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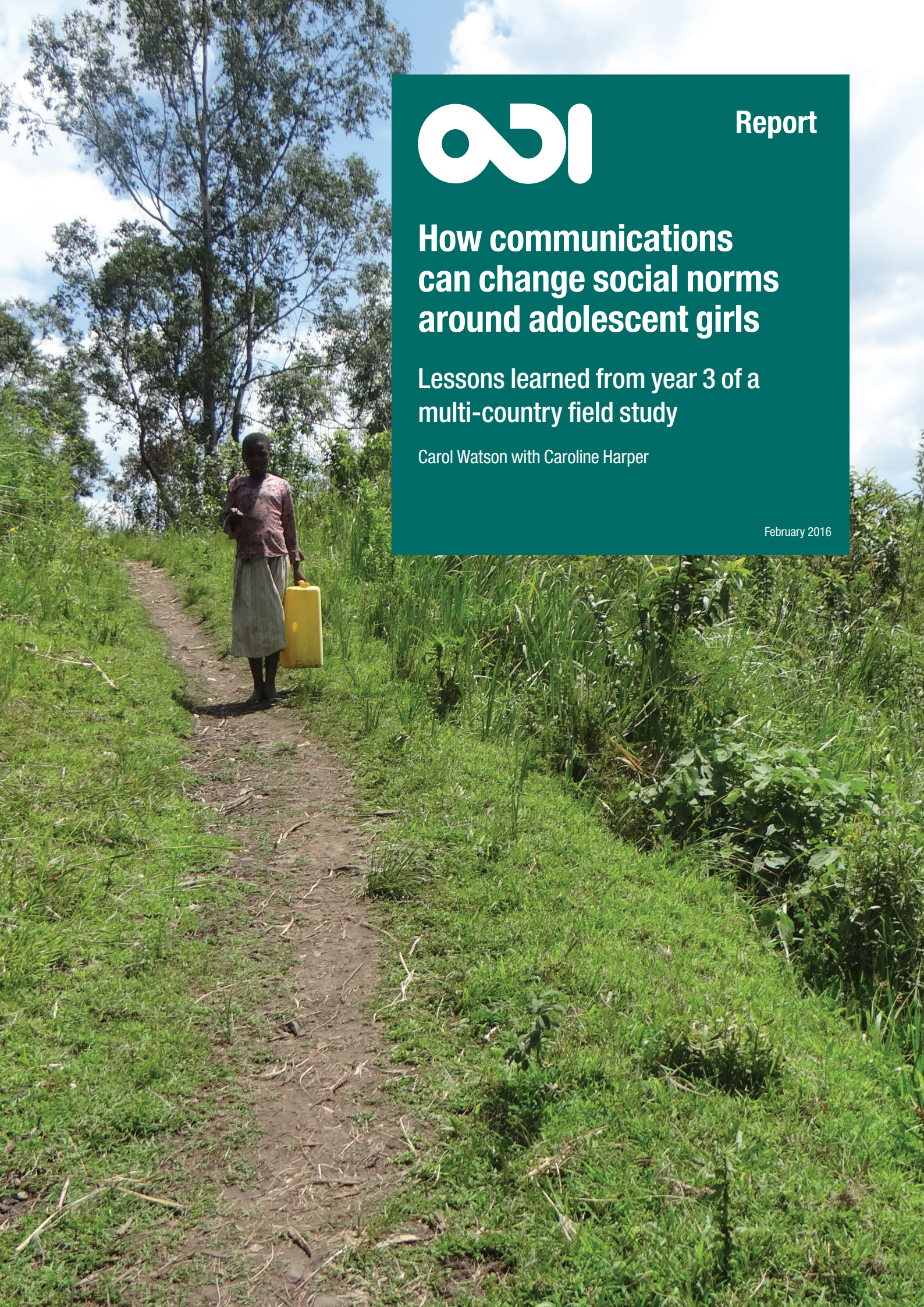
How communications can change social norms around adolescent girls

Lessons learned from year 3 of a multi-country field study

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Cover photo: Women and girls often spend the majority of their time walking to find unclean water © Ryan's Well Foundation, April 2nd 2013

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Acronyms

ADA	Amhara Development Agency (Ethiopia)
ANPPCAN	African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect
AWA	Amhara Women's Association (Ethiopia)
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DWD	Department of Women's Development (Nepal)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GREAT	Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations (Uganda)
IDI	In-depth Interview
IEC	Information, Education and Communications
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STF	Straight Talk Foundation (Uganda)
WCDD	Women and Children's Development Department (Nepal)
WDA	Women's Development Army (Ethiopia)

1 Context and background

1.1 Understanding discriminatory social norms around adolescent girls and how they change

Poised at the intersection between childhood and adulthood, adolescent girls face unique challenges to the full development and exercise of their capabilities. Child marriage and under-investment in girls' education are two such challenges that continue to limit girls' trajectories, fuelled in part by discriminatory social norms that uphold these practices within local settings that are often circumscribed by poverty and lack of opportunity.

A multi-year, multi-country study has been exploring the complex ways in which adolescent girls' capabilities are shaped and/or constrained by gender-discriminatory social norms, attitudes and practices, and under what conditions positive changes may be brought about, particularly around norms and practices related to child marriage and education. The study has been conducted by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in partnership with national research teams in Viet Nam, Nepal, Ethiopia and Uganda, commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) as part of a flagship programme on Transforming the Lives of Girls and Young Women. The field research is part of a broader stream of work that includes literature reviews, policy-influencing events, and production of a Knowledge to Action series, all aimed at enhancing the visibility of adolescent girls in programme and policy dicussions, and strengthening the evidence base to inform more effective interventions.

The first year of field research (2012/13) mapped out the complex and often intersecting domains that shape adolescent girls' capabilities, highlighting challenges in education, household and family relations, economic empowerment and access to resources, physical safety and health, psychosocial well-being, and political/civic participation. The second year of research (2013/14) provided more in-depth analysis of change and persistence in gender-discriminatory social norms, focusing on norms connected to the pivotal issues of child marriage and girls' education. Box 1 summarises the key findings from our first two years of research.

1.2 A focus on communications initiatives

The third year of research (2014/15) turned to an analysis of specific policy and programme interventions aimed at combating the social norms and practices that underpin child marriage and promoting girls' education. We focused on a broad spectrum of communications-based initiatives, as identified in a recent global review (Marcus and Page, 2014).

Box 1: Lessons learned from the first two years of research

- Although national laws and information campaigns are having a positive impact, early marriage remains prevalent, driven by socio-cultural and economic forces that influence norms and practices of parents and children alike.
- More girls are benefiting from education, particularly at primary and lower secondary levels. This is largely due to national policies on free and obligatory schooling but also greater awareness of the social value of educating girls; however, this progress has not always carried through to higher-level secondary. In many settings, early marriage or pregnancy remain key reasons why girls drop out of school.
- Gender roles, relations and expectations within marriage remain rigid, prescribed by discriminatory norms guiding behaviours of men and women and by deep-seated notions of honour and shame – both of which contribute to a 'stickiness' in social norms around gender and ideals of masculinity and femininity.
- Supportive families are critical in providing gender-equitable opportunities and expectations for girls; positive role models in the community also offer transformational potential.
- To be most effective, efforts to change social norms around adolescent girls must be accompanied by parallel efforts to open up services and opportunities through broad-based, integrated approaches; otherwise, significant progress for girls will be inhibited.

Source: Watson, 2014

Evidence from this review showed that communications programmes[1] could be an effective way of challenging gender-discriminatory attitudes and practices, reaching a variety of stakeholders with both broad pro-gender equality messages and messages on specific discriminatory norms. While no one approach was found to be more effective than others, programmes with more than one communications component and those integrated with activities other than communications were found to achieve a higher proportion of positive outcomes. Effective communications approaches included: dialogue-based processes that create opportunities for reflection and help people change their attitudes and practices; face-to-face communication with a diversity of target groups; creating appealing TV and radio characters that facilitate dialogue and act as role models; and provision of and availability of supportive information, education and communications (IEC) materials readily available. The review recognised that processes of social change are neither linear nor mechanistic; providing information or encouraging people to think about an issue in a different way does not necessarily lead to changes in attitudes and behaviours (Marcus, 2014; Marcus and Page, 2014; Marcus, 2015). Figure 1 depicts the potential pathways for change processes linked to communications initiatives.

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1. Defined broadly to include mass media and social media; dissemination of information, education and communications (IEC) materials; community dialogue and reflection; non-formal education, including life skills; mentoring and peer education; public ceremonies; training and capacity-building for professional personnel; and hybrid approaches of the above (Marcus and Page, 2014).

Figure 1: Conceptual framework outlining potential pathways for change

Contextual issues affected by:

Culture/religious beliefs
Politicisation of gender issues
Socioeconomic factors affecting:
-- access to communications
-- capacity to act on changes

Programmatic issues affected by:

Intensity of exposure
Participation of target audiences in developing messages
wxtent communication methods are combined with each other
Framing of messages
Opportunities to put new ideas into practice

Intended outcomes

More egalitarian gender norms & attitudes

Reduction in gender discriminatory practices:

• early marriage
• transactional and intergenerational sex
• FGM/C
• in education
• related to mobility, roles and aspirations
• son preference
• physical and sexual violence

• Non-formal, participatory education
• Community dialogue
• Provision of information materials
• Publicity events (e.g. street theatre, puppet shows)
• Training for service providers (e.g. on laws and practice)

• Non-formal education, group mobilisation
• One-to-one communication, mentoring
• Public commitments

• Edutainment (mass media, street theatre etc.)
• mass-media messaging campaigns (public service announcements and other media-based awareness-raising/messaging)
• One-to-one communication

Supported by non-communication activities

e.g. Livelihood strengthening, safe spaces/opportunities for girls to build social networks, bridge to formal education, enhanced access to health services, sports and games etc.

