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Last year, Ci3's [Transmedia Story Lab](#) (TSL) launched [Kissa Kahani](#), a two-year, international project that uses multimedia approaches, storytelling, and novel research techniques to better understand and promote gender equity in the urban areas of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India. In Hindi, Kissa Kahani loosely translates as "anecdotes and stories." We landed on this title because our goal for this project is to amplify youth voices in the empowerment of women and girls. Harnessing the power of narrative, TSL understood that one of the best ways to do this was to provide opportunities for youth to share their personal narratives and disrupt what many of us think we know about their adolescent experience.

The digital stories from our Kissa Kahani project beautifully explore the cultural, emotional, and social experiences of Lucknow youth.

Upon entering Lucknow, the charge lay before us to create the space and process for adolescents to tell stories about their gendered experiences using words and images in a media making workshop. The complicating factors included language and cultural barriers, not to mention the need to build trust. Before entering Indira Nagar, the neighborhood where we worked, we could not know what stories would emerge.

Our principal storytelling collaborators, [Storyographers](#), and I are well-versed in these practices as deployed in a U.S. context, but we could not account for the depth and richness that would come from the youth and young adults who participated in our storytelling workshops. With support from the 11 Hindi-speaking, Indian facilitators that we trained, we accomplished our goal.

The stories all seem to articulate the absence of [voice, choice, and power](#) to determine the course of their own lives. From the perspective of both males and females, these narratives reveal the social and structural barriers faced by adolescents of low socioeconomic status, particularly among young women and girls. These stories introduce audiences to the many ways that youth in this area experience and make sense of gender inequities in their lives, families, and communities.

Expressing joy and celebrating life, these young people exhibited indomitable spirits, even in the face of adversity. Guided by the newly trained facilitators, some nearly as young as the workshop participants, we bore witness to the unfolding of stories that sought to make sense of economic hardship and gender-based violence.

The storytellers came away with new meaning that they then each incorporated into the respective story arcs of their individual stories. Our hope is that audiences come away with a greater appreciation of the grit exhibited by these brave young souls. The question, then, is how best to address the issues raised in the stories. Through our recently launched Kissa Kahani Small Grants program, several youth-led organizations in Lucknow have already begun to develop other innovative programs that promote gender equity and family planning among adolescent girls and boys.

For the next several weeks, we are excited to introduce to you a series of six videos by the youth, co-produced by Storyographers. This week's videos feature the stories of Kalyani and Pinky. In each, the audience is exposed to the strength and courage of women and girls in India. In *Wings*, Kalyani recounts being "eve teased," the local term for sexual harassment, and her brother refusing to allow her to enter a dance contest. *Daughters* explores a mother's experience of violence after giving birth to two daughters. The author of the latter story, Pinky, won a special award from the children's jury at the 10th International Chinh India Kids Film Festival.

These stories, along with many of the other digital stories that came out of this project, highlight the importance of understanding how youth make sense of the structural barriers that they face as well as the importance of providing youth with the tools to tell their own story.

Kalyani | Kissa Kahani

Pinky Sr | Kissa Kahani