

## Abstract

This article looks at girls and young mothers as the victims of Child, Early and Forced Marriages (CEFM), and how their wellbeing and livelihoods were sustained through the “Girls Inspire” project in Tanzania under the Commonwealth of Learning. It explores how this socio-economic empowerment project has brought about positive changes in the lives of girls and women seven years after it ended. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were collected from February 2022 to December 2023 with 70 Girls Inspire beneficiaries aged 17 – 32 who were purposively and randomly selected from the five districts of Bahi and Kongwa (Dodoma region), Karambo and Nkasi (Rukwa region) and Ruangwa (Lindi region). Other data were obtained through reviewing reports regarding the status, designs and implementations of Girls Inspire intervention. The findings show that these girls and young women benefited by becoming more literate and acquiring entrepreneurial skills they could apply to ensuring that they received an income, thereby sustaining their socio-economic development. They used these skills to make soap, produce batik fabrics and process food. The project aligned with national policies and legal frameworks, ensuring commitment and access to financial opportunities and support for girls and young mothers to improving their livelihoods. The scaling-in of women's empowerment interventions, which involves deeper integration into system or communities rather than expansion in size or geography, would ensure the sustainability of many projects, such as Girls Inspire, which are crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goal number 5 on gender equality, women's empowerment and social-wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Girls’ and women's empowerment; Scaling-in; Livelihoods’; Gender equality; Sustainable development

## Introduction

Tanzania has taken various initiatives to support socioeconomic empowerment of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (URT, 2017). One of these initiatives was the implementation of Girls Inspire programme by the Commonwealth of Learning in collaboration with the Institute of Adult Education from 2015-2018 in Dodoma, Lindi and Rukwa regions on Tanzania mainland, mainly focusing on prevention of the Child, Early and Forced Marriages and underage pregnancies (COL, 2018; 2016).

Girls Inspire supported education and skills development through improving the quality of lives among the victims of child, early forced marriage and underage pregnancies in rural, disadvantaged and hard to reach communities by providing them with leadership, vocational and entrepreneurship skills to address their needs and concerns. More than 3,000 girls and young mothers aged between 15 - 24 benefitted on the programme from 2015-2018.

Achieving its long-term developmental objectives, the Girls Inspire programme, not only enabled girls and young mothers to work their ways out of poverty in the limited space and time of the programme implementation, but also focused on using generated positive results to inspire other girls, young mothers as well as communities. In doing this, the programme leveraged on policies and practices, including financial and political capitals to a larger scale through scaling-in- of the project versus scaling up. Many socioeconomic empowerment interventions in Tanzania are short-lived, limited in impact and reach, and are concluded at the time when they are highly needed most, and when beneficiaries start to experience positive outcomes (Mnubi, 2020; Agape, 2014).

The scaling-up or in, of successful girls and women socioeconomic interventions have been considered as some crucial development strategies as they increase gains and enhance the probability of sustaining positive change. Scaling up means to “expand, adapt, replicate and support pilot or small-scale projects to increase the impact of successfully pilot innovations so as to benefit more people and to foster policy, programme and project development on a lasting basis” (WHO, 2010). In contrary, Girls Inspire scaling-in didn’t involve transforming the project into larger projects “scaling up” due to budget restrictions, given limited resources available from development partners, instead was compelled to sustain successful innovations within the same community and geographical setting while leveraging policies and practice changes. Effective scaling-in was the key measure of successful Girls Inspire intervention.

Many socioeconomic empowerment projects experience many challenges when it comes to sustainability and continuity in the absence of development partners’ funding in Tanzania (Mnubi, 2015). Given the importance of gender equality and women socio-economic empowerment to ensure Tanzania achieve the SDGs with targets 4.5

and 6 by improving the quality and access to education by girls while improving gender equality in the country, this paper, therefore, sought to explore gains while offering useful tools for successful and sustainable scaling-in of girls and women socioeconomic empowerment projects beyond project cycle, taking a case of Girls Inspire implementing in districts of Bahi, Kongwa, Kalambo, Nkasi, Ruangwa and Kilwa on Tanzania mainland.

