FOREWORD

The world has much to gain from the activation of youth as learners, dreamers and innovators. However, far too often young people, and particularly adolescent girls and young women, face barriers to realizing their possibilities and participating fully and equally in society.

At Sunsilk we have made it our mission to open up possibilities and expand girls’ and young women’s horizons—to assist girls and young women in exploring and, through exploration, meeting people who inspire them to dream bigger, dream differently, and turn their dreams into reality.

This paper, written in partnership with the International Center for Research on Women, describes the rationale for Sunsilk’s strategy and reviews the global evidence that guides and shapes its goals. It also serves to expand knowledge about the innovative strategies Sunsilk is using to open up possibilities for girls.

TO OPEN UP POSSIBILITIES FOR GIRLS IS TO ENABLE THEM TO OVERCOME LIMITING NORMS, IN ORDER TO INCREASE THEIR PERSONAL POTENTIAL TO DEVELOP STRENGTHS, EXERCISE AGENCY, AND ACHIEVE GOALS

Sunsilk’s aim is to empower and equip girls with the vision, support, skills and confidence they need to start exploring their possibilities—ultimately stretching the horizon of what they believe they can be and achieve. When girls are able to freely and fully explore, they experience wide-ranging benefits and so does society.

The paper has a global lens but takes a deeper look at several of Sunsilk’s largest markets—Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, and the Philippines. These countries provide a window into the diverse challenges facing girls and young women in several economic and cultural contexts, yet also point to common threads that unite girls and young women in a shared experience.

Katherine Fritz, PhD, MPH
Director, Advisory Practice of the International Center for Research on Women

Zeynep Kutlay-Ozcan
Global Brand Vice President
Sunsilk
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Today’s population of adolescents has the size and power to catalyse change, both for themselves and for their communities. Globally, many youth are finding their voices and raising them to advocate for much-needed social changes in order to bring about a more secure and inclusive future.

However, not all adolescents are afforded opportunities to define their own paths and explore who they want to become. Possibilities are often the starkest for adolescent girls, who tend to participate less in education, the labour force and civic life than their male counterparts. Evidence shows how empowering girls can significantly benefit them as they transition to adulthood, as well as leading to positive impacts on their families and society at large. However, girls and young women live in complex environments in which internal and external barriers prevent them from actualizing many game-changing opportunities. In most societies, formal and informal gender norms shape how freely a girl can develop, often scripting how she “should” behave and what she can or can’t do with her future. When people and societies buy into limiting gender scripts, girls and women are often hindered from dreaming, achieving, and fully participating in many domains of public life.

Sunsilk aims to change this reality. The brand’s social mission aims to inspire girls to dream of a future full of possibility—unlimited by norms and conventions. Through programmes with strategic partners in key markets, Sunsilk is encouraging girls to “rescript” their lives by defining their own vision for the future, and developing the skills they need to explore different possibilities. The social mission aligns with both the Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory and the evidence on girls’ empowerment. While acknowledging that environments must enable girls’ empowerment, Sunsilk’s partnerships focus on the critical component of enhancing their personal sense of agency, or potential to develop and deploy strengths to achieve aspirations, without fear of violence or backlash.

This White Paper highlights the brand’s theory of change for confronting adverse norms and unlocking the benefits of empowered youth. Sunsilk’s strategies centre on horizon-stretching role models who inspire girls to deviate from societal scripts, aspire higher, and exercise greater agency in their lives. Leveraging film and other creative platforms, the strategy leads girls on a Journey to New Horizons, in which they develop vision, soft skills, confidence, and support networks to encourage them on their way. In each market, powerful Sunsilk advertisements and communications further bolster the social mission by reinforcing messages of girls’ agency. As a leader in corporate commitment to adolescent girls and young women, the brand defines its future agenda as scaling up current partnerships with organizations like Girl Rising, and tracking the progress of its initiatives and impact with its evaluation partner, the International Center for Research on Women. Its ultimate goal remains to inspire girls to greater exploration and participation in their own lives.
INTRODUCTION: WHY GIRLS, WHY NOW?

68% PRODUCTIVITY GAINS (EQUIVALENT TO GDP)¹

$28 TRILLION ADDED TO GLOBAL GDP BY 2025²

20% POTENTIAL BOOST TO GIRLS’ WAGES⁶

MORE ROBUST SOCIAL NETWORKS

BETTER MENTAL HEALTH¹⁰
THE OPPORTUNITY: WHY INVEST IN GIRLS AS EXPLORERS?

Over 1.2 billion adolescents around the world hold the promise of possibilities. These young people, aged 10 to 19, make up 16 percent of the global population, representing the greatest youth development challenge and opportunity of our generation. Ensuring their successful transition into healthy and productive adults is critical to achieving the prosperous and sustainable future envisioned by the Global Sustainable Development Goals.

All youth—girls and boys—require and deserve attention and investment in order to secure this bright future. Expanding girls’ capabilities and opportunities during adolescence holds special promise, however. Throughout history and continuing today, girls and women have had less opportunity and encouragement than boys and men to participate in education, employment, and civic activity. Lack of equal participation has limited girls’ and women’s achievements as individuals—it has also harmed society by depriving it of their valuable contributions.

SOCIAL IMPACTS

There are also multiplier effects that extend to families and communities, leading to generational impact. For example, when girls are educated, they are twice as likely in adulthood to encourage their daughters and sons equally to go to school. Greater educational attainment for girls also leads to benefits in their future household’s health. The children of an educated woman are less likely to have stunted growth and 50 percent more likely to be immunized against childhood diseases. Education is well known to improve women’s decision-making power and this has powerful effects in a number of areas such as delaying age at marriage, reducing the number of pregnancies and increasing spacing between children—all of which reduce maternal mortality.

Indeed, an empowered girl is a force for good in households, communities and the economy—but most importantly, empowering girls activates lifelong benefits for the girl herself.

Research suggests that increasing girls’ self-confidence and aspirations leads to more positive attitudes towards studying, improving girls’ retention in school and ultimately her educational attainment. With gains in education, girls are more likely to secure employment and become financially independent. Completing one more year of school beyond the national average can boost a girl’s eventual wages by 10 to 20 percent.

Educational and economic gains also help girls and young women have more voice and visibility in their families and communities. As girls become more physically mobile, they have more robust social networks and better mental health. Girls who spend time outside the home are more likely than home-bound counterparts to report having a non-familial best friend and having a place to meet a friend outside of home or school. These freedoms help girls build a supportive peer network of fellow “explorers” on the journey to empowerment. Lastly, research highlights the link between participation in life skills programmes intended to expand girls’ skills and opportunities, and significant improvements in coping ability, adjustment tendencies, and resilience—all indicators of “grit” and positive mental health.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

An analysis of “the girl effect” in 14 countries found that if girls advance to and complete their next level of education (e.g., primary students advance to and complete secondary education), this could lead to productivity gains equivalent to 68 percent of annual GDP. An equally strong case can be made for closing gender gaps in labour force participation, whereby as much as USD 28 trillion could be added to global annual GDP by 2025. Further, if women participated in the global economy identically to men, there would be a 26 percent increase in annual global gross GDP over the next 10 years.
THE CHALLENGE: WHAT KEEPS GIRLS FROM PARTICIPATING IN SOCIETY?

