



An adolescent girl in Kigali in Rwanda © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2020

Exploring adolescent girls' and boys' capabilities and the role of adolescent empowerment programming in Rwanda

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Introduction

Rwanda is a small landlocked country that borders Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The most densely populated country in Africa, about one-quarter of its citizens are adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19, and 40% live below the poverty line (UNDP, 2020). Over the last two decades the country has seen high economic growth and a significant decline in poverty and extreme poverty (Bizoza and Simons, 2019). Rwanda is also an international leader in women's access to voice and agency, boasting the world's highest rate of women's parliamentary representation at the national level (World Bank, 2019). However, research evidence suggests that adolescent girls' access to decision-making at household and community levels is still significantly limited by conservative social norms (NISR, 2016). To contribute to the limited evidence base on young people's gendered well-being in Rwanda, this policy brief summarises formative mixed-methods research about adolescent girls and boys in both rural and urban communities across all five provinces in late 2019. The participants in the quantitative sample were 10 years old, while the qualitative sample included 10–12-year-old participants and older 12+ Programme graduates who are now 15–17 years old.

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Conceptual framing

The research findings are framed according to the GAGE ‘3Cs’ conceptual framework with these standing for capabilities, contexts and change strategies (from behavioural change communications interventions to social assistance) (GAGE consortium, 2019). We draw on Amartya Sen’s capability approach, which emphasises the importance of individuals having the ability to achieve a life that they find meaningful (1984; 2004). Adolescence heralds significant physical, cognitive and socio-emotional changes for girls and boys, and notwithstanding the significant progress made for girls since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, especially in terms of education, in many contexts they still face a range of gender-specific vulnerabilities. Our focus is on understanding the patterning of adolescent outcomes across six key capability areas that appear to be critical to young people’s well-being and eventual transitions into early adulthood (Patton et al., 2018). These six capability domains are: education and learning, health and nutrition, bodily integrity including freedom from age- and gender-based violence, psychosocial well-being, voice and agency, and economic empowerment. Of particular importance for sustainable change in girls’ life chances are not only their individual capabilities – such as knowledge, analytical skills and life skills, which shape their capacity for exercising agency – but also the collective capabilities embodied in social relationships, which allow them to claim rights, tackle injustice and ultimately bring about structural change (Kabeer and Sulaiman, 2015).

In terms of ‘change strategies’ in this brief, we explore the role of the 12+ Programme for adolescent empowerment, a 10-month life skills curriculum-based intervention for 12-year-old adolescent girls implemented in Rwanda from 2013–2017, in shaping adolescent capabilities. Older adolescent mentors, who were recruited from the communities, led gatherings for younger adolescents to provide mentorship and create safe spaces for participants to learn new skills, play games and build self-esteem. 12+ aimed to impact adolescent trajectories through direct programming for young adolescents, capacity building and economic opportunity for older adolescent mentors, and community inclusive programmes to shift social norms. Primary programme outcomes focused on the education, well-being and health of adolescent girls.

This brief connects the formative research about the capabilities of young adolescents with the potential impacts of the 12+ Programme as a girl-focused change strategy.

Methods

The research combined a quantitative survey with in-depth qualitative interviews with adolescents. Data collection took place from October to November 2019 in the four provinces and Kigali, in a mix of urban, semi-urban and rural districts and sectors as presented in Table 1. Ethics approval was obtained from the Rwandan National Ethics Committee, from George Washington Ethics Committee and the ODI Research Ethics Committee.

