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DOCUMENTING RESULTS FROM THE ADOLESCENT GIRLS PROGRAM

IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS CLINTON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Girl Up
Initiative Uganda

OUR VISION

A gender equal world where girls thrive and lead.

OUR MISSION

To build a vibrant movement of girls through transformative leadership, sexual and reproductive health education, and skills development.

ABOUT US

Girl Up Initiative Uganda (GUIU), founded in 2012, runs three programs in Kampala that aim to empower adolescent girls and young women through education, leadership skills and economic empowerment. Whilst girls and women constitute our focus group, our approach engages boys and men as well, as this is key to bringing about lasting gender transformation. The outcome is a harmonious and informed community of confident, aspirational independent girls and women, supported by gender- conscious boys and men.

ABOUT THE CLINTON SCHOOL

This project and report was developed, administered, and prepared by Clinton School of Public Service student Jordan Sanders (February-July 2019). The University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service is a two year graduate program dedicated to giving students the knowledge and experience to further their careers in the areas of nonprofit, governmental, volunteer, or private sector service.
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BACKGROUND

The target population of the program is adolescent girls, ages 9 to 15 years, living in urban slum areas in Kampala, Uganda. The main challenges facing adolescent girls living in urban slum areas are related to safety, access, and wellbeing issues arising from deeply entrenched beliefs of gender inequality and extreme generational poverty. Specifically, they experience high rates of gender-based violence and challenges staying in schools due to lack of school fees and/or lack of menstrual health education and proper management.

Poverty

Kampala is the most populous urban area in Uganda with approximately 1.5 million people. The majority of the population is young with over half under 24 years of age, 45% under 18 years, and 40% between 10 and 24 years.

Kampala is also Uganda's economic hub generating 65% of the national GDP, with 80% of the country's industrial and commercial activities and from the informal sector. However, economic growth in Kampala is unequally distributed, with 20% of the households being within the high-income bracket, 40% within the middle income bracket and the remaining 40% within the lowest-income category (UNICEF, 2012). Thus, the city is characterized by extreme poverty and high rates of unemployment. The World Bank estimates that 83% of young people (15 to 24 years) in Uganda are unemployed or work within the informal economy (Farés & Garcia, 2008).

Despite the lack of formal jobs in Kampala, the rate of rural-to-urban migration continues to rise. According to a 2015 World Bank press release on Uganda's sustainable growth, Uganda's urban population will increase from six million in 2013 to over 20 million by 2040.

High levels of rural-to-urban migration combined with one of Africa's highest fertility rates translate into urban population growth rates close to 6%. This rapid urban population growth is unmatched by corresponding planning and increases in service provision. The result is the proliferation of informal settlements both in and around Kampala and in many secondary cities characterized by poverty, inadequate housing and marginalization especially for the most vulnerable such as the commercial sex workers. Kampala has 57 such slum settlements (Development Research and Training, 2014) where the poorest live and unemployed is highest among the youth. A UN-HABITAT (2007) report estimates that around 60% of the total population of Kampala are living in such areas. This has led to significant levels of violence in fragile urban areas related to gangs, substance abuse, kidnappings, and robberies.

Gender Inequality and Gender-based Violence (GBV)

Unequal gender power dynamics fundamentally constrain adolescent girls' rights and choices. As a result, 40% of girls in Uganda are married before the age of 18, and one in 10 is married before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2015). Cultural norms and expectations place pressure on girls to marry at an early age rather than complete schooling. Most parents prefer to receive financial assets for their daughter in a marriage rather than invest in her education. Particularly for families living in extreme poverty in the slums of Kampala, parents struggle to pay school fees for all their children, and therefore they often choose to send their sons to school given the perceived economic return of investing in boys rather than girls. This leaves girls feeling like they don't matter and can't contribute to their families, further lowering their self-esteem and self-confidence.

It is also important to recognize that not all school environments are girl-friendly. Gender-insensitive and unsafe learning environments, as well as irrelevant and gendered curricula, are often cited as negatively impacting the quality of the educational experience of girls. This dampens girls' academic interest and performance, and leads parents to withdraw them from school, especially when they are poverty-stricken.

Unequal gendered power dynamics has also led to extremely high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) with girls, women and children disproportionally more affected both directly and indirectly. In 2012, UBOS found that 64 percent of women (15-49 years) and 56 percent of girls (15-24 years) reported having experienced GBV. GBV has serious consequences for one's safety and mental and physical well-being, yet is not well understood among youth in Kampala. In Plan International Uganda's (2016) baseline study, it found that only 14% of youth in Kampala have adequate knowledge on GBV issues.

