

# Skills4Girls: Girl-Centered Skills Development

A Learning Agenda



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## BACKGROUND

The world today is home to an estimated 600 million adolescent girls (UN DESA 2019). These girls are our future leaders and change agents; however, globally, and particularly in developing countries, they are persistently and disproportionately excluded from critical education and skills-building opportunities (UNICEF 2020). This exclusion limits girls' opportunities, threatens their successful transition to adulthood, adversely impacts their long-term health and well-being, and robs the world of their potential contributions. Investment in skills-building initiatives is one critical pathway to building girls' and young women's self-confidence and resilience, increasing their access to opportunities, ensuring their equal participation in the labor force, and promoting their empowerment (UNICEF 2020). Ensuring that programs are tailored to meet girls' unique needs and that girls themselves fully participate in the design and implementation of such initiatives (an approach often referred to as girl-centered programming) are central principles to the efficacy and impact of these programs.

Despite the importance of skills development for girls, little is known

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GIRL-CENTERED SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020. In an effort to prevent the spread of the infection, many countries have taken prevention and response measures, resulting in the disruption to education systems and the economic sector; and in many countries, in the confinement of people to their homes. Community-based health and development programs significantly decreased their activities or have stopped operating altogether. An already vulnerable population, adolescent girls and young women have borne the brunt of the impact of this crisis (Plan 2020, Girls Not Brides 2020, Paruzzolo 2020, UNICEF 2020).

Since the start of the pandemic there has been a documented uptick in rates of domestic violence—girls are already at a higher risk of experiencing physical, emotional and sexual violence than both older women and their male peers. As seen with past crises such as the Ebola outbreak, girls may be less likely to return to school than their male peers, more likely to be forced into early marriage, and more likely to experience unplanned pregnancy—placing them at an even greater disadvantage. Girls who remain out of school will miss opportunities to build the skills needed to compete in today's labor market (UNICEF 2020).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, girls and young women accounted for 68% of the total population of youth ages 15–24 who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (UNICEF 2020) and evidence suggests that once a girl who is out of school becomes economically inactive, she is likely to remain in that status into adulthood, which could limit her chances of breaking the cycle of poverty for themselves and their families (ILO and UNICEF 2018). Crisis situations exacerbate existing education and economic gender inequalities. While the long-term economic impact of this crisis is still unknown, it is likely that gender disparities in pay and in the availability and type of work will widen.

The need for a girl-centered approach to skills development has never been as urgent. At the same time, many of the same resources that are necessary to build girls' skills are urgently needed to respond to this on-going global health emergency. In the immediate future, progress may occur more slowly than hoped, and approaches may need significant adaptation—however, it is critical that the need for a girl-centered approach to skills development remain a central focus of the global development agenda.

about what it means for a skills-building program to be “girl-centered,” or of the best practices for engaging girls in the implementation and design of skills-building programs. Furthermore, a consolidated definition and measures of empowerment in the context of skills-development is needed. Recognizing that girls are not a homogenous population, more evidence is also needed to inform which approaches are most successful for the various subpopulations of girls, and in which contexts. To address these evidence needs, FHI 360, in collaboration with UNICEF, conducted an exploratory review of the evidence describing the implementation and evaluation of skills-building initiatives for girls’ empowerment, with a specific focus on those that were girl-centered in their design and implementation. The findings of the review informed the framework for this learning agenda.

UNICEF has identified four categories of skills necessary for children and adolescents’ successful transition into adulthood. These include foundational skills, digital skills, transferable skills, and job-specific skills. Following are the UNICEF definitions for each skill category (UNICEF, 2019).



**Foundational skills:** Foundational skills, namely literacy and numeracy, are essential for further learning, productive employment and civic engagement.



**Transferable skills:** Also called “life skills,” “twenty-first-century skills,” “soft skills,” or “socio-emotional skills,” these allow young people to become agile learners and global citizens equipped to navigate personal, social, academic and economic challenges. Transferable skills also help crisis-affected young people cope with trauma and build resilience. They include problem-solving, negotiation, managing emotions, empathy and communication.



**Job-specific skills:** Also known as “technical” and “vocational” skills, these are associated with occupations – such as carpentry, accounting or engineering – and support the transition of older adolescents into the workforce.



**Digital skills:** Digital skills and knowledge support the development of digitally literate children, enabling them to use and understand technology, search for and manage information, create and share content, collaborate, communicate, build knowledge, and solve problems safely, critically and ethically. Our review focuses heavily on STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and math) skills building approaches given their promise for girls’ empowerment.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (**STEM**) education means educating students in four specific disciplines — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — in an interdisciplinary and applied approach. Through STEM education, students increase their understanding of how things work, improve their use of technologies (foundational skills and job-specific skills), and transferable/development skills such as problem solving, innovative thinking, adaptability, complex communication, team work, self-management, and systems thinking within the context of real-world problems. This approach to learning has enormous potential to transform gender norms in the classroom and in the workplace, since STEM educated girls and women gain the confidence, agency, and assets to question key issues in the world around them and propose solutions to solve such problems – thus changing the views of men and women in their communities about what girls are able to do and what they can aspire to (UNICEF, In Press).

## **THE CASE FOR A GIRL-CENTERED APPROACH**

Throughout their life-course, girls and young women experience a series of gendered risks and barriers that limit their opportunities. For example, factors such as poverty, gender-based violence, discrimination and unequal gender norms about girls' role in society contribute to the unacceptably high number of adolescent girls who are excluded from a formal secondary education globally (UNICEF 2020). Unequal access to education limits girls' opportunities to build their foundational and transferable skills. When girls are in school, gender bias from teachers, families, and male and female peers drive girls away from pursuing STEM subjects and from building the digital skills necessary to be competitive in a 21st century job market. Due to high levels of gender-based violence, girls are excluded from skills building opportunities simply because it is not safe for them to access. Gender norms about the type of work that is appropriate for men and women lead to inequalities in income and place girls and women at an economic disadvantage (ILO and UNICEF 2018; Ashburn 2010; Plourde 2012).

Globally, girls (especially those who are out-of-school) experience higher levels of social isolation than boys (Austrian 2010). This means that they have less peer and adult social support and fewer safety nets. Many girls lack access to female role models in their communities, to supportive female adults who are themselves empowered, enabled, and/or meaningfully employed, and to trusted adults to confide in, and to help them navigate the life challenges and roadblocks that prevent them from achieving their aspirations. As such, a future where they have and are able to apply the skills they need to earn an equitable income, become financially independent, start a business, or lead a community initiative, can seem unattainable to many girls.

Because of the gendered risks and barriers girls experience along their pathway toward adulthood, efforts to support girls to develop their skills will be ineffective if they do not also seek to build their self-efficacy to utilize them and minimize the risks that threaten their life trajectories. Girls must, first and foremost, have a physically and emotionally safe environment in which to learn. They must be able to see examples of other empowered females in their community so that they can begin to also imagine themselves as empowered adults. Girls need to know their opinions are valuable. Finally, girls must be provided opportunities to apply their skills in their communities.



## PURPOSE OF LEARNING AGENDA

This learning agenda presents a methodology that collates existing evidence and provides a common approach to:

- Advance girls' skills through intentional girl-centered program design, and
- Contribute to the evidence base for girl-centered skills development programs

The intended audience for the learning agenda is country programs designing, implementing, and supporting skills development.

