



Girls' clubs and empowerment programmes

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Knowledge to action:
Effective action on
gender norms that
affect adolescent girls



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Key points

- Girls' clubs – whether in school or other community settings – aim to empower girls by giving them a chance to learn about issues that affect their lives, enabling them to expand their social networks and, in some cases, learning vocational and life skills.
- Girls' clubs and empowerment programmes can help to shift gender norms, attitudes and practices by increasing girls' self-confidence, encouraging them to express their views, and giving them access to role models who often also act as mentors.
- Programmes need to do more to target the most vulnerable girls. Clubs must be held at convenient times for girls, and activities must be appropriate to participants' age and context.
- Clubs should engage with girls' families to influence girls' lives so that they can pursue their rights within a supportive environment. It can be particularly fruitful to engage with men (fathers, grandfathers, uncles and older brothers) who have the greatest decision-making power over girls' lives.
- Girls' clubs are one of several 'ingredients' of empowerment and gender norm change. They are most effective when accompanied by complementary interventions such as universal education, broader behaviour change and rights awareness communications that promote gender-egalitarian values, economic opportunities for educated women, and legal changes to prohibit discriminatory practices.

Setting the scene

Gender norms typically assign girls a heavy burden of domestic labour, which limits the time they can spend studying, and in turn affects their progress through school and subsequent job opportunities. Gender norms also limit girls' free movement outside the home and their ability to socialise outside their family. As a result, many adolescent girls feel isolated and disempowered, and have limited aspirations for their future beyond imminent marriage and motherhood.

This Research and Practice Note outlines the role girls' clubs and empowerment programmes can play in promoting adolescent girls' wellbeing and changing the gender norms that constrain their lives. It draws on our fieldwork in Ethiopia, Nepal, Uganda and Viet Nam (see Box 1), our systematic review of communications programmes, and secondary literature. We begin by describing what girls' clubs are and what they do, then explore some of the challenges and limitations they face. We conclude with recommendations about how programme staff can maximise the impact of girls' club activities, and outline key resources for further guidance.

What are girls' clubs and what do they do?

Girls' clubs are an increasingly popular approach to promoting adolescent girls' wellbeing. They help girls cope with the physical and emotional changes they experience during adolescence, and equip them with knowledge and skills to help them challenge discriminatory norms within

their home and wider community. Typically, they aim to empower girls by giving them access to information about their rights (including their sexual and reproductive health). They also equip them with life skills, which build their self-confidence and help them to negotiate for their rights and voice their concerns. The approach aims to broaden girls' horizons and encourage them to envisage and realise a better future.

Some girls' clubs and empowerment programmes take place in schools, typically at the end of the school day or during holidays. Others take place in different settings such as community centres or health centres, in rooms attached to churches, mosques or temples, in the offices of non-government organisations (NGOs) or cooperatives, or even outdoors. Their target groups vary: school-based clubs are usually only open to girls attending that school, whereas community-based clubs often target girls who are out of school (though some are open to school-going girls too). Some clubs target girls in a specific age group (e.g. 15 and above) or girls whose situation makes them especially vulnerable (e.g. married girls or girl mothers). Other clubs are open to any girl who wishes to participate.

Most girls' clubs are single-sex environments, enabling girls to meet, learn and discuss issues that affect their lives without the presence of boys, who might dominate discussions or make it harder for girls to reflect on gender inequalities. For this reason, they are often labelled 'safe spaces'. But many adolescent empowerment programmes work with girls and boys in mixed as well as single-sex

groups, as boys have an important role to play in changing attitudes and practices around gender equality.

Girls' clubs operate in different ways. Some are drop-in clubs, others meet regularly but infrequently (e.g. once a month), others still meet for several hours a week. Some are organised by community groups or NGOs while others are initiated by girls. Some use formal teaching methods including lectures and video presentations (often for older

girls); others organise fun activities such as dramas, quizzes and games (usually for younger girls). Some clubs aim to boost girls' educational performance; others provide non-formal education to girls who have dropped out or never attended school, acting as a bridge for them to re-enter formal education (Girl Hub, 2013). Others still focus on economic empowerment, offering training in vocational skills and financial literacy, and small loans or start-up grants to help older adolescents to develop businesses.

