



## Impact of Livelihoods and Life Skills of Adolescent Girls in Liberia



### Intervention

Young girls in Liberia are particularly vulnerable to a number of challenges as opposed to their male counterparts. The long-lasting war until early 2000 further exposed them to the violation of their rights and increased their livelihood insecurity. To create a conducive learning environment and empower them economically and socially, BRAC follows an integrated and community-based approach in facilitating their labour force participation and increasing their sexual and reproductive health (SRH) awareness. The *Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents* (ELA) programme draws on the lessons learnt in Bangladesh where 9,000 clubs have been reaching over one million girls since 1993. With the support of NoVo Foundation, BRAC Liberia implemented the ELA programme during 2016-2018. It served 3,500 in- and out-of-school girls 10 to 19 through 60 ELA clubs in Montserrado, Bong, Grand Cape Mount and Margibi county.

The programme operated within safe clubs set up in the community and opened five afternoons a week. These clubs were run by older girls, selected from the same community and trained to act as mentors to younger girls. They facilitated life-skills and SRH education for a small lump-sum incentive. In the later years, centres offered livelihood training on income-generating activities (IGAs) and financial literacy courses for senior out-of-school girls. These senior girls were also eligible for a loan to kick-start their business and capitalise on their acquired knowledge. Mothers' forum and parents meeting were other activities to facilitate the conducive environment for the girls at home.



### Research

*Enhancing Livelihoods and Life-skills of Adolescent Girls* (Olobo and Nansamba, 2019, Monrovia: [BRAC IERC](#))



### Method

A *difference-in-differences* (DID) estimate was applied to evaluate the programme's impact on the girls' wellbeing. A total of 744 girls followed to the endline were split into: (i) active treatment girls during this endline survey, (ii) former treatment girls who were ELA members two years before, and (iii) comparison girls randomly chosen from the same communities with similar socio-demographic characteristics.



▼ **8.1**  
pp ever-pregnant rate

▲ **21.5%**  
used condom in last encounter

▲ **3.2**  
years preferred age for having a child

▼ **11.3**  
% feeling sad

▲ **15.5**  
% feeling special

▲ **11.4**  
% feeling smart

ELA clubs significantly contributed to increasing the agency of the young women by improving their knowledge, awareness and behaviour. The table 1 below shows that the 'ever pregnant' rates of the active and former ELA participants were significantly **lower** than the comparison ones. Even if ELA girls were sexually active, they were more likely to use condoms and less likely to cohabit. Interestingly, the situation of former ELA participants was almost identical to active ELA girls and significantly better than in the comparison group, implying long-term effectiveness of the intervention.

**Table 1: Key findings across three groups**

Variable	Active ELA girls	Former ELA girls	Comparison
Used condom during last encounter (yes)	21.5%	18.2%	13.4%
Ever pregnant (yes)	10.5%	12.1%	20.2%
Ever cohabited (yes)	14.8%	13.1%	21.4%
HIV knowledge score (10 point scale)	6.4	6.5	6
Suitable age for childbirth	26.9	23	23.7
A married woman can reject sex with her husband (yes)	78.9%	72.7%	65.1%
Family perception toward child before 18 (concerned)	82.4%	82.4%	68.5%
Want to study 5-10 years from now (yes)	85.2%	71.7%	70.2%
Want to be engaged in IGAs 5-10 years from now (yes)	9.6%	18.9%	18.9%

The results further show that both active and former ELA girls were more likely to agree that a married woman can reject sex with her husband. The active ELA girls significantly increased their preferred age for having a child by **3.2 years** relative to the comparison girls. A considerably higher percentage of family members of the active and former ELA girls reported concern about girls' having a child before 18. This shift in perceptions by the ELA girls and their family members is useful to challenge the harmful gender and social stereotypes.

The girls' perception of self was improved, as were their educational and future career aspirations. A higher percentage of active ELA girls prioritized their schooling over engaging in IGAs. The impact estimates (DID) further clarify how girls who remain active within the social-safety nets of the ELA clubs have significantly higher psychosocial resilience. They were **11.3%** less likely to report feeling sad and more likely to express feeling special by **15.5%**, feeling liked by **7.5%** and feeling smart by **11.4%** than former ELA participants.

## Way Forward

The ELA clubs providing a safe space for socialising and learning were effective in increasing the SRH and psychosocial wellbeing of the young girls. The findings are broadly consistent with the ELA evaluation in Uganda (Bandiera et al., 2020) where the model reduced fertility rate by 24% and increased income-generating activities by 47% from baseline means. To cite further references, the effectiveness of ELA even in crisis situation has sustained in [South Sudan](#) (Buehren et al., 2017) during the 2013 civil war and in [Sierra Leone](#) (Bandiera et al., 2019) during 2014 Ebola outbreak.