Specifically, the learning agenda:

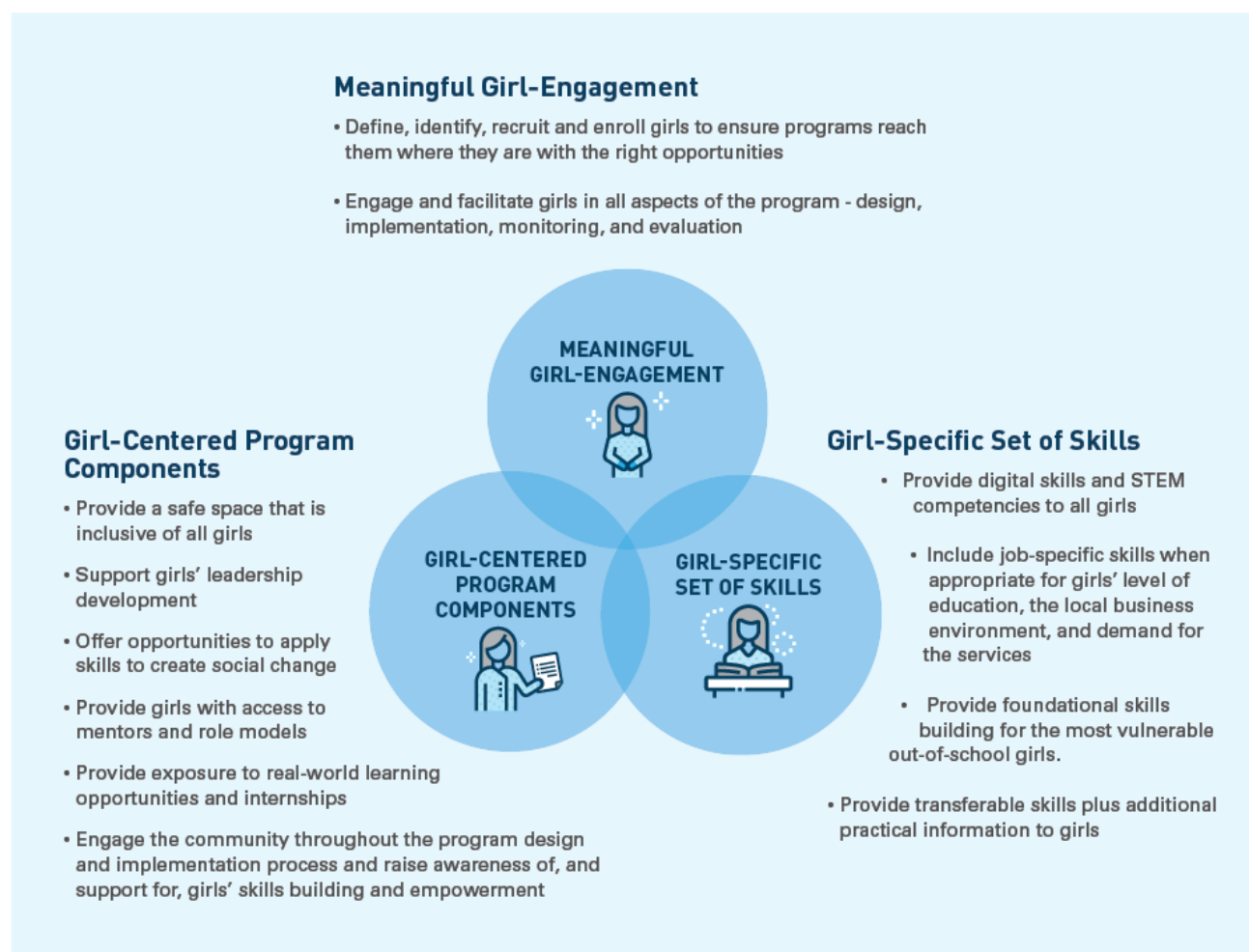
1. Presents a model for a girl-centered approach to skills development
2. Describes a way to apply the key elements of girls-centered skills development to program design
3. Identifies key learning themes in order to contribute to the evidence base for girl-centered skills development

The focus of this learning agenda is to support skills development programs to ensure that they are meeting the unique needs of girls. However, this is only one piece of a broader agenda to transform harmful gender norms and build a more gender equitable world. Gender equality requires the full participation of men and women, boys and girls, and people with different gender identities. We recognize the need to engage men and boys, not only in support of girls' and women's empowerment, but so that boys and men can be active participants in the transformation of patriarchal norms in many societies that serve to undermine social, political and economic development.

Furthermore, we recognize that investment in skills development initiatives is one critical pathway to building girls' and young women's self-confidence and resilience, increasing their access to opportunities, ensuring their equal participation in the labor force, and promoting their empowerment. This learning agenda recognizes the transformational activities of UNICEF and other UN agencies to build the health, social and economic assets of adolescent girls. This portfolio of work includes significant investments in preventing harmful traditional practices including child early and forced marriage and FGM, increasing girls' access to school, promoting life skills, and reducing adolescent pregnancy, among many others. The priority research areas (or themes) and illustrative associated research questions outlined in this document offer an opportunity to leverage existing investments across Skills4Girls countries and elsewhere to build a stronger evidence base for girl-centered skills development programs.

# 1. MODEL FOR A GIRL-CENTERED APPROACH TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The results from the Evidence Review (described in Annex 1) highlighted the following key elements for girl-centered approach to skills building: **meaningful girl-engagement, a girl-specific set of skills, girl-centered program components.**





## MEASURING EMPOWERMENT

The text box to the right includes UNICEF's current working definition of adolescent empowerment (UNICEF In Press). Across the youth and gender development literature, there are varying definitions of, and frameworks for, girls' and women's empowerment. Most definitions of empowerment recognize that it is not a static goal, but rather a process of individual transformation and shifting balance of power (UNFPA and UNICEF 2020; UNICEF 2020; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation).

### UNICEF WORKING DEFINITION OF ADOLESCENT EMPOWERMENT (UNICEF IN PRESS)

A personal journey during which an adolescent (age 10-19), through increased critical awareness and assets develops a clear and evolving understanding of themselves, their rights and opportunities in the world around them, and through increased agency, access, voice and participation, have the power to make personal and public choices for the improvement of their lives and their world.

UNICEF's definition of empowerment recognizes four key interlinked components: critical awareness, assets, agency, and voice/participation. Skills-building programs for girls are inherently an asset-building approach. However, building skills alone does not make an intervention an empowerment approach. For a program to be considered an empowerment program it must not only build assets but also seek to shift the balance of power, and increase individual agency, critical awareness, agency, voice and participation. Thus, measures of impact on empowerment for girl-centered skills development programs should incorporate the following four constructs: 1) Increased assets; 2) Increased levels of critical awareness; 3) Increased agency; and 4) Increased levels of voice and participation.

### ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS OF EMPOWERMENT INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

1. Illustrative indicators of **improved assets** utilized by programs identified through the evidence review include: improved skills, social networks, financial capital, self-esteem, and confidence (Decker 2018; Scales 2013).
2. Illustrative indicators of **increased critical awareness** utilized by programs identified through the evidence review include: increased awareness of rights for themselves, knowledge (and confidence) that girls can say no to marriage, awareness of major issues within girls' own countries and improved aspirations (Amin 2018; Echavez 2014; CEDPA 2001).
3. Illustrative indicators of **improved agency** utilized by programs identified through the evidence review include: changes in girls' mobility within the community and control over body (Bandiera 2018; Sambodhi Research Communications 2014; Austrian et al 2013; CEDPA 2001).
4. Few illustrative indicators of improved **voice/participation** were identified, though the evaluation of the Deepshikha project in India examined the program's impact on girls' participation in local politics (Sambodhi Research Communications 2014).

## 2. ADVANCING GIRLS' SKILLS THROUGH INTENTIONAL GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAM DESIGN: HOW TO APPLY THE KEY ELEMENTS OF GIRL-CENTERED SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The table below outlines recommendations on how to apply the key elements of a girl-centered approach to skills development. In addition, it provides illustrative interventions that can be incorporated into existing programs, questions for programs to ask in order to assess their alignment with the key elements, and illustrative monitoring indicators that can be used to track programs toward a girl-centered approach. More information about the evidence base for these recommendations can be found in Annex 1; practical tools and resources to support the implementation of the recommendations can be found in Annex 2.

MEANINGFUL GIRL-ENGAGEMENT				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
<b>Apply evidence-based and intentional approaches to defining, identifying, recruiting, and enrolling program participants to ensure that programs reach the right girls with the right opportunities</b>	The Biruh Tesfah (Bright Future) program in Ethiopia recruited girl domestic workers and migrant workers by going door-to-door in the community and directly meeting with girls' employers (Erulkar 2013). A STEM program in the United Arab Emirates reached girls from lower income expatriate families who do not have many options for a well-funded education by engaging with lower resourced schools to recruit girls and their parents to join the program (Khan 2017).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct participatory mapping activities with girls using evidence-based mapping tools to collect information about all girls in the community, identify which segments of the population would be best served by program activities, and develop appropriate recruitment strategies.</li> <li>• Partner with disabled persons organizations to recruit girls and mentors with disabilities, and to ensure that safe spaces are accessible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your program involve girls in determining which population of girls are targeted by activities and the best approaches to reach them?</li> <li>• Does your program have an existing and specific strategy to ensure the most vulnerable girls are being recruited?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of mapping activities conducted in collaboration with girls</li> <li>• % of program participants that fall into one or more category of vulnerability</li> </ul>

MEANINGFUL GIRL-ENGAGEMENT				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify who in the household or community determines girls' mobility and work with them to identify and recruit girls who are typically less visible.</li> <li>Use existing disaggregated data to understand girls needs.</li> </ul>		
<b>Meaningfully engage girls throughout the program design, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) processes.</b>	<p>The Feminist Approach to Technology's (FAT) program topics (STEM, technology access, feminist rights), are fixed, but there is no set curriculum. Girls make the decisions on what they want to learn and explore within the topics. A leadership initiative is also in place, including paid internships where adolescents and young women can work alongside the team and voice their decisions in regular operations as well as longer-term strategic planning for the program (FAT n.d.).</p> <p>The Anasoma project by Worldreader seeks to address the gender digital divide and empower women and girls by providing access to digital libraries of feminist literature. To ensure that the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold consultations with girls to determine their unique needs and vulnerabilities as well as their specific interests and skills development goals.</li> <li>Hold follow up consultations throughout program implementation to ensure program is meeting girls' needs and respecting their rights.</li> <li>Place girls at the center of the research process by supporting them to collect data, and to contribute to interpretation and analysis during the monitoring and evaluation processes.</li> <li>Follow strong practices for engaging girls throughout the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are girls currently involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of your program?</li> <li>How were girls involved in the process of identifying the specific skills provided by your program across the four-skills categories (digital, life-skills, foundational, and digital)?</li> <li>How are girls being engaged in determining what works and does not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># of interventions or activities that are designed or initiated by girls (Coalition for Adolescent Girls 2015)</li> <li>Existence of specified and sustainable budget lines for girl engagement processes (Coalition for Adolescent Girls 2015)</li> <li>% of girls who believe their input is valuable (Coalition for Adolescent Girls 2015)</li> <li># of consultation events hosted with girls to determine appropriate skills content</li> <li>% of program participants who report that they have</li> </ul>

MEANINGFUL GIRL-ENGAGEMENT				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
	program content and delivery approach are relevant to their audiences, Worldreader created a series of user profiles through interviews with current and potential mobile readers. This activity helped the project to understand barriers and facilitators to digital literacy for women and girls in Kenya from various age, educational, and income groups. The Worldreader team utilizes the user experience (UX) to further tailor activities to the needs of women and girls/. (Worldreader 2017).	program cycle <sup>1</sup> (Do no harm, strategic identification and recruitment of girls ,consider girls' needs, and value girls' contributions.)	<p>and how to adjust programs midway?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can girls provide feedback on the program's implementation (e.g. online feedback tools)?</li> </ul>	<p>opportunities to decide "what program activities they do and how they do them" (Girl Scouts 2017)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of girls consulted for feedback on program content, delivery and other aspects at mid-line and end-line monitoring and reporting</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> See Annex 1 for additional information about strong practices for engaging girls throughout the program cycle

GIRL-SPECIFIC SET OF SKILLS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
<b>Provide digital skills and STEM competencies to all girls</b>	Technovation Girls is global program with chapters in over 100 countries. Participants ages 10–18 identify social challenges in their communities, establish a team, and work together to develop digital solutions to address those challenges. The program website offers Internet Safety Training with lesson plans that girls, mentors, and parents can work through to understand internet privacy, online relationships, and gendered aspects of sharing information online. Technovation Student Ambassadors are young women who have been part of the program and are interested in sharing their experience with other girls (Technovation n.d.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider where and what type of technology is available to girls outside of the program so that the skills they are learning can be practiced in their everyday lives.</li> <li>When access to technology is limited, provide access through program centers.</li> <li>Always include digital literacy and digital safety.</li> <li>Utilize a project-based learning approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does your program offer digital skills?</li> <li>Does your program offer STEM education?</li> <li>Do digital skills and STEM competencies align with the technologies available to girls in their everyday lives?</li> <li>Does digital skills content include digital literacy and digital safety?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of girls enrolled in computer science courses (Technovation n.d.)</li> <li># of girls more confident in digital programming (Technovation n.d.)</li> <li>% girls participating in digital skills course that have knowledge about digital safety and potential online risks</li> </ul>
<b>Include job-specific skills when appropriate for girls' level of education, the local business environment, and demand for the services</b>	The Girl-Led Youth Leadership and Entrepreneurship Program, developed and implemented by the Asante Africa Foundation, focuses on personal development, job readiness, entrepreneurship and financial awareness for rural youth ages 15–21 in Kenya and Tanzania. The program has three phases: First, participants in a girl-led, school-based club, which includes both girls and boys, choose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When job-specific skills do not align with traditional gender roles in the local context, offer content for the appropriate transferable skills in combination with the job-specific skills to address gender inequities.</li> <li>Adapt job-specific skills curricula to the local context but do not limit opportunities based on gendered jobs in the local area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are job-specific skills appropriate for your program population and aligned with feminist principles and the labor market?</li> <li>Do the types of skills offered challenge traditional gender norms about</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of girls who understand what is expected of them in a career environment (Ng'ang'a 2019)</li> <li>% of girls currently involved in entrepreneurship activities (Ng'ang'a 2019)</li> <li>% girls who express confidence in themselves and the skills they learned</li> </ul>

