

SUSTAINABLE IMPACT ON GIRLS' LIVES

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

A relatively small investment in research and evidence can yield lasting impacts on young women's employment and can inform large-scale policies and programs to improve the lives of girls and their communities.

CHALLENGE

We often hear about a looming youth employment crisis in low-income countries. Although governments are spending more than ever before on youth employment programs, these programs rarely target young women explicitly, even though they have lower employment rates than young men and face additional socio-cultural barriers.

Globally adolescent girls are marginalized in large numbers, and their vulnerabilities and constraints are particularly acute in Sub-Saharan Africa. Young women tend to have less education, so they're less qualified for jobs. They do not have as much time available for paid work because of their domestic duties and they often do not pursue jobs in high-paying fields because they are not considered suitable for women. There's also a strong family formation dimension to young women's employment decisions that doesn't affect young men in the same way.

WHAT WORKS?

ENABLING GIRLS TO DEVELOP STRONG LIFE SKILLS IS KEY TO BUILDING THEIR CAPACITY TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH EVERYDAY LIFE.

The Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) program has been implemented in several countries by development organization, BRAC. It centers on adolescent girls' clubs, which offer life skills training and livelihood training to groups of girls led by a mentor. The Africa Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) evaluated this program in a randomized controlled trial in Uganda where the program reached 3,000 girls ages 14 to 20 (Bandiera et al. 2015). The evaluation found that, relative to adolescents in control communities, after two years this program raised the likelihood that girls were engaging in income-generating activities 72 percent and raised their monthly consumption expenditures 38 percent. Teen pregnancy fell 26 percent, and early marriage and cohabitation fell 58 percent. The share of girls experiencing sex against their will in the previous year dropped from 14 percent to almost half that level, and preferred ages of marriage and childbearing both rose. At a cost of under US\$100 per girl per year, the program not only worked but also was cost effective.

GENDER INNOVATION LAB

The Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) conducts impact evaluations of development interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to generate evidence on how to close the gender gap in earnings, productivity, assets and agency. The GIL team is currently working on over 50 impact evaluations in 21 countries with the aim of building an evidence base with lessons for the region.

The impact objective of GIL is increasing take-up of effective policies by governments, development organizations and the private sector in order to address the underlying causes of gender inequality in Africa, particularly in terms of women's economic and social empowerment. The lab aims to do this by producing and delivering a new body of evidence and developing a compelling narrative, geared towards policymakers, on what works and what does not work in promoting gender equality.



Nakand Maimunah, 19, who mentors other girls at the club, said she believes young women have more power than they realize.

“Here, in Buganda [a subnational kingdom within Uganda], they usually minimize girls. They think girls cannot do some jobs. They think the office is only for men. ... Why should jobs be for the men only? We all have equal rights and what a man can do, I can also do it.



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In contrast to community-based life skills programs, center-based technical vocational education and training (TVET) programs focus explicitly on developing employment-related skills. The Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) program in Liberia run by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection reached 4,000 young women with a 12-month program including 6 months of classroom life and business skills training and 6 months of follow-up support. A randomized impact evaluation led by GIL found that employment increased 47 percent and earnings increased 80 percent (32 USD/week) among participants relative to nonparticipants. The impacts were particularly strong for young women enrolled in the business skills track, rather than the vocational skills track. However, the evaluation found mixed impacts on fertility, with a decrease in the probability of having a child but a corresponding increase in pregnancies, leading evaluators to conclude that participants in the treatment group had delayed pregnancies during the program period, with no net impact on fertility (Adoho et al. 2014). The results showed that this 12-month intervention put girls on a higher trajectory and girls stayed on that higher trajectory even after the program ended.

The strongest evidence on skills development programs for adolescent girls supports holistic community-based programs that combine life and livelihoods skills training and other financial and social assets in girl-only or girl-friendly settings.

SUSTAINABLE IMPACT ON GIRLS LIVES & LARGE SCALE POLICY CHANGE

These pilots and evaluations delivered lasting improvements in the lives of young women and provided evidence on what works for skills development programs for adolescent girls that have influenced much larger-scale investments.

- **The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project** (US\$67 million, 6 countries, 300,000 girls and women) will establish safe space clubs to deliver services to adolescent girls, including life skills and sexual and reproductive health training and mentorship. Building on the evidence base from Uganda and Liberia, the safe space clubs will be offered in combination with other types of innovative support, such as vocational training and entrepreneurship grants. Impact evaluations of the safe space model will be conducted in all six countries.
- **The Republic of Congo Youth Employment project** (US\$10 million, 8,000 youth) offers a choice of a job track or entrepreneurship track, with more spaces in the entrepreneurship track, based on the superior performance of EPAG's "business skills" track. The project also offers additional financial support to young mothers to facilitate their access to the program, based on EPAG's experience of offering child care during training.
- **The Zambia Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihoods (GEWEL) project's** (US\$36 million, 75,000 women) design was influenced by existing evidence on women's and girls' empowerment and skills training programs, including GIL's work in Liberia, Uganda, and other counties. The intervention includes a training that combines life and business skills, a productive cash grant, group mentorship, and savings clubs.
- **The India Tejaswini Socioeconomic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls & Young Women project** (\$US68 million, 400,000 youth) offers a comprehensive package of activities for girls aged 14 to 24, including community-based social support, life skills education, business skills and vocational training. The design builds on lessons from the GIL-led impact evaluations of adolescent girls' projects in Liberia and Uganda.

These are all large scale government programs that will reach tens of thousands of young people in the next five years. A relatively small initiative that integrates research and innovative programming can pay off not only in terms of direct impacts on beneficiaries but also in terms of better policies aimed at increasing employment for youth that can be replicated across projects and countries.

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