



**CHILDREN
EMPOWERED**

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS – COMBINING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS WITH SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SKILLS BUILDING

AFLATOUN
INTERNATIONAL

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At Aflatoun, we believe that including social and financial education into SRHR programmes allow youths to gain the knowledge, attitudes and skills that will ultimately lead to economically empowered girls that are less likely to engage in risky behaviour and be exposed to forced sex and are more likely to access health services.

THE CHALLENGE

Adolescent girls and young women face serious challenges to fulfilling their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including vulnerability to HIV, sexually transmitted infections, unintended and unsafe pregnancy [1].

Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for 15- to 19-year-old girls globally [2]. Approximately 16 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 and 2.5 million girls aged 12 to 15 give birth each year [3]. Adolescent pregnancies are a global problem that occurs in high, middle, and low-income countries. Nine in ten births by adolescents occur within marriage or a union [4]. Every day, an average of 33,000 girls are forced into child marriage [5]. For many adolescents, pregnancy is neither planned nor wanted. More than 220 million women and girls, mostly in the poorest countries and most of whom wish to use contraception, still do not have access to modern contraceptive methods [6]. The unmet need for contraception is highest among adolescents [7]. More than 3 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 in low-income countries undergo unsafe abortions each year [8]. Globally, about 120 million girls have been raped or subjected to other forced sexual acts during their lives [9].

At least 200 million girls and women alive today have been subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) [10]. Three in every five new HIV infections among young people are among young women [11].

Most of these challenges are caused by social and economic determinants. Gender norms in many societies are not conducive. On top of that, adolescent girls have limited opportunities to gain the education, knowledge, resources, and skills that can lead to better health and economic advancement [12].

COMBINING SRHR WITH SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL EDUCATION

At Aflatoun, we believe that SRHR programmes must include efforts to advance the wider economic and societal factors affecting young people. We believe that offering basic sexual and reproductive education and health services is not enough. Including social and financial education into SRHR programmes allow youths to gain the knowledge, attitudes and skills that will ultimately lead to economically empowered girls that are less likely to engage in risky behaviour and be exposed to forced sex, and are more likely to access health services. It is about girls gaining positive self-esteem, understanding their individual rights, being aware of misguided gender stereotypes, and being economically empowered, resulting in overall healthier lives.

[1] Decide: Sexual and reproductive health and rights: summary. Plan International, 2020. <https://plan-international.org/es/file/44639/download?token=3bUIS-3r>.

[2] World Health Organization (WHO) (2018). "Adolescent pregnancy factsheet" [online] www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy, Geneva: WHO

[3] World Health Organization (WHO) (2018). "Adolescent pregnancy factsheet" [online] www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy, Geneva: WHO

[4] Vogel, J.P., Pileggi-Castro, C., Chandra-Mouli, V., Pileggi, V.N., Souza, J.P., Chou, D., Say, L. (2015). "Millennium Development Goal 5 and adolescents: looking back, moving forward", *Arch Dis Child*. 2015 Feb;100 Suppl 1:S43-7. doi: 10.1136/archdischild-2013-305514.

[5] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2019). UNICEF Data: Child Marriage [online], New York: UNICEF

[6] Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) (2018). 2018 Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Crisis, <http://iawg.net/iafm/>

[7] UNFPA (2015). Facing the fact: Adolescent girls and contraception [online], New York: UNFPA

[8] UNFPA (2013). The State of the World Population, Motherhood in Childhood. Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy. [online] www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP2013.pdf

[9] UNICEF (2014). A statistical snapshot of violence against adolescent girls, New York: UNICEF

[10] UNICEF (2016). "FGM: A Global Concern", <https://data.unicef.org/resources/female-genital-mutilationcutting-global-concern/>, New York: UNICEF

[11] UNAIDS (2019). Women and HIV: A spotlight on adolescent girls and young women, [online]

[12] Fewer, S., Ramos, J., & Dunning, D. (2013). Economic Empowerment Strategies for Adolescent Girls: Adolescent Girls' Advocacy & Leadership Initiative

It is of utmost importance that every girl (and boy) receive a combination of social, financial and comprehensive sexuality education. Adolescents need to be equipped with skills and competencies to ensure good health. By increasing girls' financial capability and awareness of their health, social and economic rights, girls have increased self-confidence and agency over their future choices. They are able to manage and expand their resources in order to reach their broader life goals. It reduces the likelihood of risk behaviour, early pregnancy, forced sex and teen pregnancy. When these invaluable lessons are absorbed and subsequently also employed in the wider community, it will address broader harmful societal norms and help bring lasting change.