Lack of Sexual and Reproductive Health Information and Services

Information on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is an essential for girls to understand their bodies and make informed reproductive choices. However in Kampala, the proportion of youth who have adequate knowledge on sexual and reproductive health (SRH issues) was only at 8 % (Plan International Uganda, 2016). The major challenge is the fact that such matters are considered 'sacred' or 'taboo' and should not be discussed openly, but rather communicated through indirect language or sayings. There is also a fear that if SRH information is given too early – that is, before marriage – it will 'spoil' the girls and incite them to inappropriate behavior (ODI, 2013).

Nevertheless, the mean age for sexual debut in Kampala is 17 years (Plan International Uganda, 2016) and on average, females become sexually active and get married younger than males. Nearly 6 in 10 young women (58 percent) and half of young men (47 percent) had had sex before the age of 18 years (UBOS, 2011). This results in high rates of unintended teenage pregnancy with 35% of young women giving birth before the age of 18 years (UNICEF, 2012). The challenges facing girls are compounded by high rates of child and early marriage. Taken together, early marriage and childbearing leads to school dropout among girls. The primary completion rate for girls is 53% and for lower secondary the completion rate for girls was only at 25% (UNESCO, 2013). Approximately 35% of girls drop out of school because of early marriage and 23% do so because of pregnancy (UBOS, 2011).

At the same time, girls' lack of correct information about their own bodies is first manifested at puberty when, despite the social importance of sexual maturation processes for girls, the onset of menstruation is shrouded in secrecy, turning it into a traumatic event for many girls. Given the silence and secrecy surrounding menstruation, there exist many stigmas and myths around menstruation. It is common for a girl to be teased for menstruation by peers as well as teachers.

Due to lack of spaces for open discussion menstruation is often viewed as embarrassing, shameful or dirty (McMahon, et al., 2011; Sommer & Kirk, 2008; Sommer, Ackatia-Armah, Connolly, & Smiles, 2014). Given the high rates of poverty combined with the high cost of sanitary products, girls often use second hand cloth as an absorbent, which could leak and result in soiled clothes which cause many girls embarrassment (Sommer, Ackatia-Armah, Connolly, & Smiles, 2014). It is also still widely believed that when a girl starts menstruation she is now ready for marriage (ODI, 2013).

While menarche is a vital milestone in a girl's journey towards womanhood, it also has the potential to limit her educational endeavors. It is widely known today that menstruation inhibits girls from full school attendance. Many girls can be severely impacted by the lack of menstruation health management and access to pads, particularly those in low-income countries (Dolan, Ryus, Dopson, Montgomery, & Scott, 2013). In a study conducted by Lumutenga, et al. (2017), it was found that girls could miss up to 21 of the 90 days within a school term due to menstruation. As a result, girls fell behind in class and had difficulty catching up with the others, leading to increasing dropout rates.

Innovative programming is needed to address the multiple challenges faced by adolescent girls in Uganda. Each of these challenges inhibits a girl's ability to stay and excel in school, make informed and healthy decisions, and realize her full potential. Girl Up Initiative Uganda's Adolescent Girls Program was created to address these issues in a way that empowers and inspires girls to dream big. This program's multi-faceted components help to support, educate, and mentor girls to overcome these challenges as well as become active agents of change.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

This report focuses on GUIU's flagship program, the Adolescent Girls Program (AGP), which GUIU has been implementing since 2013. The AGP addresses the unmet need to promote girls' leadership and education in Uganda, particularly among at-risk girls living in urban slum communities.

The specific objectives of the program consist of supporting adolescent girls, ages 8 to 15 years to: 1) Improve primary school retention; 2) Improve self-esteem and self- confidence; 3) Increase leadership skills; 4) Reduce school days missed during menstrual periods; and 5) Improve knowledge and skills in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender equality, and human rights.

The program also recognizes the importance of engaging with other stakeholders and influencers who impact a girl's life and well-being, particularly men and boys. Therefore, two objectives are related to this aim: 1) Improve knowledge and skills in SRHR, gender equality, and human rights among boys; and 2) Increase engagement with parents and teachers to support girls' education.

The AGP consists of a cluster of synergistic activities to ensure that girls receive the skills, knowledge, tools, mentorship, and support to develop their self-confidence and voice to thrive as leaders in their schools and communities. The AGP model has been refined over the past 5 years of implementation.

The accompanying strategies include:

Year-long Training Program: 10-day program for 80 girls per school which is spread over 10 months with one session per month covering the topics such as: life skills, self-esteem and body image, puberty and menstruation, and violence against women and children.

Girl Up Club: Girls meet weekly to develop practical skills in making reusable sanitary pads, bags, notebooks, etc. as well as taking part in arts and painting and yoga and meditation.

Parents' and Teachers' Meetings: GUIU organizes meetings with the parents and teachers of AGP girls to promote girl-friendly home and school environments.

School Scholarship Program: AGP participants who are at high risk of dropping out of school due to their parent/guardian's financial inability to pay school fees are provided with an annual scholarship.

