Empowering girls through education

A long-term impact evaluation of the English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) project

This long term impact evaluation was conducted by The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC).

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Executive summary

In South Asia, 81 per cent of out-of-school girls are unlikely to ever start school, compared to 42 per cent of out-of-school boys.[1] The gender digital divide in the region is significant too, with women being 26 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone than men.[2] The British Council's English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) non-formal girls' education programme, launched in 2016, aims to enhance the life prospects of out-of-school adolescent girls (13–19 years of age) in socio-economically marginalised communities by improving their English proficiency, digital skills, awareness of social issues and self-confidence. It uses a peer-led model, with some among the club participants acting as Peer Group Leaders (PGLs), who are trained by the British Council to facilitate EDGE club meetings. As of February 2024, the EDGE programme had reached over 20,000 adolescent girls and trained nearly 2,000 PGLs across Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

In 2024, the British Council commissioned The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC) to evaluate the longer-term impact of the EDGE programme and assess the contribution EDGE has made to positive changes in the lives of former participants. This evaluation focused on Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. It was conducted using a mixed-methods approach and collected both primary and secondary data. The secondary document review included 49 documents developed by British Council country teams, as well as independent evaluators. The primary data was collected from:

- former EDGE participants, using 300 survey responses (125 responses from Bangladesh, 86 from Nepal and 89 from Pakistan), including 200 club members and 100 PGLs

- 69 Qualitative Impact Protocol (QuIP) interviews with former EDGE participants, including 48 club members and 21 PGLs

- family members of former EDGE participants, using two focus group discussions (FGDs) and six interviews

- community members, using two FGDs and two interviews with community members

- implementing partner team members (non-governmental organisation (NGO)/civil society organisation (CSO)), using one FGD and three interviews

- British Council country teams, using four interviews.

Key findings

Confidence and life skills of former EDGE participants

Around 98 per cent of the EDGE participants we surveyed reported that their engagement in the EDGE programme has enabled them to be more confident in themselves. This confidence has further enabled them to be agents of change in their community, including tutoring their siblings, advocating against social issues that affect them and supporting community business. Approximately 90 per cent of EDGE participants felt that the programme empowered them to make their own decisions. However, the decision-making ability varied across different families. In some families, former EDGE participants' input was limited to essential matters, while male members, such as fathers or uncles, often retained primary authority during the decision-making process.

The EDGE programme has also contributed to enhancing the life skills of the participants, who after the programme are more aware of nutrition, their rights, sexual health and social issues, including child marriage and the value of education.

EDGE and the pursuit of higher education

Eighty-eight per cent of participants surveyed felt that the EDGE programme empowered them to pursue higher education. It did so by educating them on the role of education and making education accessible through knowledge of digital tools for self-paced learning. The programme has helped 87 per cent of participants to achieve better grades. However, it is essential to note that the positive impact on English and digital skills is not always sustained. This is due to systemic barriers, including a lack of infrastructure and opportunities to regularly practise these skills.

Skills and employment

Forty-six per cent of the surveyed participants believed that the knowledge and skills gained during the EDGE programme would help them get a job or start a business at some point during their professional journey.

Well-being and changes in attitude towards marriage

The EDGE programme has started to positively impact former participants by influencing their perception of health and well-being. Based on the existing evidence, EDGE – along with other factors, including family support and personal goals – has shaped decisions related to marrying early.

Enablers for achieving long-term impact

Beyond the EDGE programme, several enablers were identified that seem to have been instrumental in a positive long-term impact on the lives of the participants. These include the role of family, awareness and mentorship in formal education, and determination of the participants to secure economic security for their families and financial independence for themselves. Additionally, 86 per cent believed family members' attitudes had changed after their participation in the EDGE programme. Families were reported to be more supportive of girls making their own decisions and pursuing educational or professional opportunities. However, there is no conclusive evidence that the EDGE programme alone caused this change.

Deterrents to achieving long-term impact

Factors acting as deterrents to longer-term impact included:

- marriage
- lack of support from family
- lack of infrastructure and ongoing learning support
- lack of financial resources to pursue education.

The lack of infrastructure and ongoing support restricted the development of digital and English skills, while financial constraints forced some participants to drop out of school or forgo higher education.

Overall, while the long-term impact of the EDGE programme continues to be generally evident in the lives of former participants, its impact on empowerment and education seems to be the most obvious. As one of the former participants from Bangladesh described, 'The EDGE programme was the first thing that taught me to dream. It gave me confidence.'

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Part 1

About the EDGE programme

The British Council, in collaboration with partner organisations across South Asia, began implementation of the English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) non-formal girls' education programme in 2016. Since then, EDGE has reached over 20,000 young women and girls aged between 13 and 19 across Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The objective of EDGE is to enhance the life prospects of adolescent girls in socio-economically marginalised communities.

The programme does this by enhancing young women's and girls' English proficiency, digital literacy, self-confidence and social awareness. Adopting a peer-led approach, the programme selects girls aged 13 to 19 as Peer Group Leaders (PGLs) based on their confidence, motivation and English skills. PGLs receive training from British Council trainers, equipping them to facilitate club meetings with other club members from a similar age group.

These clubs become safe spaces to learn within communities, reducing travel risks and fostering an environment where girls can express themselves freely. The curriculum integrates English, digital and life skills development, with active engagement from parents and local community members to reinforce the programme goals.

In South Asia, the EDGE programme is currently delivered across four countries: Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Across all countries, it engages girls from marginalised communities, including those from rural communities and poor socio-economic backgrounds.

As the EDGE programme is extensive in scope, there are variations in how the programme has been operationalised across the region, based on local needs. For example, in Bangladesh, EDGE was initially implemented in rural areas, where previous digital training was limited due to challenges such as inadequate electricity and unreliable internet connectivity. The focus was on basic digital skills, with girls learning foundational tasks like operating a laptop and using Word documents. In Pakistan, EDGE reached girls from semi-urban and rural communities, often from low-income backgrounds or regions with limited access to quality education. This included Afghan refugees and girls who face significant barriers to education. Some of these variations in scale and timeline, along with programme delivery during Covid-19, are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: EDGE participation in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan

Country	Number of participants (2016 – February 2024)		Partners	Country context
	Number of PGLs	*Number of club members*		
Bangladesh	935	11,200	• Spreeha • Dnet • BRAC • HSBC	EDGE was started in Bangladesh as a mixed-gender ICT (information and communication technology) and English course and then evolved into EDGE in 2016. During Covid-19 it was run both in person and online, using Facebook for participants with internet connectivity and SD cards/phone calls for areas with less connectivity.
India	250	1,300	• Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) • Naandi Foundation	EDGE was initially implemented in India in 2016 at a small scale. During Covid-19 it was run online using WhatsApp.
Nepal	374	4,485	• VSO • Aasman	EDGE was launched in Nepal in 2017. During Covid-19 it was held using radio drama series, phone calls and self-access resources.
Pakistan	358	4,300	• Muslim Hands • ITA • Agha Khan Foundation	EDGE was launched in Pakistan in 2020. During Covid-19 the programme was implemented in person with strict adherence to standard operating procedures, including hand sanitising, social distancing, temperature checks and mask wearing. Clubs were granted government permission to remain open despite school closures.

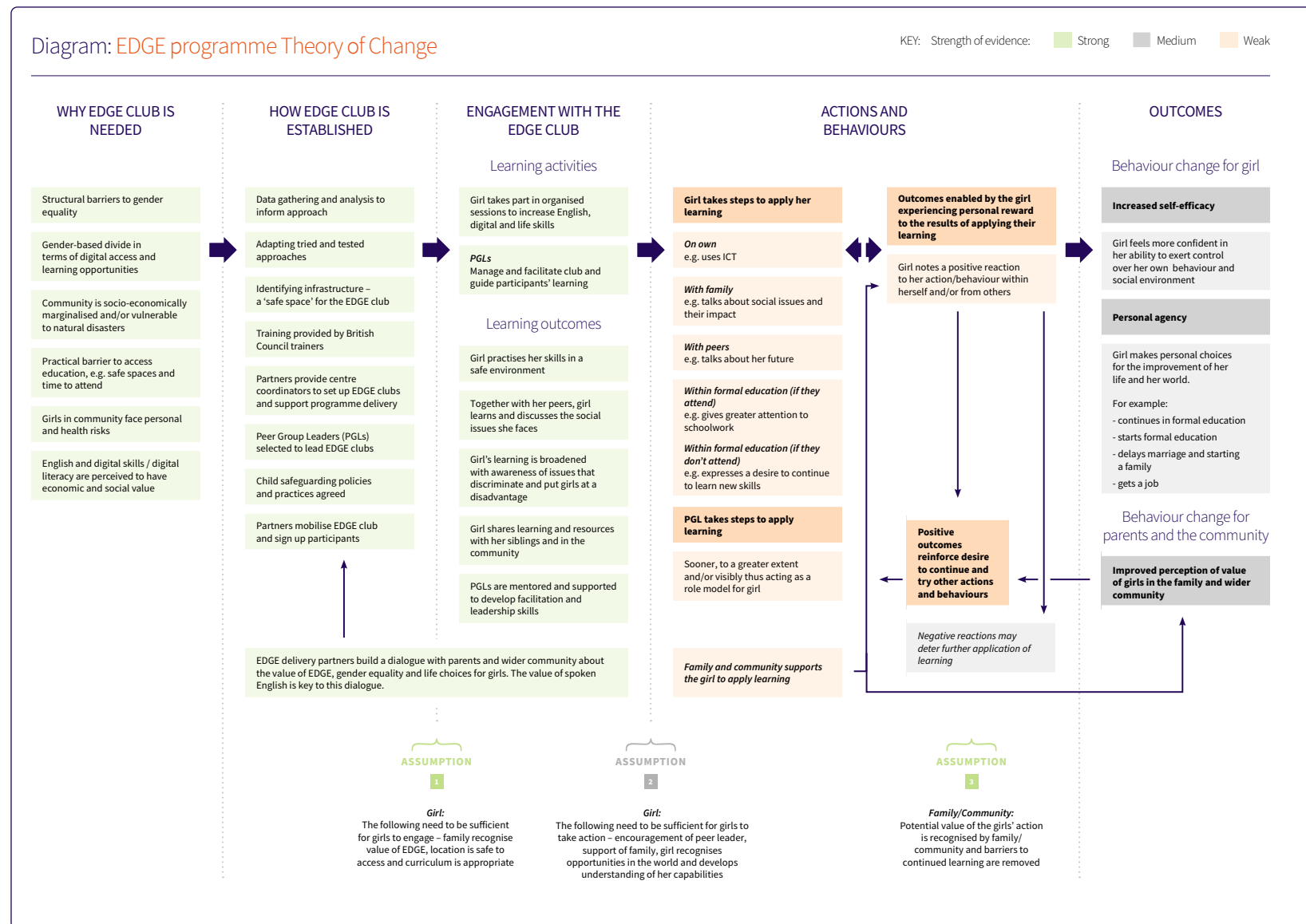To date, the programme has been guided by an overarching Theory of Change (ToC), which is detailed in Figure 1.

