



CASE STUDY:

Promoting Gender Equality in Ghana through Girls' Clubs and Role Model Outreach

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KEY FINDINGS:

- Research on the causes of girls dropping out of school provided valuable information for the project to respond better to the situation faced by girls.
- The study found that both the Girls' Clubs and Role Model Outreach contributed to girls' self-confidence, interest and involvement in school, identification of future opportunities, and a greater sense of equality with boys in school, among other important change outcomes.
- A reduction in the number of teenage pregnancies in the district was found to be linked to lessons learned in the project related to sexuality, social relations with boys, and a sense of the importance of completing education.

Introduction

Education is central to development and the improvement of a nation's welfare. It is a powerful "equalizer", opening doors for people to lift themselves out of poverty. Investment in girls' education in particular benefits the individual, the family, and society and it is fundamental for the construction of democratic societies (Bautz 1975). In the words of Dr. Kwegyir-Aggrey J.E (1975): "The surest way to keep people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation."

Ghana's Girls' Education Unit (GEU) was established within the Ministry of Education in 1996. The vision of the GEU is that "all Ghana's girl-children and their brothers are healthy, attend safe welcoming schools, are well-taught by teachers who understand their needs, achieve according to their individual potentials, graduate, and become productive members of Ghana's nurturing society."

Despite this ambitious vision, the Educational Management Information System (EMIS) report for the 2009/2010 academic year indicated low completion rates and elevated junior high school dropout rates for children, particularly girls, at the national level. The dropout rate for girls

was 38.2 percent compared with 34 percent for boys. In Adaklu-Anyigbe District, where the intervention discussed in this brief was implemented, 38.9 percent girls dropped out compared with 34.7 percent of boys. As a response, the Adaklu-Anyigbe District Education Office designed an evidence-based project to assess dropout factors specific to the district. The Adaklu-Anyigbe district was later split into two administrative districts, Agortime-Ziope and Adaklu, and the new Adaklu District Education Office (ADEO) continued with the project. Based on the results of their baseline research, the ADEO developed two interventions, Girls' Club (GC) and Role Model Outreach (RMO), to respond to the factors identified as causing high dropout levels, particularly among girls.

Underpinning the interventions is the "Developmental Assets for Adolescents" framework developed by the Search Institute (Search Institute 1990). This framework identifies "a set of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviours that enable young people to develop into successful and contributing adults" and classifies them under 40 "Developmental Assets." These assets are further explained as "non-cognitive skills, attitudes, values, and identity that young people need for success in life" (Search Institute, 2006¹ in O'Connor et al. 2014). The Search Institute also indicated that "the more Developmental Assets young people acquire, the better their chances of succeeding in school and becoming happy, healthy, and contributing members of their communities and society." The GC and RMO aimed to foster the development of key aspects of girls' knowledge and psycho-emotional characteristics that align with the "assets" identified by this framework.

The research questions the case study sought to answer were:

- Did the interventions introduced in Adaklu junior high schools address the identified causes of high school dropout for girls?
- What was the effect of Girls' Club and Role Model Outreach on gender equality in Adaklu junior high schools?

Methodology

The methodology employed for this case study included qualitative and quantitative data collection. The assessment of the characteristics of GC and RMO, as well as their benefits to the girls, was qualitative, while the analysis of the results of GC and RMO activities on enrolment, dropout,



Members of Girls Club receive extra tuition in Mathematics and Science subjects.

retention, completion, achievement, and transition rates was quantitative. A set of indicators was used that indicated outcomes or changes that occurred as a result of the GC and RMO intervention, as explained in the outcomes section below. The target population of the intervention was 699 girls between the ages of 12 and 18 in 23 junior high schools in the district. For the study, simple random sampling was used to select 10 girls from each of 15 junior high schools within the district. Other respondents included school-based facilitators, head teachers, teachers, school management committee (SMC) members, parents' club patrons, community leaders, traditional leaders, and religious leaders.

In addition, a survey on education access and quality statistics assessment was developed and administered to head teachers of the 23 junior high schools in the district to retrospectively assess enrolment figures, dropout, retention, completion, achievement, and transition rates from the 2009/2010 to the 2014/2015 academic years. The survey also assessed reasons why girls dropped out of school in Adaklu district and factors that influenced transition rates.

Interventions

The project consisted of the following four objectives:

1. Advocating for girls, particularly in deprived and hard-to-reach communities in Adaklu, to go to school;
2. Revitalizing and forming Girls' Clubs in at least 70 percent of schools in the Adaklu District;
3. Bringing enough role models to interact with and share their stories to encourage girls in Adaklu; and
4. Building girls' internal and external "Developmental Assets."

