

# Girl Hub: State of Girls in Rwanda

January 2011





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**Restless Development  
Bell and Payne Consulting**

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# Executive Summary

Girl Hub is a joint initiative of the Nike Foundation and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), working to ensure that girls in developing countries are involved in the design and implementation of policies and programmes that affect them. Girl Hub's mission is to unleash the "girl effect" at scale, whereby the 600 million adolescent girls in the developing world get a chance to grow into healthy mothers, active citizens and educated members of their societies, and transform their families, communities and nations along the way. The "girl effect" essentially refers to the positive effect that empowering girls can have on their communities and countries.

Girl Hub has agreed on a "Seven Pillars" theory of change i.e. the following seven interlocking elements which give girls the best chance in life:

- **Girlhood:** enjoying being a girl;
- **School:** finishing secondary school;
- **Marriage:** getting married later;
- **Pregnancy:** having babies later, and fewer of them;
- **Money:** understanding how to deal with money;
- **Health:** being able to look after their own health;
- **Ambition:** expecting more from their own futures.

In order to better understand what girls think, feel and believe to develop interventions which are effective, meaningful to girls themselves, and which facilitate the "girl effect", Girl Hub commissioned Restless Development, in partnership with Bell & Payne Consulting, to conduct 'State of Girls in Rwanda' research to generate deep qualitative knowledge and understanding about girls' attitudes and realities by hearing from girls directly.

## Aims and objectives

The research had two broad aims:

- To gather qualitative insights to understand the emotional rationale and practical realities that can be used to develop initiatives and communications which change girls' behaviours;
- To co-design, with girls, the basic principles for interventions to change social norms, attitudes and behaviours and catalyse the "girl effect".

By generating understanding around each of the seven pillars from the perspectives of girls, the objectives of the research were to understand:

- the differences between what girls can do and want to do in terms of their agency to both make and enact decisions about their lives, and
- the social and cultural contexts which influence - in both positive and negative ways - girls' abilities to make and enact decisions about their lives.

## Methodology

A girl-led peer research approach was designed by Bell and Payne Consulting and this report presents the primary findings of the research, conducted in Rwanda. Local partners were engaged to recruit 30 girls (16-18 years) across three research locations spanning the rural-urban spectrum. Girls were trained to conduct qualitative conversational interviews with their peers and adults from within their social networks. Girl researchers were mentored throughout this process and subsequently participated in a workshop where they analysed their data and generated key messages from the

findings for Girl Hub. Engaging girls as researchers empowered them by: opening their channels of communication; building their self-confidence; and gaining knowledge, skills and abilities.

### **Key findings**

The findings present a view of life through girls' eyes. Girls used the concept '*agaciro*' (meaning 'value' and connected with notions of respect) when talking about their lives. Gaining and keeping value was important to girls and could be achieved by 'behaving correctly'. However, girls explained that they 'get all the consequences' because they are either unable or unwilling to conform to social and cultural expectations, causing them to lose value from family and the wider community as a result. Girls overcome many obstacles to fulfil societal and personal expectations but they also make rational choices which neither conform to mainstream expectations nor discourses promoted by international development agencies.

**Pillar 1 - Girlhood:** Girls overwhelmingly felt that their lives are out of their control and unpredictable. They wanted more control, decision-making power and choice in the context of marriage, sexual relationships and health. Their ability to exert control was impacted by parents, deception by men, inequality with boys, deception by men, a lack of knowledge and lack of self confidence.

**Pillar 2 - School:** Girls consider not going to school as one of the worst things that can happen to them. School is considered as a source of valuable knowledge which can boost a girl's self-confidence and give her more control over her life. However, it was not viewed as something which would necessarily lead to a job. Moreover, girls who did not attend school frequently gained value from family members who felt they should be helping with domestic chores. Girls feel that parent's attitudes, pregnancy and marriage, poverty and lack of school fees, lack of confidence, inadequate sanitation in schools and delinquency are the major factors leading to school drop out among girls.

**Pillar 3 - Marriage:** Whilst Girl Hub's aim is to delay age at marriage, girls' goal is to exercise greater choice over marriage, something they feel is largely controlled by parents or detrimentally impacted by getting pregnant outside of marriage which causes a girl to lose value. Marriage is viewed as something which gives a girl value in addition to providing financial security, respect and love.

**Pillar 4 - Pregnancy:** Girls' goal is to have babies within marriage because having pregnancy outside marriage causes a girl to lose value. They are less concerned with their biological age at first pregnancy. Despite a strong desire to have pregnancy within marriage, girls often struggle to achieve this due to peer pressure, desire for a sexual relationship, pressure from parents and pressure to prove their fertility.

**Pillar 5 - Health:** Girls ability to look after their health is constrained by a lack of knowledge, in particular sexual and reproductive health. Being unable to talk to parents, mistrust of Health Advisors, lack of education, myths and misinformation and the consequences of seeking information, which can cause girls to be seen as promiscuous, affect a her ability to have, and to act upon, health information.

**Pillar 6 - Money:** Girls in Rwanda repeatedly said "no money, no life!" and wanted to be self-sufficient, in other words able to support themselves and their families. Importantly, they wanted money to come from sources which gave them value, rather than from sugar daddies or in exchange for sex). Money is associated with independence. Girls feel that a lack of financial advice, lack of education and their own saving and spending behaviours impact their ability to be self-sufficient.

**Pillar 7 - Ambition:** Girls aim for a 'higher level', as they described it, in order to gain value. However, they are frustrated because they do not have the same status and opportunities as boys and viewed

this inequality as a key barrier to achieving their ambitions. Girls consider money, self confidence and education as key for being successful in life.

**Additional themes:** The girl-led research identified four additional themes that are either not captured or not fully represented in the seven pillars as they are currently organised, but are central for understanding girls' emotional rationale and practical realities:

- **Income generation:** Earning an income is viewed as essential to being self-sufficient because it decreases a girl's potential to be deceived by men: a girl who is self-sufficient has value, is both respected and feared by men and has no need to be tempted by material girls from men in return for sex.
- **Abortion:** Girls who get pregnant outside of marriage sometimes have abortions to avoid losing value which is the result of having an unwanted pregnancy.
- **Relationships:** Girls lives are dominated by the nature of their relationships with boys and men, parents and friends. Girls initiate, negotiate and manage these relationships and this has an impact on their ability to gain and keep value.
- **Violence:** Domestic violence and rape are important issues for girls s another aspect of girls' lives in Rwanda that proves to be detrimental to girls' self confidence and affects almost all the pillars including going to school and getting married.

## Recommendations

Recommendations fall into two key areas: pillar-specific recommendations in terms of how to make communications and programming meaningful to, and accepted by, girls, and core principles which should underpin interventions to ensure they address the important cross-cutting issues which act as barriers to changing girls' behaviour. They include:

- **Improving lives of communication:** receiving and following advice is girls are to have value and be prevented from 'getting all the consequences'. Advice about sexual and reproductive health and finances is considered especially important. However, advice is not always forthcoming (especially from parents) nor always good advice. Interventions should avoid alienating girls who get value by following advice which goes against what Girl Hub are trying to achieve girls
- **Building self-confidence:** having self-confidence allows a girl to value herself at the same time as being valued by others. To develop self-confidence girls need advice from parents and friends, equality with boys, especially in relation to education and employment opportunities and community role models.
- **Addressing inequalities:** girls believe boys *have* value whilst they have to *get* value. Their sense of being treated unequally was most present in discussions about school and work. Interventions would benefit from taking a different direction to current messaging around gender equality which encourages girls to draw comparisons with boys.

# Prologue

These quotes were collected from girl researchers during a workshop activity in which they were asked to write down what they thought were the best, and the worst, things about being a girl in Rwanda.

## **The best thing about being a girl in Rwanda is...**

- ...the fact that I am not pregnant and I am in school.
- ...to be able to advise other girls.
- ...that I have good relationships with my parents and I respect them.
- ...to behave well, even though you don't have parents.
- ...the fact that I am in school and I still have hope to go on with my studies.
- ...to go to school and be successful.
- ...that I have an excellent relationship with my parents, they advise me and I feel loved.
- ...to respect yourself and not have sexual relations before marriage.
- ...being a girl with self-esteem, respecting parents and following their advice.
- ...when you get the opportunity to go to school and then people respect you.

## **The worst thing about being a girl in Rwanda is...**

- ...that people still think that there are some things a boy can do that a girl can't.
- ...that people don't trust you as they trust boys.
- ...that girls' suffer more when it comes to domestic work compared to boys.
- ...that when she makes a mistake, for example playing with sex with a boy, she is always the one who faces the consequences.
- ...that sugar daddies defile us without taking into consideration that we are the future of our nation. They destroy our lives.
- ...to lose parents.
- ...to be out of school or to lose school fees when you are intelligent.
- ...to get pregnant when you are not living with a husband.
- ...to be raped and rejected by others.

