



PAVING THE WAY FOR CHANGE:
How Protect Our Youth Clubs Are Helping Students
Challenge Norms and Confront School-Related GBV
A Case Study from Malawi



Cover Photo:

Secondary students debrief after
the asset mapping exercise

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About the Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc.

The Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc. (WEI/Bantwana) was launched in 2006 to address the comprehensive needs of children and families made vulnerable by HIV and other adversities.

Using evidence to inform innovative programming models, WEI/Bantwana harnesses and strengthens the talents, creativity, and commitment of communities, governments, and other partners to develop innovative models of care that build family resilience and wellbeing.

Working closely with government, WEI/Bantwana strengthens health and social welfare delivery systems by working with actors from community to national levels to improve capacity, coordination, and delivery of integrated, high-quality services.

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The Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project:

Gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread in Malawi particularly in schools, with school-aged girls reporting the second most commonly perpetrator of GBV was a classmate. Additionally, over 60 percent of girls have reported that their experience with GBV directly results to performance problems in school.

The Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc. (WEI/Bantwana) is implementing a school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) component of the Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project, led by EngenderHealth and funded by the US Department of State Secretariat for Global Women's Initiatives (S/GWI). In collaboration with the Government of Malawi, WEI/Bantwana's SRGBV component will address factors that contribute to and perpetuate SRGBV at multiple levels.

Component Goal: To reduce SRGBV in 40 Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS).

- Objective 1: Equip secondary school students (girls and boys) with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to combat SRGBV.
- Objective 2: Strengthen caregivers' capacity and commitment to prevent and respond to GBV.
- Objective 3: Equip teachers and school support structures with the knowledge, skills, and tools to prevent and respond to SRGBV.

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Unless otherwise stated, the appearance of individuals in this publication gives no indication of sexuality or HIV status.

Design: Caroline Giandomenico

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ACRONYM LIST

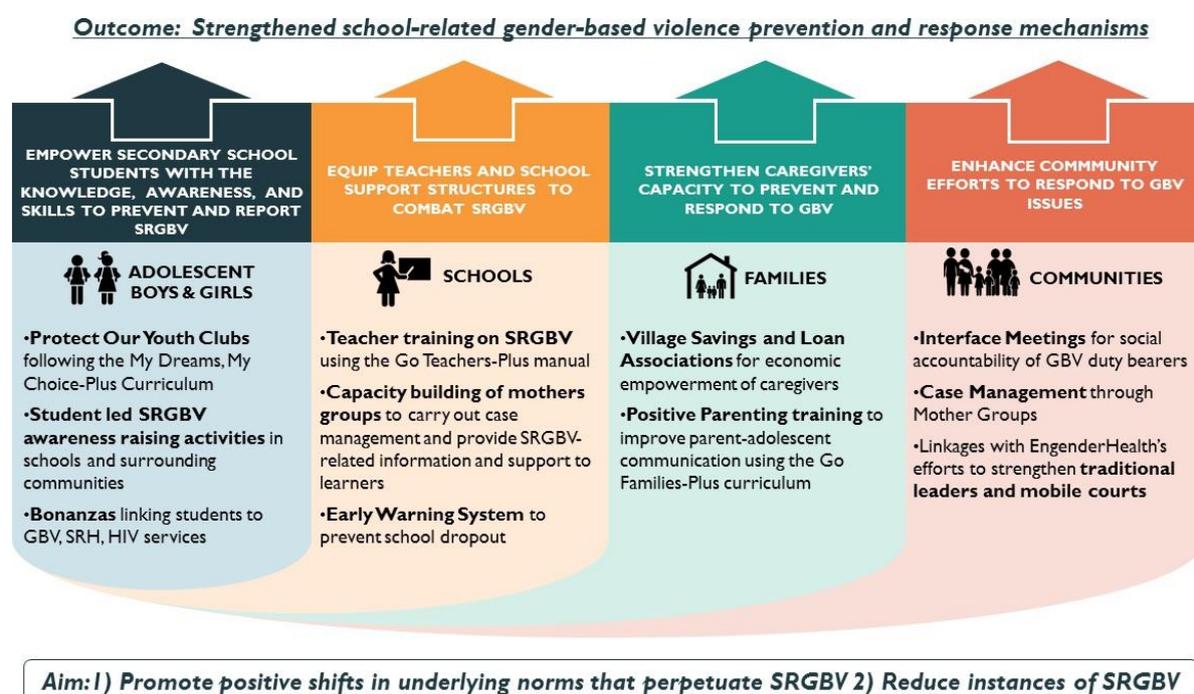
| | |
|--------------|--|
| ASRH | Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health |
| DHS | Demographic and Health Survey |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| IDI | In-Depth Interview |
| KII | Key Informant Interviews |
| MoEST | Ministry of Education, Science and Technology |
| MSC | Most Significant Change |
| POY | Protect Our Youth |
| PSLE | Primary School Leaving Exam |
| S/GWI | US Department of State Secretariat for Global Women's Initiative |
| SRGBV | School-Related Gender-Based Violence |
| TA | Traditional Authority |
| VACS | Violence Against Children |
| WEI/Bantwana | The Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc. |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) affects millions of children around the world and contributes to higher rates of educational underachievement and school dropout for girls. To address high rates of SRGBV in Malawi, the Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc. (WEI/Bantwana)—through EngenderHealth’s Essential Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Services and Prevention Project, funded by the US Department of State Secretariat for Global Women’s Initiatives (S/GWI)—launched ‘Protect Our Youth’ clubs in 43 community day secondary schools in Blantyre, Chiradzulu, Kasungu and Mzimba districts. The clubs aim to help prevent and reduce SRGBV through protective asset building, like skills and adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) information, and by addressing gender norms and power relationships that contribute to unwanted pregnancy and early marriage.

Protect Our Youth (POY) clubs are just one component of an integrated and comprehensive approach to strengthen SRGBV prevention and response mechanisms as illustrated in the Theory of Change below.



Assessment Description

In July 2019, WEI/Bantwana conducted a qualitative assessment of its POY clubs as part of the strategy to combat SRGBV. The qualitative assessment focused on exploring students’ experiences participating in POY clubs and positive changes that POY clubs had on the lives of students and within schools/communities.

Methods

The qualitative assessment—undertaken in four sites in Malawi—employed a multi-method qualitative approach that included focus groups discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KII), and ‘most

significant change' methodology to capture stories of significant change that have resulted from students' participation in clubs.

Findings

The qualitative assessment found that POY clubs are a promising platform to: 1) clarify the scope and definition of SRGBV; 2) challenge students' perceptions of male and female roles, including engaging boys in deliberate discussions about gender, masculinity, and violence; and 3) activate girls' autonomy, agency and action.

Students described having a better understanding of and ability to recognize the different forms of GBV (e.g., physical, sexual and emotional violence) and a clearer and more nuanced understanding of how it manifests in school settings. Students also spoke of increased knowledge of where to report SRGBV (e.g., club matrons, other teachers, mother groups, and police). The findings further revealed that the POY clubs created a safe space for students to interact, socialize, and learn in a supportive and inclusive environment; challenged gender stereotypes; and encouraged critical thinking, for girls especially. This safe space operated as a strong protective factor, and many students perceived the POY clubs as change agent in terms of their sense of self, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Female club members described two areas of their lives, in particular, where they were able to better assert themselves and activate their own autonomy and agency as a result of participation in the club—staying in school and rebuking unwanted advances from men. The findings also showed that engaging boys to interrogate and challenge stereotypes about masculinity and power dynamics in their own lives not only sparked a change in their own thinking around traditional gender roles and expectations, but also built their capacity as champions and change agents. However, male participants, pointing to the need to further support strategies to address these entrenched attitudes, also expressed victim-blaming attitudes around SRGBV.

Implications

The qualitative assessment suggests that POY clubs play a catalytic role in empowering students to better respond to and prevent SRGBV in a way that promotes gender equality and provides an alternative lens through which they can challenge the rigid and harmful gender norms that perpetuate GBV and SRGBV. POY clubs activate autonomy and agency, and support girls' life aspirations. The clubs also add value in understanding how better to support adolescent boys and girls as they explore pathways to minimize their risk of SRGBV in the future.

BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

For adolescent girls and young women across the continent, differentiated treatment and gendered perceptions lead to higher rates of physical and sexual violence; early marriage; limited, unsafe, or exploitative employment; and school dropout.¹

Recent research has highlighted the need to confront the complex vulnerabilities girls face through a combination of interventions that span multiple domains.² As the field of adolescent and youth empowerment advances, however, questions remain about how programs can best identify and deliver promising solutions—especially that are youth-led and youth-centred; respond to the needs and experiences of young people and girls, in particular; and enable young people to live meaningful, productive, and safe lives.

