



# YOUNG GIRLS' FIGHT FOR EQUALITY THROUGH SPORTS

**#OneTeamOneDream**, an *iPartner India* initiative to empower girls

# ABOUT **iPARTNER INDIA**

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With over 15 years of experience on the ground, iPartner India is a catalyst helping vulnerable communities make the journey from 'Marginalised to Mainstream'. Over the past 15 years, iPartner India has worked with more than 90 partner organisations and projects across 22 states of India.

Currently our focus areas are:

**EDUCATION**  
**HEALTH**  
**VULNERABLE CHILDREN**  
**SPORTS**  
**WOMEN & LIVELIHOODS**  
**ENVIRONMENT**

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## ROSHNI YOUTH GROUP

Roshni is one of iPartner India's direct intervention programmes, where we aim to empower girls living in the slums of Rajabazar through the medium of sport.

# THE GEOGRAPHY

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The slums of Rajabazar in Kolkatta comprises largely of the muslim community. Most of the girls and women residing in Rajabazar are victims of gender discrimination and violence. Their right to survival, protection, development and participation, are violated on a daily basis. Poverty also adds to their existing crisis which gives them no opportunity for self-development and esteem. Girls are married off at an early age and are burdened with household chores, early pregnancy and child rearing responsibilities.

The project intends to address this via a multi-pronged approach aimed at empowering girls and women on issues related to gender-based violence, facilitating civic participation of young people and promoting gender equality by engaging adolescent girls in sports. Our theory of change is ***“if adolescent girls, who are vulnerable and at-risk, participate in a comprehensive sports and life skills programme, they acquire skills, knowledge and confidence to gain the tools and support they need to truly take control of their own lives in the face of discrimination while becoming agents of change in their communities.”***

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# THE CHALLENGES

The role of sport is pivotal in the lives of children and young people in general, but participation in sport holds a special significance, especially for girls and women. Girls and women in India are denied equal opportunities on several levels due to factors like poor education, early marriages and a general lack of freedom to make decisions. In such a setting, sports assume a very noteworthy role because each day presents a new opportunity. Sports also help in breaking gender stereotypes. Yet, despite the many benefits, girls even today are unable to participate in sports due to the wider societal limitations that they face on a daily basis.

Early intervention with young girls can empower them to recognise their right to development, protection and participation. With the right skills, they are able to disrupt the larger cycle of discrimination to become agents of change. iPartner India has developed a well-designed programme that aims at breaking the gender stereotypes and improving leadership skills of young girls through football.





## THE SOLUTION

iPartner India has developed a well-designed programme which ensures a positive change in the lives of young girls. The project aims at breaking gender stereotypes and improving the leadership skills of young girls through football. More than 200 girls have been trained on gender and rights issues and 40 girls have been trained through football. We aim to reach out to 100 more girls in the current year.

# OUR INTERVENTION



1

Film screenings on gender, women's mobility, health and other issues are organised to initiate discussion around issues affecting women and young girls. Participation of men and young boys during these events is encouraged to ensure they are part of the process of change. Community events are also held to increase mobility of girls in community spaces while spreading awareness on the rights of women and girls.



2

Regular life skills and gender training workshops are held with adolescent girls from the community. The training aims to improve the knowledge and capacity of young girls on gender equality, health, hygiene, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence etc. Similar sessions are held with women as well.



3

Adolescent girls are trained to become professional football players through regular training sessions. The coaching also helps the girls to break gender stereotypes.



4

Survivors of domestic violence are provided with access to legal aid and counselling to help them break free from the vicious cycle of abuse and trauma.

# OUR IMPACT

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A comparative analysis of the midline and endline assessment with the adolescent girls and women was conducted, which revealed a shift in the understanding of social norms and stereotypes.

As per the midline, 16% of girls had agreed that women shouldn't step out of their homes without their husband's permission. However, the endline noted that only 7% of the girls still believed that to be the case. Similarly, 100% of girls believed that domestic violence was wrong and women shouldn't endure that just to keep their families together as against 55% in the midline. The findings of the two assessments also showed a change in the thinking of women in the community.

As per the midline, only 60% of the women agreed that women should be able to choose her own career, however as per the endline, 100% of the women agreed with the given statement.

40% of women in the midline believed that husbands should share the responsibility of the household work which increased to 87% in the endline.

Similarly, 60 % of women in the midline believed that if a good match is found they can marry their daughter before their daughter turns 18 years of age. In the endline, 100% of women reported that they would not marry off their daughter at an early age even if they find a suitable groom for their daughters. Increasing access to sports at the grassroots can go a long way in achieving key development outcomes.

Through this project, iPartner India envisions bringing instrumental change in the lives of the young girls and women as they chart their journey towards a more equitable India.



# MEET SOME OF OUR FOOTBALL PLAYERS



**AYESHA PARVEEN**

*“In my community, there is no opportunity for women football players and this is the first girls’ team I have ever seen to be playing football. I really enjoy the game and my only dream is to become a professional football player. After playing football I have overcome many obstacles and I can tell other girls today not to let fears stop them from doing what they want in life.”*

Ayesha, 16, is studying in 6th grade. Growing up, she has always loved football and wanted to become a good player. She came to know about the all-girls’ team through a friend and eagerly waited for an opportunity to become part of the group. Last year in January 2020, Ayesha represented her team for a Slum Football Tournament in Goa and has since been playing competitive matches.



**SANA RIYAZ**

*“I want to become an IAS officer, for that, I will have to work hard and keep a focus on my studies. I also enjoy playing football and if given a chance, I would like to represent my country in international matches. I have been taught that if you want to do something in life, you will have to do it yourself because nobody can help you better than yourself. This is something I keep reminding myself to help me achieve my dreams.”*

Sana is 17 and she is currently pursuing her first-year graduation. She enjoys playing in the defensive position. In her free time, she enjoys listening to music and watching football matches on TV. Three years ago, she never imagined herself to be playing football, let alone represent her team in inter-district tournaments. She feels extremely proud to be part of the team and has learned how important a role each one plays to contribute to the game. The past year has been a struggle for Sana between online classes and having to practice football in the small confines of her home. But she is eagerly waiting to start practising with her team and play matches.



## SHAISTA PARVEEN

***“My first dream is to become a pilot and second is to become a football player. When I play football, I feel energised, confident and strong.”***

Shaista, 16, studies in the 10th grade. She plays in the mid-field position. She had been playing football for two years when she joined Roshni Youth Group that encourages girls to play football.

For Shaista, her father is her role model. During her free time, she enjoys watching football matches and playing video games. Being part of the team has helped her learn about unity, discipline and sportsmanship.



## SHAHINA PARVEEN

***“I feel girls are not given enough opportunities as compared to boys. I want to inspire other girls from my community to never be afraid to speak up for ourselves. Keep fighting for your dreams and believe in yourself and you can do unbelievable things. When someone tells you and say you can't do it, turn around and say 'watch me'.”***

Shahina, 17, is a 12th grader. She plays in the defensive position and has been part of the team for the past four years. She looks up to her coach for inspiration. The coach mentors her and trains her to focus not just on the game but on life as well. Having never kicked a ball ever, Shahina is now representing her community and her team by taking part in inter-community tournaments. She wants to be a lawyer and also play football professionally. She loves the practice sessions with her team and is working hard to improve on the techniques and skills taught by her coach. She strongly believes that she has the potential to become a great football player. In addition to playing football, she is also keen on completing her education so that she can pursue law. The past year has been tough as online classes were a huge challenge due to lack of digital infrastructure. Shahina had to share her father's mobile phone with her brother.



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