Big Sister Network: Network established for AGP graduates to nurture girls as mentors and peer leaders. Activities include: an annual leadership camp, yearlong facilitation and mentorship, and advocacy outreaches.

Boys' Dialogues: GUIU engages with 80 boys per school, three times a year, to gain knowledge on critical topics such as life skills, relationships, and gender. The dialogues bring attention to boys' role in gender equality and nurturing girl-friendly environments.

Mass Campaigns: GUIU holds mass campaigns for all school girls, ages 9 to 15 years on critical topics such as life skills, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence.

Counselling and Emergency Support: GUIU provides emergency gender-based violence support and general counselling for vulnerable adolescent girls.

The curriculum for this program was created by the Executive Director and Program Officer of Girl Up Initiative Uganda. The curriculum is passed off the Ugandan Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy to Youth (PIASCY) and was adjusted to fit the needs and life experiences of the program's target audience. The curriculum includes ten lessons that are taught over the course of a school year.

Life Skills

This session encourages girls to identify their unique values and beliefs around the construction of social relations. Activities encourage critical thinking and teach participants the steps of informative decision-making.

Self-Esteem and Body Image

Girls are enabled to recognize their personal values and strengths. This lesson uses the “I am special exercise”, that allows them to appreciate themselves for their unique accomplishments, instead of focusing on physical appearances as a measure of self-worth.

Peer Pressure and Communication Skills

Through peer pressure exercises, girls learn how to recognize passive, aggressive and assertive communication. Girls also practice using refusal skills to communicate their emotions, principles, and reasoning when encountering sexual pressures.

Gender and Power

Girls learn the differences between sex and gender. Through discussing the gender norms, roles and stereotypes within their own communities they are able to understand that although we may be different, we all have equal rights.

Your Changing Body

This session explains that adolescence is a transition time period in everyone’s life as they become an adult from a child. Participants are prepared to recognize the signs of puberty, such as hair growth, breast development, emotional changes, and menstruation.

Gender-Based Violence

Girls are given a variety of scenarios that educate them on the different types of violence, their impact, and how to prevent cases of GBV. The myths that surround violence against women are debunked and girls realize that gender-based violence is a violation of their human rights.

Human Rights

In this session, girls learn to recognize their rights. They are given practical actions to respect the rights of others. Girls learn to understand, appreciate, and adhere to human rights principles as well as understand the responsibilities that come with them.

Leadership

Through reflective activities, girls are taught the characteristics of a good leader, encouraged to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and given the space to share their personal leadership stories. Girls understand that by embracing leadership positions they are empowered to create change in their communities

Business and Entrepreneurship

In this session girls explore the characteristics of a good business owner and are encouraged to think of innovative business ideas. They are inspired to think of ideas that could generate income and learn from other business owners.

Realizing Your Dream

Girls are encouraged to dream about their future and through the creation of short-term and long-term goals, they gain an understanding that they can accomplish anything they set their minds to, as long as they work hard and believe in themselves.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study investigated the impact of Girl Up Initiative Uganda's Adolescent Girls Program. The research was guided by the following questions:

- How do adolescent girls experience participation in the Adolescent Girls Program?
- How do girls understand their roles as leaders and peer mentors?
- What behavior and attitude changes have been observed in program participants?

2018 program participants included urban adolescent girls in Kampala who attend one of seven schools. Program participation is voluntary and participants are selected by teachers and GUIU staff members. Data was collected through five methods: focus groups, interviews, field observations, survey data, and supplementary document review and was analyzed through inductive thematic analysis.

Focus Groups

All focus group participants were recruited via voluntary non probability convenience sampling during the Girl Up Initiative Uganda Big Sister Camp 2019. Non Probability convenience sampling is defined as drawing a sample from the population that is close at hand (Nishishiba, Jones & Kraner, 2014). All participants gave verbal consent once informed of the purpose of the discussion and signed an attendance form that included their name, age, school and signature. Three focus group interviews were conducted: the teacher focus group included nine teachers with at least one from each school, the first student focus group contained ten participants, and the second student focus group contained nine girls. Girls were selected for having participated in the program for more than two years. All students ranged from 13 to 16 years old.

Focus group discussions were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for key themes by the researcher with supervision from the organization's Deputy Executive Director.

Interviews

Three interviews were conducted with Adolescent Girl Program facilitators who are referred to as 'Coaches'. Two of the interviewees were full time staff members and one was a volunteer working on a stipend-basis. Each interviewee has been involved for the program for at least one year. Participants were recruited via non probability convenience sampling. The researcher explained the purpose of the interview to the interviewees and each participant gave verbal consent. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and key quotes informed the creation of themes for this report.

