



At a Glance

BREAKTHROUGH

Breakthrough shifts culture by working with adolescents and young people (ages 11–25) who are best positioned to lead this change. Using culture to change culture, Breakthrough transforms attitudes and behaviours across an entire generation so young people can question and call out harmful and regressive practices and champion equality.

The aim is to build a future where a girl can walk into any space, a school, an office, a factory, a field knowing she is valued and she belongs. Where she works, earns, grows, and makes decisions with confidence, her family is proud of her and celebrates the life she builds on her own terms.

Founding Background

The cutting edge music video Mann ke Manjeere: An Album of Women's Dream launched Breakthrough as an organization in the early 2000s. Mann ke Manjeere

featured the true story of a survivor of domestic violence who left an abusive relationship and became a truck driver, challenging gender norms, and lighting a collective fire. The music video became a success and won a National Screen

Award. Breakthrough's founder Malika Dutt used popular media and culture to raise awareness about gender-based violence. This initial project illustrated the power of popular media for community education about gender rights and popular media's potential to create cultural shifts.

Initially Breakthrough took the pioneering approach of focusing on pop culture, arts and media, combined with partner engagement. Breakthrough created public campaigns that forwarded the concept that engaging men and boys as allies is a critical part of the solution towards preventing VAWG and developing mutually respectful, nonviolent relationships. Notable campaigns include Bell Bajao! (Ring the Bell), which viewed men and boys as allies and encouraged people to intervene in cases of violence.

Breakthrough's early work revolved around campaigning and building public accountability in preventing VAWG, using culture to change regressive cultural norms. Over time, the organization's leadership realized that media engagement needed to be paired with direct interventions with young people to shape gendered attitudes and behaviors during a time when their approaches and attitudes are malleable.

Overview of Programs Offered

Taron ki Toli curriculum (TkT)

Breakthrough's signature gender program for adolescent youth is its Taron ki Toli program. Taron ki Toli is a 2-year gender-

equity curriculum designed, developed and implemented by Breakthrough in schools and communities across 4 states.

Target Population

Breakthrough works with adolescents between the ages of 11-18 for their adolescent programming and youth between the ages of 19-25 as community leaders. It also engages actors within education ministries and school systems such as teachers, state level trainers and master trainers through its system-level gender equity intervention in the states of Odisha and Punjab. Its popular media campaigns and systems strengthening work has widespread reach.

Relationship to Formal Systems

Breakthrough's direct intervention TkT curriculum is implemented within schools. Further, Breakthrough works with education systems in the states of Odisha and Punjab through its Gender Transformative Education Systems (GTES) approach covering 30000 schools. In addition, Breakthrough is a technical partner to state education systems of Tamil Nadu; Karnataka, Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu to incorporate a GTES lens.

Curriculum

Breakthrough's Taron ki Toli curriculum focuses on building life skills and

aspirations among adolescents and young people. The curriculum aims to increase self-awareness, enhance confidence, build collaboration, communication, negotiation, leadership skills among adolescents and works to make young people aware of their rights and entitlements. The pedagogical approach follows Jaano-Jaago-Jagao (Know-Be aware and take action-Make others aware). This scaffolded curricular approach allows young people to develop understandings in earlier years (11-14) and take action and spread awareness about gender justice in later years (15-18).

Program Delivery

The TkT curriculum is delivered twice a month in schools and communities and has proven effective in moulding gender norms and beliefs before they solidify into behaviour and instil more progressive gender-equitable thinking. In the GTES model, the gender equity curriculum is integrated with academic subjects like English, Social Studies and Moral Science to ensure system adoption and long term sustainability of the program.

Coalition Building

Breakthrough co-leads the India Coalition for Education for Gender Equality, bringing together over 32 civil society organisations, state education

departments and academic institutions currently covering 50 million adolescents to advance gender-transformative change in education. The Coalition works to move beyond access, addressing deep-rooted norms, safety, leadership, and learning outcomes for girls. Through collective action, evidence-building, and system engagement, it strengthens accountability and influence at policy and practice levels. Together, the Coalition is shaping an education ecosystem where every girl can learn with dignity, safety, and agency.

Geography and Reach

Based in India, Breakthrough works in four states for its direct service intervention program including Delhi, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Breakthrough's Gender Transformative Education System initiative operates in two states in partnership with the governments of Punjab and Odisha. Breakthrough provides technical inputs to national and state education systems of Tamil Nadu; Karnataka, Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu to incorporate a GTES lens.

For more information, see:

inbreakthrough.org

OVERVIEW AND MISSION

Breakthrough is committed to preventing violence against women and girls by transforming gendered norms and behaviors that perpetuate violence. Breakthrough’s mission is to build a critical mass of people whose values are rooted in gender equity and justice—who are able to transform their families, communities, and institutions to make violence against women and girls unacceptable. Breakthrough works on culture change by shifting norms that limit women and girls from reaching their full potential. They work with adolescents and young people aged 11-25 years aiming for an entire generation to shift and push for change. Over time, Breakthrough has worked with more than 2.3 million adolescents and young people, to encourage aspiration, agency, leadership and negotiation through their work in schools and communities. They also support them with media tools that shape public narratives. This has resulted in a generation of young people shifting to think and act in confident, intentional ways.