Diagram: EDGE programme Theory of Change

KEY: Strength of evidence: Strong | Medium | Weak

WHY EDGE CLUB IS NEEDED

- Structural barriers to gender equality
- Gender-based divide in terms of digital access and learning opportunities
- Community is socio-economically marginalised and/or vulnerable to natural disasters
- Practical barrier to access education, e.g. safe spaces and time to attend
- Girls in community face personal and health risks
- English and digital skills / digital literacy are perceived to have economic and social value

HOW EDGE CLUB IS ESTABLISHED

- Data gathering and analysis to inform approach
- Adapting tried and tested approaches
- Identifying infrastructure – a 'safe space' for the EDGE club
- Training provided by British Council trainers
- Partners provide centre coordinators to set up EDGE clubs and support programme delivery
- Peer Group Leaders (PGLs) selected to lead EDGE clubs
- Child safeguarding policies and practices agreed
- Partners mobilise EDGE club and sign up participants

EDGE delivery partners build a dialogue with parents and wider community about the value of EDGE, gender equality and life choices for girls. The value of spoken English is key to this dialogue.

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE EDGE CLUB

Learning activities

- Girl takes part in organised sessions to increase English, digital and life skills
- *PGLs* Manage and facilitate club and guide participants' learning

Learning outcomes

- Girl practises her skills in a safe environment
- Together with her peers, girl learns and discusses the social issues she faces
- Girl's learning is broadened with awareness of issues that discriminate and put girls at a disadvantage
- Girl shares learning and resources with her siblings and in the community
- PGLs are mentored and supported to develop facilitation and leadership skills

ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS

Girl takes steps to apply her learning

On own e.g. uses ICT

With family e.g. talks about social issues and their impact

With peers e.g. talks about her future

Within formal education (if they attend) e.g. gives greater attention to schoolwork

Within formal education (if they don't attend) e.g. expresses a desire to continue to learn new skills

PGL takes steps to apply learning

Sooner, to a greater extent and/or visibly thus acting as a role model for girl

Family and community supports the girl to apply learning

Outcomes enabled by the girl experiencing personal reward to the results of applying their learning

Girl notes a positive reaction to her action/behaviour within herself and/or from others

Positive outcomes reinforce desire to continue and try other actions and behaviours

Negative reactions may deter further application of learning

OUTCOMES

Behaviour change for girl

Increased self-efficacy

Girl feels more confident in her ability to exert control over her own behaviour and social environment

Personal agency

Girl makes personal choices for the improvement of her life and her world.

For example:
- continues in formal education
- starts formal education
- delays marriage and starting a family
- gets a job

Behaviour change for parents and the community

Improved perception of value of girls in the family and wider community

ASSUMPTION 1

Girl: The following need to be sufficient for girls to engage – family recognise value of EDGE, location is safe to access and curriculum is appropriate

ASSUMPTION 2

Girl: The following need to be sufficient for girls to take action – encouragement of peer leader, support of family, girl recognises opportunities in the world and develops understanding of her capabilities

ASSUMPTION 3

Family/Community: Potential value of the girls' action is recognised by family/ community and barriers to continued learning are removed

Figure 1: The EDGE programme ToC

Part 2
About the evaluation

In 2024, the British Council commissioned The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC) to evaluate the long-term impact of the EDGE programme.

The evaluation focused on four countries: Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Its primary aim was to evaluate the programme's long-term effects on the lives of former participants, identifying both the enablers and deterrents to achieving a lasting impact. Additionally, the evaluation sought to gather feedback to highlight areas for future improvement.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the impact, the evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This included a review of secondary documents provided by the British Council and primary data collection through surveys, interviews and FGDs. By combining these approaches, the evaluation aimed for a holistic view of the factors influencing participants' experiences and outcomes.

2.1 Objectives of the evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation included answering the following evaluation questions.

- What is the long-term impact of EDGE on the lives of former participants of the programme? How has this programme contributed to the impact on former participants' educational attainment, employment, socio-economic status and empowerment?

- Under which conditions has the programme achieved (or not) long-term impact on participants' lives?

- What have been the enablers for former participants to use those life skills to achieve their goals? What deterrents have former participants faced to prevent them from using those skills? How can the programme be improved?

- How can we ensure this programme's long-term impact for future participants is sustainable?

2.2 Methodology

The evaluation was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, which included primary data collection and secondary document review across Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. We used primary data collection activities to collect qualitative and quantitative data from different stakeholders, including former participants, parents of former participants, community members, implementing partners and the British Council programme teams. We used the following methods to collect data.

2.2.1 Primary data collection from participants, including PGLs

- **Survey**: A survey was administered in the four countries to gather information from participants regarding their employment status, educational achievement and socio-economic indicators. The survey data was collected by British Council consultants using in-person data collection, telephone calls, online surveys or a mix of all these approaches. Due to limited access to former EDGE participants in India, in-depth data collection using interviews was prioritised instead of surveys.

- **Qualitative Impact Protocol**: Qualitative Impact Protocol (QuIP) is an impact assessment methodology designed to collect credible information directly from intended beneficiaries on significant drivers of change in selected domains of their lives over a pre-defined period of change. This method was selected to facilitate an open expression of participants' experiences, capturing diverse perspectives on effectiveness. It collected qualitative data for informed judgements on the EDGE programme's efficacy, fostering a holistic understanding of contributing factors for future investment decisions. It included identifying expected and unexpected factors leading to change. The QuIP data collection was conducted in person where possible or using telephone calls. The QuIP interviews were held in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. As the programme was launched in Pakistan only in 2020, TSIC prioritised the other three countries, where there was more potential for long-term impact.

2.2.2 Primary data collection from parents, community leaders and representatives of the NGOs/CSOs

Primary data was collected from parents, community leaders and representatives from NGOs/CSOs through interviews and FGDs. This was undertaken in the following ways.

- Data from NGO/CSO representatives was collected through online interviews and FGDs across all four countries by TSIC.

- Data from parents was gathered through in-person interviews and telephone calls in the four countries. The data was collected by British Council consultants.

- Data from community members was collected both in person and via telephone calls in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan by British Council consultants and TSIC.

2.2.3 Primary data collection from the British Council programme team

This data collection was undertaken by TSIC and included online interviews with the British Council programme teams across the four countries involved in the implementation of EDGE, to gather insights on programme effectiveness and challenges. Table 2 summarises the data collected.

Table 2: Summary of the primary data collection methods

Data collection method	Number of data collected/responses				Total number of data collected/responses
	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	
Surveys for former EDGE participants	125	–	86	89	300 survey responses
QuIP interviews	28	17	24	–	69 interviews
FGD/Interview with family members of EDGE participants	1 FGD	1 interview	5 interviews	1 FGD	2 FGDs and 6 interviews
FGD/Interview with community members	1 FGD	–	1 FGD	2 interviews	2 FGDs and 2 interviews
FGD/Interview with implementing partner team member (NGO/CSO)	1 interview	1 FGD	1 interview	1 interview	1 FGD and 3 interviews
Interview with British Council country teams	1	1	1	1	4 interviews

2.3 Sampling

The sampling approach used for QuIP varied across different countries. The data for QuIP was collected using purposive sampling in the case of Nepal:

• identification of positive/negative deviance, i.e. participants who were unemployed/dropped out of education/married early and those who were not

• sampling within clusters through a mix of further segmentation by membership: PGL or club member.

In the case of Bangladesh and India, convenience sampling was used owing to limited access to former EDGE participants.

For the surveys with participants and interviews/FGDs with family and community members, convenience sampling was used to identify respondents based on access to them and their availability for data collection.

Primary data was collected from participants, including 248 club members and 121 PGLs. Table 3 summarises this data.

Table 3: Summary of the primary data collected by country

Country	Survey		QuIP	
	Number of club members	*Number of PGLs*	*Number of club members*	*Number of PGLs*
Bangladesh	95	30	22	6
Nepal	53	34	16	1
Pakistan	52	36	10	14
Overall	**200**	**100**	**48**	**21**

The sample for data collection from British Council programme teams and implementing partners was identified using a purposive sampling approach. Representatives who had been actively engaged with EDGE over the years were identified and contacted for data collection.

