

Girls' Leadership Development: Lessons from the Field



“Before this program, I couldn’t do or say anything. Now I can convince my brothers to do something. I attend meetings and fight for my ideas.”

– A Girl from Egypt

Worldwide, girls and women suffer disproportionately from poverty. They also bear the brunt of gender-biased attitudes and practices that perpetuate their continued marginalization. At the same time, a growing body of evidence indicates that girls’ well-being is critical to progress on a range of developmental outcomes: an educated girl is more likely to delay marriage and childbirth, enjoy greater income and productivity and raise fewer, healthier and better-educated children.¹ The idea that girls can bring about powerful social and economic change when they have the opportunity to participate in their societies has gained increased recognition in international development dialogue. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that the experiences, knowledge and skills acquired in adolescence have critical implications for individuals’ prospects in adulthood.²

CARE recognizes the essential role of education in empowering girls and women by building their capacities to improve their own situation and that of others in their community. Evidence shows that investments in girls’ education may go further than any other spending in global development.³ And yet, while many girls’ programs worldwide address issues of educational inequality, very few include leadership development as a priority. Leadership skills

help girls to capitalize on their education, to express their opinions and ideas, to take action on issues of personal importance, to make healthy decisions, and to work toward future dreams and goals. Most recently, CARE has drawn on its decades-long expertise in girls’ education and its operations in nearly 70 countries to implement two USAID-funded initiatives, the Power to Lead Alliance (PTLA) and Innovation Through Sport: Promoting Leaders, Empowering Youth (ITSPLY).

PTLA was implemented in six countries; from September 2008 – September 2011, focused on over 50,000 10- to 14-year-old girls, but also included older and younger girls, as well as boys. Through participation in diverse extra-curricular activities such as sports activities, theater and art groups, debate clubs, technology clubs, and school government, girls developed their leadership competencies and then put them into practice in public spaces through active civic engagement in their schools and communities.

ITSPLY is capitalizing on the growing body of evidence that shows that well-designed sport-based initiatives can be powerful, practical, and cost-effective tools to achieve a diverse range





What Does CARE Mean by Girls' Leadership?

CARE defines a girl leader as an active learner who believes that she can make a difference in her world, and acts alone and with others to bring about positive change. This is not about top-down leadership in the traditional sense, but rather a girl's ability to take action and exert a positive influence in her family and community. CARE has identified five key leadership characteristics which our leadership programs seek to develop:

- **Voice/Assertion:** Able to articulate thoughts and make decisions, be critical, ask questions and be assertive. Having a voice and knowing she has the right to an opinion.
- **Decision-making/Action:** A sense that her decisions matter in her own life, that she can create opportunities for herself.
- **Self-confidence:** A belief in her value as a person.
- **Organization:** Able to organize herself to achieve her goals; able to take something from an idea to a final product.
- **Vision /Ability to Motivate Others:** Able to bring people together to accomplish something and to play an active role in the community.



of development goals. These include leadership development, improving education success, enhancing economic opportunities, and social inclusion of marginalized groups. ITSPLEY has drawn on the convening power of sport to connect and engage youth in four countries: Bangladesh, Egypt, Kenya and Tanzania. The aim of this three-year project, initiated in 2009, is to enhance the institutional capacity of local organizations in adolescent programming, and provide youth, notably girls, with opportunities to develop and practice leadership skills through sport-based and recreational activities. ITSPLEY has involved approximately 200,000 children and youth and 10,000 youth leaders in sports, traditional games, life skills, and civic action. An innovative institutional development model is being used to strengthen the capacity of local sports clubs and other organizations and develop local networks to facilitate the exchange of expertise and services on adolescent programming.

Evaluations conducted of the two initiatives found robust evidence of and potential to impact girls' leadership development and to influence shifts in community attitudes.⁴ Girls showed particular development in individual agency and changes in relations with peers and supportive adults. Additionally, women and men reported changing attitudes concerning girls' rights to education and participation.

