



PARTNERS IN LEARNING IMPACT ON GIRLS

OVERALL, AROUND 700 GIRLS TOOK PART IN THE PILOT PHASE OF THE PROGRAMME. 60% OF THE BIG PARTNERS AND OVER 50% OF THE 1000 LITTLE PARTNERS WERE GIRLS. FOR OLDER GIRLS, THE PROGRAMME IMPACTED SELF-CONFIDENCE, COMMUNICATION AND MOTIVATION TO STAY IN SCHOOL.

Context

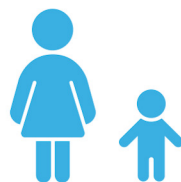
In April 2020, schools in Pakistan were closed indefinitely in order to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The phenomenon of school closures caused huge concerns about learning losses globally - it was estimated that 1.6 billion learners in about 190 countries would be affected and decades of progress in education would be eliminated.

Street-connected children were particularly vulnerable to the social and economic shocks of COVID-19 due to exclusion from official welfare programmes and the closure of informal education and protection services. Exacerbating this further, is the disproportionate impact of such losses on women and girls (Oxfam, 2022).

Over 80% of girls from low-income backgrounds in Pakistan on average spend only two years or less in school (UNESCO, 2021).

A 2020 UNESCO predicted that 11 million girls would not return to school following the COVID-19 school closures, significantly increasing the risk of adolescent pregnancy, early and forced marriage, and violence, particularly in low and lower-income countries. Building upon the pre-existing and deep-rooted gender disparities in global education, and particularly the intersectional inequalities of Pakistani boys and girls within education and society at large, the girls we work with were among the worst hit during this crisis.

The pilot Seekho Sikhao Saathi (SSS) - or “Partners in Learning” – was our response to school closures during COVID-19 in 2020, to support street-connected children served by the Pehli Kiran School System in Islamabad.



**ADULTS
(TEACHERS)
SUPPORTING
BIG PARTNERS**



**BIG PARTNERS REACHING
GROUPS OF ABOUT FIVE
LITTLE PARTNERS IN THEIR
COMMUNITIES**

The Child to Child model was based on equipping older children (Big Partners) to deliver early learning sessions to younger children (Little Partners) within their communities, in safe ways.

Programme Overview

The Partners in Learning programme was built upon an evidence-based Child to Child model and school readiness programme, originally piloted with UNICEF in 2007. To this we brought in the Cities for Children ethos of playful learning, Montessori principles and culturally and socially responsive adaptations.

Our mantra:

**HAPPY MEMORIES BUILD RESILIENCE
for children in difficult circumstances.**

By becoming education champions within their communities, Big Partners provided Little Partners with creative literacy and numeracy sessions with a multitude of benefits for all involved and the wider community. The SSS programme has endeavoured to address such impacts and ensure that the gains in girls’ education of the last decade are retained and improved through difficult times.

A Gendered Lens

We can look at the impact of Partners in Learning for girls not just in terms of immediate learning, but also in terms of longer term relationship with education - and themselves.

For the Little Partners, **improved school readiness skills** provide the foundation to help the girls enter school ready to learn. This can help address both the enrolment and retention gaps between boys and girls across the country. With sessions being led by female Big Partners, there was also the creation of strong, relatable female role models.

For the Big Partners in particular, we look at impact on various domains of **social-emotional learning**, and the value of the programme in preparing girls for the opportunities and challenges they may face across various private and public spaces. Research by Girls Inc. finds social-emotional learning to correspond with higher rates of "diligence, perseverance, leadership, standing up for one's beliefs and fairness, social responsibility, and self-regulation" alongside higher academic performance. The kind of SEL imparted through the programme can help empower girls to push past limiting stereotypes, taking calculated and confident risks to lead.

SOME OF THE MAIN THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM WEEKLY REFLECTIONS WERE:

creativity
CONFIDENCE
 LEADERSHIP
 GROUP MANAGEMENT
 problem-solving
 empathy

We found many of the girls within a short period of time were able to appreciate and recognise their own skill sets and capabilities, providing a strong foundational basis for female empowerment. Our analysis into the impact on girls also shed light on their motivation to stay in school.