2.4 Document review

The evaluation included a secondary review of 49 documents, which were developed by British Council country teams as well as independent evaluators. They included:

- programme evaluation reports
- Theory of Change
- data collection tools
- assessment tools
- other project management plans.

2.5 Coding and analysis

The evaluation began with a review of the documents listed in section 2.4. The process involved reviewing the existing data against the ToC and identifying gaps in evidence.

The QuIP interviews were coded in causal maps across all three countries. The causal map app was used to identify various links (statements where changes occurred). This was done by labelling the influence and consequence that led to these changes. Finally, these changes were visualised using the causal map. The rest of the data, including FGDs and interviews, was analysed using Dovetail. The data from the survey was analysed in Microsoft Excel.

2.6 Limitations

There are several process- and content-related factors that are interrelated and may impact the evaluation results. These include the following.

- **Limited access to former participants**: British Council country teams often lacked direct access to former participants' contact information, instead relying on partner organisations to provide these details. This limited retention of contact information in certain countries constrained the sample available for data collection.
- **Changes in contact details**: As the evaluation targeted former participants who engaged with the programme during or before 2021, many contact details had changed, further reducing the sample size, especially in India.
- **Challenges in administering surveys**: Although the goal was to collect a minimum of 125 survey responses across the four countries, surveys could only be administered in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. Limited access to participants and outdated contact details led to prioritising in-depth qualitative data collection through QuIP interviews for former participants in India instead of surveys. Additionally, for the survey data collected, the response rate for one question from Pakistan was as low as 19 per cent.
- **Challenges in attributing change**: QuIP was used to attempt to identify the attributable impact. Findings were triangulated with input from stakeholders (including family and community members). However, this evaluation did not include a control group. As a result, a direct comparison of outcomes in education, employment, empowerment and socio-economic status was not possible.

Summary

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, combining primary data collection and secondary document review across Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Primary data collection consisted of:

- 300 survey responses from participants
- 69 QuIP interviews with participants
- 2 FGDs and 6 interviews with family members of participants
- 2 FGDs and 2 interviews with community members
- 1 FGD and 3 interviews with implementing partner team members (NGO/CSO)
- 4 interviews with British Council country teams.

The secondary data collection involved reviewing 49 documents developed by British Council country teams and independent evaluators. These documents included programme evaluation reports, Theory of Change, data collection tools, assessment tools and project management plans.

Part 3

Key findings: Impact in numbers

This section highlights the key findings from the surveys administered to former EDGE **participants from Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan**. Sections 3.1–3.3 highlight key findings related to the impact on participants from these countries' education, empowerment and satisfaction levels.

3.1 Education

In Bangladesh, approximately 74 per cent of participants surveyed are either currently pursuing or planning to pursue higher education (bachelor's or master's degree), with all participants in this group aged 21 or older. In Nepal, although 64 per cent of participants are aged 18 and above, only 13 per cent are pursuing higher education, suggesting potential barriers that may discourage or limit girls from continuing education beyond secondary school, as highlighted in Figure 2. In Pakistan, around 80 per cent of surveyed participants are under 18 years old, with about 67 per cent currently in grades 9–12.
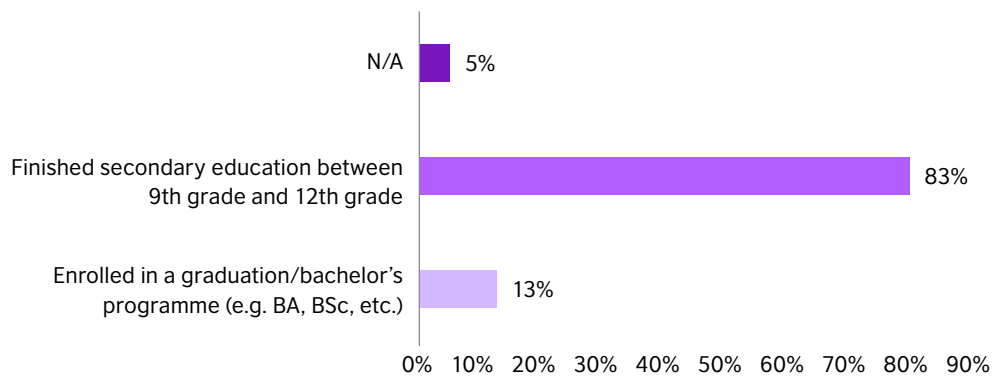
Figure 2: Highest qualifications for participants from Nepal, *N= 86*

The survey highlighted that approximately 87 per cent of former EDGE participants reported that the EDGE programme helped them achieve better grades. Figure 3 shows the results by country.
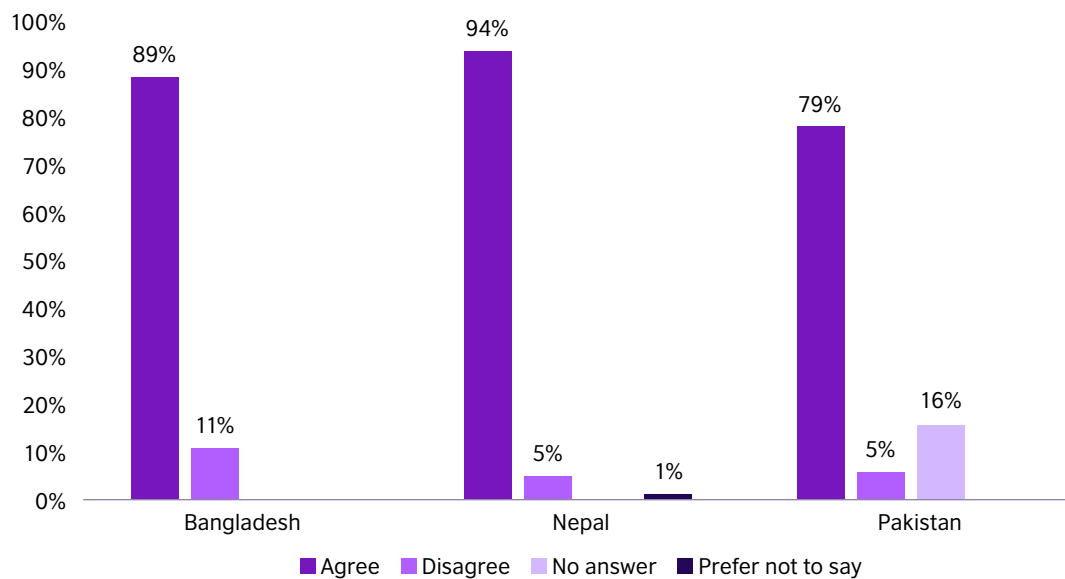
Figure 3: 'My participation in the EDGE programme has enabled me to get better grades during my education', *N= 125 Bangladesh, 86 Nepal and 89 Pakistan*

3.2 Empowerment

Approximately 90 per cent of participants surveyed indicated that EDGE enabled them to make their own decisions. However, as this is self-reported data, it is important to assess participants' actual ability to exercise independent decision making. As highlighted in Part 4, the extent of decision-making autonomy, as perceived by family members of the participants, varies depending on the nature of the decisions.

Approximately 94 per cent of participants surveyed believe that the EDGE programme enabled them to be more confident. This sentiment was widely reflected across the three countries where the survey was distributed, with Bangladesh showing the highest percentage, where about 98 per cent of participants reported increased confidence due to EDGE (Figure 4).
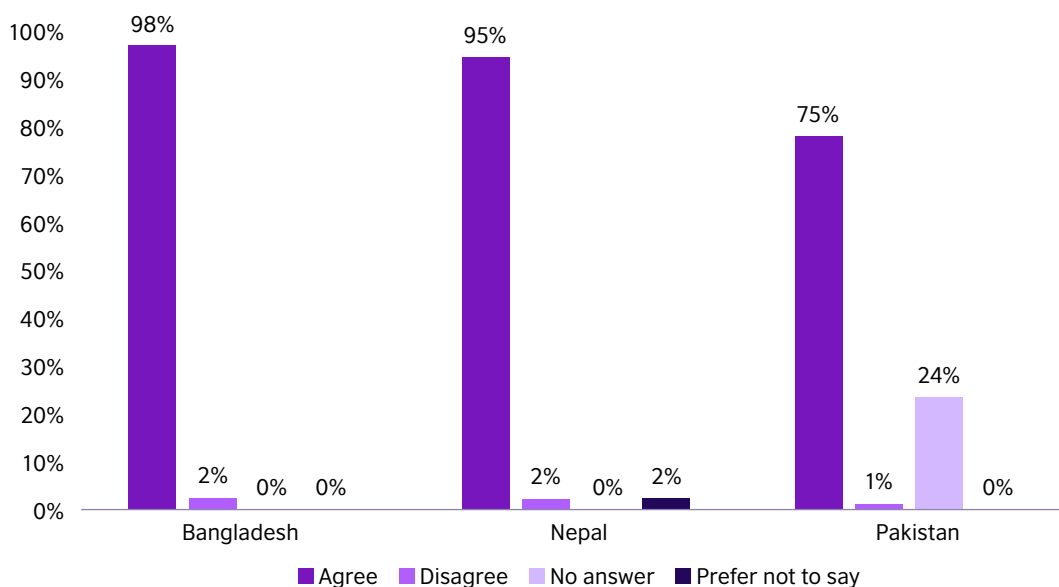
Figure 4: 'The EDGE programme has enabled me to be more confident', *N= 125 Bangladesh, 86 Nepal and 85 Pakistan*

Former participants reported a positive change in family and community attitudes towards girls, with 86 per cent of participants surveyed believing their families' attitudes had changed after they participated in the EDGE programme. In particular, 92 per cent from Bangladesh, 95 per cent from Nepal and 70 per cent from Pakistan believed this change occurred regarding girls making their own decisions and pursuing various opportunities. However, there is no direct evidence of changes in the perceptions of family and the community regarding the value of girls' education and employment being due to the EDGE programme.