In many ways, girls participate less than boys from a young age. This gap reflects unequal gender norms that penetrate society from the micro to macro level. A socio-ecological model considers different layers of influence on an individual’s life, and illustrates where gender norms may manifest in various ways as they are adopted and reinforced by people, structures, and institutions.

INDIVIDUAL
This layer represents internal or personal factors. These include characteristics and assets such as knowledge level and access to information, skills, attitudes, behaviour, self-efficacy, confidence, interests, internalized stereotypes, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious affiliation, racial/ethnic identity, economic status, goals, expectations and worldview, among others. An individual’s experience of these realities is affected by the surrounding layers, which comprise the enabling environment.

HOUSEHOLD
This layer represents the influence of one’s family or closest associates, who can have tremendous impact on young people’s ambitions and choices. For example, a key determinant of a girl’s “occupational vision” for life is the extent to which her parents imparted achievement-related values to them as children, with girls’ interests and aspirations particularly affected by attachment style to their mothers.

COMMUNITY
This layer accounts for the influence of interpersonal experience and group practices, including values and customs emerging from interaction with peer networks and mentors, schools and workplaces, religious organizations, and social support systems (or lack thereof).

SOCIETY
At this broadest layer, gender norms are communicated and enforced through laws, policies and regulations set by governments; through the media, including television, film and advertising; and through economic structures, such as employers categorizing certain job functions as best suited to men or to women or financial institutions discriminating against women in lending.

A socio-ecological model of human development grounds girls’ aspirations and participation in the interplay of these nested layers of internal and external factors. Cultural and gender norms permeate each layer, with formal rules or informal dynamics often relegating women to stereotypical roles and spaces.
This ecology of factors can enable or disable girls’ empowerment depending on the prevailing set of norms. For example, a 2016 study on women’s leadership in Indonesia found that nearly half of respondents both in Asia and globally agree that children suffer when a mother works for pay. Specifically the Indonesian concept of *kodrat* was identified as the societal expectation that women are inherently nurturing and should take care of domestic commitments before engaging in any other activities. At each socio-ecological layer, this common cultural attitude may be adopted and reinforced, with *kodrat* shaping girls’ personal expectations about the roles they are best equipped to play; guiding parents’ treatment of daughters compared to sons; supporting publication of gender-biased textbooks; skewing experiences of young women versus young men in seeking education, training and work opportunities; constraining the participation of women in various public spheres such as the labour force and civic leadership; influencing gender depictions in marketing and media; and even precluding equal legal provisions for women and men as rights-bearers.

When ecological factors are characterized by limiting gender norms, research shows that girls face constraints in the following main categories:

**Time, Mobility, and Social Capital**

Girls and women hold a disproportionate share of care and domestic burdens compared to male family members. Globally, girls aged 5 to 14 spend 40 percent more time on household chores compared to boys their age. The disparity grows as girls get older, with girls aged 10 to 14 spending 50 percent more time than boys their age. In households where girls are restricted to the domestic sphere, their time and mobility are severely limited. As changes in time-use can disrupt the balance of power in the home, parents may initially view girls’ exploration and empowerment as a threat to the family structure. When daughters aspire to greater educational attainment, mobility, or employment, it may impede their ability to contribute to household livelihood activities, perform chores, or help with care work.

As a result, girls are more likely than boys to be socially isolated and excluded from opportunities outside the home. There may also be wider mobility and safety norms reinforcing ideas about where girls can be visible and participate, for example informally barring them from certain markets, businesses, places of worship, or even public transport at certain times of day. Infrequent travel outside the neighbourhood can restrict girls’ exposure to ideas and networks, and limit girls’ imagination in terms of what roles are socially acceptable, personally desirable, and structurally attainable for their future.

**Access to Assets like Education, Training, and Jobs**

One in five children, adolescents and youth is out of school (OOS), with girls still representing the global majority despite some regions’ progress closing these gaps in recent years (e.g., Latin America and the Caribbean). In very restrictive cultures, girls may be prevented from entering formal education, training or paid work; in others they may be forced to work with limited control over compensation. Girls in resource-poor households may receive less health and educational investment than their brothers or drop out to assume childcare or other household responsibilities. On global average, girls miss between 10 to 20 percent of school days every year because they lack resources to manage menstruation. The threat of gender-based violence within and en route to schools further causes many girls to withdraw from educational settings for safety reasons.
Beyond unequal access to academic education, young women have fewer opportunities to participate in valuable hard and soft skills trainings that augment youth employability. OOS rates tend to increase with age as youth find or search for employment but skill gaps—along with cultural expectations and hiring discrimination—may limit adolescent girls’ successful entrance into the job market. This leaves young women aged 15 to 24 at more than three times greater risk than young men (34 percent versus 10 percent) of being “not in education, employment or training” (NEET). This gap is reflected across the current key markets, representing noticeable disadvantages for young women:

**BODILY AUTONOMY AND SAFETY**

Early marriage and pregnancy pose additional barriers to girls’ participation. Each year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. Further, approximately 16 million girls aged 15 to 19, and 2.5 million girls under 16, give birth each year in developing regions. Whether these pathways are forced, negotiated or chosen, early marriage and pregnancy may constrain girls from participating in other ways in society for a period of time, or throughout adulthood. A recent ICRW study found that girls who marry early are significantly less likely to complete their secondary school education which, in turn, lowers their potential earnings as adults, thereby reducing their family’s economic potential. Moreover, child marriage, and thus lower educational attainment, creates ripples into the next generation by diminishing the educational and health prospects for their children.

**Gender-based violence and harassment** often deters girls and women from fuller participation in the public sphere. Globally, gender-based violence affects one in three women in their lifetime. Manifestations can be psychological, physical, sexual or economic. They may span the life cycle, from school-based bullying and street harassment, to intimate partner violence, workplace harassment and discrimination, and denying girls/women inheritance rights. Complacency toward such practices often reflects cultural acceptance of gender-based violence, even in some instances by women and girls.

**EXPERIENCES OF RACE, CLASS, AND OTHER INTERSECTING IDENTITIES**

Globally, women and girls may find that their gender identity is just one of many other factors shaping their access and participation. Intersectionality provides a necessary lens for examining a range of identity factors that influence girls’ participation and horizons. These may include identifying with a historically marginalized ethnic or religious group. Girls of a certain age, socioeconomic class, geographic location, or migrant status may also be more vulnerable, as well as orphaned youth, individuals living with a disability, or in some contexts, members of the LGBTQI community. Girls’ exclusion may be compounded by one or multiple of these other identities, to further constrain their access and participation, with poor minority girls susceptible to “Triple invisibility.” Investigation into the current key markets illuminates some aspects of intersectional discrimination in Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Geographic location affects types of opportunities available to young people. For example, nine out of ten Argentines lives in cities and towns, making Argentina one of the most urbanized countries in the world. While urbanization can deliver social advantages, in Argentina it has made differences in wealth starker. Rapid expansion of cities has led to a sharp increase in residents of informal vilas settlements, where poverty levels may exceed 95 percent. One in three adults living in vilas finishes high school, compared to three-quarters of young adults nationally, affecting urban girls’ access to female mentors and role models who have completed secondary education.