GIRL-SPECIFIC SET OF SKILLS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
	program modules to over 12-15 months. Entrepreneurial fundamentals are discussed such as business planning, financial modeling, human centered design, and ideation. These topics carry into the second phase which includes national level workshops and in-depth job readiness training. Third, participants join a week-long Business Competition Incubator. Throughout these phases, students have access to skilled entrepreneurs and mentors (Ng'ang'a 2017). Program evaluations and reviews noted positive trends in girls' improved academic performance and demonstrated observed leadership attributes (Ng'ang'a 2019).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider job skills related to girls' current mobility in the community (ex. skills that can be used from home).</li> <li>Create options for girls to choose which job-specific skills they would like to learn.</li> </ul>	employment and promote gender equality?	during the course (e.g. self-budgeting and savings)
<b>Provide foundational skills building for the most vulnerable out-of-school girls</b>	As part of the Girls' Education Project, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in Afghanistan established reading centers for girls ages 15-20 who could not continue their education. The reading centers are inspired by the principles of home-based rural libraries. The reading centers were designed as safe spaces for the girls. Numeracy and literacy were embedded along with educational rights within the educational training module, one of four modules girls could	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer curricula-based sessions on literacy and numeracy skills.</li> <li>Provide "booster" material for foundational skills to strengthen girls' literacy and numeracy even if they already have the skills.</li> <li>Strengthen the foundational skills girls already hold through tutoring.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does your program reach girls whose formal education has been disrupted?</li> <li>If so, is the program offering foundational skills?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of girls with increased awareness of rights for themselves (Echavez 2014)</li> <li>% of girls correctly answered more than 8 out of 13 mathematical questions (Amin 2016, 2018)</li> </ul>



GIRL-SPECIFIC SET OF SKILLS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
	choose from within the program. The modules are taught by facilitators who are often former BRAC schoolteachers. Program participants reported that the life-skills training was useful for greater knowledge on health, literacy skills, and rights awareness. Overall participation in the program had a positive effect on social relations and respect from family and community members. A majority of participants said the livelihoods training taught them new skills or improved their existing skills. More than one-third of participants reported being able to have a greater say in household income and spending (Echavez, 2014).			
<b>Provide transferable skills plus additional practical information to girls</b>	The Safe and Smart Savings Products for Vulnerable Adolescent Girls project was led by the Population Council and MicroSave in Kenya and Uganda. The project provides girls with individual savings accounts in trusted institutions, weekly group meetings on health and financial education with a female mentor in a safe space with 15-25 girls separated by ages 10-14 and ages 15-19, and a 16-session financial education curriculum working on goal setting and savings plans. The program hosted fun days and parent meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that transferable skills include communication, resilience, self-management, negotiation, and leadership as minimum components (UNICEF 2019; Amin 2018; Bandiera 2020; Decker 2018; Sambodhi Research and Communications 2014).</li> <li>• Offer additional content on entrepreneurship, gender and power.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your program offer transferable skills?</li> <li>• Does content include communication, resilience, self-management, negotiation, leadership, gender and power, and entrepreneurship?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of girls who received each skills module (Echavez 2014)</li> <li>• % of girls who report feeling worthless (Austrian 2013)</li> <li>• % of girls who feel as intelligent as others their age (Austrian 2013)</li> <li>• % of girls who have knowledge about their rights and available health,</li> </ul>

GIRL-SPECIFIC SET OF SKILLS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
	Girls received workbooks tailored to each age group, which covers plans for saving and planning for the future, personality traits, negotiation, and conflict resolution. The program was evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively against a comparison group of girls. Results demonstrate expanded social networks and social relationships, increased self-esteem, increased community mobility, and increased savings among program participants (Austrian 2013).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What features are in place to review the quality of the content?</li> </ul>	education and psychosocial services

GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAM COMPONENTS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
<b>Provide a safe space that is inclusive of all girls</b>	<p>The Biruh Tesfa program in Ethiopia specifically focused on creating a safe space for girls with disabilities by constructing ramps, and providing girls with crutches, wheelchairs, and/or accompaniment to and from the sessions (Erulkar 2011).</p> <p>The Digital Youth Divas program in the U.S. sets expectations with girls at the start of program activities for respectful feedback and interactions to create a safe space that operates both in-person and through a private, online platform (Pinkard 2019; Erete 2016).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct safety scan activities with girls to ensure that the (digital or physical) location where program activities are conducted is both physically and emotionally safe:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work with girls to map their communities and identify safe and unsafe locations. It is important that both the location, and the commute to the location are safe for all participants.</li> <li>○ Consult girls about their patterns of time use and identify a meeting time that fits their reality. Consider how these patterns may change seasonally.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Work with community members to identify safe locations for program activities.</li> <li>• Create a trusting environment.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support girls to collaboratively establish ground rules for their meetings.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are program activities currently being delivered in a physical or digital space and a time of the day that is safe for girls to access and that provides a comfortable private area for learning?</li> <li>• Is the program implementing activities that are specifically designed to build and ensure trust between participants and among participants and program staff?</li> <li>• Do program social protection policies and procedures exist?</li> <li>• Have steps been taken to make sure the space is accessible for all girls, including those with disabilities?</li> </ul> <p>Have those who are entrusted as mentors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of consultations with girls about safety conducted</li> <li>• # of safe space locations identified and utilized</li> <li>• % of girls with improved feeling of safety in their physical environment (Hinson 2016)</li> <li>• Change in % of adolescent girls permitted to participate in certain social activities (Amin 2016, 2018)</li> <li>• % girls who have access to a close friend with whom they can share their problems</li> <li>• % of girls who are able to go to youth groups/girls' group on their own, where these services are available (Austrian 2013)</li> </ul>

GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAM COMPONENTS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dedicate program time to fun social activities that build relationships, and to group based mentoring discussion.</li> <li>○ Provide access to games and learning equipment.</li> <li>● Establish program social protection policies and procedures.</li> </ul> <p>Ensure that safe spaces are accessible to all girls, including those with disabilities.</p>	<p>been sensitized in Do No Harm principles?</p>	
<b>Support girls' leadership development</b>	<p>TEKEDU's Girls Go IT program in Moldova trains graduates to become mentors for girls who are currently enrolled (TEKEDU n.d.).</p> <p>Project Soar participants in Morocco and Uganda practice their leadership skills as elected club leaders (Project Soar n.d.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engage girls as peer educators and peer mentors (FAT n.d.; Ivey 2011; White 2015).</li> <li>● Apply a cascading leadership approach whereby program graduates are trained to take on increasing levels of responsibility in program implementation.</li> <li>● Engage girls in program and organizational leadership as members of the organization's board of directors by establishing youth advisory boards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What opportunities are girls being given to develop and exercise their leadership skills?</li> <li>● What leadership roles do girls currently hold in your program?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● % of girls participating in [clearly defined project leadership role i.e. as peer mentors, as advisory board members, etc.] (Hinson 2016)</li> <li>● % girls who report that the program prepared them to be a leader (Girl Scouts 2017)</li> </ul>

GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAM COMPONENTS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
<b>Offer opportunities to apply skills to create social change</b>	<p>Through the Technovation program, girls embark on an analysis of social issues in their community and design a mobile app-based solution to address the issues they identify (Technovation n.d.).</p> <p>The SHINE project in Pakistan focuses on climate justice and encourages girls to be stewards of their environment through tree planting and care, and litter elimination (The World with MNR n.d.).</p> <p>Girls who are enrolled in the Feminist Approach to Technology project in India hosted community movie screenings of short films produced and directed by themselves showcasing an issue within the community followed by a discussion facilitated by the girls (FAT n.d.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve girls in identifying social issues in their communities as well as in developing the strategies and solutions to address them.</li> <li>• Improve girls' awareness of gender inequality and rights-based issues in their communities, countries, and globally through thoughtful reflection about their own identities and positionality in a society, functions of power in society, and injustice.</li> <li>• Work with girls to identify key issues that they want to address.</li> <li>• Help girls to develop their own solutions and advocacy projects with guidance from program leaders that incorporate the skills they are developing.</li> <li>• Organize safe opportunities for girls to share their thoughts and solutions with community members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your program offer participants opportunities to apply the skills they are learning in order to address the social issues that impact them in their communities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of community-based social change initiatives developed by girls</li> <li>• % of girls who report that they feel empowered to make a change in their community (Girl Scouts 2017)</li> </ul>

GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAM COMPONENTS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
<b>Provide girls with access to mentors and role models</b>	<p>The Techno Girl program for girls ages 15–18 in South Africa and the Career Girls program in Rwanda connected girls with both mentors and role models. Techno Girl provides female mentorship alongside job-shadowing opportunities for participants from underprivileged and urban communities (UNICEF 2015).</p> <p>While Career Girls connects girls to both in-person mentorship through the Starlight Africa co-founders, as well as virtual role modelling via videos of African women in STEM careers through the Career Girls website (Career Girls 2019).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage girls in identifying and recommending mentors and role models from their communities, developing criteria for mentors, determining the appropriate mentor approach, and even serving as peer mentors themselves.</li> <li>Implement strong mentor training so that mentors have the skills to act as role models, support girls as they transition into adulthood, help girls to navigate life's challenges, and connect them to services and opportunities.</li> <li>Establish written mentor agreements to ensure that expectations of their role are well understood.</li> <li>Determine the best approach to mentorship for your program: group-based, one-on-one, or online mentorship; or a combination of in-person and online mentorship.</li> <li>Establish a cascading leadership process supporting participants to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is your program selecting mentors and role models and are you preparing them appropriately?</li> <li>How is your program exposing girls to mentors and other female adult role models, especially in STEM careers?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># of girls who received career guidance and support (UNICEF 2015)</li> <li>% of girls reporting increased support from a mentor at the conclusion of programming (Hinson 2016)</li> <li>% of girls reporting that at least one adult makes them feel valuable (Girl Scouts 2017)</li> <li>% of girls reporting that their mentors have inspired them</li> </ul>



GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAM COMPONENTS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
		<p>“graduate” to become mentors themselves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors should be compensated for their time supporting the program.</li> <li>• Link mentors with community resources so they may refer girls to services as various needs arise over the course of the program.</li> <li>• In addition to mentors, connect girls to other female role models who are working in STEM. Role models can give lectures, deliver training workshops, or participate in career panels.</li> </ul>		
<b>Provide exposure to real-world learning opportunities and internships</b>	A number of programs connected girls with internships and job placement opportunities. TEKEDU's Girls Go IT program in Moldova links girls to internship opportunities after completion of intensive workshops and boot camps with leading tech companies. As the program continues to grow, it is seeing more girls becoming mentors in STEM to other program participants (TEKEDU n.d.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult girls about the types of internships and learning opportunities they are interested in accessing.</li> <li>• Partner with the private sector to connect girls with internships, and real-world learning opportunities such as job-shadowing, and site visits to STEM workplaces.</li> <li>• Consider opportunities for mentorships and learning and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What exposure to real-world learning opportunities and internships does your program provide?</li> <li>• Has your program established agreements with employers to possibly hire a certain number</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of girls who participated in structured job shadowing and placement programs (UNICEF 2015)</li> <li>• % of girls who report that at least one adult has helped them think about their future careers (Girl Scouts 2017)</li> <li>• % of girls who report changes in their perceptions of the appropriateness of</li> </ul>

GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAM COMPONENTS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
	Girls Can Code, a program for girls in Grades 10–12 in Afghanistan designed to build their digital skills and interest in STEM provides participants training in the English language, computer literacy, and coding and web development. Once participants have completed their training, Girls Can Code seeks to match girls with internship opportunities.	support circles for girls who are involved in internship programs to continue the network building, support their safe navigation of the workplace, and promote critical reflection in their roles.	of girls after the internship?	<p>STEM careers for females (i.e. “how much they see engineering as a better job for a man than a woman.” (Girl Scouts 2017)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of girls who report not having hope for the future (Austrian, 2013)</li> </ul>
<b>Engage the community throughout the program design and implementation process and raise awareness of, and support for, girls’ skills building and empowerment</b>	Ishraq in Egypt, BALIKA in Bangladesh, Biruh Tesfa in Ethiopia, a pilot STEM program in UAE, and Innovate3 in the U.S. all put an emphasis on community involvement and awareness throughout their programs. These programs held community-based program orientation meetings, parent workshops, and formed village committees to ensure that the power holders and influencers of the girls in their communities understood the value of the program. Mentors often led the community meetings and often went household to household to meet with families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify key stakeholders and community groups, inform them of program activities, and involve them if possible.</li> <li>• Since families and communities often hold power over girls’ access to opportunities and agency, programs should consider how community sensitization can help to transform gender norms and community perceptions of girls’ roles in society, generate support for girls’ participation in program activities, and increase girls’ social networks.</li> <li>• Safely engage girls to raise awareness of program activities and to gain support from their</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your program share information about project activities with community members?</li> <li>• How are community members involved in implementing activities?</li> <li>• What community sensitization events does your program implement?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of girls involved in organizing/ facilitating community sensitization events (CEDPA 2001)</li> <li>• Changes in level of community member support for program</li> <li>• Change in community attitudes and gender norms related to girls and skills (Amin 2016, 2018)</li> </ul>

GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAM COMPONENTS				
Activity	Program Example(s)	Illustrative Interventions	Program Assessment Question(s)	Illustrative Monitoring Indicators
		<p>parents, guardians, friends, peers, and other community members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a community entry plan outlining key messages and audiences.</li> <li>Establish a community action committee for your specific project that meets regularly to discuss how they can support program activities and participants. Ensure that girls are active participants in committee meetings. Community action committee members can help programs identify safe meeting spaces opportunities for real-world learning connect programs to role models and mentors help to identify the most vulnerable girls in communities and support other program objectives.</li> <li>Host community dialogues or other awareness raising events to sensitize the community to the unique needs of adolescent girls. Engage girls in the organization of events and development of messages.</li> </ul>		

### 3. CONTRIBUTING TO THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR GIRL-CENTERED SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: KEY LEARNING THEMES

This section of the learning agenda outlines **priority research areas** (or themes) and illustrative associated research questions for the field of girl-centered skills development. The themes and questions emerged from the findings of the evidence review of girl-centered skills development programs and are meant to both fill existing gaps in the evidence and produce new information about emerging topics (such as micro-employment and social entrepreneurship). Country programs can contribute to the learning agenda through evidence building activities, such as implementation research studies, user-centered design, and process evaluations.