Field Observations

Field notes were taken during four Adolescent Girls Program sessions: the four-day Big Sisters Camp, two in-school sessions and a refresher training for program facilitators. The notes were separated into two columns: neutral observations (specifically in regards to education and empowerment) and the researcher's interpretations. Notes were recorded via a notebook and then typed onto a personal laptop. These observations allowed the researcher to gain a deeper contextual understanding of the lives and challenges of program participants and understand the structure of the program. The information from the observation notes were included in the creation of key themes.

Survey Data

Surveys were administered by the GUIU Program staff at the beginning and end of the program to measure the changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices. A sample of the 209 girls were randomly selected to partake in the pre-training and post-training survey. The Program staff read aloud the questions to the girls and translate them into Luganda, the predominant local language, if needed. Information from the survey data from the 2018 AGP provided the quantitative data used in this report concerning changes in behaviors and attitudes held by program participants prior to and after the program intervention.

Supplementary Document Review

Additionally, the researcher reviewed in-depth stories from the book, We Have Something To Say: True Stories From Adolescent Girls Growing Up In The Slums of Kampala. This book was a collaborative effort between a GUIU Volunteer, staff members and graduates of the AGP program participants to document their experiences as girls growing up in Kampala. From August 2017 to February 2018, a GUIU volunteer collected stories from 16 graduates from the Adolescent Girls Program. Four stories were selected from the book to be included in this study.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was the chosen method for this study in order to maintain an Afro-centric that is centered around the experience, knowledge and perceptions of the participants. The purpose of this study was not only to access the impact of the program, but to give the girls the opportunity to share their program experiences (Asante, 1987). Thematic analysis involves an inductive approach - identifying key themes that arise within the data (Nishishiba, Jones & Kraner, 2014). The process of data analysis began during and after transcribing the interviews from the audio recordings. As I re-listened to the recordings, I highlighted key themes that emerged. After transcription was complete, I created separate thematic coding sheets were created for each interview, focus group, and field observation. The data was then combined and organized into themes, subthemes and supplementary quotes. The qualitative data results were them compared to the survey findings to look for significance.

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FINDINGS

Becoming a leader

By the end of the program, 40 percent of the 2018 participants held a leadership role within their schools, up from 31 percent before joining the program. There are various opportunities for leadership within schools. These roles vary from being a Head Girl, who serves as a role model for positive classroom behavior, to being a Class Monitor who assists the teacher in taking attendance and managing the classroom. Each of the roles gives the girls opportunities to use their newly acquired leadership skills in a greater capacity to positively influence others. Maria Sandra (14) acknowledged that being a leader has enabled her to influence her peers,*"I can tell other girls what they should do and what they need to do, to do the right thing at the right place."*

Program graduates also understand that leadership is not simply about a position title, but also about a way of living as a leader that makes them responsible for their actions. As noted by AGP graduate Apili Nelly (13), "(Leadership) means you must be an example to others. You can differentiate what is right and wrong. You cannot just keep quiet, but you can fight for this and be exemplary." A teacher from Luzira Secondary School discussed the noticeable leadership skills in participants who completed the program in primary school and have moved on to secondary school. She gave a specific example of AGP graduate, Adong Pauline (15), who participated in the program in Primary 6 and is now in Senior 3, "Sometimes when you've missed lessons, she teaches her own. You find she has managed the class and she reports to you, the teacher, while you are away. She would say: 'I managed to give them this exercise, could you please see through the exercise we did?'"

In this way, the AGP graduates have taken on leadership roles both in formal and non-formal roles in the school environment. When asked about how she shows leadership in her community, Apili Nelly (13) stated that, "I think the greatest thing that I've learned ever is counseling my fellow girls together with boys because they taught us that not only girls need to be advised, but also boys because we are brothers and sisters and we have to share the same ideas."

Sharing Knowledge of Rights

95 percent of program graduates know their human rights, specifically that every girl in Uganda has a right to an education. This is a positive outcome, considering the program's emphasis on teaching girls about their human rights. When reflecting on the impact of the program on her life Nalkioga Nabilah (14) shared, "If I was not in Girl Up, I would have been a different girl. I would have not known my rights as a girl." The program affirms that girls' rights are necessary to enjoying a life of freedom of dignity and that they have equal rights to boys. Participants, such as Namboowa Viola (13), recognize that they should not be treated differently because of gender norms and stereotypes, "Boys should also respect girls. Even girls are human beings and should not be taken as animals."

Girls also learn that rights come with responsibilities, including sharing the information they have learned with others.

Nakalunde Brenda (15) emphasized the importance of sharing their knowledge to support their peers and friends, "For me, I have learned that as a girl I have my rights and it's also my responsibility to fulfill them. I have learned how to be confident since I joined Girl Up and I have also learned that I should inspire and empower other girls and also help other girls who need help. Like those who don't know their rights I should help them to know their rights." Once knowledgeable about their rights, program participants demonstrated a passion to not only advocate for themselves, but also for others. In this regard, Naigaga Joan (13) stated, "I am able to speak out for both my rights and my friends' rights. I am sharing my story because I want to help girls get their rights back. They are abused and violated. I want to speak out for them for they are voiceless."