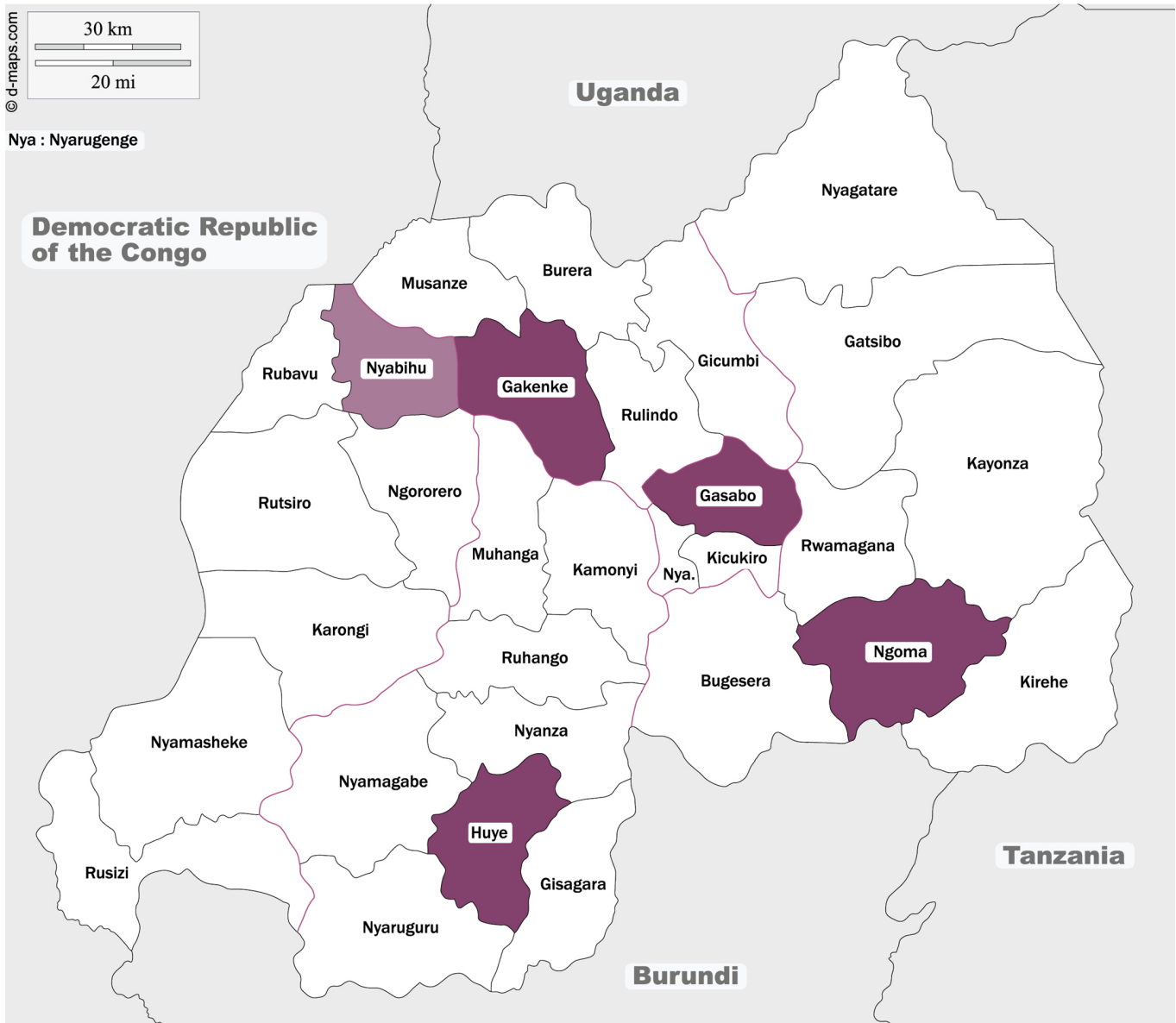
Table 1: Research sites for quantitative and qualitative data collection

Quantitative and qualitative
City of Kigali: Gasabo district (urban), Kinyinya sector Urban area in Kigali. Adolescent girls migrate here for domestic work. Developed infrastructure: schools, hospitals, health centres, busy trading centre and offices.
Southern Province: Huye district (semi-urban), Simbi sector Remote with limited business opportunities, no trading centres, limited access to electricity, primary schools and secondary schools. Reported high levels of adolescent rural–urban migration for domestic work.
Northern Province: Gakenke district (rural), Muzo sector A rural area distant from the main road. Factories, secondary and primary schools, churches and a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) school, which are relatively accessible.
Qualitative only
Western Province: Nyabihu district (rural), Jomba sector Rural area although close to the main road. Limited infrastructure (e.g. trading facilities), economic activity and health facilities in the surrounding area.
Eastern Province: Ngoma district (urban), Remera sector The site was close to a town with a university. There were factories, schools, trading centres, a petrol station, a stadium, a brick furnace and markets.

The quantitative sample included 129 adolescents aged 10. The surveys, which included questions on adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH), nutrition, education, paid work, experiences of violence and gendered attitudes, were translated into Kinyarwanda. In addition, a survey was conducted with 127 primary female caregivers and two male caregivers, which included household-level data (on assets, household composition, uptake of safety net programmes, etc.). Statistical analysis was conducted using Stata15.1.

The qualitative sample included in-depth interviews with 10–12-year-old girls (10) and boys (10). The sample also included focus group discussions with 23 12+ Programme graduates, aged 12–17, and in-depth interviews with 10 programme mentors, aged 25–30. The research tools were translated into Kinyarwanda and all interviews were

Figure 1: Map showing the research sites for quantitative and qualitative data collection in Rwanda



Quantitative and qualitative

Source: Created using d-maps at https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=4896&lang=en and modified to show research sites.

Qualitative only

taped, transcribed and coded thematically. The qualitative research tools explored adolescents' experiences across GAGE's six capability domains.

Findings

We now turn to a discussion of the key findings from the research, presenting the quantitative and qualitative data for adolescent girls and boys from young adolescents for each of the six capability domains. The discussion includes some reflections around the contributions of the 12+ adolescent girls' empowerment programme in shaping adolescent capabilities.

