
WOMEN AND GIRLS: MAKING A LASTING DIFFERENCE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

ABOUT THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

We work with over 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Each year we reach over 20 million people face-to-face and more than 500 million people online, via broadcasts and publications. Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body.

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

This brief is part of a wider study undertaken by ODI that reflects on the work of the British Council in relation to the empowerment of women and girls between 2010 and 2015, generating recommendations on ways to improve on the existing offer through the identification of strengths, gaps and opportunities in this area. An important dimension of the analysis relates to the British Council's use of its cultural relations approach in its work on gender equality – that is, how much it shows a deep understanding of the context, promotes trust, works in partnership and fosters participation.

The study analyses impact with respect to five outcome areas for women and girls' empowerment to tackle gender inequality:

- (i) increased awareness and agency
- (ii) fairer access to opportunities and resources
- (iii) dialogue, collaboration and collective action
- (iv) supportive policy and institutional reform
- (v) changes in attitudes, beliefs, practices and discriminatory social norms

The focus of this brief is on how British Council programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa have contributed to achieving results for women and girls across those five outcome areas.

BRITISH COUNCIL’S WORK ON WOMEN AND GIRLS’ EMPOWERMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Sub-Saharan Africa is the largest recipient of UK Official Development Assistance (ODA). The British Council works in the following countries in the region: Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Work on women and girls is a cross-cutting feature of all our programming in Sub-Saharan Africa. The portfolio of projects that directly or indirectly impact on the lives of women and girls is large and varied, including projects in the areas of sports for development, peace-building and justice, social and collective action¹; education, and the arts, as well as skills and work on civil society and governance. While each country in the region decides what specific projects they implement and set their objectives depending on the country’s context as well as on resources and funding opportunities available, there has been a commitment to increase the focus on women and girls across the region. Some of the projects have done this by ensuring gender parity in participation which is a positive step, while others have made more profound engagement toward contributing to improve the situation of women and girls and gender equality, such as influencing changes in policy. The region’s diverse portfolio includes some large, multi-million pound donor-funded projects (two of which in Nigeria that include a component focusing on women and girls) and other small and medium scale projects, some of which focus on women and girls specifically. Here we present five projects from countries in the region that illustrate how the British Council is contributing to women and girls’ empowerment. It is important to note that while the projects are provided as examples of work in one outcome area, the majority of projects have impacts on more than one dimension of empowerment.

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH FOOTBALL², KENYA (2015–PRESENT)

This programme is highly regarded by communities, partners and British Council staff alike for its uniqueness working on violence against women and girls (VAWG) while incorporating the sport for development dimension. The approach is reflective of the way in which British Council works through sport as a way of reaching young people, and uses it as engagement tool to also address issues such as child protection, violence against women and promoting changes in gender norms and roles. It does this through opening opportunities for boys/girls and men/women to engage together in safe spaces, where a premise of gender equality is promoted, in order to play sport together. DFID-funded (£1.8m), the programme was designed by the British Council Kenya office through consultations with authorities and members of the community.

The three-year VAWG programme has been set up as a pilot in a rural location (Mount Elgon) and an urban location (Kisumu). In Mount Elgon, where this study collected data, the programme works in two localities with a total of 48 coaches (27 men and 21 women). There are currently 422 girls and 538 boys enrolled – so 44% girls, exceeding the target of 40%.

The multi-pronged approach engages participating boys, girls and coaches through football while including training sessions on a specially designed curriculum on VAWG. The programme trains coaches who are active members of the community to help disseminate the messages of the programme more broadly.

The design and initial implementation of this programme is a strong example of the British Council’s cultural relations approach in the area of women and girls’ empowerment, given its explicit efforts to understand the context, promote partnerships and build stakeholders’ trust. According to local officials in Mount Elgon and in Bungoma county, the programme is co-owned: they endorse its messages and methodology: ‘The British Council came at a time when we needed them...The programme has developed all of us’. This has been instrumental in the programme’s first year success.

The preliminary findings identified through this study conducted half-way through project implementation include the following:

Coaches explained that the approach to integrating girls and boys through football was useful so that they could interact in a social, non-sexualised context, while the information about protection and their bodies could keep them safe. According to a female coach, ‘[t]he programme has helped girls look at themselves in a way they didn’t before, they have more information and that allows them to be able to talk to their parents, and also to relate to other boys.’