# 1. Introduction

## Girl Hub and the “girl effect”

Girl Hub is a joint initiative of the Nike Foundation and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), working to ensure that girls in developing countries are involved in the design and implementation of policies and programmes that affect them. Girl Hub's mission is to unleash the “girl effect” at scale, whereby the 600 million adolescent girls in the developing world get a chance to grow into healthy mothers, active citizens and educated members of their societies - and transform their families, communities and nations along the way. The “girl effect” essentially refers to the positive effect that empowering girls can have on their communities and countries. Girl Hub's work will be in two key areas:

- Making policies and programmes for girls as effective as possible, by working closely with government ministries such as the Ministry of Health.
- Creating communications that connect with girls and inspire them to believe in their own ability because for sustainable change to occur, girls themselves must believe in their own capacity to create change.

In both these areas of work, Girl Hub aims to elevate the voices of girls and ensure they are equal and active participants in design and implementation stages. Girl Hub are beginning their work in Rwanda where gender issues, gender equality, and the promotion of girls in particular, are especially important policy concerns.

Girl Hub has agreed on a “Seven Pillars” theory of change, i.e. the following seven interlocking elements which give girls the best chance in life:

- **Girlhood:** enjoying being a girl
- **School:** finishing secondary school
- **Marriage:** getting married later.
- **Pregnancy:** having babies later, and fewer of them.
- **Money:** understanding how to deal with money.
- **Health:** being able to look after their own health.
- **Ambition:** expecting more from their own futures.

## ‘State of Girls in Rwanda’ research

Girl Hub want to better understand what girls think, feel and believe to develop interventions which are effective, meaningful to girls themselves, and which facilitate the “girl effect”. To do this, Girl Hub commissioned Restless Development, in partnership with Bell & Payne Consulting, to conduct ‘State of Girls in Rwanda’ research to generate deep qualitative knowledge and understanding about girls’ attitudes and realities by hearing from girls directly. Drawing on girl-led peer research undertaken by girls in Rwanda, this report documents primary research findings in line with two objectives specified in the brief:

- To gather qualitative insights to understand the emotional rationale and practical realities that can be used to develop initiatives and communications which change girls’ behaviours;
- To co-design, with girls, the basic principles for potential interventions to change social norms, attitudes and behaviours and catalyse the “girl effect”.

Two important dimensions of the research included exploring:

- the differences between what girls can do and want to do in terms of their agency to both make and enact decisions about their lives; and
- the social and cultural contexts which influence – in both positive and negative ways – girls’ abilities to make and enact decisions about their lives.

The girl-led peer approach was designed to unleash the “girl effect” and to enable girls to talk about the issues that were important to them. Alongside the fieldwork, a documentary film about the research process was made by Grain Media. Whilst the film-making process is not documented in this report, the goals of the film were to enhance the replicability of the girl-led research process and to document the way in which the research empowered girl researchers.

## **Report structure**

The structure of this report focuses on exploring the objectives highlighted above and is divided four remaining chapters:

- **Chapter 2** summarises the girl-led peer approach used.
- **Chapter 3** explores girls’ perspectives on Girl Hub’s seven pillars in terms of their emotional rationale and practical realities and discusses four additional which are important to girls but not currently reflected in the existing pillars.
- **Chapter 4** explores girls’ perspectives on the impacts participating in the girl-led peer research has had on their own lives.
- **Chapter 5** provides recommendations from the research including core principles for communications and interventions based on key messages generated in collaboration with girl researchers.

## 2. Girl-led peer research

### The girl-led peer approach

Drawing on Bell & Payne Consulting's experience of carrying out peer-led research with young people in African contexts, an innovative girl-led peer approach was used to conduct this research. The approach draws on a range of research theories - including youth and child-led research, ethnography, peer-to-peer methods and participatory techniques - to engage girls as researchers in their own communities. The methodology was driven by a few key principles which were innovative and empowering:

- working with girls as co-researchers, key informants, co-designers and co-analysts.
- empowering girls to undertake research with their peers, and influential adults in their social networks, initiating and maintaining discussions that do not usually occur.
- hearing from girls about their own lives directly, generating a depth of understanding that is not possible in any other way.
- engaging girls in decision-making about the research itself including research themes to be investigated and how to make methods locally appropriate.

The research process was based around three stages that, together, generated insights about the situation of girls in Rwanda. These stages included training, supported fieldwork and analysis.

#### *Training*

The training stage ensured that girls had the capability and confidence to lead and design the research process most appropriate for their local contexts. Five day trainings were held in each research location. The aims of these interactive trainings were to:

- Build girls' confidence and self-esteem as researchers and communicators across age and gender boundaries.
- Build their relationships with each other and the research team.
- Involve girls in decisions about the research agenda including research topics and participants.
- Develop girls' capacities to conduct conversational interviews and drawing on input from girls to ensure these could be conducted in locally appropriate ways.
- Train girls in techniques for remembering and recording data.

#### *Supported fieldwork*

During fieldwork, girl researchers conducted six conversational interviews each including two with young girls aged 12-15 years; two with same age girls aged 16-18 years; and two with adults (one male and one female) leading to a total of 178 conversational interviews. The persons interviewed included a good mix of 'in school' and 'out of school' girls, girls with diverse socio-demographic backgrounds and those with significant personal experiences of rape, abortion, domestic violence, forced marriage and early pregnancy. Girl researchers were mentored during supported fieldwork by female research assistants<sup>1</sup> who held regular mentoring meetings and provided one-to-one support. Mentoring meetings continued to build girls' research capacities by hearing feedback about interview experiences and conducting group problem-solving activities to address challenges faced; and

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<sup>1</sup> During the in-country research one-to-one weekly meetings were also held with research assistants to capture their perspectives on the research process; incorporate their ideas into on-going development of workshop sessions and activities; deal with any problems or issues they were experiencing or which they had noticed among girl researchers; and debrief on research findings (including feedback from interviews they conducted with community stakeholders).

ensured depth and detail from interviews were captured. Consequently, they encouraged an iterative approach to research and initiated the analysis process in which girl researchers were subsequently involved.

### ***Analysis***

Girl researchers were involved in data analysis to ensure their perspectives were included in making sense of the information they had gathered and in developing principles for Girl Hub interventions based on key messages from the research. This involved the girls reporting back in detail on their findings and interpreting them, drawing on their own experiences as girls in Rwanda. Data generated on each research topic was organised according to the age group and gender of interviewees and, whether girls interviewed were 'in' or 'out' of school. Areas of overlap and difference, points of contention and particular interest were then explored in more detail through focused group discussions. Following this, girls generated key messages for each topic, based on the most important findings. Finally, girl researchers conducted a participatory evaluation of their experience of the research process.

## **Research logistics**

### ***Research locations***

The three different locations including the Kigali (the capital city), Gitarama, (a regional town in Southern province), and Bugesera (a rural district in Eastern Province) allowed for in depth understanding and analysis from three distinctive locations and types of communities. Decisions about research locations were primarily influenced by the need to cover the urban-rural continuum to ensure the research accessed girls with different life experiences and opportunities.

### ***Local partner organisations***

Two local partner organisations were recruited through a formal call for partners and briefed prior to the team's arrival in country. These were: Voluntary Services Overseas Rwanda (VSO Rwanda), alongside their partners, Help Life Rwanda and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), for research in Kigali and Gitarama respectively; and Right To Play Rwanda, Rwanda for research in Bugesera.<sup>2</sup> Partners assisted with the research by facilitating access to communities, making introductions to key stakeholders, recruiting girl researchers from within their own networks, providing logistical support with training venues and communication with girl researchers, and acting as a referral point for the research team and girl researchers. Partner staff also attended workshop sessions to build their own research capacities and learn from the research to inform their own work.

### ***Girl researchers***

In each research location, ten girl researchers were recruited by local partners from within their networks. Girl researchers were between the ages of 16 and 18 years, with at least basic literacy skills and included a balance of 'in' and 'out' of school girls. Girls were recruited from different geographic areas within research locations to ensure that their research reached a wide-range of social networks and reflected a diversity of cultural, social and economic backgrounds in each location.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Details of partners are available from Restless Development and Bell & Payne Consulting on request.

<sup>3</sup> A recruitment brief supported partners during the recruitment process and regular meetings were held to track progress (see Appendix 8).

## **Qualitative analysis**

The research process produced the following data sets: field diaries kept by the research team; field notes from workshop and mentoring sessions including notes from focus groups and detailed accounts of girl researcher conversational interviewing; field notes from weekly in-depth interviews with research assistants. Data analysis was an on-going process, involving girl researchers and research assistants to encourage iterative learning, and to ensure the process of making sense of data was grounded in local interpretation. This was combined with the use of further rigorous grounded thematic analysis techniques using 'open coding' and 'axial coding' (Crang, 1997). Grounded thematic analysis involves the search for themes and topics in the data, and is a form of pattern recognition. Themes identified are meaningful by virtue of holding some degree of importance to the community in which the data was generated. Thematic analysis, therefore, aims to 'safeguard' the subjective point of view rather than replace it with meaning construed by the researcher. The analysis processes used are highly generative and means data are grounded in a cultural framework which is meaningful for exploring life from the vantage point of those living it.