Improving Confidence and Self-Esteem

Self-esteem and positive self-image are the building blocks for a girl to feel empowered to be a leader. The Adolescent Girls Program provides a space for participants to be proud of what makes them a girl and what makes them unique as an individual. Program graduates demonstrate a high level of confidence, not only about their skillsets, but also about their bodies. Namboowa Viola (12) discussed how being involved in the AGP impacted her own body image, "Girl Up Initiative Uganda taught us how to be confident and how to appreciate our bodies. I learned that you should appreciate your body. There are people who don't have the body you have. If you're admiring other people's bodies, you need to know you have the best body."

In many school settings, girls feel shy and fear speaking up in class, while the boys are more actively involved. Therefore, the facilitation of the AGP sessions ensures that girls have the opportunity and safe space to speak up and share their ideas, feelings, and opinions confidently. Girls are asked to come to the front of the class to give their ideas and to present their learnings in skits, songs, and other activities to get them used to speaking up in class and as a result, improve their feelings of self-confidence. As AGP Coach Dorothy explained, "I remember the first session the girls couldn't speak, but after a few sessions they put up their hands and give you an answer." After the program, more than half of program participants (51 percent) felt that they were no longer shy after the program as opposed to 39 percent before the program.

By equipping girls with the tools to build their self-confidence, they are able to combat negative influences that may impact their sense of worth and ability. An example of this can be seen in Amanicia Spencer (13) who explained how she was now able to stand up to her bullies thanks to the AGP, "I told them, just because I'm different does not mean I'm not a human being. We have the same blood. I'm proud of what I am. They left me alone after I stood up to them." Similarly, Bashabomwe Shivan (14) discussed how the program has impacted her self-esteem, which has allowed her to change her behaviors, "Now I know that I am not a failure. I deserve the best. I am confident and can talk to people who are older than me. I can choose my friends wisely. My performance in class is better. I am now among the top 10 in my class. I can make good decisions by staying away from peer pressure groups and friends who do drugs and dodge class and I trust my friends who can support me that what I am doing is right."

Increasing Knowledge on Sexual and Reproductive Health

Many girls are not provided with the correct information and knowledge to enhance their capability to make healthy and informed decisions about their bodies and sexual and reproductive health. One of the songs that the AGP graduates learn is “To Whom Does it Belong”- a song and dance that has the girls place their hands on different body parts and sing in unison “To me, to me!” emphasizing that their body is theirs to decide how they want to be touched. Thanks to the program, 88 percent of girls now report that they are capable of making decisions about their bodies, as opposed to 79 pre-program. Adolescence is also a critical period for girls as they experience bodily changes due to puberty and the expectations it brings to a girls’ life and choices. In the AGP, girls gain knowledge and acceptance of their menstrual periods.

Ajilong Esther (14) discussed how participating in the program taught her to be proud of her period, “I was so ashamed of my menstruations. In the Adolescent Girls Program, they taught us that every girl gets a period. The coaches told us about body changes and how the changes are natural and normal. I was so relieved. Now I know nothing was wrong with me. I know that menstruation is for every girl and you don’t need to be afraid of it because it doesn’t kill. It’s just a monthly thing. They advised us to appreciate our bodies and take proper care of them and also told us to always be confident. Since then, my confidence improved. I am proud of my body and am no longer ashamed of my periods.”

During the in-school sessions, many girls discussed feeling pressured to have sex from men and boys since their bodies were developing and for some this is a sign that girls are ready for sex. In response to these questions and concerns, Coach Marion explained to the girls, “As you grow older your body will start to change and boys will start to notice you. They may offer you gifts, but you have to be confident and tell them no. Even when they entice you and call you ‘beautiful’ you say, ‘Thank you I know that I am beautiful.’” Because of the daily poverty that girls experience, they are more prone to the lure of gifts from men (‘sugar daddies’) and boys who have expectations attached to the gifts. This issue is emphasized in the AGP and after the program 96 percent of girls reported that it is not ok for men and boys to expect girls to have sex with them in exchange for gifts.

Again, the AGP graduates were able to share their knowledge on SRH with others who did not benefit from the program. As Coach Hajara, AGP Program Officer, noted the program emphasizes preventive care and addressing challenging issues related to girls' sexual and reproductive health early, "As a nurse I see girls come to the hospital often (pregnant) with swollen bellies scared about what's happening to them because they don't realize what's happening to them. This program is preventative because we give them skills that can enable them to go through life and increase their self-esteem so that these things don't happen and they complete school."

