

G L O B A L
G · L ·  · W

**How to support adolescent girls in
using their agency, voice, and power
to build a life of their own design**

Best practices from the literature

June 2023





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About Global G.L.O.W.



Global G.L.O.W. mentors girls around the world to become powerful advocates and confident leaders. Since inception, our GLOW Clubs have ignited the power of over 91,000 girls to do 3 transformative things: increase their confidence, strengthen their voice, and build their power. We sharpen girls' advocacy skills by supporting specialty summits, sponsoring girl-led community advocacy projects, and engaging in U.N. advocacy, reaching 2 million people annually. Our outcomes evaluations demonstrate that girls experience growth in confidence and a more positive future outlook, along with measurable progress in their own lives and in their communities.

This review was commissioned by Global G.L.O.W. with the objective of collecting and synthesizing evidence on what is needed for girls (ages 10 to 18) to pursue and build a life of their own design – one in which they have agency, autonomy, and decision-making power. A literature review was conducted by an external consultant and the results of that review formed the basis of the design of Global G.L.O.W.'s new conceptual model and theory of change. The findings are presented here.



Introduction

Gender Inequality and Adolescent Girls

Adolescent girls are one of the most vulnerable populations in the world who are often left powerless without a voice or control over their lives. (Ricker & Ashmore, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; UNAIDS, 2014) Most adolescent girls in the world live in low- and middle- income countries and are vulnerable to early marriage and childbearing, unsafe sexual practices, gender-based violence, exploitation and limited opportunity for education. According to United Nations Women (2022), over 380 million women and girls currently live in extreme poverty (under \$1.90 a day), putting them at risk for early marriage and other vulnerabilities. The most vulnerable girls, including those affected by poverty, are three times more likely to get married before turning 18 than those from wealthier homes. (Hinson et al., 2021) Overall, global estimates suggest that 12 million girls are married before the age of 18 each year, including 35% percent of girls in sub-Saharan Africa. In terms of education, approximately 130 million girls worldwide are not in formal education; of these, about 54% are in crisis- or conflict-affected contexts. (UN Women, 2022)





These vulnerabilities are due to widening gender inequalities, which are reinforced by biased gender social norms and practices that violate adolescent girls' rights to education, health, and protection from violence. According to United Nations Development Program (2023), biased gender social norms undervalue girls' capabilities and rights in society, thereby limiting girls' choices, opportunities, autonomy, mobility and access to information, and services needed to make informed decisions. (Berhane et al., 2018; Ricker & Ashmore, 2020) For example, the practice of child marriage, which is largely driven by social norms, poverty, and unplanned pregnancies (Psaki et al., 2021), is a violation of adolescent girls' human rights, particularly their rights outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 2(2) & Article 19(1)). (UNICEF, 2023) Child marriage not only denies adolescent girls the opportunity for cognitive development but also takes away their right to freedom and education. (Dube, 2022). Child marriage therefore violates many human rights, which in turn can have a negative impact on girls' sense of self-worth, self-efficacy, and empowerment, ultimately limiting their agency over their own bodies and lives. (Dube, 2022; Ricker & Ashmore, 2020)

However, adolescence is not only recognised as a vulnerable period, but also as an opportunity to prevent harmful gender norms from becoming internalized by both young boys and girls. (Berhane et al., 2018; Lundgren et al., 2013) Globally, practitioners are recognising the importance of seeing adolescent girls as "active agents" in their own development who need to build their agency to have greater control and power over their lives. (Vijayaraghavan et al., 2022) When adolescent girls build their agency, voice, and power, they develop confidence to challenge harmful gender social norms, and can advocate for their rights and gender equality. (Dube, 2022; Klugman et al., 2014; UNDP, 2023) For example, adolescent girls with agency can use their voice and power to advocate for delayed marriage and achieve their educational and career aspirations. Enhanced agency also gives adolescent girls more control over their sexual and reproductive health and enables them to participate in better informed decisions about their health, education, and future. (Klugman et al., 2014)



Agency, Voice, and Power

Agency, or the ability of an individual to make choices free of violence, retribution, or fear, is associated with autonomy. Specifically, a person is autonomous when they have capacity and/or freedom for self-government, expression, and moral independence. In many circumstances, women, girls, or other individuals may have the capacity or desire to self-govern, but do not have the power to act. Agency, therefore, is the ability to make effective choices and to transform those choices into one's desired outcomes. (Gammage et al., 2016; Hanmer & Klugman, 2016; Klugman et al., 2014; Vyas et al., 2021)

Voice reflects the capacity to speak up and be heard in one's environment(s) by participating in discussions and influencing decisions that directly or indirectly may impact them. (Klugman et al., 2014) The expression of voice to influence decision-making helps to build environments in which girls are free to use their agency and act on and have power over the various dimensions of their lives. (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016)



Building Agency – Individual Level

The first key review area on the necessary elements for girls to pursue and build a life of their own design is at the individual level. Equipped with both agency and power, adolescent girls can be empowered to access services that support their wellbeing through health, education, economic opportunities, public life, and security – also referred to as the right of access. (Hillenbrand et al., 2015) To exercise agency, girls must have the necessary knowledge to make informed choices or challenge previous thinking; access to and control over the right resources for action; and have the necessary skills or capacity to put knowledge and resources into action. (Banati et al., 2021; Berhane et al., 2019; Donald et al., 2020; Hanmer & Klugman, 2016; Hinson et al., 2019; Klugman et al., 2014; Sidle, 2019) These three components of agency form the foundation of building agency and capacity for life design within adolescent girls.