Education and learning

Over the past decades, and in line with the recent expansion in schooling in low-income countries, Rwanda has invested significant resources towards universal and equitable access to basic education for all Rwandan children (World Bank, 2018). Among major policies implemented to achieve this objective, in 2008 the Nine-Year Basic Education Policy (9YBE) guaranteed nine years of free and compulsory education to all Rwandan children, and was expanded to include the 12-Year Basic Education Policy (12YBE), and a temporary measure of implementing double shifts in schools (2009) aims at optimising the use of resources in primary



An adolescent in a school in southern Rwanda © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2020

education (Laterite Ltd, 2018). As a result, in 2016 (and since then), net enrolment rates have reached 98% in primary school according to the Education Statistical Yearbook published by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2018). Given this high rate of primary school enrolment, we utilised school-based sampling to identify the 10-year-olds for the study, thus virtually all (99%) respondents were enrolled in primary school. While 98% of 10-year-olds in Rwanda are currently enrolled in school (MINEDUC, 2018), enrolment rates remain low at pre-primary level, below the 2013/14–2017/18 Education Sector Strategic Plan targets (MINEDUC, 2018). In this study, half (51%) of surveyed pupils have attended a pre-primary (nursery level – four to six years old) or an early childhood development centre (pre-nursery level – zero to three years). This compares with the current nationwide participation rate of 32% for the nursery age group (four to six years old) according to the latest national statistics (MINEDUC, 2018).

In Rwanda, the official age range to attend primary school is between seven and 12 years (MINEDUC, 2018). In line with those standards, the average age of pupils entering primary education reported in the study was seven, although 28% of surveyed pupils entered Primary 1 between ages eight and nine. While Primary 4 is the age-

▶ I like studying because I perform well and make my teacher proud.

(A young boy in Remera, Eastern Province)

appropriate grade for 10-year-olds, 75% of the respondents were enrolled in Primary 2 and 3. More generally, 84% of the surveyed pupils were enrolled at a lower grade level than their official age-appropriate grade, in line with previous findings in Rwanda (Laterite Ltd, 2018).

High levels of grade repetition contribute to students being old-for-grade, although rates are decreasing (18.4% in 2015/2016 fell to 13.4% in 2017/2018) (MINEDUC, 2018). A majority (63%) of surveyed students reported repeating at least one class. Among those, 32% have repeated multiple grades. In line with previous findings in Rwanda, boys were more likely to repeat grades than girls (74% compared to 55% respectively of surveyed pupils). Grade repetition was also lower among respondents living in Huye (45%) where the share of pupils that were in the correct grade for their age was also higher (28%).

Both a consequence and a cause of grade repetition, primary school classes are overcrowded, with a national average of 77 pupils per classroom in 2018 (Laterite Ltd, 2018). Class sizes reported by surveyed students ranged from 11 to 89 students, with half of the students reporting class sizes above 40 pupils.

Despite these challenges, surveyed pupils generally enjoy going to school and learning. A young boy in Remera, Eastern Province was enthusiastic about his performance: *'I like studying because I perform well and make my teacher proud. When you are a good student you make your teachers happy.'* Meanwhile a girl from Eastern Province in the same town illustrated her love for school through her requests to

her mother: *'I told her to buy me a school uniform, a beautiful bag, and beautiful books and pens. I also told her that if she is able to, she can put me in a boarding school, and if she can't, she can pay school-feeding fees so that I can study in the Nine-Year Basic Education System school.'*

Many pupils aspired to achieve higher levels of education. Half of the respondents wished to reach university, and an additional 33% said they would like to attend at least some secondary education. These percentages did not vary significantly by gender. A young girl in Remera noted, for example: *'I will study and finish all my studies to go to the university and then become a doctor.'*

Ten-year-olds are aware of gender-based social norms, starting with school enrolment. While close to half of the respondents (48%) agreed with the statement that *'girls should be sent to school only if they are not needed to help at home'*, only 18% think that *'it is appropriate for parents to take boys out of school for work.'* Attitudes toward discrimination against girls' enrolment in school differ by gender: 55% of boys agree that *'if a family can afford for one child to go to secondary school, it should be the boy only'* compared to 24% of girls. Similarly, 54% of boys agree that *'only boys should learn about science, technology and math'* versus 33% of girls.

Beliefs about punishment by teachers in schools are widely shared by respondents. Fifty-seven percent of respondents agree that *'when teachers don't punish students, students behave worse in school'* and 61% agreed that *'when teachers punish students, the learning environment in school is better'*. A young adolescent girl in Simbi noted: *'What happens when your answer is wrong? We are punished ... they beat us ... with a stick.'*

Sexual and reproductive health

In line with commitments to improve the lives of adolescents, Rwanda has implemented policies and strategies focused on increasing knowledge, reducing risky sexual behaviour, and allocating resources for SRH programmes for adolescents. The Education Health Policy of 2014 is just one example of efforts made to increase SRH knowledge among students (MINEDUC, 2014). The implementation of this policy was operationalised in 2016 through the integration of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) topics into the curricula for primary and secondary education (MINEDUC, 2015). Furthermore, the National Family Planning and Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (FP/ASRH) Strategic Plan (2018–2024) declares family planning and adolescent reproductive health a national priority and outlines a strategic plan to meet the SRH needs of women and adolescents. Taking a people-centred approach, the Strategic Plan highlights a broad range of SRH needs and aims to increase demand for SRH

services, improve the availability of youth-friendly services, and strengthen policy and governance to enhance SRH programming (MOH, 2018). Policy-level support for menstrual hygiene management has received special policy attention. The end of 2019 saw the tax exemption of menstrual hygiene management products to increase affordability for the poorest (Isimbi, 2020).