Girls interviewed agreed the programme had improved interaction between girls and boys, making boys more respectful during the football and educational sessions and beyond the programme’s activities. They also noted that they had gained some confidence to negotiate with parents with regards to their safety, with one girl saying, ‘I now tell my mother in the evening that I do not want to go out to the shop in the evening to buy things for her as this can be dangerous.’ Boys said they had increased awareness of sex education and of inappropriate behaviour towards girls; and to respect and not abuse their peers, including by avoiding physical fights..

The VAWG programme aims to have an important impact in changing social and gender norms in the community that perpetuate violence; to improve the local policy and institutional environment through its work with authorities, who have become actively engaged with the programme; and ultimately, to strengthen girls’ individual power and agency with greater self-confidence and active knowledge about their rights and the risks they face, enabling them to protect themselves better. Work with boys seeks to involve them in creating an environment of respect and safety, while also teaching them about their rights and responsibilities. Therefore, while still early in the process, the VAWG programme is in line to meet two of the outcomes in the framework: increased awareness and agency and changes in attitudes, beliefs, practices and discriminatory social norms.



1 Also known as ‘social action’
2 <https://www.britishcouncil.co.ke/vawg>

ACTIVE CITIZENS UGANDA (2013–15)

Active Citizens³ promotes intercultural dialogue, community-led social development and social responsibility, working to build empowerment through the promotion of social change in communities. Implemented in partnership with CSOs and academic institutions, the programme has been running in more than 40 countries globally since 2009.

In Uganda, between 2013 and 2015, the programme targeted unprivileged and marginalised communities within the five districts of Bushenyi (Western Uganda), Nebbi and Apac (Northern Uganda), Pallisa (Eastern Uganda) and Kampala (Central Uganda) with the primary focus on increasing community awareness and participation through locally-led initiatives, called Social Action Projects (SAPs). The programme had a specific focus on youth, and promoted the development of social enterprises as a solution to high levels of youth unemployment and community development. While the programme did not have a specific focus on women and girls' empowerment, there are both women-led and women-focused SAPs.

Research for this report conducted in Apac district revealed that SAPs implemented by volunteers had contributed to increasing economic opportunities for young women participants by providing them with relevant skills in business development and financial management. A female focus group participant in Apac provided the following example: 'The knowledge and skills we got was on business development. We started with a very small tree... Before, we were waiting for external support but after getting knowledge from AC we now started a nursery bed with our own resources.'

Active Citizens in Uganda also strengthened participation in the community of participating young women through their involvement in programme activities. This was important as women are typically relegated to domestic work and have very limited social interaction in the community. A female beneficiary in Apac district credited the project with important benefits: 'It has empowered us [women involved in the project]. We have the ability to do things the community can also appreciate such as planting trees in schools. When the community see that this group of women are the ones doing it, this makes us feel the project has empowered us... The project has specifically given me confidence to speak to people, I have confidence to approach people and even I can talk about what is wrong and good in the community and I can sensitise the community.'

The project also enhanced the capacity of women in Apac to resolve their challenges collectively, demonstrating the power of collective action and empowerment: 'They have taught us how to build trust and to understand our friends, to understand how things can start and how things can get developed. Things like forming a group, how to manage the group and how you can make the group to be known outside' (female beneficiary).

Still the participation of active female leaders in programme activities remained low at the end of the project as a result of the traditional social norms that assign women to domestic work, leaving them little or no free time to participate in activities.

Findings from qualitative fieldwork in Apac district indicate some evidence of the programme's contribution to two of the outcome areas: fairer access to resources and opportunities by women who had participated in business development and financial skills training, as well as increased awareness and agency by women who had become involved in voluntary work and realised they could contribute through their participation. There is limited evidence on transformative changes of attitudes and social norms, however at the time of writing. Some community members – particularly men – said they had been made aware of the usefulness of women's participation, but changes in social norms take time. However, through the creation of new spaces for women's active participation in community life and women's increased awareness of their contribution beyond the domestic realm, there might be some transformation in attitudes and beliefs, triggered by the programme's initiatives.



