

YOUTH CLUBS, GIRLS'  
EMPOWERMENT  
AND GENDER EQUALITY



## Youth Clubs, Girls' Empowerment and Gender Equality: Implementation lessons from the WGCD Grand Challenge

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This brief presents findings from four organizations that are implementing and researching youth clubs as a tool for girls' empowerment and gender equality. All are doing so with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation under the Women and Girls at the Center of Development (WGCD) Grand Challenge. The lessons derived from their ongoing monitoring, evaluation and research are framed here to address gaps in evidence identified in *Girls' clubs, life skills programmes and girls' well-being outcomes*, a rigorous review of evidence from over forty clubs, primarily single-sex, conducted by the Overseas Development Institute's Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) initiative. These preliminary findings can help to frame future research questions to increase the evidence base on effective club models.

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## Background

The Women and Girls at the Center of Development (WGCD) Grand Challenge was launched by the Bill and Melinda Foundation in 2015 and funded 22 programs to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The WGCD Community has grown to include 38 foundation investments in 16 countries. The WGCD Learning Agenda, designed and facilitated by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), supports mutual learning among the WGCD partners and joint dissemination to build the evidence base on intentional, effective gender equality programming.

A popular trend among organizations working towards gender equality and improvements in the lives of women and girls is programming centered around and delivered through girls' and youth clubs. Increasingly popular<sup>1</sup> as a tool for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, these clubs offer school- or community-based training outside of formal education. Clubs are led by facilitators who often act as role models or mentors for participants. While club activities vary widely by context and implementer, they commonly provide life skills and vocational training, teach sexual and reproductive health, encourage financial savings and promote civic engagement. By expanding participants' peer networks, clubs build social capital and can alleviate social isolation, especially among vulnerable and excluded populations.

While some programs include activities for both boys and girls, others are designed only for girls. The theory behind the girls-only approach is that it provides the most comfortable space for girls to share and participate, making the clubs an effective site for building self-confidence, retaining information and developing skills. In some communities, parents are more likely to allow their daughters to attend a single-sex program.

Though the use of clubs in gender empowerment programming is on the rise, there is limited understanding of – and a growing debate over – their impact, sustainability and cost effectiveness. In 2017 the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) initiative of the Overseas Development Institute released a rigorous review of the evidence around girls' clubs. The review, entitled *Girls' clubs, life skills programmes and girls' well-being outcomes*, examined impact studies of 44 club-based programs, diverse in region, focus, target population and scale. While the GAGE researchers found overall positive impacts, particularly in social and psychological empowerment and knowledge outcomes, they also noted significant gaps that limited their ability to establish the efficacy of these programs. Gaps included a lack of data on the comparative impacts and cost effectiveness of different club-based approaches and insufficient implementation knowledge on how best to tailor club materials to ensure age-appropriateness, foster sustainability and maximize spillover effects.



Photo Credit: Barbara Kinney/Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

<sup>1</sup>Marcus, R., Gupta-Archer, N., Darcy, M., & Page, E. (2017 September). GAGE rigorous review: Girls' clubs, life skills programmes and girls' well-being outcomes. <https://www.gage.odi.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/GAGE%20Girls%20Club%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.

## Lessons on Youth Clubs from the WGCD Grand Challenge

In 2015, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded 22 multi-year grants to implementation and research programs building women and girls' agency and advancing gender equality under the Women and Girls at the Center of Development (WGCD) Grand Challenge. The programs span a range of geographies and intervention sectors, but generally engage adolescent girls using the principles of *Positive Youth Development*, building **assets, agency, contribution**, and an **enabling environment** to empower young people to reach their full potential.