Box 1: Examples of the girls' club approach in practice

Ethiopia

Girls' clubs are an increasingly popular approach to promoting girls' empowerment in Ethiopia and are being widely used by the government and NGOs. **The Amhara Development Association Girls' Club Initiative**, for example, runs clubs in 20 *woredas* (districts). They aim to improve girls' awareness of their sexual and reproductive health rights and improve their health outcomes. The clubs are run by trained teachers. They work with a select group of girls who are then expected to spread the messages to their peers, including through the '1-5' development army structure, which involves all citizens from the grassroots up in governmental development initiatives. Key messages have covered how to manage menstruation (including how to make sanitary pads) and access to contraceptive services. Interestingly, in an evaluation of the initiative carried out in 2014 by the International Center for Research on Women, in one district one of the three participating schools had also set up a 'secret club' that helped girls anonymously report sexual harassment by teachers (Warner et al., 2014).

Nepal

The Women Development Programme, run by the Government's Department of Women and Children, organises clubs for girls in school and out of school, aged 11-21. First, the Women Development Office selects girls and provides a 7-day training course on vocational skills; girls can select their preferred topic, such as goat-rearing or vegetable farming. The training provides seed money for girls and young women to set up income-generating activities, as well as training on financial literacy and guidance on setting up savings groups. There are also 3-day training programmes covering adolescence and gender-related issues such as sexual and reproductive health. Following this, 25 to 30 girls are brought together to form an adolescents' group, which meets monthly, runs a savings scheme, and carries out awareness-raising and peer education activities.

World Vision (WV) has established girls' clubs in communities where it works. Targeting girls from poor families, it runs youth clubs for girls, facilitated by local NGOs and partners, which raise awareness of issues like gender-based violence, early marriage and teenage pregnancy. The girls are encouraged to share what they have learnt with their peers. The clubs provide a safe space for girls, enabling them to organise street dramas, peer education and other ways of highlighting issues of concern in their communities.

Uganda

The Straight Talk Foundation (STF), an NGO, targets adolescents and young people aged 10 to 24 in school and out of school with messages about safer sexual and reproductive health. It mainly works through Straight Talk 'dialogues' held in schools, and helping teenagers form mixed-sex Straight Talk clubs in their schools. School clubs are led by elected student leaders who work as a team in a committee. STF supports the school clubs and other out-of-school clubs by training peer trainers and arranging support visits by development workers or health workers. STF also uses popular media (newspapers and radio programmes) as well as outreach work and training. It strives to make schools a more welcoming environment for young people in order to reduce dropout rates. See more [here](#)

Viet Nam

As part of its **'Because I am a Girl' programme**, Plan runs two girls' clubs in Can Chu Phin commune, Ha Giang province. One club is for out-of-school girls aged between 15 and 19. It meets every month, and is facilitated by a male Plan staff member. The other is for girls aged 11-15 at the lower secondary school (6th to 9th grade). It meets twice a month and is facilitated by teachers. The clubs provide safe spaces where girls can discuss child marriage, sexual and reproductive health, and other problems they face. See more [here](#)

Source: Kyomuhendo Bantebya et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2015a, 2015b

Clubs are run by a variety of people ('facilitators'): usually teachers, community leaders, local women (and occasionally men) who act as role models, or older girls (Girl Hub, n.d.). Many clubs emphasise building trust – between members, and between members and club leaders – to encourage discussion, moving away from the more formal teacher-student relationships typical of schools.

Most clubs aim to empower girls through mentoring, inspiring them by introducing them to role models – local women or older adolescent girls who have achieved beyond what was expected of them and who are usually strong advocates of gender equality. Girls' clubs also aim to build a cohort of young women who can go on to act as role models for the next generation.

Girls' clubs often tackle specific issues. For instance, in areas with high rates of child marriage, the clubs teach girls what to do if their parents try to arrange a marriage for them. They also work with parents (and sometimes adolescent boys) to help them understand why it is so important for girls to complete their education and delay marriage. Some clubs – such as those we encountered in Nepal – are trained to raise awareness in their communities by conducting street dramas. Programmes targeting married girls or girl mothers explore common problems such as gender-based violence, and reproductive health and rights (Kyomuhendo Bantebya et al., 2015).