In 2018—through EngenderHealth’s Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project, funded by the US Department of State S/GWI—WEI/Bantwana launched ‘Protect Our Youth’ clubs in 43 community day secondary schools in 4 districts in Malawi to prevent and reduce SRGBV. POY clubs help secondary school students, age 13 to 19, to build social assets, develop life-skills, learn ASRH information, and address gender norms and power relationships that contribute to unwanted pregnancy and early marriage, with particular focus on girls.

POY clubs are just one component of an integrated and comprehensive approach to strengthen SRGBV prevention as response mechanisms as illustrated in the Theory of Change illustrated on page 3.

This qualitative assessment analyses WEI/Bantwana’s POY clubs as one strategy to combat SRGBV by building young people’s confidence, capabilities, and assets. It includes relevant learning and findings, and considerations for similar interventions in future contexts.

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/esa/gender-equality>

² CHANGE Center for Gender and Health Equity Data Brief;

http://www.genderhealth.org/files/uploads/change/publications/CHANGE_AGYW_data_brief.pdf

CONTEXT

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global pandemic and one of the most widespread human rights violations in the world.³ Violence by an intimate partner is the most common form of GBV, with partner violence against ever-married adolescent girls particularly high in sub-Saharan Africa.⁴

A 2013 Violence Against Children and Young People in Malawi survey (VACS Survey, 2013) indicated that a staggering 41% of girls age 13 to 17 experienced physical violence, while 23% experienced sexual violence at least once in the preceding 12 months.⁵ Many adolescent girls in Malawi are also at risk of HIV, early and unintended pregnancies, school dropout and early marriages—all of which are affected by gendered perceptions and further exacerbated by GBV. Data obtained from the DHS (Demographic and Health Survey, 2015-16) further outlines the growing problem of GBV experienced by adolescents in Malawi, with gender-based sexual and physical violence experienced by 15 to 19-year olds increasing over ten years from 23.7% in 2005 to 25.5% 2010, and 26.8% in 2015.⁶

School-Related Gender-Based Violence

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)—defined as ‘acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around school, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics’⁷—affects millions of children. It includes acts of bullying, sexual or verbal harassment, non-consensual touching, rape and assault. Although both girls and boys can be targets of SRGBV, girls are most vulnerable—with violence against girls contributing to higher rates of educational underachievement and school dropout.⁸ SRGBV is further exacerbated by gender-biased curricula and/or teacher interactions.

In Malawi, the experience of SRGBV contributes to over 60% of girls reporting performance problems in school.⁹ According to the VACS (2013), the most common location for incidents of sexual abuse is on a road or in school, with long journeys to and from school, especially in rural areas, putting children at particular risk.¹⁰

Addressing both GBV and SRGBV is particularly challenging due to both the complex set of factors that give rise to and perpetuate violence—including patriarchal power systems, cultural and social norms, and poverty—and underreporting. Furthermore, while the evidence base is growing, there is still a limited body of evidence on the extent and scope of SRGBV and the effectiveness of SRGBV prevention programs, interventions, and strategies—globally, in the region, and in Malawi.¹¹ It is within

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialdevelopment/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls>

⁴ UNICEF (2014). A Statistical Snapshot of Violence against Adolescent Girls, UNICEF, New York

⁵ Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare of the Republic of Malawi, United Nations Children’s Fund, The Center for Social Research at the University of Malawi, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). Violence against Children and Young Women in Malawi: Findings from a National Survey, 2013. Lilongwe, Malawi: Government of Malawi

⁶ National Statistics Office. Malawi Demographic and Health Survey, 2015-16. Zomba, Malawi.

⁷ WHO (2019). School-based violence prevention: a practical handbook. Geneva: World Health Organization.

⁸ UNICEF. (2014). Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children, UNICEF, New York.

⁹ Bisika, Thomas & Thomas, & Ntata, Pierson & Konyani, Sidon. (2009). Gender-violence and education in Malawi: A study of violence against girls as an obstruction to universal primary school education. *Journal of Gender Studies*. 18. 299-306.

¹⁰ Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare of the Republic of Malawi, United Nations Children’s Fund, The Center for Social Research at the University of Malawi, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). Violence against Children and Young Women in Malawi: Findings from a National Survey, 2013. Lilongwe, Malawi: Government of Malawi

¹¹ UNESCO and UN Women. 2016. Global Guidance on Addressing School-related Gender-based Violence. Paris: UNESCO.

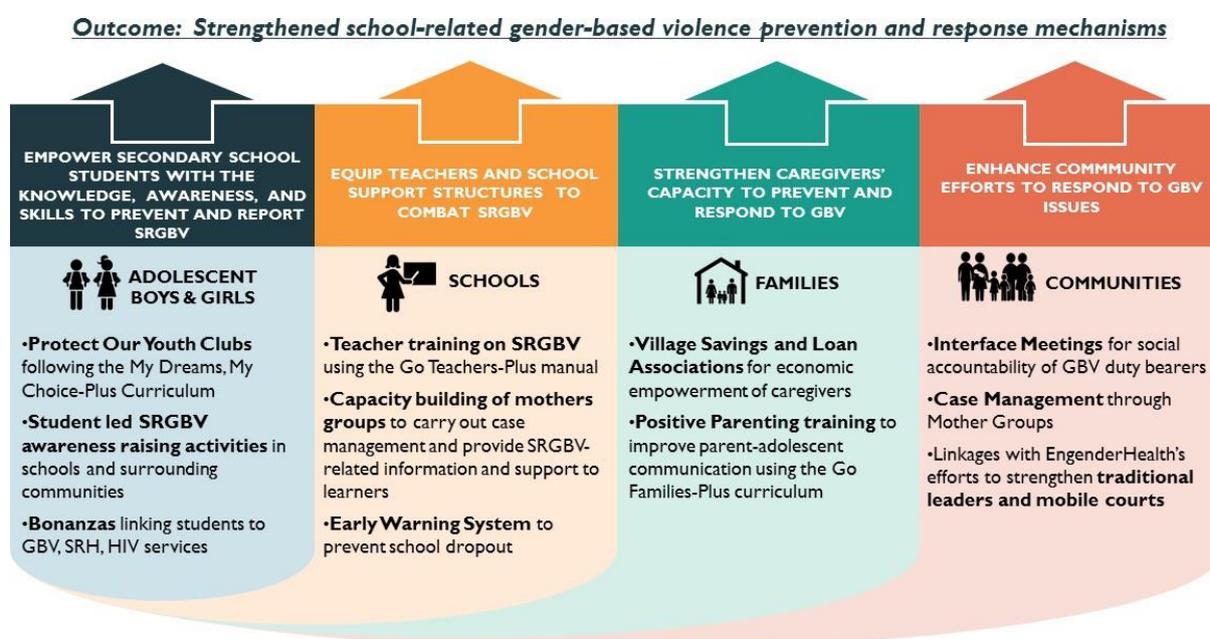
the context of these challenges and gaps that WEI/Bantwana’s POY clubs in Malawi were designed and implemented.

WEI/BANTWANA’S SRGBV COMPONENT

WEI/Bantwana’s SRGBV component was implemented in four districts across Malawi—Blantyre, Chiradzulu, Kasungu, and Mzimba—from May 2018 through November 2019. Recognizing that violence against adolescent girls is the result of a complex combination of factors and in line with emerging evidence, WEI/Bantwana implemented interventions to address SRGBV at multiple levels:

- At the **individual level**, the intervention aimed to equip secondary school students (girls and boys) with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to combat SRGBV;
- At the **household level**, the intervention aimed to strengthen caregivers’ capacity and commitment to prevent and respond to GBV; and
- At the **school level**, the intervention aimed to equip teachers and school support structures with the knowledge, skills, and tools to prevent and respond to SRGBV.

POY clubs are just one component of an integrated and comprehensive approach to strengthen SRGBV prevention as response mechanisms as illustrated in the Theory of Change below.



Aim: 1) Promote positive shifts in underlying norms that perpetuate SRGBV 2) Reduce instances of SRGBV

The key focus for this qualitative assessment is the **POY clubs**, which were implemented in 43 community day secondary schools. Community day secondary schools are the most under-resourced and disadvantaged type of secondary school in Malawi. Students assigned to community day secondary schools tend to be from impoverished households and have lower scores on the primary school leaving exam (PSLE).

POY clubs aim to build the protective assets of adolescents by equipping them with information, skills, and support networks to better navigate the variety of risks they face. With support from trained teacher patrons/matrons, Peer Educators facilitate discussions between boys and girls in the club using

'My Dreams, My Choice Plus,'¹² an evidence-based 7-module participatory toolkit consisting of 24 weekly one-hour sessions. A core strategy of POY clubs is to enlist boys as both Peer Educators and club members to act as agents of change. All Peer Educators work in teams, one girl and one boy, to encourage students to be more self-aware, develop self-respect, and value girls' aspirations. Students openly discuss issues related to gender and explore how gender and gender roles affect girls' low sense of personal agency and low completion rates of secondary school. They also reflect on their own beliefs and use their experiences to relate to other students. POY clubs also help adolescents build soft skills (such as goal setting, time management, communication skills, and decision-making) to support their academic success and encourage them to pursue their education.