Conversely, rural youth may live in hard-to-reach settlements, where girls in particular are invisible, often “dropping off the radar” of government assistance or livelihood schemes offering greater mobility or growth potential. In Brazil, remote communities in rural areas are at a great disadvantage in educational attainment: just 9 percent of poor, rural males completed lower secondary school in 2016, which was still twice the rate of poor, rural girls. Indeed while girls in the Southeast and South regions of the country may face barriers compared to boys in the South, they are more likely to attend school during ages 13 to 16 than girls in the North, Northeast, or Center-West. In Indonesia, being born in a rural area is also a child marriage risk factor for girls; while 11.2 percent of girls are married before the age of 18 nationally, levels increase in rural areas and peak at 16 percent in Kalimantan province.

Often linked to location are both household socioeconomic status (SES) and racial or ethnic identity. Lower-income women and girls face even greater gender gaps and obstacles to opportunity than relatively higher SES counterparts. In the Philippines, more than one-fifth of women in the country give birth before reaching the age of 20. Among young women aged 15 to 24 in the lowest wealth quintile, 37.3 percent of have had a live birth or are pregnant with their first child, compared to 13.2 percent of women in the highest wealth quintile. Of women in the lowest quintile, only 5.5 percent have attended or completed college, compared with 62.4 percent in the highest wealth quintile.

Social diversity can be a great asset to young people seeking belonging and inspiration, and yet present challenges in equity and access. Globally, almost two-thirds of OOS girls belong to ethnic minority groups in their own countries. In the Philippines alone, there are a total of 182 ethnonlinguistic groups, of which 110 are considered indigenous. The Philippines also has one of the highest rates of income inequality in the world, with 21.6 percent of the population below the national poverty line. This persistent disparity between the richest and poorest has implications on educational and vocational opportunities for all Filipino citizens, and further compounds structural gender inequity to marginalize poor women the most. The heterogeneity of languages, experiences and access to resources leaves many indigenous girls and young women without support for their own development.
In Brazil, the confluence of racial identities, ethnicities and origins also drives substantial ethno-racial division along rates of poverty, unemployment, and educational attainment. The market is characterized by high disparities in income levels, as 10 percent of Brazilians earn 42.7 percent of the nation’s income, while 34 percent earn less than 1.2 percent. Afro-Brazilians are among the poorest of the country’s sub-populations. In 2013, the university enrolment rate for Afro-Brazilians was less than half that of whites (10.8 percent versus 23.8 percent), despite the adoption of quotas for Afro-descendants and indigenous people in public universities. Women are most marginalized by these inequalities. Afro-Brazilian women face significant wage inequality, earning on average 7.7 BRL (2.50 USD) per hour compared to 12.5 BRL (4.02 USD) for white women and 15.6 BRL (5 USD) for white men. Those who have completed high school earn just half the wage of white Brazilian men with the same level of education. Further, Afro-Brazilian women are more vulnerable to maternal death, violence, and femicide than other women. Women who are the most marginalized may have limited life opportunities and even lose hope. Worth noting is the suicide rate among indigenous women, which was more than twice as high as the female population of Brazil as a whole in 2012. Individuals from disadvantaged groups—particularly young women who have overcome painful challenges at these intersections—have great potential to serve as role models and encourage their younger female peers.

Personal and collective religious identities can be a strong factor shaping gender attitudes and expected behaviours related to societal participation. Living in the largest Roman Catholic nation in the world, girls in Brazil may be strongly influenced by faith practices and beliefs. In Argentina, the historical influence of Catholicism is also very strong, especially with regard to the organization of family life. This has historically had direct impacts on women’s lives; for example divorce was not legalized until 1987, following a century of struggle between the government and conservative groups. Similarly, Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population in the world, with approximately 227 million adherents in 2017. The vast majority of Indonesians consider religion to be essential to their life and the role of Islam is present in almost all aspects of society, including politics, education, and marriage. Affiliation with a faith community can also represent opportunities for personal motivation, collective organizing, and accessing support. With a shared religious background, girls may feel a deeper sense of solidarity with their peer networks, which can act as either pressure or support for those taking risks and exploring beyond their traditional roles.

**REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY**

Broader societal messages and interactions can also adversely affect girls’ exploration and pursuit of higher goals. Narratives in popular media may not resemble the images or experiences of typical viewers, and often promote unattainable standards of wealth or beauty. The content of mass marketing, news, and entertainment can also exacerbate gender stereotypes and implicitly confirm that certain pathways are not designated “appropriate” for women and girls. While it has long been understood through social learning theory that media models have the power to transmit values and influence the viewer’s behaviour, more recent studies have further demonstrated how exposure to uninspiring stereotypes can undermine women’s aspirations and agency. For example when shown gender-stereotypic TV commercials, women in California were persuaded to avoid leadership roles in favour of non-threatening subordinate roles. A consequence of pervasive stereotypes in the media is lower visibility of female models in horizon-stretching roles, which in turn stunts girls’ ability to visualize their own futures beyond conventional paths and scripts.

Culture and power bearers, such as influential community leaders or government officials, may also perceive deviation from gender normative aesthetics, behaviour, and relations as threatening to established social structures or their own control. If the social environment is unsupportive of girls’ exploration and empowerment, vocal young women may experience psychological or physical backlash—a forceful deterrent to others’ participation. Social norm theory explains that deviation, and perceived deviation, from what is “expected” can be fuel for punishment, harassment and violence towards the deviators.

**SELF-CONCEPT AND AGENCY**

Such sociological realities impact the psychological mindset. This is seen in the emergence of feminine and masculine “scripts” reflecting the explicit or implicit patterns and rules about what is normal for men and women. These scripts restrict girls and boys to socially acceptable roles and pathways, and configure power in a way that leaves girls vulnerable, with fewer options.

When “reading from the script” girls may self-restrict their interests or limit themselves from participating in certain activities. Gender scripts can indeed lead to stereotype threat and self-selection out of particular education or career pathways. “Stereotype threat” refers to being at risk of conforming, as a self-characteristic, to a stereotype about one’s social group. It is the feeling of vulnerability for not conforming to a dominant stereotype, or when confirming a negative stereotype. For example, a girl who is good at math may alter her performance on a math test so as not to deviate from a socially dominant norm that girls are not good at maths. Internalized stereotypes can weaken girls’ future-orientation, delimit one’s self-concept and self-efficacy, and produce artificial limiting beliefs that persist through adulthood.

This ecology of internal and external factors can pose numerous barriers to girls’ full and unfettered participation. Norms and scripts exist in any society, but they do not have to be harmful. By liberating norms and scripts, youth advocates open up a wider range of possibilities for both girls and boys.
HOW TO EMPOWER GIRLS TO PARTICIPATE: POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
Young people have long been cast negatively as a social risk. The stereotype of the “troubled” or rebellious adolescent who exhibits behaviour such as delinquency, violence, risky sexual behaviour, and substance abuse pervades many cultures. As a result, youth programmes have often adopted a deficit perspective, which focuses on helping youth understand what not to do. Not surprisingly, these approaches have on the whole proven ineffective. In recent decades, the international community has largely abandoned the deficit perspective and instead adopted a more optimistic view of youth and their capabilities.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is the overarching framework for this newer approach to investing in youth as actors in preventing and solving problems, rather than problems to be solved. PYD uses a capabilities approach in which young people’s freedom and capabilities widen as they come to understand more of what they can effectively be. Global evidence shows that PYD interventions are effective because they assess and address the fuller circumstances of young people’s lives, then focus on expanding opportunities and capabilities, rather than purely mitigating risks. This positive approach—deepening young people’s understanding of the range of things they can become and do with their lives—is particularly salient for girls, as they face greater barriers to participation due to gender bias.