Through these programs, Raising Voices aims to build capacity within schools, communities, and government systems to prevent violence and change school culture. The organization’s mission is to prevent violence against women and children so all can flourish in safety and dignity. This is operationalized through practice, learning, and influencing.

Approach to Shifting Adolescent Gender Norms

Breakthrough’s approach to shifting gender norms is multi-level and draws on multiple strategies. It is divided into four pillars: deep transformation through community engagement; integration of gender lens in school curriculum through GTES intervention; using media (digital and mainstream) to shift norms and narratives on gender and training youth; positioning the voices of adolescents in national, regional and global forums.

Deep Transformation through Direct Intervention & Community Engagement

According to Breakthrough, direct intervention with adolescent youth must be paired with community engagement. Breakthrough’s program, Taron ki Toli (TkT), works with adolescent youth in order to build life skills and aspirations. It focuses on the development of self-awareness, development of confidence, communication, negotiation, and leadership skills. The carefully designed pedagogical method follows the Jaano-Jaago-Jagao approach (know-be aware-take action-make others aware). Sessions with 11-14 years old (Ujjwal Tara) focus mainly on knowledge building, helping adolescents recognise forms of gender-based violence and

discrimination and develop more gender equitable thinking, questioning of gender stereotypes and enabling them to increase intergender/intergenerational dialogues. The program with older adolescents (15-18 years old) focuses on taking initiative and action, practice and inspiring others to take action. As young people begin to participate in community decisions around this age, the curriculum focuses on relevant knowledge on health, education, career and their rights so that they make informed decisions on issues like early marriage, girl's education and career. Also, they come together as a collective and start taking initiatives in organising community events like Kishori Mela (Adolescent fair) 'Nutrition fair' and 'Career fair' which builds their ability to work in teams and represent their communities

Community engagement involves the development of youth leaders & networks that Breakthrough calls Team Change Leaders (TCLs) for young people between 19-25 years in the community. The focus of this is to help sustain the program by building youth agency, collective leadership to support the development of awareness within the community.

Systems Level Change: Gender Transformative Education Systems

The second approach integral to Breakthrough's overall methods in bringing about change in gender norms is a systems level Breakthrough has been working in collaboration with two state governments Integration of gender lens in school curriculum through Gender Transformative

Education Systems (GTES) intervention in the states of Odisha (6-8) and Punjab (6-10). Breakthrough's attempt to create gender equitable government school systems focuses on the integration of a gender lens across school curricula and professional development. This approach has involved teacher and school leader training and development to build knowledge about gender and gender responsiveness, engagement with middle management and education ministries to ensure effective implementation. At present, the gender curriculum has been integrated in the textbooks of Social Studies, English and Welcome Life in Punjab and is being taught by teachers in classes VI to VIII. The capacity building for educators and curriculum roll out follows a cascade model. An online repository of teaching aids such as lessons of gender integrated into the textbook and demonstration videos helps with ongoing support for teachers.

Digital Campaigns For Narrative Change

Breakthrough began as an organization using popular digital media to create change. As such, its approach to gender norms change continues to integrate this important strategy. For direct intervention Breakthrough uses social and behavioral change communication to develop and support content, narrative/messaging, IEC material, audio-visual products, and conducts media training to seed alternative narratives and difficult conversations around community gender norms. Digital Media content is used to flip the narrative on regressive gender ideas and encourage

young people to call them out online and offline.

Collaboration & Centering Adolescent Youth Voices

The fourth dimension of Breakthrough’s approach in shifting gender norms involves positioning youth issues and gender equality using a normative lens in national, regional and global forums. Breakthrough has been active in national, regional and global networks such as the Action for Coalition against Gender Based Violence as part of Generational Equality Forum, Catalyst 2030, Global Alliance for Social Behavior Change Communication, etc. This involvement

contributes to the creation of an enabling policy, resource and response environment to address violence against women and girls. contribute towards creating an enabling policy, resource and response environment for addressing violence against women and girls; and positioning issues of adolescents (both boys and girls) with diverse and relevant stakeholders . Breakthrough has been a part of various global, regional and national networks and alliances (eg; Co-lead for Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence as part of Generation Equality Forum, Catalyst 2030, Global Alliance for Social Behavior Change Communication) including those working on technology facilitated gender based violence (TFGBV).



THEORY OF CHANGE

How Breakthrough's Approach Attempts to Shift Adolescent Gender Norms?

Breakthrough's organizational theory of change is built on the idea that gender norms can shift only when individuals, families, schools, and the social systems all change together. Their vision is a gender-sensitive society where adolescents, especially girls, can reach their full potential and live free from violence. Towards that end, the organization focuses on making adolescents more aware of gender-based discrimination, helping them develop gender-equitable attitudes, and supporting girls to stay in school and make their own life choices.

