

# Unlocking Potential:

## The Transformative Power of the Second Round of Tech Age Girls





## What is Tech Age Girls?

Tech Age Girls (TAG) is a holistic leadership development program for girls, developed and refined by IREX globally and introduced to Nepal in partnership with READ in 2018. TAG combines technology, leadership, and life skills training with practical assignments and community engagement projects that build critical leadership and 21st-century skills including higher-order thinking, collaboration, positive self-concept, adaptability, and resilience. READ aims for TAG graduates and those they go on to train to have the skills and confidence to succeed at school, set and pursue ambitious educational and professional goals, and become leaders creating positive change in their families and communities by promoting sustainable development and celebrating diversity and inclusion. **To date, 785 young women have graduated from the TAG program, and have gone on to provide formal training to 4,882 peers and have informally reached more than 50,000 people.**

TAG is offered in three phases, starting with a large number of girls receiving general ICT and leadership training. In this phase, girls receive practical exercises to put their new skills to use. Top performers advance to subsequent phases with more in-depth skills development, community projects, and cascade training for their peers. Finally, the program rewards the most motivated and high-performing 25 girls with expanded opportunities to grow their leadership potential. They are sent to a National Leadership Conference and establish Girls Leadership Groups within their communities. These future leaders continue to conduct cascade training to share what they've learned with their family and peers, broadening the impact of TAG and sustaining the work long beyond the end of the program. Throughout the program regular events are held with local governments, parents, schools, and other stakeholders to highlight the important leadership role young women can play in their families and communities.

## Overview of Tech Age Girls Round 2

The second round of the Tech Age Girls (TAG) program, generously funded by the L'Oréal Fund for Women, was implemented from January 2023 to June 2024, providing direct support to nearly 3,000 youth and indirect support to over 25,500 individuals. Throughout the program, READ engaged intensively with 285 girls in grades 9-12, encouraging them to dream big while equipping them with the skills, confidence, and knowledge needed to pursue their goals. These young women subsequently trained over 2,700 peers through school and community events on topics such as menstrual hygiene management, social media literacy, child marriage prevention, climate change adaptation, and resources for addressing gender-based violence.

In addition to peer-led training, participants also led community projects, including impactful street dramas highlighting the dowry system and its effects on child marriage and girls' education, initiatives to improve local waste management infrastructure and practices, and interactive events designed to help residents prepare for common natural disasters like flooding. Building on this success, 100 TAG graduates are now stepping into roles as trainers and mentors for the next generation of TAG participants.

## TAG Program Centers



The program operated in rural areas of 5 districts—Parbat, Kaski, Lalitpur, Nawalparasi, and Chitwan—each through a sustainable, locally-led READ Community Library and Resource Center (READ Center) eager to implement and sustain the program.

The program was implemented in close coordination with the Municipality and Ward offices, District Education Office, and schools adding value to the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) of Nepal's Ministry of Education and its goal to provide quality education, gender-friendly schools, and empower girls to create a better future.



» Participants performing a street drama to educate on the negative impact of the dowry system.

## Sample of TAG Training Topics

### Phase I

57 hours of Training

- Introduction to ICT hardware and software such as MS Office
- Media literacy
- Internet safety
- Gender and social inclusion
- Lifeskills and leadership

### Phase II

85 hours of Training

- Coding with Microsoft Sr. Software Engineer
- Understanding community needs
- Project planning
- Content creation and blogging
- Graphic design
- Cloud computing
- Digital storytelling
- Curriculum vitae creation
- Strategies for tackling child marriage
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation and disaster risk reduction
- Menstrual hygiene management
- How to be a mentor



» TAG participants share their learnings with community members

Initially, my education performance was quite poor, but that started to change after participating in TAG. Whenever I miss any class in the school, I can now use Google and YouTube to understand the chapter. Now I am first in my class.