Successful PYD interventions seek to overcome gender bias and discrimination by encouraging deep and thorough consideration of how best to support girls and boys in their exploration. They consider and respond to their different needs; aim to balance power between genders; and actively seek to change the feminine and masculine norms that harm or limit both girls and boys. They address unique gender needs based on the environments in which youth live, specifically considering the social context, norms, and gatekeepers of girls’ participation. They also view young people as future and present-day leaders in their own right, with family and community members also responsible for ensuring girls’ opportunities are realized.

PYD approaches engage youth, along with their families, communities, and governments, so that young people are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD focuses on four interlocking domains in order to achieve the ultimate vision of healthy, productive, and engaged youth [see graphic].

PYD programmes target outcomes in each of these four domains. Evidence clearly shows programmes are most effective when they include a diverse array of activities across the domains, reinforcing the likelihood of success in any single area.

On the following pages we describe each of the four domains, along with evidence for their contribution to positive impacts for youth.

**AGENCY**
Youth perceive and can employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence decisions about their lives, set goals, and act to achieve desired outcomes, without fear of violence or backlash.

**ASSETS**
Youth have hard and soft skills, competencies, and resources to achieve their possibilities.

**ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**
Youth are surrounded by an environment that maximizes their assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities as well as their ability to avoid risks, stay safe and secure, and be protected. An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive.

**CONTRIBUTION**
Youth are engaged as agents of change seeking their own rights and their communities’ positive development.
A girl’s level of agency represents her ability to capitalize on the opportunities before her. The bedrock of youth empowerment, agency is young people’s perception and ability to employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence decisions about their lives, set goals, and act to achieve desired outcomes. When youth have the agency to make key choices across all aspects of their lives—from health, education, marriage, family planning, household expenditures, and beyond—they are more likely to grow into successful, healthy adults.

Mounting evidence shows the power of agency-based trainings to bolster young people’s mindsets and help them to visualize better futures that can be acted on in the present. Activities to enhance participants’ agency have resulted in greater resilience and grit, self-efficacy and confidence, improved mental health, and higher aspirations for the future. Related research demonstrates real outcomes in academic motivation and achievement, marriage decisions, and even greater entrepreneurial success than microentrepreneurs trained only in business skills.

Building agency is foundational for shifting girls’ mindsets around what they believe they can do and their sense of confidence to achieve related goals. Evidence shows that when modules on personal agency are added to programme interventions, participants experience greater impacts on intended outcomes. In a randomized control trial among rural adolescent girls in India, girls receiving training in a resilience-based health programme improved more on emotional resilience, self-efficacy, socio-emotional assets, psychological and social wellbeing, compared to girls who received just a health programme. Relatedly, results from a World Bank study show that participants in psychology-based entrepreneur training programmes focused on cultivating self-starting behaviour, identifying new opportunities, goal setting, and overcoming obstacles could outperform those in traditional business trainings, significantly increasing their economic empowerment.

Further, agency and self-efficacy are central to young people’s future-orientation. Research shows that adolescents who feel more capable in their abilities and know their strengths tend to set more specific outcome goals and more challenging outcome goals.

Building a sense of agency and resilience also positively impacts girls’ performance in school and the workplace. Specifically, for academic motivation and achievement, a meta-analysis of efficacy beliefs on academic achievement found that self-efficacy accounted for approximately 14 percent of the variance in students’ academic performance, and was the most predictive indicator of academic accomplishment following an intervention. Grit, defined as passion for and perseverance towards long-term goals, has positively predicted graduation from secondary school and longer retention in the workplace. For example, students in a Chicago public school who measured one standard deviation higher on a grit index were 21 percent more likely to graduate on time. Another UK-based study found that resilience and determination had a protective effect on youth at high risk of dropping out of education and the labour market. Findings suggest that grit may decrease the chances of becoming NEET by as much as 10 percent.

With an improved sense of agency, young people—especially girls—grow more determined to override gender scripts, more resilient in the face of setbacks, and mentally stronger to surmount life’s hurdles on the path to greater possibilities. At a critical time when girls begin

SUCCESSFUL AGENCY-BASED PROGRAMMING WITH ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN INDIA

From ICRW’s Voice, Choice, and Power (Hinson et al., 2019)

In the Planning Ahead for Girls’ Empowerment and Employability (PAGE) project in New Delhi, girls aged 15 to 17 who were exposed to a curriculum about empowerment and employability saw a statistically significant increase in their reported ability to say who and when to marry by the end of the programme. The empowerment curriculum focused on building girls’ understanding of gender and power and developed their self-efficacy skills. Under the employability component, girls were given concrete pathways to envision career possibilities. The programme also included skill-building and interaction with employment partners through school-based career events, during which information was provided to advance participants’ understanding of and interest in various career paths. PAGE has helped girls to not only have aspirations for a better future, but to map out how to achieve their career aspirations.

Similarly, ICRW’s PAnKH (Promoting Adolescents’ Engagement, Knowledge and Health) programme aimed to enhance life skills, knowledge, agency and empowerment in married and unmarried girls aged 12 to 19 in Dhoplur, Rajasthan. Evaluation results (ICRW, IFS & Manjari Foundation, 2019) demonstrate that older girls who received the PAnKH intervention are less likely to be married as children than girls in control groups, indicating growth in individual agency.
deciding if and how they want to participate in society, “agency-based” interventions during adolescence have proven to be a powerful antidote to stereotype threat, psychologically empowering participants to face even structural challenges in their external environment. Individuals who aspire higher can beat the odds. Even after controlling for ability, socioeconomic, and demographic variables, studies have found that higher personal aspirations are a significant predictor of whether children will stay in school.\(^8^1\) Research has also shown that, despite exposure to stigmatized social identities and their corresponding stereotypes, creating an “identity safe” environment eliminates vulnerability to stereotype threat.\(^8^2\) Therefore complementary activities to enhance girls’ aspirations and enabling environments can significantly flip the script and enable girls to participate more fully.

**Assets**

Assets and agency are mutually reinforcing. When afforded opportunities to learn, acquire skills and capitals, and gain experience, girls and women boost their self-efficacy to enter and succeed in male-dominated spaces.

**Assets** are the resources and tools that equip young people for success in life, including quality education and “hard” and “soft” skills training. Young people benefit strongly from training in financial literacy and saving, vocational or technical skills, and other transferable skills. Together, these assets form a powerful engine for individuals to achieve goals and participate actively in private, interpersonal and public life. Other types of assets include internships, apprenticeships and access to capital to start businesses. Access to networks, loans, and transitional support may be derived from numerous experiences and sources.