## Methods

Purposive and randomly sampling methods were used to select 113 participants of the Girls Inspire programme from five implementing districts. The researcher conducted 50-70 minutes in-depth, open-ended individual interviews with 24 young mothers and women that were purposively selected. Other data were obtained from the use of focused group discussions with a non-random sample of 84 young mothers and women. The participants volunteered to be interviewed during the period from February, 2022 to December, 2023.

Some of the key questions asked include, but were not limited to existing drivers of project sustainability, access to financial space, community leaders' support as well as supportive policy and legal frameworks. Other questions centred on levels community involvement, knowledge and skills acquisitions, participants' ownership of the intervention.

The study also benefited from reviewing reports regarding the status, designs and implementations of Girls Inspire intervention in Tanzania. Twelve archival documents were analyzed to portray the current status of the issue, including various documents from the Government of Tanzania, Commonwealth of Learning, UNICEF as well as UNESCO. Other sources of data included the National Library, Tanzania Institute of Adult Education and Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children (MCDGC). The dates of the archival sources analyzed are from 2000 to 2024. This approach is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Respondents and Approaches Utilized**

No	Respondents	Mode of approach	No. of Respondents
1	Girls and young mothers, purposively selected	In-depth individual interviews	24
3	Focus group discussions	FGDs	84
4	Group leaders	Individual interviews	3
5	Community leaders	Individual interviews	2
6	Archival documents	12 documents reviewed	
<b>Totals (N)</b>			<b>113</b>

## Ethical Issues

Ethical clearance procedures for the care and use of human subjects were followed. The study was conducted under the institutional requirements and approval by the Research, Publication and Consultancy Directorate at the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania. Participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study, after they were informed about the purpose of the study, and promised anonymity. The names of all the participants were kept confidential and coded by numbers and letters to protect their identities. Any information obtained for the study that could be identified with the participants will remain confidential and not to be disclosed without their permissions.

## Data Analysis

The study utilized qualitative approach by triangulating sources of data collection against each other. The data were analysed thematically to clarify and triangulate the meaning from girls and young mothers experience. The emphasis

was placed on the participants' informed consent. First, the interview data were transcribed, read through and informal notes were made regarding the emerging themes.

The researcher then honed the categories of the themes and analysed divergent findings, through deliberating on opposing ideas and agreeing on the meaning of the findings. Inductive analysis was used to get the meaning from the participants and provide descriptive details on the research undertaken. The findings in the following sections are reported in aggregate form.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Project sustainability**

The sustainability of the Girls Inspire intervention was centred on three fronts of: Developing capacities and raising awareness through project components; Community and beneficiaries' ownership/commitment to the project outcomes; and Measures taken as exit strategies to maintain the progress achieved by the project and its constituent components after the financial assistance ceased in 2018.

The project members received proper training on skills to identify and select right and dedicated leaders as well as their abilities to self-advocate for their education and socioeconomic needs were enhanced. The sustainable element appeared when girls and young mothers gained confidence in expressing their needs and could employ appropriate political and social strategies for seeking readiness for perceived rights to sustainable livelihoods often via invoking the mechanism of government and local community leaders.

The programme helped to develop awareness, resiliency, entrepreneurial skills as well as family ability to be self-sufficient. For example, one group leader noted that "group leaders are chosen by their own people; therefore, it is easy for their fellow females to listen to them, and hence promote obedience and reduce unnecessary resistances." For example, few diminished and poorly performed groups showed a certain lack of commitment and solidarity among group members, manifesting itself in contrary to project activities i.e. dodging group meetings, defaulting and delaying the monthly payments.

Another element focused on improving the capacities of community members while strengthen the links to and engagement with communities, particularly parents and spouses. Through their engagements, majority of respondents, including all parents and spouses as well as community leaders, believed that the impacts of the project are sustainable. The project opened the minds of parents and spouses who once prevented their daughters and wives from participating in incomes generation activities. For example, one young mother from Dodoma was initially prevented by her spouse from attending the Girls Inspire project but after the project, the woman was able to explain her views to her husband who allowed her to fully participate in the project. She is now the community champion and the group leader. In addition, community leaders reported that, "group members can now assist the community in leading by ensuring that elected community leaders are acting responsibly and fully ensure that women groups are actively participating in all community development cycles.