Several WGCD partners utilize and evaluate youth clubs as part of their programs, including CARE Malawi, ICRW Asia, Wits RHI and ZanaAfrica. The implementers discussed in this brief run club-based programs that reach girls and boys ranging in age from 10 to 21; in classrooms and outside of school; and with diverse intended outcomes like increasing girls' self-efficacy around sexual health or career choices, shifting gender attitudes and norms and/or improving school retention rates. Grounded in research and implementation experience, the WGCD partners share seven lessons across three programmatic elements:

### ENGAGING BOYS



#### LESSON 1

Gender norms may create particular retention challenges for boys

#### LESSON 2

Intentional curriculum development is necessary for strategic engagement of boys

### CLUB FACILITATION



#### LESSON 3

Intensive facilitator trainings at various stages of a program foster facilitator engagement and improve intervention efficacy

#### LESSON 4

Projects may struggle with facilitator retention, which has implications for training and relationship-building

### PROGRAM LENGTH & INTENSITY



#### LESSON 5

Intensive delivery schedules boost participant retention

#### LESSON 6

Extra time at the start of interventions supports stakeholder relationship building

#### LESSON 7

Repeating the intervention improves participant outcomes and facilitation techniques

## Data Sources

Data informing the lessons on youth clubs were drawn from partners' formal evaluations, routine monitoring and observational data and key informant interviews with program staff. These data speak to the promises and trade-offs of

different approaches to running girls' and youth clubs and can inform the design and adaptation of club-based interventions. Below is an overview of partner organizations in Malawi, India, South Africa and Kenya, along with the key features of their clubs:

### CARE Malawi: Umodzi

Kasungu District, Malawi

Student ages: 10-18  
Adolescent life skills, sexual & reproductive health

### ICRW Asia: Plan-It Girls

Delhi & Jharkhand, India

Student ages: 14-17  
Self, self-efficacy, resourcefulness & employability, gender equitable attitudes

### WITS RHI: GAP Year Program

Cape Town & Johannesburg, South Africa

Student ages: 14-17  
Soccer as a tool for engagement to promote health, safety, school retention, positive gender attitudes

### ZanaAfrica: The Nia Project

Kilifi County, Kenya

Student ages: 10-21  
Reproductive education & provision of sanitary products

## Engaging boys

The gap according to GAGE:

*“[What are] the relative benefits and disadvantages of single- and mixed-sex groups? Surprisingly, none of the studies in this review addressed this issue.”<sup>2</sup>*

Of the programs reviewed by GAGE, the majority provided activities for girls only, while others included girls and boys either together or separately.<sup>3</sup> Engaging men and boys for gender equality is in line with the principles of many WGCD partners, and is, in general, increasingly recognized as a critical tool that can transform gender norms and practices to achieve more equitable gender relations.<sup>4</sup> However, the best ways to integrate boys into programming to promote more equitable gender norms remain unclear. Like the broader literature, none of the four WGCD partners tested the benefits and disadvantages of single-sex and mixed-sex groups. However, their different approaches to working with boys provide insights into the advantages and disadvantages of each.

### WGCD Partner Youth Clubs: Boys' Engagement Strategies:

#### CARE Malawi

**Single-sex or Mixed:** Mixed-sex teen clubs; additional single-sex sessions for both boys and girls

**Sex-specific Approaches:** In addition to the regular curriculum, boys are connected with Male Champions and girls with Mothers' Groups, who act as gender equality role models for boys and girls, respectively

**Findings:** Sex-segregated sessions with older role models encouraged participation

#### Wits RHI

**Single-sex or Mixed:** Single-sex sessions for boys and girls for first year; mixed sessions for second year

**Sex-specific Approaches:** Girls' curriculum focuses on empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights; boys' curriculum focuses on gender norms, power dynamics and harmful constructions of masculinity

**Findings:** Recruitment & retention challenges for boys, different learning preferences between boys and girls

#### ICRW Asia

**Single-sex or Mixed:** Single-sex sessions for both boys and girls

**Sex-specific Approaches:** Girls' curriculum focuses on self, self-efficacy, resourcefulness and employability; boys' curriculum focuses on gender equitable attitudes

**Findings:** Boys were comfortable expressing themselves in single-sex environments

#### ZanaAfrica

**Single-sex or Mixed:** Girls' programming only

**Sex-specific Approaches:** No boys' programming

**Findings:** Boys reportedly complained about lack of programming for them

### Lesson 1: Gender norms may create particular retention challenges for boys

Engaging boys presents implementation challenges, particularly with recruitment and retention. CARE Malawi and Wits RHI both noted that boys were less likely to join and attend clubs than girls. CARE Malawi staff suggested that boys worried their participation in such a program would make them

appear weak, especially if they were taught or encouraged to perform traditionally female tasks like housework. They were therefore initially reluctant to join, which suggests that other implementers should consider stigma against boys participating in gender equality programming and its effect on enrollment. Wits RHI posited that introducing boys to the curriculum in the sex-segregated first year may have mitigated some of these challenges.