Knowledge and Belief Systems

Girls access their internal knowledge and beliefs when they access and process the information needed to make wise judgements. (Hillenbrand et al., 2015) This serves as a crucial starting point for programmatic action, because girls must have sufficient access to information to build these abilities. (Banati et al., 2021; Berhane et al., 2019; Hanmer & Klugman, 2016; Hinson et al., 2019) The methods used to disseminate information to girls must take into account different literacy levels and learning styles in order to reach the most vulnerable or marginalized groups. For instance, health material and services are not frequently presented in an environment appropriate for adolescent girls. (Adokiya et al., 2021; Ambresin et al., 2013; Daley, 2011; Denno et al., 2020; Hoopes et al., 2016) Adolescent-friendly material development, therefore, is a crucial element of successful programming.





Access to information does not in and of itself constitute power within. Individuals are also heavily influenced by their beliefs, which are culturally bound. For example, traditional health beliefs influence perceptions of health and illness, causes of disease, approaches to health promotion, and preferences for help-seeking behavior. Individuals may defer to these traditional health beliefs before accessing new information (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2014; Ezenwaka et al., 2020; Munakampe et al., 2018). Programmatic action to increase access must include fostering a personal or group sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and self-knowledge among girls in order to put knowledge into action and enable them to build the confidence and negotiation skills to challenge dominant discourse and belief systems. (Lussier, n.d.; Nanda et al., 2020; Ross, D.A., et al., 2021) Therefore, in addition to building knowledge, building the capacity of girls to inform their own beliefs, attitudes, and self-efficacy is also essential for girls to pursue and build a life of their own design.

Two critical components that contribute to one's confidence is self-efficacy and the belief in their future or positive future outlook. (Gavin et al., 2010; Greve et al., 2001; Tsang et al., 2012) These components are closely related as self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their capacity to control their own life and act on behaviors to produce specific results. (Bandura et al., 1999) Belief in one's future involves internalizing hope and optimism about future outcomes (Gavin et al., 2010). For adolescent girls, particularly those in vulnerable settings, a belief that they can have a future different from their parents or peers is critical to fostering long term goals such as those related to higher education or employment. (Packer et al., 2020) These can be influenced by having successful experiences, observing or hearing about successful experiences from others, visualizing successful experiences, and having social influences of an experience – all of which are formed by daily interactions and settings. (Bandura et al., 1999). Emerging adolescent girl development research highlights the influence that aspirations have on development outcomes and how individual and contextual factors influence the development of and dynamic relationship between aspirations and self-efficacy. (Madjdian et al., 2021; Packer et al., 2020) The development of these elements are discussed further in the community/household level section of the findings.



Children and Agency

Children can be both reliant and independent at the same time, and their agency varies based on where they are, what they do, and with whom they engage. Age, developmental stage, maturity, locality, cultural norms, family economic situation, and exposure are all interconnected with agency. (Ballet et al., 2011) Children's agency is characterized by their interdependence with others, and is nested inside their social relationships with adults and their peers.

As the frame of this report covers girls aged 10-18 who may not be considered adolescents, it is important to consider how agency applies to children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child repeatedly emphasizes the rights of children's participation (UNCRC). (OHCHR, 1990) They have the right to free speech, the ability to organize and join associations, the ability to seek and receive accurate information, and the ability to be consulted on issues that affect them, according to articles 12 and 17. The experience of child autonomy is complicated and heavily contextualized, however. Everything that exists within a child's surroundings, or nested ecological systems, has an impact on their growth- from the networks of their family, school, and peer groups to political and economic macrosystems. (Unterhalter, 2012) Although this is true for adolescents as well, they tend to have more independence than children, which presents unique programmatic considerations.

From a programmatic standpoint, aspects of children's agency including participation, autonomy, resilience, self-efficacy, and decision-making should be addressed within the social, familial, and structural contexts in which they live (Carlson et al., 2015; Zaidman et al., 2023), as one would for adolescents. However, for children, there may be more necessity to incorporate parents into programming, and/ or approach programming through existing channels such as schools.





Expressing Voice – Household/Community Level

The second key review area on the necessary elements for girls to pursue and build a life of their own design is at the household and community levels. At this level, agency is complemented by opportunities to share and engage, or express their voice, building their power. At this stage, the knowledge and beliefs built at the individual level can be expanded upon with the capabilities to express voice and participate in decision-making.