Evidence suggests a varied degree of accurate SRH knowledge among adolescents. Fifty percent of surveyed adolescents reported having a source of information on puberty, with girls most commonly citing their mothers or friends as a source of information while boys relied more heavily on radio, TV and films. In focus group discussions, adolescents confirmed that sources of information of SRH varied by gender, with girls emphasising parents and peers, such as an older sister, and boys reporting they learned about SRH at school. Both sources of evidence suggest that boys rely on information from outside the home more than girls. Additionally, 21.3% of female participants reported ever having talked to their mother or female guardian about menstruation. When asked if they had access to a class about puberty and relationships, 79.8% of young adolescents did not have access, and 12.4% reported having classes on puberty in school.

Qualitative findings showed that when asked about physical changes associated with puberty during interviews, boys and girls promptly mentioned growing breasts and starting menstruation for girls and nocturnal emissions for boys. In a focus group discussion, one young adolescent in Northern Province stated: *'Yes, the girls get periods and the boy when he is an adolescent, he has wet dreams.'* The Kinyarwanda word for menstruation is widely known by female and male adolescents, but knowledge about menstruation varied across the study sites. Adolescent girls interviewed in the Northern and Western Provinces reported understanding how to manage menstruation by using sanitary pads and keeping themselves clean. However, the adolescent girls who participated in the study in Eastern Province and Kigali City reported that they did not know how to manage menstruation or when to expect menstruation to begin. Despite having knowledge about menstrual hygiene management, participants did not report knowing how to calculate a menstrual cycle, with one young girl in Eastern Province, stating: *'I don't know anything.'* In the provinces where adolescents were found to have limited knowledge about menstrual hygiene management, the study found that there was stigma surrounding menstruation. Young female adolescents who reported having limited knowledge on menstruation also reported being surprised and ashamed when they reached menarche. During a focus group discussion, one young

▶ When you start getting into menstruation, you feel afraid and get shy.

(A young girl in Eastern Province)

adolescent in Eastern Province stated that *'When you start getting into menstruation, you feel afraid and get shy.'* In a similar vein, a 12-year-old boy from Northern province noted: *'We were told that during ejaculation, boys should be cautious for them not to cause unwanted pregnancy in girls.'*

Adolescent pregnancy and sexual relationships

Adolescent pregnancy has become an increasing political and social concern in Rwanda. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) of 2014/2015 reported that the percentage of mothers in Rwanda who are adolescents increased from 6.1% in 2010 to 7.3% in 2015 (NISR et al., 2016). Concern about unplanned pregnancy was also a recurring theme during focus group discussions and interviews relevant to the conversations about physical changes where both female and male adolescents associated physical changes with the risk of pregnancy. As a 12-year-old girl from Western Province explained: *'The consequence when a girl has her period and she doesn't behave well, going to look for men, is that she can become pregnant at a young age. This means that she does not respect or love herself. She only loves*

men and she will be unable to care for her children.'

The quote above also illustrates the shame and blame that is assigned to an adolescent when she gets pregnant. A young adolescent aged 12 in Eastern Province mentioned in a focus group discussion that sexual activity among adolescents can also be attributed to peer pressure, stating, *'Sometimes it is because of peer pressure.'* Even though peer pressure and transactional sex were reported as the reasons why adolescents engage in sexual activities, in the case of pregnancy, the blame is often also placed on the parents, especially the mother, as expressed by a young girl aged 11 in a focus group discussion in Remera, Eastern Province: *'It is because a parent has not sat to tell you the bad effects of having sexual intercourse and that it is a sin.'*

Bodily integrity

Corporal punishment emerged from our research as an important concern for young adolescents, a problem frequently experienced at home and at school. In 2011, the government of Rwanda accepted the recommendation made during the Periodic Review for the Convention on the Rights of the Child to prohibit all corporal punishment of children. As a result, the National Integrated Child Rights Policy, adopted by the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion that year and intended as a guide for legislation, states that 'physical abuse, including torture and cruelty against children and corporal punishment of children is prohibited in all settings' and defines all settings as including

Box 1: Sexual and reproductive health and the 12+ Programme

Findings from the qualitative research indicate that when SRH information is provided at a young age, there are long-term impacts for young adolescents. This was evident for girls who took part in the 12+ Programme that sought to empower girls with knowledge and skills about a range of capabilities, including their reproductive health (Skinner, 2017). Across all the sites of the research, graduates of the programme, now aged between 12 and 17, reported increased knowledge about SRH as well as improved menstruation management practices. One 12+ Programme graduate participating in a focus group discussion stated: *'We are able to count our monthly period and we are able to know when we are going to be menstruating. When I see that my menstruation time is approaching, I start carrying pads with me so that I won't be surprised.'*