<sup>2</sup>Marcus, R., Gupta-Archer, N., Darcy, M., & Page, E. (2017 September). GAGE rigorous review: Girls' clubs, life skills programmes and girls' well-being outcomes. <https://www.gage.odi.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/GAGE%20Girls%20Club%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>Of 44 club-based programs described in the GAGE review, 15 work with both girls and boys, in either mixed clubs or gender-segregated clubs.

<sup>4</sup>Van der Gaag, 2014; as cited in Marcus, R., Gupta-Archer, N., Darcy, M., & Page, E. (2017 September). GAGE rigorous review: Girls' clubs, life skills programmes and girls' well-being outcomes. <https://www.gage.odi.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/GAGE%20Girls%20Club%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.

When clubs are offered after school, boys may be less likely to participate, perhaps due to having more opportunities than girls to participate in extracurricular activities. Wits RHI found that the boys who did participate in the program were typically those with the fewest alternative activities. Implementers should be aware of competing extracurricular activities and responsibilities for girls and boys, and determine how best to attract and retain potential participants.

## Lesson 2: Intentional curriculum development is necessary for strategic engagement of boys

While ZanaAfrica's program engaged only girls, the other three partners discussed here worked with both boys and girls but employed different strategies for their engagement. The experiences of all three implementers speak to the need for intentional boys' programming in order to achieve desired results.

ICRW Asia separated girls and boys completely and delivered different content to each group. For girls, facilitators implemented a curriculum that focused on developing identity, self-efficacy, resourcefulness and, ultimately, employability, while the boys' curriculum focused on instilling gender equitable attitudes and reducing acceptance of gender-based violence. These two curricula were specifically tailored to the learning needs of boys and girls, in such a way that learning among boys would create a safer environment for girls and support successful outcomes of the girls' program.

Wits RHI also separated students by sex, but only for the first year of the two-year program: boys and girls were brought together for the second year. Staff found that learning styles and preferences appeared to differ by sex. Boys exhibited higher levels of engagement in lessons that incorporated games, while girls tended to prefer group discussion activities. If programs seek to engage both girls and boys as participants and achieve desired outcomes in both groups, they must be prepared to introduce not only sex-targeted content, but also different teaching methods into the structure of the course. While this may present an additional challenge and time burden to facilitators and implementers, it may be necessary to successfully reach different kinds of learners.

CARE Malawi ran the most integrated program of the three, with girls and boys attending most club sessions together, but additional sessions were conducted in single-sex settings. Boys met separately with Male Champions and girls with Mothers' Groups, both of whom acted as positive role models for the students. Interestingly, program staff noted that boys would skip the sessions with Male Champions until parallel sessions for girls and Mothers' Groups were added to the program. This indicates that coordinating content delivery is important, as it demonstrates to students that the content of sex-segregated sessions is important. Additional findings suggest that learning and behavioral outcomes varied by sex as well as age, again pointing to a need for intentional, targeted curriculum development.

## Spotlight: Wits RHI Girls Achieve Power (GAP)

*Wits RHI's GAP Year program was run over two years. The first-year curriculum focused on sex-specific information around sexual and reproductive health and was taught in single-sex groups. In the second year of the program, boys and girls were brought together for reinforcement of the concepts from the previous year, and to receive new content around safety and violence.*

*The team noted that separating the students by sex for the first year established confidence and trust over time, so that when they were brought together for the second year, the transition was less challenging, because they had already had the opportunity to engage in what they considered a safe space. Boys were initially uncomfortable in the mixed-sex setting, but as the second year progressed, they became more confident and participatory. The co-ed clubs also provided an environment in which boys and girls could share and appreciate different perspectives on issues like menstruation, consent, contraception and expectations for love and sex. **Mixed-sex programs can inspire productive conversation around sexual health, but participants must also have time and space to address and challenge social and gender norms around the interactions between boys and girls.***