Intended processes of change

Develop new knowledge and understanding from:

New information
Dialogue with peers and role models

Develop community of people with new norms

Develop reference groups with new views or commitment to changed practice to sustain change.

Role modelling

Modelling/endorsement of change by peers or change-makers.
Promoting self-efficiency.
Endorsement of change by influential people (e.g. community /religious leaders celebrities)

Target groups

Adolescent girls/ young women

Adolescent boys/ young men

Parents and grandparents

In-laws

Community leaders

Religious leaders

Source: Marcus and Page, 2014

The review also identified a number of knowledge gaps. These included key programme design issues such as: the kinds of messages that most motivate change; the relative effectiveness of different communications initiatives; differences between the effectiveness of stand-alone communications and more integrated approaches; identifying 'thresholds' for the optimum number of communications activities to achieve maximum effect, if this is possible; the role of informal peer communications; and the role of social media and new technologies in promoting gender-egalitarian norms and behaviours (Marcus, 2014; Marcus and Page, 2014). The third round of qualitative field research aimed to fill some of these knowledge gaps.

Building on previous years' field research findings, and drawing insights from the global review, year 3 research aimed to: (1) deepen our understanding of whether and how key national policies on gender, education and adolescents recognise the importance of discriminatory social norms and express commitment to addressing these; (2) explore how selected communications initiatives translate such policy commitments into projects or programmes that address discriminatory gender norms, attitudes and practices around child marriage and girls' education; and (3) analyse the effectiveness of such initiatives in fostering positive change from the perspectives of key stakeholders, including programme implementers, local government officials, project beneficiaries and community members. The programmes assessed in the four countries are outlined in Box 2.

Box 2: Overview of case study initiatives

VIET NAM (Meo Vac district of Ha Giang, among Hmong girls)

- *Because I am a Girl* – An initiative implemented in Ha Giang province as part of Plan International's broader efforts to support comprehensive development for girls, including through provision of safe spaces and gender rights education.

- *My Rights, My Voice* – A project developed by Oxfam to improve Hmong children's access to quality education by empowering children to understand and express their needs, building local capacity to implement child-centred teaching, and fostering cooperation between parents and educators in an overall effort to strengthen accountability between education professionals and the community.

- *Meo Vac District High School's extracurricular activities* – A range of activities implemented by teaching staff aimed at providing information and messaging around the national marriage and family law and the health consequences of child marriage and consanguineous marriage.

NEPAL (Kailali district)

- *Adolescent and reproductive health programme* – Implemented by World Vision as part of its maternal and child health and nutrition interventions, within its broader Area Development Programme, focusing on sensitising adolescents around reproductive and sexuality issues and enabling them to communicate information to the wider community. Activities include promoting awareness of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) rights and life skills training, peer-sharing of information, and street dramas to disseminate information to other reference groups in the community.

- *Adolescent development programme for school dropouts* – Implemented by the Department of Women's Development (DWD) of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Affairs as a follow-on from an earlier UNICEF-funded project, Choose your Future. The focus is on enhancing self-awareness and confidence among adolescent school dropouts by providing training, creating savings groups, and giving seed money for income-generating activities.

ETHIOPIA (Amhara regional state)

- *Community dialogue and peer-to-peer education around SRH issues* – Conducted by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Hiwot Ethiopia, broadly aimed at eliminating child marriage, delaying first pregnancy and

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- *Yegna* – A Girl-Hub Ethiopia social communications platform delivered via radio, broadly aimed at shifting attitudes around valuing girls. The radio programme, implemented by the Amhara Women's Association (AWA), addresses issues such as violence against girls, forced marriage, teenage pregnancy and school attendance. It is funded by DFID as part of Girl Hub's broader international effort to improve the lives of girls in developing countries.

UGANDA (selected districts in eastern and northern regions)

- *Unite for Body Rights* – A sexual and reproductive health (SRH) rights initiative implemented by the Straight Talk Foundation (STF) in eastern Uganda, focusing on individual empowerment and strengthening services for adolescents.*Child Protection and Development* – A child rights project implemented in eastern Uganda by the national chapter of the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), which aims to provide a secure and protective environment for children, with a focus on orphaned and other vulnerable children and child mothers.

- *Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations (GREAT)* – A multi-partner initiative under way in northern Uganda (and including Georgetown University's Institute of Reproductive Health, Pathfinder International, and the local Concerned Parents Association), combining a broad focus on community dialogue to promote gender equality with more specific actions around reproductive health, gender-based violence (GBV) and education.

1.3 Methodological approach

Overall, field assessments used a social norm lens to explore the ways in which selected programmes are working with adolescent girls and communities to tackle child marriage, early motherhood and under-investment in girls' education through a variety of communications interventions.

The study was qualitative in design and combined document review of policies and programmes with semi-structured interviews, including key informant interviews (KIIs) at the national and sub-national levels, focus group discussions (FGDs), community mappings and case studies through in-depth interviews (IDIs) with individual beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.

Field research at community, sub-district and district levels to understand what works and why in the selected programmes was embedded within a secondary analysis of policy commitments and mapping of programme approaches at national level. This was accompanied by a review of all available programme documentation, including pre-existing studies, assessments and evaluations.

It is important to note that, while case study research included a review of existing programme evaluations, the field studies themselves were not designed as evaluations per se, but rather as qualitative assessments of what seems to be working, what might be posing potential challenges, and how girls and their communities are experiencing the interventions under way.

2 Key findings from case studies: successes and challenges

Country-specific findings provide rich detail on the different policy and programme environments and the broad range of communications initiatives undertaken – either stand-alone or components in broader interventions – to address discriminatory gender norms and/or their effects on adolescent girls, child marriage and education. Full results can be found in the detailed reports produced by each country team (see References section), which illustrate the diverse entry points used by the programmes (education, child rights, SRH, gender equality), the variety of intervention models adopted, and the range of programme components. Some of the key cross-cutting issues that emerged when the country teams met to share and discuss results are detailed below. These have been further developed through review of the individual case studies.

2.1 Progressive laws and policies in place, but not all address social norms

Most of the countries included in the field study have an extensive array of policy documents and statutes outlawing child marriage, promoting girls' education and encouraging gender empowerment. While some address discriminatory social norms head-on, others do not, and specific strategies to deal with such norms remain patchy. Implementation of existing laws and policies is also uneven.

- In *Viet Nam*, the policy environment that shapes Hmong girls' lives was found to be mixed. While the government is strongly committed to gender equality (especially with regard to women taking up public roles) and has dedicated considerable resources to improving the lives of minority populations, the research team could not identify a single core policy that directly addresses social norms. There also appears to be little attempt to integrate policy and programming around gender inequality with policy and programming to tackle ethnic inequality.

- In *Nepal*, national policy around adolescent girls is moving from a limited focus on health and education towards a more holistic recognition of broader needs related to employment, skills development and civic participation. There is also explicit recognition that adolescents form a heterogeneous group and that distinctions based on culture, religion, caste and ethnicity (among other factors) must be taken into account in programme development.

- In *Ethiopia*, where, as elsewhere, the government has outlawed child marriage and criminalised harmful traditional practices, broader gender-related laws and policies also shape child marriage. Legal changes have opened up some space for women's access to assets and decision-making, and fostered dialogue about gender equality. There is some concern, however, that implementation of the law is proceeding without the required changes in attitudes and practices. Because of lack of public support for the policy, there are signs that the practice is being driven underground. There is also concern that the law may not adequately recognise the potential protection afforded by early marriage, and that programmes and policies do not offer appropriate alternative opportunities for adolescent girls beyond a life of marriage and motherhood.

- In *Uganda*, the national policy review revealed a multitude of progressive laws, policies and strategies addressing gender equality, girls' education, SRH and, more recently, child marriage/teen pregnancy. Some explicitly recognise the importance of social norms, some do so implicitly, while others do not recognise their importance at all. Even those that do explicitly recognise the importance of social norms do not always detail how to address them. In the end, however, the key issue seemed to be not so much the legal/policy environment, but how laws and policies are implemented, which depends – among other things – on capacity and political will.

2.2 Positive impacts from promising initiatives

2.2.1 Community dialogues

- *Ethiopia*: An evaluation of Hiwot Ethiopia's initiatives in 2011 found that more than 120,000 community members had been reached through community conversations, youth dialogue forums and mass 'edutainment'. Among other things, this led to the cancellation of over 600 planned child marriages and, according to beneficiary girls, had resulted in an overall '*friendlier environment at home, at school and in the community for young girls to openly talk about their [reproductive health] concerns and seek services*' (Hiwot Ethiopia, 2013: 2). Field research highlighted community conversations as a key strength of Hiwot programming and confirmed their broad reach. Fathers, for example, report that '*We discuss HIV/AIDS, child marriage and use of contraceptives. We have learned that having large numbers of children make us poor. We are also talking with young boys and girls about HIV and abstinence. We are all participating in the community discussion group.*' The community conversations use existing local structures for public communication and sensitisation to discuss a range of development topics established by the Women's Development Army (WDA) through its '1-to-5' groups, which reach down into each community.