Another core strategy of POY clubs is to support club members to apply the skills they have learned through the POY clubs to conduct awareness raising activities within their schools and surrounding communities to help prevent and respond to SRGBV, including speaking publically at assembly points; performing dramas, poetry, songs and dance; and creating posters on SRGBV prevention and response. Further outreach is achieved through school- and community-level bonanzas, which are one-stop-shop events that combine awareness-raising and demand generation for SRGBV services, with on-the-spot linkages to medical, legal, and counselling support for survivors. POY clubs also elevate social accountability among duty bearers, through interface meetings that provide platforms and safe structures for student advocates to engage with GBV service providers, traditional leaders, and local government to hold them accountable for responding to cases of abuse and ensuring service provision. In promoting help-seeking behaviour with adolescents, POY clubs encourage victimized youth to access response mechanisms and link to other wrap-around services (e.g., psychosocial, health and/or legal support services), ensuring a comprehensive model of prevention and response.

QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

WEI/Bantwana engaged the expertise of the Centre for Reproductive Health, College of Medicine to undertake a qualitative assessment to assess the changes that have occurred in students' lives as a result of their participation in the POY clubs. Specifically, the assessment explored how the POY clubs contributed to positive changes in the lives of students, age 13 to 18, across multiple outcomes, including:

- GBV prevention and response mechanisms;
- Protective asset-building/social capital and life skills;
- Gender attitudes/gender norms and relationships with families/caregivers; and
- Awareness of and improved attitudes on SRGBV.

A qualitative approach (described in the section below) was used to collect data on the experiences of beneficiaries and stakeholders involved directly or indirectly with the POY club intervention after one year of implementation, in an effort to answer the following questions:

- What impact have the POY clubs had on the lives of students and within the schools/communities?
- What positive changes, if any, have been brought about by the POY clubs?

¹² https://bantwana.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/My-Dreams-My-Choice_Plus-Malawi-Facilitators-Manual_FINAL_Combined_Modules-1-7.pdf

https://bantwana.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/My-Dreams-My-Choice_Plus-Malawi-Participant-Manual_FINAL_Combined_Modules-1-7.pdf

METHODS

The qualitative assessment included: 1) a case study analysis of the POY clubs using focus groups discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KII); and 2) 'most significant change' (MSC) methodology using in-depth interviews (IDIs) and FGDs to capture stories of significant change that have resulted from students' participation in clubs. Fieldwork was undertaken in all four project sites. The assessment population was in-school POY club boys and girls, age 13 to 18. The FGDs and IDIs explored perceived benefits of the POY clubs, including changes in individual behaviour, attitudes, or beliefs, and the most important factors that facilitated or impeded positive outcomes. The KIIs explored perceived positive changes in young people by teachers, district officials, and program officers.

The combination of these qualitative approaches allowed the researchers to examine the social context in which change around perceptions of SRGBV occurred and to explore the personal experiences and viewpoints of students about the most important changes from their perspectives. Taken together, it is hoped that the case study and the MSC stories allow for a more in-depth understanding of the assessment questions.

SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

Participants and Setting

The qualitative assessment was undertaken by the Centre for Reproductive Health in July 2019 in the four districts of Blantyre, Chiradzulu, Kasungu, and Mzimba. Initially, one Traditional Authority (TA) from the two supported by the project per district was identified using purposive sampling from each in line with their availability and other scheduled activities that were being carried out concurrently in the same areas.

The project is implemented in rural and peri-urban communities; thus no urban sites were included in the study. Two active community day secondary schools were selected from each of the sampled TAs for a total of eight schools based on the same criteria above (availability, schedule of activities etc.). Participants included in-school youth, age 13 to 18, from POY club members and Peer Educators in the four schools. All students from the POY clubs in the selected schools took part in the discussions. Only students who were no longer active/attending the clubs were excluded from the assessment. In addition, the assessment targeted POY club patrons/matrons (teachers), program officers, and district officials who were also selected using purposive sampling. Since each school had only two matrons/patrons and each district had only one program officer, they were automatically included. Selection criteria for district officials included those directly involved with POY clubs with good knowledge about the program.

Methods and Assessment Instruments

Three qualitative methods were used: FGDs, MSC stories (solicited through both IDIs and FGDs), and KIIs. Interview guides and topics for all three methods were developed in reference to the assessment objectives and are outlined below.

1. Focus Group Discussions

As Table 1 (next page) indicates, six FGDs (three with girls and three with boys) were conducted at Ntenjera CDSS, Matindi CDSS, Chikangawa CDSS, Chindidi CDSS, Muhasuwa CDSS, and Chamama CDSS, respectively. A total of 75 students participated in the FGDs (four FGDs had ten members each, three FGDs had nine members each, and one FGD had eight members). Two of the six FGDs were used to capture MSC stories, where 9 stories were collected. FGDs explored students' views

on how the program has influenced their understanding of gender and GBV, and their attitudes about the need to speak out against violence. They also explored other learning and skills introduced through the clubs such as protective asset-building/social capital and life skills. Finally, students were given the opportunity to discuss whether or not the POY clubs had met their expectations, how POY clubs have influenced changes in their lives, and how POY clubs could be improved. During the FGDs, further probing questions were asked about each discussion topic to elicit deeper responses. The FGD guide is attached in Annex 1.

2. Most Significant Change Stories

In an effort to identify the most significant changes in the lives of students because of their participation in the POY clubs, the MSC methodology was used to collect stories from the participants. From the assessment participants, 12 (six boys and six girls) were selected using purposive sampling to ensure gender representation and diversity of views and opinions. The MSC technique involved the collection of stories through two FGDs and 12 IDIs using an MSC guide that was adapted for the program (see Annex 2). Narrations centred on exploring the most important change resulting from their enrolment into the program. A total of 21 stories were collected from students (nine from the FGDs and 12 from IDIs). Story collection was followed by a systematic selection of the stories that represented the MSC as voted on by panels of selected stakeholders at district and national levels who have been involved in the project. The process for story selection and analysis is described in the analysis section below.

3. Key Informant Interviews

In an effort to gather a 360-degree viewpoint on changes resulting from the POY clubs from individuals knowledgeable about its progress and implementation, eight KIIs were conducted with three teachers, three Peer Educators, and two program officers. These interviews provided insights on the POY clubs' impact on students, schools, and communities—including how the program has been received broadly and any challenges (see Annex 3 for the KII guide).

TABLE 1: ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS AND METHODOLOGY

| District (Traditional Authority) | School | Focus Group Discussions | | Key Informant Interviews | | | Most Significant Change In- Depth Interviews ¹³ | | Total |
|--|----------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---------|--|------|-------|
| | | Girls | Boys | Peer Educator | District Official | Teacher | Girls | Boys | |
| Chiradzulu District (Kadewere) | Masalani | 1 (MSC FGD) | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| | Muhasuwa | | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | 3 |
| Kasungu District (Wimbe) | Chamama | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| | Chimbowe | | 1 (MSC FGD) | 1 | | | | 1 | 3 |

¹³ 12 MSCs stories were collected from IDIs but an additional 9 MCSs were also collected from FGDs.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Mzimba District (Chindi and Kapingo Sibande) | Chindindi | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | | 3 |
| | Chikangawa | | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Blantyre District (Kapeni) | Ntenjera | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| | Matindi | | 1 | 1 | | | | 1 | 3 |
| Total | | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 28 |
| Total | | 8 | | 8 | | 12 | | 28 | |

Identification and Training of Enumerators

Eight research assistants were recruited for the assessment and were divided into two teams of four. The research assistants underwent a two-day training where they were familiarized with the research tools and data collection methodologies. One team was responsible for data collection in Blantyre and Chiradzulu, while the other team was responsible for Mzimba and Kasungu data collection. The research assistants were selected based on previous qualitative research experience. Team members responsible for Mzimba and Kasungu were also selected based on their fluency in Tumbuka language.

DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative Interviews

FGDs and KIs were transcribed, translated into English, and cleaned. A code book was developed to guide analysis of all qualitative data. Qualitative data analysis was done using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative software program. A thematic content analysis approach was followed during the data analysis process and included: thoroughly reading the data (by a team of two study coordinators); coding the data; developing a list of emerging themes; categorizing the themes within a hierarchical framework of main and sub-themes; looking for patterns and associations between the themes; and comparing and contrasting within and between the different groups of participants. Thematic analysis was an iterative process and emerging themes have been presented in relation to the context of the POY club intervention. Representative quotations illustrating the main findings were identified from a range of participants.