## **Ethical considerations**

The research was carried out in accordance with ethical guidelines produced by the Royal Geographical Society Developing Areas Research Group and the Association of Social Anthropologists. Importantly, it was also passed by the Rwandan Government's Ethics Committee prior to arrival in-country. Further to this, we drew on guidelines outlined in the Knowing Children Handbook (2009), Ruth Payne's work on reinventing ethics (Payne, 2009), and her experience of developing ethical guidelines for child protection research.

### 3. The Pillars: through girls' eyes

This chapter presents the findings of the research and analysis of the pillars 'through girls' eyes'. It unpicks findings from the girl-led research to gain a better understanding of the practical and emotional realities of daily life for girls in Rwanda, from their own vantage point. It draws on the concepts girls used to talk about their lives, the issues that were important to them and the ways in which these connected together. In doing so, it celebrates the methodology that was girl-led and girl driven. Importantly, it demonstrates the agency of girls in negotiating a complicated terrain of cultural and social expectations, emotions and practical realities, whilst also recognising the constraints they face. The findings are organised under the Girl Hub "Seven Pillars". In order to understand the context across all seven pillars, it is important to first understand "*agaciro*", a concept which is central to the lives of girls in Rwanda.

#### ***Agaciro*: a lens for understanding girls' lives**

Viewing the pillars through girls' eyes is impossible without first understanding a central cultural concept they use to talk about their lives: *agaciro*. Literally translated, *agaciro* means 'value'. *Agaciro* is:

- closely connected with the notion of respect (*kwiubaha*);
- attached to individuals;
- can be both given and received;
- can be given by an individual to themselves: "*you are always valued if you value yourself*";
- inherently connected to decisions and actions which lead to both getting and losing value; and
- comes through certain attitudes and behaviours in terms of the 'the way a girl handles herself' (*imyifatire*): "*you start respecting yourself and then you get it*".

Girls explained that there is a 'correct' way to behave which allows them to get value from family and wider society. This narrative of girlhood broadly involves:

- following the advice of parents;
- having respect for yourself (e.g. 'looking after your body') and treating others with respect (especially elders);
- avoiding bad behaviour (such as sexual relationships before marriage);
- getting married at the time specified, and to the person chosen, by parents;
- having money (through 'honest' work);
- having children; and
- getting an education (not something which is universally viewed by either adults or girls as a requirement for fulfilling dominant social and cultural expectations around being a girl and being a person who has *agaciro*).

Girls frequently contrasted this narrative of girlhood with another in which attitudes and behaviours are in stark contrast to what was expected of them and which, ultimately, leads to losing *agaciro* from family and wider society. This narrative is described by girls as 'getting all the consequences' and broadly involves a chain of events in which girls become 'delinquent' (*kuba ikirara*) either because they do not follow, or receive, advice. They consequently:

- become involved in sexual relationships with boys;
- get pregnant outside of marriage;
- contract STIs and HIV/AIDS;
- are abandoned by relatives who are ashamed of their association with them; and
- engage themselves in prostitution to earn a living.

In reality, as this chapter will show, girls' lives do not 'play out' according to one of these narratives. Neither do these narratives paint a true picture of the emotional rationale driving the decisions they make, the opportunities available to them and the constraints facing them. Life for girls in Rwanda is full of tensions and contradictions in terms of what is expected of them by their families, communities and wider society; what they want themselves; and way they negotiate and shape pathways available to them. Girls overcome many obstacles to fulfil societal and personal expectations. They seek to conform to the socially and culturally accepted narrative of girlhood but are not passive recipients of this. Rather, they make rational choices that do not consistently conform to either mainstream expectations or to discourses promoted by international development agencies. Understanding what drives girls' behaviours, especially when the behaviour goes 'against the grain' of accepted narratives, is important to ensure interventions are meaningful to girls and will be accepted by them.

**The seven pillars**

The sections below present an analysis of the findings according to Girl Hub's seven pillars. They explore how Girl Hub's goals compare and contrast with the goals girls have for their own lives, the drivers behind these goals and the factors affecting their ability to achieve them. Findings are presented in relation to the barriers and triggers for girls' behaviour in terms of their emotional rationale and practical realities including:

- the differences between what girls can do and want to do in terms of their agency to both make and enact decisions about their lives; and
- the social and cultural contexts which influence – in both positive and negative ways – girls' abilities to make and enact decisions about their lives.

Whilst girls identified with the seven pillars, they often conceptualised them differently and had different goals in mind for each pillar compared to those presented by Girl Hub. Since our research was concerned with understanding girls' perspectives, these are listed alongside Girl Hub's goals in Table 1. It is important for Girl Hub to consider these differences when designing interventions to ensure that these are meaningful to girls themselves and take account of the barriers and triggers to their behaviour.

*Table 1: Comparing & contrasting Girl Hub goals and girls' goals*

Pillar	Girl Hub Goal	Girls' Goals
Girlhood	I enjoy being a girl	I want more control over my life
School ( <i>amushuri</i> )	I want to finish secondary school, and I can	I want to finish school, and I can
Marriage ( <i>gushaka</i> )	I want to marry later, and I can	I want to choose who I marry
Pregnancy ( <i>gufatwa</i> )	I want to have babies later, and I can	I want to have babies once I am married
Health ( <i>ubuzima/amagara</i> )	I want to look after my own health, and I can	I want to be more informed about my health to address problems better
Money ( <i>amafaranga</i> )	I want to look after my own money, and I can	I want to be 'self-sufficient' ( <i>kuba wishobye</i> )
Ambition	I can do what I want with my life	I want to succeed in life

## **Pillar 1: Girlhood**

Girl Hub's goal for pillar 1 is: 'I enjoy being a girl'. Girls explained that the extent to which a girl enjoys being a girl depends on 'how she is living' but felt that enjoyment as a girl is connected with things which allow a girl to conform to culturally and socially accepted narratives of girlhood including:

- going to school;
- having a good relationship with your parents;
- looking after your body;
- following advice;
- being treated equally with boys; and
- having access to money, education and advice which, together, make the achievement of goals possible.

However, girls overwhelmingly felt that, as a girl, life is '**out of your control**', '**unpredictable**' and that '**anything can happen**'. Rather than the goal of enjoying being a girl, girls' discussions about girlhood were dominated by a strong sense of wanting more control, decision-making power and choice over many areas of their lives including marriage and negotiating sexual relationships with boyfriends and sugar daddies. There are a number of factors that influence the extent to which a girl feels in control of her life. These relate to the different aspects of girls' lives, discussed in pillars 2-7 below, and have a direct impact on her ability to get value. This section touches on a few of these, listed below.

Some mothers don't want them [girls] to go to school because they want them to stay home and help with the house chores.

*Woman, Gitarama*

**Parents:** Parents often make decisions about who a girl marries and whether she should remain in school or stay at home to help with domestic work. This impacts on whether girls are valued. If they drop out of school at parents' requests, they gain value from parents but this often conflicts with their own desire to continue at school.

**Deception by men:** Girls feel deceived in the context of their relationships with men. Sugar daddies tempt them into sexual relationships by offering gifts of clothes, jewellery and cosmetics. However, they also provide money for school fees and family necessities. Because girls need these items, they feel they cannot say 'no' to demands for sex, nor ask men to use protection. Sexual encounters with sugar daddies can result in a 'chain reaction' in which girls feel more likely to suffer negative consequences from these relationships and lose value in the process. These consequences include: getting pregnant out of marriage and being unsupported by the baby's father; being rejected by family members; being out of the 'marriage market'; and being exposed to sexually transmitted infections (including HIV/AIDS).

**Inequalities with boys:** Girls feel they have fewer opportunities to succeed in life than boys, for example, in terms of education and getting jobs. Having domestic responsibilities, in contrast to boys who were able to play and study, is perceived to be a key barrier to having more control over life because it prevents girls from getting an education which puts them in a better position to earn their own money through business or having a job, rather than depending on men.

**Lack of knowledge:** Girls associate a lack of knowledge about health issues with an inability to have control over life because it means they are not equipped with information that can enable them to make decisions. For example, girls feel uninformed about their sexual and reproductive health which reduces their capacity take greater control over sexual relationships. In addition, not understanding how to apply knowledge and skills gained at school to jobs and in business, is a barrier which prevents

girls from having more control over decisions about what to do when finishing school, which in turn causes them to get married earlier to gain financial security.

**Lack of self-confidence:** Girls stated that they lack self-confidence, especially compared to boys. This restricts their abilities to have control over life because it inhibits them from performing well in school, or in terms of exerting more control in the context of their relationships with boys.