Autonomy and Decision Making

Having the right information and confidence in one's own intrinsic abilities cannot support girls in designing their own lives unless they are also provided with the resources necessary for action. A classic example includes girls' knowledge of reproductive health choices. While girls can be given information regarding contraception and safe sexual activity, without safe access to contraception and abortion, adolescent girls will face unintended pregnancies or situations in which they would have to leave school or see other plans similarly derailed. (Hinson et al., 2019; McCarthy et al., 2022, 2023; Mcharo et al., 2021; Pulerwitz et al., 2019; Vizheh et al., 2021; Yakubu & Salisu, 2018)



Given this, programming to equip girls with the ability to pursue and build their own lives should work to ensure that girls have power over the resources necessary for their health and wellbeing.

Capacity and Skill-Building

In addition to knowledge and resources, girls must have the power to act, measured in terms of skills or capacity to make decisions. Programmatic action must include increasing practical skills through training, while being intentional in the equitable participation of girls in situations where programming may be co-ed. Capacity must also extend beyond the practical/technical skills to include 'soft skills' such as self-efficacy, bargaining power, negotiation, and conflict management. (Banati et al., 2021; Hayhurst, 2013; Klugman et al., 2014; Lussier, n.d.; Nanda et al., 2020; Ross, D.A., et al., 2021)

Models that incorporate life skills, comprehensive sexuality education, or local-level advocacy enable girls to advance the knowledge they have gained by strengthening power within. These models also strengthen power with or collective agency, as groups of girls – alone or jointly with boys - work together to bring about structural change. (Banati et al., 2021)

Adolescent programming often focuses on building particular skills or capacities, such as economic opportunities, educational attainment, and social and emotional skills like navigating relationships and building self-confidence. Specific areas covered by these programs include health and nutrition (including reproductive choice) (Acton, 2021; Hinson et al., 2019; McCarthy et al., 2022, 2023; Pulerwitz et al., 2019; Van Eerdewijk et al., 2017), development of life skills and financial capacity (Edmonds et al., 2021; Gulesci et al., 2021; Hanmer & Klugman, 2016; Klugman et al., 2014; Sidle, 2019), sports programming (Hayhurst, 2013), and school-based programming that encourages girls to stay in school (Banati et al., 2021; Edmonds et al., 2021; Klugman et al., 2014; Scales et al., 2013). Benefits of the programs include a decrease in dropout rates (Edmonds et al., 2021), improved nutritional choices (Acton, 2021; O'Leary & Sarkar, 2021), and decreased violence against girls. (Gulesci et al., 2021)



Peer Programming and Advocacy Groups

Strengthening the agency of women and girls through building their self-confidence and internal capabilities is critical, but it is not sufficient on its own for building their power and creating empowered generations. At the household and community level, girls should be equipped with spaces where they feel safe expressing themselves and can have their voice heard, and with programs that teach them how to advocate within their households, peer groups, and communities.

Adolescent girl groups, also known as community-based girl groups or 'safe spaces' for girls, were found to positively influence girls' self-perception, attitudes towards gender norms, and confidence. (O'Leary & Sarkar, 2021; Temin & Heck, 2020a, 2021, 2020b) Girl groups did not necessarily require a fixed space in which they could be held. For example, a successful 'collective movement' of girls in Copenhagen, Denmark found that girls created their own places and spaces over time, using these 'safe spaces' to work on developing personal boundaries and agencies with peers. (Christensen & Mikkelsen, 2013; Hanmer & Klugman, 2016; Klugman et al., 2014)

Girl groups had varied and often combined purposes, some of which are discussed in the second category below. However, girl groups generally involved, at their core, a focus on building the internal knowledge and capability of girls to understand and express their choices and desires, and to learn how they can approach advocating for themselves and their peers. (Banati et al., 2021; Berhane et al., 2019; O'Leary & Sarkar, 2021; Scales et al., 2013; Temin & Heck, 2020b) Girl groups also enabled them to build resilience and social capital. (Van Eerdewijk et al., 2017)





Overall, findings from the literature review support the role of girl groups and safe spaces for girls as important contributors to girls' empowerment and the development of their agency and voice. However, it was also cautioned that girl groups should be complemented with other activities that focus on building supportive communities and enabling environments so that girls are able to express their newfound agency and voice while feeling empowered as key members of their communities. (Edmonds et al., 2021; Temin & Heck, 2020a, 2021, 2020b; Van Eerdewijk et al., 2017)

Community Engagement

A final significant aspect related to building agency and voice for girls was programming that built supportive communities around girls, such as those that built male champions of gender equality or increased opportunities for girls to engage with their parents in a collaborative manner. (Bhatta et al., 2021) Opportunities for community engagement were a secondary outcome of one project's adolescent girl groups, which reported that girls felt more comfortable engaging in their households and communities, including with their parents. (Acton, 2021) These programs noted the importance of building supportive environments for girls in which they could use their agency and voice their opinions. (Banati et al., 2021; Klugman et al., 2014; Van Eerdewijk et al., 2017)