Most Significant Change Stories

MSC stories collected from both FGDs and IDIs were analyzed at the district level by the district stakeholder team. Each district stakeholder team included a partner program officer, the district gender officer, the district social welfare officer, a victim support unit police officer, the district division manager, and school head teachers or their representatives. Stories were shared with the stakeholders and everyone was asked to read each one. The group then held an in-depth conversation about which stories should be chosen. Each individual was asked to score to all the stories in terms of significance and impact using a scoring rubric that defined specific criteria in relation to the significant changes (see Annex 4). The stories were then ranked based on their scores. The three top ranked stories from each district were then taken up to the national level. The national level stakeholder team included one representative from the Ministry of Gender, one officer from a civil society organization, and one WEI/Bantwana representative. The same iterative methods were used, and the three top ranking stories were selected.

DATA MANAGEMENT

The audio-recorded interviews (FGDs and IDIs) were conducted in Chichewa and Tumbuka. These audio-recorded files were then translated and transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word by trained transcribers. Qualitative transcripts were reviewed by the local consultant from the Centre for Reproductive Health, College of Medicine Malawi. As they were being transcribed, all personal identifiers were removed from the transcripts. A small sample of transcripts was also sent to WEI/Bantwana's international consultant for review. The local consultant performed quality control over all the transcripts by checking each transcript against the recorded data to ensure that there was no misrepresentation of data. Data collected from this assessment remains the property of WEI/Bantwana and will not be used by the local consultant for any purposes other than this assessment.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permission to conduct the assessment was sought from relevant authorities, including the District Commissioners and school head teachers. Risks to the participants were minimal as the assessment did not focus on incidents of violence but rather explored positive changes that results from participation in POY clubs. Every possible step was taken to ensure confidentiality, ensure that no harm was done to the respondents, and prevent any personal information from being known to anyone outside the survey team.

It was not the intention of the assessment to primarily target GBV survivors in a bid to source their personal experiences. However, WEI/Bantwana was cognizant that there may be possibilities of participants revealing certain information of personal GBV experiences. Hence, WEI/Bantwana undertook deliberate steps to ensure confidentiality of all participants and ensure all ethical considerations were observed. Thus, all research assistants undertaking the assessment underwent a two-day intensive training on this study, with particular emphasis on ethics, confidentiality and ensuring that the research did not cause deliberate harm to participants.

At the start of all interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the qualitative assessment, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time, for any reason, without loss of benefits or services to which they may be entitled.

Participants were further assured of confidentiality of results and that their names and identities would remain confidential. All participants signed informed consent forms, while caregivers of participants below age 18 also provided their consent (see Annex 6). As part of the consent procedure, the participants were informed that the data collected would be held in strict confidence and that they would be verbally recorded for transcription purposes only.

Lastly, all data files were safely kept in password protected files for confidentiality. The transcripts did not capture names or references that could identify a specific individual. During data analysis and report writing, findings were not linked to any individual.

LIMITATIONS

Some limitations of the present assessment should be noted. The national stakeholder meeting to select MSC stories only consisted of three stakeholders (one representative each from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, a civil society organization, and WEI/Bantwana), which may have limited the discussion. Furthermore, the results from this assessment are representative only of a purposive sample of students and key informants—those identified through the project, who agreed to participate, and were available within the period for field work—and so self-selection bias cannot

be ruled out. As information was self-reported, it may have been subject to social desirability bias. Finally, our interests were in primarily identifying the positive changes that occurred as a result of the POY clubs across specific domains and thus the program's potential impact on other areas of the adolescents' lives or challenges were not fully examined. As a result, the findings focus more on promising avenues or possible approaches that can be useful for designing interventions in similar settings, rather than generalizable results. Nonetheless, the findings contribute to a growing body of evidence documenting how programs can best design and deliver effective programming to strengthen SRGBV prevention and response mechanisms that address multiple outcomes—including social and gender norms, protective assets and skills, HIV knowledge and risk perception, and reproductive health and sexual behaviours.

KEY FINDINGS

The assessment findings—drawn from the perspectives, reflections and experiences of students, teachers, program staff, and district officials—shed light on the key areas in which the POY clubs have contributed to positive change in students’ lives across a number of domains. Specifically, positive changes for adolescent girls and boys participating in the POY clubs centred around three main themes: individual understanding of SRGBV, perceptions of male and female gender roles, and autonomy, agency and action.

“Before joining the POY club, I had no idea what gender equality was all about and did not understand the term ‘gender-based violence.’”

DEFINING AND EXPANDING CONCEPTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Through the *My Dreams, My Choice Plus* toolkit, the POY clubs aim to support students and teachers to clearly define, understand, and identify GBV, including SRGBV. A number of students expressed that they had limited knowledge and understanding of SRGBV prior to the implementation of the clubs. As a result, students were ill equipped to identify or report certain incidences of violence, even those happening in plain sight. One of the key achievements of the POY clubs was that they served as a safe space for students to unpack and better understand the range of behaviours that constitute GBV, including the various ways GBV might present in school:

Before joining the POY club, when a teacher proposed [to] a girl, we did not think of it as gender-based violence, considering that they are elders. However, after joining this club, they made us aware that this is inappropriate and to report such instances. - [male, FGD, Chiradzulu-Muhasuwa]

At this school I did not know that when a boy touches a girl’s breast, it’s GBV but now I know and we are supposed to report to the matron or to the teachers. - [female, FGD, Blantyre-Ntenjera]

Prior to participating in POY clubs, many students were unaware that verbal abuse and harassment—particularly when it is used to reinforce gender roles, or objectify or humiliate girls—were forms of SRGBV.

I did not know that there is physical, sexual and verbal violence, but now I know. Some people use obscene language and that is also violence. - [female, FGD, Blantyre-Ntenjera]

It might happen that in a classroom a child might be seated and a teacher might come, and instead of starting to teach, the student might be asked to answer the question, and it might happen that the child has failed, let’s put it like that... And it might happen that [the teacher] is saying at her, “you should just go and get married, you are grown,”... And we can say that this is also abuse.

- [peer educator, KII, Blantyre- Matindi]

Club matrons/patrons confirmed that prior to the intervention, many students were unaware that some offensive language used by teachers was a form of SRGBV:

The POY club has helped the youth to know about GBV because in the past they thought some actions from teachers were normal. Some teachers used to say derogatory things about girls which affected them psychologically, comments about their appearance and their class performance such as, ‘With such big breasts how can you pass exams?’ This demotivated the girls but now they know that teachers are not supposed to make comments about their bodies. - [teacher, KII, Blantyre-Ntenjera]

One female Peer Educator explains that not only do students have a better understanding of SRGBV, they also are better able to communicate this knowledge to teachers and convey how other forms of 'negative' language affect them as well.

Since the establishment of POY clubs, we know what abuse is and we have also helped the teachers to understand how even negative words affect us as students. - [female, KII, Blantyre-Matindi]

A number of students described how increased understanding of SRGBV has enabled them to identify and report incidences of abuse:

Before joining the POY club, I had no idea what gender equality was all about and did not understand the term 'gender-based violence.' I have learned more about rights and what we could do when such rights are violated. For instance, I am able to recognize violations of rights both at school and at home. For example, a student beaten up by the teacher or forcing a girl to have sex. These are forms of abuse. I have become more empowered to report abuse to the mother group in our community, the chief, or even those from the community police. Previously I was not aware of such things.

- [male, IDI, Blantyre-Matindi]

It [POY Club] helped a lot. There was a certain girl who got married and we went to report the matter to the mother group and they went to get her. Now she is back at school.

- [Peer Educator, KII, Kasungu-Chimbowi]

Most girls did not know where to report about the violence they experience in their day-to-day life but now they know where to go.

- [female, FGD, Kasungu-Chamama]

Though the topic of blaming and shaming victims is covered in the *My Dreams My Choice Plus* curriculum, some students—often boys but even some girls—struggled to endorse the idea that girls who dressed a certain way were not to blame for SRGBV:

I will start with the dress code as a way to prevent GBV. Particularly, the girls. For example, here at school if they put on short materials and sit on these desk, then they are showing us more than they should.

- [male, FGD, Blantyre-Matindi]

Alternatively, they [girls] should put on a piece of cloth on top of their revealing attires instead of courting trouble and consequently putting the blame on the students [boys] just because of their own making.

- [male, FGD, Blantyre-Matindi]

Gender-based violence, like rape, mostly happens to girls because of their dressing. Some girls' dressing is so tempting to men.

- [female, FGD, Blantyre-Ntenjera]

Teachers also noted that students are selective about the SRGBV cases they report. According to key informants, students were more likely to report SRGBV related to punishment from their teachers. Some cases involving sexual harassment were not reported.

Like a teacher giving them punishment during classes, they say that's GBV. But for them to report on GBV issues like someone proposed me, someone is forcing me to have sex with them, someone is calling me all sorts of names - they don't. They just feel ok since they find some benefits from such relationships.

