

# Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents in Sierra Leone



Adolescent girls living in low-income settings may be trapped in a vicious cycle that prevents them from attaining employment and achieving better health outcomes and reproductive autonomy. Researchers will evaluate the impact of a program in Sierra Leone that aims to address this problem by bundling health education, vocational skills training, and micro-credit. They will evaluate the impact of these programs components, together and individually, on girls' economic activity, engagement in sexual and risky behaviors, and future goals.

## Policy Issue

Adolescent girls in low income countries appear to be trapped in a vicious circle where low skills and poor labor market opportunities make girls turn to (often older) men for financial support; this increases the chances of childbearing that, in turn, further reduces the chances of acquiring useful skills and future labor force participation. In [previous research in Uganda](#), researchers found that a combination of health education and vocational skills training can break the vicious circle. This study aims to assess where the causal chain starts, namely, whether it is the lack of health education, skills, or credit that keeps adolescent girls trapped in the vicious cycle of high fertility and low labor force participation.

## Evaluation Context

In Sierra Leone, teenage pregnancy and early childbearing are pervasive: of all pregnancies, 34 percent occur amongst teenage girls (SLDHS 2008) and 40 percent of maternal deaths occur as a result of teenage pregnancy (MICS 2010). In 2013, the Government of Sierra Leone launched a [Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy](#), which aims to reduce the adolescent fertility rate by 4 percentage points by 2015. As part of this strategy, the government has partnered with UNICEF and BRAC to implement the Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) program. BRAC is implementing the ELA program in six countries globally. In Africa, the program has already been implemented and evaluated in South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

## Details of the Intervention

Researchers designed a randomized evaluation, which is being implemented by IPA, to evaluate the



### RESEARCHERS

Oriana Bandiera, Niklas Buehren, Markus Goldstein, Imran Rasul

### COUNTRY

Sierra Leone

### PARTNERS

BRAC, UNICEF, World Bank, International Growth Centre (IGC)

### PROGRAM AREAS

Financial Inclusion, Health, Social Protection

### TOPICS

Financial Capability, Intimate Partner Violence, Microcredit, Training & Mentoring, Women & Girls

### TIMELINE

2013-

impact of the ELA program and its various components on girls' economic activity, engagement in sexual and risky behaviors, and aspirations. In addition, they will assess if the program affected girls who did not participate in the program but have social ties with those who had.

The program operates from adolescent development centers, or "clubs," staffed by BRAC trained mentors, who are older adolescent girls from the same communities. Researchers will evaluate the following three program components, together and individually:

- **Health education** ("life skills training") which is mostly delivered by trained mentors, covers the following topics: sexual and reproductive health, early pregnancy, menstruation and menstrual disorders, leadership among adolescents, gender, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, family planning, gender-based violence, and adolescent responsibility within the family and community. Group learning is encouraged through participatory classroom trainings. In addition, the girls receive issue-based sexual and reproductive health training from the BRAC Health Program. Girls aged 13-24 can participate in the health education training.
- **Vocational** ("livelihood") training covers the skills required to engage in different income generating activities and financial literacy. Girls can choose to receive training in hairdressing, tailoring, animal husbandry, or agriculture. The training lasts about a month and is delivered by local service providers in Sierra Leone. The financial literacy module covers topics such as budgeting, financial services, financial negotiations, and accounting. Following successful completion of training, trainees receive input supplies to start their chosen business activity. To prevent school dropout, only girls aged 17-24 are eligible for training.
- **Microcredit** Eligible girls who are engaged in a self-employment activity will be offered credit of up to US\$100 to finance their business. The loan duration will be one year with an annual interest rate of 25 percent and weekly repayments. Girls aged 17-24 are eligible for credit.

Participants will be randomly assigned to one of the following four groups, each consisting of 50 villages and 1,400 adolescent girls:

- (1) Health education
- (2) Health education, vocational training
- (3) Health education, vocational training, microcredit
- (4) Comparison group: No program

Results from this replication study will allow for a cross-country comparison of the program's effects and help to build the evidence on the program's impact. In addition, by introducing different treatment groups this evaluation aims to separate the effects of the programs different components, which will provide important information to partners on how the program should be expanded. Moreover, information drawn from individuals about the relationships they have with others in their village, known as social networks data, will reveal how information and skills acquired by program participants spreads to non-participants.

## Results and Policy Lessons

Results forthcoming.

*Read more about the ELA Sierra Leone program [here](#).*

*Read about previous research on the program in Uganda [here](#).*

---

**GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS**

101 Whitney Avenue  
New Haven, CT 06510 USA  
+1 203.772.2216 | [contact@poverty-action.org](mailto:contact@poverty-action.org)

**poverty-action.org**