Jenisha, TAG Participant

## Program Impact

The second round of Tech Age Girls brought about transformational changes for the participants, their families, schools, and communities. Young women gained confidence and set more ambitious educational and professional goals. Families began to involve their daughters in important decisions, such as education and marriage preferences. Teachers adopted more gender-inclusive and interactive teaching methods, and local governments started to allocate additional funds to support girls' empowerment training.

To assess the program's outcomes and impact, READ conducted a hybrid analysis using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This included baseline and endline surveys with participants and their families, focus group discussions with participants, families, and teachers, and key informant interviews with school and local government leaders. The following are some of the key findings.

To assess the outcomes and impact of the program, READ undertook a hybrid quantitative and qualitative analysis composed of baseline and endline surveys with participants and their families, focus group discussions with participants, families, and teachers, and key informant interviews with school and local government leadership. The following are some of the highlights of the findings.

### Cultivating Agency & Skills for Success

TAG participants and their families have gained greater choices and the ability to solve their own problems through collective effort, shared commitment, and access to resources.

### Inclusive Reach

The program effectively reached those most in need, fostering stronger connections among all community members and promoting ongoing collaboration.

### Systemic Change

Attitudes towards the abilities and opportunities for young women have shifted significantly, paving the way for broader societal change.

### Self-Propagating

A ripple effect emerged as TAG participants leveraged the READ Center's platform, network, and resources to expand knowledge, skills, and attitudes across their communities.

### Sustained Solutions

Local ownership of the program has led to increased investment, ensuring the continuation of similar opportunities for empowerment.

## Cultivating Agency and Building Skills for Success



» Microsoft Headquarters Sr Software Engineer Yadav Bhattarai training TAG participants on coding.

TAG participants underwent transformational changes in how they viewed themselves and their future opportunities. At the start of the program, many were shy and allowed others to dictate their life path and opportunities. By the end, this had changed dramatically, with many participants stepping into local leadership roles, dreaming big, and actively taking steps to achieve their goals.

- » **87%** of participants reported improved grades at school, and **90%** noted an increased interest in their studies.
- » **80.9%** of girls described themselves as extremely or very confident, marking a **32.4%** increase from the baseline survey.
- » **71%** of participants are taking on leadership roles in their communities to address social issues such as waste management, the dowry system, child marriage, and menstrual stigma, representing a **42%** increase from the baseline. Additionally, **89%** now see themselves as leaders.
- » **51%** of participants have changed their professional goals as a result of the program.
- » **66%** have altered their educational goals, with **93%** of these aspiring to attain a higher level of schooling.
- » **67%** now plan to attend university, a significant rise from the baseline figure of **13%**.
- » **67%** have changed their intended field of study to computer science, math, or science.
- » **87%** believe they are now better positioned to secure a job

## Ensuring Inclusive Reach

64% of participants came from traditionally marginalized communities. Through the Tech Age Girls program, they not only developed individual skills but also built networks with a diverse range of peers and local stakeholders from various socio-economic backgrounds. This exposure helped participants to broaden their perspectives, bridge social divides, and foster connections that extend beyond their immediate communities. By engaging with people from different walks of life, they learned to collaborate effectively, advocate for their needs, and gain support for their initiatives, thereby enhancing both their personal growth and community impact.

Participants' views on gender and social inclusion evolved significantly throughout the program. For example:

- » At the beginning, only **9.8%** of participants strongly disagreed with the notion that men make better doctors than women. By the end of the program, this figure increased to **40%**.
- » Similarly, just **15.2%** of participants initially disagreed with the statement that women make better receptionists than men. This number rose to **60.6%** by the program's end.
- » Only **10.8%** of participants initially disagreed that girls are better suited to look after siblings than boys. This perspective shifted dramatically, with **60.1%** disagreeing by the end of the program.

## Fostering Systemic change

Long-held beliefs about young women, their roles in the community, and their potential are beginning to shift. This change is evident through baseline and endline surveys of parents, discussions with stakeholders, and reflections shared by the young women themselves.

- » **85%** of participants believe they are now more respected at school, **84%** feel they have gained greater respect at home, and 86% perceive increased respect within their community.
- » **52.6%** of participants frequently discuss their future education plans and goals with their families, a significant rise from just **14.5%** at the start of the program.