- [teacher, KII, Blantyre-Ntenjera]

CHALLENGING STEREOTYPICAL GENDER ROLES

The promotion of gender equality is another critical aspect of violence prevention. In Malawi, and around the world, cultural and social norms play a particularly important role in driving violence against

women and girls. Qualitative interviews indicate that student involvement in POY clubs has helped both boys and girls to better understand and then to challenge the cultural norms that perpetuate GBV, including negative or stereotypical gender roles. For example, a number of students described how they have changed their perceptions of gender-specific expectations after participation in club activities:

They say when a girl has become of age she is supposed to have sex with a man. We discuss about that and now we know that it is wrong. We should not be doing that.

- [Peer Educator, KII, Kasungu-Chimbowi]

Previously only boys were considered for leadership positions but not anymore. That is why the term 'chairman' changed to 'chairperson', so that it can suit either of the sex.

- [male, FGD, Blantyre-Matindi]

If it's in the village, they expect a girl to get married the moment she starts menstruation, but we have learnt from the club that a girl starting menstruation is not the end of a girl's life. She also has things she wants to achieve in life; she has dreams to be fulfilled. - [female, FGD, Blantyre-Ntenjera]

It [POY club] has made a change because we have learned that boy and girls are all the same and we both have the potential to fulfil our dreams. Because way back we were told that only boys had the potential to fulfil their dreams but that is not the case. Girls also have the potential to fulfil their dreams.

- [female, FGD, Kasungu-Chamama]

Students also described how the POY clubs, including discussions around gender roles and expectations, have fostered improved relationships between boys and girls:

Nowadays we stay in peace. We are like brothers and sisters and we even help each other with schoolwork. Earlier we lived like cat and mouse.

- [female, FGD, Mzimba-Chindindindi]

Before joining the POY club, I thought as a boy that my friends will only be boys. But after joining POY, I have realised that even girls can be my best friends.

- [male, FGD, Chiradzulu-Muhasuwa]

Adolescent male POY club members described the double standards that exist in their schools and communities with regards to social expectations and gender roles, particularly around domestic and school chores and being allowed to go to school. Through the POY clubs, they were encouraged to rethink the inherent unfairness of these double standards and help promote gender equity among their peers. A number of boys talked about how they have become more aware of gender inequalities after participating in the clubs and have started to demonstrate shifts in their own thinking:

There is a change [in] the way boys perceive the gendered division of roles. Previously, almost all household chores were regarded as 'girls' work, whilst 'boys' work was defined as 'manly' like chopping firewood and sweeping the surroundings. In POY club, we learned about gender issues and that whatever a boy could do, so too can a girl—be it drawing water, fetching firewood or washing plates—and this has reduced abuse towards the girls.

- [male, FGD, Blantyre-Matindi]

Before joining the POY club, I thought going to the maize mill was only the responsibility of girls, even drawing water. But after joining the POY club, I have realized that there is no specific work for boys and girls. Every work can be done by anybody.

- [male, FGD, Chiradzulu-Muhasuwa]

Boys also reflected on how they have learned to actively share what they have learned about gender equality and 'enlighten' their families and communities:

For instance, we can reason and plead with our parents to allow our sisters to come with us to school, if the parents wanted them to stay behind and perform other chores before going to school.

- [male, FGD, Blantyre-Matindi]

Discussions about gender have helped because people in communities are now aware that it is not right to violate the child's rights to education, because they liked saying a girl child has no right to education. So, we enlighten them by telling them a girl child has equal rights to education as a boy child.

- [peer educator, KII, Kasungu-Chimbowi]

Previously, for example, if a family was lacking and only able to provide school fees for one of two children, and it so happens that it is a boy and a girl, the boy was automatically the preferred choice to go to school whilst the girl stayed at home, as it was perceived that the girl would get married. Now things have changed so that even us boys are able to reason with the parents/guardians to provide equal treatment to both boys and girls.

- [male, FGD, Blantyre-Matindi]

“Even us boys are able to reason with the parents/guardians to provide equal treatment to both boys and girls.”

ACTIVATING AUTONOMY, AGENCY, AND ACTION

Girls commonly described the pressure they felt from family members and friends to drop out of school and get married. Many adolescent girls valued the role that the club had in giving them the skills and courage to assert their own desires around when and when not to get married and school progression.

I wanted to drop out of school because my dad said he does not have money for my fees and said it was better for me just to get married. I was attending POY club, then after a certain lesson at the club, I learnt how best I could talk to my father and braved myself up and asked my father why he was refusing to pay my school fees. I reminded him that it is his duty to pay for me and he indeed understood what I said and started paying for me again. So, I can say what has changed in me is to face my fears and be able to properly talk to people which I could not do before I joined the POY club.

- [female, FGD, Mzimba-Chindindindi]

In my area, girls face a lot of challenges when it comes to finishing school. The practice of paying 'lobola' as bride price has made most parents opt for their girls getting married early. I have faced a lot of challenges for me to remain in school. My friends mocked and bullied me and my parents refused to pay my school fees. Both friends and parents would tell me to my face that I was mature enough to get married and was wasting time in school. Although they made me feel bad, I remained adamant and continued with school. I am the only girl in school from my village.

- [female, IDI, Mzimba-Chindindindi]

When I was in primary, I had a best friend who got married and people started saying 'Have you seen your best friend is married and you are still at home? What are you going to do at home? You will just become old.' And when I came here and joined the POY club, we were told of the disadvantages of

early marriage and my best friend who got married came back and told me of how hard married life is. Then, I had second thoughts about the whole thing and now I stand firm on continuing with my education and even when people say I will become old I do not care.

- [female, FGD, Mzimba-Chindindindi]

“After a certain lesson at the POY club, I learnt how best I could talk to my father and braved myself up and asked my father why he was refusing to pay my school fees.”

A number of girls discussed instances where they had to negotiate unwanted advances from men or sexual harassment. They describe how the assertive communication skills they gained in the club—including standing straight, maintaining eye contact, using strong body language, and speaking with a confident voice—has helped them respond:

When someone is asking me out (making some advances) I make sure I use body language. I stand firm without any fear because if I do not stand up for myself, the guy might think that if he continues I will say yes. So, when someone is asking me out I make sure I stand firm, look straight into his eyes, not facing down.

- [female, FGD, Kasungu-Chamama]

This club has helped me. In the past, whenever I felt bad about how a boy has spoken to me, I could not say anything because I was unable to express myself in a proper manner. But now, we have learned to be strong and ably express ourselves. I have changed because in the past I was just looking but now I speak and they cannot even come back to me to do the same like they used to.

- [female, FGD, Blantyre-Ntenjera]

It has made a difference in my day-to-day life because I am now able to answer back to any person making advances on me. If an older man is asking me to go out with him, I answer him with courage and confidence, but before I joined the POY club I was not able to do that.

- [female, FGD, Kasungu-Chamama]

District officials have also noted some improved negotiating power among girl members of the clubs:

Girls now have the ability to have a say whenever something bad is happening, like the issue of arranged marriages. With the POY clubs, now girls are able to say no to any marriage and prefer to proceed with school. So that negotiating power, it was not there among most of the POY club members. Girls have that negotiating power now.

- [district officer, KII, Chiradzulu-Mahasuwa]

Most Significant Change: “I will not stand for it anymore.”

For one student, the POY club equipped her with the skills to navigate a potentially dangerous situation and emboldened her to speak her truth.

These men, older men, some of them influential rich businessmen in our area, tried to coerce me into sexual relationships with them. There was one man that was very persistent. He would wait for me on the road almost every day, trying to too hard to pressure me into dropping out of school so that I would marry him. He was forceful and threatened me to try and convince me that I must marry him. I was terrified of going to school. I love going to school but because of these encounters, I was afraid of going to and from school. I was terrified of meeting this man. I was so affected that I did not concentrate in class, since all my thoughts were on what would happen to me if I met the man again. I was unhappy, I was depressed. I thought that my dreams would not be realized and I had completely forgotten about having a bright future. When I joined the POY club, I learnt a lot of useful things, which I applied in my life and they have benefited me tremendously. I was able to confront my tormentor at last. When he tried to harass me recently, I stood up straight, looked him straight in the eyes and spoke to him in a calm but confident voice and I told him, “This better stop right now. I have been empowered. What you have been doing to me is abusing my rights and I will not stand for it anymore. If it continues, I will report the matter to my school, the police and the community leaders.” Now I am happy. I go to school freely. I participate in class fully. I am able to interact with my peers with confidence, be it boys or girls. I am no longer scared or depressed. This to me has been a very significant change in my life, since I now know how to stand up and speak up for myself.

- [female, MSC, Chamama- Kasungu]

“I was able to confront my tormentor at last.”