How can girls' clubs help to change gender norms?

Our fieldwork suggests that girls' clubs can empower girls and help to change gender norms in several ways.

By giving girls time and space to develop their thoughts and views, and the opportunity to challenge norms about what girls can and can't (or should and shouldn't) do.

During our fieldwork (all of which took place in poor, rural communities), one theme came up repeatedly – girls' domestic duties limit their time for studying or taking part in activities outside the home. Freeing up time spent doing household chores can give girls space to think new thoughts, identify changes they would like to make in their own lives, and ways they might achieve them.

By giving girls a forum in which they can relax and socialise with other girls. Adolescent girls from poor families and girls who are married often drop out of school and are not allowed out of the house except to get food, water or other basics. This leaves them socially isolated. Girls' clubs enable adolescent girls to spend time with their peers, build friendships and develop social networks. The fact that clubs provide learning opportunities as well as a social network outside the family means that girls have access to support from other girls who have already been

exposed to new thinking about how gender norms limit what girls can do. Because clubs are usually single-sex environments, parents, husbands or partners tend to have fewer concerns about girls attending them.

By giving girls access to new knowledge and information.

During our research in Ethiopia's Amhara state, girls identified school clubs as one of the most effective ways to learn about their rights, including their sexual and reproductive health rights, and how to stay safe in a world where being young and female often carries many risks and dangers. Giving girls new knowledge can also have important knock-on effects; other people (within the family or outside it) reportedly afford girls more respect, which can in turn lead to girls having more of a say in household decisions.

These gradual shifts in family and community perceptions of what girls can do may have broader implications too. For example, in the New Horizons non-formal education programme in Egypt (which we looked at as part of our systematic review of communications initiatives), girls reported better communication with family members, who started treating them as equals with their brothers as a result of the girls' greater knowledge (North South Consultants Exchange, 2003). Where clubs have equipped girls with income-generating skills and those girls have gone on to set up successful businesses, some reported being able to exert greater influence on household decisions as a result of their new earning power (Marcus and Page, 2014).

'The school-based activities give us information about how we should not be ashamed of menstruation and should not let it stop us from going to school; we should not get married early because this will stop short our education; and that we should share household chores so that we both have time to study.'

14-year-old girl from a Straight Talk Foundation club, Uganda (Kyomuhendo Bantebya et al., 2015)

By broadening girls' horizons. By exposing them to role models (such as older girls attending university) or possible work options they had previously not considered, clubs enable girls to imagine a different life beyond imminent marriage and motherhood. In Viet Nam and Uganda, the clubs enabled girls to develop new aspirations, which led to a renewed commitment to staying in school and delaying marriage.

By increasing girls' self-confidence so that they can advocate on their own behalf and collectively, for other girls in their community. For example, a Hmong girl from

a club in northern Viet Nam noted how she had talked a friend into not dropping out of school as a result of the programme. On her own initiative, she ‘called on other friends to go there. Each of us gave... advice and the friend listened to us.’ Other club members subsequently felt sufficiently empowered to negotiate with their mothers over how hard and how long they work (Jones et al., 2015b). Girls’ club members in Nepal told us that they had reported to the police allegations that a boy’s family were forcing a girl to elope; the police were able to intervene before the ceremony took place. Club members also spoke with the girl to raise her awareness of the risks of child marriage. Our findings are in line with wider research highlighting the potential of girls’ clubs – acting together with the police, teachers or local authorities – to help prevent proposed child marriages (Warner et al., 2014).

