

## SAI Faculty Grant Profile: *The Champions Project*

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**The François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University** is an interdisciplinary research center that works to protect and promote the rights and wellbeing of vulnerable children and adolescents worldwide.

### **Project Partners:**

- The National Commission for the Protection of Childs Rights, Delhi, India
- Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women’s Studies Centre, University of Pune
- The Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur

### **Project Summary**

The Champions Project probes the persistent challenge of female educational disadvantage in India. It hopes to contribute knowledge that will enable the Government of India (GOI) to maximize the impact of the tax rupees spent promoting girls’ education. Specifically, we plan to determine the infrastructural and social triggers that enable disadvantaged girls to successfully complete secondary education and gain access to third level institutions. Our project will employ the positive deviance approach, which deconstructs the uncommon behaviors of the successful minority to amplify efficacious strategies for the benefit of the disadvantaged majority. The positive outliers or “champions” are 800 female second year college students who are daughters of illiterate parents in Maharashtra and Rajasthan. We will investigate the triggers of the girls’ success such as government schemes, infrastructural supports and social and personal drivers of success.

### **Research Question**

What are the key drivers of educational success for disadvantaged girls and what are the most cost effective expenditures to promote this for government? More specifically: how have 800 “champions,” Indian female college students who are daughters of illiterate parents in Maharashtra and Rajasthan, managed to successfully overcome the numerous challenges and barriers to girls’ education and gain access to a college education? What are the infrastructural and social triggers of the girls’ success? Which public policies make the most significant contribution to their success? How might these policies be replicated and scaled to benefit future generations of Indian girls and women?

### **Interim Report**

**Partners:** Over the past six months the François Xavier Bagnoud (FXB) Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University has worked closely with our partners the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), India, to implement the first stage of the Champions Project. The NCPCR has helped us to identify two esteemed local partners to begin project implementation: the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women’s Studies Centre, University of Pune and the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur. Our partners in

Maharashtra have already begun data collection and we plan on scaling efforts to Rajasthan in early 2013- funding dependent.

**Advisory Committee:** In July 2012, we travelled to Maharashtra to meet our partners at the University of Pune, our advisory board, the field research team and review the survey tool. The meeting was attended by various members of our advisory board including representatives from prominent organizations such as UNICEF India, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, as well as the Government of India.

**States:** Maharashtra and Rajasthan were selected on the basis of the presence of exceptional local partners, regional knowledge and existing contacts. Developmentally the states present a troubling picture: Both states have an alarmingly low 0-6 child sex ratio of just 883. But they also present scope for interesting comparisons. Maharashtra is comparatively economically developed; it ranks 7th in the country's human development index whilst Rajasthan ranks 17th out of 28 (Indian National Human Development Report 2011). Maharashtra is more urbanized with almost half the population now living in urban areas. Its overall female literacy rate is 75% for women and 90% for men. By contrast, Rajasthan scores particularly low on female literacy. According to the 2011 census, the female literacy rate is just 46% in rural areas (where three out of four women live), as opposed to 77.5% for rural men.

In each state, the sample of Champions to whom the questionnaire will be administered, is being drawn from 20 colleges across 10 districts (two per district). In each district we are selecting one professional college and one general education college. Districts have been selected on the basis of their rankings in terms of female literacy gaps and women's labor force participation: the top five and bottom five ranking districts have been selected. Selecting colleges across a variety of districts will provide a representative picture of the state.

**Champions:** Champions are being selected and invited to participate in the study based on parental educational status. We expect parental education level to be a good proxy for disadvantage. In 2006, Kamakshya examined the relationship between educational human capital and income in 15 major Indian states during the years from 1965 and 1992. The results suggest that educational human capital, proxied by high school enrollment rates, has a robust positive impact on steady levels of income. By using parental levels of education as our selection criterion, we expect a significant number of young women from scheduled caste and tribe (SC/ ST) communities in our sample. Hnatkovska, et al. (2012) examined the relative fortunes of the historically disadvantaged SC/STs in India, in terms of their education attainment, occupation choices, consumption and wages, using household survey data from successive rounds of the 1983–2005 National Sample Survey. The study found that while the disparity was decreasing, SC/STs are still hugely overrepresented in illiterate groups. In 1983, about 77 percent of SC/STs were either illiterate or had below primary level education, while the corresponding number for non-SC/STs was 54 percent. In 2004–2005 these numbers lay at 50 percent for SC/STs and 34 percent for non-SC/STs.