While some programs focused specifically and exclusively on girls, others suggested that boys should be included through participation in activities, forums for discussion, and listening in on sessions for girls. This involvement, although less intentional and without specific goals or outcomes in mind, often resulted in improved behaviors with respect to gender equality from participating boys (Nanda et al., 2020; Sharma & Nanda, 2019). These considerations were also important for men who influence and enforce norms, such as community leaders, religious influencers, teachers, and other role models. (Chang, 2020; Nanda et al., 2020; Sharma & Nanda, 2019)



Access to Services

Physical access refers to the availability of adequate and functioning infrastructure and/or institutions. When collaborating with partners to design or improve institutions, unique barriers for women, girls, and marginalized populations must be considered and assessed. Increasing the availability of infrastructure can help to expand coverage, and thereby access. Coverage must also ensure that proximity is optimized at a reasonably convenient geographic location for as many individuals as possible - particularly for women and girls, who face increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, especially when traveling long distances for services. Accessibility must also account for the needs of persons with disabilities to ensure equitable utilization of service by all. Adequate infrastructure should account for the unique needs of women and girls, including essential gender appropriate water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities and menstrual hygiene equipment/supplies and support. (Ambresin et al., 2013; Denno et al., 2020; Hoopes et al., 2016; Mcharo et al., 2021; Temin & Heck, 2020a)



Economic Opportunities

Lack of economic and financial independence or equitable decision-making over household resources often hinder women's and girls' access to available infrastructure, institutions, and services. Hidden costs such as transportation, user fees, even wait times that take away from productive and domestic work, act as additional economic barriers to access or opportunities for women and girls. For example, the monetization of access, through user fees, forces poor parents to choose which of their children to send to school and often indicates a preference for educating boys over girls. Parents often decide on the basis of what they believe will be the maximum economic benefit to the family, over the long term, on their educational investment. Because of entrenched gender inequality, labor markets generally favor men. Therefore, parents often conclude that it is better to educate boys who are able to access better employment opportunities as a result of their education. (Donald et al., 2020; Edmonds et al., 2021; Perezniето & Taylor, 2014)

Building power over economic resources coupled with skills and capacity (power to) to save and manage finances is essential to achieving gender equality. Therefore, programs must include aspects of economic power within theories of change and measure them accordingly. Social and cultural norms and institutionalized gender inequality have significant impact on access to and power over financial resources for women and girls. Addressing these societal norms and beliefs systems through promoting individual and collective participation (power within and power with) is critical to achieving the right of access to systems and can serve as a catalyst for developing new systems (e.g. girls' entrepreneurship). (Banati et al., 2021; Chang, 2020)





Reaching Empowerment – Systems/Societal Level

Strengthening the agency and voice of women and girls, as well as their advocacy and participation skills, are crucial steps towards gender empowerment. However, on their own, they are insufficient to guarantee progress towards gender equality.

Societies are often structured in a way that systematically excludes or disadvantages women and girls. Therefore, agency and empowerment must also be integrated into rights within systems with gender equality being a primary goal through supportive policy and legal environments, comprehensive and wide-scale delivery of gender-equitable services, and gender-equitable governance structures. It is imperative that these systems promote the rights of the women and girls who benefit from them, but also the rights of women and girls who contribute to, or lead, their operations. (Banati et al., 2021; Chang, 2020; Heymann et al., 2019; Nanda et al., 2020; Sharma & Nanda, 2019; Van Eerdewijk et al., 2017)



As rights within individual systems change, it is critical to recognize, address, and account for the interdependence of rights between systems. Gender equality gains or losses within one sphere (socio-cultural, political, education, health, livelihoods, and economic development etc.) can positively or negatively impact other spheres. For example, as women and girls realize their rights in education, their enjoyment of rights in nutrition or health potentially increase. Conversely, the lack of realization of rights in health and nutrition reduces participation in and enjoyment of rights in education. Transformation within and through interdependent systems cannot be achieved without social and political accountability: at each level of systemic change there must be an interplay of individual and collective agency, where power within is expressed through collective voice. (Chang, 2020; Heymann et al., 2019; Klugman et al., 2014; Klugman & Twigg, 2013)

Integrating an enabling and supportive regulatory environment within programs is critical for gender equality, and working with a knowledgeable, skilled base of gender equality advocates to develop core related activities is essential for holistic progress. Programming at the systems level must address change practically, by creating opportunities for women and girls to access and engage with systems; and socially, encompass values of respect and promotion of girls' and women's human rights within systems. (Banati et al., 2021; Heymann et al., 2019; Klugman & Twigg, 2013)

Policy/Legal Environments

Dominant social structures that currently reinforce gender inequality alongside other intersectional factors, such as social strata, ethnicity, race, or disability, can significantly hinder or negatively influence policy change. (Banati et al., 2021; Heymann et al., 2019; Klugman & Twigg, 2013) Programmatically, the role of non-governmental organizations can and should be multifaceted: advocating for gendered policy and legal review at national and sub-national levels; educating community members about their rights and services provided to them; and establishing/equipping community-based organizations or governance structures to monitor and engage government actors and duty bearers holding them accountable to gender-equality and human rights.