In order to inform the programme's design, baseline research was conducted to explore and map dropout factors specific to schools in Adaklu district. These were shared with many education stakeholders, primarily non-govern-

1 <http://www.search-institute.org/surveys>

mental organisations (NGOs), in and outside the district. The school dropout rate in Adaklu District was found to have a significant gender dimension. As a result, GC and RMO were developed to generate positive attitudes in young people and address gender-related challenges.

Role Model Outreach and Girls' Clubs

Role Model Outreach (RMO): Role Model Outreach was organized in two forms: school-based RMO which allowed role models to share their life stories with girls to inspire them to aim for the best educational goals and careers, and community “durbars” (a traditional ruler’s court) where role models share their experiences with both the girls and their parents to inspire the parents to support their girl children in education. The selection of role models was determined based on the target group that she would interact with: girls only, girls and boys, or parents and community members. Depending on the issues the target club members wanted to discuss, role models could be selected from inside or outside the community.

Girls' Clubs (GC): Girls' Clubs were formed in all junior high schools in the district. These clubs organized meetings on specific days where members engaged in interactive learning on a broad range of topics including adolescent reproductive health, the rights and responsibilities of children, and time management. They also received counselling and learned vocations for economic independence. GC activities not only facilitated the development of girls' confidence and leadership skills, they also empowered girls to become

economically independent through life skills training. As a point of convergence for girls, the clubs also organized extra tuition on specific (“difficult”) topics in mathematics and science to help members grasp useful concepts, boosting their academic performance at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). Most activities in GC and RMO used learning approaches involving groups; drama and role play; peer-led activities involving group discussions; presentations from adult experts, adult role models, and peer role models; and analysis of short stories to tease out lessons. GC and RMO learning activities are designed to result in the acquisition of Developmental Assets by the girls².

The Girls' Club and Role Model Outreach in Adaklu schools started in 2009/2010 academic year. However, while the project is on-going as of 2015, it has been dormant in some schools due to the transfer of some of the school-based facilitators.

Outcomes from Girls' Club and Role Model Outreach

Head teachers and school-based facilitators were interviewed to assess the unique characteristics of GC and RMO. When asked if there were differences between their normal classroom conditions and instructional techniques and those in GC and RMO, they all said “yes.” They were again asked to state any differences they observed. The responses from the head teachers and school-based facilitators are presented in Table 1.

² Details can be seen in the full report related to this brief: Adaklu District Education Unit (2016).

Table 1: Responses from teachers regarding the characteristics of GC and RMO

Characteristics of Girls' Club
Girls draw their own rules and consequences to guide club activities.
Girls lead and manage a club or a group.
Girls spend extra hours in school accessing new learning opportunities.
Learning environment is a relaxed one with the girls in charge.
Learning activities expose girls to taking on responsibilities and ownership of the activities they undertake.
Provides additional knowledge, effective and practical skills which may sometimes not be emphasised in school subjects and normal classroom instruction.
Promotes exchange of ideas through peer-to-peer interactions during discussions and debates.
Provides opportunities for girls to copy or emulate good behaviour from their peers.
Girls become more friendly with one another and network.
Exposes girls to learn from adults other than their teachers.
Role models encourage the girls to take care of themselves, learn hard to become like them or better than them.
Interactions with role models encourage girls to see setbacks as stepping stones to their future success and so strive to surmount them.



Cultural performance by Adaklu Sofa D/A JHS Girls Club

In addition, during a participatory focus group discussion held with a group of beneficiary girls, a set of 41 outcome indicator statements for GC and RMO was developed. To test for the validity of the indicators and determine whether the participatory responses could be generalized, a five-point Likert scale was used to measure the beneficiaries' levels of agreement with the indicators. The response categories on the Likert Scale were as follows: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Somewhat Agree (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5).

These indicators were presented to the beneficiary girls in the form of an interview guide. The levels of agreement and disagreement with the statements were then estimated as percentages. In order to consider the indicator valid and be able to make a case for the effectiveness of the GC and RMO interventions, the level of agreement by the respondents must be at least 80 percent affirmative.

Girls' Clubs: According to the analysis of the survey findings, these are some examples of outcome from the girls' club:

- Ninety-eight (98.7 percent) of the girls said, "I understand and appreciate my personal development and uniqueness." The statement suggests that majority of the girls achieved some level of self-identity and may be able to pursue their own personal goals and aspirations.
- Eighty-five percent of the sampled girls agreed with the statement "I have been exposed to various career opportunities and have made my career choice." It suggests that a majority of the girls place a high value on schooling and learning to realize the career choices they have made. Ninety-six percent of the girls said, "I have become more regular and punctual in school" and "I have developed high self-esteem and a positive

attitude toward education," while 73.8 percent said, "I am encouraged and motivated to remain in school." These responses point to the changes that have happened to promote punctuality at school among the girls and a positive attitude to schooling, and empower them to stay in school.