Photo Credit: Karin Schermbrucker/Wits RHI

## Club Facilitation

### The gap according to GAGE:

*“The quality of facilitation is under-discussed...The challenge of maintaining good-quality facilitation is [only] touched on in a few evaluations – primarily in relation to facilitator remuneration and the challenges of monitoring the quality of clubs.”<sup>5</sup>*

The facilitators in the clubs reviewed by GAGE varied widely by their age, level of training received, occupation background and general approach to facilitation. Yet operational research is lacking on how differences in facilitator characteristics, background and facilitation style influence project outcomes. WGCD partners have extensive documentation of their facilitator recruitment, training, support and monitoring processes. Collectively, this information provides a valuable guide for program and evaluation design.

### WGCD Partner Youth Clubs: Facilitators

#### CARE Malawi

**Facilitator Profile:** Male and female school teachers; Male Champions; Mothers' Group members<sup>6</sup>

**Training & Ongoing Support:** 5-day initial training on curriculum content and gender; regular learning sessions for facilitators, students, local leaders, and intervention staff

**Compensation:** Unpaid

**Findings:** Initial training too short; Male Champions required additional support in classroom setting; travel demands on facilitators encouraged dropout

#### Wits RHI

**Facilitator Profile:** Women and men (18-25 years old)

**Training & Ongoing Support:** Weeklong initial training on curriculum and briefing on intervention; weekly planning meetings; 3 support visits by senior coach per intervention cycle; access to social workers for support; coaches submit written narrative on successes and challenges in each session; curriculum refinement between intervention cycles

**Compensation:** Stipends or salaries

**Findings:** Coaches with regular salaries more likely to stay; coaches need support to deal with unforeseen challenges

#### ICRW Asia

**Facilitator Profile:** Women and men (20-28 years old), recruited based on willingness to learn about gender

**Training & Ongoing Support:** 5-day initial training on gender norms, power dynamics, sexuality, facilitation & program content; weekly check-ins; monthly discussions and practice sessions

**Compensation:** Paid

**Findings:** Facilitators in rural areas needed more training; facilitators in urban areas left to pursue other opportunities

#### ZanaAfrica

**Facilitator Profile:** Women (early- to mid-20s), recruited based on education level and prior experience

**Training & Ongoing Support:** 2-week initial training on content, facilitation, professionalism; monthly reviews; in-person mentoring 3 times per term; refresher courses on content; facilitators submit tracking form for each session

**Compensation:** Paid, with benefits and transportation stipends

**Findings:** Breaks in program delivery periods allowed additional training and engagement; coaches were empowered to take ownership of monitoring systems

<sup>5</sup>Marcus, R., Gupta-Archer, N., Darcy, M., & Page, E. (2017 September). GAGE rigorous review: Girls' clubs, life skills programmes and girls' well-being outcomes. <https://www.gage.odi.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/GAGE%20Girls%20Club%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup>Male Champions were husbands of women engaged in a CARE agricultural initiative; Mothers' Groups were pre-existing groups who had already received gender sensitization training.

### Lesson 3: Intensive facilitator trainings at different stages of a program foster facilitator engagement and are key to successful interventions

Though facilitator trainings before the implementation phase were costly in both time and money, all four teams reported they were critically important for preparing facilitators for their roles in the project. These trainings provided support beyond curriculum content and classroom management. They were also an environment in which facilitators, many of whom were just a few years older than participants, could explore their own emotions around the material. ICRW Asia found this to be especially true for facilitators in rural areas who had not been exposed to similar programming as students.

