

Evaluating Individual- and Community-Level Impacts of the Girl Power Project in Central Uganda

Cleopatra M. Abdou, Ph.D.
University of Southern California

Manuel Pina, Jr., Ph.D.
Texas A&M University

Annette McFarland, M. A.
The Demographic and Health Surveys Program

Tessa Davis, M.A.
Just Like My Child Foundation

Shawn McQueen-Ruggeiro, M.B.A.
University of Oxford

Prepared for submission to *Gender & Society*

Abstract

Empirical and experiential evidence demonstrate that girls are the most powerful resource for combatting poverty and its far-reaching intergenerational consequences.[i] Investing in girls is increasingly regarded as one of the most important ways to uplift families and entire communities, both short- and long-term. When girls and women are healthy and prosperous, subsequent generations are more likely to be healthy and prosperous. Empowered girls grow into women with greater earning potential; and it is these very women who invest 90% of their earnings back into their families and communities.[ii] Critically, as education increases in a community, there are marked decreases in poverty, crime, and violence.[iii] Two mixed-method studies evaluated the impact in Central Uganda of the Girl Power Project curriculum, a two-year educational and life skills curriculum designed to support adolescent girls in staying in school, delaying child-bearing and marriage, and reducing risk of HIV transmission and sexual and broader gender-based violence. The first study (N=752) used a longitudinal design to assess whether Girl Power Project participants experienced improvements in multi-dimensional empowerment (i.e., power to, power with, power within). Whereas the first study assessed the impact of the Girl Power Project on the girls participating in the curriculum, the second study assessed the impact of the Girl Power Project on the community at large. The community-level study interviewed 139 individuals representing 17 communities and seven stakeholder groups, and interviews were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Results of Studies 1 and 2 demonstrate the positive impact of the Girl Power Project at the level of the individual girl and the larger community. In Study 1, girls participating in the Girl Power Project (n=487) were significantly better off, as compared to girls participating in the control group (n=265), on all indicators of empowerment at timepoints 2 and 3 (i.e., midpoint and completion of the study). For instance, girls participating in the Girl Power Project reported greater power to protect themselves from contracting HIV and from sexual violence. Similarly, in Study 2, community members reported directly benefiting from the Girl Power Project curriculum and supplementary training for boys, adults, and community legal advocates, as well as from cooperative agreements with the legal and healthcare systems and religious organizations. Among the themes that emerged in qualitative analysis is the idea that the promotion of community-wide gender equality fosters better relationships between parents and children and promotes a broader sense of justice and

safety in the community. Jointly, these two studies are the first to provide empirical evidence of the efficacy of the Girl Power Project in Central Uganda. This evidence has laid the groundwork for pilot projects underway to culturally tailor and test the efficacy of the Girl Power Project in other communities in the developing and developed worlds, including communities in northern India and the indigenous communities in the U.S. Beyond the 15,000 individuals across 100 communities who have already been impacted by the Girl Power Project, the two studies reported here contribute to the growing body of evidence demonstrating that empowered girls are the foundation of empowered communities.

[i] United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls—
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/254904.pdf>

[ii] Clinton Global Initiative Empowering Girls and Women—
<https://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/phlntrpy/notes/clinton.pdf>

[iii] Debrah, E. (2013). Alleviating Poverty in Ghana: The Case of Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP). *Africa Today*, 59(4), 41-67. doi:10.2979/africatoday.59.4.41

DRAFT