3.3 Satisfaction level

The overall satisfaction levels with the EDGE programme are positive. In Bangladesh and Nepal, 96 per cent of participants reported being either satisfied or very satisfied with the EDGE programme. In Pakistan, all participants expressed satisfaction, with 43 per cent reporting satisfaction and 57 per cent being very satisfied.

3.4 Reflections on the programme delivery

This section highlights the reflections gathered from participants (surveyed across Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan), implementing partners and British Council country teams (all four countries) on the delivery of the programme, including on the most impactful activities.

3.4.1 Most impactful activities

As can be seen in Figure 5, around half of the former EDGE participants (47 out of 91) most appreciated the skills-building component (English/digital skills). The other half (44 out of 91) felt most impacted by the less direct outcomes and building social awareness. This includes the following.

- **Development of English language skills**: 30 per cent of participants noted changes in their English speaking and comprehension abilities as the most impactful activity.

- **Development of digital literacy and computer skills**: 22 per cent of participants mentioned learning how to operate computers and the use of the internet as the most impactful activity.

- **Social skills and collaboration with peers**: 18 per cent of participants listed the peer-led format of the programme as the most impactful. They noted it fostered social skills through group work and collaborative activities. Participants also appreciated learning to work as a team.

- **Confidence building**: 16 per cent of participants highlighted a marked increase in self-confidence among participants as the most important element of the programme.

- **Awareness of social issues**: 14 per cent of participants listed the component on social awareness of issues like child marriage and the dowry system as the most impactful activity.

In comparison, the implementing partners and British Council country teams listed the following as the most impactful elements of the programme.

- **Peer-led format**: The peer-led format was thought to be highly effective, as it created an environment where participants felt comfortable and at ease, allowing them to actively engage in various activities and discussions without the fear of judgement.

- **Community engagement**: Engagement with parents and the broader community played a crucial role in shifting perceptions regarding the significance of English and digital skills, as well as the overall importance of education, fostering a more supportive atmosphere for learners.

- **Approach to learning**: The activity-based approach was particularly useful in facilitating the learning process, as it encouraged participants to engage hands-on with the material.
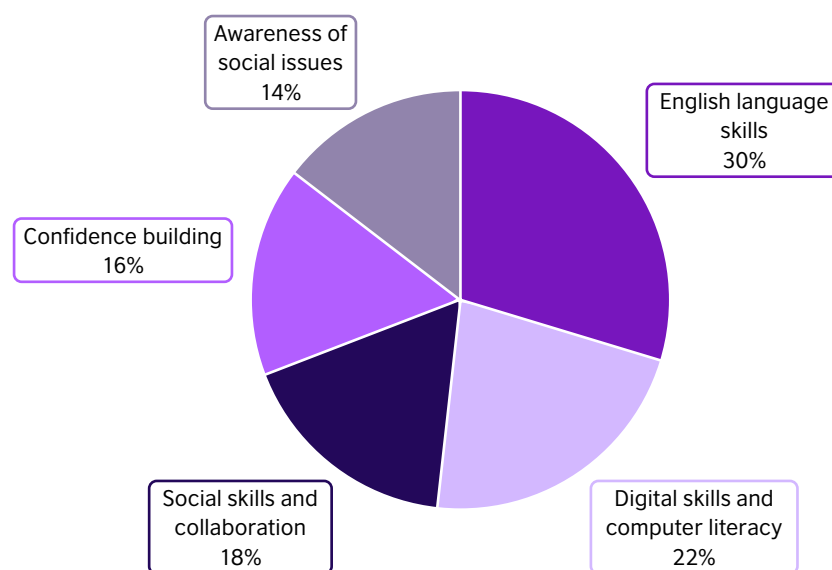

Figure 5: The most impactful activities of the EDGE programme, according to participants, *N= 91*

Summary

This section includes evidence of changes in the education, empowerment and satisfaction of former EDGE participants.

- In Nepal, although 64 per cent of participants are aged 18 and over, only 13 per cent are pursuing higher education, indicating potential barriers for girls to continue education beyond secondary school.

- Approximately 87 per cent of former EDGE participants reported that the programme helped them achieve better grades.

- Around 90 per cent of participants surveyed believed that the EDGE programme enabled them to make their own decisions.

- Former participants reported a positive change in family and community attitudes towards girls, with 92 per cent from Bangladesh, 95 per cent from Nepal and 70 per cent from Pakistan believing this change occurred, especially regarding girls making their own decisions and pursuing various opportunities.

- Overall satisfaction levels among former participants are positive.

- This section highlights the most impactful elements of the EDGE programme based on reflections from former EDGE participants, implementing partners and British Council country teams. The most impactful element for former participants was the development of English language and digital literacy skills.

Part 4

Understanding the long-term impact of EDGE

The EDGE programme has contributed to the positive impact experienced by former participants across various areas of their lives, including their empowerment, educational attainment, employment status and various socio-economic indicators.

It is important to recognise that while the EDGE programme had an impact on participants' education, employment and well-being, other factors – such as family support, guidance from teachers and formal education – have also contributed to these changes.

This section highlights **insights gathered across all four countries** using surveys, interviews and FGDs.

Table 4 summarises the strength of evidence across different areas of impact. We used four categories to determine the level of impact.

- **No evidence**: There is no evidence of impact found in the evaluation process due to the EDGE programme.
- **Limited evidence**: There is some evidence of impact, but it is limited in its sample size or does not fully demonstrate meaningful impact.
- **Emerging evidence**: There is evidence of impact, but more data is needed to clearly demonstrate the causal link between the programme's activities and its impact.
- **Stronger evidence**: The evidence clearly demonstrates a meaningful positive impact strongly linked to the programme activities.

Table 4: Strength of evidence across different areas of EDGE's impact

Area of assessment	Strength of evidence
Empowerment	
• Confidence	Stronger evidence
• Life skills	Emerging evidence
• Agency	Emerging evidence
Education	
• Continued education	Stronger evidence
• Better grades	Emerging evidence
• Sustainable use of English and digital skills	Emerging evidence
Employment	
• Employment status	Emerging evidence
• Employability	Emerging evidence
Socio-economic status	
• Child marriage	Emerging evidence
• Health and well-being	Emerging evidence

4.1 Impact on empowerment

By the end of the EDGE programme, participants reported growth in their social interaction skills, particularly in confidence, self-expression and leadership, alongside a heightened awareness and understanding of social issues. To assess empowerment, we focused on key areas of self-confidence and personal agency.

Participants reported a significant improvement in their confidence and life skills. This has enabled them to be agents of change in their society, including tutoring their siblings, advocating against undesirable social issues and supporting community businesses. They have reported expressing their opinions more clearly and pursuing various educational and employment goals. The impact on decision-making ability varies across families, where decision making is often seen as a collective process, with male members, such as fathers or uncles, holding primary authority.

Confidence

According to the survey, a large majority (around 98 per cent) of the former EDGE participants across Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan reported that their engagement in the programme enabled them to be more confident in themselves. Former participants from India interviewed during QuIP interviews also reflected that they are more confident now due to their participation in the EDGE programme: 'I am more confident and hard-working now. I feel it is due to the [EDGE programme] that it improved.'

Confidence seems to have shaped the ability of the participants in three ways. It has enabled them to:

- **actively express their opinions:** 'Before EDGE I couldn't speak with my friends properly. EDGE taught me how to present in public.' (Former EDGE participant from Nepal)

  One of the parents of a former EDGE participant from Nepal also shared positive impacts:

  My daughter makes me feel proud. She doesn't find it difficult to purchase medications written in English from the pharmacy. In addition, she has become more friendly and outspoken over the last eight years.

- **set goals, including education-related goals:** One of the participants from Bangladesh said 'The EDGE programme was the first thing that taught me to dream. It gave me confidence.' For others, the EDGE programme has 'inspired us to continue and maintain our academic pursuits. The club has inspired all of us to achieve something great in our life through education.' (Former EDGE participant from Nepal)

- **make their own decisions:** Approximately 90 per cent of participants surveyed felt that the programme empowered them to make their own decisions, as highlighted in Figure 6. However, the extent of their decision-making autonomy varied. According to feedback from parents, decision making within families is often a collective process rather than an individual one, with one parent noting: 'Decisions about our lives are made collectively and not by one person. All family members are involved; there is not a single person who takes the lead.'