Our systematic review also found that empowerment programmes targeting adolescent girls led to a greater sense of self-efficacy, enabling girls to challenge discriminatory norms and persuade parents and family of the need for change. Examples included girls feeling empowered to talk to their parents about continuing their studies, avoid early marriage, and go out of the house unaccompanied. As girls continue to speak out and advocate for change, they may begin to erode expectations that adolescent girls should obey their elders and not voice their own opinions. **By developing girls’ leadership skills.** Because clubs are supportive environments, many girls who take part go on to become agents of change in their communities. Our

research found examples of girls in eastern Uganda who had participated in Straight Talk clubs and gone on to disseminate messages they had learnt through their church choir, and on the radio. Similarly, girls (and boys) who had participated in community education activities through the Gender Roles, Equality and Transformation (GREAT) project testified that they had grown in confidence and were now able to speak out and advise others (Kyomuhendo Bantebya et al., 2015).

Other research confirms the potential of girls’ clubs to develop participants’ leadership skills. For example, in Ethiopia, leaders of clubs combating female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) reported gaining confidence and leadership experience as a result of their participation (Norad, n.d.). And CARE’s Power to Lead Alliance encouraged girls in India and Malawi to become more vocal in public, using songs and community theatre and speaking out against discriminatory practices in their communities (CARE, 2012).

By functioning as a protective/child safeguarding mechanism. Clubs can make a practical difference to girls’ lives – for instance, giving members the chance to report a proposed marriage or instance of abuse. There is evidence from Ethiopia (both from our fieldwork and from Gage, 2009) of teachers who run girls’ clubs taking action to prevent planned marriages; while in Uganda (Kashaija, 2011), teachers who lead girls’ clubs have reported instances of sexual abuse in school to the headteacher. Girl

Box 2: Girls’ clubs in Can Chu Phin province, northern Viet Nam

As part of its ‘Because I am a Girl’ programme in northern Viet Nam, Plan International runs two clubs in the area covered by our fieldwork: a school-based club (open to all girls attending the school) and a village club (for older adolescent girls no longer attending school). A Plan representative explained that the clubs try hard to build trust between girls and club leaders, encouraging them ‘to talk as if we’re sisters in a family, not teachers and pupils’.

As well as question and answer (Q&A) sessions, the clubs use role-plays, games, competitions and dramas to build girls’ confidence and enable them to practise the skills they may need to protect themselves from child marriage. The school-based club tends to use play and participatory approaches, partly reflecting the younger age of its members but also the fact that the older girls in the village-based club tend to be exhausted by their workloads and more focused on economic survival.

Ly Thi Va is a 15-year-old 10th grade student who took part in Plan’s school-based club for several years. She feels it was instrumental in helping her reach high school. Her favourite activities were quizzes and drama – she and other girls created and acted out an anti-child marriage play. In the quiz, the club leaders ‘gave us answers in advance and we learnt by heart. Such questions as what is child marriage... and many other questions about family and early marriage.’

Overall, girls noted that their involvement in the clubs increased their commitment to staying in school and avoiding early marriage, increased their confidence and ability to communicate with family members, gave them access to a larger social circle, and allowed them to imagine a different, brighter future.

Source: Jones et al., 2015b

Box 3: Highlights from our systematic review: impacts of girls' clubs and empowerment programmes on gender norms

Following girls' participation in various programmes:

- In Burkina Faso, more girls believed that they should be able to choose their marriage partner, and girls were less likely to agree that boys should be prioritised in education
- In Egypt, more girls expressed their desire to marry after, rather than before, the age of 18
- In Bangladesh, more girls aspired to participate in the public realm, in professions such as medicine and law
- In India and Egypt, girls were more able to move freely and independently outside the home, in public spaces
- In Egypt, participants' families were more likely to treat their daughters and sons equally
- In Kenya, more girls stated that girls and boys should have equal rights.

Source: Marcus and Page, 2014

members of anti-FGM/C clubs in Ethiopia also noted that school clubs are often the only source of protection for girls in communities that are strongly committed to such practices (Norad, n.d.). The very existence of a girls' club can send the message to the local community that girls' issues are important and should not be overlooked.

Everyone involved (particularly external organisations) needs to be mindful not to place too much of a burden on girls' clubs as a means of tackling discriminatory practices and norms. External organisations must give all necessary support so that girls' clubs are not tackling issues in isolation, but are perceived and treated as partners. Given the risk of a backlash when tackling sensitive issues such as early marriage or discrimination (see page 9), it is vital that girls' clubs receive full support from adults in government, civil society, religious organisations and the wider community, who should fulfil their responsibilities to girls and young women.