**Practical implications.** Enjoyment for girls is essentially connected to addressing the barriers they face in relation to their goals for other pillars. The barriers girls face in having more control over their lives poses important dilemmas for the success of programming and communications (e.g. not impacting detrimentally on a girl's ability to gain value from parents by encouraging her to continue with school. The practical realities of girls, in which they secure money for school fees, family needs and material items through risky relationships with sugar daddies, have implications for programming and communications around the pillars. For example, enabling girls to become self-sufficient (pillar 6) will empower girls in the long-term by allowing them greater control over income-generation, meaning they can meet financial needs and retain value.

## ***Pillar 2: School***

Girls described school as **'the foundation of life'** and cited **'not going to school' as one of the worst things about being a girl**. Girls felt that getting an education was important and widely expressed a desire to finish school, irrespective of age or background. For girls 'in' school, their goal was to finish school and get a job, whilst for those 'out' of school, their goal was either to return to school or to succeed in business.

There are a number of reasons why girls believe education is important and want to finish school. School is considered as a source of valuable knowledge and skills that equip a girl for dealing with life situations so she 'doesn't get stranded' and can negotiate the various challenges of adolescence. However, for many girls, going to school is not related directly to gathering knowledge and skills. Rather, acquiring knowledge and skills is a pathway to 'the good life'. Girls believe that completing school and if possible going to the university can lead to getting a better job, enable to run more profitable business and can lead to marriage with a boy who is educated and wealthy.

Girls' recognise that opportunities for them to attend and succeed in school are improving. For example, in national exams, pass marks for girls are set lower than for boys to make it easier for them to continue with school; girls who get pregnant are now able to continue attending school; and basic education is free for boys and girls up to Grade 6. However, girls continue to face a number of barriers in relation to attending school, and capitalising on their education. These are outlined below:

**Attitudes of parents:** Attitudes of parents are a reason for girls dropping out of school, a barrier to girls returning to school and a cause of girls not capitalising on education:

- Parents value girls learning and helping with domestic chores as opposed to attending school.
- When money is tight, parents prefer to send boys to school because their education and job will support the entire family, whilst girls will marry and leave the family.
- Girls' household responsibilities interfere with homework, getting to school on time and staying in school each day. Girls feel disproportionately burdened with household chores compared to boys who are viewed as more intelligent and can spend time doing homework and playing rather than housework.

- Parents believe girls are less likely to complete their education because they will get pregnant or married before they finish school.

**Pregnancy and marriage:** Although girls can officially continue attending school if they fall pregnant, many feel unable to because pregnant girls experience:

- New responsibilities including earning money to support their child, especially where support from the baby's father is not forthcoming.
- Changes in peer groups that make them both unable and reluctant to spend time at school because they feel ostracised and excluded from friendship groups. This is both because they are encouraged to spend more time at home and with other pregnant girls, married women and mothers; and because other parents do not want their daughters associating with an unmarried pregnant girl.

**Poverty, and lack of school fees:** Girls feel boys' education is more valued and they are disproportionately affected when income is tight. Though primary education is free in Rwanda, after primary school, points are required to graduate to grades 7, 8 and 9. Girls often fail to achieve the required points because household responsibilities detrimentally affect their performance in school. Unable to get a place in government schools and unable to afford fees charged by private schools, they drop out.

**Inadequate sanitation & knowledge about hygiene:** Girls frequently miss school during menstruation to avoid the shame they associate with this experience. This is compounded by inadequate sanitation facilities at schools and not knowing how to look after their bodies during menstruation.

**Lack of confidence:** Girls experience a lack of confidence in their educational abilities, describing themselves as 'weak in the mind' or 'lacking capacity'. Not being clever leads to teasing and feeling inadequate, resulting in a decision to drop out. Even when older girls return to school, they frequently feel ashamed because they are forced to attend classes with much younger girls.

**Delinquency:** Delinquency, indiscipline, getting involved with boys, and 'wanting too much too quickly' were viewed as reasons why girls do not attend, finish or return to school. Girls who were in school often cited laziness and unwillingness on the part of 'out' of school girls as reasons for dropping out. Such attitudes were strongly associated with becoming involved with boys, who are considered a source of distraction, and a desire to earn money. Girls who become engaged in such behaviours lose value, because they do not conform to social and cultural expectations that bring respect.

## Case Studies

**Maria:** *Maria, 23yrs, from Bugesera dropped out of school in Senior 2. She decided to return to Ruhuha School and entered a Senior 2 class. However, she quickly found the experience difficult because her teacher was a woman with whom she had attended primary school many years before. As Maria's sense of shame in being taught by a childhood classmate grew, she became increasingly uncomfortable at school. Eventually she decided to drop out of school again.*

**Florine,** *16yrs from Bugesera, explained that now she loves school and she is fifth in her class but it was not always like this. She dropped out of school a few years ago because of 'delinquency', as she called it – she was not interested in learning and got lazy about going to school. Her younger sister then passed her by moving into a grade above where Florine had been before she dropped out. Florine got jealous of her sister's achievements and became determined to go back to school and*

*compete with her sister. She says “now we have a rivalry”. Florine is ahead in the class at the moment and she is very proud to be back in school.*

**Practical implications.** The barriers facing girls in terms of going to school, finishing school and capitalising on their education pose several important dilemmas for programming and communications because the reasons why girls drop out of school include following the advice of parents, through which girls gain value. Communications should be careful not to inadvertently reinforce negative stereotypes in which girls who are uneducated or do not attend school are perceived to lack value.

### ***Pillar 3: Marriage***

Girl Hub’s goal for this pillar relates to enabling girls to get married later: ‘I want to marry later, and I can’. Girls’ goal was: ‘I want to choose who I marry’. These goals are overlapping in the sense that they both acknowledge the importance of marriage in girls’ lives. However, in Girl Hub’s goal there is an assumption that girls want to marry later which is not present in girls’ own goal. Social and cultural expectations placed on girls to get married are strong and girls, almost without exception, embrace these expectations, claiming that it is impossible to conceive of a future that does not include marriage.

Girls are not especially concerned about their biological age at the time of marriage and did not express a strong desire to get married later. Rather, they want more control over decisions about who they marry. Girls’ reasons for wanting to get married were focussed around the value that being married gives to a girl and include:

- Having children and the expectation to have children within marriage.
- Being financially supported. Not having a job after secondary school, not being able to afford essential items, nor earn enough money to be self-sufficient means marriage is an attractive option. Having a husband was sometimes a deliberate strategy for getting school fees paid.
- Escaping from unhappiness and being emotionally supported and advised by someone close.
- Gaining the respect of family members and the wider community, connected to dominant social and cultural norms which dictate that parents should give daughters away respectfully by arranging their marriage to a suitable man.
- Being in love. Although girls disagreed about the extent to which love and financial support were connected, the concept of romantic love was present among girls. Girls related stories in which girls and boys had fallen in love and eloped together, against the wishes of parents or were passionate about their relationships, being ‘so, so hot that they fell in love’. Girls also described how it felt to be in love with a boy, in terms of feeling happy and being distracted from everyday life, such as in school and doing chores. Girls contrasted the love they could feel for boyfriends and husbands to feelings about sugar daddies who are ‘*mukuru mukuru mukuru*’ (much older). By contrast, boyfriends were described as ‘on the same level’ as girls and, therefore, as having marriage potential.

The barriers associated with a girls’ ability to make choices about marriage are important to understand in terms of thinking about how Girl Hub and girls’ goals can become more aligned. They include:

**Parents:** Parents are a key barrier to girls’ decision-making power about marriage because they want girls to marry boys from families of which they approve. This usually means families from the same ethnic group, who are respectable, and able to financially support their daughter.

**Pregnancy out of marriage:** Girls who get pregnant outside of marriage often feel they have no choice but to marry the father of their child. They are frequently forced into doing so by parents who instruct them to 'go and find the one who impregnated you' rather than burdening the family for support. Girls who are unable to marry the father of their child seek to earn their own money through petty business or prostitution, or have abortions. In addition, they often find their opportunities for getting married to a person of their choice are limited because they have lost value due to the stigma associated with having sex outside of marriage. Despite these barriers, girls initiate and negotiate relationships with boys, organise their own marriages without parents' permission and rebel against the decisions made by parents about marriage, despite serious consequences and the implications for losing value.