- *Uganda*: Community dialogues are an important feature of both the GREAT and ANPPCAN projects. In the former, they are integrated into a community action cycle aimed at identifying and developing an action plan around the most critical gender issues for that community; they have creatively revived a local tradition of 'fireside chats' at which elders talk to younger community members. Within ANPPCAN, community conversations are structured around child protection issues and include topics such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, bridewealth and violence against children. Programme organisers and beneficiaries of each programme attest to the positive impact of such dialogues. A local GREAT advisory group member noted that '*The fireside chats are appreciated because they revive an older tradition that had fallen out of use and they bring elders together with others*'. Combined outcomes of this project and others in the community are reported to include reduced violence, greater value accorded to girls' education, and greater consideration of sharing gender roles within families. Mothers involved in the ANPPCAN project state that of all the different communication modalities, '*Community meetings are the best*'. Combined outcomes of the project reported at community level include better attitudes towards child mothers, heightened awareness of child rights issues and increased tendency to report

violations, changed attitudes towards early marriage, and considerable improvement in school attendance among orphaned and other vulnerable children.

2.2.2 Clubs, life skills education and peer-to-peer education

A number of programmes focus on establishing or reinforcing girls' clubs – for girls in school and out of school – as a means of disseminating information on important topics and promoting life skills and leadership skills to boost self-confidence. Well-managed girls' clubs can provide emotional support and role models for girls – both of which are crucial ingredients in empowerment. Mixed-sex clubs have also shown promising results in some contexts and the promotion of peer education skills and processes has further boosted participants' confidence and leadership skills.

- *Viet Nam*: For Hmong girls who have been able to participate in Plan's Because I am a Girl clubs, the experience appears to have been genuinely transformative – with girls rejecting child marriage, displaying a strong interest in high school, and beginning to express their own needs and wants. The field research suggests that club participation has served as the primary catalyst for changes experienced by individual girls, beginning with a new sense of confidence. They are telling their brothers that '*girls also have the right to go to school*' and arguing back when they are told they won't do well there; they are also '*taking the initiative to make friends*'. As one girls' club member said: '*I've become more confident, less shy. In the past, when I met a stranger, I was very nervous; now, I feel it is normal.*'

- *Nepal*: Life skills training by World Vision and the Women and Children's Development Department (WCDD) has increased girls' self-sufficiency and confidence in terms of speaking out, voicing their concerns, and approaching authorities in instances where their rights have been violated. One girl, taken forcibly for marriage by a son and his mother, was rescued by the police after her friends – who had undergone the World Vision training and knew such actions were illegal – reported the incident. That was one of three such forced marriages they had been able to stop in one year. Another girl reported that she was able to protect herself from sexual harassment on the bus thanks to the new assertiveness she gained through the training and the knowledge that such behaviour was illegal. By bringing girls together regularly, the programmes have also enhanced their social networks – a benefit reported by all of the girls.

- *Ethiopia*: Amhara Development Agency (ADA)'s chosen modalities (especially girls' clubs) and their

focus on issues such as menstrual management are helping to keep girls in school, bolstering their self-esteem and confidence, improving their understanding of reproductive biology, and promoting more gender-equitable relationships with male classmates. In focus groups, girls' club members report many positive changes: '*We are trained to feel confident, be active… We are trained that we have the right to express our ideas freely*'… '*Previously, people in our community would tell us that education for girls doesn't go beyond grade 8 or 10 and I would get married soon. Now, because of the club, I have changed my mind and have started to study hard*'… '*We know that we should not get married before we reach our destiny.*' In some cases, where clubs include girls and boys as members, '*The male students… have been educated about the appropriate relationship between male and female students*'.

- *Uganda*: In the Straight Talk Foundation initiative, 'Straight Talk' information corners in schools and 'Young Talk' clubs are considered an important source of support for boys and girls alike, including as a means to provide guidance, counselling and life skills. Training on peer education and club management is given to school pupils and young girls and boys who are out of school. One boy reports that '*Instead of loitering around the school compound, we go to the Straight Talk corner and read Young Talk magazines. I also share the knowledge from Straight Talk with classmates and with out-of-school friends through participation in Young Talk clubs.*' Girls also attest to newfound confidence and leadership skills. One explained: '*I didn't know I had the right to bark at older boys who try to force us… I now know I can say no, without fear, even if they are old*'. Another reported that, '*My other Straight Talker friend and I are leaders of the choir at church and we sing messages for parents about the need to keep girls in school.*' Promotion of gender equality messages via peer-to-peer learning through youth platforms in the GREAT project was also highly appreciated, both for the messages themselves (which young people have internalised) and for the confidence and leadership they gain as a result of participating in such platforms. '*I can now speak in public and advise others,*' said one adolescent boy. '*The community sees us with respect because of the training we have had,*' said a newly married adolescent girl. '*Before GREAT, I used to be afraid when there were many people around and would feel like just staying inside. But now I have gained confidence and can interact freely among people without fear,*' said another adolescent girl.

2.2.3 Drama, games and interactive approaches

The importance of interactive approaches was emphasised by a number of programme implementers, who recognised the

power of 'play' and the rewards of building knowledge and confidence through active participation in learning activities.

- *Viet Nam*: The Youth Union-facilitated girls' clubs as part of Plan's Because I am a Girl project use a wide array of role-plays, games, competitions and dramas. These let girls practice their newly learned skills and try out the language they may ultimately need to protect themselves from child marriage. Field research showed that girls are not only talking to their parents more, telling them '*about funny stories I have learnt at school*' or '*about my participation in the girls' club, playing games and singing*', but some feel close enough to their mothers to begin setting limits about how hard and long they are able to work.

- *Nepal*: Street drama is an important component of World Vision's adolescent reproductive health programme, tackling issues such as domestic violence, alcoholism, child marriage, and school dropouts. After preliminary training on different topics, the adolescent boys and girls selected for the drama choose the most relevant topic for their community. They prepare a script, which is finalised through discussion with the trainers, and then invite community members to the local school to see the performance. The drama is very popular in the district; the group has won several drama competitions and the district police officer now hires them to disseminate information on social matters to various communities, inside and outside the district.

- *Uganda*: The GREAT project has developed a number of different interactive games and role-plays supported with visual aids that are highly appreciated by programme participants. Role-play around the thematic materials in the communications packet or as part of the community action cycle is a popular activity and participants can see its value: '*If you prepare a drama that talks about early marriage and you teach people in the community, you can make other people copy what you have done,*' explained one adolescent girl. Participation in drama has also helped girls gain more confidence; as one adolescent girl said, '*I can now stand in front of people and talk*'.

2.2.4 Radio programmes and listener groups

Radio programmes were used in case studies in two countries as an accompaniment to and support for other programme activities. Some involve listeners' groups to stimulate collective learning and participation.

- *Ethiopia*: The Yegna radio drama, implemented by the Amhara Women's Association (AWA), has been designed to create role models and highlight relevant social issues for girls in order to stimulate discussion in communities and create a safe, informed and inspiring conversation

about the value of girls. While fieldwork indicates that programme reach is still limited, girls reported that: '*We are very eager to listen to the drama on the radio. We wait for it by forming groups. Our mothers also listen to the drama together with us and ask us for clarification when they don't understand something.*' A father also reported that: '*Through the radio, I have learned a lot about child marriage – such as she would be exposed to fistula. The society now knows that fistula is too awful… So if people know about this, they would take care of their children.*' A key feature of the programme is the interactive drama component, with school children performing skits based on the storylines of key characters. Girls who enact the skits during parents' day at school reported that 'Our parents are changed in their behaviour due to the influence of the drama. They understand that child marriage is harmful due to the drama.'

- *Uganda*: Straight Talk Foundation broadcasts a radio 'edutainment' programme for and by young people on topics such as SRH, teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse and gender-based violence, along with other issues raised by adolescents who have sent in letters (one programme every month is dedicated to answering listeners' questions). Participants at all levels expressed appreciation for these shows, which one of the programme implementers noted have a wider reach than community dialogues. Local police also noted that: '*The radio shows give people an avenue where they can make calls and so they talk, ask questions, share experiences and also contribute*'. Adolescent girls reported that the topics are very relevant: '*The programme airs questions about bodily changes. For example, "I am 15 years old and haven't begun menstruation – am I normal?" So a girl in a village listening can be helped.*' The GREAT project also includes a radio series called Oteka, which covers many of the issues faced by adolescents (especially those who are newly married or new parents), with discussion guides for peer-group use. According to district stakeholders, Oteka 'tries to inform the public that it is time to change – we need to transform our gender roles'. Older adolescents in particular appreciated the programme, and some could recount their favourite episodes. However, they did not often manage to get together in discussion groups outside of the occasional parish youth group event.

2.2.5 Integration of elements other than communications

Most of the programmes reviewed included a broad array of communications interventions. Some were also set within more multi-dimensional programming that featured elements other than communications. These were linked to: (1) economic empowerment and livelihoods support; (2) material support for school attendance (including provision of menstrual hygiene pads and, in one instance, school fees and materials); and (3) strengthening service delivery (focusing on schools, adolescent health services, and child protection structures).