#### THEME 1: WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING GIRLS ACROSS THE PROGRAM CYCLE, AND PARTICULARLY IN THE DESIGN AND MEL STAGES?

The evidence review found very few programs engage girls across the program cycle, especially in MEL. The few programs practicing strong, meaningful engagement of girls identified are listed in the table above and are also found in the evidence review. Programs could explore various approaches to meaningful engagement and add to the growing evidence base for this girl-centered component.

Illustrative research questions:

1. What are the opportunities for girls' leadership across various program implementation models such as Bootcamps, Safe Spaces, and Innovation Labs?
2. What practices work best for engaging girls in rural areas in the design/implementation/MEL of skills programs?
3. What does a digital skills and STEM competency development program for marginalized girls look like if a girl-centered approach to design is utilized? What skills are most relevant to lives of:
  - girls in rural settings?
  - pregnant adolescents and/or adolescent mothers?
4. How can girls be involved in documenting lessons learned from the implementation of a girl-centered and girl-led project that addresses health challenges (such as SRH and mental health) or educational barriers (such as school-related gender-based violence) faced by girls?

#### THEME 2: WHAT MORE CAN WE LEARN ABOUT GIRL-SPECIFIC SETS OF SKILLS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES?

The evidence review found that digital and transferable skills are essential for all girls at all skill levels. Job-specific skills and digital skills require a tailored approach to the social context in which the programs

are delivered and need more intention to make the content gender transformative. Foundational skills are likely most important for extremely vulnerable girls and those whose education has been interrupted. Likewise, little evidence about how to tailor digital skills for the most vulnerable segments of the girl population was identified.

Illustrative research questions:

1. What is the impact of integrating gender transformative approaches into job-skills building programs?
2. Is it feasible and acceptable to girls and their communities for a skills development program for the most vulnerable out of school adolescent girls to provide job-skills in STEM sectors that are not traditionally occupied by women?
3. What are the best strategies for introducing digital skills and STEM competency programs to girls who face the greatest barriers to formal education?
  - How are programs addressing both digital and foundational skills?
  - What access to technology do vulnerable girls have that can be leveraged?
  - What are the best approaches to retain vulnerable girls in skills development programs?
4. How do social entrepreneurial skills complement other skills?

### **THEME 3: WHAT ARE POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO THE ADAPTATION, SCALE-UP, AND SUSTAINABILITY OF EVIDENCE-BASED GIRL-CENTERED COMPONENTS ACROSS VARIOUS SKILLS DEVELOPMENT MODELS?**

While the evidence review identified a number of programs engaging community members to create an enabling environment, few examples of successful approaches to scale-up and sustainability for girls' skills-building programs emerged. Scale up and sustainability are key to UNICEF's mandate. Therefore, UNICEF has an opportunity in its engagement with government and ministry representatives around the world to promote scale up of girls' skills-building programs. In some countries, national government ministries have already implemented and supported STEM and digital programs, but more documentation is needed on the appropriate practices for widespread adaptation and implementation, especially outside of the education sector and for out-of-school girls.

Illustrative research questions:

1. What are effective approaches to integrating girl-centered program elements (such as safe spaces, mentoring, etc.) into national curricula and education systems, for scale and sustainability?
2. What role can government ministries play in connecting girls (especially rural girls) to "real world" learning opportunities such as internships and exposure visits?
3. Are there differences in feasibility, acceptability, cost and impact of an employer/ apprenticeship-based mentor model vs. one that is safe space-based?

4. What are effective approaches to engaging community members to support skills development, and create an enabling environment, for the most vulnerable adolescent girls (girls who are out-of-school, adolescent mothers or pregnant girls)?

#### **THEME 4: WHAT CAN LESSONS FROM THE FIELD OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT CONTRIBUTE TO THE EVIDENCE FOR GIRLS' SKILLS DEVELOPMENT?**

The evidence review did not identify many programs rooted in the field of women's economic empowerment. Yet, many of the principles key to the women's economic empowerment field are also relevant to the design of girls' skills development: improving access to assets, income and economic inputs; building agency, i.e control, ownership, and decision-making power; strengthening leadership in business, community, region and country; alleviating and responding to diverse potential risks to economic participation, and creating an enabling environment for systems and norms to support women's economic empowerment. In addition, very few programs designed activities for transitions of skills through the life cycle. Programs could add to this gap in the evidence by examining the links between girls' skills-building and women's economic empowerment.

Illustrative research questions:

1. If we build a life cycle approach into girls' skills building programs, how will that help prepare girls for economic empowerment as they move into other stages and ages of their life?
2. What are the long-term effects of girls' skills building activities on the ability of girls to transition into formal sectors of work?
3. Do girls' skills building activities have an impact on their ability to make reproductive decisions that can impact their ability to persist in the work force?

#### **THEME 5: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MEN AND BOYS IN A GIRL-CENTERED APPROACH TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT?**

The evidence review did not focus on the role of men and boys in skills-development programs for girls. Though, some programs in the review did engage boys and men to support girls in their journey of leadership development and other key skills. Programs could largely contribute to the needed evidence on the role of boys and men within skills-building programs for girls.

Illustrative research questions:

1. What are the most effective ways of engaging men and boys in the design and implementation of the girls' skills building programming?
2. Is it possible to achieve transformation of unequal gender norms if we do not engage men and boys in the design and implementation of girls' skills development programming?
3. What is the impact on the ability of girls to fully realize in the medium to long term the benefits of skill building if boys and men have not been engaged in the design and implementation?
4. What impact will there be for boys who see girls participating in skills building programs, and perceive themselves to be left out?