Another sustainable component of the project is that all the districts have "development officers" to liaise between the diverse actors and support youth and women socioeconomic empowerment. In addition, the access to funds by disadvantaged and marginalized groups has been included in the checklist of the districts. Fund release confirmation and checklists represent a real victory for sustainability. However, like many other studies have indicated, to maintain this momentum, two things must occur. First, partners and supports, including community leaders and CSOs must effectively lobby to get the fund release movement onto the developmental inspection criteria in many regions-perhaps nationwide (URT, 2017). Second, partner's entities ought to strongly lobby for the importance of girls and women socioeconomic empowerment as an essential component of Tanzania's movement toward sustaining the middle-income status and achieve the SDG thresholds (COL, 2016).

### **Drivers of scaling-in**

The scaling-in of the Girls Inspire project was considered on the basis of resources constraints. The project obliged to sustain successful innovations within the same community and geographical spread. It is worth identifying the

drivers and leverage capacities for increased sustainability and continued impacts beyond project life cycle while ensuring the policy framework and financial resources availability.

The continued success of the project capitalized the available spaces, such as financial access, gained skills, community awareness as well as supportive empowerment policy, in which the intervention was nurtured.

The availability and strong need for the women groups to effectively participate and equally enjoy opportunities in political, economic, social and in public life is crucial to sustain the empowerment model. Girls and women solidarity and group formation helped for sharpen the course to strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

One of the sustainable elements is the active community involvement in decision making and planning of the activity plans that make girls and women part of the solutions. The key factor towards sustainability was the long-term commitment in working with the beneficiaries as well as continuous community mobilization and sensitization.

### **Financial space**

The scaling-in pathway of the Girls Inspire was dependent on existing available local public financing. The availability of conducive financial space among groups was one of the key factor to support the scaled-in to sustain the intervention and match the available resources. The scaling-in model mainstreamed project activities into the government empowerment programmes. For example, since 2016, each village has been allocated TZS 50 million, with ten percent allocated to women group, youth and people with disabilities.

It is the socioeconomic right for girls and women groups to be empowered and ensure they are positively contributing members to communities and families. The Girls Inspire unlocked the potential and aspiration of girls and young mothers from rural settings. The available infrastructure could ensure financial sustainability through revolving zero-interest micro-loans. The availability of conducive financial space among groups was one of the key.... to support the scaled-in and sustain the intervention and match the available local resources while reducing the calls for outside financial support. This was supported by the existing policy and increased government commitment.

The study found increase in women participation in community leadership and in their ability to self-advocate for needed change. During the interviews, girls and women beneficiaries indicated that liquid soap and batik fabrics were the most preferable products than the bar soap in the market, which requires more expensive in raw materials. Women and girls earn money as additional capital to increase production cycle. The evidence indicated a strong need for rural disadvantaged women to access financial services and are willing to contribute to the national development while improving their own livelihoods. These changes hold great implications for sustainability, as women now expect to move communities forward (in terms of, for example gender equity). This is akin to priming a water pump-once the water flows, there is no chance to stop it.

### **Skills acquisition**

It is crucial that the acquired knowledge and skills set address the community felt needs, specifically among girls and young mothers. The intervention ensured that girls and young mothers achieved their priority, which is sustaining and improving their livelihoods. The knowledge and skills acquired support sustainability through scale in-after the intervention was ended in 2018. In many instances, participants utilized their skills in batik making, soap making, healthier flour and peanut butter making.

Another development and encouraging sign for sustainability of the project was the return of girls and young women to continue with their secondary education. From 2018-2023, fourteen young mothers successfully completed form four and seven and three among them transitioned to high schools and universities respectively. Girls and young mothers' beneficiaries keep on assisting and inspiring other girls and women by giving them hope and belief that girls and women have a bright future.