**Practical implications.** Girls' reasons for getting married often lie in complete contradiction to the goal outlined by Girl Hub that specifies the idea of getting married later. The differences here (girls' reasoning may often be hidden from public conversation) have important implications for the success of interventions in terms of girls buying into what Girl Hub is trying to achieve. The contradictions and tensions surrounding the concept of value and how it is applied in the context of girls' relationships and marital choices is important to consider for programming and communications. Messaging around marriage, if it is to be directed towards girls' goal, should avoid encouraging association between choice about marriage and the notion of losing value. Messages that encourage girls to 'wait until you are sure' would achieve Girl Hub's goal for later marriage and address girls' own desires for more choice over marriage whilst avoiding suggestions that choice equals losing value. An integrated approach making links between pillars is required. The root causes for girls becoming pregnant outside marriage are linked to pillars 5 (health) and 6 (money): girls' lack of knowledge about sexual health issues is a key reason for being unable to safely negotiate sexual relationships; girls' dependency on sugar daddies for money, in the absence of being self-sufficient, impacts on their ability to make choices about initiating sexual relationships which impact on marriage opportunities.

#### ***Pillar 4: Pregnancy***

Girl Hub's goal for pillar 4 is: 'I want to have babies later, and I can'. Like the pillar on marriage, the assumption here is that girls want to, and should, have children later in life. Girls' own goal for this pillar was: 'I want to have babies in marriage', reflecting that girls are primarily concerned with ensuring they have babies within marriage. Whilst this often coincides with having babies at an older age, it is the fact of being married that is important to girls rather than age *per se*.

When girls talk about 'early pregnancy', they use this term to refer to a pregnancy that occurs outside marriage rather than of a married girl who got pregnant at a young age. For example, girls in Kigali explained that for the Abanyamurenge (a pastoralist ethnic group in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo) it was 'okay' for girls to have babies when they were young because they usually get married at an early age. Girls' reasons for wanting to get pregnant within marriage are essentially connected to:

- Keeping value. Pregnancy outside marriage results in a girl losing value, though with different intensity depending on factors such as where a girl lives and her age. For example, in Bugesera, it is especially taboo for a girl to become pregnant outside of marriage compared to in Kigali where it is frowned upon but often accepted as 'part and parcel' of daily life. There was some disagreement over whether it is worse for younger or older girls to get pregnant out of marriage. If a young girl gets pregnant, people will either blame the parents or assume she has been raped so she will be relinquished from responsibility for the pregnancy and not lose so much value, but if an older girl gets pregnant, people will think she 'should have known better' and she will be more shamed by her 'mistake', losing more value as a result.
- Changes in relationships and job prospects. As explained above, once pregnant, the relationship of the girl with her family members and peers changes dramatically and so does her prospects of getting a better education and job.

Despite a strong desire to have babies within the context of marriage, girls often struggle to achieve this for several reasons:

**Peer pressure.** Girls stated that they experience considerable pressure from friends to have boyfriends and begin sexual relationships. In turn, they are pressured for sex from boyfriends and sugar daddies and feel unable to control these encounters either in terms of saying 'no' or ensuring that boys use protection. Girls described this as 'being deceived' because they feel obliged to have

sex with boyfriends and sugar daddies who give them gifts and money. Some girls believed that pressure to have sex was more keenly felt by girls who were in school, who were 'more exposed to boys', available to spend time with them and who both wanted and needed the material items a boyfriend or sugar daddy could provide in order to 'keep up' with friends. They compared this to girls who were out of school, for whom getting a boyfriend is 'a golden chance'.

**Desire:** Girls said that they wanted to have sexual relationships even if this means engaging in sex outside of marriage and in spite of the risks of getting pregnant.

**Parents:** Parents can be instrumental in encouraging girls to have relationships with boyfriends and sugar daddies in an attempt to secure financial support, which leads to girls becoming pregnant outside marriage. This behaviour by parents is often defended by girls themselves because they recognise it fulfils their expectations, for example, for school fees and to support parents.

**Proving fertility:** Being fertile gives a girl value because she is able to fulfil social and cultural expectations around giving birth and raising a family. Consequently, girls feel pressurised by boyfriends to prove they are fertile or feel that by demonstrating this, boyfriends will be encouraged to marry them.

## Case Study

*Louise used to live in Nyamirambo in Kigali. She was forced to marry Innocent, the son of a rich family friend despite the fact she was in love with a poor boy, Fidele, from her neighbourhood. Despite her marriage to Innocent, she continued to spending time with Fidele and eventually fell pregnant. Unhappy with Innocent, unsure whose baby she was carrying, and having lost value from her parents, Louise planned with Fidele to run away. They eventually eloped together and are now living in Tanzania. Louise is no longer recognised as one of the family by her parents and cannot come home to see them.*

**Practical implications.** The concept of value is an important lens for understanding the impact early pregnancy has on a girl's life, especially in terms of her opportunities in the context of other pillars (marriage and school). Addressing the overlaps between these pillars will require some careful messaging which strikes a balance between encouraging behaviour which enhances a girl's access to value but does not widen divisions between girls who are more or less able to act on information about later pregnancy. Early pregnancy can be responsible for setting up stigmas between girls that can have a detrimental effect on the "girl effect". Communications will need to focus on breaking down barriers between girls and avoid widening assumptions about girls who become pregnant being on 'a different level'. The tensions girls experience in the context of their relationships with sugar daddies also raise dilemmas for communications and programming aimed at encouraging later pregnancy and pregnancy within marriage. For example, creating messaging which emphasises the value a girl gains from having babies within marriage, whilst recognising the necessary role risky sexual relationships play in enabling girls to get things they need. Finally, cultural and social pressures on girls to prove their fertility pose challenges for interventions aimed at delaying pregnancy in terms of not exacerbating assumptions that girls who do not marry or produce children early are more likely to be infertile.

## Pillar 5: Health

Girl Hub's goal for this pillar, 'I want to look after my own health, and I can', involves attention to both knowledge and action in terms of empowering girls to manage their health. Likewise, girls' own goal

reflects a desire to deal with health issues better. Girls are already involved in actions through which they look after their health. However, they feel ill equipped to address health issues.

In particular, girls want to be informed about issues concerning sexual and reproductive health, including hygiene. They asserted that this becomes increasingly important during adolescence. Therefore, they want to receive information and education about sexual reproductive health earlier with many claiming that receiving information in school at the age of 12 years is too late. This is because some girls start menstruating periods before this age and do not know what to do or do not know how to negotiate pressure from sugar daddies.

A variety of factors are influential in determining the extent to which a girl is able to become informed about health. These include:

**Nature of relationship with parents:** Adults indicated that parents have a responsibility to educate their daughters about health issues including sexual and reproductive health. Despite this, few girls felt that parents were forthcoming with advice and argued that fathers, in particular, rarely discuss health issues with them. Whilst some girls felt able to talk to their mothers about changes in their bodies and menstruation, many felt it was impossible to seek advice about sex and sexual relationships because parents would view them as promiscuous and 'badly behaved'. Girls were quick to assert that 'it depends on the parents' but overwhelmingly felt that certain topics were off the agenda as far as parents were concerned.

Despite this, girls have strategies for encouraging parents to discuss sexual and reproductive health issues with them. For example, they will start conversations using other girls as examples to find out what parents think about health issues, especially sex and relationships, and persuade them to offer advice.

**Relationships with other adults:** Having access to people in the wider community with whom girls felt comfortable talking about health issues is a second factor affecting the extent to which girls are informed about health. Girls frequently asserted that Community Health Advisors are 'not approachable' because they are family friends and neighbours who 'might tell your parents', and are nearly always women who 'have too many words'. Perhaps surprisingly, girls expressed a desire to have more male adults with whom they can discuss health, including sexual and reproductive health, on the basis that men are usually more discreet than women.

**School attendance:** A girl's level of education and whether she attends school impacts on her ability to become informed about health. Girls identify school with learning about sexual and reproductive health issues and feel that those who are 'out' of school have fewer opportunities to become knowledgeable about looking after their bodies properly.

**Myths:** Myths and misinformation, for example, that having sex will solve girls' problems of pain during menstruation or improve girls' skin condition, means that girls are not well informed about health issues. Misinformation comes from various sources including friends and boyfriends and girls stated that they are often forced to sift through scanty information and make decisions about what is accurate.

**Consequences of seeking information:** Finally, girls are reluctant to seek information about health because of the negative consequences of doing so. For example, if a girl has an abortion, and subsequently develops reproductive health problems, she might refuse to see a doctor because he could discover evidence of her abortion and bring it as a criminal case.

**Practical implications.** Girls get value by looking after, and having respect for, their bodies. However, their ability to do so is impacted by their ability to be informed about health issues. The barriers outlined here demonstrate that seeking information is challenging. Simply asking parents or even health professionals about sexual and reproductive health issues can have detrimental impacts on a girl's ability to retain value because asking is associated with 'bad behaviour' in which girls are viewed as promiscuous and disrespectful. This raises important dilemmas for communications and interventions aimed at enhancing girls' access to health information. In particular, a careful balance must be struck between equipping girls with knowledge about health issues whilst allowing them to keep value.