Country Specific Highlights:

BANGLADESH Girls gained the confidence and voice to speak up for themselves in their families and in the community on issues that affected their education and personal development. Girls in five villages mobilized community members in advocating against early marriage and were able to help village leaders declare these villages "child marriage free" zones. Girls also worked with young boys to address sexual harassment and teasing and create awareness on girls' rights and protection in their communities leading to reduced incidences of abuse and harassment. The girls are now able to articulate a vision for their future and steps they need to take to achieve it.

EGYPT Girls participating in core groups gained skills in effective facilitation, planning, monitoring, and documenting community initiatives. The groups used their newly developed skills to carry out 27 community initiatives addressing environmental concerns such as poor latrine maintenance, a polluted pond, school and/or community clean-up and beautification, preparing a girls' playground, and construction of a school theatre; and social concerns such as gender discrimination, female genital mutilation (FGM), and violence among students.



HONDURAS Youth previously involved in destructive graffiti became engaged in a creative painting group. Girls and boys in activity groups demonstrated decision-making skills and initiative by selling paintings, embroidery, and bakery products they made in order to support other children to be able to learn those same skills. Other youth are actively involved in promoting school improvement initiatives and supporting at-risk children.

INDIA Girls have become more vocal and are participating actively in both school and village-based activities. In areas where previously girls didn't speak in public, girls are being heard through songs and community theatre, and are raising their voices against discriminatory practices that they encounter either in their families or in the society at large, such as early marriage.

KENYA Girls reported changing greatly in their ability to state their opinions and ideas. Community leaders indicated that the community had become more accepting of girls, seeing them as responsible, capable individuals. They said that boys had realized that girls were sources for information and that girls could surpass them in many activities.

MALAWI Girls learned to use theatrical arts as a vehicle to raise community awareness of girls' rights and girls' concerns and also to engage community leaders and parents around girls' issues. Parents' meetings and larger community gatherings were used as platforms for girls to voice their concerns to the

wider communities through theater. Theater groups presented plays not only in their own villages, but also toured other communities and schools, sharing information about girls' rights and gender-based violence.

TANZANIA Community perceptions of girls have changed significantly as girls have learned to confidently use public space to voice their concerns, particularly through youth-led Mock Parliaments. In sessions with Ward Development Committees and the District Council, girls held the duty-bearers accountable for addressing their needs, and community leaders have started taking action on some of the issues raised. Girls have begun using leadership skills at home to influence decisions – encouraging younger siblings to attend school, and talking to parents about joining the village savings and loan program in order to get money for school fees.

YEMEN A profound lesson learned is that even in highly conservative and marginalized communities with a long history of severe restriction of girls' freedoms, it is possible for girls to take on new roles of leadership and learning, with the full support of their families and communities. None of the societal attitudes that had formerly restricted girls' leadership roles were found to be intractable. Community attitudes towards girls shifted markedly and new community norms regarding what is desirable and appropriate for girls were established (e.g., greater freedom of movement, a priority on education, having a voice).⁵

Founded in 1945 with the creation of the CARE Package, CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. CARE places special focus on working alongside poor girls and women because, equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty.

Our six decades of experience show that when you empower a girl or woman, she becomes a catalyst, creating ripples of positive change that lift up everyone around her. That's why girls and women are at the heart of CARE's community-based efforts to improve education, health and economic opportunity for everyone. We also work with girls and women to promote social justice, respond to emergencies and confront hunger and climate change. Last year CARE worked in 84 countries and reached 122 million people around the world.



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¹ Levine, R., Lloyd, C., Greene, M., & Grown C. (2008). Girls Count: A global investment and action agenda. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

² UN Children's Fund. (2002). Adolescence: A time that matters. New York: UNICEF.

³ Herz B., & Sperling G. (2004). What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.

⁴ Miske Witt and Associates (2011). The Power to Lead Alliance: Empowering Girls to Learn and Lead, Final Evaluation Report. Innovation Through Sport: Promoting Leaders, Empowering Youth; Final Evaluation Report. Minneapolis: Miske Witt and Associates.

⁵ Beatty, Sharon (2011). CARE Yemen Girls' Education and Leadership Evaluation, Power to Lead Alliance. Minneapolis: Miske Witt and Associates.

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