Our systematic review of communications initiatives – just under a quarter of which involved girls' clubs or girls'

empowerment programmes – found that they had some important impacts in terms of changing discriminatory gender norms and practices (see Box 3).

Limitations and weaknesses of girls' clubs

Despite the impacts and future potential of girls' clubs, they face some common limitations and weaknesses, and there are important knowledge gaps (see Box 4). Their main limitations are as follows:

- **Reaching too few girls.** Our research in Nepal, Viet Nam and Ethiopia found that there were too few clubs to cater for the number of girls who wanted to participate.
- **Under-resourcing.** Some of the girls' clubs we encountered were woefully under-resourced and, in some cases, had inappropriate resources for the activities they were undertaking. For example, some clubs in Amhara (Ethiopia) had equipment such as megaphones and tape recorders rather than resources for teaching and discussion. As a result, facilitators were

Box 4: Addressing knowledge gaps

Girls' clubs undoubtedly have strong potential to continue to promote girls' development and bring about changes in gender norms. But our research revealed some knowledge gaps that need to be addressed.

- **Identifying the scale of provision:** Poor record-keeping (particularly among clubs operating on a 'drop-in' basis) makes it difficult to get a clear picture of the scale of provision of girls' clubs, and how many girls they are actually reaching.
- **Assessing longer-term impact:** Most impact assessment studies report perceptions of existing girls' club members (and sometimes other family members too). But there is scant attention to the longer-term impact of girls' clubs and other empowerment programmes. Nor are we aware of any studies with non-members or girls' club drop-outs, which might give valuable insights into weaknesses of the approach and how it could be improved.
- **Identifying the most effective delivery models:** There is considerable variation in the way girls' clubs operate. But we are not aware of any studies that have examined the impact of different approaches, either on girls' empowerment outcomes or on changing gender norms.

limited in the way they could present information, with girls having less opportunity to discuss issues or ask questions as a result. The girls' clubs we examined in Nepal had no resources.

- **Issues of exclusion and self-exclusion.** Although girls' clubs generally do not ask for membership fees, girls with the heaviest workloads are often least likely to take part in a club, either because their families do not allow them to or because they simply do not have the time. Some girls are deterred if they perceive the club as not being a 'safe space' – physically (for example, if they were to be forced to leave by a parent or husband/ partner) or emotionally (if their contributions are not valued). They may be less likely to attend if they feel they are not learning enough, or if the clubs are no fun (Girl Hub, n.d.). Some programmes may need to be redesigned to make them more accessible, particularly to the most disadvantaged girls. In some cases (particularly school-based clubs), the girls chosen to participate are 'star' students. This can mean that girls facing the most complex disadvantages do not benefit from club membership. In areas where several external organisations sponsor clubs, the same girls are sometimes selected to attend more than one club; these are often girls who are more vocal, while quiet or shy girls are bypassed.

Recommendations

Despite the limitations of girls' clubs and girls' empowerment programmes, our fieldwork and literature review provide insights into how they are making a positive contribution to many girls' lives. Below, we outline a series of good practice principles to help maximise their impact, both in terms of empowering girls to realise their rights and changing deep-rooted gender norms.

Mixed or single-sex clubs?

Girl-only clubs are a common model, for good reasons. Single-sex clubs are often more acceptable to parents, which increases the likelihood of girls getting permission to take part. They also tend to give girls more space in which to develop self-confidence.

But many of the adolescent-focused programmes encountered in our fieldwork – which appeared to be having strong positive effects on participants – worked with adolescent boys and girls in mixed groups. Our research also found that male mentors were appreciated and sometimes led to greater respect among parents for clubs and their activities, suggesting that it is not always essential to have a female club leader.

While girls-only environments may be more conducive to girls developing self-confidence and leadership skills, mixed groups can help build relationships among boys and girls that counteract gender stereotypes and promote mutual respect and understanding. Running single-sex groups that meet occasionally to discuss specific issues may be one way to reap the benefits of both approaches.