Despite these findings of positive programme impact, knowledge of and attitudes towards other aspects of SRH were found to be limited and, in some instances, erroneous or biased. Both adolescent girls and boys reported that they were taught to abstain from sexual intercourse. Research participants noted that abstinence was the only contraception method that was taught as part of the 12+ Programme as well as through other sources of SRH information. Only one adolescent girl from Eastern Province reported being advised to use a condom when not abstaining: *'They tell us how to protect ourselves from sexually transmitted diseases. They [teachers] also teach us to abstain from sexual intercourse and if one cannot [abstain], they have to use a condom.'* As a result, the knowledge and attitudes of 12+ Programme graduates regarding modern contraception methods is similar to that of non-participating adolescents. In key informant interviews, mentors in Kigali and Eastern Province reported that while the 12+ Programme curriculum did include teaching participants about condoms, it predominately focused on abstinence.

Notwithstanding this narrow focus on contraception, 12+ Programme graduates recognise the programme's protective role in helping them avoid unwanted sexual intercourse and unplanned pregnancy. They emphasised the importance of these actions by sharing how pregnancy could affect their lives, such as leading them to drop out of school. As one 12+ Programme graduate from Southern Province noted: *'I know how to behave when boys want to have sex with me because I know different consequences of it. Even though I might not get pregnant, there are many diseases associated with sexual intercourse including HIV. Knowing all these consequences helps me to know that I can say 'no' to boys who want to have sex with me.'*

'homes, communities, schools, all centres and institutions that have children, prisons and detention' (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2020). However, while Law No. 32 of 28 August 2016 governing 'persons and family' repealed the Civil Code of 1988, which previously recognised parents' 'right of correction', it does not explicitly repeal this right nor does it expressly prohibit corporal punishment. This results in an ambiguous ban on corporal punishment that is seldom put into practice. Law No. 71 of 31 August 2018 (Law No. 71/2018) relating to the protection of the child repealed and replaced Law No. 54 of 14 November 2011 relating to the rights and protection of the child. Although the government had said before its enactment that it would explicitly prohibit corporal punishment, Law No. 71/2018 does not do so. It includes in the definition of domestic violence only 'excessive' punishment (article 3) (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2020).

The limited clarity and weak enforcement of the policy and law contributes to an environment where physical violence is still frequent in Rwanda. According to findings for the bodily integrity capability domain from the pilot research with younger adolescents, 65.1% report experiencing violence at home in the last 12 months. Household violence included suffering physical and verbal violence in the home as well as witnessing physical violence against a female caregiver. Forty-seven percent of primary caretakers of young adolescents surveyed believed that a child needs to be punished physically to be brought up properly.

Younger adolescents interviewed reported that corporal punishment by teachers at schools and by parents in their homes was common. This has resulted in its normalisation by young adolescents as a standard form of discipline. Nevertheless, some interviewees in qualitative interviews did express feeling scared by this threat: *'It is my father because he beats me when I do something wrong, but my mother beats me for a short moment and stops.'* Young adolescent boy, Remera. Similarly, a young adolescent girl from Kigali recalled: *'When we were going to write, I told the teacher that I didn't have a pen and she beat me at first and told the others to lend me one.'*

Gender differences were identified in the form of corporal punishment inflicted on young adolescents, as well as by the different ways in which fathers and mothers

It is my father because he beats me when I do something wrong, but my mother beats me for a short moment and stops.

(A young adolescent interviewee)

discipline them. Thirty-two percent of guardians of male children reported shaking, spanking, hitting or slapping their child in the last 30 days compared to 16% of guardians of female children.

Another major concern reported by young adolescents was physical violence carried out by other adolescents in the community. This was a concern for both adolescent boys and girls. As a 12-year-old adolescent girl from Jomba explained: *'When we went to fetch water there were children who used to beat us.'* Seventy-eight percent of adolescents reported experiencing peer violence, which was defined as physical or emotional violence, threats and theft or damage of personal property.

Risk of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse, as any other form of gender-based violence, is punishable by law in Rwanda (through Law No. 59/2008 of 10 September 2008 on the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence) and the sentence is more severe when the abuse is perpetrated against a minor (MoH, 2018).

While some younger adolescent girls spoke about the threat of sexual abuse when out alone, particularly at night, it was not mentioned as a risk in all localities where interviews were conducted, nor was it referred to as a common risk to girls in the younger cohort. It was recognised that it does start becoming a problem as girls get older.