Ongoing support and regular check-ins throughout the program between facilitators and staff fostered continued buy-in and a sense of community that better equipped facilitators to support each other. Regular monitoring allowed staff to implement real-time adaptations and respond quickly to issues and unforeseen challenges. When Wits RHI students began disclosing physical and psychological harm outside of the program, staff were able to react and provide facilitators with tools and support to respond. When fighting broke out in the boys' clubs, facilitators were given additional resources to document, track and ultimately prevent violence between students. A key tool in their monitoring structure, Wits RHI coaches submitted written documentation after each session, detailing key success stories as well as particular challenges. As a result, program staff reported, coaches were directly involved and deeply engaged in ensuring that adaptations to the curriculum and program were made when needed.



Photo Credit: Peter DiCampo/Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Some program schedules also allowed for extra training and regular curriculum updates. Wits RHI and ZanaAfrica adopted staggered schedules for content delivery, with long breaks between terms; both teams noted that the breaks allowed time for additional facilitator training that increased engagement within facilitator teams. The breaks were also useful for reviewing and updating material with the participation of the facilitators, who shared their experience and on-the-ground knowledge to improve the overall program.

Male facilitators in particular benefited from intensive trainings and other opportunities to engage with the curriculum, and projects that employ them may need to account for additional time for pre-implementation activities, as men may take longer to buy into the project than their female colleagues. As the beneficiaries of the gender status quo, men may need more time to overcome their own biases and knowledge gaps and to understand and internalize gender and power imbalances. They may also be required to adapt to potentially new settings. The CARE Malawi team noted that the Male Champions encountered additional challenges around community concerns about them entering schools. Traditionally only the women had worked with schools, and program staff relied on Mothers' Groups to make initial introductions between male facilitators and schools to offset these concerns. This accompaniment strategy ensured a smooth entry into the school setting. Both male and female facilitators also needed the opportunity to learn or unlearn the same concepts around gender equality as club participants.

### Lesson 4: Projects may struggle with facilitator retention, which has implications for training and relationship-building

All four partners had challenges retaining facilitators, namely due to other opportunities arising, travel costs to program sites and transfer of teachers to non-program schools. ICRW Asia noted that, especially in urban settings, facilitators left the program in search of more highly paid and secure work, as well as to pursue higher education. CARE Malawi's Male Champions turned over because of travel demands – the program lost talented facilitators because they were unable to get to new project sites. CARE Malawi also employed school teachers as facilitators and voiced initial concerns that the teachers would be transferred to non-program schools and leave the program, though in the end only two teachers were lost for this reason.

Retention of facilitators should be a key concern for youth club implementers. High turnover rates require programs to quickly identify and train replacements. This can mean sacrificing high quality facilitator training, which, as discussed above, is critical for achieving desired outcomes. The CARE Malawi team reported that they had only three days to train replacements and the new recruits encountered challenges upon entering classrooms, even with support from more experienced teachers. ZanaAfrica, which also had to quickly train new facilitators to fill gaps, found it difficult to incorporate both content and professional skills into the compressed training sessions.

In addition to the tight timeframe for training replacements, ZanaAfrica found that the loss of staff was a serious blow to the safe spaces they had cultivated in their clubs, and to the trust between students and facilitators. Damage to this relationship can impact student performance and outcomes, particularly when sensitive issues are being discussed.

Implementers must be aware of factors that may lead to facilitator dropout and take effective action to retain staff in their programs. One solution is to provide remuneration strategies that are competitive with similar positions and offset travel and time costs. Wits RHI worked with different implementing partners that each had different payment models. One offered regular salaries and enjoyed relatively high retention rates. Another partner provided coaches with stipend for a two-year contract. Because some of these coaches had been brought on for other projects before the start of the GAP Year Program, the contract timeline was not always aligned with the implementation period, and Wits RHI saw a higher attrition rate among those coaches whose contracts expired before the end of the program. Offering facilitators regular salaries, then, may be one way to encourage retention of staff. For implementers working in schools, timing program delivery schedules around academic calendars helped avoid the possibility that teachers would be transferred between school years.