### ***Pillar 6: Money***

Money is important to girls. During research, a couple of phrases were constantly used by girls: '*nta mafaranga nta buzima!*' - 'no money, no life!' and 'money is important to girls because it solves all her problems'. Girl Hub's goal for pillar 6 is: 'I want to look after my own money, and I can'. Girls' goal aligns closely with this. Whilst girls already look after their own money, they want to enhance their access to money and ensure this comes from sources that enable them to be self-sufficient and have value. Self-sufficiency is a concept used by girls to refer to being able to financially provide for themselves and their dependents rather than being dependent on others, such as men.

The concept of self-sufficiency is closely related to the notion of financial independence but the two are not the same.<sup>4</sup> Self-sufficiency is a relational concept whilst financial independence implies individuality. Girls do not want to provide solely for their own needs. Rather, they aspire to providing for the needs of people who depend on them, for example parents, younger siblings and their children. Self-sufficiency is also something girls aspire to on a family level, in that they want their families to be

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<sup>4</sup> The Kinyarwanda term for 'independence' was only used twice by girls during all our workshops and mentoring meetings - and never in connection with money. By contrast self-sufficiency or *kuba wishoboye* was used by girls and was a key goal.

able to provide for their needs without having to rely on external support. Whilst girls get money from various sources including parents, friends, boyfriends, sugar daddies, and by earning it themselves through petty business (e.g. selling goods in the market), labouring (e.g. digging, construction and farming) and prostitution, being self-sufficient means earning your own money. Girls already source and manage money, asserting regularly that 'when you get money, you know how to use it' but feel they do not have access to money which enables them to be self-sufficient. Being self-sufficient is important to girls for reasons that relate to having value.

Girls have different perspectives about why they need money. Some of these are discussed here:

- To buy things they need. Girls feel that older girls have greater needs (e.g. sanitary pads, body lotion, etc) compared to younger girls. Similarly, 'in' school girls were believed to have greater needs than 'out' of school girls because of peer pressure to be fashionable.
- If they have money they won't be deceived by men.
- To support parents and siblings, thereby fulfilling social and cultural expectations related to supporting family members.
- To increase opportunities to get married and be respected by a husband who will consider a girl's ability to earn money.
- To increase self-confidence by being raised to a 'higher level' and commanding respect and value from others. When a girl has money she becomes a person of importance, a person who is *ukomaye* (strong).

However, the value attributed to a girl who has money is dependent both on the source of her money and the way she behaves once she has money. For example, if a girl gets money from parents or by earning it from 'honest' work, it can give her value. If she gets money from prostitution or sugar daddies she can lose value, unless she uses it to support family members or to 'better herself', which can gain her the respect of others. On the contrary, girls can lose value if they behave arrogantly once they have money, and do not use it to better themselves or their families. Girls face a number of barriers to becoming self-sufficient. By exploring these barriers, this section provides insights into girls' perspectives to help Girl Hub consider changes in direction in terms of their goals, as well as implications for programming and communications so that these are aligned more closely with the concepts girls use to talk about money. Some of these barriers are:

**Lack of parental financial advice:** Having advice and practical support in sourcing and managing money is important to enable girls to become self-sufficient. Advice comes from parents, usually mothers, relatives, or boyfriends. If advice is not available, girls believe they were more vulnerable to falling into 'bad behaviour' in terms of sourcing money from men in return for sex and spending it on unnecessary things, rather than saving it and using it to buy necessities, and support family members. Some girls emphasised the role parents play in preventing girls getting into 'bad behaviour' by providing 'start up' money which encourages a girl to source money through business rather than from men.

**Lack of education:** Girls cited a lack of education as a key barrier to becoming self-sufficient because it leads to 'not having a business mind' or not being able to get a good job. Consequently, education determines a girl's ability to earn her own money. Girls' tendency to perform less well in school or to drop out of school, especially in comparison to boys, was cited as a reason for them 'being weak' and having a lack of self-confidence which impacts on their ability to become self-sufficient. Despite this, other girls asserted that it is possible to get good jobs without an education and gave examples of girls who had dropped out of school and still made a lot of money.

**Saving and spending behaviours:** Girls' abilities to become self-sufficient are directly affected by their opportunities to save money so they can access to funds at times of particular need. A girl who has saved money is different to one who hasn't because 'if you get a problem, you can solve it'. The extent to which a girl is motivated to save her money is directly linked to the source of her money. Girls asserted that when they receive money from sugar daddies or boyfriends, they were more likely to 'just spend it' on clothes, cosmetics and jewellery. However, when girls receive money from parents or earn it themselves, for example through business or farming activities, they are more likely to save it so they could buy necessities each month.

There are different methods girls use to save their money though many of these are either difficult to access or simply not practical for long term saving. Some girls open bank accounts. Others use more informal saving mechanisms called '*tontine*' or '*kimina*', a savings group in which girls contribute a fixed amount of money at regular intervals (e.g. every day, week or month, depending on the *tontine*). Members then take it in turns to take the money each time they meet. However, girls often struggle to join these groups because the contribution sums are too high or because they cannot contribute on a regular basis due to the unpredictable nature of their income. Parents can also contribute to a *tontine* for their daughters as a way of saving money for them. Other methods for saving money include investing in a business or buying animals, such as goats, which reproduce and can be sold to generate profit.

**Practical implications.** Becoming self-sufficient is a key trigger for enabling girls to realise a number of their goals for the pillars. For example, being self-sufficient can give a girl greater choice over marriage enabling her to avoid behaviours which result in early marriage; and give her greater control over sexual relationships by reducing her need for dependency on sugar daddies which can result in early pregnancy. Given that becoming self-sufficient is such an important driver for girls' attitudes, for example encouraging them to stay in school longer to enhance opportunities for getting a job or succeeding in business, communications for this pillar should emphasise the notion of self-sufficiency and consider these relationships to the other pillars. In particular, communications and interventions here should utilise the concept of self-sufficiency to promote the idea that girls can have greater control over their lives by becoming self-sufficient.

### ***Pillar 7: Ambition***

Girl Hub's goal for this pillar, 'I can do anything I want', closely resembles girls' own goal, 'I want to succeed in life'. Having ambitions is important to girls. They frequently discussed wanting a 'brighter future', 'succeeding in life' and feeling like they are 'able to do anything'. Girls were specific, however, that ambition is inherently connected with aiming 'for a higher level' and requires being self-sufficient which, in turn, comes through education and succeeding in business.

Girls expressed strong frustration about not having the same opportunities as boys. Running parallel to this was an acute awareness that gender equality was an important political agenda and that girls are increasingly 'promoted'. Girls frequently referred to the work the government are doing to ensure all girls go to school and are treated equally to boys. Girls spoke of how they can 'play an important role in the development of the country' and had strong ideas about what a 'promoted girl' looked like. However, a gap exists between the agenda of 'girl promotion', present in the media, politics and discussed amongst girls themselves, and the practical realities of girls. Success and 'promotion' are viewed as things girls have to struggle for, compared with boys, who are believed to be automatically successful and 'promoted' by virtue of their gender. Consequently, girls are heavily influenced by gender equality and empowerment discourses and this is reflected in their goal for this pillar. A few

things were viewed as necessary for achieving ambitions and succeeding in life. In a sense, these are the current barriers:

**Money:** Girls consider money to be a requirement for success, as discussed in pillar 6, but have vastly different opportunities for accessing money depending on their educational and business abilities.

**Advice:** Girls argued that they need advice to ensure they are 'focused' on achieving their goals, have 'steps to reach a target', and 'avoid things that can make you lag behind such as sex and not respecting your body'. Receiving advice also involves having good role models who can provide encouragement and motivation. A role model can be 'anyone who does good things', a person who behaves well' and is 'chosen by parents'.

**Self-confidence:** Many girls attribute their lack of self-confidence to a belief that they were not able to be as successful in life as boys. Being treated differently to boys, for example at home, was a source of huge frustration. Girls asserted that, to develop self-confidence, they need advice and encouragement from parents and role models who they can relate to. For example, girls suggested that to 'get inspiration' they often identify a person in their community who is 'doing the things they want to do' and use them as an example to follow.

**Education:** Lack of education is viewed as a barrier to succeeding in life. This is because education can increase opportunities to earn money and become self-sufficient because they will be more able to find a job or be successful in business.

**Practical implications.** The barriers girls face in this pillar overlap considerably with those identified in pillars 1-6 because success for girls is inherently connected with achieving the goals they identified for other pillars. Being successful in ways that align with social and cultural norms and values, for example becoming self-sufficient, having a good job or successful business, and making a good marriage, also gives a girl value. Communications and interventions should, therefore, be directed towards enhancing girls' beliefs in, and abilities for, achieving success in life, rather than simply making them feel they can do 'anything'. In addition, messaging aimed at tackling the barriers identified in the other pillars will be crucial for addressing this pillar given their cross-cutting nature.