NIGERIAN STABILITY AND RECONCILIATION PROGRAMME (2011–PRESENT)

The British Council leads a consortium of international and Nigerian partners to deliver the DFID-funded Nigerian Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), valued at £33m. NSRP aims to reduce violent conflict, providing support to Nigerian stakeholders to better manage conflict resulting in wealth creation, service delivery and poverty reduction⁴. This programme is not specifically focused on women and girls, however Component 3, which is supported by Social Development Direct, is directed at women and girls with the aim of fostering ‘more influential participation by women and girls in institutions and initiatives relevant to peacebuilding, with reduced prevalence and impact of violence against women and girls’⁵.

Component 3 has supported the following projects in Nigeria which are aimed at improving the situation of women:

Peace clubs are one of the elements of Component 3. A core success of the programme is the increased willingness of women and girls to report sexual violence. Peace clubs train facilitators who have gained the trust of young people (both girls and boys) aged 10–24. ‘These young people are willing to report issues and through the peace clubs will be linked to the “observatory” steering committee, which has medical, legal support and religious support. Peace clubs are also sometimes characterised as “safe spaces”, as noted with the lead implementer of this component. She noted that, for violence to truly start falling, there will need a big increase in number of the cases being reported and actions taken in response to this, generating a change in social attitudes towards violence. The programme is doing this on a very localised level through NGO partners, community leaders, teachers, and others.

The Women’s Peace and Security Network (WPSN) is also supported by NSRP. There are eight state-level WPSNs and one at federal level. The network is an informal grouping of women’s organisations such as Prisoners’ Rehabilitation and Reform Action, the Medical Women’s Association of Nigeria and the Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria. All of the organisations at the federal level are significant organisations with a strong track record of action. They are staffed by dynamic professional women with great experience and knowledge. According to this study, the added value of the WPSN has been in the training offered in skills such as proposal writing, peace processes and how to use data for advocacy. For example, the head of the Medical Women’s Association stated that, ‘[w]e have become advocates now – NSRP has given us this.’ These organisations have also been involved in a dialogue about sensitising the national government on UNHCR Resolution 1325⁶ and the adoption of the National Action Plan and on lobbying government in relation to the five pillars of accountability within this. NSRP’s Component 3 therefore contributes to the ‘individual and collective power and agency’ outcome area. In the case of peace clubs, this is achieved by providing individual women and girls who have experienced violence the space and confidence to report it. The WPSN supports collective power by bringing together groups of professional women who, through their newly acquired skills, can be stronger advocates for change in governance structures that benefit society as a whole and women in particular.



⁴ <http://www.nsrp-nigeria.org>
⁵ <http://www.nsrp-nigeria.org/work/output-3-2/>

⁶ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>

**JUSTICE FOR ALL, NIGERIA
(2010–PRESENT)**

J4A is a large-scale DFID-funded programme with a total investment of £47m. The British Council is the lead partner in a consortium of several international and Nigerian partners⁷. The programme focuses on reform of the justice sector and works across several states⁸.

This programme includes broad reforms that improve access to justice for disadvantaged groups. Although gender is a cross-cutting theme, J4A is not specifically focused on women and girls, but has some explicitly gendered components. These include the following components that work on preventing, prosecuting and responding to sexual violence:

- Supporting the creation of the Mirabel Centre, situated at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, and the Tamar Centre in Enugu, which provide counselling and medical support to victims of sexual and domestic violence, as well links to legal support and referrals from model police stations. J4A reports that most victims are under 17 years of age. It should be noted that boys are also victims but much smaller numbers are seen at the Mirabel Centre.

Staff at Mirabel reported that, ‘We help them understand that what happened to them is not their fault. We have a quarterly survivor’s forum. This is so helpful for the girls to move on and for them to open up – even when this means they are going against their parent’s wishes. We also help parents understand that they should not feel shame – we see the greatest change in their attitudes after we have spent time with them.’

It is considered a mark of success that the number of referrals to Mirabel has increased and the service is highly recommended, providing a different experience to women and girls, who are the vast majority of clients in a context where victims are often treated badly and blamed and shunned by authorities as well as families and the wider community. However, with the end of J4A on the horizon, there are concerns about sustainability.

- Model police stations: J4A has also set up family support unit (FSUs), which deal with cases of sexual and gender-based violence, in 12 model police stations in the country.

