GiRLS Inspire is a partnership between the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and community organisations in Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan and Tanzania to address the barriers girls and women face that prevent their full participation in society.

Girls are a critical agent for social change and global development. Closing the gender gap during adolescence in education, economic activity and health will significantly increase national economic growth and well-being. But barriers such as child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), distance to school, security concerns, cultural values and the costs of schooling all prevent girls and women from participating in educational opportunities.

Thanks to grants from the governments of Canada and Australia, COL is using open and distance learning (ODL) and technology in Pakistan to support the schooling and skills training of girls and women, improve their livelihoods and end CEFM. These efforts are crucial to Pakistan achieving eight of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SPARC staff initially reached girls in their homes. They then registered the girls in mobile and stationary training centres and provided life and vocational skills training for up to six weeks. Forty-nine safe learning environments for girls were established.

In total, 8,674 girls and women were reached from 169 communities/villages, and all completed a locally relevant vocational course for employability.

IMPROVING WELL-BEING AND FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Daily sessions are delivered by Bedari’s social mobilisers and in-house psychologists to enhance girls’ confidence and build their knowledge about health, decision making, social rights, entrepreneurship, financial management, the consequences of CEFM and other topics vital for their self-growth; 142 girls have completed self-growth sessions.

Job fairs, career counselling and referrals to banks for financial aid have resulted in 40 girls securing microloans and 200 girls being involved in internship opportunities.

FOSTERING COMMUNITY AWARENESS

To increase community understanding about the harmful effects of CEFM and the numerous benefits of stopping it, SPARC reached 1,508 community members and held 98 meetings and events with stakeholders. They also formed committees of renowned community members, distributed pamphlets and made door-to-door visits. Bedari built community awareness through 78 events and 13 theatre performances that reached over 4,795 community members.

ENABLING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE, JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

A total of 128 staff members were trained in technology integration, gender mainstreaming, child protection strategies, ODL, content development and delivery, and monitoring and evaluation.

Bedari and SPARC established 11 exchanges with other civil society individuals and organisations. These included local, regional and national government officials, the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority of Punjab, and a network of 49 legal councils whose volunteer lawyers promote and protect human rights. Nationally, Bedari lobbied against CEFM at meetings of the National Council for Social Welfare and the Child Rights Movement. Bedari also developed the documentary *A Tale of Two Marriages*, which was seen by more than 120 community members and stopped the marriage of one teenage girl.