» A grandfather placing a TAG hat on his granddaughter during the program inauguration showcasing his support

My granddaughter's behavior has undergone a positive transformation. During the beginning of TAG I used to go along with her to the library, worried about her safety. Now, she confidently heads there with her friends, assuring me that she is now brave. She has also now been participating in family decision making. It's heartening to see her newfound independence. She isn't just learning at the program she's bringing those skills home and transforming them within the family members and her siblings.

Grandfather of TAG participant

## Self-propagating enduring impact

By building the skills and confidence of the 285 Tech Age Girls participants, the program's impact extended far into the community, directly and indirectly empowering thousands:

- » TAG participants formally trained 2,713 peers on issues identified as pressing concerns by the youth. Assuming the benefits of these cascade trainings reached trainees' households, an estimated 13,022 people were indirectly impacted.
- » On average, each participant shared aspects of what they learned in TAG with 44 others, reaching approximately 12,500 community members through informal knowledge transfer.
- » The top 100 graduates from this round of Tech Age Girls are now serving as formal mentors for the next cohort of 245 adolescent girls. These new TAG participants are expected to reach at least 1,000 more of their peers.

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### ◦ How TAG Impacted Teachers ◦

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I have started incorporating group work and projects for my students. I also feel that I've developed many ICT skills. I now teach topics like cybercrime and the proper use of social media as part of the social studies curriculum. Additionally, I teach health and population studies, where I've been able to educate students on menstrual hygiene and the proper use of sanitary pads. Students who were once too shy to ask for a sanitary pad at school can now confidently request and use them.

— Mentor Teacher, Focus Group Discussion

I teach computer science. Previously, my teaching methods were limited to the classroom and computer lab. Now, I have begun incorporating group work and have shifted to a more participatory teaching style.


— Mentor Teacher, Focus Group Discussion



## Sustaining solutions

- » Implementing programs like TAG through self-sustaining READ Centers ensures that the work continues well beyond the program's conclusion. These Centers now possess the skills and knowledge to empower youth through ongoing technology and leadership training.
- » All five local governments involved in the program have committed over 20,000 euros to sustain similar programming.
- » Teachers who served as mentors in the program report significant changes in their teaching methodologies, incorporating more group work and the use of technology in the classroom.

- » Top participants from each participating READ Center have formed Eco-Clubs to advance youth leadership in local climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. Similar groups from the first round of TAG continue to thrive.



As the ward chairperson, I am immensely pleased with the significant impact this project has had in such a short time. It has brought about a remarkable change in our teenage girls, fostering a positive mindset and motivating them to value their education. Many of these girls previously spent their time working on the farm or assisting their parents with labor instead of attending school regularly. However, this project has shifted their perspective, and they are now more focused on their education and personal safety.

**Akkal Bahadur Karki, Local government chairperson, Kaski**

I've witnessed remarkable changes in students involved in TAG. They speak fluently in class now without hesitation, their performance has improved and they are active in different programs like debate. The impact even extended to the school's computer lab. Previously underutilized, after students engaged in the TAG project, the lab saw increased usage. These students not only improved their own skills but generously shared their knowledge with peers, teaching and encouraging others to explore technology. There were also noticeable behavioral changes too. The TAG participants became more punctual and disciplined, setting a positive example for their peers.

**Jeet Bahadur Thapa- School Principal**



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## ◦ Some of the Lives Changed by TAG ◦

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### ■ Meet Deu Maya

Deu Maya recently completed her 12th-grade exams and is awaiting results to pursue a university degree in Management. Before joining TAG, her disability made her doubt continuing her education. However, TAG boosted her confidence and renewed her interest in learning. Now, she's using her certificate to apply for school jobs and preparing for a government role in a bank, with the ultimate goal of serving her country.

"I've come to embrace my disability as an integral part of who I am, discovering that determination can conquer any obstacle life presents. With two sticks as my companions and an indomitable spirit, I embarked on my quest for knowledge.