However, the principles of individual and collective agency and empowerment of girls must be central to any intervention. (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016; Klugman et al., 2014)

At the community level, it is within the social, economic, and political structures of communities where girl voices must be prioritized. Engaging women and girls individually and collectively as active members and leaders within faith and community leadership, civil society organizations, and governance structures such as village health committees provides a clear and open process for ensuring that policy and legal environments are built to reflect the considerations of gender equality, and encourage the active participation and support of all community members. Within this space, girls who have been supported to develop knowledge and capacity around gender-transformative policy and legal change can ensure that a supportive environment is created for the girls to follow. (Banati et al., 2021; Chang, 2020; Lussier, n.d.; Nanda et al., 2020; Sharma & Nanda, 2019)



Context and Interdependencies

Agency, autonomy, and empowerment are interrelated, multi-dimensional constructs. However, according to Carlson et. al., all of the dimensions of agency are related and measure the same underlying construct. (Carlson et al., 2015) Agency does not exist in isolation, however, and must be defined and measured operationally in relation to the different aspects of life; including family relationships, social standing, physical and emotional health, and economic power, i.e. distinct human rights. Women can have high autonomy in one dimension and very little autonomy in another. The structures or social, economic, and political patterns that shape societies therefore greatly influence agency, limiting or enabling women's and girls' power and decision-making. Consequently, definitions of agency must also vary between contexts with different social, economic and political structures operating at any given time within the same context.

Without exception, reviewed literature emphasized the need to understand and remain sensitive to local contexts and cultures, and cautioned that approaches that worked in one area would not necessarily be successful in another. (Klugman et al., 2014) Successful development of agency and voice is dependent on a community and society in which it can be expressed, and what current approaches are with respect to child marriage, work, health, and education. (Temin & Heck, 2020b)

Globally, gender inequality more commonly negatively impacts women and girls, though the burdens of inequality are different in each context and are determined by other vulnerabilities besides gender. There are several factors which may constrain women's and girls' agency and empowerment. According to the PROGRESS+ approach, these factors include place of residence, race, culture, language, occupation, religion, education, socioeconomic status, social capital, and any other personal or family characteristics that may lead to discrimination, such as disability, sexual orientation, or gender orientation. (O'Neill et al., 2014) Discrimination based on multiple factors further reduces an individual's opportunity to develop and enact her agency, and as such, these intersectional factors must always be considered when assessing and building



programs to support agency and empowerment. These fundamental inequalities for adolescent girls represent a lack of opportunity for girls to build and express agency and power over the choices that determine their life's path.

Within each element of the pathway to gender equality presented here, there are many critical activities and processes for change that contribute to the acquisition or strengthening of rights within each system. As rights change, it is critical to recognize, address and account for the interdependence of rights between systems, to ensure that progress in one area does not result in losses within another area, or that progress in one area can be leveraged to support gains in another. (Banati et al., 2021; O'Neill et al., 2014; Pulerwitz et al., 2019; Van Eerdewijk et al., 2017) Interdependencies can be positive - for example, as women and girls gain expanded rights to education, they may gain knowledge and decision-making over their nutrition and health choices.

Challenging existing gender norms and power dynamics is often a slow and arduous task requiring non-governmental organizations to pay close attention to the principles of Do No Harm – e.g. not pushing women and girls to advocate for topics that may increase their likelihood of experiencing violence or retribution. (Daigle, 2022; Shawar & Shiffman, 2020) Those providing programming should be aware and sensitive to the possibility that their programming may involve addressing patriarchal organizations and cultures, apprehensive or openly hostile political environments for gender equality, and people and organizations defenses about changes to existing power structures. (Shawar & Shiffman, 2020)





Applications to Global G.L.O.W.’s Theory of Change and Conceptual Model

For the purposes of this review, there were several conceptual frameworks and theories of change reviewed to explore women’s and girls’ empowerment and the factors that influence them. A conceptual model serves to visually depict a complex system or interaction, including identifying the main components and relationships of the system. (Hassan, 2022) A theory of change is defined by the United Nations Development Group as “a method that explains how a given intervention, or set of interventions, are expected to lead to a specific development change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence.” (UNDAF, 2016) All of the frameworks considered incorporated building blocks of gender equality that included individual, community, and societal level factors. They also considered the multi-sectoral nature of gender equality, highlighting the importance of addressing the agency and empowerment of women and girls in education, health, economic growth, systems and structures, laws and institutions, and through social norm development. (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2023; Klugman et al., 2014; Pulerwitz et al., 2019)



As the literature demonstrates, multiple strategies and approaches must be employed together in order to make lasting change within girls to support their development of agency, voice, and power to build a life of their own design. Our theory of change and conceptual model, therefore, incorporates the following evidence-based and informed approaches to girls' development.