## Spotlight: ZanaAfrica The Nia Project

*ZanaAfrica attempted to recruit highly qualified mentors as facilitators for The Nia Project. The team sought female mentors below age 35 who had completed at least secondary education, and selected candidates based on additional education and previous experience with adolescents. In some cases, however, due to recruitment challenges, these criteria had to be relaxed. Mentors received rigorous training before and during the program. They were paid a standard rate and received transportation reimbursement for travel to the project sites. In spite of this, program staff noted some challenges with retention: five of the program's 30 mentors left their roles for other opportunities. It is likely that the choice to employ young and educated professional mentors contributed to this, as their qualifications made other positions available to them. **While employing highly trained facilitators ensured program quality, they were more challenging to both recruit and retain.***



Plan-It Girls Youth Facilitators attend a facilitator training in Delhi. Photo Credit: Florian Lang/ICRW



## Program length and intensity

### The gap according to GAGE:

*“Many of the evaluations provide evidence of stronger impact when girls participate more intensively, [but] there is less evidence about the impact of programme length.”<sup>7</sup>*

Programs reviewed by GAGE varied in length from less than three months to over two years, but few evaluations examined the impact of program duration and intensity on intended learning outcomes. The four WGCD programs all had to adapt the timeline and intensity of their programs due to space constraints, program delays and other factors and have found interesting variations in how intensity and duration affect participant retention and recall.

### WGCD Partner Youth Clubs: Length and Intensity

<b>CARE Malawi</b>  <b>Number of Sessions:</b> 28  <b>Length of Sessions:</b> 1 hour and 15 minutes  <b>Frequency of Sessions:</b> Weekly  <b>Duration of Delivery Period:</b> 28 weeks (delivered twice over two years)  <b>Findings:</b> Students who attended both programs had more positive outcomes and facilitators introduced more creative teaching methods in the second round	<b>ICRW Asia</b>  <b>Number of Sessions:</b> 34 for girls; 17 for boys  <b>Length of Sessions:</b> 35-45 minutes in Delhi; 45 minutes – 1.5 hours in Jharkhand  <b>Frequency of Sessions:</b> Weekly in Delhi; 2-3 times per week in Jharkhand  <b>Duration of Delivery Period:</b> 2 academic years in Delhi; 1 academic year in Jharkhand  <b>Findings:</b> Long pre-intervention period allowed for increased stakeholder engagement and buy-in
<b>Wits RHI</b>  <b>Number of Sessions:</b> 44  <b>Length of Sessions:</b> 1.5-2 hours  <b>Frequency of Sessions:</b> 4 times per week  <b>Duration of Delivery Period:</b> 6-week periods, then break for rest of term, for 2 academic years  <b>Findings:</b> Frequency of meetings increased rapport between students and facilitators	<b>ZanaAfrica</b>  <b>Number of Sessions:</b> 25  <b>Length of Sessions:</b> 1 hour – 1 hour and 45 minutes  <b>Frequency of Sessions:</b> Weekly  <b>Duration of Delivery Period:</b> 5-week periods, then break for 4 weeks, for 5 periods  <b>Findings:</b> Breaks between sessions help students retain information

### Lesson 5: Intensive delivery schedules boost participant retention

Schools are key entry points for implementing youth clubs, particularly as projects are brought to scale.<sup>8</sup> However, school schedules can have implications for any youth-centered programs, as three of the four WGCD partners discovered. Both Wits RHI and ZanaAfrica were forced to alter their

implementation timelines to accommodate school schedules. Though lessons were initially planned to be delivered evenly across academic terms, they had to be condensed into the first five (ZanaAfrica) and six (Wits RHI) weeks of each term, with breaks until the start of the next term. Similarly, ICRW Asia had planned for hour-long sessions, but school constraints in Delhi condensed those into 45-minute sessions, while groups in rural Jharkhand schools met for two to three hours per week.