Some parents shared that their daughters' involvement in decision making may be limited to situations where their input is seen as essential. In some cases, male family members, such as a father or uncle, retain the primary decision-making authority. One parent described this dynamic: 'My husband makes decisions and then shares them with us. Sometimes he discusses his decision with other family members.' Another added 'My brothers make decisions. My daughters and I have no say in family decisions.'
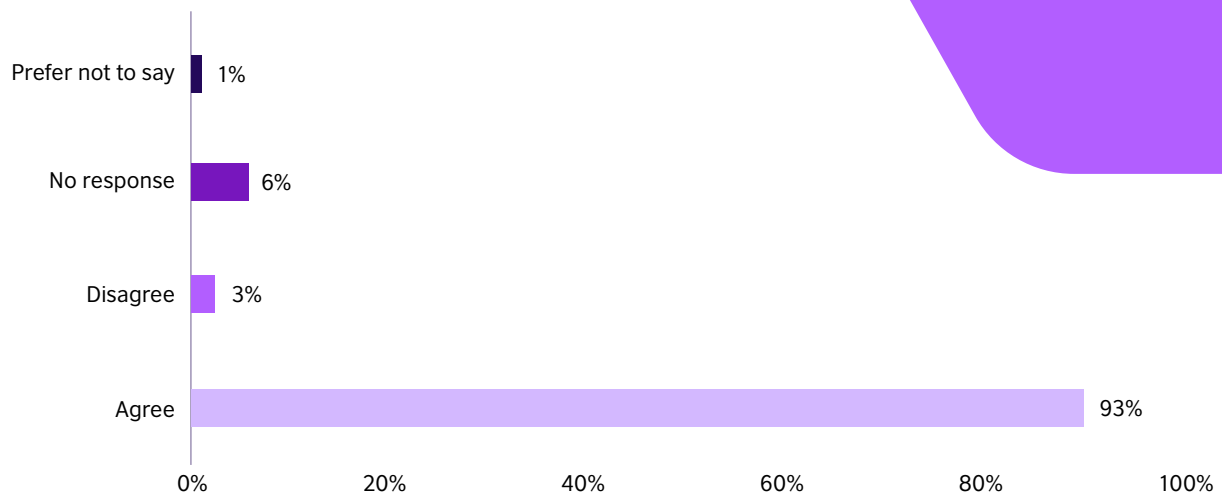
Figure 6: 'The EDGE programme has enabled me to make my own decisions', *N= 300*

Agency

The EDGE programme helped empower former participants to build fulfilling lives and contribute positively to society. Some evidence of how EDGE has done this includes:

- **educating others**: Many participants now tutor their siblings and others in their community. A parent from India noted 'Yes, my daughter has become comfortable with using a mobile and even guides others on its uses. She has also started teaching her younger brother English.'
- **advocating against social issues**: Some participants have raised their voices on critical issues like child marriage, harassment and access to education. One parent from Bangladesh expressed pride in their daughter's independence, saying 'I feel proud when I see my daughter making wise decisions in emergencies. She helped prevent child marriage in our community.' Another participant from India shared:

> *My siblings look up to me and feel inspired. I encourage others in the community to go to school, showing them that education is more valuable than staying at home. Two children have started school thanks to my encouragement.*

- **supporting community businesses:** Some participants have provided guidance to community members starting businesses by providing support on digital platforms and financial advice. A former participant from Bangladesh explained:

> *I helped a woman start her business, offering financial support as well as suggestions and guidance. My digital skills enabled me to do this, and she successfully opened a new pharmacy.*

4.2 Impact on education

The EDGE programme contributed towards empowering participants to pursue higher education. It did so by highlighting the importance of education and fostering in participants an understanding of its transformative role in their lives and the know-how of digital tools for self-paced learning. The programme enabled higher grades, while fine-tuning participants' English and digital skills. However, the impact on English and digital skills may not have been sustained due to systemic barriers experienced post-programme.

Pursuing higher education

Of participants surveyed, 88 per cent felt that the programme empowered them to pursue higher education: 83 per cent, 92 per cent and 90 per cent in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan respectively (Figure 7). This finding is particularly significant when contrasted with the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for higher education in these countries, which stands at 19 per cent in Bangladesh, 36 per cent in Nepal and a mere 9 per cent in Pakistan.

Some of the ways participants felt enabled to pursue higher education were:

- **educating them on the role of education**

  Most girls in our culture and community are either completely illiterate or do not receive higher education. The EDGE club has helped me to know and understand how important education is especially for girls. (EDGE participant from Nepal)

- **making education accessible through the know-how of digital tools for self-paced learning**.

  Due to the EDGE programme I learnt about the internet and social life. I feel due to my learnings [during the programme] *I can pursue higher education.* (Former EDGE participant from Pakistan)

It is crucial to note that while the role of EDGE has been essential, participants also reported other factors – like the support of family members and the motivation to be financially independent – that led them to pursue higher education:

> *I never compromise on my studies. I always score well in exams. In 2016, I was a grade 8 student in a rural school, and now I am a student at Dhaka University, the best educational institution in the country. I am still performing well in my exams. My willpower and the inspiration from my family helped me develop these skills. And of course, the EDGE programme helped me on this journey. This programme gave me courage and self-confidence.*
> (Participant from Bangladesh)
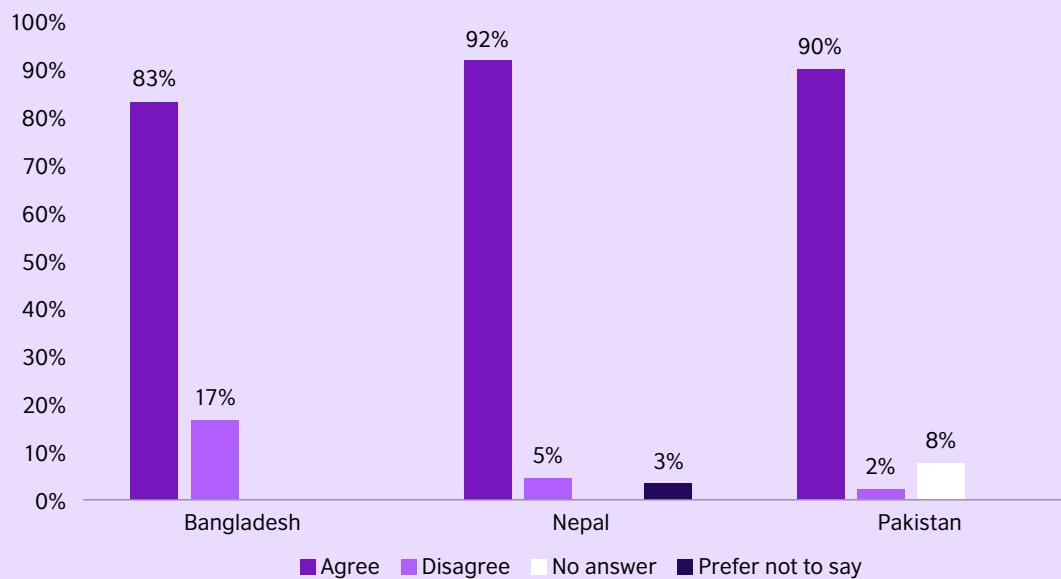
Figure 7: Response to the statement 'My participation in the EDGE programme has enabled me to pursue higher education', *N= 125 Bangladesh, 86 Nepal and 89 Pakistan*

Better performance in schools

Approximately 87 per cent of participants surveyed across Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan reported that the programme helped them achieve better grades during their education. While participants self-reported improved academic performance, this evaluation has not been able to verify changes in scores or cross-check these claims with actual academic records. Therefore, it is important to interpret these findings with caution regarding the extent of the programme's impact on academic outcomes.

Further, the ability of the girls to score better grades cannot be entirely attributed to EDGE. Other factors, including private tutoring, have also enabled them to do so. One former EDGE participant reflected that:

> *Yes, I have good English and Digital skills. In the last eight years, I improved myself more with these skills. In EDGE training I learnt a lot, and then I continued this learning through private coaching, and self-study. I practise IT skills in the University library. The EDGE programme helped me. I also took help from some other sources.*

(Participant from Bangladesh)

Impact on digital and English skills

Former participants have shown ongoing progress in their English and digital skills, utilising these improvements to support their education. For example, a participant from India shared 'I wanted to study earlier but faced financial difficulties and lacked resources. Using a phone has helped me study better, as I can look up information I didn't know before.' This quote highlights how the programme enabled the former participants to develop the know-how of various tools for self-paced learning.

A family member in Nepal noted:

> *My daughter has learned to speak in English confidently. Participation in this programme has had a positive impact on her, and I feel proud knowing she learned how to use a computer by grade 8. I think the* [EDGE] *programme had a positive effect, especially since daughters from poor families like ours are fortunate to gain these skills and resources.*

However, some participants reported that the programme's impact on their skill retention was not fully sustainable. Over time, their proficiency in English and digital skills has diminished to a more basic level, with some noting that 'the momentum is lost'. This decline was often linked to marriage and a lack of infrastructure and opportunities to regularly practise these skills.

One participant from India explained:

> *Since marriage, I haven't kept up with my English or digital skills. I can still write essays in English, but my speaking ability is limited to basic English. My digital skills are better than my English skills, but I don't remember everything I learned at the EDGE club. If I refer to my notes, I could do it again – I can turn on and off a computer, create files, and use apps like Paint and MS Office. But without regular practice, my skills have faded.*

4.3 Impact on employment

The employment status of the former EDGE programme participants varies significantly. The EDGE programme, primarily through digital and English skills, has supported participants to secure employment. However, other factors, including motivation to achieve financial independence, also contribute to this change.

Potential impact on employment status varies significantly

At the time of the survey, approximately 22 per cent of former EDGE participants surveyed were employed, while 52 per cent were unemployed, and 22 per cent were still studying (4 per cent did not respond). Around 66 per cent of those employed were 18 and above.

Across the three countries, Bangladesh had the highest employment rate, with 34 per cent of participants being self-employed or in other jobs. In contrast, Nepal had the highest unemployment rate among participants.