- *Viet Nam*: Plan's Because I am a Girl initiative is part of a comprehensive approach that has included construction of schools and water filtration systems, and providing sanitary pads to help girls manage their menstrual hygiene while at school. Oxfam's My Rights, My Voice initiative aims to strengthen quality education through improved accountability and greater capacity for child-centred teaching and learning processes.

- *Nepal*: The other activities (aside from communications) implemented by the Department of Women's Development are seen to be critical to the overall success of efforts to empower girls. These include various sorts of livelihood training (chicken, goat and pig-rearing; tailoring, knitting and weaving; making handicrafts such as candles and incense-sticks; food packaging) coupled with provision of seed money for income generation. These activities have enabled girls to become less of an economic burden on their families; some have been able to self-finance education or vocational training, or return to school after having dropped out for financial reasons.

- *Ethiopia*: Hiwot's programme includes 'green' income-generating activities, where young people can get together to generate incomes and protect the environment. Yegna, through the Women's Development Army, is also helping to promote the concept of young people building up savings.

- *Uganda*: The Straight Talk Foundation programme is part of a broader network, the SRHR Alliance, whose activities include improved SRH services and comprehensive sexuality education; the programme supplies materials and training for girls so that they can make sanitary pads locally, which is seen to be vital in encouraging girls' regular school attendance. ANPPCAN supports local child rights committees and caseworkers to take timely action on reports of child rights violations, focusing on building the capacity of local institutions such as councils, the police, and magistrates' courts and support for a child helpline. It provides scholastic materials to vulnerable children and also includes an economic empowerment component, providing training for child mothers in vocational skills such as hairdressing or tailoring, as well as business start-up kits. The GREAT project trains volunteer village health teams to link adolescents to appropriate service providers in the community.

In a number of cases, programme implementers and participants highlighted the importance of different forms

of support – specifically the material and financial inputs seen as critical for empowerment in contexts marked by extreme poverty and deprivation, and the service-strengthening elements to create an enabling environment for positive changes in social norms and practices.

Taken together, the communications and other components of the initiatives reviewed resulted in a number of positives changes at the individual, household, school and community levels (see Table 1).

2.3 Ongoing challenges to be addressed

While all programmes were showing many positive results, field investigations – as well as some programme evaluations – suggest that full transformative impacts and potential were not always fully realised. This can be attributed to a combination of external factors (socioeconomic context and the strength of prevailing social norms) and/or internal factors (programme planning, resources and partnerships, or coordination structures, or specific design features). Key aspects linked to internal factors are discussed in more detail below.

Table 1: Overview of positive changes at different levels

Levels	Positive changes (in which country programmes)	Testimonies
Individual	• Increased confidence, self-awareness and self-assertiveness *(all)* • Increased knowledge/skills *(all)* • Broadened social networks *(all)* • New aspirations for the future *(all)* • Changed attitudes (e.g. about menstruation, education, sexual harassment, child marriage) *(most)* • Economic empowerment *(some)*	• 'The club helped me improve my speaking skills… I am no longer afraid to raise questions and give answers in class.' (14-year-old girl, ADA programme, Ethiopia) • 'We now see menstruation not as a sickness but as signifying some changes in life.' (Very young adolescents, GREAT project, Uganda) • 'We learned child marriage is not good for the lives of female children – they should be married after the age of 20.' (30-year-old mother of adolescent girl, Hiwot project, Ethiopia) • 'We have so many new friends and know that some problems are not only ours – other girls face them too. We share and we are happy.' (Adolescent girls, Nepal) • 'I want to finish grade 12, and then take the university entrance exam.' (14-year-old girl, Viet Nam) • 'I earn a living out of the skills I got from this programme.' (18-year-old teenage mother, ANPPCAN project, Uganda)
Household	• Improved communication between parents and children *(all)* • Heightened parental acceptance of /support for girls' education *(most)* • More supportive and gender-equitable relations between siblings *(most)* • Heightened parental acceptance/ support for delayed marriage *(some)*	• 'The silence that used to exist between girl children and their parents has been broken. Straight Talk lessons give us a starting point to educate our children.' (Female teachers, STF project, Uganda) • 'Now she will talk back and tell her parents straight…when we have done something that she is not pleased with.' (Father of adolescent girl in Plan programme, Viet Nam) • 'Because of her training, she understands the environment, and helps me understand it as well.' (Mother of adolescent girl, Nepal) • 'My parents said once I started studying, I must study until the end - I must not drop out half way to get married.' (17-year-old student at Meo Vac High School, Viet Nam) • 'I used to feel that when money was not enough, I should send my son to school first. Now I feel they are both equal so I try to save money for both.' (Mother of adolescent girl, GREAT project, Uganda) • 'Earlier she had no brain but these days she uses it.' (Brother of adolescent girl, Nepal) • 'I used to think cooking was just for women; now, I cook for my sisters at home and am sometimes even better than them!' (Older adolescent boy, GREAT project, Uganda)

Levels	Positive changes (in which country programmes)	Testimonies
School/ community	• More positive/ supportive peer relations and interactions *(all)* • Greater visibility for and attention to adolescent concerns *(most)* • Improved health, education, or child protection services *(most)* • Enhanced status of adolescents in community *(some)*	• 'If parents don't abandon the idea of forcing their children to drop out, we will report them to our teachers and the commune authority who will have their own solution.' (17-year-old student of Meo Vac High School, Viet Nam) • 'You will hear some elders telling you how they have started calling the adolescents together and talking to them once in a while, and it's voluntary.' (Programme manager, GREAT project, Uganda) • 'The feedback is good: many of the adolescents who had left school started going again.' (Women and child development officer, Nepal) • 'The discussions are so good – the practice of child marriage has reduced in our community.' (20-year-old young man, Hiwot programme, Ethiopia) • 'People in the village now see me as someone of value – those who used to look down on me because I have a child don't do so anymore.' (17-year-old mother, ANPPCAN project, Uganda) • 'Now I know when people are doing wrong and can speak out or take necessary actions to avoid such situations.' (Adolescent girl, Nepal)

2.3.1 Expanding reach and coverage

Most of the programmes reviewed were quite small in scope (a couple of districts, several communities, a couple of schools) and could thus be expected to have limited 'spillover' effects in terms of changing social norms more broadly. In *Viet Nam*, for example, the limited scope and restrictive targeting of participants for Plan's girls' clubs (partly due to difficulties in finding local adults interested in facilitating activities) significantly limited their impact. In *Nepal*, it was often the same girls that were participating in all of World Vision's activities, effectively excluding others. In *Ethiopia*, ADA is working in just 11 schools in the district, so (as one key informant pointed out) it is 'difficult to think of bringing change within the community'. In *Uganda*, Straight Talk activities were being implemented in just 10 schools in the district; the ANPPCAN project had very limited community outreach, while the GREAT project was a pilot operating in two districts only. While limited coverage does not negate the impact of these interventions on specific girls, families or communities, or diminish the potential for wider impact, it is clear that strategies are needed to bring these types of interventions to scale in order to extend their benefits.

2.3.2 More fully involving boys, parents and other community members

A number of the programmes focused on boys as well as girls. In Ethiopia, for example, Hiwot recognises the centrality of gender norms and includes boys and men in all activities, while ADA's girls' clubs are increasingly enlisting boys as members. In *Uganda*, too, the focus for

both Straight Talk and GREAT was on gender relations and adolescence more broadly. In other cases, however, the absence of boys as a target group for communications messages and other interventions was seen as a missed opportunity. In *Viet Nam*, for example, Plan's child-centred programming has not used brothers to leverage new futures for girls, and boys have been overlooked by current communications efforts. This is especially important in the Hmong context where, as one boy explained, '*Child marriage takes place when the boy kidnaps the bride, so communication work should target the boy to convince him not to get married early…*'.

Stronger outreach activities to parents (particularly fathers) and other significant community members were also found to be needed in a number of programmes. In cases where this outreach had occurred, there were significant positive effects. In Viet Nam, for example, Oxfam's support for the 'trilateral' dialogue between parents, schools and officials promoted the most significant changes in the broader community context linked to education. In other cases, however, this aspect needs strengthening. In Viet Nam, Plan's Because I am a Girl project had little interface with parents in the commune; fathers were unaware what their daughters were doing in the clubs and mothers were only slightly more informed. In Nepal too, fathers had no idea about the content of the World Vision training their daughters were participating in. In Uganda, district officials underscored the need to mobilise parents more actively to increase the sustainability of Straight Talk Foundation's initiatives. Women teachers called for the programme to 'identify people who matter

in the communities and train them in these things of child protection, early marriage prevention and all that'.

It therefore seems that some of the programmes are not fully reaching key 'gatekeepers', either in the broader community or in individual girls' lives, with appropriate messaging on gender-equitable norms, attitudes and practices. So while interventions targeting girls are clearly having an impact in raising their individual awareness, society as a whole is 'not keeping up', leading to an imbalance that still needs to be addressed.