However, hard and soft skills and capital are not accessible to all young people equitably. Girls and women often face heightened barriers to accessing such vital assets despite their wish to be economically productive. According to the International Labour Organization’s School to Work Transition Survey, almost 70 percent of female youth aged 15 to 29 who were not in education or employment indicated they wished to work in the future.\(^8^3\) In settings where girls fail to enter formal education, lag boys in enrolment, or drop out of primary or secondary school, developing hard skills may require assets such as scholarships, special tutoring and re-entry support, non-formal education courses in literacy or numeracy, or skills training to begin an alternative vocational track. Interventions that address gaps related to educational attainment see marked improvements in first-time school entry, re-entry, and successfully passing state-wide literacy or other large-scale academic exams among girls who participate.\(^8^4\)

When girls do access education but fail to transition to the labour force, programmes may include assets related to work-readiness and job training, in order to improve skills in searching, interviewing, communicating and performing on the job. Research demonstrates that providing training in vocational and technical skills to adolescent girls and young women can improve their engagement in income-generating activities, increase their likelihood of working outside the family business, boost household income and expenditure, and enhance entrepreneurial confidence for those who are self-employed.\(^8^5\)

**Soft skills**, also called life skills or 21st-century skills, refer to a broad set of skills, behaviours, and personal qualities that enable people to navigate their environment effectively, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals.\(^8^6\) While some competencies and traits may be more or less valuable in different cultures, evidence shows that soft skills in some form serve as a mediating factor for successful youth outcomes in health, education, livelihoods, and employment.\(^8^7\) Specifically, positive self-concept, social and communication skills, self-control, and higher-order thinking have been identified as the most critical skills to improve education and workforce outcomes, including more years of schooling attained, graduation rates, higher wages, and entrepreneurial success.\(^8^8\) Providing training in soft skills can enhance participants’ aspirations, equip them to plan for the future, and prepare them to endure through adversity.
Adolescent girls operate in complex social environments where they have relatively less power than others. Their ability to explore is largely dependent on their relationship to the surrounding people and structures such as informal norms and formal institutions.

PYD programmes view an enabling environment as core to success and sustainability of outcomes. To empower girls and not their environment is to release participants back into households, communities, education systems, and labour markets that reinforce gender inequality. Doing so can cause girls to become frustrated or despondent, or even put them at risk of backlash. Conversely, engagement with influential actors and institutions on girls’ empowerment can shift potential for impact from temporary gains to sustainable gains in gender equality for the wider society—representing greater return on investment.

A diverse range of activities can cultivate an enabling environment for girls’ empowerment. Household and community mobilization can include home visits to directly engage with participants’ parents; joint programming between the adolescent and parent; community dialogue activities, including film or dramatic presentations to foster dialogue; and awareness-raising linked to rights, national campaigns, or international days. Such strategies can improve outcomes in parental involvement, bonding and communication, pro-social behaviour, equitable gender norms, and youth-friendly services.

Engaging men—fathers, brothers, teachers and adolescent male peers—as allies in girls’ exploration and empowerment can contribute to the eventual goal of greater gender balance in education, household decision-making, economic participation, political processes, and civic leadership. In many cultures, husbands and fathers are the primary household decision-makers. Sensitising men on the benefits of an empowered daughter can grant girls and women greater access to assets and resources for development, decrease girls’ time poverty and expand their mobility, and encourage their exploration of educational and career paths. Brothers and male relatives can advocate for an equal share of domestic and care responsibilities to ensure girls/women have sufficient time to study or engage in activities outside the home. In the classroom, male students can encourage their female peers’ participation and learning, and advocate for continued support to young women through completion of their highest desired level.

Other activities at the societal level to promote gender equality include addressing gender-based violence and making spaces safe for girls, subsidizing childcare, and advocating for non-discriminatory laws. Popular media can also be a lever for change, by portraying women of diverse roles and images, promoting positive messages about girls’ equal capacity and rights, and showcasing role models that are courageously defying adverse norms. When the environment supports gender equality and enables youth to develop free from limiting scripts, adolescent girls and boys feel valued, served, and more capable of using their voices for change.

Programmes with a norm change or civil society focus may engage youth to leverage the power of social media to influence their friends and networks, extending the reach of key messages and behaviour change objectives. Formal leadership and civic participation are long-term outcomes not generally captured within the programme evaluation time horizon; however, evidence of girls’ increased attendance at local government meetings, campaigning on locally important issues, or volunteering in community development projects is seen—perhaps, foreshadowing future public activity of this kind.

Supported by their environment to access assets and develop a sense of agency, youth are able to contribute to their community as actors, role models, and leaders of change. PYD programmes view young people as powerful actors as the centre of their own development. Youth are involved in programme planning, monitoring and evaluation, to ensure effectiveness and relevance of all interventions. They may also serve as mentors for younger girls and boys through facilitated “big brother, big sister” programmes, benefiting them with leadership experience and inspiring the next cohort of adolescents.

Programmes with a norm change or civil society focus may engage youth to leverage the power of social media to influence their friends and networks, extending the reach of key messages and behaviour change objectives. Formal leadership and civic participation are long-term outcomes not generally captured within the programme evaluation time horizon; however, evidence of girls’ increased attendance at local government meetings, campaigning on locally important issues, or volunteering in community development projects is seen—perhaps, foreshadowing future public activity of this kind.
AGE MATTERS

In addition to working across the four domains of PYD, successful programmes make an effort to match their approaches with the developmental stage of the youth they seek to benefit. The age range of 10 to 19 years presents a critical time period for developmental interventions. Young people are entering and progressing through adolescence, during which their brains are particularly neuroplastic and receptive to new information. As they enter this life stage, girls and boys recognize gendered social norms and can understand stereotypes as they are praised for conforming or penalized for subverting them. Biological and social changes tend to occur earlier and within a shorter period of time for girls than for boys. As both risks and opportunities expand around the age of 10, a relatively short window of time shapes the likelihood that girls will realize their potential, with different opportunities to intervene related to girls’ particular needs in early adolescence (age 10 to 14) and late adolescence (age 15 to 19).

EARLY ADOLESCENCE

As girls enter early adolescence, gender has a greater influence on their attitudes and choices. Societal norms feel more pronounced as they permeate interactions in the world, and young people awaken to the pressures and expectations placed on them by the surrounding people and structures. Career expectations and preferences are similarly shaped around this age by parents and educators, socioeconomic status and education quality, the labour market, information and media, and prevailing gender norms and scripts of a given culture. Evidence also shows that aspirations related to educational goals and career planning are formed during early adolescence. For example, a longitudinal study in Sweden found that youth’s career aspirations were largely formed by age 13, consonant with other research that it is progressively more difficult to engage students in science or alter their perceptions of self-efficacy in specific subject areas as they progress in their education. The dynamic nature of aspiration formation in response to conditioning may be even more noticeable in early adolescent girls. Research in rural China has shown that aspirations peak for girls by age 12, at approximately the age of primary school completion, while aspirations for boys continue to rise more sharply after this point. It is believed that this difference in attitudinal trajectories is related to gendered socialization in early adolescence and the cultural prevalence of male favoritism.

To counter such trends of girls’ lower aspirations and expand the potential roles girls can envision occupying later in life, early intervention represents a crucial opportunity to reinforce messages about empowerment and equality. Studies have shown that most “sensitive” period in a child’s life for acquiring the cognitive and noncognitive skills needed to achieve positive adult outcomes (e.g., high school graduation and earnings) is 8 to 11 years. Subsequent soft skills for education and workforce success are relatively malleable in early and mid-adolescence, but their ease of acquisition tapers once an individual reaches adulthood. Therefore, targeted soft skills programming related to gender awareness and rights, girls’ self-concept, aspirations and agency should be leveraged as early as possible in this stage of the adolescent journey.