Around 46 per cent of the former participants surveyed believed that the knowledge and skills acquired during the EDGE programme, including digital and English skills, helped them secure a job or start their own business. Participants who were PGLs seemed to be more likely to be employed. One of the former participants from Nepal reflected:

> *The employment at* [an NGO in Nepal] *was made possible by my professional experience, skills and knowledge gained during my time working as a PGL at the EDGE programme.*

Digital and English skills enhanced the employability of former participants

According to the survey, the knowledge and skills imparted during the EDGE programme, such as digital and English skills, have proven useful in securing employment for 46 per cent of participants. Additionally, the confidence and motivation gained through the programme encouraged participants to pursue various career goals. Performing the role of a PGL, combined with the skills acquired, further supported former participants in obtaining jobs. One participant from Bangladesh shared:

> *I do private tuition alongside my studies and have been doing this for four years, working 4–5 hours each day. I always wanted to work and earn money. My English and digital skills helped me start this job.*

While the impact of the EDGE programme on employment is emerging, other factors also contributed to participants' success. These include confidence, support from family and strong motivation to achieve financial independence. In several cases, girls' confidence and support from family can be attributed to the EDGE programme, whereas the rest of the factors are independent of it. These are discussed further in Part 5.

4.4 Impact on socio-economic status

The EDGE programme has positively impacted participants by influencing their views on marriage, health and well-being. Other factors, including family support and school awareness, have also contributed to these changes.

EDGE may have contributed to reducing child marriage rates across former participants

The EDGE programme, with its focus on social awareness, has contributed to changes in the beliefs and behaviour of former participants around child marriage. At the time of our survey, approximately 28 per cent of former EDGE participants surveyed were married. The available data for the average age at which surveyed former EDGE participants married is limited to Bangladesh. Among the participants surveyed from Bangladesh, the average age of marriage was 22 years. Several participants shared how the programme influenced their perspectives on marriage. One former participant from Nepal expressed 'I want to marry at the age of 23 or 24. I still have to study. In the EDGE club, we learned that child marriage is not good for many reasons.'

While the EDGE programme has helped shape participants' views on the appropriate age for marriage, other factors have likely influenced their decisions to delay marriage until after 18 years of age. These include family support and a desire to pursue personal goals. For example, one participant from Nepal shared 'Education is crucial for women before marriage, as it prevents early marriage under the age of 20. My parents want me to complete my education and find employment before marrying.'

EDGE improved participants' knowledge of health

Around 94 per cent of former EDGE participants said that they have been able to access resources like hospitals and medicines when sick. Notably, these statistics vary by country: 97 per cent in Nepal and 74 per cent in Pakistan. When comparing these figures to national statistics, the disparities become evident. In Nepal, approximately 70 per cent of the population has access to essential health services. In Pakistan, the situation is even more challenging, with 50 per cent of the population having no access to basic primary healthcare services.

Similarly, 72 per cent of participants have been able to access different resources needed for family planning and maternal health (e.g. contraceptives, maternal care medicines, health check-ups, etc.; Figure 8). The access to better healthcare services for EDGE participants may be due to several factors, such as access to affordable healthcare, proximity of healthcare facilities, differences in awareness or knowledge about available resources, or the prioritisation of specific health needs within each group.

The evidence seems to suggest that the EDGE programme provided girls with knowledge about nutrition, health and personal well-being:

> *I think I have been able to take good care of my health and nutrition and that of my family. When I was in EDGE Club, we discussed the ways we could look after ourselves, our family and our society's well-being.*
> (Former EDGE participant from Bangladesh)

Another participant, who had dropped out of formal education and was married, continued to utilise the health and well-being skills learned during EDGE club meetings to create healthier lifestyles for herself and her family.

Therefore, EDGE may not have directly influenced access to healthcare services and overall well-being, but it has contributed to raising awareness among former participants about leading a healthy lifestyle and may have indirectly facilitated their ability to access healthcare services.
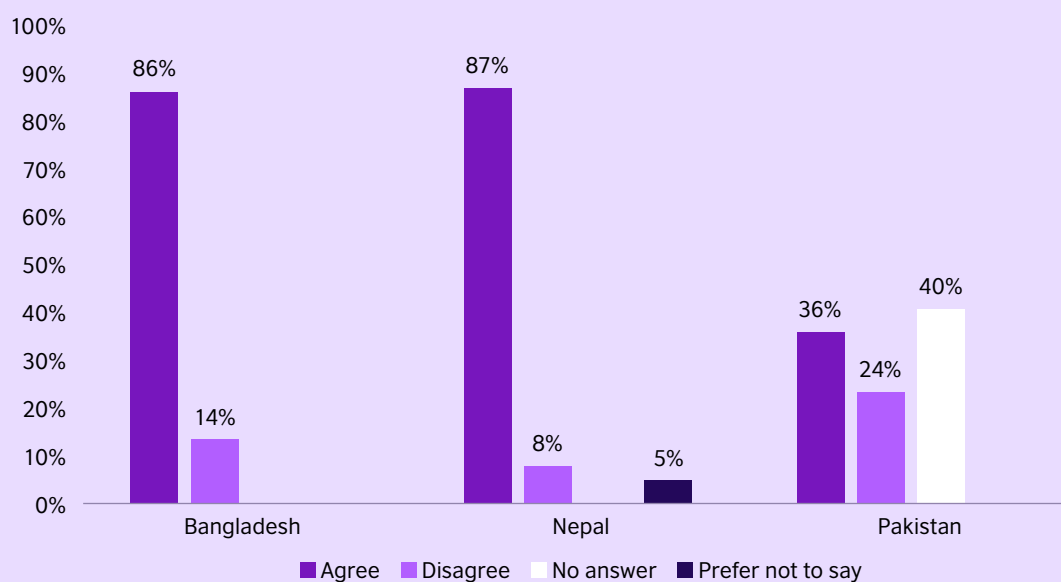

Figure 8: Response to the statement 'I have been able to access different resources needed for family planning and maternal health', *N= 300*

4.5 Theory of Change outcomes

This section highlights the impact identified during this evaluation in line with the EDGE Theory of Change (ToC).

Behaviour changes for girls

The EDGE ToC identified increased self-efficacy and personal agency as key outcomes for girls, including greater confidence in their ability to exert control over their own behaviour and social environment. This evaluation confirmed that the EDGE programme significantly boosted participants' confidence, an impact that has been sustained over the long term. While girls reported a sense of control over decision making, particularly in areas concerning their own lives, data from parents indicated that this control varies, depending on family dynamics and specific issues. The ToC also defined personal agency as the girls' ability to continue their education, delay marriage and seek employment. Existing evidence does seem to suggest that girls are empowered to continue their education and delay marriage. However, the impact on their ability to secure employment and achieve financial independence needs to be further established.

Behaviour changes for parents and the community

This evaluation concluded that the EDGE programme has had a significant positive impact on the value placed on girls' education and employment by their parents and the community. This includes positive changes in attitudes towards girls making their own decisions about their lives and pursuing various educational or professional opportunities. However, it is important to note that these findings are based on self-reported data from EDGE participants. Insights into the data collected from family members and community leaders to corroborate these perceptions are limited.

Summary

The EDGE programme has had an impact on different areas of former participants' lives, including:

- empowerment: EDGE has led to increased confidence and ability to create change
- education: EDGE has enabled former participants to continue their education and achieve better grades
- employment: The digital and English skills imparted through EDGE seem to be contributing to participants' ability to secure employment
- socio-economic status: Many EDGE participants are choosing to marry after 18 years of age and prioritise marriage after completing educational/employment goals.

While the EDGE programme had an impact on participants' education, employment and well-being, other factors – such as family support, guidance from teachers and formal education – have also contributed to these changes.

Part 5

Enablers and deterrents to long-term impact

While the EDGE programme has had several areas of long-term impact across the four countries, it is essential to understand the enablers and deterrents to achieving this impact. The sections below elaborate on these enablers and deterrents, including support from family, financial condition, formal education, infrastructure and marriage status.

5.1 Enablers for long-term impact

This section highlights several factors that have enabled the EDGE participants to achieve the long-term impact mentioned in the sections above. These include support of family, formal education and motivation to be financially independent.

The causal map in Figure 9 is informed by the QuIP interviews held with former EDGE participants. It illustrates the key enablers that contributed to the positive impacts of the EDGE programme. The map **flows from left to right**, with the influence factors on the left leading to the consequence factors on the right (drivers and outcomes). The **thickness** of the arrows relates to the number of times that particular influence to consequence relationship was cited. **Numbers** have also been added to the arrows to show the precise frequency count. The letters at the end of the labels reflect the following:

- **[E]** indicates that the cause–effect relationship was **explicitly** mentioned by the interviewee
- **[I]** indicates that the relationship was **implicitly** mentioned (e.g. referring to the programme indirectly as 'digital skills' or 'English training')
- **[P]** denotes a **positive** relationship or outcome.

