- Create regulatory environments that support innovative delivery models.
- Invest in infrastructure and institutional capacity building.

For Investors and Funders

- Fund comprehensive programming that addresses multiple competency domains.
- Support technology innovation and scalable delivery models.
- Measure impact using holistic indicators beyond traditional metrics.

For Employers and Industry

- Engage in apprenticeship and mentorship programming.
- Recognise digital credentials and alternative skill validation.
- Commit to diversity targets and inclusive workplace practices.

Closing Reflection

Preparing adolescent girls for the future of work is not simply about expanding labour supply. It is about redefining development itself — by ensuring half the population enters adulthood with the skills, agency, and opportunities to shape their economic futures.

The costs of inaction are clear: entrenched gender gaps in labour force participation, persistent poverty, and lost potential in fast-growing economies. The dividends of action are equally clear: more resilient households, inclusive growth, and societies where girls can thrive as leaders, innovators, and equal economic actors.

The choice is ours: either continue with fragmented skilling models that bypass adolescents, or seize this moment to invest in the generation that will determine the future of South Asia's workforce.

Annexure

Quick Checklist

For Practitioners

- Have we included both life and technical skills in our programme?
- Are girls gaining hands-on exposure (internships, apprenticeships)?
- Do we integrate digital and financial literacy into all trainings?
- Is there a plan to engage parents, peers, and communities to shift norms?
- Do girls have mentorship, networks, and safe spaces to explore careers?
- Are we using data-driven assessment and digital credentialing systems?
- Have we mapped local labor market demands and aligned skills accordingly?

For Policymakers

- Does our education policy integrate workforce readiness beyond traditional academics?
- Are there regulatory frameworks that support innovative skills delivery models?
- Have we allocated budget for infrastructure (digital labs, safe spaces, transport)?
- Do employment policies include gender-responsive hiring incentives and targets?
- Are we tracking gender-disaggregated data on workforce participation and wages?
- Have we created pathways for non-formal education recognition and certification?
- Is there a national strategy for bridging the skills-employment gap for girls?

For Investors & Funders

- Are we funding comprehensive programs that address all four competency domains?
- Do our investments support technology innovation and scalable delivery models?
- Are we measuring impact using holistic indicators beyond traditional employment metrics?
- Have we committed to multi-year funding that allows for sustainable program development?
- Are we supporting ecosystem building rather than just individual organizations?
- Do our portfolio organizations demonstrate evidence-based approaches and rigorous evaluation?
- Are we investing in systems change and policy influence alongside direct programming?

Annexure

Quick Checklist contd...

For Employers & Industry

- Have we established apprenticeship and mentorship programs specifically for young women?
- Do we recognize digital credentials and alternative skill validation methods?
- Are there diversity targets and inclusive workplace practices with accountability measures?
- Have we partnered with training providers to shape curriculum and skill standards?
- Do we provide flexible work arrangements that accommodate different life circumstances?
- Are we actively recruiting from diverse talent pipelines and non-traditional pathways?
- Do we offer career advancement support and leadership development for young women?

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