LATE ADOLESCENCE

As part of the Post-2015 Adolescent Girl Consultations, over 500 girls from 14 countries shared their recommendations for a girl-centred development agenda. While many of the younger girls expressed great optimism for their futures, girls in middle or later adolescence spoke of doubts and fears about what the future would hold. With more absolute years of exposure to risk factors and stereotypes, it is unsurprising that older girls are more likely to have experienced deflated aspirations or interrupted education. Indeed for many late adolescents who have married or otherwise dropped out of school, programmes aiming to prevent girls from becoming NEET may be less relevant, as it can appear already “too late” to alter the educational journeys for many of this age range.

There are also practical limits from a PYD programme perspective, including organizational challenges of accessing girls inside and outside of school settings. Older OOS girls may experience time poverty if working, caring for children, or carrying other responsibilities in the home or community, posing logistical and scheduling challenges for youth programmes. Within secondary school-based programmes, there are also time constraints in the school day, particularly where national curricula are oriented towards preparation for standardized tests; as well as grade considerations for programmes aiming to influence aspirations, as students may be required to select an academic track as early as grade 9 (ages 14 to 15).

For many late adolescents, the pressure to conform weighs heavy, especially for those envisioning what their futures may hold while negotiating gender norms, their own identity, and which resources are seemingly available. The networks of late adolescents typically expand beyond the smaller, family-based world of childhood, making space for a wider range of peers, colleagues, and possibly new families. With this increased exposure, adolescents become more receptive to peer influence. This sensitivity to opinions and ideals of peers can drive how adolescent girls shape themselves in relation to gender norms and social expectations. It may also decrease or increase their willingness to take certain behavioural risks. If girls perceive they will be socially ostracized by peers for deviating from norms, they may be more likely to conform; alternatively girls may suppress their authentic interests or overlook potential punishment by adults if peers pressure them to push their own boundaries. Building not only agency but also the soft skills for higher-order thinking (e.g., critical thinking and problem solving) and effective communication (e.g., assertiveness and negotiation) is vital for girls to navigate the various crossroads of late adolescence.
NO MATTER THEIR AGE OR CONTEXT, GIRLS DESERVE TO DEFINE THEIR OWN PATH IN LIFE AND EXPLORE WHO THEY WANT TO BECOME. TO OPEN UP POSSIBILITIES FOR GIRLS IS TO ENABLE THEM TO OVERCOME LIMITING NORMS IN ORDER TO INCREASE THEIR PERSONAL POTENTIAL TO DEVELOP STRENGTHS, EXERCISE AGENCY, AND ACHIEVE GOALS.
1. It is most equipped to add value. These are:

- Aims to make a significant contribution in the areas where dignity and choice. For its part, the Sunsilk social mission for girls so they can participate and thrive in lives of governments who are all working to improve the future participation on its own. The brand enthusiastically programme can achieve this ultimate goal of greater Sunsilk also recognizes that no single approach or

2. Horizon-stretching: Situations, people and images that defy limiting norms and beliefs by courageously moving beyond what is scripted

- Explore: Adopt a curious and optimistic mindset to try new challenges and enhance one’s sense of personal agency and self-efficacy

- Agency: The capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices

- Self-efficacy: Judgments of one’s own capabilities to organize and execute a course of action in order to attain designated goals (Bandura, A. 1996)

With this objective in mind, Sunsilk’s social mission is to inspire girls to dream of a future full of possibility—unlimited by what society says she “should” do or “can’t” do. Sunsilk aims to encourage girls to rescript their lives by defining their own vision for the future and equip girls with the skills they need to explore different possibilities. Sunsilk recognizes the importance of supporting girls during adolescence, when their life goals and aspirations are taking shape and they most need encouragement to dream—and to challenge both themselves and societal expectations. As girls journey into adulthood, these skills and abilities will continue to support their development, with expanded vision that can cascade down to other girls and women through their families, communities and peer networks.

Sunsilk’s theory of change seeks to build up girls’ capacity to dream and explore, with the ultimate goal of increasing girls’ meaningful participation and contribution to society. When girls aspire higher and exercise greater agency, they are more likely to participate in education, training, employment, and civic life in their communities.

Sunsilk also recognizes that no single approach or programme can achieve this ultimate goal of greater participation on its own. The brand enthusiastically joins the global movement of organizations, donors and governments who are all working to improve the future for girls so they can participate and thrive in lives of dignity and choice. For its part, the Sunsilk social mission aims to make a significant contribution in the areas where it is most equipped to add value. These are:

1. Building girls’ sense of agency to set a course for the future—this is the primary impact area. It also includes providing assets in the form of soft skills related to agency, as girls can use them to define and make progress toward their goals.

2. Enhancing the enabling environment through activating social support from peers and at partnering community institutions such as schools.

In addition, the brand is leveraging media funds to rescript role models in key markets where we have the greatest influence. Through advertising and marketing campaigns, Sunsilk has already begun challenging gender stereotypes and portraying girls in empowering roles—another way to create an enabling environment for girls to explore and grow.

Sunsilk is among the largest haircare brands in the world. Sunsilk products are used in about one in every five households around the world and the brand has earned consumer loyalty in many diverse markets. Because of its reach and the brand’s deep knowledge of its consumers, Sunsilk brings many insights about what matters to young people across the globe. It has forged a connection with young women through its brand personality, which emphasizes an optimistic approach to life and a “can-do” attitude toward tackling life’s challenges.

Building on the global evidence base for PYD, leveraging the expertise of its partners, and using the brand’s visibility among young people in low- and middle-income markets, Sunsilk has crafted an approach that takes girls on a Journey to New Horizons. This journey has four stages, as depicted in the illustration on page 18.

Through this journey, girls will gain the vision, skills, and confidence needed to deviate from limiting societal scripts and exercise greater agency in their lives. For girls in particular, self-efficacy is foundational because of the vast limits on girls’ decision-making and structural barriers preventing girls from participating directly fully and freely in their own lives. Without a sense of personal agency, girls will not be able to shed the existing scripts and limiting beliefs that hold them back from exploring...
outside the norm. While girls’ exploration is not the only solution needed to close gender gaps in participation, a prerequisite to surmounting larger barriers is the courage to try.

The Journey to New Horizons that girls take with Sunsilk starts with getting inspired by peers and role models. With exposure to new ideas, behaviours, contexts, and career opportunities, girls catch a vision of how to deviate from the norm.

The journey continues as girls are encouraged through guided self-reflection on their own dreams, passions, strengths, and power to overcome internal and external limits. This type of structured support enables girls to develop a more positive self-concept and intentional vision of how they too might choose their pathway, whether traditional or non-traditional. At this stage, participants are also encouraged to support one another.

Following activities to enhance participants’ mindsets are lessons preparing them to act. During this stage of the journey girls are equipped to set tangible goals and define practical steps towards achieving them. These activities foster optimism and courage, a sense of sisterhood through real or virtual peer networks, and the grit and soft skills to advance towards their vision.

