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 keeping girls and women from 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 and technology in Bangladesh to support the schooling and skills training of girls and women, improve their livelihoods and end CEFM. These efforts are crucial to Bangladesh achieving eight of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**REACHING THE UNREACHED**

Partner agency Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha (SSS) used solar-powered boat schools and floating libraries, equipped with Internet-linked laptops, multimedia projectors and educational materials, docking at villages to provide on-board training. A total of 13,578 girls were trained in life and vocational skills. Without these boat schools, these girls had no chance of an education.

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**BETTER LIVELIHOODS, ECONOMIC GROWTH**

The Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES) focused on ending CEFM, in part through education; 1,350 women and girls completed life skills training, 1,200 of whom also completed locally relevant vocational training.

CMES also developed work opportunities: 1,200 women and girls attended job fairs to learn about markets and employment; 1,131 applied for employment; and 874 gained it. In addition, 103 MOUs were signed with prospective employers.

The CMES programme enabled 418 girls to obtain microloans and 641 to become self-employed. SSS also helped 1,602 girls to access microloans and 4,389 girls and women to gain income-generating opportunities.

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BUILDING HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY, COMMUNITY

SSS held evening shows on their education boats, reaching over 10,764 community members and addressing topics such as gender equality, preventing early marriage, eliminating domestic violence and exploitation, and productive employment opportunities for women.

Community comes together to advocate for women’s rights in Nayadiary, CMES unit.

Computer skills training, CMES, Bangladesh.

GIRLS Inspire participants in vocational training on carpentry, in a boat school.

GENDER EQUALITY, STRONG INSTITUTIONS

SSS was able to expand its reach by training 20 Rights Reporters in Flood-prone Areas to host public meetings in villages to promote girls’ education and facilitate project monitoring and evaluation.

SSS also trained 132 girls and women in the Young Women’s Rights Association to become facilitators for training events on life skills, employment opportunities and financial support.

SSS now has an “equality, diversity and inclusion” policy, and CMES has a gender policy. CMES also held two exchanges with advocates for GIRLS Inspire at regional and national forums attended by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and at gender forums attended by other local and international NGOs.

Since its inception in 1978, CMES has created awareness programmes to fight against CEFM; GIRLS Inspire enabled them to extend their reach and impact. Through 143 community events, they reached 151,010 community members on topics such as human rights, repression, reproductive health and the impact of CEFM. So far, CMES has stopped 75 child marriages through the GIRLS Inspire project.

Community comes together to advocate for women’s rights in Nayadiary, CMES unit.