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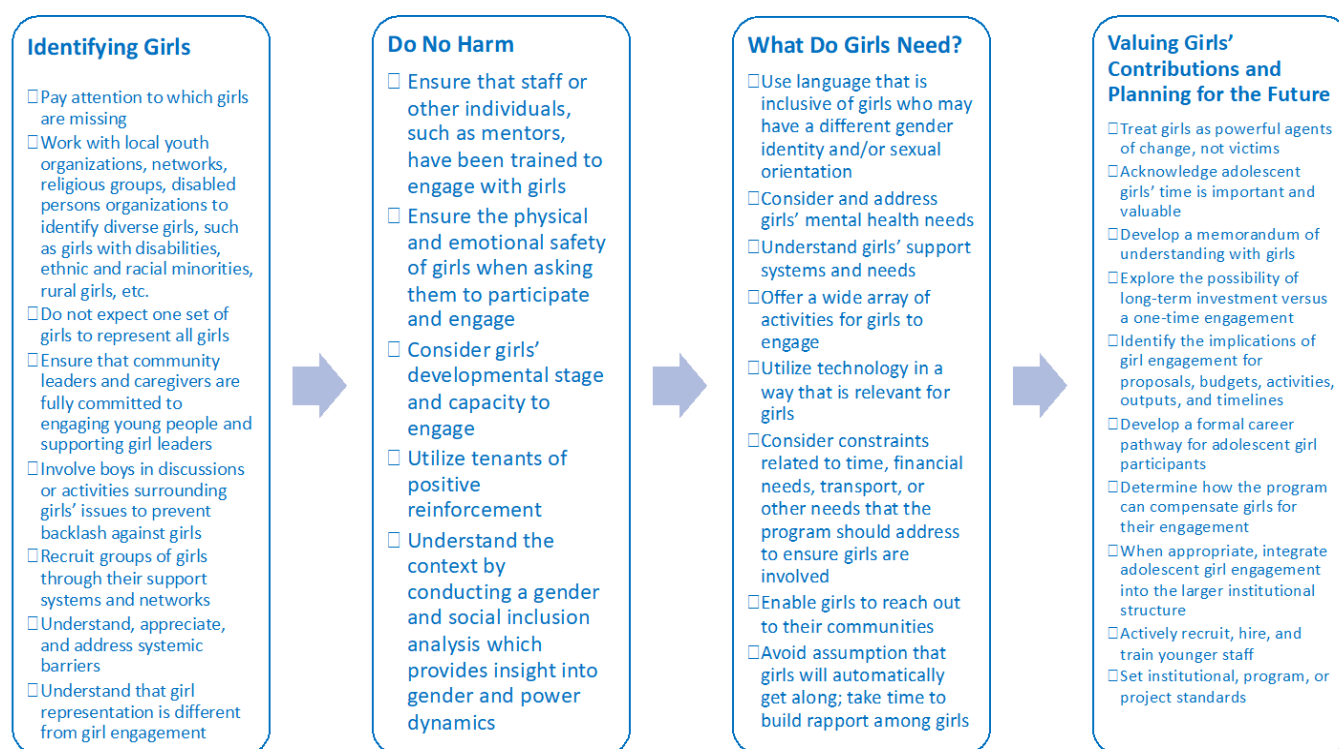
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## ANNEX 1: EVIDENCE FOR THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A GIRL-CENTERED APPROACH TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The following text summarizes the high-level findings from the exploratory review of the evidence conducted by FHI 360, in partnership with UNICEF, to inform this learning agenda. Findings are presented for each component of the Model for a Girl-Centered Approach To Skills Development.

### GIRL-ENGAGEMENT

The meaningful engagement of girls throughout the program design, implementation, and MEL processes is a key element of a girl-centered approach. Programs cannot expect to tailor their program content and mode of delivery and evaluation to girls without their input. Engagement of girls as participants in programs is a basic necessity and fundamental right. Programs that engage girls in their design and implementation are more relevant and more effective than those that do not (Green-Atchley 2014). The diagram<sup>2</sup> below outlines strong practices for engaging girls throughout the program cycle.



<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the "Toolkit for Meaningful Adolescent Girl Engagement." Coalition for Adolescent Girls. December 2015.

## Key Themes from Conversations with Young Female Leaders

*"Ask girls what skills they want!"  
"What are her future plans?"*

→ Girls should be involved in identifying the skills they are offered

*"STEM skills are the future"*

→ Girls value the importance of STEM competencies for their future; yet many girls still lack access to STEM education  
→ Digital protection is an important, but under addressed topic

*"Girls who do not have the confidence will not believe in their skills."*

→ Programs need to not only build skills, but girls' confidence to use them

*"Girls are not really apart of it [evaluation]... but just told what happens."  
"The data was explained to us what it meant rather than giving our input."*

→ Girls do not feel they are meaningfully engaged in program evaluation

*"Maybe we should build the safe space first."*

→ Girls do not have safe spaces to build their skills  
→ Schools are sometimes not the safest place for girls  
→ No online space can really be "safe"  
→ Sometimes girls do not support each other

*"Sometimes it looks like we are using them."*

→ Fairly compensate girls for their input—recognize what they are giving up, provide something in return

## GIRL-SPECIFIC SET OF SKILLS

Adolescent girls are not a homogenous group, and skills-development content should be tailored to the specific needs of the segment of the population that is being served as well as to the social and institutional context in which the program will be delivered. The distinguishing marker of a girl-centered skills development program is not the specific set of skills offered, but rather the approach to determining girls' unique needs and vulnerabilities and to ensuring that the skills offered align with those needs. Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach, the types of skills offered should be holistic, understood

within life-long learning cycle, gender responsive, inclusive, relevant, evidence based, responsive, and innovative. They should support girls' participation and promote human rights<sup>3</sup> as well as align with girls' concerns and expands their aspirations (UNICEF 2019b).

**Transferable skills plus additional practical information must be included in any skills**

**development program for girls.** Transferable skills are a necessary component of any skills-building program; and additional practical information on topics such as gender and rights; reproductive health; nutrition; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); financial literacy; and entrepreneurship are particularly important within the context of girls' empowerment. UNICEF's Global Framework on Transferrable Skills for All identifies 12 core transferable skills that are expected to contribute to outcomes across four categories: active citizenship, learning, employability, and personal empowerment (UNICEF 2019 b). While all 12 are relevant across all four categories (active citizenship, learning, employability, and personal empowerment); communication, resilience, and self-management are the three skills that are most relevant to personal empowerment. Two additional transferable skills, negotiation and leadership, emerged frequently across programs in the evidence review, which, along with the literature, suggests that they may be particularly relevant for girls within the context of skills-building approaches (Amin 2018; Bandiera 2020; Decker 2018; Sambodhi Research and Communications 2014).

Other topics of relevance for girls empowerment programs include gender and rights; reproductive health; nutrition; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); financial literacy; and entrepreneurship. Evidence suggests that when content on gender and power is incorporated into health programs, the programs' impact is more significant (UNICEF). While few programs explicitly address entrepreneurship, this appears to be an important quality for girls' successful application of job-specific skills.

**Digital skills development, including digital literacy and digital safety, and STEM competencies must also be included in any girl-centered skills development program.** Digital skills are key for girls' successful transition into the 21st century labor market as well as for their ability to safely socialize and engage online. However, the review demonstrated that digital-skills-building programs are often designed to reach in-school girls, while only a limited number of digital skills-building programs target extremely vulnerable populations. Furthermore, many programs focused on building "hard" skills such as coding, rather than important "soft" skills such as digital literacy, including online safety. Girls face a disproportionate burden of online violence, and so the provision of information about online safety is a necessary part of any digital skills building program for girls. Digital literacy can increase girls' access to critical health and financial information, social networks, and opportunity.

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<sup>3</sup> These key principles were originally presented in UNICEF's Global Framework on Transferrable Skills for All (UNICEF, 2019).



Providing access to technology, including low cost portable devices, and through program centers can also be critically important for girls because their access to technology is often limited in many contexts (UNICEF EAPRO 2019; Career Girls 2019). For example, girls may not be permitted to go to public internet cafes, or they may fear harassment if they do, because these spaces are often male dominated (UNICEF EAPRO 2019). Furthermore, there are well-documented gender disparities in technology ownership, and when girls do have access to technology within their homes, it is often restricted (UNICEF EAPRO 2019). It is equally important for digital skills building programs to consider where and what type of technology is available to girls outside of the program setting so that the skills they are learning can be practiced in their everyday lives. Programs may wish to consider a project-based learning approach to digital skills development.