Alongside improved negotiation and communication skills, many students described how the POY club helped them to think more hopefully about their life choices and goals, and has motivated them to improve their school performance.

The POY club has helped us realize that there’s more to a girl’s life than just marriage. A girl also has things she wants to achieve in life; she has dreams to be fulfilled.

- [female, FGD, Blantyre-Ntenjera]

We have time to reflect on what we want to achieve in life. Through these sessions, we have been empowered and are able to ask questions, respond to questions and/or make class presentations, as well as public speaking. We now actively participate in class and freely express our views in groups. This has improved our class performance.

- [female, IDI, Masalani-Chiradzulu]

As for me, in the POY club what I have benefitted from is that I had the heart to get married at first and most of the people at home were telling me just to get married because I am mature for marriage, giving examples of how my body looks... But when I joined the POY club, I learnt a lot about how I want my future to be and this encouraged me not to get married and now I am working hard so that in future I can become a madam (female teacher)

- [female, FGD, Mzimba- Chindindindi]

Several participants noted that the POY club provided a safe space and a trusting environment through which they could openly speak about their problems. The solidarity and safety offered by the group

setting made it easier for club members to reveal challenges, confront negative thoughts and behaviours, manage doubts, and develop solutions:

This club has helped me to be free and open among my friends. In the past, I never used to be in groups for discussions; I was shy but now I participate openly and share my ideas on how we girls can protect ourselves.
- [female, FGD Blantyre-Ntenjera]

POY helps us to talk freely, like at a group. Most of the time we are shy to talk, but at POY club we are encouraged to speak more freely. You find that when you are at a group and you are shy to talk, you see your friend talking without fear, and that gives you courage to stand and air out your concerns. Sometimes we also share experiences and issues that affects us. We share our concerns with club members who jointly assist on how to deal away with such situations.
- [male, FGD, Chiradzulu-Muhasuwa]

It is good for us because we are able to talk/chat with our fellow youths and when one faces a problem we are able to advise each other.
- [peer educator, KII, Kasungu-Chimbowi]

It is a safe space and in the past students never used to report the cases of abuse, whether they are being proposed by a teacher or at home. But right now we have students who come to the POY clubs, to the peer educators. . . It has empowered them to be able to speak out. So, it has really been helpful to our students.
- [program officer, KII, Mzimba]

DISCUSSION

This qualitative assessment sets out to explore how the POY clubs have contributed to positive changes in the lives of students (age 13 to 18) across multiple domains. Three major themes arose from the interviews with students, teachers, and district officials participating in WEI/Bantwana's SRGBV program. Specifically, the qualitative assessment found that POY clubs have served as a promising platform to:

- Clarify the scope and definition of GBV and SRGBV;
- Challenge students' perceptions of male and female roles, including engaging boys in deliberate discussions of gender, masculinity, and violence; and
- Activate girls' autonomy, agency and action.

Even though evidence shows that SRGBV is common, it is often not clearly understood or well-defined. This is particularly true of forms of SRGBV that have been normalized—such as verbal and psychological abuse, sexual harassment, and intimidation. An ability to define and understand the range of behaviours that constitute SRGBV plays a critical role in preventing and responding to it. Students describe how, through the POY clubs, they now have a **better understanding of** and are **better able to classify the different forms of GBV** (e.g., physical, sexual and emotional violence) and have a **clearer and more nuanced understanding of how it manifests in school settings**. Notably, many students revealed that, prior to the POY clubs, they were unaware that violence could be verbal. There were particularly noteworthy shifts in students' understanding of more implicit forms of GBV and SRGBV (e.g., bullying and verbal abuse) and how language from both teachers and peers can be used in schools to perpetuate GBV. Students also noted increased knowledge about where to report SRGBV (e.g., club matrons, other teachers, mothers' group, and police).

Descriptions of relationships and gender roles between boys and girls emphasized the unequal division of labour around chores, at school and at home, and perceived limitations of girls in school leadership, school performance, and within the wider society. At the same time, a number of adolescent girls described the strong social pressure they felt on all sides to conform and get married at puberty. Our findings reveal that the clubs—through the *My Dreams, My Choice Plus* curriculum, peer-to-peer discussions, drama, and other activities—**created a safe space to escape harmful social norms, challenge gender stereotypes, and encourage critical thinking**, for girls especially. The safe space created by POY clubs appeared to be a strong protective factor, especially in light of the way gender stereotypes were being widely reinforced within the larger school, at home, in communities, and, oftentimes, in the students' peer group. These findings are similar to what has been observed in other studies on safe space interventions aimed at developing agency for adolescent girls.¹⁴ Evidence also shows that engaging boys, in particular, to question and challenge stereotypes about masculinity and power dynamics in their own lives is an important factor in reducing tolerance of GBV in communities and schools.¹⁵ Our findings suggest that boys' participation in the POY clubs not only sparked a change in their own thinking around traditional gender roles and expectations, but also built their capacity as champions and change agents. Positive change was also witnessed in the nature of the male-female relationships among club members, including less teasing and more cooperation.

However, some students expressed the belief that the way girls dressed seduced boys, and thus the girls were responsible for GBV. Victim-blaming attitudes have been observed in a number of contexts

¹⁴ Svanemyr, J., Amin, A., Robles, OJ., Greene, ME (2015) 'Creating an Enabling Environment for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health: A Framework and Promising Approaches' *Journal of Adolescent Health*, January 2015, Vol 56, No 1, pS7–S14

¹⁵ Svanemyr, J., Amin, A., Robles, OJ., Greene, ME (2015) 'Creating an Enabling Environment for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health: A Framework and Promising Approaches' *Journal of Adolescent Health*, January 2015, Vol 56, No 1, pS7–S14

across countries, and represent a barrier to the prevention of SRGBV.¹⁶ Furthermore, forms of GBV related to students' relationships with teachers and/or older men were noted as often not reported due to the transactional nature (financial benefits) of such relationships. This was identified as a challenge because even when such cases are reported, the involved students often deny the allegations and no action can be taken.

Evidence further shows that programs that aim to improve social skills (e.g., communication, problem-solving, etc.) and help develop protective assets (e.g., strong social networks, self confidence and self-esteem, increased knowledge about relevant ASRH information, etc.) are effective at preventing GBV and helping adolescent girls respond to GBV at school, at home, and within their communities.^{17/18} Many of the adolescent girls described their participation in the POY clubs as a turning point in terms of their sense of self, self-esteem, and self-confidence—all of which are important skills in preventing and responding to GBV. They described two areas of their lives, in particular, where **they were able to better assert themselves and activate their own autonomy and agency: staying in school and rebuking unwanted advances from men.** Adolescent girls described becoming aware of the possibility of achieving their life aspirations and dreams and of recognizing their value/worth (e.g., 'I can do this', 'I can achieve my goals')—coupled with stronger assertive communication skills—as factors involved in reinforcing agency and action. Even in the cases where girls faced hostility and criticism from family and friends, many described the choice to persist and remain in school. Furthermore, **the network of POY clubs supported agency and action, especially for girls,** as members were able to use clubs to speak openly about their problems, learn that they were not alone, view things in a new light, and brainstorm solutions.

These findings provide insights on the areas in which POY clubs have empowered students to better respond to and prevent SRGBV, based on their own experiences and from the perspectives of people knowledgeable about the program. The findings shed a light on areas where more work needs to be done (victim blaming and shaming) and offer value in understanding how to better help adolescent boys and girls explore pathways to minimize their risk of SRGBV in the future.

¹⁶ Sprechmann S., Christie K. and Walker, M. (2014) 'Challenging Gender-Based Violence Worldwide: CARE's Program Evidence. Strategies, Results and Impacts of Evaluations 2011-2013'. PLACE: CARE International

¹⁷ Sida (2015). Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence: Expressions and Strategies Retrieved from <https://www.sida.se/contentassets/3a820dbd152f4fca98bacde8a8101e15/preventing-and-responding-to-gender-based-violence.pdf>

¹⁸ Population Council. (2016). Building girls' protective assets: A collection of tools for program design. New York: Population Council. Retrieved from https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2016PGY_GirlsProtectiveAssetsTools.pdf

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Malawi, discriminatory social and gender norms and practices—such as early marriage, unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities, and socially accepted notions of masculinity related to violence—still inhibit adolescent girls’ equal development and access to education and increase their risk of GBV, including SRGBV.

Because schools are an important setting for gender socialization, they can provide a platform for change, offering students and teachers an opportunity to create non-violent, gender-equitable environments. POY clubs are providing adolescent girls and boys with increased access to information and skills that are already bringing about positive change in many club members’ lives. According to students’ own narrations, they have more access to information about SRGBV; increased skills to resist and exert pressure on teachers, parents, and communities to change harmful social norms; and increased confidence in their ability to protect themselves and achieve their life goals. Although these changes have been realised for some of the students who participated in the POY clubs, many more students remain vulnerable. The following recommendations are therefore provided to help build upon investments in this critical area.