2.3.3 Improving specific design features

Some of the individual programme elements were not having maximum impact as a result of specific design characteristics. This was true, for example, of the use of radios in *Uganda*, which were: (1) not always reaching the target audience (young people) either because they lacked access to radios or lacked batteries; and (2) not being used as a basis for group discussions because participants had difficulty calling everyone together. Language issues in the provision of training or communications materials also posed problems in some cases: for example, in *Viet Nam*, Hmong mothers admitted that they could not follow the translation of Oxfam's rights-training sessions and could not keep notes (as they were asked to) because they were illiterate. In *Uganda*, some translation issues also arose in the production of the communications materials for two districts with different local dialects.

2.3.4 Investing in developing local capacity and coordination structures

Projects work best, and have the best overall chance of sustainability, when they are firmly linked into local structures and development planning and processes, and when a significant component includes support for capacity development at local level. In *Ethiopia*, for example, ADA's project is set against a broader background of government interventions and primarily uses existing channels to deliver programmes; respondents felt that ADA had built collaborative relationships with officials and service providers in various government departments as well as with community members. The Yegna initiative is also well coordinated with the government through the AWA and the WDA, and respondents indicated that the WDA's nested 1-to-5 groups are especially effective structures. In Uganda, the GREAT project has established a coordinating structure through technical advisory groups, which include relevant local government departments and build on existing platforms such as youth groups and village health teams for programme implementation.

In other cases, this kind of coordination and/or investment in local government implementation capacity is lacking. In Viet Nam, for example, Plan was found to have made no attempt to systematically liaise with the justice officials who have primary responsibility for child marriage. In *Nepal*, while the government (WCDD) is itself implementing one of the programmes (having taken over a previous UNICEF initiative), lack of resources and staff shortages in particular limit the extent to which it can support and monitor the programme. Even in *Uganda*, where GREAT had used existing structures, these structures were expected to implement project activities on a voluntary basis, and have not been fully integrated into local government's development planning processes, leading to a number of questions about the likelihood of implementation beyond the pilot phase. In all cases, issues of sustainability are critical and need to be built into programme design and implementation planning, with adequate budgets for local capacity-building and clear linkages with national programme and policy structures.

3 Advancing conceptual development

Our conceptual framework for expected changes from communications-based interventions (Figure 1) had drawn on analysis of processes leading to change in gender norms and insights form the wider literature on communications and communications for development (C4D). It showed the pathways through which different types of communications can lead to change, and which the programmes reviewed in our country studies aimed to set in motion. In addition, a number of the programmes we reviewed had their own theories of change and conceptual frameworks, which were developed to guide programme interventions at different levels. This section outlines key features from these programme-linked theories of change and draws together some of the lessons learned on communications interventions change processes through our case study reviews in the field.

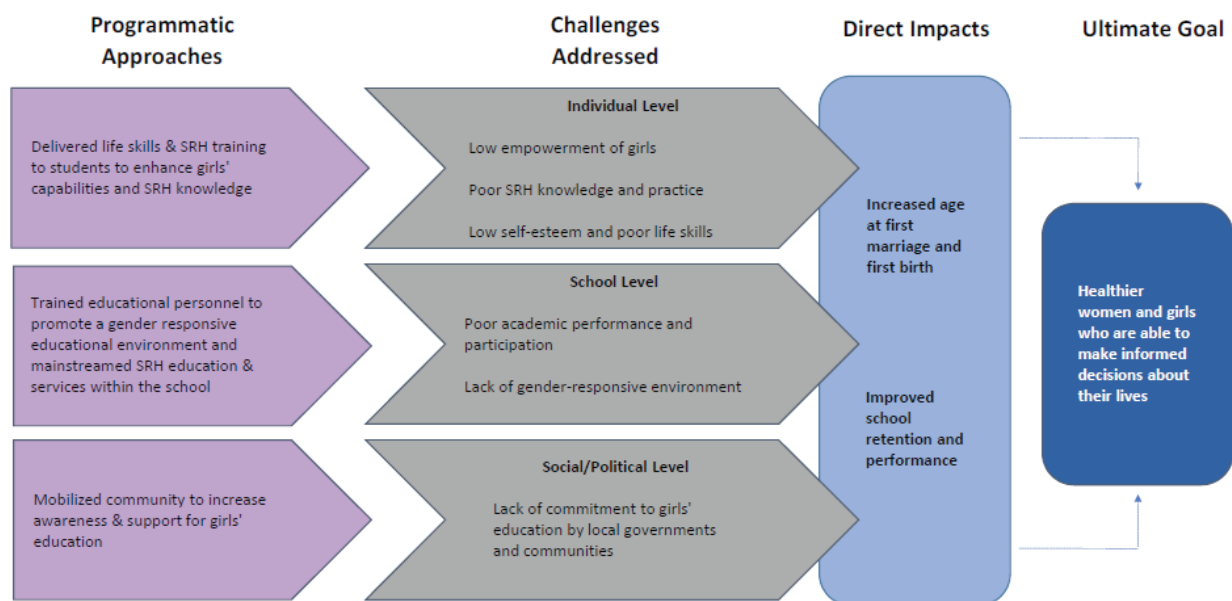## 3.1 Theories of change in selected programmes

Two programmes in Ethiopia and two in Uganda had their own conceptual frameworks to depict the different levels and pathways of change envisaged by programme designers and implementers (Figure 2). The main features are as follows:

- *Amhara Development Association (ADA), Ethiopia*: The ADA project is aimed directly at school children in the 5th-12th grades and indirectly at their parents and the broader community. It is based on an understanding that there are three clusters of reasons why girls drop out of school: (1) personal factors specific to the individual, such as low self-confidence and poor resistance to peer pressure; (2) school-level factors, such as unsafe and unresponsive environments; and (3) family and community factors, such as girls being over-burdened with domestic work and norms that favour girls' marriage over girls' education. The project tackles all three levels, ultimately aiming to enable girls to live healthier lives and to make their own informed decisions.

- *Hiwot, Ethiopia*: Hiwot's conceptual framework is embedded in the programme structure and in the form of the types and levels of interventions it plans to make. These include: (1) the individual level (empowering girls and young couples with reproductive health and family planning information); (2) the health service level
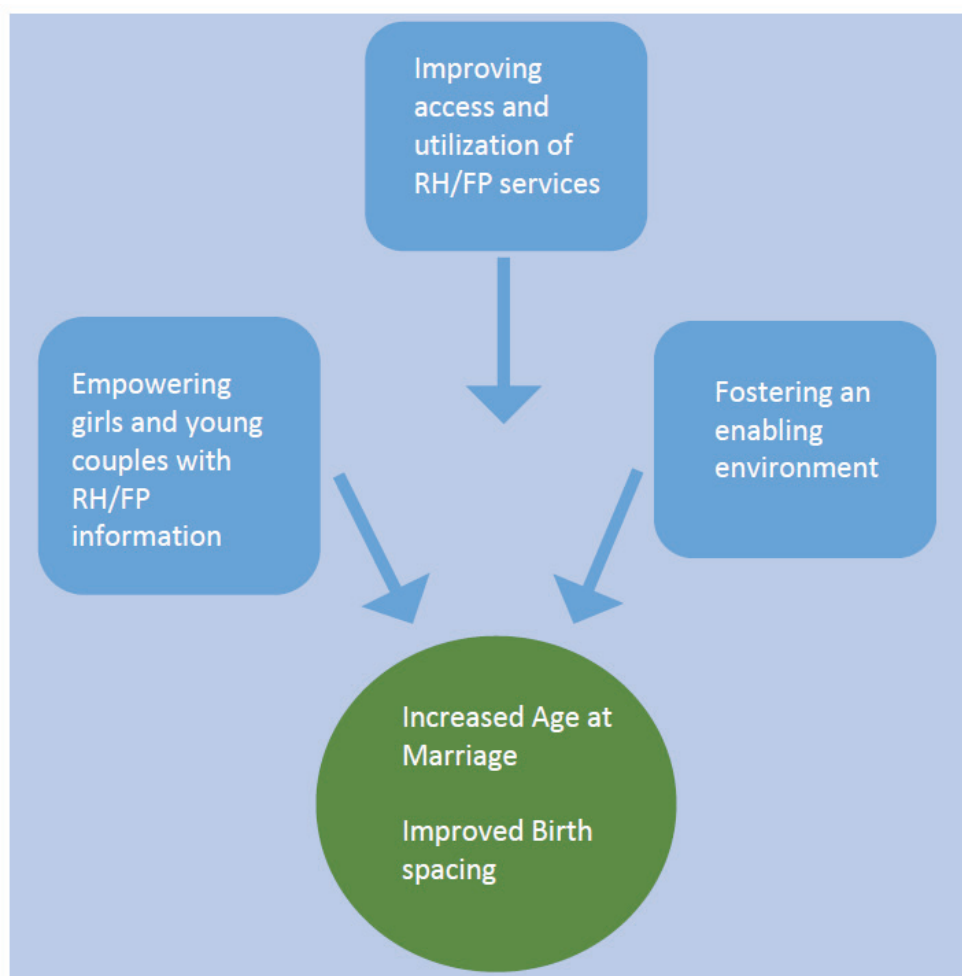
(improving access to and utilisation of reproductive health and family planning services); and (3) the broader societal level (fostering an enabling environment). These three actions, taken together, are expected to deliver the desired programme impacts of increased age at marriage and improved birth spacing.

- *Straight Talk Foundation (STF), Uganda*: STF follows an 'ecological' model of behaviour change, addressing individual adolescents within the context of their families/schools set within the overall community and political environment. Information activities are designed for each level.