## **Additional themes**

This section provides recommendations for reshaping and refocusing the seven pillars so they better reflect girls' own perspectives of their lives. This would enable the development of communications and programming around the pillars which engage with girls in more meaningful and relevant ways. The following sections outline four key issues which are important to girls but not dealt with either explicitly or sufficiently in the seven pillars as they are currently organised:

### ***Income generation***

Girls expressed a strong desire to become self-sufficient. Earning an income is viewed as essential to being self-sufficient because it decreases a girl's potential to be deceived by men. A girl who is self-sufficient has value, is both respected and feared by men, and has no need to be tempted by material gifts from men that are offered in return for sex. Whilst getting an education is one pathway towards securing a job or becoming successful in business, girls who drop out of school can also provide for themselves and their families through farming or petty business activities, and gain value through these activities. Girls perceive education and income generation as separate and mutually exclusive. This is because even where girls have finished school, the lack of careers advice and available jobs

frequently lead to financial dependence on sugar daddies or getting married to secure the support of a husband.

**Practical implications.** Girl Hub should ensure pillars 2 (school) and 6 (money) include explicit attention to communications and programming which address the need for careers advice for girls and the creation of income generation opportunities which enable a girl to become self-sufficient. Drawing on the concept of value as a lens for understanding the role income-generation can play in a girl's life will be helpful for ensuring such communications and interventions are aligned closely with girls' own perspectives of these issues.

### ***Abortion***

Abortion was emphasised to be an important issue for girls. Abortion is currently illegal in Rwanda. Despite this, girls who become pregnant outside of marriage often have abortions, enlisting the help of friends, parents and doctors to do so, because they:

- cannot secure the support of the baby's father;
- have been raped;
- want to avoid losing value through having a baby outside of marriage; and
- are persuaded by parents who want to avoid the shame an unwanted pregnancy brings on the family and to retain a daughter's eligibility for the 'marriage market'.

Methods for abortion include using traditional medicine and drinking medicines given by doctors which induce early labour (for example, medicines given to cows to bring on labour). Girls reported spending not less than 50,000 Rwf as a bribe to doctors who were known to help girls have abortions.

**Practical implications.** There are sensitivities and practical challenges associated with interventions which focus on abortion. Addressing it involves tackling broader problems associated with girls' losing value because they have babies outside of marriage. Using the concept of value and the implications of early pregnancy should be used for development of communications and programming which can raise the profile of, and support for, girls who get pregnant outside of marriage. This requires work with both girls and parents to ensure that the issue of losing value through early pregnancy is addressed from both directions.

### ***Relationships***

Whilst there are exclusive pillars on marriage and pregnancy, these do not sufficiently reflect the role relationships play in the lives of girls in Rwanda. Girls' discussions about their lives were dominated by accounts of their relationships with other people, especially boys and men, parents, and friends. In particular, girls were preoccupied with how they made decisions and actions in the contexts of these relationships, their feelings about them, and the ways in which relationships changed in response to their behaviours and different experiences. Girls initiate, negotiate and manage these relationships to get what they want from them. This, in turn, has an impact on their ability to get and keep value.

**Practical implications.** More attention should be focussed on three key relationships in girls' lives: their relationships with boys and men; parents; and friends. With regards to boys and men, communications and programming should recognise both the positive and necessary role boys and men play in girls' lives in terms of allowing them to address their needs for money, material items, school fees, advice, and sex. In the context of relationships with parents, messages should be directed towards improving communication between girls and parents by demonstrating the impact this can have on increasing a girl's value, which is a central issue of concern for both parents and

girls. For addressing girls' peer relationships communications and programming should be directed towards breaking down stigmas between girls attached to pregnancy outside marriage and school drop-out, which are closely associated with losing value. The methodological approach used in this research has shown how girls from contrasting backgrounds can work together, build friendships, open up channels of communication and break down barriers with adults and men. The effects of this can be very powerful and need to be harnessed to achieve the "girl effect".

## **Violence**

Violence was a prominent concern for girls and was selected as a topic for research by girl researchers. In particular, violence against girls in the home, often from parents, and rape, were prominent concerns. Violence in the home was most frequently associated with situations in which fathers, who were drinking heavily, beat their daughters, or where girls lived with step-parents. Whilst instances of physical violence almost always involved fathers or step-fathers, step-mothers were often cited as starting gossip or 'back biting' against girls to deliberately tarnish their reputation, for example by accusing her of being pregnant or a prostitute. This invariably led to physical punishment by fathers.

Rape was one of the themes discussed most by girl researchers during their interviews and workshops. According to girls, rape involves physical force and deception. It is most frequently perpetrated either by family members or family friends, or in a small number of cases, by boys with whom girls are in relationships. Most stories about rape involved girls being sent on errands by parents to a neighbour's home, finding a male neighbour at home alone and being forced to have sex. A culture of silence exists around rape because girls are too scared to report this to their parents for a number of reasons:

- feeling that people will not believe them or might think they had encouraged the rape to happen by their 'bad behaviour';
- because they are financially dependent on the person who had raped them;
- because they don't want to 'cause chaos in the family'; and
- because they are worried about losing value which, in turn, impacts on their opportunities to get married and be respected by community members.

## **Case studies**

*A woman in Bugesera left her young sister at home with her husband. Whilst she was out, her husband called her sister to his bedroom, asked her to lock the door and raped her. Eventually, the man was arrested and put in prison. However, the girl who was raped was sent away by her older sister who refused to believe that she had not been responsible for encouraging the rape to happen.*

*Marita in Bugesera talked about her daughter, Clarisse, who was raped by a neighbour when she was 14. Clarisse was raped at home whilst she was looking after the younger siblings whilst Marita went to the market. When Marita learned about the attack, they went to the hospital. Despite the shame a rape can bring to a family and the impact it can have on a girl's eligibility for marriage, Marita reported the rape to the police and the man is now serving a sentence in prison.*

**Practical implications.** Attention to violence requires a focus on both domestic violence and rape. Girls' experiences of domestic violence are connected with the way they are attributed value by parents and wider society. For addressing domestic violence, communications and interventions should be directed towards both parents and girls to ensure messaging is effective. Girls' experiences of rape are complex. Communications and interventions should avoid exacerbating beliefs amongst some girls and adults that girls who engage in 'bad behaviour' (identifiable by the way they dress and behave) encourage rape to happen to them. Addressing the culture of silence around rape

and domestic violence requires understanding and appreciating the role value plays in girls' lives, for example, the implications being raped has on causing a girl to lose value and the impacts that differential value attached to boys and girls in the home can have on how girls are treated by parents.

## **4. Creating the “girl effect”**

This chapter focuses on the positive impact the research approach had on girl researchers by discussing feedback from participatory evaluations and exploring the various ways it contributed directly to the “girl effect”. Involving girls as researchers had a direct impact in terms of building their capacities, knowledge and skills. It also built their confidence and opened channels of communication and opportunities to develop relationships that were not previously available to them. The following sections describe how the girl-led peer research approach contributed to the “girl effect”.

### **Opening channels of communication**

For girl researchers, channels of communication were opened up in two ways:

- By enabling them to hold conversations with people they would not normally talk to, such as adults and, in particular, adult men.
- By enabling them to hold conversations about issues they would not usually discuss. For example, the research encouraged girls to talk about sexual health, rape and abortion in detail with their peers and, in some cases, girl interviewees shared personal experiences of rape and abortion with their friends for the first time. Girl researchers also reported having conversations with adult men - including their fathers - about sensitive topics such as girls’ relationships with boyfriends and sugar daddies, and sexual and reproductive health.

### **Building confidence**

At the start of the process, girls were generally extremely shy, quiet and reluctant to contribute to discussions without considerable prompting and encouragement, and were inclined to agree with each other very quickly. However, by the beginning of analysis sessions, girls were more comfortable organising themselves, making decisions about the order of activities, and contributing to discussions freely and generally taking ownership of the research process. They also became more articulate and argumentative as their ability and confidence to question each other and put forward contrasting perspectives developed. The confidence girl researchers developed during their research activities had broader impacts in terms of the way they handled themselves in the wider community. For example, one girl researcher chose to interview an alcoholic community leader who she had always been very intimidated by. In deciding to interview him she wanted to overcome her fear of him.

### **Gaining knowledge and developing skills and abilities**

The research activities were an important source of knowledge for girl researchers because they were able to talk about issues that affected them and learn things from each other, and those they interviewed. During workshop sessions girls debated the research themes, argued with each other and shared their opinions and experiences. They often gathered new information about issues and problems in their lives and, especially during interviews with adults, received advice about how to handle them, such as sexual and reproductive health issues and relationships with boys and parents.

Girl researchers were interested in learning how to do research and actively sought to develop their skills and abilities during the course of the training, supported fieldwork and analysis stages. They were able to track their progress during mentoring sessions where they could address problems they faced during interviews and further develop their interviewing technique.