The commanding officer of Isokoko (Lagos) Police Station interviewed for this study, said, ‘We are finding that more and more people are reporting here and referring cases to this station. We used to see domestic violence as an issue to be settled between a man and his wife. We tried to make peace only rather than to prosecute... In J4A we have simplified the GBV and domestic violence law but we need to do more to build the capacity of police to prosecute.’

A woman inspector trained to work with victims of sexual violence reported that, ‘J4A has encouraged us to share the training and lessons that we have learnt...We have been trained[by British people] and we know how to appreciate and talk to the victim.’

However, at the time of the research, very few cases had been successfully prosecuted, and this was a source of frustration for those working at Mirabel and at Isokoko Police Station.

The J4A programme also links with local community organisations that raise awareness on issues of GBV and the need for victims to seek justice by going to the police.

In terms of the British Council’s engagement at the policy level, J4A contributed to putting political pressure on the Nigerian president, who signed the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Bill (VAPP) into law in 2015. The VAPP Bill contains resolutions on the prohibition of domestic violence.

J4A has contributed to several of the British Council’s outcome areas. Through its gender-responsive components, it has the potential to promote individual awareness and agency by reducing the impacts of stigma on victims and strengthening self-confidence to report perpetrators, and also by providing physical and psychological healing. It has also contributed to changing negative attitudes to victims, particularly among the police, as well as from men within the community. While its reach is too small to be considered to have impacts in terms of social norm change, by engagement with victims and their families to counter their sense of shame it is improving social perspectives towards victims. Lastly, the J4A programme has helped improve individual institutions and policies through political pressure, as well as cross-sector working to better respond to VAWG cases and victims, which can be attributed to the British Council’s strong efforts to build partnerships and promote policy change.



7 Atos Consulting, Oxford Policy Management, the IDL Group, CLEEN, PRAWA, JRI and NCMG.

8 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/ng/justice-for-all-nigeria/about>

CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT PROGRAMME, ETHIOPIA (2011–PRESENT)

The Civil Society Support Programme⁹ (CSSP) is a large-scale €40 million multi-donor¹⁰ programme that has awarded grants to over 500 CSOs and delivered capacity development training to over 700 CSOs. It works collaboratively with CSOs in Ethiopia to strengthen their contribution to the government’s goal of achieving national development and poverty reduction. In order to align with government requirements, CSSP has targeted members of the ‘hard-to-reach population’, defined as those left behind in the development process owing to geographical remoteness, status and overlooked issues. Women and girls are among this population. CSSP has placed particular emphasis on supporting gender equality and on reducing VAWG in Ethiopia.

One of the initiatives within CSSP that has focused particularly on improving the situation of women and girls is SASA!, an approach which was developed by the Ugandan-based organisation Raising Voices¹¹. The SASA! model has four phases: 1) the Start phase, to foster power within programme participants (community activists) to address the connection between violence against women and HIV; 2) the Awareness phase, to engage the community to become aware of power imbalances between men and women and how silence about this power imbalance perpetuates violence against women and its connection to HIV/AIDS; 3) the Support phase, to engage the community in offering support to one another to confront violence against women and HIV/AIDS; and 4) the Action phase, to engage the community in using their power to take action to normalise shared power and non-violence, demonstrate its benefits and, as a result, prevent violence against women and HIV.

The Oromia Region Women’s Association (ORWA) is one of the implementing partners for SASA! in the Oromia region and in parts of Addis City Administration. ORWA is a membership organisation with strong links to the government. It has developed strong experience working with marginalised women – particularly on addressing violence against women and girls. In Oromia, SASA! is currently being piloted in Debre Libanos woreda (district). The project has completed the first phase and is well into the second. While the structure to eliminate harmful traditional practices exists in the kebele (village), it requires improvement. The Programme Coordinator noted that ‘the task forces at kebele and woreda level do not do preventive work. They only react when the crime is committed. SASA! is working on behavioural change to prevent violence against women’.