Preventing Gender-Based Violence

Akumu Faith (14) noted that participating in the AGP gave her the ability to say 'yes' to good influences and 'no' to bad influences. This trend is seen amongst the participants with 83 percent of girls reporting that they are now feel confident enough to refuse unwanted sexual attention from a relative or someone they knew. Akumu Faith (14) went on to explain, "I have learned how to be confident and courageous. I can stand up to the boys I can fight for the girls. For example, if I find her when they're abusing her in any way I can fight for her without failing." In addition, 71 percent of participants now have correct and improved knowledge on gender-based violence (GBV) and understand that it can impact both boys and girls, compared to 60 percent before the program. The AGP has also equipped girls' with the confidence and skills to lead discussions with adolescent boys on SRH and GBV that allows them to obtain the same knowledge as the girls.

Abuse in all forms is commonly tolerated amongst women to ensure peace in the family, leaving her, as well as her children vulnerable to its long-term negative impacts and creating unsafe home environments. Therefore, it is critical that girls understand that all forms of abuse are wrong, illegal, and harmful. After the AGP, 64 percent of girls do not believe that a woman should tolerate violence for the sake of her family, up from 55 percent at the beginning of the program. It is also important to note that 71 percent of program graduates now feel entitled to report abuse in all its forms from sexual abuse to physical abuse.

The girls are taught what to do and who to report to in cases of violence and abuse. It takes courage to stand up against abuse and violence like Naigaga Joan (13) who gave an example of how she spoke up for her friend, "I have a friend whose grandmother keeps beating her for nothing. They give her hard work to do and her uncles are just sitting there doing nothing. I went to her grandmother and told her to stop violating the girl. The grandmother yelled at me saying I know nothing. That the girl's father died and she is now responsible. I told my mom to go and talk with the grandmother and she did. Now the grandmother doesn't beat my friend anymore." Given the rampant incidence of GBV in communities in Uganda, teaching girls how to identify and report cases of GBV is an effective preventative approach.

Skills-Building for Income-Generation

During the 2019 Big Sisters Camp, program graduates participated in hands-on skills such as making jewelry, pottery, tie-die, and reusable sanitary pads. After participating in the jewelry making activity, Margret Aluka (14) stated, "Making bangles and necklaces out of beads was my favorite. I did not know I had the ability to make something so beautiful using my hands with the available resources around me." Nakaiunde Brenda (14) re-iterated the importance of skills-building when she discussed the hands-on skills she gained as an AGP participant, "I can create now. Because of Girl Up, I have learned how to make many things for example, bangles, reusable pads, and paper bags, which can even earn money for me." In a context of extreme poverty, Coach Hajara explained that these skills are useful in the case that girls drop out of school or need to earn money to pay for their school fees, "These skills enable them to survive and empowers them economically to support themselves."

One of the most popular skills that the girls want to learn is how to make reusable sanitary pads. Many of the girls expressed that they joined the AGP because they wanted to learn how to make pads. As Rovina Sonya (14) stated, "What inspired me to join was that they promised to teach us how to make pads and bangles. For me as a girl I had challenges so when I saw this opportunity, I saw that it could really help me." Learning how to make reusable sanitary pads is useful to not only help participants properly manage menstruation, but also as an avenue for income generation.

Amooti Florence (13) explained that, "Learning how to make sanitary pads and jewelry can even earn money for me. I can even move to villages and help other people who cannot make it." In Uganda, there is a huge unmet need to build girls skills for income-generation and proper menstrual hygiene. As Amooti described, the AGP graduates now have the hands-on skills to teach others beyond Kampala and spread the impact of the learnings.

Importance of Girl Up Coaches

By the time of program completion, 88 percent of participants noted that they have a trusted adult they can turn to if they have challenges or questions, with many of them noting AGP coaches as those role models. Achola Jennifer, a teacher at Uganda Police School noted that coaches are not only facilitators, but also empower the girls by listening to their stories and creating a comfortable atmosphere, "The way they share with these girls and listen to them. They give them attention and the girls feel comfortable to be themselves".

Program participants not only see coaches as teachers, but also as positive role models. Akite Peace (14) recalled how the coaches influence on her peers sparked her interest in joining the program, "I was inspired by the coaches of Girl Up and the way they do their things. My friends came to class copying the coaches in the way they were acting. So I got inspired and I said let me join Girl Up. By the time I joined Girl Up I learned so many things and now I am who I am today because of Girl Up Initiative Uganda and my coaches."