In Remera, during a 'body mapping' exercise with young adolescent girls, a few participants mentioned that they were aware that some girls had already engaged in sexual intercourse at 12 years old, explaining that this occurs when parent have not talked to their daughters about the negative effects of having sex, or as a result of peer pressure. They also attributed it to parents not meeting the girls' material needs (transactional sex). In this regard, girls spoke about being tempted by older adolescents or men into having sex to get access to things they did not have, such as clothes,

Box 2: Curriculum content on protection from sexual violence

The 12+ Programme taught participants about the steps they should take if they faced sexual abuse, such as reporting the situation. It also helped them to identify risky situations in order to avoid them and, as a possible solution to both general threats and sexual violence, it explained that they could 'run away' from harm. Other types of responses, such as self-defence, did not appear to be included in the curriculum, however. As a 12+ Programme facilitator explained: *'We used to have discussions about abuse and teach them that they should tell their parents or authorities about any abuse they could face.'*

or *'money or sweets or doughnuts'*. However, transactional sex did not seem to be common among this age group, and it did not come up in the focus group discussions with young adolescent girls in other provinces.

Some girls in the focus group discussion in Jomba showed concern about pregnancy and birth complications at a young age. They spoke about the fear of sexual abuse if walking out at night, although they did not mention specific cases. In Muzo, young adolescent girls participating in a focus group discussion indicated a vague awareness of the risk of *'temptation'* but did not talk about it directly.

Psychosocial well-being

Much of the existing evidence on adolescent psychosocial well-being in Rwanda is focused on understanding the impacts of genocide and HIV on young people's mental health and looks more at child-headed households than at adolescents' gendered experiences. Being forced to leave school, unplanned pregnancy, struggling to raise a child and poverty have been found to contribute to girls' stress levels and how often they experience negative thoughts (Botea et al., 2015). One study found that compared to in-school girls, out-of-school girls were 18% less likely to say that they were usually happy with their situation or that they had some control over their own futures (Walker et al., 2014). Other research has found that reported life satisfaction was negatively influenced by punishment by teachers and domestic violence (Pontalti, 2013), and that girls expressed dissatisfaction with having to take care of younger siblings or help their mothers instead of being able to have some leisure time as their brothers do (Goh, 2012).

Using an internationally validated measure of psychosocial distress, the GAGE survey found that according to the PHQ-9, 10.1% of adolescents have symptoms suggesting moderate to severe depression and 39.5% had symptoms suggesting mild depression. The

survey results showed no significant differences between males and females or across different locations.

Resilience, defined as a modifiable and intrinsic asset that allows an individual to overcome adversity, is vital for an adolescent's capacity to navigate resources, relationships and community assets. Young adolescents scored an average of 31.8 on the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM), a measure of youth resistance that accounts for cultural norms across diverse populations (Liebenberg et al., 2013). The CYRM was scored 0–36, with higher values indicating higher levels of resilience. Findings from this population of young adolescents indicate similar levels of resilience compared to similar populations in low- and middle-income countries found in the literature (Panter-Brick et al., 2018).

Social and family relationships are key to adolescent development. In terms of social connectedness, 100% of adolescent survey respondents reported having a friend he or she trusted but our qualitative findings highlighted that those in families experiencing domestic violence were less likely to socialise. The majority of adolescents participated in sports, with 66.7% of females and 75.9% of males reporting participating, though this varied by location. Even more than gender, location seemed to influence adolescent participation in sports. More adolescents from the rural district of Gakenke reported participation in sports (84.8%), compared to just 58.1% in the urban district of Gasabo, which is part of Kigali. Adolescents were asked if they spoke with their male and female guardians about future work, bullying and religion. In an index of these three items (scored 0–3), on average girls scored 2.1 and boys scored 1.8 for speaking with a male guardian. Both girls and boys scored significantly higher on the index measuring speaking to a female guardian compared to a male guardian (2.5, $p < 0.001$).

In line with GAGE's socio-ecological conceptual framework, the survey underscored that the role and involvement of parents in children's upbringing is critical,

Box 3: Psychosocial dividends from participation in the 12+ Programme

Former participants in the 12+ Programme for adolescent empowerment emphasised that strengthening relationships with peers was a key benefit of the programme in their eyes. As a 14-year-old girl, a graduate of the 12+ Programme, noted: 'What I gained from 12+ is to love my colleagues because a friend in need is a friend indeed. We sometimes have problems, but friends are there to help. Before this programme, I was not used to hanging around with girls, I was nervous.'

Programme graduates also noted that programme mentors had provided active guidance on relationships which was helpful. Mentors confirmed this role, which is illustrated by the following quote from a 12+ Programme mentor: 'Children from my village come and say: aunty, I have a problem, please help me. Then, I advise them on how to deal with that problem. Even if we are no longer in the programme, we are still friends.' The implementation of savings groups among the 12+ girls also provided them with opportunities to work together and establish trust – relationships that in some cases have lasted beyond the life of the programme. One mentor in Kigali said: 'I feel like the 12+ Programme can come back. We once taught the girls about savings and we took them to visit financial institutions and they loved it. Now, some adolescents have developed a savings culture and continued saving in their small groups. Because of 12+ Programme, there are adolescents who say that they have bought rabbits and chickens, which indicates that it was a good programme.'

shaping their trajectories, confidence and opportunities. In the qualitative work, young adolescents with close relationships with their parents were found to self-report as being happier, as this quote from a young girl in Western Province shows: *'I am happy to be with them because my parents give me everything I need.'* Overall, our findings showed that mothers are generally more emotionally available than fathers, with adolescents reporting greater communication on a range of topics with mothers. For example, only 17.3% of female respondents reported talking to their fathers about marriage plans compared to 29.3% with mothers. Boys also reported lower rates of discussing important life issues with their parents. In the case of marriage, for example, no boys reported discussing marriage plans with their guardian.