TIP

Girls' clubs can achieve a great deal but they will not, on their own, be enough to change deep-rooted gender norms

Though they provide a safe space for girls to share problems and find support, there are limits to what girls' clubs can achieve, particularly if they meet infrequently.

To fulfil their potential for changing gender norms, girls' clubs or other empowerment programmes should be complemented by broader initiatives that transform the structure of opportunities open to girls (e.g. through education or work), provide effective services for girls, and promote gender equality and girls' rights in all aspects of family and community life.

- **Expand school-based clubs.** School-based clubs have the potential to reach many girls, especially as the number of girls enrolling in secondary education increases. Girls generally do not need separate permission from parents to stay on after school to attend a club, which increases their chances of attending. Teachers are generally trusted and respected by the community, and are therefore in a good position to convince parents about the usefulness of enrolling girls in clubs.
- **Expand community-based clubs to reach the large numbers of disadvantaged adolescent girls who either never attended school or dropped out.** Community-based clubs and empowerment programmes can be a good way to reach out-of-school girls, including girls who are already married or have children. These girls are most likely to be vulnerable, socially isolated and overworked. Timings and frequency of meetings will need to be such that these girls can participate; outreach to parents may also be necessary.

Box 5: The power of girls' clubs in Ethiopia's Amhara region: Alemnesh's story

Alemnesh, aged 16, lives with her widowed mother. Her life has been transformed by taking part in a girls' club at school. Before joining the club, Alemnesh assumed she would finish 8th grade and then marry. Now, she hopes to go to university and become a teacher.

She attributes her new dream to the leader of the girls' club, who not only taught her *'everything about early marriage, about other harmful traditional practices such as abduction and rape'* but also to *'focus on our education instead of wasting our time in doing silly things'*. The club also helped Alemnesh develop self-confidence and skills: *'Before the club I had no skill to solve any problems; now I can propose ideas that can solve any problem.'*

Before joining the club, Alemnesh thought she should not go to school while menstruating. Now she never misses class. She also has different ideas about marriage now: *'I want my husband to have equal responsibility in the house and work and to help each other without having any differences,'* she explained.

Source: Jones et al., 2015a

- **Engage with parents and brothers.** Our systematic review suggests that to be most effective, girls' clubs and empowerment programmes need to work with multiple stakeholders to drive changes in perceptions of what girls can and can't achieve. This work needs to involve parents, brothers, other male family members, and the wider community. Strategies should:
 - **Work with parents to sensitise them about girls' rights, the long-term benefits of educating their daughters, and the dangers of early marriage.** Exposing parents to the ideas their daughters are learning in clubs could encourage debate and discussion within families, potentially quickening the pace at which gender norms change.
 - **Engage adolescent boys in gender equality work.** Programmes such as Choices (Egypt and Nepal) and Horizons and Ishraq (Egypt), which work with adolescent girls and boys separately (Ishraq) or in mixed groups (Choices), have brought about changes in boys' attitudes and behaviour. Boys taking part are typically more likely to take on their share of household work, and to accept girls' rights, including the right to choose a marriage partner. Boys can also help to persuade parents to treat their sons and daughters equally (Jones et al., 2015b; Marcus and Page, 2014).
- **Ensure that club leaders/teachers are adequately trained.** Many teachers leading girls' clubs did not feel sufficiently well prepared to deliver sensitive information on topics such as sexual and reproductive health. Enabling these teachers to feel confident will greatly increase girls' learning and the clubs' potential to empower girls. Training girls' club facilitators to use a participatory style, rather than reinforcing a didactic teacher-student dynamic, is particularly important if clubs are to be fun and engaging. This will also help ensure that girls feel able to speak and interact freely and openly, and feel confident to ask questions. Opportunities for discussion and reflection are critical for catalysing behaviour and norm change (Marcus and Page, 2014; Rogers, 1986).
- **Provide detailed information and relevant vocational skills.** Our systematic review and fieldwork in Viet Nam, Uganda and Ethiopia highlighted the importance of giving girls detailed information about their rights, including health and related issues. Girls in a Viet Nam club commented that advice on sexual and reproductive health should be more detailed, with pictures and videos to help them understand better (Jones et al., 2015b). As well as disseminating information, clubs can help girls develop practical skills they can use in their daily lives. Programmes offering vocational skills are often particularly attractive to girls and their parents, and provide a platform for broader empowerment-oriented activities (Marcus and Page, 2014).
- **Ensure that clubs and activities are age-appropriate.** Our fieldwork in Viet Nam found that while participatory games and competitions were good for engaging younger girls, older girls preferred dramas and discussion group activities (Jones et al., 2015b). Similarly, the GREAT project in Uganda found that older adolescents preferred receiving messaging through radio dramas, while younger adolescents enjoyed materials such as flipbooks and board games (Kyomuhendo Bantebya et al., 2015).
- **Expect some resistance or backlash and plan for it.** In Ethiopia and Uganda, some parents were concerned that teaching adolescent girls about sexual and reproductive