The most common approach to building STEM Competencies was the implementation of STEM camps and workshops designed to increase girls' interest in STEM-related fields (Andam 2013; Al-Khalifa 2019; Barta 2014; Khan 2017; Stapleton 2019; Wiest 2017). While evaluations of these programs suggest that they may influence girls' interest in STEM subjects and future career choices, the long-term impact on girls' overall empowerment has yet to be evaluated. Furthermore, little evidence about how foundational, transferable, and/or job-specific skills can best be integrated with broader STEM competencies exists. Finally, there is a need to understand the potential impact of longer-term programmatic approaches to building STEM competencies when compared to one-off events.

**Foundational skills are especially important for the most vulnerable out-of-school girls.**

Foundational skills—basic numeracy and literacy—lay the groundwork for the job-specific and digital skills, and STEM competencies that girls and young women need to be successful in the 21st century job market. Because foundational skills are frequently developed in the school-based setting, girl-centered skills building programs outside of the school setting tend to include content and approaches to strengthen numeracy and literacy only when the program population included a large number of out-of-school girls, or girls who faced other educational disadvantages (Echavez 2014; Scales 2013). Programs should consider the current school-status of participants as well as the educational context within the community where the skills development program will be implemented when determining if foundational skills should be offered.

**Job-specific skills should be incorporated when aligned with girls' education, the local business environment, and demand for the services and should seek to transform gender norms.** Improving girls' access to job skills can improve their future economic and career prospects. The programs identified via the evidence review demonstrated how skills development programs can tailor job-specific skills content to both girls' needs and the program's social context (Bandiera 2020; Echavez 2014; Scales 2013; White 2015). At the same time, these programs all focused on gendered job-training opportunities, such as embroidery and food processing. Programs should objectively assess the labor market demand,

the sustainability of gendered employment options, and girls' interest in these or other industries, before automatically limiting girls' training opportunities to the gendered norm.

### GIRL-CENTERED PROGRAM COMPONENTS

**Provide a safe space that is inclusive of all girls:** Given that girls often lack a safe, girl-only spaces in their community to gather, providing a safe space that is inclusive of all girls is a key component of girl-centered programming. Within the context of skills development, the provision of a safe space increases girls access to training programs, allows girls to openly discuss and critically reflect on sensitive issues such as health and gender. Evidence demonstrates that the provision of a safe space for participants was as effective alone as it was when implemented with other program strategies, highlighting the potential impact of this practice across all skills-building categories (Marcus 2017; UNICEF 2018; UNESCO 2017).

**Provide girls with access to mentors and role models:** Mentors and role models, especially role models from a girls' own community, demonstrate immense benefit to girls in skills building programs. Mentoring programs have demonstrated improvements in girls' reproductive health knowledge and behavior, academic achievement, financial behavior, job skills, and social networks, as well as reductions in their experience of violence (Plourde 2017). Literature suggests that role models may be especially important for programs that build digital/ STEM skills because research demonstrates that a major reason for girls' lack of participation in STEM is that they often see STEM professions as incompatible with their gender (UNESCO 2017). Mentors and role models allow girls to see themselves in careers and roles that are often occupied by males. Mentors and role models can also serve as liaisons to the community and to family members to have conversations around the value of girls' skills building.

**Provide exposure to real-world learning opportunities and internships:** Like with mentors and role models real-world learning opportunities and internships can expose girls to other women who are applying the that skills they are learning. They can also offer practical opportunities to apply and further develop skills and are often entryways into potential career paths for girls. Exposure to real-world learning opportunities has been identified by UNESCO as a recommended practice for programs seeking to increase girls' STEM skills (UNESCO 2017). Girls, participating in digital skills and STEM knowledge programs, often gained more interest in the topic after being able to apply what they learn and were more likely to use transferable skills, such as creativity and teamwork, as a result.

**Offer opportunities to apply skills to create social change:** The meaningful engagement of girls in community change initiatives has demonstrated the ability to improve girls' skills, support their leadership development, strengthen their social networks, and improve key health, education, and financial outcomes (Green-Atchley 2014). It can increase their awareness of social and political issues, their connection with their communities, and their civic competence (Green-Atchley 2014). This is particularly important within the context of the two on-going global crises: climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, as women and girls play a vital role in efforts to address both.

**Support girls' leadership development:** Girls' meaningful participation in program leadership and as leaders in their community can have an important influence on their personal development. The provision of opportunities for girls to exercise leadership is associated with improved confidence, collaborative skills, and self-efficacy (Green-Atchley 2014). Girls can be engaged as leaders in multiple ways: as project staff, peer educators, or peer mentors. Programs can introduce an approach to train program graduates to take on leadership positions or engage girls through formal project advisory committees or as members of organizations' board of directors.

**Engage the community to create a supportive environment:** Community sensitization, community mobilization, and community ownership are essential points of consideration for program success identified throughout the Evidence Review. Community sensitization can help to transform gender norms and community perceptions of girls' roles in society, generate support for girls' participation in program activities, and increase girls' social networks (Echavez 2014; Rushdy 2012; Selim 2013).

**Reach the right girls with the right opportunities:** As we seek to broaden opportunities for girls, we must ensure that we are reaching all segments of the population, especially the most vulnerable; and that we are reaching the appropriate population of girls for program activities and goals.

## ANNEX 2: PRACTICAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Following is a list of practical tools and resources that can be adapted to support the implementation of girl-centered skills development programming:

- [Partners and Allies Toolkit for Meaningful Girl Engagement](#) (Coalition for Adolescent Girls 2015).
- [Girl Consultation Research Toolkit](#) (Girl Effect 2013).
- [UNICEF's Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation: Foundation Guidance](#) (UNICEF 2017).
- [I'm Here: Steps and Tools to Reach Adolescent Girls in Crisis](#) (Women's Refugee Committee 2016).
- [Girl Roster™](#) (Population Council 2015).
- [Using Data to see And Select the Most Vulnerable Adolescent Girls](#) (Engelbrechtsen 2012).
- [UNICEF's Global Framework on Transferrable Skills for All](#) (UNICEF 2019).
- [Technical Note on Life Skills Programmes For Empowering Adolescent Girls: Notes for Practitioners on What Works](#) (UNICEF 2019b).
- [Digital literacy for children — 10 things to know](#) (UNICEF 2019 c.).
- [Girl-Centered Program Design: A Toolkit to Develop, Strengthen and Expand Adolescent Girls Programs](#) (Population Council 2010).
- [Evidence-Based Guidelines for Youth Peer Education](#) (FHI 360 2010).
- [Making the Most of Mentors: Recruitment, Training, and Support of Mentors for Adolescent Girl Programming—Toolkit](#) (Population Council 2019).
- [YouthPower Action AGYW Mentoring Program Toolkit](#) (Plourde 2018).
- [Technovation curriculum](#) (Technovation n.d).

### UNICEF'S ADOLESCENT KIT FOR EXPRESSION AND INNOVATION

UNICEF's Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation explicitly puts adolescents in the lead of the program from the start by asking when, where, and how should activities be organized and asking what activities meet their interests and needs (UNICEF 2017).

- The “Foundation Guidance” document provides 10 key approaches for working with adolescents and a section on adolescents and gender equality
- The “Activity Box” includes content that can support the development of select girl-specific skills
- When utilizing in the context of girl-centered skills development programming:
  - Follow strong practices for engaging girls throughout the program cycle (Do no harm, strategic identification and recruitment of girls, consider girls' needs, and value girls' contributions).
  - Integrate girl-centered program components



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