Breakthrough's adolescent programming attempts to shift gender norms by working at multiple levels at once. They train teachers and principals to model and reinforce gender-equitable behavior, and they work with parents to promote girls' education and change gender expectations at home. Their Taaron ki Toli program teaches adolescents about gender norms through life-skills sessions, peer discussions, and community activities that promote equality. At the system level, they advocate for education officials to adopt a gender lens in monitoring and policy. Together, these strategies aim to shift adolescent beliefs and transform the environments that shape those beliefs, creating long-term change in gender norms.

Research and Program Evaluations

Research and evaluation are an integral part of Breakthrough's approach. Breakthrough's monitoring team oversees regular internal project monitoring to observe progress and engage in course correction. Its evaluative approach incorporates a commitment to continuous improvement. Additionally, Breakthrough uses quantitative & qualitative methods to understand program impact and to share best practices. Changes in the community and among stakeholders are assessed through participatory qualitative tools such as in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions.

External evaluation partners such as the

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Lab (JPAL) and NR Management Consultants (NRMC). The NRMC evaluated the Taron ki Toli program in Uttar Pradesh in 2021. Findings from the endline report clear improvements including girls' average age at marriage which increased from about 16 to nearly 18, demonstration of more gender-equitable attitudes, greater mobility of young people, and increase in dialogue with elders in the community about education and life choices. The study also documented reductions in discriminatory gender norms around chores, improved comfort discussing menstruation, and increased access to health services like IFA tablets and sanitary pads. Direct correlation was found between the intensity of interventions and outcomes. An impact

evaluation of Breakthrough's 'Taro ki Toli' program in Haryana conducted between 2014-2016 similarly found that the curriculum significantly shifted the gender attitudes and behaviours of both boys and girls, and led students to enact more gender-equitable behaviors.

Most recently, JPAL was brought on to evaluate the Gender Transformative Education Systems (GTES) with the Government of Punjab's Department of School Education. Thus far, JPAL has conducted baseline and midline evaluation using a survey of teachers to assess the base model for GTES for systems adoption which included curriculum integration, teacher training, and classroom teaching.

Findings from a midline survey on a sample of 85 teachers across Patiala and Sangrur with the aim of measuring the change in gender attitudes and gender related behaviours. The midline evaluation finds that female respondents are more gender progressive, and there was improvement in the gender attitudes of the respondents from one of the two districts. However, the overall percentage of males with gender progressive attitudes have declined. There was significant improvement in attitudes towards violence against women but not for sub-themes. Gendered behavioral changes were identified in some household activities but limited changes overall.

Further, Breakthrough has engaged in process monitoring and action research for an extended version of the model which included parental engagement and district

and school level interventions. Overall, Breakthrough values evaluative assessment of their programs for design improvement and for public knowledge sharing regarding its best practices.

What is Working?

As a leading organization working to end violence against women and girls, Breakthrough has a range of promising practices in its approach to changing gender norms.

First, Breakthrough's creative use of digital and popular media recognizes the critical role of media platforms and devices in the lives of young people and society more broadly. Its innovative and groundbreaking use of media draws on social behavioral change communication (SBCC) and has had significant impact. It has been used to create awareness and change, has been integrated within programs, and initiatives to address online gender based violence. For instance, the campaign Bell Bajao reached 230million people globally, was adopted by seven countries, and eventually was taken up by the UN Secretary General. Storytelling methods are used for narrative change, and audio-visual products facilitate difficult conversations with families and stakeholders in an interactive and engaging manner.

Second, as its theory of change underscores the necessity of systems change for gender norms change, Breakthrough's strategy is multilevel and engages with multiple actors. Breakthrough begins with the principle that 'change begins with you.' Breakthrough uses

a socio-ecological model of norm change. Breakthrough's programs work within school systems with its Taron ki Tali signature adolescent youth program. The organization emphasizes each person's capacity to be a change agent; if this is aggregated with thousands of young people, a new order is possible, according to Breakthrough. Further, the organization has designed a model that addresses multiple levels of the system, engages different youth, and popular culture to shift norms within broader contexts. As part of this systems wide approach, embedding a gender lens throughout the school curricular within formal education systems intentionally emphasizes the teaching of new norms.

Third, Breakthrough's pedagogical design and models are participatory and intentional. Its signature adolescent education program has a scaffolded pedagogical method that

moves from developing understanding and knowledge, to taking action in one's own life, and subsequently bringing about awareness (Jaano-Jaago-Jagao). This carefully designed model deepens knowledge before supporting young people in taking action. Subsequent interventions such as youth leadership networks sustain the effects of the intervention. Breakthrough ensures that its curriculum is context relevant and non-threatening.

Fourth, Breakthrough's approach to its program development is reflective, experimental and participatory. Within processes of research and implementation, Breakthrough uses modeling and participatory methods. This design allows organizational implementers to truly partner with project participants in leading and owning the process of change.