To develop agency, adolescent girls need knowledge on how to make informed decisions and the necessary skills and capacity to put this knowledge into action. Programmatic action should include fostering a personal and group sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and self-knowledge among girls to support their application of this knowledge and enable them to build the confidence and negotiation skills to challenge dominant discourse and belief systems. Our programming directly impacts this by using curriculum that teaches

the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning framework for social emotional learning (SEL) competencies and intentionally builds program participants' capabilities in the five key areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), n.d.) This provides the foundation for adolescent girls to have the power to act when measured in terms of their skills or capacity to make decisions and their power within. Having a positive future outlook or belief that one's future can be different is an important and positively reinforcing element to adolescent girls acting upon their confidence and power.





Further, the literature suggests that agency is complemented by opportunities to share and engage, or express voice, thereby building power. At this stage, the knowledge and beliefs built at the individual level can be expanded upon with the capabilities to express voice and participate in decision-making. At the household and community level, girls should be equipped with spaces where they feel safe expressing themselves and can have their voice heard, and with programs that teach them how to advocate within their households, peer groups, and communities. Our programming works directly to provide opportunities for adolescent girls to practice and use their voice in safe environments, and employ power with other girls and agencies, by offering leadership opportunities both within the safe space structure and outside of it in the community with the support of their peers and mentors. In addition, we provide evidence-based recommended safe spaces for girls as it positively influences girls' self-perception, attitudes towards gender norms, and confidence.

We recognize the need for programming that seeks to change gender-related norms and behaviors, to work closely with churches, other faith communities, traditional leaders, and other key local opinion leaders who are trusted and influential. We work in this area via our targeted community projects created by girls with the influence of their mentors as a standard learning opportunity, thereby demonstrating to girls the necessity of their opinions and voices alongside other key opinion leaders in the larger conversation of community progress and enhancement.

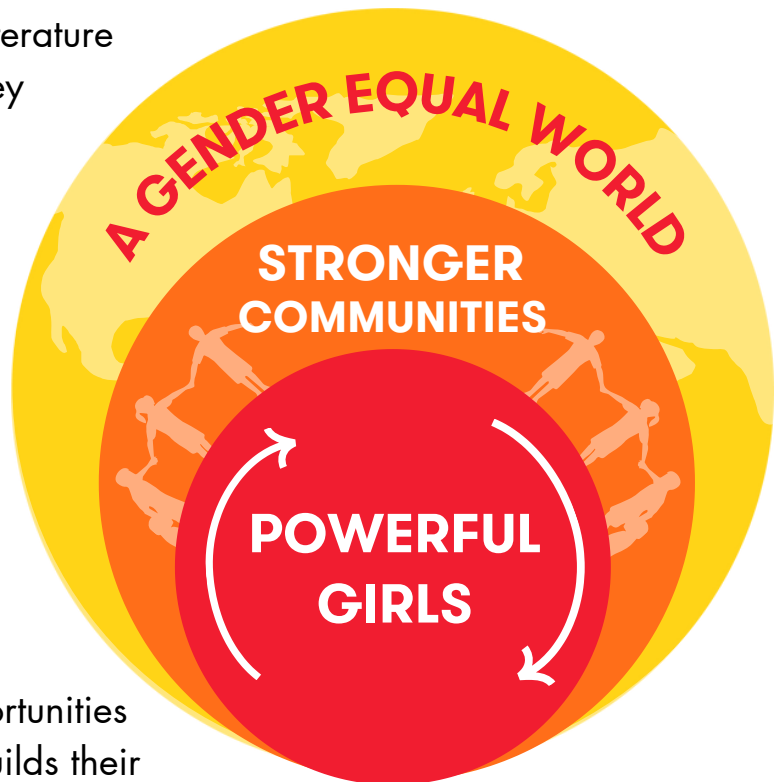
NGOs, particularly those with more limited resources or smaller areas of focus, often have limited opportunities to influence societal and systems-level change. In order to maximize their impacts, findings from the literature indicated that their efforts are best placed to build girls' agency, knowledge, and skills through individual mentoring and/or peer groups while teaching them to engage at the household and community level. By focusing in these areas, programs can support girls to express their voice and shift the balance of power.