The outcomes include enhancements in the participants' ability to care for their health and well-being, represented as 'Well-being [P]', as well as their capacity to make independent decisions, labelled 'Decision-making [P]'. Additionally, the map highlights the role of girls in creating societal change, denoted as 'Agents of change [P]'.
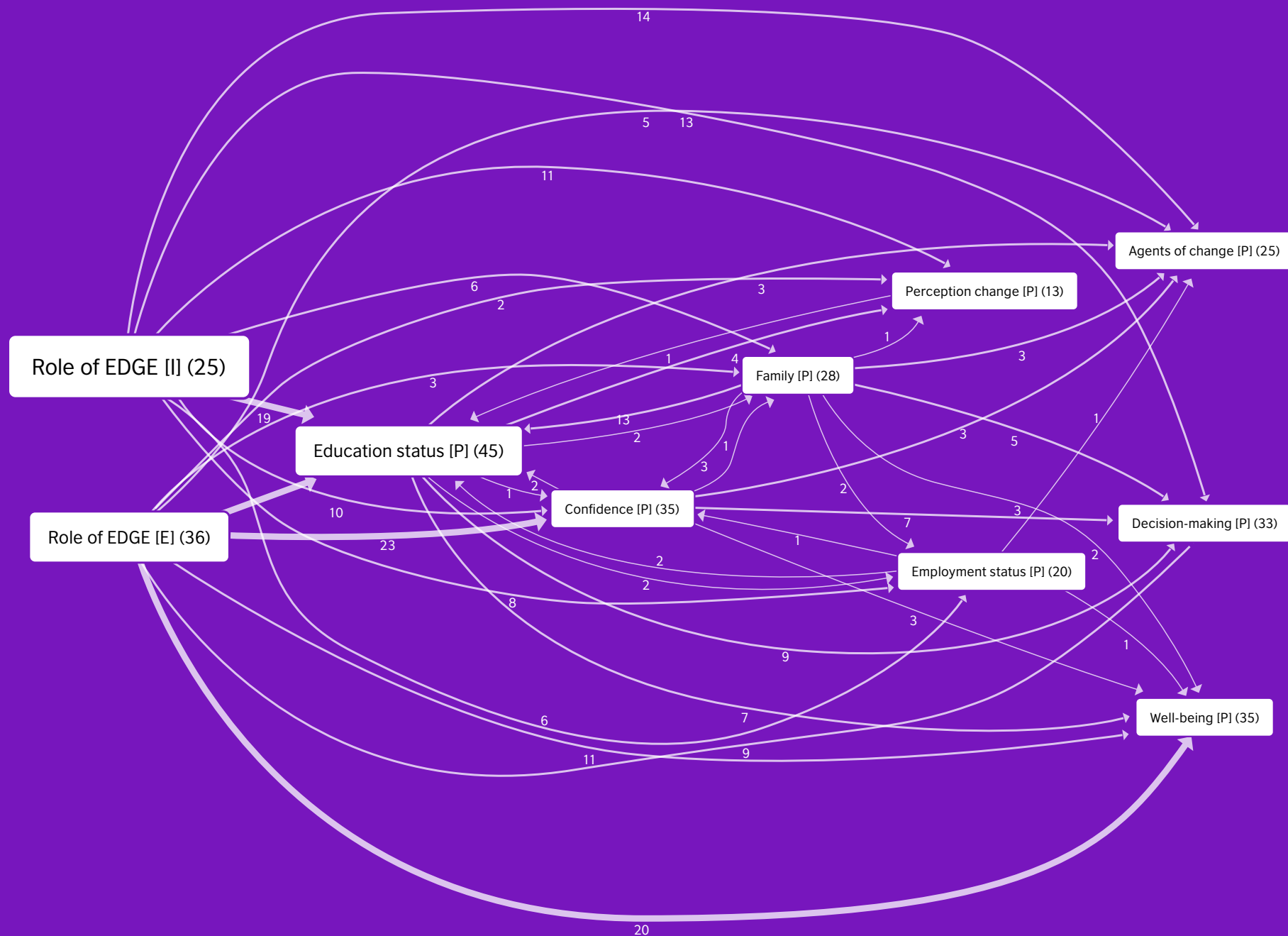
Figure 9: Causal map of EDGE's long-term impact

Several factors are identified as both **enablers and outcomes** of the EDGE programme. These include:

- continued education, referred to as 'Education status [P]'
- increase in confidence among girls, called 'Confidence [P]'
- support from families for girls pursuing education and employment, represented as 'Family [P]'
- the positive shift in the attitudes of families and the community regarding the value of girls, indicated as a 'Perception change [P]'
- lastly, the interest or ability of participants to secure employment opportunities, shown as 'Employment status [P]'.

Together, these factors underscore the comprehensive impact of the EDGE programme on the participants and their communities.

Although the causal map is informed solely by interviews with former participants, the remainder of this section highlights overall enablers identified by interviews/FGDs with various stakeholders, including former participants, parents, community members, British Council team members and implementing partners.

Family

Family support has proven to be essential for former participants in achieving their educational and professional success. One of the participants recalled that her family 'often motivated me to do good in my studies' and that her mother 'pushed me to become a teacher and motivated me to work' (participant from Nepal). The different ways the families support their daughters includes the following.

- Families often guide their daughters toward financial independence and informed choices regarding marriage: 'My family members value education more than getting married young' (former participant from Nepal).
- Families who are aware of health and well-being make a conscious effort to ensure that girls receive the necessary care and nutrition, empowering them to focus on their studies and personal growth. One participant from Bangladesh described the care she receives at home, saying 'I eat well and eat right … most of the time; I feel my parents are taking care of me.'

- For many participants, having role models within their families has been instrumental in encouraging them to prioritise their careers and delay marriage, allowing them to make choices based on personal goals and circumstances. These influences are tangible examples of women who have succeeded in professional fields, inspiring confidence and ambition.

One participant from India shared that her role models include her aunt and sister-in-law, both of whom are teachers. She is also motivated by TV shows that depict women in high-status roles, such as civil servants and doctors:

> *Observing real-life examples of women who have succeeded in such fields, along with the fact that girls often excel in sports and education, motivate me and reinforce my belief in the potential for women to achieve great things. For me, the choice of marriage age – whether 22 or 25 – will depend on my preferences and circumstances.*

Another participant explained that her family's emphasis on employment has influenced her drive to work – 'Everyone in my family is employed' – and she looks up to her sister, who works for a telecommunications company. Despite her current pregnancy, she has adapted her aspirations to her situation by offering coaching from home, showing resilience and commitment to her professional goals. Parents of former participants that we have spoken to acknowledge the pivotal role of family in shaping their daughters' futures. For instance, the mother of a participant from India mentioned:

> *I always encourage my daughter to study. She is told to spend time studying and not doing any household chores. Elders always encourage her. Everyone wants her to become financially independent so that for her needs, she doesn't have to depend on anyone.*

Similarly, a family member in Nepal emphasised that 'daughters must be financially independent through education to lead fulfilling lives.'

These examples underscore the powerful role of family role models and societal influences in shaping former participants' aspirations, encouraging them to pursue employment and allowing them the freedom to make marriage decisions based on their own readiness and circumstances.

Formal education

Formal education, including guidance from teachers, was a factor in the positive impact on former participants, shaping their views on health, well-being, child marriage, the importance of education and leadership. This influence is clear in their evolving perspectives and growing capabilities in making personal and societal decisions.

One former participant from Bangladesh shared how education has shaped her **future plans**, saying 'I want to get married when I will stand on my own feet and take responsibility for my family and society. Education has influenced my decision about the age.' Another former participant from the same region highlighted the sense of empowerment she gained, stating 'I do believe that I have the capability to create a fulfilling life for myself, my family, my society. EDGE Club meetings and school education have contributed to this change in me.'

The combination of education and involvement in EDGE has supported girls in building **confidence and leadership** skills. A former participant from Bangladesh reflected:

> *I have learned a lot of things that have guided me to become more confident and developed my leadership skills. EDGE Club, school education, and involvement in child club have led to these changes.*

Another former participant, from Nepal, stated 'With my age and maturity, my decision-making ability has been improved. This is due to family support, and education.'

Teachers have also played a transformative role. One former participant from India described the impact of her college teacher's encouragement:

> *During class, he would tell us that one person can change the world if they want to. All that they need is the ability to do something. If you are not successful, nobody will listen to you. If you want to change something about society, become capable of that. Do something with your life first.*

Additionally, education has encouraged a focus on **health and self-care**. One former participant from India, who moved from home to a hostel, shared:

> *Previously, I was at home, so nutrition was taken care of by my parents, but now I stay in a hostel, so I take care of myself. My teachers also play an important role in that as they keep guiding me about health and well-being.*

Socio-economic status

For former participants, challenging socio-economic conditions have fuelled their determination to pursue education and employment as a means to support their families and break the cycle of poverty. Growing up in financially disadvantaged circumstances has transformed education into a path toward empowerment and economic security.

One participant from India shared how witnessing her father's hard work as a labourer motivated her to contribute financially: 'I saw my father working very hard as a labourer. I wanted to support him after taking up the job, so I continued my job.' This desire to ease her family's burden underscores the significance of education as a gateway to financial independence.

A former participant from Nepal expressed a similar perspective, stating:

> *Growing up in a financially disadvantaged environment has motivated me to continue my education, viewing it not only as a means to acquire knowledge but also as a tool for empowerment, breaking poverty's cycle, and paving the way for a secure future. Currently, I am pursuing a comprehensive management education.*

Motivation to be financially independent

Motivation to be financially independent has empowered former participants to set and pursue personal and professional goals.

A former participant from Nepal shared how her educational goals are closely tied to her aspirations for independence, saying:

> *I would want to marry at the age of around 27–28. Before my marriage, I want to first complete my studies and be independent. My decision about when I want to be married has been affected by my intense desire to pass the Lok Sewa exam.*[3]

Her vision for her future highlights the strong link between educational achievements and the desire for self-sufficiency.

Similarly, a former participant from India noted 'I always wanted to become financially independent by taking up a job, this has changed my perspective and encouraged me to study hard', illustrating how career aspirations can transform academic motivation. Another former participant from Bangladesh added 'A good job with a good income is my motivational factor for my education', underscoring the impact of financial goals on educational dedication.