health issues would encourage them to experiment with sex, and that this focus on women and children's rights was making it harder for men to assert their authority. However, we did not come across any examples of girls who had not been allowed to attend clubs. Involving parents in programme design can help allay any fears about what will be taught (Austrian and Ghati, 2010). Holding clubs at times that do not conflict with girls' other duties can also make them more readily accepted by parents. Organising outreach activities in the community such as dramas performed by girls' club members can also help, as can demonstrating that clubs are teaching girls practical skills.

- **Use clubs to introduce role models for girls.** Clubs provide a unique platform for exposing girls to strong female role models ('successful' women, community leaders or girls who have gone against tradition to achieve certain goals). This kind of exposure can help drive change in norms and values, including those surrounding early marriage, education and the role of women in society. In Ethiopia, our respondents, young and old alike, highlighted the importance of role models in helping them to challenge gender norms in their family and community. Often, adolescent girls themselves – particularly those that have had to fight for their right to education – have powerful stories that could inspire their younger peers.
- **Build a supportive environment among institutions and service providers.** Girls are more likely to be able to apply their new skills and knowledge if the wider environment is supportive of them doing so. For example, girls who learn about their sexual and reproductive health rights through girls' clubs need access to relevant services if they are to use that knowledge (and not be turned away because they are unmarried, for example).
- **Plan for sustainability.** Many of the initiatives we looked at were dependent on external funding, often provided for a few years at most. As new cohorts of girls reach adolescence and the trend of increased female enrolment in school continues, funding needs to be made available for longer timespans. Crucially, though, girls' clubs and other empowerment programmes should explore ways of being financially self-sustaining in the longer term. Our research in Nepal found examples of adolescent girls' savings groups linked to mothers' cooperatives. Existing club facilitators need to be retained, supported and motivated – for instance, through access to training, new materials, etc. and a generation of new facilitators needs to be developed.

Resources

ODI Programme outputs

Jones, N., Tefera, B., Gebre, B. and Berhanu, K. (2015a) *'Now I can propose ideas that can solve my problem': The Strengths and Weaknesses of Community Awareness Interventions in Ending Child Marriage and Empowering Adolescent Girls in Amhara Regional State in Ethiopia*. This report examines communications initiatives aimed at shifting social norms related to early marriage and education in Amhara, Ethiopia. It includes an analysis of the impact of girls' clubs run by the Amhara Development Association.

Jones, N., Presler-Marshall, E., Tran, T.V.A., Thuy, D., Le, D. and Thao, N. (2015b) *'You must be bold enough to tell your own story': Programming to Empower Viet Nam's Hmong Girls*. This report draws on primary research to explore how selected communications initiatives translate policy commitments to address discriminatory norms around early marriage, pregnancy and girls' education in Viet Nam. It looks at girls' club programmes (in-school and out-of-school) implemented by Plan as part of its 'Because I am a Girl' programme, as well as other locally initiated clubs, highlighting their transformative power and setting out recommendations to improve efficacy.