- *Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations (GREAT), Uganda*: The GREAT project is also based on an 'ecological' model, with a life course focus which recognises that norms and behaviours are influenced by multiple individual and social factors that evolve over the life course. An additional 'social constructionist' perspective views individuals as active agents in constructing and reconstructing gender norms based on shared expectations and understandings. Adolescence is seen to represent a window of opportunity to promote positive and lasting gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours. Key project target groups are very young adolescents (aged 10-14), older adolescents (aged 14-19) and newly married or parenting adolescents and young people. Adults in the community are also targeted as key stakeholders – and sometimes gatekeepers – who are important to reach in order to create an enabling environment for gender empowerment and change.

  What is perhaps most striking about these conceptual frameworks is that they all recognise that changes in social norms, attitudes and practices require action at different levels. In programmatic terms, therefore, it is not enough to focus communications interventions on change at the individual level; they should be accompanied and supported by other actions that will have an impact on the context in which the individual lives. This context is depicted at different levels. Some frameworks (such as those for GREAT and STF in *Uganda*) acknowledge the foundational nature of the household and family. They understand not only that adolescent girls will need encouragement from supportive families if they

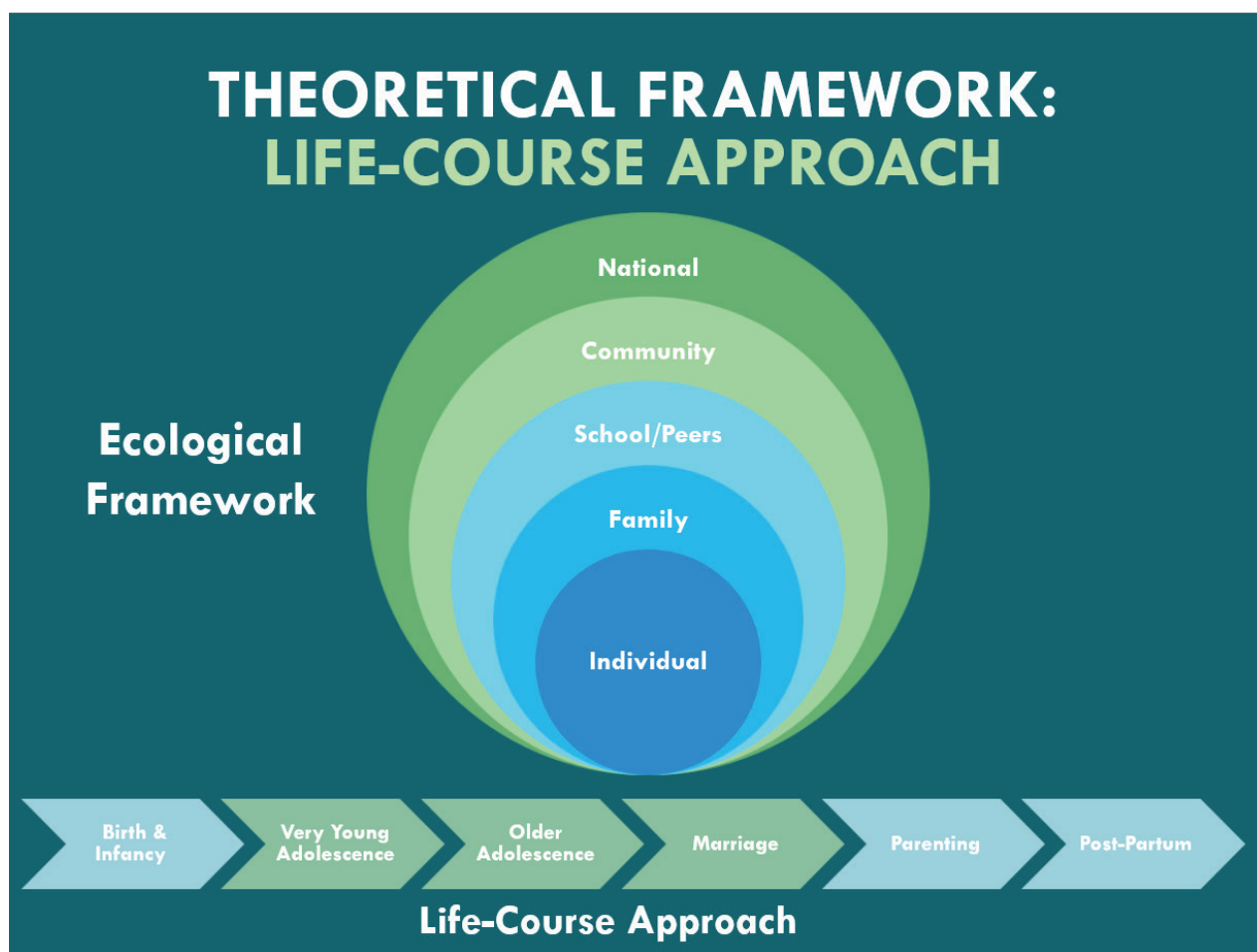**Figure 2: Programme specific conceptual frameworks**
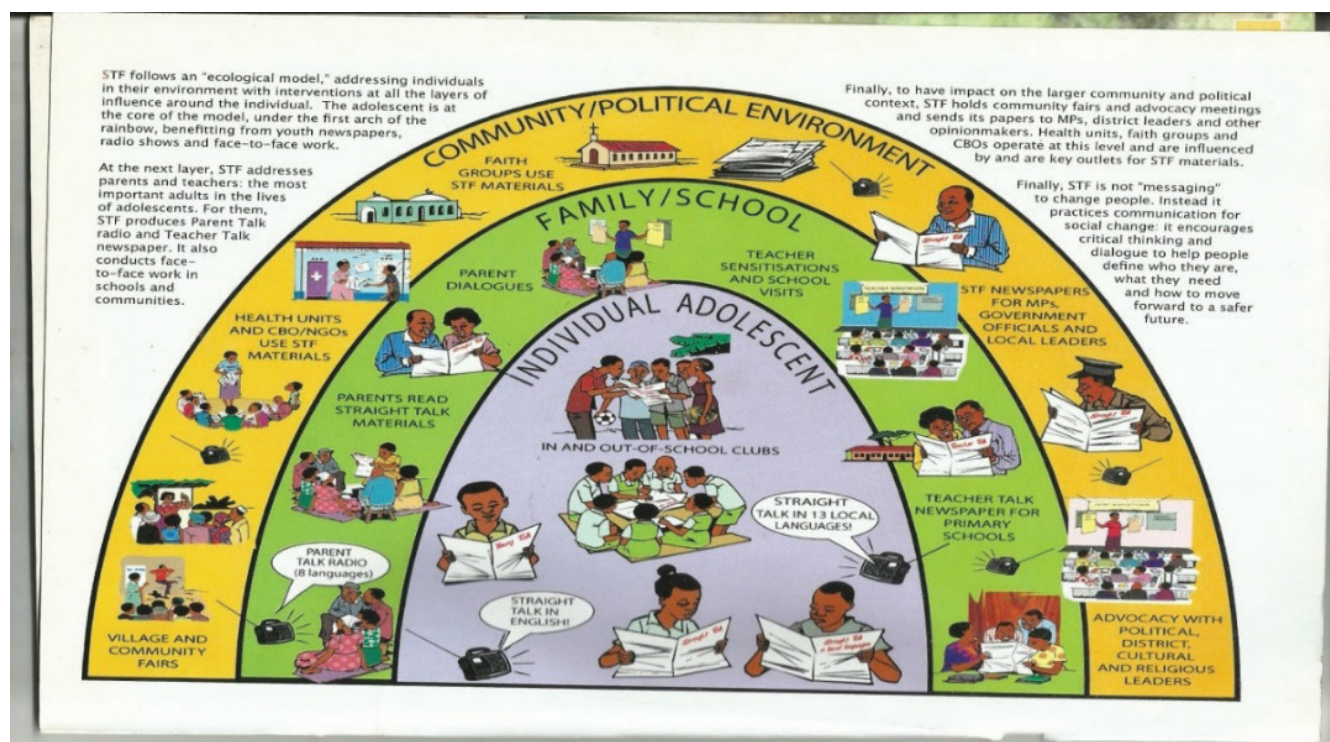

Source: ADA, Ethiopia (Namy et al. 2014)

Source: Hiwot Ethiopia (2013)

Figure 2: Programme specific conceptual frameworks (continued)

Source: GREAT project, Uganda (IRH, 2014)

Source: Straight Talk Foundation, Uganda (STF, 2008)

are to realise their full capabilities, but also that specific communications interventions need to target parents and siblings to help bring about the positive attitudinal and behavioural changes around gender norms and socialisation processes that are so deep-rooted at this level. GREAT's focus on role-play around gender roles and division of labour within the household is an example of an intervention designed with the family level in mind.