- Eighty-five percent indicated that "I used to be timid but now I have become more courageous," while 80.5 percent said, "I have overcome stage fright and am now more vocal on issues" and "I have become more assertive." Nearly 92 percent said, "I relate better with school mates and teachers." The above statements suggest a high level of boldness developed by the girls through girls' club activities.

Role Model Outreach: Similar results were identified from the RMO intervention. Some examples are as follows:

- More than 78 percent of the girls said, "My self-confidence has been boosted through listening to and interacting with role models," while 88.6 percent of them said, "I have become more disciplined, sociable, and able to network," suggesting that experience with role models improved self confidence, discipline, and networking among the girls.
- Eighty-six percent of the girls said, "Role models help decrease the dropout rate of girls in school," 75.8 percent of them stated that they could return to school after having been pregnant, and 93.3 percent said, "I am encouraged and motivated to remain in school." More than 83 percent of the girls explained that "Girls' Club activities and Role Model Outreach programmes assist us to adopt the appropriate strategies to overcome



Community RMO at Adaklu Sofa: Parents thrilled by Girls' cultural performances

challenges affecting our retention and performance in school.” These statements suggest that RMO impacted positively on girls retention and reduced the dropout rate.

- About 89.3 percent of the girls also said they “have a role model/mentor to emulate and aspire to become like her.” These statements suggest that GC and RMO provide the context and some of the experiences to enable the girls to learn.

The learning outcomes from GC and RMO were compared to the Developmental Assets. It was found that the outcomes covered 65 percent of the 40 Developmental Assets in the framework. Some boys and parents were interviewed as part of the study. Findings indicate that boys now appreciate and accept that girls should enrol and stay in school, and they treat them better than before. The boys now want to learn with girls and share ideas on all subject areas. Parents see the need to keep their girls in school and treat them like they treat the boys. Household chores are shared equally and the parents now come to the school to report their girls who refuse to come to school and insist that teachers follow up on their girls. They provide for the basic school needs of the girls, not just the boys, to the best of their ability because of RMO interactions.

Results of project on dropout factors: The project baseline research found that the dropout factors in the Adaklu District junior high schools were pregnancy, student or parent decision for the student to drop out, financial difficulties, migration, distance to school, and death of parents.

The intervention had the greatest effect on reducing adolescent pregnancy levels. Pregnancy dropped from a



Girls in a drama to showcase the importance of educating girls and the need for girls to avoid dropout tendencies.

high of 26 students in 2010/2011 academic year to a low of 4 students in 2014/2015 in all 23 schools in the district. Part of this change can be attributed to the intervention, particularly when viewing the figure in light of the learning outcomes identified by the girls. Nearly 86 percent of the girls said they abstain from pre-marital and unprotected sex, while 82.6 percent also said they “keep healthy opposite-sex relationships.”

The number of girls who dropped out as a result of the other factors identified during the baseline study fluctuated over the project period and changes cannot be attributed to the intervention.

Results of the project on education access and quality indicators: The project contributed to improving gender equality in Adaklu junior high schools as shown by the following indicators:

- **The rate of girls’ dropout was reduced in general by 3.8 percent.** More than 86 percent of the girls attributed the decrease to the effect of role models and 75.8 percent of them also said they could return to school after experiencing teenage pregnancy, while 93.3 percent were encouraged and motivated to remain in school. Eighty-three percent of the girls explained that the interventions aided them to “adopt appropriate strategies to overcome challenges affecting their retention and performance in school.”
- **The retention rate increased by 2.7 percent.** The claim is supported by extracts from the outcomes the girls indicated. Ninety-six percent of the girls said they have “become more regular and punctual in school,” while 96 percent of them also said they “have developed high self-esteem and a positive attitude toward education.” Seventy-three percent said they were “encouraged and motivated to remain in school.”



Traditional leadership embraces the promotion of girls’ education and promises support through byelaws and education fund.

- **Achievements increased by 23.2 percent.** Seventy-nine percent of the girls indicated that their “interest has increased in mathematics, science, English, and technology subjects,” while 83.9 percent of them said they gained “understanding of difficult topics through remedial teaching.” More than 93 percent said they improved reading skills and have improved academically as a result, while more than 83.9 percent of the girls said they were exposed to current issues and have become more knowledgeable, suggesting that girls’ club activities helped them to improve academically.
- **Transition rates increased but fluctuated within a range of 27.2 percent to 41.6 percent** above the baseline figure of 23.8 percent. The claim is supported by 98.7 percent of the girls saying that they understood and appreciated their “personal development and uniqueness” as 85.2 percent of the them made their career choices. Girls see themselves as being on par with boys in academia. Assertiveness skills increased, and they are able to accept positive treatment and stamp out negative treatment.