Girls also reported that their involvement in the research had allowed them to develop skills which were applicable to other areas of their lives, such as the learning how to handle themselves when talking to an adult. In particular, girls spoke about being able to ‘look adults in the eye’ and lead during conversations with them. Involvement in the research also made girls recognise skills they had which

were not usually recognised or acknowledged by others. For example, in Gitarama, one of the girl researchers had significantly lower literacy than other girls in the group. However, her recall abilities were much better and she was often able to report in great detail on her interviews despite not having made copious notes.

### **Expanding social networks**

Being involved in the research provided girl researchers with opportunities to expand their social networks in terms of the friendships they built with each other and others in their community, including adults and community leaders. Through their shared experiences of doing research, overcoming challenges together during fieldwork and supporting each other during problem-solving activities, strong friendships, of girls from often very different backgrounds, developed. For example, in Kigali one 'in' school girl developed a firm friendship with an 'out' of school housemaid who had very little confidence. Over the course of the training week, the two girls worked together and the housemaid gradually developed confidence as she was drawn into conversations and group activities. The two girls came from very different backgrounds and had deeply contrasting experiences but, despite this, formed a strong friendship, looking out for each other at the start of sessions and sitting together during breaks.

During their fieldwork, girl researchers also came into contact with people with whom they did not normally mix such as adult neighbours and community leaders, as well as other girls in their neighbourhoods. People were generally interested in knowing about the research and understanding more about the project girl researchers were engaged in. As a result, they found themselves speaking with a number of people beyond their immediate peer networks.

## 5. Recommendations: catalysing the “girl effect”

Practical implications of findings are discussed against each pillar in Chapter 3. This chapter outlines core principles that should underpin any effective communications and interventions if they are to engage meaningfully with girls themselves and to address ‘changing social norms, attitudes, and behaviours which can catalyse the “girl effect”’, as outlined in the brief. In Rwanda, catalysing the “girl effect” is essentially about enhancing girls’ opportunities to get, and keep, value. However, this is a complex process because girls can still give value to themselves even when their behaviours and attitudes go ‘against the grain’ of what is accepted, respected, and thus valued, by wider society. Such behaviours and actions are also often in contrast to the agendas for behaviour change which are being pursued by international development organisations. The key messages here were developed for Girl Hub alongside girl researchers during analysis sessions. They reflect core issues which cut across the pillars and which impact upon girls’ abilities to achieve their goals.

### Improve communication

In Kinyarwanda, the term *kugirwa inama* refers to ‘giving advice’. This term was used repeatedly by girl researchers and the people they interviewed, and is a central aspect of daily life for girls in Rwanda. Receiving and following advice is vital if girls are to have value, and be prevented from losing value. In fact, a lack of advice was cited by girls as one of the key reasons for ending up in ‘bad behaviour’. Not receiving or following advice was seen as responsible for tipping girls into a ‘chain reaction’ in which girls ‘get all the consequences’ from becoming involved with men including early pregnancy, dropping out of school, being out of the ‘marriage market’, unable to get a job, thrown out by parents who are shamed by the girls’ behaviour and ending up in prostitution.

Traditionally, girls were given advice from paternal aunties about issues during puberty and to prepare for marriage. However, girls asserted that this practice is not as strong as previously and nowadays girls seek and receive advice from a wide range of other sources. Current sources of advice include parents and other relatives, community leaders, teachers, friends and boyfriends and via social media including radio programmes such as *Urunana* (a radio programme which deals with issues such as relationships, sexual and reproductive health and school drop-out). However, social media of this kind came much further down a list of sources of advice and information than parents, teachers and friends.

Considering the importance of advice, girls feel strongly that advice about sex and relationships, sexual and reproductive health and hygiene is lacking. Girls’ relationships with parents change over the course of their lives and during adolescence they want to talk to parents about the changes in their bodies and their relationships with boys. However, they feel unable to seek advice because they worry that parents will think them promiscuous and not give them value. Girls wanted parents to make them ‘feel free’ rather than fearful, be listened to by parents and were keen to improve openness between girls and parents.

However, parents are not always viewed as appropriate sources of advice because they ‘don’t have good behaviour’, or are not around to ask for advice, for example, where girls’ parents have died or abandoned them, or where girls are working away from home. Being in receipt of bad advice from parents was raised by girls when they discussed how parents can encourage them to get boyfriends and sugar daddies because they know this will bring financial benefits to the home. Boyfriends and friends are also important sources of advice. In particular, these relationships enable girls to have important conversations about sex which they cannot have with parents during which they receive encouragement to stay away from ‘bad behaviour’.

**Practical implications.** Interventions must capitalise on the value girls place on receiving advice and ensure that opening up channels of communication to facilitate advice-giving is a key part of messages and programmes. Interventions can make use of existing sources of advice to ensure girls are informed about issues that affect them. This requires attention to the relationships girls have with parents, relatives, teachers, friends and boyfriends and careful messaging with both girls and parents to ensure communications do not alienate girls who get value by following advice which goes against what Girl Hub are trying to achieve.

## **Build self-confidence**

Self-confidence was a central theme running through all aspects of girls' lives but was discussed mainly in the context of their ambitions and plans for the future. Girls' cited a number of reasons why they lack confidence which included:

- Not being 'strong' enough, either mentally or physically, in comparison to boys.
- Not going to school and having the knowledge that comes with this.
- Some parents do not treat girls and boys equally, nor make concerted efforts to build girls' confidence but rather undermine their confidence by taking them out of school or telling them that they will not be able to get good jobs.
- Not being in receipt of advice from parents and other elders which results in not having confidence about how to behave..
- Not having good role models or motivation which can develop self-confidence.

To develop self-confidence, girls identified the following important forms of support:

- Learning from other people.
- Constant advice from parents and friends who are 'doing the things you want to do'.
- Equal treatment with boys in relation to school and job opportunities

**Practical implications.** Given that these related to all Girl Hub pillars, building girls' confidence in their abilities to achieve their goals should be considered a central part of communications and interventions. Messaging to increase self-confidence can be effectively attached to individual pillars and should draw on the fact that having self-confidence can give a girl value. The effects of such messaging would be broad in terms of enhancing girls' beliefs that they can take greater control over their lives, therefore, connecting will all the other pillars and especially pillars 1 (girlhood), 3 (marriage) and 5 (health).

## **Address inequalities**

Girls' feelings that they are given less value than boys permeated discussions about all aspects of their lives. They drew an important distinction between boys and girls, arguing that, whilst boys *have* value, girls have to *get* value. Girls' sense of being treated unequally with boys was present most strongly in discussions about education and work where they felt their opportunities to be successful at school and get jobs were vastly different to those of boys. Inequality was also raised during conversations about relationships with parents, domestic work, violence, ambitions and health. For example, girls described occasions where their health problems had not been taken seriously by parents whilst their brothers were taken to the hospital. At the same time, girls appeared to embrace widely held beliefs that they were less capable and intelligent than men, referring to themselves as 'weak' and as lacking in 'capacity'. For example, they suggested they are 'weak' in terms of their interactions with men, often agreeing to sex when they didn't want to, or allowing themselves to be deceived by tempting gifts from sugar daddies.

**Practical Implications.** Communications and programming would benefit from taking a different direction to current messaging around gender equality which encourages girls to draw comparisons between their abilities and opportunities, and those of boys. Rather than drawing further attention to, and exacerbating, these comparisons, interventions should focus on celebrating girls' value on its own merit. This would also ensure they are rooted in the concepts girls use to talk about their lives and which play a central role in their understanding of achieving success in life. Pillar 2 (school) would be a useful starting point for messaging around gender inequalities because it is an area in which girls felt especially impacted by the different opportunities afforded them compared to boys. Attention to inequalities in the context of education would have knock-on effects on other pillars, such pillar 6 (money) by addressing some of the barriers to girls' abilities to become self-sufficient.

## **Appendix 1: girl researchers**

This girl-led peer research was conducted by thirty girls in three research locations in Rwanda: the capital, Kigali, a town in Southern Province, Gitarama, and a rural district, Bugesera in Eastern Province.

### **Kigali**

Aurore Umubyeyi  
Hope Mutoni  
Aline Uwihirwe  
Patience Mugishakazi  
Christine Ingabire  
Claudine Narambe  
Marie Louise Dusengimana  
Samia Umurutasate  
Sife Ombeni  
Bahati Bahizire

### **Gitarama**

Neema Uwanyirigira  
Marlene Ndikuyeze Uwase  
Devotha Uwimbabazi  
Germaine Uwamurera  
Delphine Muterambabazi  
Floride Nyiramana  
Jeanne d'arc Uhawenimana  
Agnès Uwanbabyeyi  
Claudine Nyirabasoni  
Marie Chantal Tuyisenge

### **Bugesera Rural District**

Esperance Uzamukunda  
Christelle Ndindabahizi  
Annaïse Ndashimwe  
Claudine Umurungi  
Jeannette Ahishakye  
Beata Uwizeyimana  
Florence Tuyisenge  
Vincente Murekatete  
Alice Dusabimana  
Francoise Mwigeme