Most frameworks also signal that interventions are needed at the intermediary level of services and service providers (principally health workers, teachers, and child protection services) to make these services more 'adolescent-friendly', 'child-centred', 'gender-equitable', and 'child rights-based'. Most of the programmes consequently invested in various sorts of communications and other interventions to strengthen such services, depending on the nature and focus of each. In *Viet Nam*, the three programmes focused on education: Oxfam's My Rights, My Voice project explicitly set out to make education more child-centred and to enhance social accountability in schools. In *Nepal*, the World Vision programme set its activities within an overall SRH rights framework, while the WCDD programme was focused more on education. In *Ethiopia*, Hiwot stemmed from an SRH framework while the ADA project linked health and education. In *Uganda*, the Straight Talk Foundation project linked SRH and related communications with school-based and out-of-school activities; the ANPPCAN intervention focused more specifically on strengthening child protection awareness and services, while GREAT combined a holistic focus on more equitable gender roles with interventions to strengthen health information (through the village health teams) and school-based activities.

The wider environment, often articulated as 'the enabling environment', was seen to embrace both the community and national levels, including reference to the overall community setting as well as influential community authorities ('gatekeepers'), and highlighting local as well as national laws, policies and structures. This, of course, recognises that context matters; that social norm change demands change both at the individual level and more widely within society; and that interventions at one level need to be reinforced by interventions at the other. A number of the programmes therefore had a local and district/commune focus as well as a national focus. In *Viet Nam*, for example, Plan's Because I am a Girl initiative aimed to strengthen commune planning processes and practices; the support of commune officials was acknowledged as essential in motivating girls to have greater aspirations. In *Ethiopia*, much of the effort at local level was to raise awareness of and adherence to national laws against child marriage. In *Uganda*, the ANPPCAN programme combined local-level project interventions with broader advocacy efforts around national child protection laws as well as local bylaws, while the GREAT project involved district officials and community authorities

(including traditional leaders). A number of the field studies, however, highlighted the need to further strengthen these local-national linkages, and to ensure that national laws and policies were being appropriately implemented at local level, with local authorities receiving the support and encouragement needed to do so.

A recognition of context was also apparent in the integration of measures other than communications (such as material support and livelihoods strengthening) in a number of the programmes. In *Nepal* and *Uganda*, for example, economic empowerment measures and support for income generation were explicit features of particular projects, which recognised that poverty and lack of independent economic means contributed strongly to the lack of an enabling environment for change in the lives of adolescent girls.

An interesting addition to the primary conceptualisation of norm change occurring at different levels is the 'life-phase' approach. This was often implicit, but was made most explicit in the conceptual framework for the GREAT project in *Uganda*. This project went to great lengths to develop communications materials that were both age- and gender-specific and appropriate, dividing boys and girls into narrower age groups (very young adolescents or older adolescents) as well as categories (newly married or parenting young people). As one programme implementer put it, this is because '*different age groups face different issues… different pressures*'. Within the broader context, one of the big issues around promotion of SRH information and services in the country is, in fact, around the question of the appropriate age groups for such information, with differences of opinion about whether to introduce such issues at primary-age level or wait until secondary. GREAT's communications material consequently focused on sexual maturation processes for the younger adolescents and included aspects to do with family planning for newly married or parenting young people. Other age-distinctive interventions were apparent in other country case studies. For example, in Viet Nam, interactive games and contests were seen as important in retaining younger students' attention.

3.2 Conceptual lessons learned from field research

- In the flurry of interest around social norms, it is important to give continued attention to **broader contextual factors** such as **poverty/lack of resources** and the **lack of alternative roles and possibilities for the future** that play such a huge role in determining whether adolescent girls can fully develop their capabilities and have equal life chances. The implications for programming are that communications interventions that focus on changing norms and attitudes are important but not sufficient on their own to bring about change; they appear to work when combined

with broader interventions, including those that support economic empowerment for adolescent girls.

- Drawing on the 'ecological model', it is important to analyse and understand the **different levels** where changes can occur (from the individual to the family, community and district/country) and – to the extent possible – devise interventions that can address each level. There should be greater focus on creating a **conducive enabling environment** for change in knowledge and attitudes at the individual level. For example, efforts to strengthen individual knowledge of SRH rights must be supported by progressive policies on adolescent health and appropriate service provision. So too, interventions designed to increase overall awareness and understanding of gender rights and equality must be accompanied by legal reforms and stronger mechanisms to uphold those rights.

- While the conceptual frameworks of the programmes we assessed seem to suggest a unidirectional log frame flow, from input to output, we need to understand that these are just diagrams used to simplify relationships. It is important to constantly keep in mind (as our own conceptual framework indicates) that **change is not a linear process**; rather, it comes in fits and starts, can affect some groups or levels faster than others, and can **generate resistance**. Most programme implementers recognised that interventions need to take such complexity into account. A good baseline analysis, coupled with consistent monitoring and evaluation (M&E), can help identify at the outset potential areas where resistance might be expected. It can also keep tabs on the rhythm of changes at different levels so that interventions can be adjusted accordingly.

- Linked to the above, it is clear that **gatekeepers** of different types, at different levels, are critical figures to take into account in programmes designed to induce changes in individual and community norms, attitudes and behaviours. Understanding their roles and interests and the actual scope, sphere, or force of their influence on others is vital, as is enlisting their help and support to ensure that interventions are successful. It is equally important, though, to be aware of the challenging '**dialectic**' involved in efforts to work through existing gatekeepers, local value systems, and belief structures, while at the same time striving to change the discriminatory norms and practices that may lie at the heart of the social systems they uphold.

- Communications – in the fullest sense – involve **interactions as well as 'messaging'**; the face-to-face element and dialogue features of interventions seem to be critical in paving the way for changes in attitudes and behaviours. This is linked to our understanding of how social learning best occurs to bring about empowerment. Programmatically, this implies greater attention to and support for processes such as mentoring, counselling, one-on-one discussions, development of role models, and peer-to-peer communications processes that allow individuals to engage with and respond to the new information or behaviours that are being promoted.

- **Social norm change around gender** involves girls and boys, women and men; it is important to keep this in mind, conceptually and programmatically, as a focus on one without the other is incomplete and may not deliver the intended results.

4 Lessons learned on research methodology and approach

4.1 Overview of research tools

The nature and aims of the study demanded a mixed-methods approach that was qualitative in nature. The main methods for data collection are outlined in Table 2 below. Document review encompassed national policies and programmes as well as specific documents linked to our case study projects. Interviews with key informants at national level helped identify the programmes for study as well as providing an outline of their key contours. Thereafter, local-level research tools included key informant interviews (KII) with district-level and project stakeholders, focus group discussions (FGDs) or community mappings with selected community members and leaders, FGDs with project beneficiaries (girls and boys), and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with selected girls and boys. All tools were adapted for use in the different country contexts. Lessons learned from their application in the field are drawn from discussions with the country teams, building on lessons learned from field methods in years 1 and 2.

Table 2: Research tools and aims

Instrument	Purpose	With whom?
Focused policy review	• To assess the degree to which national policies take into account (explicitly/implicitly) social norms in their formulation	
Programme landscape review	• To provide an overview of some of the different kinds of programmes currently implemented to support adolescent girls	
Programme document review	• To review available documentation on selected case study programmes and their implementing agencies, including strategic vision, organisational structure and processes, programme plans of action, reviews and evaluations	
National level		
KIIs	• To understand programme trajectories, strengths and weaknesses as well as implementing agency's structure, function, processes, distribution of responsibilities, external relations, human resources, accountability measures, focus on results/M&E, lessons learned about what does and doesn't work • To understand specific characteristics, successes and challenges in policy development and implementation	• Programme designers and managers • Development partners • Policy-makers • •

Instrument	Purpose	With whom?
Local level		
District-level KIIs	• To understand the context in which the programme is implemented • To understand district-level priorities and how the programme is aligned with these goals • To understand programme perceptions and results (where they have this knowledge) • To gain access to community sites • To help identify key stakeholders	• Relevant authorities – formal and traditional • Programme managers and partners (where relevant) • Civil society groups working on early marriage/girls' education
Programme-level KIIs	• To understand institutional structures and functioning • To understand programme evolution and operationalisation • To understand programme strengths/weaknesses/successes/ challenges • To explore results and relevant impact pathways as well as lessons learned • To explore thinking around sustainability post-programme • To explore understanding of gender equity / girls' empowerment and how these are operationalised through the programme	• Programme implementers • •
FGDs/ community mappings	• To get an overview of community history, key institutions, power relations, gender issues • To understand perceptions about most significant change in gender relations in terms of early marriage and investment in girls' education • To assess knowledge and perceptions of programme processes and results	• Elders, religious leaders, local service providers (e.g. teachers, health clinic staff, extension officers), with representation of women, minorities, and other groups subject to discrimination.
FGDs	• To understand how participants view early marriage and under-investment in girls' education • To understand local perceptions of key interventions needed to address early marriage and under-investment in girls' education • To explore perceptions of most significant change brought about by programme intervention as well as unintended effects	• With programme beneficiaries and family or community members (people involved in the programme directly and indirectly)

4.2 Successes and challenges in fieldwork

The type of research conducted in our third year of field study, though using some of the same tools as in previous years, was quite different in nature; it focused investigations around a project rather than (as in previous years) specific households or communities (although community-level discussions remained important for contextual background and for understanding local dynamics). It was also different in that in addition to the basic social research thrusts of the first two years, it had an added evaluative component. Though not an evaluation per se, the basic aim was to assess the extent to which selected project interventions and communications approaches were contributing to changes in social norms, attitudes and behaviours around adolescent girls and

paving the way for fulfilment of their capabilities, with the intention of identifying good practice. This led to a slightly different field experience from that experienced in the first two years. Key lessons learned are highlighted below.