At the same time, those offering programming in this area should also be mindful of the unique influences that every context will have, designing

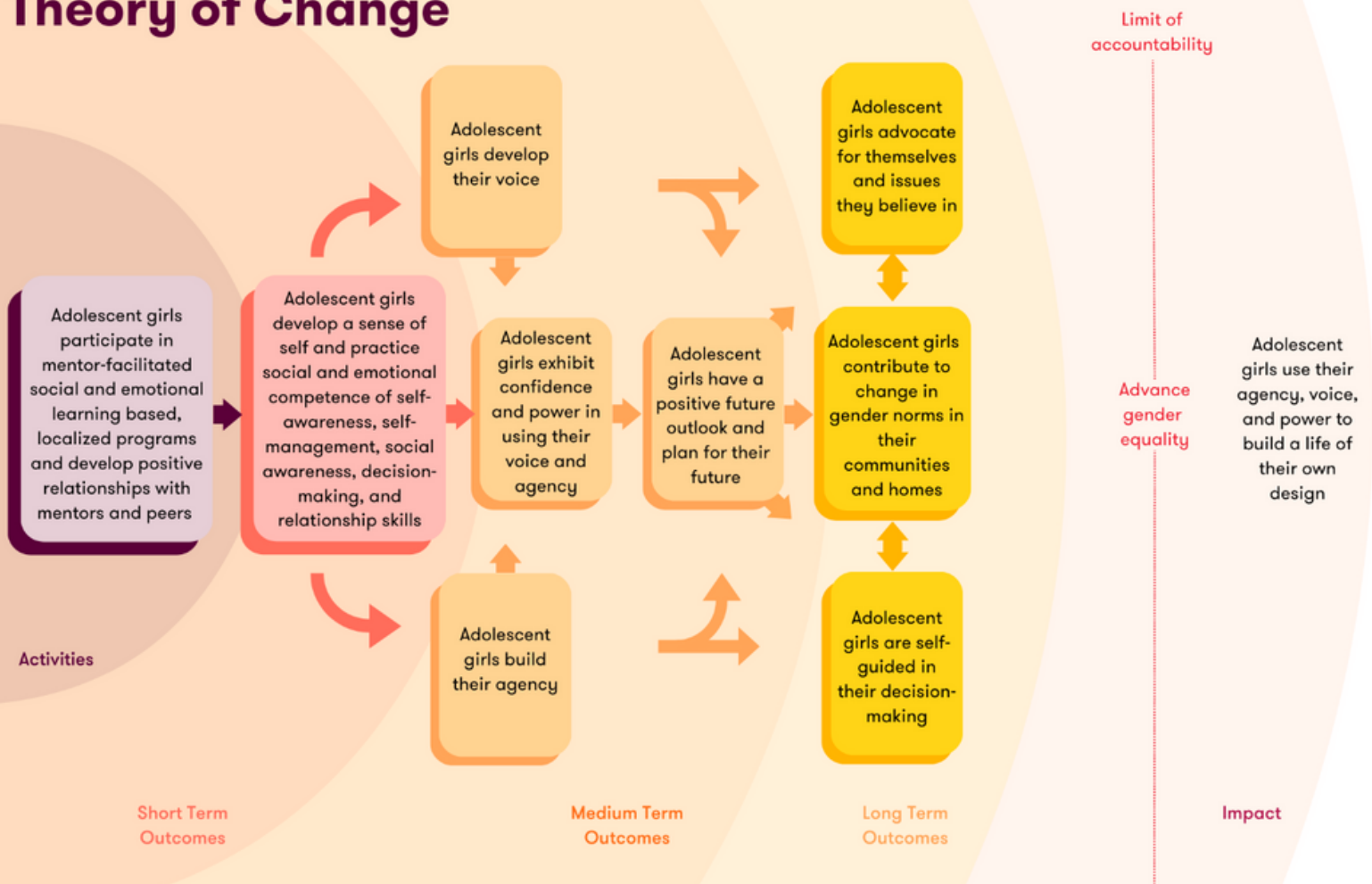


programs to address any local barriers while also ensuring that girls are not placed in difficult positions within their community. For example, in very restrictive contexts with respect to girls' rights and agency, programs may wish to focus on a softer 'entry point' such as nutrition programming that introduces girls to concepts of agency. We also incorporate the recommendation for interventions to be sensitive to local contexts and cultures as each partner is encouraged to tailor and adapt the curriculum to meet their own needs.

Based on the findings from the literature search and conversations with key stakeholders, our conceptual model and theory of change are presented here. Global G.L.O.W.'s approach to fostering adolescent girls' ability to use their agency, voice, and power to build a life of their own design is built on the positive feedback loop that developing agency in girls through social emotional skill-building and providing opportunities for girls to practice their voice builds their confidence and belief in themselves as individuals and therefore their power. This leads to downstream longer term outcomes targeted by our programming such as girls advocating for themselves and the issues they believe in, girls changing gender norms in their homes and communities, girls making decisions for themselves, and girls having hope for and planning for their future.



Theory of Change



A Note about Definitions

Based on the literature review findings, Global G.L.O.W. has adopted the following definitions and developed youth-friendly definitions to ensure youth engagement with the concepts:

Agency: the capacity to make decisions about one's life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution, or fear (Klugman et al., 2014)

- Youth definition: the ability to make your own choices about your life and put those choices into action to reach your desired goals.