In addition to the work on GC and RMO, given that other factors were identified as contributing to girls’ poor enrolment and high dropout rates, the district made improvements to school infrastructure, urinals, water, toilets, provided teaching and learning materials, implemented teacher training programmes, developed scholarship schemes for pupils, and promoted reading. This resulted in a more holistic approach to tackling the multiple barriers to girls’ education. The NGOs in the district provided support and Action Aid Ghana is currently in the district supporting women’s income-earning opportunities and helping the clubs with handicrafts and other needs. The boys were not left out, they participated in activities and their performance has improved equally.

Challenges

The following challenges were identified during the project’s implementation:

- **Time:** GC and RMO activities are organised outside of class hours. This can limit participation by students whose parents expect them at home to help with chores immediately after school. Role models frequently travelled from distant places and had to return the same day to their homes. This denied participants the opportunity to interact personally with role models.
- **Challenges in the home:** The traditional role of girls doing housework hampered the participation of many



Stakeholders at a community sensitization workshop deliberate on ways of bridging the gender gap in education.

girls in club and role model outreach activities. Inadequate shelter also exposes some girls to their parents’ sexual activities, limiting changes in their sexual behaviour. Despite the positive changes that GC and RMO have brought, there are still some challenges with a few parents who are apathetic about girls’ education.

- **Socio-cultural practices:** The encouragement of early marriage and betrothal of girls is a practice that goes against efforts to promote girls’ education. Changing these attitudes was difficult.
- **Limits of sex education:** Social constraints prevent girls from discussing sex education at home to reinforce what they have learned in Girls’ clubs.
- **Lack of policy on GC and RMO:** Since GC and RMO are project activities, they are not backed by any policy, which limits their sustainability.

Cost and replicability

District education administrative funds from DFID were used to finance this project. A total amount of GH¢ 2,000 was allocated to the implementation of the girl child project in the then Adaklu-Anyigbe district. Out of this amount, 60 percent was devoted to formation and capacity building of the Girls’ Clubs, while the remaining 40 percent went to Role Model Outreach. By 2014, a total of 701 girls had gone through Junior High School 3 in Adaklu district. The cost per head of the programme is approximately GH¢ 2.9, which is a relatively low cost for an intervention with evidence of positive outcomes on girls’ educational perspectives.

With respect to replicability, other district education directorates with similar gender inequality challenges can adopt this relatively simple project approach to tackle gender-related problems faced in education. The approach can be adapted to address the specific contextual factors causing girls’ dropout, which should be assessed prior to project implementation. Adaklu district, by working to support girls’ educational and psycho-social development in parallel to supporting educational infrastructure and enhancing teaching, aimed to



Club at Adaklu Waya Junior High School Girls Club Members

tackle a complex problem from multiple angles. As noted by Unterhalter et al. (2014), “A mix of interventions to provide resources, change institutions or shift norms, works more effectively than trying to isolate a ‘silver bullet.’”

Resources such as community-based role models and the UNICEF HIV Alert Child-Led Manual are available for the clubs. Data gathering tools and guidelines for GC and RMO activities developed by the project will be used in subsequent monitoring and evaluation by the district education officers. While DFID funding is no longer supporting the district, Action Aid is helping in some of the communities in the district.

Lessons learned

- Research on the causes of girls’ school dropout provided valuable information for the project to respond better to the situation faced by girls.
- Dropout causes can be mapped school by school and for each academic year by using an interview guide.
- The project had no monitorable effect on enrolment because girls who were not in school did not participate in the Girls’ Club and Role Model Outreach activities.
- School policies can affect the achievement of project indicators, as with completion rates. Completion rates

fluctuated below the baseline figure because some headteachers and teachers repeated JHS 3 girls whom they perceived as not well prepared to take the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). These girls were repeated based on a mock examination taken by all final year students.

- A mix of interventions works better because Girls’ Club and Role Model Outreach could not also provide infrastructure, books, and potable water for schools. Disseminating maps of assessed school needs attracted stakeholders who helped meet those needs that were also barriers to girls’ education.
- Leaders of district education directorates require orientation in gender analysis and gender sensitivity to embark on similar projects to improve gender equality in education. The district director of Adaklu at the time was a gender activist and an expert in child rights. He did the orientation and the analysis to initiate the proposal with the district girls’ education officer.
- The project is on-going and sustainable because the experience of the district education officers, club patrons, teachers, head teachers, and community leaders has been harnessed for continuity of the project.
- The project demonstrates good practices in developing and implementing gender equality improvement programmes in education. The project suggests effective interventions to tackle gender disparity in education and its approach is replicable with little modification in schools and districts with similar dropout factors.
- The results of the project suggest the need for a policy dialogue on adopting Girls’ Club and Role Model Outreach to promote gender equality in Adaklu Schools.
- Teachers no longer look at girls as simply preparing for marriage but now understand that girls can become doctors, lawyers, and pilots, for example, and so treat them the same as boys. They give both boys and girls equal opportunities in class and encourage the girls to do their best. ■

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