Little Partners and Readiness for School



MORE THAN 2/3 OF CHOTAY SAATHI BECAME AWARE OF THE ENGLISH ALPHABETS

MORE THAN 50% COULD READ AND DISCUSS A 3-STEP PICTURE STORY WITH RELATIVE EASE

3 OUT OF 4 LITTLE PARTNERS COULD COUNT FROM 1-10

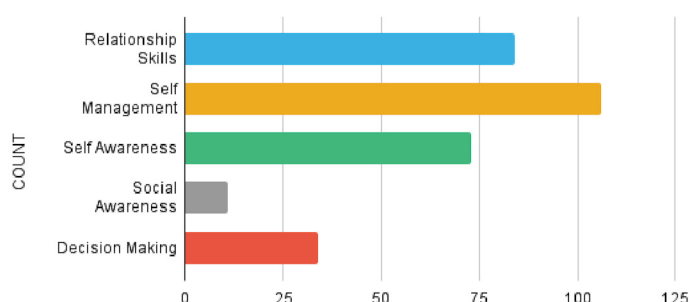
For Little Partners in the pilot phase, we conducted baseline and endline surveys after 17 sessions to gauge progress in the domains of: literacy and language; numeracy; fine and gross motor skills; and socioemotional learning (SEL). We found results to be similar across both girls and boys equally, the greatest impact being in terms of numeracy skills.

FOR THE PLAYGROUP LEVEL, THE PROFICIENCY IN 'COUNTING FROM 1-10' MORE THAN DOUBLED.

It is worth noting that all learning gains for Little Partners for the first phase of the programme, from which results are shared, can be directly attributed to the Partners in Learning Programme as schools were otherwise closed.

Big Partners and Readiness for Life

In order to understand the range of impacts of the SSS programme on girls who were Big Partners, we first used the CASEL framework to articulate and identify the components of socio-emotional learning that came up in our impact harvesting exercises in five domains: self awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.



We then went on to look more specifically at what the most significant areas of impact were for us through this programme, within the different SEL domains. Given the very rich participatory data and close relations build between children, programme implementors, partners, and researchers, several valuable findings were drawn by looking at girls' reflections on how they felt before and after the programme.

MOST SIGNIFICANT REPORTED OUTCOMES

- **DEVELOPING A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE**
- **LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE CONFIDENTLY AND KINDLY**
- **SHOWCASING RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT SKILLS**
- **DISPLAYING SELF-CONTROL AND NON-VIOLENT CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

“ I learned how to speak politely and softly with children. ”

“ I didn't respect elders and kids before, but now I have learned to talk nicely to them and respect them. ”

“ I used to think of beating, but now I have changed. ”

IN OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONING, OVER 50% GIRLS EXPRESSED A KEEN DESIRE TO STAY IN SCHOOL.

One girl, Isha* had dropped out of school to start working in houses and earning, but rejoined to be a Big Partner during COVID-19. After the pilot, we were thrilled to learn that she has now joined the school again! This was a consequence of her seeking her teachers' help to return to education, the dedication of the school staff as well as her tapping her agency to articulate her concerns and desires, and actioning positive partnerships between the school and her family.

“ At first I used to hear that I couldn't do anything, that I couldn't do any work... Now I hear that I can do anything and I can help people ”

“ Before the session if anyone talked to me I would look down and would not share things with anyone. Now if someone talks to me I can look at them and talk to them ”

“ Before, I would feel shy when I saw people... Now I don't feel shy when I see people ”

TAKING THE LEAD

The girls' weekly reflections and responses in focus group discussions showed constantly evolving confidence and leadership in their ability to think outside the box and go beyond the curriculum; making responsible decisions.

When some of the Little Partners did not show up for sessions, their female Big Partners visited their homes to bring them around.

When one mother refused to let neighbours' children into their home, her daughter continued to deliver sessions under a tree - until her mother was inspired to open her doors.

DARING TO DREAM

The development of a positive self-image and strengthened agency also saw a rise in the communication of big dreams. Notably, the language used by the girls in many instances showed a progression from a passive, abstract conversation about their dreams, to words reflective of a more affirmed and proactive approach to dreams that they are seeking out.

“
Before, I wanted to be a teacher. Now, I can reach my destination
”

Schools and Community

On a wider scale, the programme had fantastic spillover effects in the shape of community support, home learning, and a changing of perceptions regarding children's agency. Regarding community support, it was found that most communities were glad of the opportunity for their children to learn. Building from here, a new link between caregivers and children's education was formed.

WHEN OVERSEEING SESSIONS AT HOME, NON-LITERATE MOTHERS BEING ABLE TO ENGAGE CLOSELY WITH THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER WITH SOME MOTHERS LATER APPROACHING THE SCHOOL WITH A DESIRE TO LEARN HOW TO SUPPORT THE ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN.

Finally, by witnessing how the Big Partners were able to create positive change in their communities, new respect for children's agency was formed. Teacher perceptions around what children could achieve also evolved - while they started out unsure about whether or not they would be able to lead the sessions, by the second phase they were confident in the Big Partners' skills and even added in content that they felt would support their own work in the schools.



From event celebrating the achievements of Big and Little Partners at PKSS