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GIL TOP POLICY LESSONS ON EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Adolescent girls face multiple challenges that restrict their horizons, often having to make decisions about employment and their fertility at an early age, and with limited formal education opportunities. With lower levels of education than men, girls are often less equipped for work. Additionally, a plethora of expected domestic responsibilities limit their time for income-generating opportunities.

A range of Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) studies across Sub-Saharan Africa have demonstrated the potential of girls' empowerment programs to change the life trajectories of young women even across a variety of contexts. These programs typically combine community-based girls clubs, life-skills training, vocational training, and sometimes financial literacy and microcredit access, for young women. In addition to implementation in countries such as Uganda and Tanzania, these programs have also helped create a buffer from conflict for young women in South Sudan and during the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone – showing that they are beneficial even across fragile contexts.

WHAT WORKS TO EMPOWER ADOLESCENT GIRLS?



CREATING SAFE SPACES

Creating safe spaces for girls to receive job or life-skills trainings that are tailored to an adolescent girl's environment and experiences has been shown to be effective across a variety of contexts.

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 gender gaps in earnings, productivity, assets, and agency. The GIL team is currently working on over 60 impact evaluations in more than 20 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 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.



POLICY IN ACTION: SAFE SPACES IN UGANDA

In Uganda, non-governmental organization BRAC implemented a multifaceted program: Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescent Girls (ELA) created girl-only clubs, which became hubs for delivery of vocational and life-skills trainings. The program had positive impacts on income and on girls' decision-making power over childbearing, marriage, and sexual activity. Overall, girls in the ELA program were 26% less likely to have a child, 25% more likely to report always using a condom during sexual intercourse, and 44% less likely to have had sex against their will over the previous 12 months. Economically, they were 72% more likely to be engaged in income-generating activities, and reported self-employment earnings three times higher, compared to the original average¹. At a cost of under US\$100 per girl per year, the program not only worked but also was cost-effective. Implementation of the program in other contexts has shown the importance of high-quality execution for these results to be achieved.

POLICY IN ACTION: SAFE SPACES IN SIERRA LEONE

After the successes in Uganda, a similar program was designed for Sierra Leone. However, Sierra Leone was hit with the 2014 Ebola epidemic during the program

implementation. Quarantines were imposed which limited travel, halted market activity, and closed schools. Health services were repurposed to fight the epidemic—and medical services on sexual and reproductive health were severely reduced. In light of these circumstances, the program was redesigned to understand if and how the ELA clubs might help safeguard adolescent girls in a crisis environment.

Working with village leaders, a World Bank team categorized communities into high- and low-disruption areas to determine how the crisis and the program might have impacted the resilience of girls in both types of communities. Though the measures taken were critical to contain Ebola, they did have strong, negative effects on adolescent girls. In high-disruption communities with no ELA programming, younger girls were 16% less likely to return to schools after they were reopened, and spent an average of 1.3 additional hours with men. Girls in the high-disruption communities were also more likely to become pregnant.

In contrast, the girls in the ELA program had different outcomes. The school enrollment slump in high-disruption communities was reduced by half if the girls

¹ Bandiera, Oriana; Buehren, Niklas; Burgess, Robin; Goldstein, Markus; Gulesci, Selim; Rasul, Imran; Sulaiman, Munshi. 2018. "Women's Empowerment in Action : Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial in Africa". World Bank.



were exposed to the clubs. In all types of communities, both younger and older girls who participated in the clubs spent less time with men. In high-disruption communities, pregnancies outside of wedlock also decreased by 7.5%. In areas highly disrupted by the Ebola crisis, older girls reported increases in unwanted and transactional sex—as younger girls enrolled in the ELA program spent less time with men, it is likely that men shifted their attention to older girls. However, the ELA program increased the ability of older girls to mitigate some of the risks associated with transactional sex. They were more likely to use contraceptives and there were no resulting increases in pregnancy rates².

TAKING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION INTO ACCOUNT

Careful program design that is tailored to the specific needs of adolescent girls is critical to keep in mind for programs targeting young women. Indeed, trainings for young women that take the constraints that may restrict girls from attending the sessions into account have been demonstrated to be effective. For example, these might include free child care or transportation that allows women with children, or limited means, to attend.

POLICY IN ACTION: REMOVING CONSTRAINTS IN LIBERIA

In Liberia, the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) project offered a year-long employment program, including six months of trainings—which included socio-emotional skills, as well as either vocational or business skills training—and six months of follow-up support. Free childcare was provided during the classroom trainings—as well as savings accounts, a stipend for transportation, and a completion bonus. The program was geared toward young women, between the ages of 16 to 27, who had been out of school for at least a year. Compared to non-participants, young women in the program had strongly positive employment and earnings outcomes: employment increased by 47%, and earnings increased by 80%. Along with the economic outcomes, participants gained other elements of empowerment: access to money, self-confidence, and anxiety about circumstances and the future were positively impacted³.



MENTORING PROGRAMS

Mentors can play a positive role in girls' lives, helping them to transition into adolescence and adulthood, adopt healthy behaviors, build confidence and self-esteem, and

² Alibhai, Salman; Buehren, Niklas; Frese, Michael; Goldstein, Markus; Papineni, Sreelakshmi; Wolf, Kathrin. 2019. "Full Esteem Ahead? Mindset-Oriented Business Training in Ethiopia". Policy Research Working Paper; No. 8892. World Bank.

³ Adoho, Franck; Chakravarty, Shubha; Korkoyah, Jr, Dala T.; Lundberg, Mattias; Tasneem, Afia. 2014. "The impact of an adolescent girls employment program : the EPAG project in Liberia". World Bank.



navigate decisions about schooling, employment, and fertility. At critical junctures in girls' development, mentors can help to nudge them in positive directions.

POLICY IN ACTION: MENTORING PROGRAMS IN LIBERIA

The Sisters of Success (SOS) program in Liberia harnessed the power of mentorship: creating a program in which mentors and girls' groups delivered life skills trainings—social and emotional skills—to young adolescent girls, between the age of 12-15. Compared to girls who did not receive the program, girls in the mentorship program were 4% more likely to have completed primary school and 3% more likely to have enrolled in secondary school (Koroknay-Palicz and IRC, 2016). In addition to the boost in school enrollment, girls in the clubs improved the quality of their relationships with both their peers and their parents. The younger girls, between ages 12 and 13, had more concentrated impacts—indicating that policies for girls in fragile environments can indeed be effective at younger ages.



SCALING UP PROGRAMS THAT WORK

The results from the ELA and EPAG interventions informed the design of the Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Regional (SWEDD). Since the early design stage of the project, GIL joined the SWEDD Project team to provide technical assistance on the design of the interventions based on GIL's own and other rigorous global evidence of adolescent girls' projects. Notably, GIL influenced the design of several innovations that were included in the project, including the development of safe spaces curricula based on international best-practice and the introduction of boys' clubs in addition to girls' clubs in three of the six target countries. Similarly, these findings influenced the World Bank-Tejaswini project in India which uses safe spaces as a platform to offer a package of activities for girls aged 14 to 24, including community-based social support, life skills (including reproductive health), business skills and vocational training. The project will reach 680,000 girls over 5 years.

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