Jones, N., Presler-Marshall, E. and Tran, T.V.A. (2014) *Early Marriage among Viet Nam's Hmong: How Unevenly Changing Gender Norms Limit Hmong Adolescent Girls' Options in Marriage and Life*. This report draws on research from in-depth qualitative fieldwork in Ha Giang province, northern Viet Nam, on what drives the shifting and persisting norms surrounding marriage practices – and marriage-education trade-offs – for girls within the Hmong community. Although it does not explore their value and practicalities in depth, the report recommends setting up girls' clubs where progressive role models could talk and inspire girls to imagine quite different futures.

Kyomuhendo Bantebya, G., Muhanguzi, F.K. and Watson, C. (2015) *'This is not the work of a day': Communications for Social Norm Change around Early Marriage and Education for Adolescent Girls in Uganda*. This report presents key findings about the approach and efficacy of three communications programmes in Uganda. Each was designed to raise awareness and bring about change in social norms through in-school and out-of-school clubs. They were run by Straight Talk, the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) and the Gender Roles, Equality and Transformation (GREAT) project.

Marcus, R. and Page, E. (2014) *Changing Discriminatory Norms affecting Adolescent Girls through Communication Activities: A Review of Evidence*. This report reviews evidence about the effectiveness of communications programmes in changing social norms that affect adolescent girls. Just under a quarter of initiatives worked with adolescent girls in single-sex settings and another 11% worked with boys and girls in mixed groups. The review found that taking part in girls' clubs had a positive impact on girls' self-confidence and aspirations, citing changes in attitudes on issues such as early marriage, education, gender division of labour and gender-based violence. In some cases, families had started to perceive girls as having valuable knowledge and had started to listen to their opinions. Where clubs or empowerment programmes held parallel classes for boys, or engaged with parents from time to time, the impacts on norm change were generally greater. A summary of this report is available [here](#).

Other key literature

Adolwa, J., Brand, C., Kintz, G., Renault, L. and Toth, C. (2012) *Girls' Leadership Development in Action: CARE's Experience from the Field*. Atlanta, GA: Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc (CARE). This report draws on CARE's fieldwork and research to outline the key factors underlying girls' empowerment: education, leadership development opportunities and an enabling environment. It describes outcomes of CARE's leadership projects in different domains across different countries.

Austrian, K. and Ghati, D. (2010) *Girl-Centered Program Design: A Toolkit to Develop, Strengthen and Expand Adolescent Girls' Programs*. New York: Population Council. This toolkit gives detailed practical guidance on developing programmes targeted at adolescent girls. It showcases a number of tools for needs assessment, programme design and group facilitation. It also provides guidance on themes such as sexual and reproductive health and economic empowerment activities.

Baric, S., Bouchie, S., Cronin, P., Heinzen, A., Menon, G. and Prather, C. (2009) *The Power to Lead: A Leadership Model for Adolescent Girls*. Atlanta, GA: CARE. This report was developed to help guide CARE's leadership model. It provides a literature review on different approaches to girls' education and leadership development (including safe spaces) and explores theories and pathways of change.

Girl Hub (n.d.) *The Essential Guide to Safe-Space Programmes for Girls*. Washington DC: The Girl Effect. This report explores the essential ingredients of safe spaces for girls. These include creating a place and time for girls to meet without men and boys present, involving trusted female role models, and encouraging community buy-in. It includes tips on appropriate places to run clubs (such as community centres or churches) and has case studies of successful girls' clubs in Brazil and Burundi.

Girl Hub (2013) *10 Reasons Safe Spaces are at the Heart of the Girl Effect*. Washington DC: The Girl Effect. This briefing summarises the benefits of safe-space programmes, including their ability to build girls' confidence, skills and independence, and give them a vision of a different future. It draws on examples across the developing world to highlight the potential for clubs to build girls' social networks, protect them from risk and broaden their horizons.

Warner, A., Stoebenau, K. and Glinski, A. (2014) *More Power to Her: How Empowering Girls Can Help End Child Marriage*. Washington DC: International Center for Research on Women. This report explores four girl-centred interventions (two of them based around girls' clubs) in Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia and India. It discusses routes to girls' empowerment and discusses what the four programmes have achieved in helping girls avoid child marriage. It also stresses the limitations of girls' clubs in changing gender norms, and the importance of engaging with parents and community leaders, given that adults should hold primary responsibility for ending child marriage.

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