Voice and agency

Voice and agency, which includes one's ability to define and act upon goals, are key components of adolescent empowerment (Kabeer, 2018). As with other capabilities, a focus on the critical time period of adolescence is crucial to the development of voice and agency. Implementing programmes in the earlier stages of adolescent development is likely to be more effective than adult-based programming (Kabeer, 2018).

Qualitative findings from focus group discussions and interviews indicate that young adolescents do not often have much agency either at home or at school. As a 12-year-old girl from Northern Province explained: *'They [her parents] can refuse to give me permission when I tell them that I am going to visit my classmate but they don't refuse when I tell them that I am going to visit my grandmother.'*

While 77.5% of adolescents stated that they were comfortable expressing opinions to and disagreeing with people older than themselves, some adolescents found it difficult to express their ideas even during interviews. Despite limited opportunities for adolescents to be vocal and have their voices heard, participants mentioned spaces where they had the opportunity to speak about their lives. One participant in Remera shared that *'We have groups for young children, adolescents, youth and old people, where they meet and talk about their lives. We call it Ingamba.'* The ability of adolescents to express themselves during interviews and focus group discussions varied by location, with adolescents in urban areas speaking more freely about their experiences and opinions than their counterparts in rural settings.

Having role models is a key factor in adolescents' ability to define and act upon goals in their lives. Role models offer critical guidance and nurture identity in young people during this period of transition to adulthood, with evidence

► In the past, a girl could say something, and other people would say "you are just a girl", but today, a girl can say something in the family and be respected.

(A participant in a focus group discussion in Remera)

pointing to poorer social and academic outcomes for young people without role models (Madhavan and Crowell, 2014). While many adolescents named their parents and siblings as role models, 51.2% of adolescents reported having a role model outside of their home. Role models, in particular those outside of the home, are vital in the development of career aspirations of adolescents. An adolescent boy in Remera emphasised the value of public figures as role models, stating that *'H.E. Paul Kagame inspired me because he did a lot to my country and I think I can be a good leader too. I think about becoming a district executive.'* Girls often admire local women with businesses and adolescents in more urban areas referred to politicians and celebrities as role models.

As a regional leader in ensuring female participation in civil society and legislation targeting gender-based violence, Rwanda has put structures in place to activate more equitable gender norms (Isimbi et al., 2018). Along with changes to the way policies are made so that they are more inclusive of women, qualitative data suggested positive changes to the rights of and norms for girls. A participant in a focus group discussion in Remera emphasised these changes by saying: *'In the past, a girl could say something, and other people would say "you are just a girl", but today, a girl can say something in the family and be respected.'*

While evidence shows that the divergent socialisation of boys and girls may play a role in the voice and agency of adolescents, quantitative data collected by GAGE did not indicate significant differences between the voice and agency of younger adolescent girls and boys. This may indicate that societal norms that enforce restrictions on girls once they reach puberty though gender-based social norms have been internalised by young adolescents. While gender-based social norms are widespread among surveyed pupils, expectations for girls' behaviour are more widely shared than those related to boys. Eighty to 91% of respondents at least partially agreed that *'girls should avoid raising their voice to be ladylike', 'girls need their parents' protection more than boys' or 'girls are expected to be humble'*. On the other hand, 66% to 74% of respondents at least partially agreed that *'boys who behave like girls are*

▶ The reason why I chose hens and I had that wisdom of rearing them? It is because I was born in poor family. When you can rear hens, it will enable you to grow financially and buy a sheep.

(A young adolescent in Jomba)

considered weak', 'boys should always defend themselves even if it means fighting', and 'boys should be raised tough so they can overcome any difficulty in life'. The shift toward more restrictive norms for girls as they grow older is an area for further investigation to understand the unique needs of adolescent males and females.

Economic empowerment

Paid work

According to a US Department of Labor report, laws and regulations related to labour conditions in Rwanda are in line with international standards, including a minimum working age of 16 and protections in place to prevent the trafficking and exploitation of children (2018). In 2017, the Ministry of Public Service and Labour released guidelines and integrated child labour reduction policies throughout the country. The enforcement of these guidelines and policies remains problematic as most child labour in Rwanda exists in informal sectors with limited regulation (US Department of Labor, 2018).