Coach Marion, another AGP Program Officer, explained how she often uses her own story as a source of inspiration for the girls, "I use myself as an example. I say that because I was able to finish school, I am now working. I am working because I went to school, I have a degree and I'm able to ask for a job. So I encourage them that as younger girls, they should take their education very seriously because there is nothing you can do outside of an education." Not only do the coaches serve as role models, but sources of help in times of need. Nanyanzi Sumayia (13) turned to the coaches for assistance when a girl from her school was in a critical situation, "Another girl came to me in trouble. Her step-father was going to beat her and she didn't want to go home. She didn't have anywhere else to go. I wasn't able to let her stay at our home, but I remembered I had one of the Girl Up coach's numbers. So I called her and she coached me through what to do. I had the girl go to the Girl Up office. I gave her money for transport and told her how to get there. They were able to help her and coach her and her mom. Now they all have a better relationship."

The coaches are not only committed to supporting a girl's education within the program, but also supporting them in every aspect of life. Coach Marion discussed the importance of her quarterly follow-up calls with parents, "I try to follow up with past program participants and see what they're up to and what's happening in their lives. And when I speak with them they tell me, 'Because of the words that you are always telling us coach, I'm really taking it seriously and I'm going to school.' I remind them that we all face challenges and you have to think about what will make you succeed at the end of the day." The AGP Coaches also serve as advocates and educators of parents. Amooti Florence (13) recalled the impact of an GUIU Parent Meeting on her mother's behavior, "The coaches encouraged the parents to give their children a safe space for sharing and to also forgive them when they do wrong actions. She also told me she would not continue to beat me and she forgave my sister for her wrong actions".

Inclusivity of Differently-abled Girls

Beginning in 2018, the AGP expanded the program to include girls from Uganda School for the Deaf (SOD). The Uganda School for the Deaf is the first school of the deaf in Uganda that not only serves deaf children, but also those who have additional hearing impairments. During the 2019 Big Sisters Camp, SOD participants were very interactive during sessions and with fellow participants. They expressed a deep gratitude for being included and interacting more with abled girls. It not only impacted their experience, but those of the other participants. One of the other participants Nakyese Desire (14) explained how being with the differently abled girls changed her perspective, "The girls from the School of the Deaf have taught me that disability does not mean inability and we should focus on what our body can do best."

Out of the seven schools in 2018, the SOD participants had the highest increase in confidence rates with 91 percent of participants reporting that they feel good enough the way they are, compared to 56 percent pre-intervention.

After the program, 94 percent of girls from the SOD were also confident that if they tried hard they would be able to improve their lives. Kansiime Carol (13) from the School of the Deaf explained, "Since I have joined Girl Up, I have changed my behaviors. I was unruly and rude when I joined, but now I am a more responsible person." Even the teachers from the SOD, such as Atete Dorothy have seen the impact of the program for this specific population of girls, "It benefits us (SOD) in more ways than you know. The girls have low self-esteem and don't usually feel confident enough to interact with others. Through this program, they have been lifted up and they can easily come out. It builds them up and makes them think, we can also make a difference. We can also do something in our community and we also have a future."