Lastly, once participants are prepared to act, they are prompted to explore, through challenge activities that “stretch” girls and enhance their self-efficacy. By taking risks and seeing their own progress, dreams feel less distant. When a girl demonstrates her own capacity to act, she boosts her self-confidence and sense of agency, which can eventually lead her to participate in education, training, employment, or another chosen path that might otherwise have been a missed opportunity.

The expected outcome of guiding participants through this journey is a new cohort of adolescent girls who have gained the vision, support, skills, and confidence needed to deviate from societal scripts, aspire higher, and exercise greater agency in their lives. As an evidence-driven partner on this journey, Sunsilk is committed to ensure that the programmes in which it participates are effective and that initiatives under its social mission are designed, refined, monitored and measured for impact on these key aspects of positive youth development.
How does Sunsilk inspire personal agency and equip girls with new assets?

Exposure to Role Models

Through exposure to role models, girls become exposed to different ideas of what life can look like, see different options and opportunities that they may have previously thought were unavailable to them, and ultimately broaden their horizons as to what they can expect for themselves. Through such exposure, girls see examples of others like them who have exhibited agency and independence in their life choices—which provides an inspiration and example of how they too can develop their own agency. For the most significant outcomes role models should be relatable, close in age and, in some instances, of a similar identity or background.

Youth are inspired by realistic, relatable, and attainable traits—not just seniority or success status. Someone who is “too successful” or distant from the participants’ own experiences prevents girls from being able to imagine themselves in that position. Further, when a role model talks about obstacles they have faced along the way, this offers a real-life example in a useful and influential way. This can be particularly pertinent when addressing the structural barriers girls face as they try to realize their dreams. Youth with low self-efficacy may feel unable to affect the external environment holding them back. Therefore, role models sharing anecdotal insights on their setbacks, failures, and the strategies they used to address the obstacles and remain resilient is particularly powerful. Relatability can also be achieved if role models hold a clear set of values that resonate with young people. Youth may admire others who retain the same values as they move through successes and challenges, as it provides evidence that their values do not need to be compromised for success to be possible. In short, it is important for girls to “see themselves” in a role model and connect with someone who they feel is accessible to them.

Mendy Indigo, Thailand
International DJ

A role model who is close in age to participants has advantages for girls. In programmes that foster interaction with role models who have a “big sister” or mentor role, closeness in age is more likely to build stronger rapport and trust among participants than introducing a wider age (and potentially power) gap. Young people also tend to choose role models whom they find relevant and to whom they can compared themselves, specifically when it comes to similarity in background and other identity factors. Identification with a same-gender role model is important for girls, who may see fewer women in many roles and sectors. It is also particularly true for girls of marginalized identities (race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, LGBTQ identity). Girls of marginalized identities are treated differently in society and may face numerous additional barriers as a result. Therefore, it can be especially impactful for them to see another in-group member who has been successful.

Rural and urban populations have additional preferences related to ideal role models. Rural populations are more likely to select role models from their immediate surroundings, whether that is family members, neighbours or peers. It is possible that this finding stems from the limited interaction of rural populations with outsiders beyond their own demographic or family, and, in some contexts, the reduced access to technology and media sources to identify role models outside their immediate community.

This does not preclude the powerful effect of recognizing one’s common experiences with others who are not similar, and the opportunity for generating solidarity with a “global sisterhood” of adolescent girls. Participants’ preference and responsiveness to various types of role models should be tested prior to finalising the programme materials, which is precisely what the Explore More! programme has done in its different markets.
Rimsha (19), owner of the Lyari Girls Cafe, leading the cycle learning class in the streets of Lyari, Karachi, Pakistan.

Azima (20), CEO of ConnectHear, with her friends and colleagues in Karachi, Pakistan. ConnectHear, is a startup providing sign language interpretation services to deaf individuals through various channels.
Exposure to role models and to visible female leadership has demonstrated impacts on girls’ aspirations and life outcomes, including educational attainment. A policy experiment in India found that in villages where seats on local village councils were reserved for women, there were marked improvements in aspirations. The gender gap in aspirations closed by 25 percent in parents and 32 percent in early adolescents (11 to 15 years) in villages assigned to a female leader for two election cycles compared to villages that did not reserve seats. The gender gap in adolescent educational attainment was erased (even reversed in some villages) and girls spent less time on household chores. There is also an extensive body of literature which suggests that female role models, especially in politics, increase the propensity for discussion about civic action and engagement among young women, with some studies suggesting that young women were more likely to declare their intention to be politically active in the future as a result of the role model effect.

**FILM-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE**

Another lever to support girls in their journey of exploration and agency development are film-based interventions. Films illustrate for viewers how a character’s circumstances lead her to make certain choices and take concrete actions with visible outcomes. Film interventions that tell powerful stories can generate empathy, illuminate new perspectives, spark conversation, and enact a process of self-reflection and self-evaluation against goals—all of which can ultimately inspire action among viewers.

The power of a film-based “agency” intervention is in the ability of a fresh storyline to affect the viewer’s own self-concept and self-efficacy. Social cognitive theory posits that modelling through media catalyses vicarious learning and ultimately affects viewers’ self-efficacy and behaviours. Specifically, film-based interventions are effective at sparking cognitive change in individuals due to the **para-social relationship**, that is, the relationship which develops between the character and the individual audience member. Para-social relationships happen at three levels:

1. **By watching** and seeing the character, viewers begin to recognize behavioural alternatives through the actions of the character, then begin to evaluate their own self-efficacy in relation to the character.
2. **Through reflection**, the audience member begins to relate the character to their own personal experiences—understanding that they may be similar, face similar challenges and strive for similar goals.
3. **Through dialogue and action** the film stimulates thought on current topics and inspires viewers to modify their behaviour based on the messaging in the media.

Research consistently shows that educational entertainment effectively increases viewers’ knowledge and their intention and decision to act as well as facilitating communication. There is a large body of evidence on film-based interventions showing that they change individual attitudes and behaviours on a variety of issues, from family planning and health services uptake to entrepreneurial attitudes among adolescents in Tanzania and improving parents’ support of lesbian, gay and bisexual children. Evidence from India suggests that consuming television more broadly can increase school enrolment for children, perhaps through viewers’ exposure to new information about other parts of the world and other ways of life, which then impact gender attitudes and actions. Female school enrolment specifically increased, as did birth spacing, with stronger impacts where women had formerly held high preferences for sons.

Adolescent girls can be powerfully impacted by para-social relationships with characters who deviate from commonly held norms and explore the world beyond girls’ usual boundaries. Through exposure to other models of behaviour and storylines with intriguingly unique female characters, girls can be challenged to raise their own ambitions. When combined with reflective and preparatory exercises to encourage and equip girls for exploration, programme participants acquire essential soft skills for success, such as grit or resilience, along with skills for effective communication, decision-making and higher-order thinking. The result is a greater sense of “what I want” and the personal agency to take life in one’s own hands.

**HOW DOES SUNSILK ENHANCE GIRLS’ ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

**PEER NETWORKS AND THE GLOBAL “SISTERHOOD”**

A supportive peer network is crucial for facilitating girls’ empowerment and building their aspirations. Fostering sisterhood involves cultivating an encouraging environment for girls to meet, learn, and discuss issues that affect their lives and practise skills to help them challenge harmful social scripts without fear of judgement or other negative repercussions. A supportive peer network:

1. Provides girls with the time and space to develop their thoughts and views about what they can do;
2. Gives girls a forum where they can socialize and find support from other girls;
3. Gives girls space to develop their own self-confidence and practise advocating on their behalf in a safe and supportive environment.
4. Establishes a network of strong and empowered girls who can advocate collectively for themselves and for all girls in their community—ultimately facilitating norm change at a community level.