TAG entered my life as a game-changer, introducing me to the realms of technology and leadership skills. It unlocked a universe of possibilities I had never dared to dream of. Through TAG, I unearthed my voice, both within the classroom and in the grander theater of life itself. Public speaking, once a daunting fear, has now become a source of immense pride and unwavering self-assurance. I can't express my happiness for receiving this very first certificate of my life"

**Deu Maya, TAG Participant, Kaski**



» *Deu Maya's disability no longer holds her back from achieving her dreams.*

### ■ Meet Nisha

"When I was 16, I believed that love was enough for marriage, but the struggles I faced taught me the importance of waiting until the right age. Through the TAG program, I learned the value of education, independence, and why it's crucial to wait until after 20 to get married. Now, I advocate in my community, sharing my story and advising young people to give themselves time to grow, learn, and build a future before making such a lifelong commitment. Marrying before 20 doesn't just limit your dreams—it can take away your potential."- Nisha

Nisha got married at 16 to the man she loved, shortly after completing her Class 10 education. Despite objections from her parents, she went through with the marriage. Her husband, 20 at the time, soon went abroad for work, leaving Nisha to live with her in-laws and take on significant household responsibilities at a young age. Despite these challenges, she continued her studies.

Before TAG, Nisha lacked computer skills, confidence, and awareness about the implications of child marriage. However, through TAG, Nisha gained basic and advanced computer skills, boosting her academic growth. She also conducted cascade programs in her community, which built her confidence. Over time, seeing these positive changes, her mother-in-law began supporting her education and even helped with household chores. Nisha became aware of the importance of waiting until 20 to marry, reflecting on her own early marriage and sharing her experiences with others. She now educates her community about the risks and legalities of child marriage.



» Nisha, performing a street drama to raise awareness on disaster risk reduction.

The skills Nisha acquired through TAG also helped her secure a job at her former school as a teacher. Now, she supports her family financially and inspires her community through her active participation and personal growth. Despite the challenges of early marriage and limited family support, Nisha transformed her life through the TAG program and continues to positively impact her community.

## ■ Meet Durga



Durga, a young woman from Jahada, came from a poor, largely illiterate family, in which only she and one sister were educated. Despite her strong desire to learn, her parents did not support her education, often requiring her to help make bricks instead of attending school. Durga left school when her parents arranged a marriage in the 9th grade. After enduring abuse from her in-laws, she returned home and attempted to rejoin school, but could not pass the required grade 10 exams to be readmitted. Nevertheless, Durga never gave up her desire to study, even without family support.

Durga's life changed when she discovered the TAG program at the library, which offered technology-based learning opportunities. Selected for the program, she received training in various skills and felt empowered to share her personal story during a session on gender equality, feeling a weight lifted from her shoulders. The READ Center intervened to help her get readmitted to school, and even helped secure funds for the registration fee and school uniforms. Durga is now studying for a degree in education so she can help other girls build a better future for themselves.



## About READ

READ facilitates the creation of self-sustaining, community-led library and resource centers that serve as foundational platforms for unlocking a community's social and economic potential. With 139 centers across Nepal, Bhutan, and India, READ is building cohesive, inclusive, and resilient communities where everyone—especially the most marginalized—can access and benefit from the knowledge, resources, and opportunities needed to shape dignified and fulfilling futures.

The TAG program exemplifies the READ Method, a facilitation approach refined over 30 years of community-led development. This approach emphasizes fostering individual and collective belief in the ability to address challenges and build better futures. Studies have shown that this method effectively nurtures social trust and collective action, enhancing communities' capacity to come together and tackle pressing issues. As a result, communities experience a range of positive outcomes, including increased literacy rates, improved household incomes, and greater opportunities for women, girls, and other disadvantaged groups.

READ extends its sincere gratitude to the L'Oréal Fund for Women, as well as the Jahada, Tarauli, Godawari, Deepsikha, and Moti READ Centers, and all participating community members for their partnership in driving this transformative change.