Therefore, the Girls Inspire developed capacities and capabilities for partners and beneficiaries to participate and implement the intervention successfully. Kohn (2012) defines “capacity” as the organization ability to deliver the innovation at the desired scale as well as capacities and ability to implement the intervention according to the original design while adapting to local conditions.

Socioeconomic empowerment of women not only impacted their lives positively, but also helped them out of poverty while contributing the country efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, one woman explained how she spends her income generated as a result of the Girls Inspire on feeding and educating her children. Women socio-economic independency is a strong weapon against their exploitation, violence and discrimination.

### **Community leaders support**

The project design and implementation need more engagement with local communities as well as increased government involvement and commitment to the outcomes of the project. The local community leaders involved themselves from the programme design phase and continued their involvement throughout programme implementation. During the inception of the programme, all key stakeholders, including village executive councils, district commissioners, community development officers, education officers and parents, were invited and continuously consulted regarding programme implementation. For example, in 2019, Chamwino District Commissioner, Hon Fatuma Said, was invited to speak about positive outcomes and impacts of the programme to various schools in her area.

At the community level, the intervention managed in great extent to integrate and link the champions with the communities through raising awareness, community commitment and support for the critical need of the girls and women groups. When asked about this aspect of programming, mentors cited a lack of time. This needs to be a priority in any future project expansion.

In a few successful community engagements, the project champions were able to organize female parents and their spouses to attend and observe various organized trade fair. Similarly, one female champion reported that, “Through Girls Inspire, girls and young mothers are more confident when it comes to their issues than how they were before.” She continued by noting that *“One day I instructed my daughter to milk the cows before she went to school, but she responded confidently that it was time to go to school and she had to exercise her right to get education which she will eventually use to support her family including her parents.”*

The project identified key strategic movers and shakers as well as institutional areas that need to be developed in order to sustain positive changes over time. These included district community development officers, champions and spouses. With the guidance of district community development officers, girls and women came together, wrote constitutions and register their business groups. So far, 5 groups still exist, including Mwanguta Women Group in Msanzi ward (meaning a woman is a pillar of the nation) and Msanzi Women Group in Kalambo District. All these groups have bank accounts to cultivate a culture of money savings and they can access 10% revolving fund from District Councils to support women, youth and people with disabilities.

### **Policy framework**

In line of promoting women socioeconomic empowerment and gender equality, the government of Tanzania enacted appropriate policies and legal frameworks to support scaling-in of the empowerment. When scaling up women socioeconomic empowerment interventions, potential accessibility to finance needs to be addressed.

Meeting the government officials to discuss the project on CEFM encouraged support and enforcement of policies. All District Commissioners (DC), District Administrative Secretaries (DAS), District Executive Directors (DED) as well as Education Officers (EO) were involved on the course and the need to work and involve multi-sectoral stakeholders.

During the discussion, for example DED from Nkasi stressed that once groups have been officially registered and introduced to district councils, they are eligible to receive zero or low interest rate loans from the revolving funds

issued by the District Council to assist youth and women. District Community Development Officers also provide guidance and support to help marketing and selling of beneficiaries' products.

### Lesson learned

During the implementation, girls and women beneficiaries faced several challenges, including lack of proper teaching and learning environment, lack of electricity as well as conflicting priorities. Not only that but also, lack of electricity restricted the use of multimedia during facilitation. Meanwhile, during the harvest seasons, some girls and women learners dodged classes.

### Conclusion

Persistent poverty and gender-based inequalities threaten the socioeconomic gains as a result of empowerment interventions. Addressing the women socioeconomic empowerment need to look into structural drivers of rural poverty, social injustices and environmental sustainability dimensions which have shaped women's role to enhance conditions for economic and socially sustainable future for Tanzania.

The sustainability of girls and women empowerment hinged on local adaptability in terms of resources, environment and availability of skills sets. The socio-economic participation, including increasing financial inclusion and literacy as well as entrepreneurial skills will empower disadvantaged rural girls and women to take control of their livelihoods while support their children welfare, including education. The data re-affirm the relationship between gender and socioeconomic development and concludes that without full women participation, sustainable development in Tanzania will not be achieved.

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