Recommendation 1: To address the fact that SRGBV is often challenging to confront due to difficulties defining and detecting it—as well as difficulty attaining social acceptance—it is important that programs, teachers, and schools work together to develop a unified, whole school approach and a common (clear and concise) understanding of SRGBV, along with clear and unambiguous guidance (code of conduct) for teachers and students that is continually updated as evidence-based best-practices and recommendations emerge.

Recommendation 2: Many schools remain sites where rigid gender stereotypes are reinforced in school learning, extra-curricular activities, and chores. Additional work is needed to promote appropriate gender role flexibility and gender-sensitive pedagogy in school settings.

Recommendation 3: While the *My Dreams, My Choice Plus* toolkit does address the ‘culture of blame’ that is associated with SRGBV, some participants in the assessment still blamed girls for these incidences. These responses point to an urgent need for sustained support to engage more youth, especially males, in discussions about SRGBV and to develop strategies to transform the practice of victim blaming into a culture of non-tolerance.

Recommendation 4: SRGBV related to students’ relationships with teachers and/or older men were noted as often not being reported, due to their transactional nature (financial benefits). Within the context of school-based GBV programs, special attention should be paid to using platforms like the POY clubs to address social norms around power imbalances that lead to age-disparate relationships and enhance social accountability of SRGBV duty bearers.

Recommendation 5: Based on our assessment findings, further research in the following critical areas would be useful—identifying and understanding the scale of more implicit forms of SRGBV (e.g., psychological and emotional abuse, bullying, intimidation); school actions that help to prevent and reduce SRGBV; and studies to evaluate a change in the incidence of SRGBV.

ANNEX 1: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Project: Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project in Malawi – SRGBV Component

District: _____

School: _____

Focus group facilitator: _____

Notetaker: _____

Time focus group started: _____

Time focus group ended: _____

Date: _____

Number of participants in the group: _____

Introduction:

[consent forms should be discussed and signed ahead of time]

Hello. Thank you for agreeing to take part in the focus group. My name is _____ and I will be facilitating the discussion today. The colleague with me is _____ who will be taking notes. You have been asked here today since your point of view is important. I know everyone is very busy, and we appreciate your time.

INTRODUCTION: We are here today to talk about WEI/Bantwana’s SRGBV Component of the Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project in Malawi, funded by the United States Department of State through EngenderHealth. The project was designed to reduce school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in 40 schools in Malawi. One of the ways the project aimed to do this was to equip secondary school students (girls and boys) with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to combat SRGBV. WEI/Bantwana is now conducting an assessment to see how the program performed, as well as to understand any difference the program made and challenges faced. We want to talk to you as participants in the program.

GROUND RULES: Please feel free to talk openly. There are no wrong answers. Please respect the opinions of others—we don’t have to agree; we are interested in hearing different viewpoints. You do not have to speak in any particular order. When you do have something to say, please do so but please speak one at a time. There are many of you in the group and it is important that I hear each of your views, so please give everyone an equal chance to participate in the discussion. If you are uncomfortable talking about any aspect, or would rather not answer a particular question, that is fine.

This focus group will take about 2 hours. Everything you say to us will be treated confidentially. When you share something, we will note it but will not put your name next to it. Please respect everyone’s privacy and confidentiality. After the focus group, do not talk about what anyone has said in the meeting.

RECORDING: Do you mind if I record this focus group? It is only in case we miss anything when taking notes. [Start recorder only if all agree. Take detailed notes whether the session is recorded or not.]

I am going to ask you to complete this background information form. You do not need to put your name on this form. This form provides us with some background information that is helpful to us to know who we spoke with. [Hand out forms and walk people through these. Collect completed forms.]

Warm up

First, I’d like everyone to introduce themselves. Can you tell us your first name or the name you would like us to call you in this discussion?

Opening Questions

1. How have you been involved in the Protect Our Youth (POY) club?
2. Can you briefly describe the goal of the POY club in your school?

Participation and Impact

3. Did you learn anything or benefit as a result of your participation in the POY club? If yes, what?
4. Were your expectations met?
 - a. If not, why?
 - b. If yes, tell us more.
5. Were there things you wished you had learned in the POY club that you did not? If yes, what?
6. Has the POY club made a difference for you in terms of your day-to-day life?
 - a. If yes, what difference has it made?
 - b. If no, why not?
7. Which activities in the POY club did you find the most useful? What are the reasons for this/why?
8. Which activities in the POY club did you find the least useful? What are the reasons for this/why?

Specific project components: We also want to get your thoughts on some specific components of the POY club.

9. *GBV prevention and response mechanisms:* What, if anything, has changed for you in terms of your knowledge about gender-based violence, including GBV prevention and response, as a result of the POY club?
10. *Protective asset-building/social capital and life skills:* What, if anything, has changed for you in terms of your self-esteem, self-confidence, decision-making, life aspirations and leadership skills, as a result of the POY club?
11. *Gender attitudes/gender norms and relationships with families/caregivers:* What, if anything, has changed for you in terms of how you feel about the social and cultural expectations of boys and/or the social and cultural expectations of girls? What, if anything, has changed for you in terms your relationships with family?
12. *GBV in school setting:* What, if anything, has changed for you in terms of your knowledge about school-related gender-based violence and how to combat it?

Recommendations

13. What recommendations do you have for the future to improve these types of programs for adolescent girls and boys in Malawi? [Probe: what would you do differently? What would you leave the same?]

Conclusion: We have come to the end of the specific questions we planned to discuss with you.

14. Before we conclude, do you have any comments or things that we haven't discussed that you would like to share/mention?

Thank you so much for your time.

ANNEX 2: MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE INTERVIEW GUIDE

| Topic | Description | Time |
|---------------------|---|------------|
| Welcome Remarks | <p>[Facilitator to welcome participants – everyone to introduce themselves.]</p> <p>Hello. Thank you for agreeing to take part in the focus group. My name is _____ and I will be facilitating the discussion today. The colleague with me is _____ who will be taking notes. You have been asked here today since your point of view is important. I know everyone is very busy, and we appreciate your time.</p> <p>We are here today to talk about WEI/Bantwana’s SRGBV Component of the Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project in Malawi, funded by the United States Department of State through EngenderHealth. The project was designed to reduce school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in 40 schools in Malawi. One of the ways the project aimed to do this was to equip secondary school students (girls and boys) with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to combat SRGBV. WEI/Bantwana is now conducting an assessment to see how the program performed, as well as to understand any difference the program made and challenges faced.</p> <p>We would like to capture stories of significant change that have resulted from your participation in the Protect Our Youth (POY) clubs in your school.</p> <p>The stories and information collected from these focus group discussions will be used for a number of purposes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to learn what impact the POY club has had on the lives of students and within the school/community; • to identify positive changes brought about by the POY club; • to acknowledge and share the programs successes. | 15 minutes |
| Ground Rules | <p>Please feel free to talk openly. There are no wrong answers. Please respect the opinions of others—we don’t have to agree; we are interested in hearing different viewpoints. You do not have to speak in any particular order. When you do have something to say, please do so but please speak one at a time. There are many of you in the group and it is important that I hear each of your views, so please give everyone an equal chance to participate in the discussion. If you are uncomfortable talking about any aspect or would rather not answer a particular question, that is fine.</p> <p>This focus group will take about 1.5 hours.</p> | 5 minutes |
| Review of MSC | [Brief review of Most Significant Change.] | 10 minutes |
| Pair/Share Activity | <p>[Participants are asked to provide the most significant changes in their lives.]</p> <p>Everybody’s experiences are unique. In this section, we want to get some facts about the changes you have experienced. What we really want to know is: what are the most significant/the BIGGEST changes you have experienced since joining the POY club? We want you to feel free and comfortable to share your experiences.</p> <p>[Facilitator introduces the questions:]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me how you (the storyteller) first became involved with the POY club and what your current involvement is. 2. From your point of view, describe the most significant change that has resulted from your involvement in the POY club. | 60 minutes |

| | | |
|--------------------|--|-----------|
| | <p>3. Why is this significant to you? What difference has this made now or will it make in the future?</p> <p>[Note-taker keeps track of which person the story is about and the key elements of the story. Later, these notes will be turned into a story.]</p> | |
| Closing Statements | <p>[Thank participants for their input. Confirm that their participation is valued and assists WEI/Bantwana greatly.]</p> <p>We have come to the end of the specific questions we planned to discuss with you.</p> <p>Before we conclude, do you have any comments or things that we haven't discussed that you would like to share/mention?</p> <p>Thank you so much for your time.</p> | 5 minutes |

ANNEX 3: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

(Peer Educators, District Officials, Partner Program Officers)

Project: Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project in Malawi – SRGBV Component

District: _____
Site: _____
Interviewer: _____
Time interview started: _____
Time interview ended: _____
Date: _____
Sex of interviewee: _____

Introduction:

[Consent forms should be discussed and signed ahead of time.]