<sup>7</sup>Marcus, R., Gupta-Archer, N., Darcy, M., & Page, E. (2017 September). GAGE rigorous review: Girls' clubs, life skills programmes and girls' well-being outcomes. <https://www.gage.odi.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/GAGE%20Girls%20Club%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup>GAGE notes that the largest girls' clubs tend to be school-based while smaller projects are community-run. (p. 11)

According to monitoring data, it appears that adjusting club schedules to better fit school schedules had a positive effect, and in fact supported more intensive delivery schedules. Wits RHI observed a retention rate of nearly 100 percent for girls and around 75 percent for boys and believe the frequency of the club meetings quickly built rapport between learners and facilitators and encouraged participants to return again and again. Even where participant drop-off is not a major concern – as, for instance, when programs are conducted in academic classrooms and during school hours – cycles of shorter, more frequent sessions punctuated by longer breaks can aid in participant retention of information while avoiding overloading and potential burnout, as ZanaAfrica reported. The break periods gave students time to internalize previous lessons and prepare to absorb new material.<sup>9</sup> The breaks also offered advantages for facilitators and mentors, who were able to use the time to obtain feedback and restructure or refine lesson plans and teaching styles where needed or appropriate.

### Lesson 6: Extra time at the start of interventions supports stakeholder relationship building

Due to program delays, ICRW Asia had a longer start-up phase than planned. Yet staff members noted that the extra time enabled the teams to deepen their relationship with partner schools and provide additional training for session facilitators. This finding suggests that regardless of the length of the actual implementation phase of club programs, sufficient time should be allotted for planning, coordination and engagement with stakeholders (e.g., schools and parents).

For example, Wits RHI, which shortened its planning and implementation phases to meet the demands of the schools, noted that coordination between some stakeholders was difficult, especially outreach to schools and parents. As engagement activities are critical to ensure student participation and community and school support for club-based empowerment interventions, WGCD partners recommend dedicating more than a year to this pre-implementation period.

### Lesson 7: Repeating the intervention may improve outcomes and facilitation strategies

While ICRW Asia, Wits RHI, and ZanaAfrica were all forced to condense their implementation periods, CARE Malawi encountered the opposite: though the team had planned for a shorter timeframe, grant savings allowed them to implement a second round of the curriculum. While some students lost interest in the repeated material and facilitators noted the additional time burden, outcomes were generally positive among students who completed two full rounds. The cohort who received a second round of the curriculum retained more information than their peers who only attended one round, and the repetition allowed students who had missed sessions the opportunity to make

them up. Facilitators appreciated the opportunity to teach the curriculum a second time and found that familiarity with the material not only improved their teaching, but encouraged them to be more creative in their instruction.

## Spotlight: ICRW Asia Plan-It Girls

*All program participants attended at least one Plan-It curriculum session per week. However, differences in context and school operations between urban Delhi and rural Jharkhand produced variation in program schedules. In Delhi, Plan-It Girls was integrated into regular school schedules as an assigned class period. The clubs met once per week for between 35 and 45 minutes and facilitators delivered one lesson per session. In Jharkhand, the schedule was more flexible, allowing for longer and more frequent sessions. The clubs met between two and three times per week, and each session lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours.*

*Program staff noted that in Delhi, facilitators were restricted by the shorter sessions and unable to answer all students' questions in the time allotted. The longer, more frequent sessions in Jharkhand helped facilitators ensure that students fully understood the material and supported student-facilitator relationship building. Both were more at ease with the pace of content delivery in Jharkhand school clubs.*



Photo Credit: Ryan Paul Lobo/ Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

<sup>9</sup> ZanaAfrica students have, anecdotally, reported this to be true, noting that they feel they are better able to recall information and continue learning without feeling overwhelmed.

# Recommendations for Youth Club Implementers

Based on preliminary lessons from WGCD youth clubs seeking to improve gender equality and achieve outcomes from sexual health to employability, other youth club implementers should consider the following recommendations:

1

## Use school-based programs

to reach boys - they may have other opportunities that compete for their time outside of school.



2

## Tailor content and approaches

for boys to engage them in gender equity.



3

## Incorporate intensive facilitator training

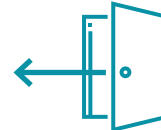
throughout the program before beginning implementation and during content delivery periods.



4

## Address risks of facilitator dropout

like competing opportunities and transportation costs.



5

## Follow intensive delivery schedules

to boost student retention rates and encourage higher quality learning without overwhelming students.



6

## Plan for stakeholder engagement activities

before beginning the implementation to encourage good relationships between actors.



7

## Allow for multiple intervention cycles

to achieve higher rates of material retention.



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