Research for this study confirmed that community activists are teaching women and girls about their rights, early marriage, girls’ education, violence against women and HIV/AIDS. Men from the community have been engaged as community activists reflecting a good understanding of local gender dynamics – part of the British Council’s cultural relations approach. For example, when women interviewed were asked if it would be better to have only women activists, they said it would have been very difficult for women to teach the men alone. Some of the positive results that have been identified are in relation to changes in attitudes among some members of the community. For example, a female community activist spoke about a man who had beaten his wife for many years but who had changed since receiving SASA! sensitisation: ‘After I got the [SASA!] training, I started educating him and his wife about harmful practice men are doing on women. I was not afraid of him. I used to go with my colleague [a male community activist]. After some time we began seeing change in this person. He started supporting his wife to bring water and helping her in the domestic activities at home.’

ORWA has also established two SASA! clubs that work with children on violence against women. They have a balanced number of girl and boy members, as well as a gender balance in the number of teachers. The school has experience working on abduction since some of the girls coming from the lowland areas are abducted and drop out from school. SASA! has contributed to changing this situation. For example, a teacher who is also member of the SASA! school club told a story of how a brother helped his sister stay in school: ‘We have a male student here. His sister stopped coming to school because her parents refused to send her to school for fear that someone will abduct her. Her brother convinced his parents that he would protect her from abduction by walking with her to and from school. She is now attending in school’. Male and female students are now travelling together.

SASA! has shown important potential to change social norms and discriminatory behaviours against women and girls through community activism. Community activists, mainly women and girls, but also men and boys, are educating people in the community to change their attitude towards gender power relations, which is the major factor in violence against women. It can also be seen as contributing favourably to promoting dialogue, collaboration and collective action, with men and women volunteers working together with the common aim of improving the situation of violence and increasing women’s knowledge about their rights. Community activists themselves, through training and greater spaces for engaging with the community and local government, have seen important developments in their awareness and agency. Thus, this programme can be seen as contributing to three of the outcome areas.



9. www.britishcouncil.org/partner/track-record/civil-society-support-programme

10. Irish Aid, DFID, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Embassy of Sweden, Embassy of the Netherlands, Canadian International Development Agency.

11. <http://raisingvoices.org/sasa/>

The examples presented illustrate how the British Council is implementing programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa with effective actions across the five empowerment outcomes that frame this area of work. They also show that programmes contribute across a number of outcome areas, working to subvert gender stereotypes, and help change discriminatory social norms – particularly in relation to violence against women and girls and their equal participation in society. The majority of programmes have also been able to promote participants' awareness, agency and self-confidence as an initial step to achieving progress in other outcome areas.

One of the challenges that remains for work by the British Council in Sub-Saharan Africa is its knowledge management of the impacts its programmes have on women and girls' empowerment. While there are several targeted programmes which have clear objectives and actions to improve the situation of women and girls, there are a number of projects in the portfolio, such as Active Citizens a and CSSP, that do not specifically target women and girls but that do contribute to their wellbeing indirectly. Current monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management systems in the British Council need to improve their capacity to identify models that impact on the lives of women and girls that work, and uncover why they work. This is important to understand the British Council's contribution to equality and diversity, as well as to inform a more gender responsive design of its programmes across the regional portfolio.

In terms of the cultural relations approach, the British Council works in close partnership with local organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Another major strength is the way it works in countries over long periods of time, having had presence in the region for over 70 years.

The projects explored are responsive to the context and build capacity of local organisations and volunteers to work on issues that are important for women and girls and that can contribute to their wellbeing. This is a factor that can contribute to their sustainability if communities are able to take them forward beyond the project's duration and/or funding, particularly as the financial sustainability of larger scale programmes is challenging.

The development of a regional strategy to address women and girls' empowerment placed within a global framework can also contribute to greater sustainability. Adopting a regional perspective can offer guidance and stimulate synergies among country offices across programmes has the potential to enhance the impact of the organisation's work on women and girls at the country and regional levels while strengthening the British Council's track record on women and girls' empowerment in country and region consistently. The organisation is well positioned to develop its view and tools to achieve women and girls' empowerment based on global, regional and local trends and research.

The British Council should ensure that projects are designed and financed consistently in a way to reflect a deep understanding of the local and regional contexts as well as of the mission of the organisation which has been developing significantly in the past few years. Resources should be used efficiently and in a way to avoid one-time projects whose impact is hard to assess and to become long lasting. Placing projects within a country, regional and global strategy on women and girls' empowerment would help to avoid these shortcomings and enhance the profile of the organisation as a key player within the gender field.