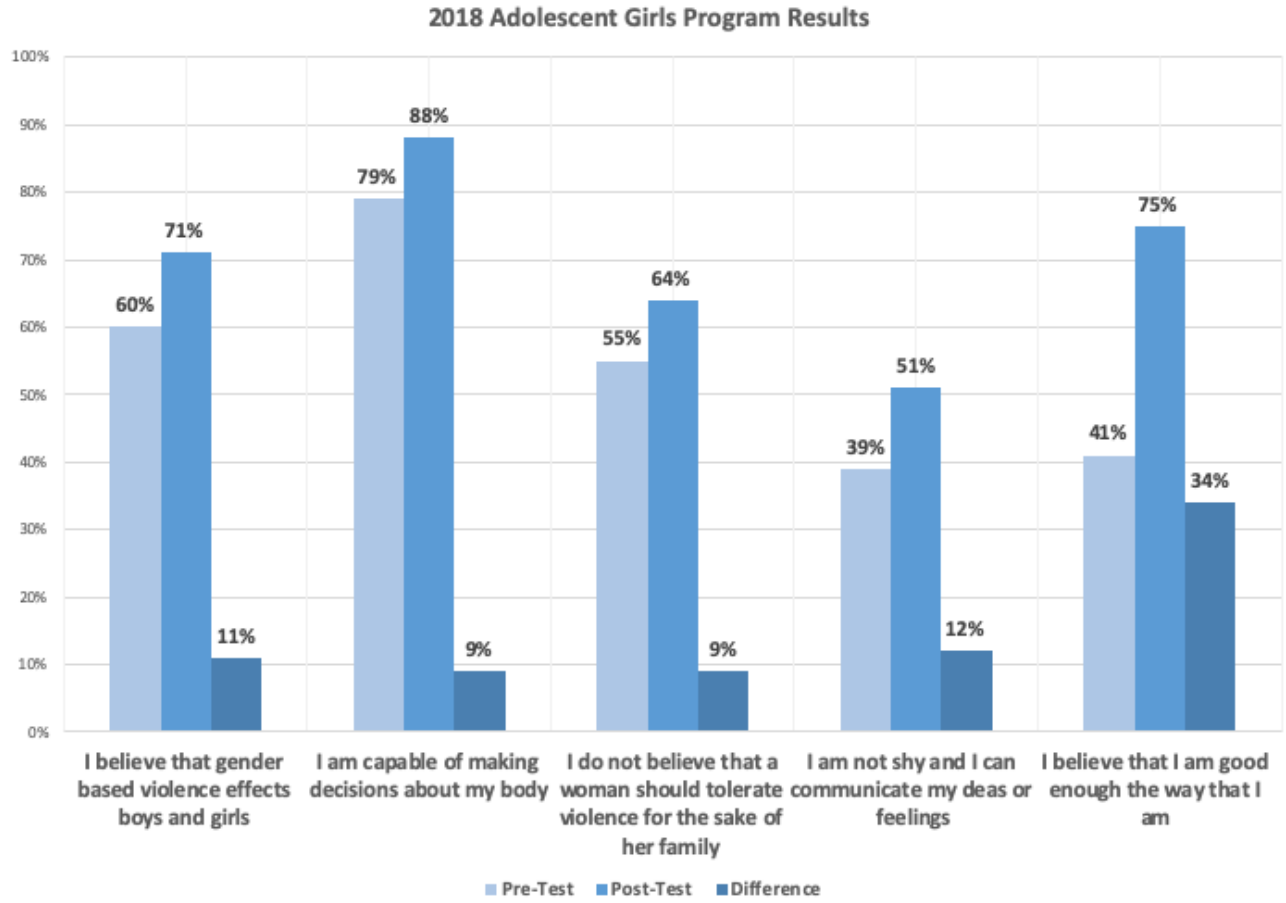
CONCLUSION AND BEST PRACTICES

Adolescent girls in urban areas in Kampala are facing multifaceted barriers to education, such as gender-based violence, poverty, lack of menstrual health hygiene education, and lack of information on sexual and reproductive health. Yet, despite the challenges they face, the Adolescent Girls Program is enabling and supporting girls to realize their power, the benefit of education, and the importance of informed decision-making. Specifically, in the areas of knowledge of gender-based violence, practices on SRH, attitudes on gender equality, and self-esteem, program graduates showed significant growth with a change of nine percent or above (see graph on the next page).
As this report illustrates, the Adolescent Girls Program provides a safe and supportive environment that supports girls' holistic well-being and education

Program participants have shown significant improvements in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors post-training in relation to core topic areas in human rights, leadership, GBV, and SRH.

Based on our experiences, we offer organizations looking to develop a girl-centered model the following best practices and main learnings:

- **Collaboration with teachers**. The AGP fosters intimate relationships with teachers at each school who serve as co-facilitators. Two teachers are chosen from each school to serve as 'patron teachers'. Their primary functions are to support the mobilization of girls, coordination program activities, and act as liaisons with parents and school administrators. GUIU provides ongoing training to the teachers to ensure that hey understand all the lessons and are on board with the program given that teachers have a key role in reinforcing topics throughout the school year to all children.



- **Engagement of parents and boys.** Parents are engaged throughout the project life cycle and must consent for their girls to participate in the program. We host three meetings a year for parents to learn about the program, ask questions, and discuss ways that we can jointly support girls. The Boy Champions Project also hosts parallel sessions with boys in schools to ensure that boys are also being invested in and obtaining the same information. Boys in the program are encouraged to recognize the value of girls and encourage them to pursue leadership positions.

- **Investment of Coaches/Facilitators.** The AGP Coaches are whole heartedly invested in the continuation of the program and the personal development of the girls. The Coaches see their positions as more than a job, but an opportunity to impact the next generation of girls leaders. This mindset enables them to build personal connections with the girls that lasts beyond the program. It is also key to have coaches who are young women from the same communities as the adolescent girls so they can best understand the challenges of the girls and serve as role models.

- **Creating a safe environment for discussion.** By using a single sex environment for participants to learn about sensitive topics, girls are able to feel comfortable and safe to ask sensitive questions, particularly around SRH. Girls in the program are able to foster relationships with other participants and find commonalities between each other.

- **Continual programming and support.** The AGP was designed to provide long-term support, mentorship, and education to girls. It is not a one-off activity. The graduates become Big Sisters so that they can continue to be part of GUIU. In addition, it has been effective to have our office space located in close proximity to the schools so that girls can come to the office in case they need anything. GUIU also created a girls' space and library in the office where girls can come to hang out, relax, and get help with school work if needed.

As the Adolescent Girls Program continues to expand and grow, the organization will continue to adapt activities to address the changing needs and concerns of adolescent girls in urban settings. In the coming years, GUIU looks forward to working with its partners to reach its vision of creating a gender equal world where girls thrive and lead.

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