Indeed, these networks are central to cultivating a cohort of young female explorers who are empowered to support one another to seek beyond what society has prescribed for them.

**TEACHER ENGAGEMENT**

During her Journey to New Horizons, a girl has the potential to impact others in the environment around her, specifically by sparking a similar journey of self-reflection among the teachers and facilitators who she is coming into contact with through the programme. Seeing girls go through this self-discovery process and build the confidence to deviate from norms and articulate their aspirations can catalyse a similar self-reflection activity among female teachers who may not have been encouraged to explore in the same way when they were adolescents.

For Sunsilk and our partners, the teachers who facilitate our programmes comprise a key “secondary beneficiary” group. Through training and capacity building on gender empowerment for school-based programme facilitators, we are able not only to sustain the gains of our programme with permanent members of community support networks but also to benefit teachers themselves, providing them with a wider framework for their own confidence and vision casting, and a deeper sense of vocational purpose as mentors for adolescent girls.

**SCRIPT-FLIPPING ADVERTISEMENTS**

To encourage girls to dream big and do more, Sunsilk purposefully depicts images of girls in nontraditional spaces and roles to the wider community. Advertisements and communications feature realistically aspirational images and messaging for girls to see the range of possibilities that exist and are attainable.
WHERE ARE YOUTH CONTRIBUTING IN THE SUNSILK MODEL?

While the central focus of Sunsilk’s PYD value-add is primarily in the agency and enabling environment domains, brand-sponsored programmes may also support youth’s contribution in their local contexts. Participants may contribute by serving as a role model for younger girls in the community or share their own Journey to New Horizons reporting successes and setbacks on social media or through a mentoring role alongside future programme cohorts. Research has shown that when young people give advice to others, it also improves outcomes for the advice giver. Youth further contribute to the design of programmes and feed into implementation and evaluation. As Explore More! continues, alumni will contribute to future iterations through their active involvement in impact assessments and other programme learning.

HOW SUNSILK PROGRAMMES SUPPORT GIRLS ON THEIR JOURNEY TO NEW HORIZONS

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<td>Peer networks and the global “Sisterhood”</td>
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WHAT’S NEXT: SUNSILK’S AGENDA

INFORMED BY THESE GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES ON WHAT WORKS TO OPEN UP POSSIBILITIES FOR GIRLS, SUNSILK IS COMMITTED TO CREATING A WORLD OF EXPLORERS—GIRLS WHO DARE TO DREAM BIGGER AND CAN INSPIRE OTHERS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AND BEYOND.
LEARNING FROM CURRENT EFFORTS

JUNTAS ARRASAMOS DIGITAL PLATFORM WITH SUNSILK BRAZIL

In Brazil, Sunsilk is engaging adolescent girls through a dynamic and interactive digital platform called #JUNTASARRASAMOS. Using this platform, girls will gain courage to expand their horizons beyond limiting norms and conventions and gain support and inspiration from peer networks and positive role models (the “sisterhood”). Activities include diagnostic quizzes, interactive tips, online and offline challenges, links to influencers and role models as part of an online community and, for some, connections to exploration partners in the community.

THE EXPLORE MORE! PILOT WITH GIRL RISING

The global non-profit Girl Rising uses the power of storytelling to change the way the world values girls and their education. The organization specializes in telling stories about girls who face daunting barriers to their independence with determination and courage, informing and inspiring communities to take action for girls and gender equality. Working with local partners, Girl Rising adapts these stories into culturally relevant educational tools and curricula to build confidence and agency in girls and to change attitudes and social norms within their communities.

Millions of girls grow up with few role models, deprived of inspiration or feelings of possibility to become anything other than what is traditionally expected. In 2017, Sunsilk and Girl Rising collaborated to change this narrative through the Explore More! toolkit, piloted in Thailand and Pakistan and reaching 549 girls and boys.

The partnership provided the opportunity to create a robust facilitator’s guide and programme structure, introducing young people to the themes of aspiration, self-awareness, and possibility, all critical conversations on the path to empowerment. Sunsilk also supported Girl Rising in repackaging the longer film into “role model videos” and creating additional shorter video vignettes featuring local role models for use in each country programme. These resources can be leveraged to cultivate transformative opportunities for youth to engage with stories from the original Girl Rising film. Partnerships with grassroots non-profit organisations and school networks further allow the programme to reach a variety of participants, including both OOS youth and those in-school who are at risk of “becoming NEET”.

GIRL RISING
OPENING UP POSSIBILITIES FOR GIRLS

SCALING UP EXPLORE MORE! IN NEW MARKETS

Following the pilots, Girl Rising and Sunsilk extracted key learnings, analysed evaluation data, and synthesized feedback from participants and facilitators to refine and develop the new Explore More! model, which targets 53,000 youth in six countries, including Argentina, Indonesia, and the Philippines, as well as Thailand, Vietnam, and Pakistan.

In the process of expanding geographically, Sunsilk continues to contextualize its approach based on the nuances and particular experiences of adolescent girls in each of the markets. For example, in Indonesia, approximately one million children of 7 to 15 years did not attend primary or secondary school in 2016. An estimated 3.6 million children aged 16 to 18 also did not attend school. With the second highest female NEET rate across Explore More! scale-up countries and a gender gap in labour force participation of almost 31 percent, Indonesian girls’ empowerment programmes must find ways to operate within present cultural and economic realities, while still designing strategies to challenge the patriarchal system that often relegates women and girls to exclusively reproductive and domestic spheres. Drawing on similarities, differences, opportunities, and challenges across the new markets, Girl Rising has tailored its Explore More! activities and key messages to capture relevant and meaningful exploration experiences with high-impact potential for girls in each country context.

THE EXPLORATION INDEX

In the coming years, Sunsilk also intends to develop an “Exploration Index” that will capture a combination of metrics related to girls’ ability and willingness to aspire to do more, dream differently and bigger, show resilience in the face of setbacks, and achieve self-determined goals related to greater participation in society. Together with Girl Rising and our research partner, the International Center for Research on Women, the brand will use this index to evaluate the impact of the Explore More! programme on key aspects of girls’ personal ambition and agency.

SHARED VALUE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Seeming impossibilities for girls can be surmounted through agency-based empowerment and complementary supports. As an empowering and optimistic brand, Sunsilk believes that agency building is a critical component of PYD which it can directly impact through its communications and social mission. Our mission focus reinforces Sunsilk’s commitment to the success of girls around the world, and increases trust and equity for the brand at the household and market level. A member of the Unilever family, Sunsilk also aims to inspire similar company-wide commitments to social and environmental responsibility within the private sector and galvanize more corporate actors to leverage their potential for sustainable good.
ENDNOTES

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Unilever: Mathilde Bresson, Sandra Fontano, Mia Fuentes, Naomi Macphail, Eleanor Masters, Giulia Salusest, Barbara Scala, Zeynep Kütlay-Ozcan

ICRW: Shelley Martin, Margi Goelz, Katherine Fritz

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