

Empowering Adolescent Girls



Goal: To enable adolescent girls in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa to reach their full potential and break the cycle of poverty through approaches that promote economic empowerment, social empowerment, and education.

34% Reduction in teen pregnancy for girls in villages with ELA clubs

62% Decrease in early entry into marriage or cohabitation among ELA girls

48% Increase in likelihood to engage in income-generating activities among ELA girls

Background

Strong foundations in education, health, and life and livelihoods skills in adolescence can prepare girls for lives as strong, resilient, and adaptable adults. However, girls across the developing world face disproportionate risks during adolescence that can hinder their transitions into adulthood. In the countries where BRAC works, adolescent girls often face high barriers to education and economic opportunity and high levels of teenage pregnancy, early marriage, and gender-based violence.

These barriers are often mutually reinforcing. Without clear economic opportunities available to them later in life, girls are less incentivized to invest in education and skills training in their adolescence. This can increase the likelihood of early marriage and childbearing, and make girls more dependent on older men. In turn, teenage pregnancy and early

marriage often make it more difficult for adolescent girls to accumulate education and livelihood skills, limiting their ability to gain employment later in life. This creates a cycle of economic and social disempowerment in adolescence that carries into adulthood.

Opportunity

By promoting the education, economic empowerment, and social empowerment of adolescent girls, we can help break the cycle and unlock the potential of girls and women. Research shows that empowered, educated girls are better equipped to avoid child marriage, delay teenage pregnancy, and build healthier futures for themselves, their families, and their communities.



ELA girls play board games. ©BRAC/Alison Wright



ADP girls participate in Karate. ©BRAC

Approach

BRAC has operated clubs for adolescent girls in Bangladesh since 1993, later adapting the model in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, and Nepal. Through BRAC's Adolescent Development Program (ADP) in Bangladesh and the Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescent (ELA) program in sub-Saharan Africa and Nepal, more than 6,600 clubs reach over 190,000 adolescent girls.

Outside the pressures of the home and male-dominated societies, ADP and ELA girls gain confidence in themselves and learn crucial life skills from peer mentors, including training in financial literacy, women's rights, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Older and out-of-school girls receive livelihood trainings in fields ranging from farming to digital photography, depending on market demand. Livelihood trainings are complemented by access to microloans, so girls can launch and grow their own businesses.

To measure ELA's impact, a randomized control trial (RCT) in Uganda conducted by independent researchers found that, four years post-intervention, girls in villages with ELA clubs were less likely to experience teenage pregnancy, early entry into marriage or cohabitation, or sex against their will and more likely to participate in income-generating activities. Forthcoming RCTs from South Sudan and Sierra Leone further demonstrate ELA's effectiveness in making girls more resilient in the face of crisis.

Beyond ELA and ADP clubs, BRAC offers a host of other opportunities, including girls' education and skills development programs, scholarships, accelerated learning programs, technical and vocational training, apprenticeships, leadership opportunities, English and ICT courses, and activities like karate, cricket, volleyball, and theater.

Recognizing that supportive environments are crucial in enabling girls to flourish, BRAC also engages boys, parents, and community members to raise awareness of the issues that prevent adolescent girls' from achieving their full potential, including gender-based violence and restrictive gender norms.

Why BRAC?

In sub-Saharan Africa, BRAC is moving towards a more sophisticated model for livelihood trainings in ELA, with a greater focus on demand-driven training and promoting non-traditional career paths for girls through apprenticeships and technical training. It will also expand access to adolescent-friendly SRH services and provide alternative learning programs for girls who have dropped out of school. Within Bangladesh, BRAC is also experimenting with cost-recovery models for ADP to help ensure that we can continue to reach marginalized girls for years to come.

“**Programs like ELA are shaped not by presuming that development workers and program designers know best,” says Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, BRAC Founder and Chairperson, “But by giving voice to young people’s concerns and aspirations—and then giving them the means to shape their own futures.”**”