Voice: the capacity to speak up and be heard, in all environments, to shape and share in discussions, discourse, and decisions that affect them. (Klugman et al., 2014)

- Youth definition: the ability to speak up in any conversation you desire, especially those that affect you, and for your opinions to influence those conversations and any decisions being made.



Power: the ability to act and to shape one's life (power-to), one's sense of self-worth, self-knowledge, and self-confidence (power-within), and collaborative power (power-with). (Van Eerdewijk et al., 2017)

- Youth definition: how much voice and agency we get to use. Sometimes it is clear how much power we have in our lives and community and sometimes it is not. Three different types of power are the power you have over your life, your power within yourself, and the power you share with others in your communities when you work together.

Positive Future Outlook: believing in and planning for a desired future.

- Youth definition: imagining your ideal future, believing it can happen, and knowing how to set goals to achieve it.

Advocacy: the ability to effectively support and assert one's own interests for a collective cause.

- Youth definition: being able to speak confidently about and support what you care about. For example, being able to clearly express what you are interested in, what you want to see happen within your community, and your rights and needs as a young person wherever you live.

Social and Emotional Skills: the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (CASEL, n.d.)

- Youth definition: Being in control of my own thoughts, emotions and behavior, and having the skills to achieve goals and build healthy relationships.

Gender Norms: informal, deeply entrenched and widely held beliefs about gender roles, power relations, standards or expectations that govern human behaviors and practices in a particular social context and at a particular time. (UNICEF, 2020)

- Youth definition: ideas or 'rules' about how girls and boys and women and men are expected to be and to act. (UNICEF, 2020)



Recommendations

The conceptualization and evaluation of girls' empowerment is still a nascent area of study for many contexts. It is well-agreed within relevant literature and existing conceptual frameworks that the elements of agency, voice, and autonomy are core to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and that these elements influence girls' outcomes across all sectors – health, education, economic opportunities, and beyond. However, even for girls as individuals, empowerment will fluctuate depending on their environment and stage of life. Little research has been done to understand the changes in power differentials over time, or if and how empowerment gains are maintained over a girl's life span. Therefore, it is necessary for further research to be conducted in this area to understand these changes.



At the same time, more research must be undertaken on how to consistently and comprehensively measure changes in girls' empowerment over time. Standardized measures may enable global benchmarking and/or comparisons between contexts, but it is also necessary to incorporate context-specific measures that provide insights into how a girl's environment influences her ability to exercise her agency, express her voice, and fulfill her power. These measures should include considerations such as family dynamics, community norms and approaches, and policy and legal environments.

It is important for more research to be done that specifically focuses on girls' empowerment rather than incorporating them into women's empowerment, as the dynamics of change and approaches used will be different for these groups. Adolescent girls are in the unique position of being more autonomous and independent than younger children, but without the considerations that women of adult age may face. They require – and deserve – research and programming that reflects this unique time in their lives.

In alignment with the necessary components of gender equality presented in the conceptual frameworks, evidence suggests that multi-component empowerment programming is more effective than individual programming, with respect to both sectors (e.g. health, education) and levels (e.g. individual, community). For example, girl groups should be complemented with community strengthening activities, so that girls who build advocacy skills have a supportive community in which to express it. (Temin & Heck, 2020b)

Education and awareness must be provided to current holders of power (in many cases men) encouraging a transfer or sharing of power equally between relevant decision makers. Men, community leaders and faith communities play a vital role in establishing and reinforcing systems and structures that negatively impact women's and girls' agency and bar active participation. There is a need for programming that seeks to change gender-related norms and behaviors, to work closely with churches, other faith communities, traditional leaders, and other key local opinion leaders who are trusted and influential. Evaluation frameworks should include a focus on key community and policy actors with a focus on measuring policy shifts and cultural norms.



Conclusion

This review aimed to explore and synthesize evidence on what is needed for girls (ages 10 to 18) to pursue and build a life of their own design through developing their voice, agency, and power. Findings of the literature review emphasized the importance of building agency, voice, and power concurrently and at different levels, ensuring that girls build their internal capacity, knowledge, and skills to express agency, share their voice, and demonstrate their power.

At the individual level, findings from the literature indicated that programs should focus on building knowledge, both about specific topics (e.g. health and nutrition) and about the concepts of agency, autonomy, voice, and decision-making, so that they are equipped to build those skills when engaging with others.



At household and community levels, findings from the literature indicated that programs should first focus on creating 'safe spaces' and peer groups for girls in order for them to have an environment in which they can practice expressing their voice. Peer groups and safe spaces can be content-specific, with girls sharing their opinions and knowledge on particular topics, or they can simply be open areas for discussion and expression. Peer programming can also teach girls how to organize and collectively express voice by engaging in advocacy on particular topics. Programming might offer girls skill development in talking with their parents, community leaders, faith leaders, or other key influencers of their environment.

At the level of systems and society, findings from the literature review indicate that it is important for girls to have environments in which they can equitably access the services necessary to build a life of their own design, while also equitably engaging in the political and societal processes that shape these systems.





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