• The benefit of **using multiple research tools** to capture change processes at field level (through a combination of FGDs, IDIs and community discussions and mapping), coupled with extensive documentary review at the outset, was reconfirmed. This permitted the necessary triangulation of findings and comparative assessment of results from different perspectives. There were, however, some challenges in consistently linking findings from national policy reviews with specific programme-level reviews in the field. In some cases, this was at least

partly due to a lack of specificity in programme design that could be linked to the particular policy thrusts.

- Teams confirmed the utility of **engaging with programme and project staff** before field visits. This was seen as critical to gaining an understanding of the local context and of the key thrusts of project interventions before conducting fieldwork, as well as for explaining the nature of the research to project staff (illustrating good practice rather than evaluating projects per se). In at least one country, sharing drafts of research findings was also beneficial, allowing a cross-check of facts, which enriched the conclusions drawn.

- The importance of **engaging with other gatekeepers** to gain access to research sites/communities was also critical. Some teams suggested it may be necessary to combine formal and informal methods of gaining entry to research sites.

- Beyond an investigation of the particular programmes, **engaging with national government and district officials** through KIIs and FGDs was found to be critical in understanding the modalities for service delivery between government and NGOs/civil society organisations (CSOs), and hence gaining a better understanding of the interests and perspectives of a range of stakeholders. In this regard, one could **add a consultative workshop exercise** as part of the research process, to bring key stakeholders together to share and exchange views.

- It was very clear that any research looking into change processes around gender norms and practices that affect adolescent girls must look beyond girls and include tools and processes designed to **engage boys and men,** as well as **including discussions with a broad array of significant adults** in girls' lives – men and women. This enables the research to uncover potential opportunities and constraints to change processes in the enabling environment at different levels (home, school/health centres, community spaces).

- While designed as an assessment based on a particular set of pre-determined research questions rather than an evaluation, the evaluative nature of the year 3 research encountered many of the usual challenges of evaluation. These included: (1) clearly **attributing results to project-specific interventions** as opposed to broader processes of change in the community; (2) **assessing the nature or likelihood of longer-term social impacts** arising from primarily short-term projects; and (3) **disentangling reported changes in knowledge/attitudes from changes in actual practice.** Recognising the complexity of change processes around social norms, it would be useful for further research and evaluations to combine longitudinal and statistical approaches to **more fully identify the nature and weight of all the factors that contribute to change or stasis, and to more fully establish empirical impact.**

- The comparative nature of the country research design – consisting of **identifying two to three different programmes for assessment in each country** – served as a very useful analytical approach, which allowed teams to reflect on and compare results across different sectors and sometimes across different communities. This, coupled with the multi-country nature of the research programmes, contributed significantly to the richness of the overall findings and conclusions.

5 Policy, programme and research implications

5.1 Key policy implications

- **Strengthening recognition of the force of social norms within national policies**: Reviews of the national policy and legal frameworks in all countries revealed a number of progressive laws and policies aimed at promoting gender equality, with some focused specifically on issues related to adolescent girls, including around marriage, reproductive health and education. Some of these laws and policies explicitly mentioned the importance of dealing with underlying social norms that were seen to be discriminatory, while others were more implicit. In both cases, the laws and policies normally stopped short of specifying the exact nature of the norms and customs in question and identifying the precise strategies needed to address them. Strengthening the social norms lens at the level of law and policy could provide a firm foundation for developing appropriate programmes of action. Firm commitment to implementation on the ground would thereafter much depend on political will, coupled with ongoing efforts of 'champions' to carry such actions forward.

- **Reinforcing linkages between national gender policy frameworks and local actions**: All projects were in line with the national legislative frameworks and key national policy thrusts, and all were striving to translate these into practice at community level, with many working through district authorities and community structures. This is a good reflection of how stakeholders attempt to carry out national policy commitments at field level. However, some efforts were being hampered by a lack of clear national guidelines (for example, on integrating SRH education into national curricula); others were being hampered by lack of investment in local enforcement of national laws (for example, on minimum age at marriage). Programmes aimed at transforming social norms that affect adolescent girls should be embedded in clear national policy guidelines and frameworks. These need explicit links from national to local levels and investment in local government and community-based structures as key partners in programme design, implementation and sustainability.

- **Ensuring that national gender equality laws and policies address women and men, and girls and boys**: Too often, national policies aimed at promoting gender equality and the ministerial departments charged with their implementation assume a de facto focus on women and girls, often leaving out the essential dimension of gender relations that necessarily involves a broader focus on society as a whole. It is important to recognise that gender norm change needs to take account of existing 'masculinities' as well as 'femininities', and to identify both opportunities and challenges to positive change in each.

5.2 Key programme implications

- **Investing directly in transformative awareness-raising and confidence-building activities with adolescents**: A number of the programmes show evidence of the success of girls' clubs, youth organisations and mentoring initiatives in expanding awareness, strengthening self-confidence, and promoting leadership skills, as well as broadening aspirations for the future. Investing in young people as project facilitators and peer educators also offers a promising pathway to empowerment.

- **Developing multiple channels of communication**: Multiple communications channels seem to offer the best potential for reaching different audiences, with both medium and message tailored to specific needs. It is critical that programme design features communications tools that are specific to differences among the target audience in terms of age, gender and language. It is also important to recognise the added value of interactive dialogue, creativity and play around the specific messages conveyed in communications programmes, as these elements seem to facilitate good understanding and internalisation of such messages.

- **Involving men and boys as well as other significant gatekeepers in programme activities**: With the focus on social norms around adolescent girls implying a societal-wide perspective, target audiences for communications initiatives should include boys and girls and the significant adults in their environments, including fathers and mothers, older siblings and community leaders. Some of these serve as particularly influential 'gatekeepers' for community values and can either work to maintain or change power relations based on gender,

age or other factors, at the home and/or community level. Countering eventual sources of resistance and enlisting such influential figures as allies is the surest way to avoid a backlash.

- **Integrating communications and other complementary approaches:** An emerging 'communications-plus' model offers promise in responding to strategic as well as practical needs for gender empowerment through changes in social norms and practices. Communications components that seek to promote positive changes in gender norms and attitudes should be complemented by other kinds of support to empower individuals for behavioural change, including livelihoods support or economic empowerment support. Investment in interventions that seek to increase knowledge and to change attitudes should be accompanied by similar strong and consistent attention to investments in service provision so as to contribute to the necessary enabling environment for such changes to take root and flourish in communities.

- Recognising and addressing multiple levels for social norm change: The conceptual frameworks developed for our case study programmes all demonstrate the importance of situating the individual within their wider family, school, community and national context. The basic theory of change that has emerged is a dialectical one in which the individual acts on the environment at the same time as the environment exerts pressure on the individual. Many of the programmes were designed around the recognition that interventions to change social norms need to address individual attitude and behavioural change along with changes in the broader enabling environment.

- **Addressing multiple sectors:** Multi-sectoral participation and coordination is important, as issues related to adolescent girls span at least three or four sectors, including health, education, child protection, and gender and community development. Specific institutional structures should be established with mandates to promote such coordination at national and local levels; service providers in each sector should be involved in programme activities; and different forms of support should be included to strengthen their capacities to promote gender-responsive services, implement gender-responsive policies, and enforce gender equality laws.

- **Strengthening coordination structures and implementation capacity at local level:** The case study programmes we assessed were characterised by a variety of implementation structures. Some were designed and implemented by international NGOs, linking up with local structures and CSOs for implementation; others were developed and implemented by national or district bodies as part of ongoing government development efforts. In either case, it is critical that local authorities and government representatives at sub-national level are recognised as key stakeholders in both the processes and the outcomes of programme activities; strong coordination structures should be developed and nurtured at this level, and programmes should include significant investment in capacity development for such structures.

- **Ensuring sustainability of activities for long-term change:** While some programmes we assessed were embedded within local government programmes and structures and were part of ongoing national development thrusts, others were implemented under a clear timeframe of between three and five years and were dependent on external funding sources that were not automatically foreseen to extend beyond that period. Yet social norm change – entailing as it does individual attitude and behavioural change and changes in the enabling environment – is a long-term process; 'directed' change of the type promoted through our case study projects, which seek to transform gender roles, expectations and relations, requires continued, long-term support and encouragement. Moreover, local communities do not exist in isolation, so achieving the critical mass needed to embed such changes in local practice requires continued efforts to expand into surrounding communities – all of which calls for sustained, committed support beyond the project cycle.

5.3 Key research implications

- **Promoting rich and textured situation analyses as a baseline for programme interventions:** Such baselines serve as an example of good practice in programme design processes and should continue to be promoted as a foundation for all programming around adolescent girls. As far as possible, qualitative as well as quantitative tools and indicators should be used, and local-level analyses should link up with/feed into broader district or national data collection and assessment efforts.

- **Reinforcing programme M&E:** Strengthening the evidence base on what works in terms of programming for adolescent girls will depend on strong M&E systems that enable programmes to analyse change processes at different levels and clearly attribute changes to particular interventions. Rigorous evaluation methods should again include qualitative and quantitative approaches.

- **Developing longitudinal tools and analyses of impact:** Future research should go beyond short-term monitoring of the immediate effects of individual programmes to longer-term assessment of overall programme impacts and social change processes. This will require appropriate research and survey tools, along with significant investment in their application over time.

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