For the 10-year-olds sampled in this study, 34.9% reported participating in paid work in the last 12 months. As the participants were sampled from schools, this was paid work in addition to their formal schooling. Few young adolescents drop out of school to work and they reported spending limited time on work in order to still attend school. In the quantitative data, boys and girls reported similar jobs. Fetching water, carrying agriculture or construction materials, and small-scale selling of livestock or food were the most commonly reported jobs. However, information from the qualitative interviews with adolescents suggests that there is a perception that different jobs are suited to different genders. In focus groups and interviews, participants explained that boys and girls had different jobs in the communities. Boys are more likely to herd and carry out petty trade, while girls are more involved in household chores and fetching water. Echoing these findings in the qualitative interviews, a boy in Simbi stated, 'I sold a cock and I bought shoes for myself.'

Another young adolescent in Jomba spoke about rearing hens: 'The reason why I chose hens and I had that wisdom of rearing them? It is because I was born in poor family. When you can rear hens, it will enable you to grow financially and buy a sheep.' Qualitative findings show that younger adolescent boys spent more time involved in paid work than girls because they have more mobility and because they do not spend much time completing household chores. A young boy from Muzo in Northern Province said: 'I do some work like carrying non-heavy objects from some and when I get paid, I go to watch games.'

Girls often referred to their household work: 'I help [my mother] to wash the dishes and sweep the house. And we both feel happy about that,' reported a young adolescent in Gasabo. However, in some cases, girls are paid to undertake chores for others: 'Sometimes they tell us to bring them water and when we do they give us money,' explained a young adolescent girl in Kigali. During a group discussion, a young girl mentioned: 'We clean the house for people and they give us money.' Of those who reported earning money, the average wage earned was approximately 1200 RWF (1.25 USD) a week, and about half of the wage earners did not keep this money for themselves.

Gendered attitudes toward economic opportunities

Turning to look at gendered attitudes around economic opportunities, it is surprising to note that there were no significant differences between male and female adolescent responses. Sixty-five percent agreed that it is important for women and girls to have their own savings, though less than 20% of girls reported having any savings. Despite Rwanda having the highest representation of women in political power, respondents' attitudes suggest they are still unsure about women serving in leadership and political positions (World Bank, 2019). Sixty-nine percent of respondents agreed or partially agreed that women who participate in politics or leadership cannot also be good mothers.

Participants' attitudes about gender roles in the workforce and at home were not straightforward. Though 64.3% of respondents agreed that women should have the same chance to work outside the home as men, the data suggest that adolescents think that a woman's leadership or political role may conflict with her role as a mother. Forty-three percent partially agreed or agreed with both the following statements: 'Women should have the same opportunities for work outside the house as men' and 'Women who participate in politics or leadership positions could not be good mothers and wives.'

Conclusions and policy and programming implications

Key policy and programming implications emerging from our findings that could help the government of Rwanda to meet the SDGs include the following:

1. Promote adolescent-friendly health services

In line with SDG 3.7 on ensuring universal access to SRH services, and given how much adolescent pregnancy can affect girls' futures, it would be useful to ensure that SRH goes beyond abstinence to minimise pregnancy risks for girls. Despite the recognition by informants and authorities that adolescent pregnancies pose a threat to their futures, access to other methods of contraception is hindered by Article 11 of Law No. 49/2012 on medical professional liability insurance, which does not allow minors (children under 18 years old) to seek healthcare services without the prior consent of a legal guardian. Our findings also suggest that it is important to work with mentors of adolescent programming to ensure that they are not reinforcing harmful social norms.

2. Invest in gender-responsive education and learning services

SDG 4.5 calls for the elimination of gender disparities in education. Programming to address gender disparities in education, especially at the point of primary to secondary school transitions, where many girls are at risk of dropping out, is critical. Policies promoting inclusive education, such as the Girls' Education Policy, should be periodically updated to account for the evolving situation of boys and girls from disadvantaged backgrounds and provide

orientation on the national priorities to all stakeholders. Our findings also suggest that informal education and life skills programmes could include a stronger focus on adolescent boys and promoting positive masculinities.

3. Expand low-cost opportunities to support adolescent mental health

In line with SDG 3.4 on promoting mental health and well-being, our findings suggest that there is a strong role for community and religious leaders to play in promoting the development of supportive services and spaces for adolescents, particularly girls. In addition, given the influence of parents in the lives and development of adolescents, it is critical to engage parents, especially regarding positive parenting approaches.

4. Engage parents and community leaders to tackle age- and gender-based violence

SDGs 5 (target 5.2) and 16 (target 16.2) call for the elimination of all forms of violence against girls and women in the public and private spheres, and an end to all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse against children, including physical punishment by caregivers. In the Rwandan context, in line with the policy and legal provisions on the prohibition of violent discipline, our findings point to the importance of working with parents and norms gatekeepers to actively address underlying attitudes towards violent discipline given this is a key concern of younger adolescents in the family, community and schools. Programming designed to raise awareness about how to report violence could also consider providing active self-defence training to girls, rather than merely encouraging them to avoid risky situations.



Adolescent street vendors in Rwanda © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2020

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