For some former participants, the desire to earn and support their families has led them to take on part-time work while studying. As one former participant from Bangladesh shared, 'I have been doing private tuition besides my study for the last four years. Yes, I always wanted to work and earn money. This is helpful for my family and for myself.'

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3   The *Lok Sewa* exam in Nepal is a competitive examination conducted by the Public Service Commission of Nepal (*Lok Sewa Aayog*) for recruiting civil servants across various government ministries and departments.

5.2 Deterrents to long-term impact

Several deterrents presented challenges to achieving long-term impact. These include marriage, familial attitude, insufficient infrastructure, a lack of ongoing support and a lack of financial resources. These are explained in more detail below.

Marriage

Marriage has influenced the educational journeys of participants, often creating barriers to continued learning and personal development. For some former participants, marriage has led to a shift in priorities and responsibilities, making it difficult to focus on education or career ambitions.

Marriage for some has created challenges in balancing academic pursuits with new responsibilities, resulting in declining academic performance: 'I was a good student in school. I used to score very well in exams. But after marriage, I cannot concentrate on my study properly. My performance is falling down' (participant from Bangladesh).

For other former participants from Bangladesh, marriage not only disrupted their studies but also led to family obligations that limited their ability to continue their education. One participant shared 'I could not continue my education after Secondary School. I got married and gave birth to my two kids, so I got busy with them.' For others, marriage resulted in a complete shift away from education and employment, leading to dependency on husbands and in-laws: 'I got married. This is the only change in my life in the last eight years. I am not studying, not doing any job, I am fully dependent on my husband and in-laws.'

These stories might indicate that marriage, while a significant life event, can sometimes limit educational and career opportunities for women, depending on personal, familial and societal factors.

Attitudes of families

The attitudes of families toward girls' employment have an impact on their professional journeys. In cases where families place little value on employment for girls, former EDGE participants have faced discouragement: 'I was once getting the job but was not allowed to take it [by my family]. Now I am searching for one but not getting it. I am a little disappointed but trying hard' (participant from India). Her situation highlights the frustration that can arise when familial restrictions prevent girls from taking advantage of opportunities, creating obstacles that are difficult to overcome.

For others, the lack of support has left them to navigate the path to employment on their own: 'I am unemployed right now. For my first job, I went looking on my own. There was nobody around to help me' (former participant from Nepal). Her statement underscores how a lack of family encouragement can affect self-confidence, leaving young women feeling unsupported in their career aspirations. Another former participant from Bangladesh cited familial restrictions, saying 'I could not continue my education after Secondary School. My in-laws do not allow me.'

In many communities, families might prioritise boys' education while emphasising marriage for girls. As one community member from Bangladesh put it, 'Maximum families in Bangladesh strongly focus on boys' education and girls to get married as soon as possible. Boys are meant to do jobs, and girls are for marriage.' This mindset can hinder girls' opportunities for professional growth and independence, as the value placed on education and employment for girls is often diminished in favour of traditional gender roles.

Lack of infrastructure and ongoing support

Participants have faced challenges in applying and developing their English and digital skills due to the lack of infrastructure and ongoing support. Limited access to essential tools such as computers, smartphones and the internet has hindered their ability to practise these skills, leading to stagnation or a decline in their proficiency.

A participant from Bangladesh shared 'My skills have gone down a bit these days as there are hardly any computers out there and my personal laptop has stopped working.'

Lack of financial resources

The lack of financial resources within households has forced some participants to drop out of school or forgo higher education due to an inability to cover tuition and other costs. This financial instability not only disrupts their education but also affects their quality of life and well-being.

A participant from Bangladesh shared the impact of financial constraints on her education: 'As my parents had no money to pay for my grade 9 exam, I could not appear in the exam, and I left school.'

Another participant from India highlighted how economic challenges have affected her family's diet and health:

I am aware of a balanced diet, nutrition, and health. But due to the poor financial conditions, it's difficult to get the right food. In the present conditions, right now, it's more important to get daily bread.

Reflection from TSIC

When analysing enablers and deterrents, it's important to recognise that they often don't act in isolation. Multiple factors can simultaneously influence a person's decisions and outcomes, such as financial constraints coupled with limited access to infrastructure or family support. Understanding the combined impact of these factors is crucial for a deeper insight into how they affect education and career paths. This interconnected perspective presents an interesting hypothesis to test in future evaluations, helping to design more effective, holistic interventions.

Summary

This section highlights how the long-term impact achieved by the EDGE programme can be linked to several enablers and deterrents. These are critical when determining the design of the programme and identifying stakeholders to engage during the programme.

The enablers that have led to the long-term impact include:

- support of family
- formal education
- motivation to be financially independent

On the other hand, the deterrents include:

- marriage
- familial attitude
- insufficient infrastructure and a lack of ongoing support
- lack of financial resources.

Part 6

Recommendations

This section provides feedback and recommendations for the programme, along with key lessons learned. Its purpose is to help enhance the impact and sustainability of the programme, and provide guidance for conducting efficient and inclusive assessments for similar programmes. The feedback and recommendations are drawn from EDGE stakeholders' insights and experiences as well as from TSIC.

6.1 Recommendations from EDGE stakeholders

Stakeholders have identified several key areas for improvement to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of similar programmes. These recommendations are as follows.

- **Enhancing continued engagement**: To support former participants in further developing their skills, it is essential to offer ongoing guidance and resources. This could include career counselling services, workshops and digital-skills training sessions. By accessing continuing support, participants can better navigate their educational and professional paths.

- **Contextualised resources and curriculum**: It is crucial to design educational resources and curricula that are tailored to meet the specific needs and contexts of local communities. This includes the provision of multilingual materials to ensure accessibility for all participants. By aligning resources with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of learners, programmes can improve engagement and understanding.

- **Curriculum relevance:** Curricula should be continually updated to reflect current skill demands in the marketplace. By ensuring that the skills taught are relevant and aligned with industry needs, programmes can better prepare participants for future opportunities and challenges.

- **Active partner engagement**: It is important to actively involve implementing partners in the programme design process. Regularly gathering their feedback and insights will enhance the effectiveness of the programme and ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of participants and the community at large. This collaborative approach can lead to more impactful outcomes and a stronger network of support. In addition, mechanisms should be established in partner contracts to encourage their involvement beyond active project cycles.

By addressing these areas of improvement, programmes can better support participants in their ongoing development and ensure that the skills and knowledge gained are effectively utilised in their ongoing lives.

6.2 Recommendations from TSIC

- **Provide long-term support**

  A long-term engagement strategy would significantly shape the trajectories of participants, providing them with continuous opportunities for growth. Training offerings could include emerging skills, such as artificial intelligence, and provide different levels of training over the years to cater to the evolving needs of participants. Additionally, maintaining connections with alumni networks who have successfully navigated their educational and career paths could foster a culture of mentorship, where they serve as role models and guide current programme participants.

- **Family support and community mobilisation is critical**

  Recognising the importance of family support in determining the life outcomes of programme participants is essential. Programmes should mobilise community resources through targeted awareness initiatives at various stages of engagement. This mobilisation could begin before enrolment, encouraging communities to actively support and enrol girls in the programme. By fostering a supportive environment at the community level, programmes like EDGE can enhance the commitment to girls' education and well-being.

- **Continue to embed a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) lens**

  Programmes like EDGE should actively seek to identify and engage with communities that have not yet participated in a similar initiative. By broadening the reach, this can ensure that all girls, regardless of their background, have access to the opportunities provided by the programme.

- **Support the ecosystem and use a systems change lens**

  Programmes like EDGE operate within a complex ecosystem, where various actors – including formal education systems, educators, families, communities, learning infrastructure and prevailing social norms – interact and influence one another. It is essential to continually assess the enablers and deterrents within this ecosystem that affect impact and sustainability. Clearly outlining strategies to actively consider challenges such as inadequate learning infrastructure, social issues like child marriage, and insufficient family support for girls' education and employment will be crucial. By considering these systemic barriers during the programme design stage, programmes can enhance their effectiveness and foster a more supportive environment for girls' education.

Summary

This section includes recommendations from various stakeholders engaged with the programme as well as TSIC. These recommendations are focused on:

- building long-term engagement with programme participants across several years
- developing stronger and long-term relationships with implementing partners
- continuing to mobilise family and community members to address cultural norms posing barriers to girls' educational and employment outcomes
- curating curricula that meet the local demands and skills of current job markets
- using a systems change lens during programme design and continuing to embed a DEI lens.

Part 7

Conclusion

The British Council, in collaboration with partner organisations across South Asia, implemented the English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) non-formal girls' education programme in 2016. Since its inception, EDGE has reached over 20,000 young women and girls aged between 13 and 19. The objective of EDGE is to enhance the life prospects of adolescent girls in socio-economically marginalised communities.

The EDGE programme was delivered across four countries – Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan – and focused on three key skills: English, digital literacy and social awareness. The evaluation utilised a mixed-methods approach, combining primary data collection and secondary document review across the four countries.

The EDGE programme showed evidence of impact on former participants, enhancing their English and digital skills, building confidence, increasing awareness of social issues and fostering community engagement. Participants reported continued education and an emerging influence on employability, with a shift towards prioritising marriage only after achieving educational or employment goals. While the impact of the programme on education, employment and well-being is evident, additional factors – such as family support, formal education and economic motivation – also played a role.

Long-term impact was facilitated by enablers like family support and financial independence goals, while barriers such as early marriage, cultural attitudes and limited resources remain challenges. Key recommendations include maintaining long-term engagement with participants, strengthening relationships with implementing partners, mobilising community support to address cultural barriers and tailoring curricula to local job market needs, all with a systems change and DEI focus.