Hello. Thank you for agreeing to take part in the interview. My name is _____. You have been asked here today because your point of view is important. I know you are very busy, and we appreciate your time.

INTRODUCTION: We are here today to talk about WEI/Bantwana's SRGBV Component of the Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project in Malawi, funded by the United States Department of State through EngenderHealth. The project was designed to reduce school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in 40 schools in Malawi. One of the ways the project aimed to do this was to equip secondary school students (girls and boys) with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to combat SRGBV. WEI/Bantwana is now conducting an assessment to see how the program performed, as well as to understand any difference the program made and challenges faced. We want to talk to you as contributors to the program.

GROUND RULES: Please feel free to talk openly. There are no right or wrong answers. If you are uncomfortable talking about any aspect or would rather not answer a particular question, that is fine.

The interview will take about 1 hour. Everything you say to us will be treated confidentially.

RECORDING: Do you mind if I record this interview? It is only in case we miss anything when taking notes. [Start recorder if participants agree. Take detailed notes whether the interview is recorded or not.]

I am going to ask you to complete this background information form. You do not need to put your name on this form. This form provides us with some background information that is helpful for us to know who we spoke with. [Hand out forms and walk interviewee through them. Collect completed forms.]

Opening Questions

1. What is the Protect Our Youth (POY) club? How would you describe its purpose?
2. What is/was your role in the POY club?
3. Based on what you know, can you briefly describe how the POY club has been implemented?

Project Effectiveness and Impact

4. In your opinion, how, if at all, has the POY club helped the intended beneficiaries?
5. In what ways has the program:
 - a. Been of benefit to you?
 - b. Mobilized and strengthened schools to support beneficiaries around SRGBV?
 - c. Mobilized and strengthened communities to support beneficiaries around SRGBV?
 - d. Built the capacity of teachers and schools around SRGBV?
6. Were the POY club interventions rolled out as intended/designed?

7. How did the POY club model interact with other efforts by government and other implementing partners in providing SRGBV support to students?
8. Did the program have any unintended (beneficial or adverse) effects on the following:
 - a. Students
 - b. Schools
 - c. Teachers
9. Did the program achieve the intended results? If not, why?
10. What were the challenges encountered? How were they addressed?

Specific Project Components: We also want to get your thoughts on some specific components of the POY club.

11. *GBV prevention and response mechanisms:* To what extent, if any, has the POY club helped build knowledge and skills on gender-based violence, including GBV prevention and response among students?
12. *Protective asset-building/social capital and life skills:* To what extent, if any, has the POY club helped build protective assets and life skills (self-esteem, self-confidence, decision-making, life aspirations and leadership skills) among students?
13. *Gender attitudes/gender norms and relationships with families/caregivers:*
 - a. To what extent, if any, has the POY club helped change students' feelings about the social and cultural expectations of boys and/or the social and cultural expectations of girls?
 - b. To what extent, if any, has the POY club changed (improved? affected?) student's relationships with their family?
14. *GBV in school setting:*
 - a. To what extent, if any, has the POY club helped build students' knowledge about school-related gender-based violence and how to combat it?
 - b. To what extent, if any, has the POY club helped build students' capacity to report incidences of SRGBV?

Recommendations

15. What recommendations do you have to improve POY clubs in schools in Malawi in the future?
16. What recommendations do you have to reduce SRGBV in schools in Malawi in the future?
17. Are there specific lessons from the POY club program that can be applied to similar or future interventions?

Conclusion: We have come to the end of the specific questions we planned to discuss with you.

18. Before we conclude, do you have any comments or things that we haven't discussed that you would like to share/mention?

Thank you so much for your time.

ANNEX 4: MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE SCORING RUBRIC

| Most Significant Change (MSC) Story | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Scoring Rubric | | | | |
| Criteria | Score | | | |
| | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| | Complete: detailed explanation | Solid: clear explanation | Limited: unclear explanation | Lacking: no clear explanation |
| <i>Story demonstrates positive change related to an activity of the POY club</i> | | | | |
| <i>Story demonstrates POY club contributed to change beyond the storyteller (i.e., other students, school, community)</i> | | | | |
| <i>Story demonstrates POY club met a need</i> | | | | |
| <i>Story demonstrates a positive change that will affect the student, school, and/or community beyond the life of the project</i> | | | | |

ANNEX 5: CONSENT FORMS

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAM ASSESSMENT – Assent and Parental Permission for Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Group Discussions – Beneficiaries

Principal Investigator: Dr Effie Chipeta

Contact Details:

Email: echipeta@medcol.mw

Mobile: 0999981937

Dear Participant,

My colleague and I would like to talk about WEI/Bantwana’s SRGBV Component of the Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project in Malawi, funded by the United States Department of State through EngenderHealth. The project was designed to reduce school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in 40 schools in Malawi. One of the ways the project aimed to do this by equipping secondary school students (girls and boys) with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to combat SRGBV. WEI/Bantwana is now conducting an assessment to see how the program performed, as well as to understand any difference the program made and any challenges faced. We want to talk to you as contributors to the program.

We are interviewing key informants, such as beneficiaries enrolled in POY clubs, along with teachers and district officials. If you join the assessment, it will take about 1-2 hours. We will ask about your experience in the POY club and, specifically, about how the program has had a positive impact in your life. This interview will be confidential and we will not share your name or any identifying information about you or your responses. But, we will share what we learn from this assessment with other people. The interview may be audio recorded if you give us permission. The recording will ensure that we hear every part of your answer and accurately transcribe your responses.

You will receive no personal benefit from answering our questions. There is no payment for helping us, but we do appreciate your time. Joining this assessment is your decision. You can stop at any time. You can refuse to answer a question that you do not want to answer.

If you have any future questions about the assessment, contact Dr Effie Chipeta at 0999981937.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this interview.

Certificate of Consent - Participant

I have read or have been read the above considerations regarding my participation in the program assessment. I have been given a chance to ask questions and the questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that my records will be kept private and that I can stop the discussion at any time. I also understand that my decision to stop the discussion will not affect me adversely.

I agree to this discussion.

Signature of participant: _____

If oral consent, signature of interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Certificate of Consent – Parent/Caregiver

I have read or have been read the above considerations regarding the child's participation in the assessment. I have been given a chance to ask questions and the questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to this discussion.

Signature of parent/caregiver: _____

If oral consent, signature of interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Investigator's Statement

I, the undersigned, have explained to the participant the procedures to be followed in the assessment and the risks and benefits involved. I have also provided my mobile number so that he/she may contact me at any time if required.

Name of the interviewer: _____

Signature of the interviewer: _____

Date: _____

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAM ASSESSMENT - Key Informants (Club Matrons/Patrons and District Leaders) - Consent to Participate in Program Assessment

Principal Investigator: Dr. Effie Chipeta

Contact Details:

Email: echipeta@medcol.mw
Mobile: 0999981937

Dear Participant,

My colleague and I would like to talk about WEI/Bantwana’s SRGBV Component of the Essential GBV Services and Prevention Project in Malawi, funded by the United States Department of State through EngenderHealth. The project was designed to reduce school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in 40 schools in Malawi. One of the ways the project aimed to do this was by equipping secondary school students (girls and boys) with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to combat SRGBV. WEI/Bantwana is now conducting an assessment to see how the program performed, as well as to understand any difference the program made and any challenges faced. We want to talk to you as contributors to the program.

We are interviewing key informants, such as beneficiaries enrolled in POY clubs, along with teachers and district officials. If you join the assessment, it will take about 1-2 hours. We will ask about your role in the POY club and specifically about how you think the program has had a positive impact in the lives of students. This interview will be confidential and we will not share your name or any identifying information about you or your responses. But, we will share what we learn from this assessment with other people. The interview may be audio recorded if you give us permission. The recording will ensure that we hear every part of your answer and accurately transcribe your responses.

You will receive no personal benefit from answering our questions. There is no payment for helping us, but we do appreciate your time. Joining this assessment is your decision. You can stop at any time. You can refuse to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

If you have any future questions about the assessment, contact Dr. Effie Chipeta at 099998 1937.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this interview.

Certificate of Consent - Participant

I have read, or have been read, the above considerations regarding my participation in the assessment. I have been given a chance to ask questions and the questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that my records will be kept private and that I can stop the discussion at any time. I also understand that my decision to stop the discussion will not affect me adversely.

I agree to this discussion.

Signature of participant: _____

If oral consent, signature of interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Investigator's Statement

I, the undersigned, have explained to the participant the procedures to be followed in the assessment and the risks and benefits involved. I have also provided my mobile number so that he/she may contact me at any time if required.

Name of the interviewer: _____

Signature of the interviewer: _____

Date: _____