



## Impact of the Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescent Programme in Uganda



### Intervention

Uganda has progressed at a slower pace in socio-economic empowerment of women compared to developed countries. Violence against women is more prevalent as they have limited control over their bodies. The majority of girls marry and have their first child at a young age.

To contribute to their socio-economic empowerment through facilitation of their labour force participation and increase of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) awareness, BRAC developed the largest youth empowerment platform in Uganda. The *Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA)* programme draws on lessons learnt in Bangladesh where 9,000 clubs have been reaching over one million girls since 1993. With the support of Bank-Netherlands Partnership Programme, Africa Gender Innovation Lab, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), Mastercard, Nike, the World Bank and the IGC, BRAC Uganda implemented the ELA programme between 2008 and 2012. It served 50,000 in- and out-of-school girls 14 to 20 through 1,200 ELA clubs in 27 districts.

The programme operated within safe clubs set up in the community and opened five afternoons a week. The clubs were run by older girls, selected from the communities and trained to deliver life-skills and SRH education as well as mentor younger girls in exchange for a small lump-sum incentive. In later years, livelihood training on income-generating activities (IGAs) and financial literacy was delivered by entrepreneurs and professionals for the senior out-of-school girls (above 15). After the training, they were eligible for a small loan to capitalise on their acquired skills. To further support girls, meetings with parents and village elders were organised periodically.



### Research

*Women's Empowerment in Action: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial in Africa* (Bandiera et al., 2020, [AEJ](#), Vol. 12 (1), pp. 210-259)



### Method

A clustered *randomised controlled trial* (RCT) was applied to enroll 150 communities in rural regions of Iganga and Jinja and urban or semi-urban regions of Kampala and Mukono into treatment (100) and control arms. A total of 3,522 aged between 14-20 were tracked to the endline. The programme's impact on girls' socio-economic outcomes was evaluated using an ITT estimate.



▼ **24**  
% fertility rates

▼ **30**  
% sex against will

▲ **48**  
% in IGA  
engagement

▲ **45**  
% wage  
employment

▲ **50**  
\$ annual earnings

▲ **0.27**  
years a suitable  
age for  
childbearing

**17.9**  
\$ per girl cost

▲ girls who  
dropped out  
motivated to go  
back to school

The ELA programme had a strong negative impact on early childbearing as, over two years, the fertility rates of ELA girls dropped by **24%**. At the endline, they were 3.8 percentage points (pp) less likely to have a child, relative to the control means. The likelihood of them being married or cohabitating dropped by 8 pp and having sex unwillingly by **30%**. Their pregnancy and HIV knowledge increased by around 3% and the use of condoms by 4 pp. These aggregate improvements increased the control over their body index by 0.27 standard deviations (SD).

Significant improvements were observed in girls' labour force participation - they were 4.9 pp more likely to engage in IGAs, which was a **48%** increase over the baseline mean. This was predominantly driven by their higher rate of self-employment that nearly doubled relative to the control group. On the intensive margin at the endline, their self-employment earnings increased by more than six times their baseline value and their wage employment was **45%** higher. Their annual earnings increased by three-fold, which was an additional **\$50** a year. Overall, their economic empowerment index increased by 0.13 SD at the endline.

Girls' perceptions of gender roles and aspirations regarding marriage and childbearing were impacted in the short run with an aspiration index up by 0.27 SD at the midline, though the effects faded away by the endline. They have significantly pushed up their ideal age for marriage by 0.77 years at the midline and 0.23 years at the endline, and the most suitable age for having their first child by 0.62 years at the midline and **0.27 years** at the endline.

The study was brought to a successful conclusion with the per-girl cost at the endline of **\$17.9** being more than offset by their annual increase in income. The gains in economic empowerment did not come at the expense of school enrollment. In fact, a significant portion of **girls who dropped out of school were more motivated to go back to school** meaning that the ELA clubs effectively increase the value attached to formal education in treatment communities.

## ➤ Way Forward

The evidence from Uganda confirmed ELA intervention as transferable across countries, scalable and cost-effective with minor adjustments. A central advantage of the approach is its potential to give a big push to adolescent girls' empowerment along potentially interlinked dimensions and thus kick-start a virtuous cycle of growth. Future steps in the evaluation should include the analysis of the programme's components to understand the impacts of each and their possible complementarities. Including fathers and men from the communities should be explored as it could potentially make short-term effects on girls' aspirations or similar dimensions permanent.