THE SOLUTION



Programmes and interventions that combine SRHR, social, and financial education are more effective. A recently published independent review found that combining financial education, social education (self-efficacy), and sexual and reproductive health education have positive effects on SRHR/HIV-related outcomes. These outcomes included improved knowledge, attitudes and reduced sexual risk-taking behaviour. Furthermore, it found improved self-efficacy, including changes in confidence, negotiating ability and social conditions that enable adolescent girls (and boys) to act on their gained knowledge [13].

For example, a study of a programme with 14–20-year-old adolescent girls and young women in Uganda that included health education, financial education and

vocational/skills education saw significantly improved HIV and pregnancy knowledge and behaviours and increased likelihood of engagement in an income-generating activity (IGA). A study on the Shaz! Project in Zimbabwe, which offered adolescent girls and young women an intervention that included life skills, health education, financial education, and vocational skills training for an IGA, saw reduced food insecurity, lower risk of transactional sex, higher likelihood of condom use, and fewer unintended pregnancies [14].

AFLATOUN INTERNATIONAL'S PROGRAMME OF SUPPORT



AFLATEEN+

With the focus to enhance gender equality, Aflatoun International designed a global initiative: Aflateen+, a powerful educational programme to transform the lives of girls and boys aged 14–19 through life skills, financial education, and entrepreneurship with a gender lens, provided through student-centred learning methods. The programme can be integrated into existing initiatives or function as stand-alone programmes [15]. The SRHR/Gender theme is prominent throughout the Aflateen+ curriculum as adolescents explore social concepts as identity, community norms, socio-economic status and religion. Throughout the lessons, the connection between gender equality and economic prosperity is emphasised; encouraging the empowerment that improves the wider societal situation of SRHR. The curriculum consists of 48 flexible sessions, each between 1 and 2 hours, that can be adapted and integrated into other programmes. The programme is designed for both girls and boys, as we want to give organisations the opportunity to engage everyone in an equal manner.

[13] Lee, Nanci & Stücklin, Sabrina & López Rodríguez, Patricia & Faris, Meryem & Mukaka, Ida. (2020). Financial education for HIV-vulnerable youth, orphans, and vulnerable children: A systematic review of outcome evidence. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*. 16. 10.1002/cl2.1071.

[14] ASPIRES Evidence Briefing Note: Emerging Learning to Inform DREAMS. USAID. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00W5ZD.pdf

[15] For example, a growing number of DREAMS countries use the Aflateen tools as part of their programmes. DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe) is a USAID/PEPFAR partnership aimed at reducing rates of HIV among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in the highest HIV burden countries.

The programme can also be used with girls-only groups if this is preferred.

The Aflateen+ programme uses active-learning methods to engage adolescent girls and boys. Educators who undergo the training benefit from our student-centred learning methodology as well. For example, teachers will better understand how to engage students with the curriculum material, learn how to reduce gender bias in their approach and treat girls and boys equally in the classroom.

DEMONSTRATED IMPACT



In 2020, Aflatoun completed two rigorous external impact evaluations (Randomised Controlled Trials) of Aflateen+ programmes in Burkina Faso and Cameroon. Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) are the most rigorous way of determining whether a cause-effect correlation exists between intervention and outcome. Children and adolescents receiving the Aflatoun Life Skills and Financial Education programme are compared with control groups that did not receive it. This method rules out the possibility that the effect measured is caused by factors external to the programme.

The RCT of Aflateen+ in Cameroon found that the Life Skills and Financial Education programme has a positive impact on students' skills. This includes: critical thinking about gender roles, student's knowledge about human rights & responsibilities, sexual-based violence, financial knowledge, saving & spending behaviour and entrepreneurial behaviour. The RCT of the Aflateen+ programme in Burkina Faso found a positive effect on awareness of rights and responsibilities, critical thinking about gender roles, decision making in personal relationships, financial knowledge, saving & spending behaviour, and entrepreneurial attitudes.



Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls - Burkina Faso & Cameroon

In partnership with Sint Antonius Stichting, we scaled up our operations in these two West African countries to roll out Aflateen+. Utilising a national network of NGOs (civil society) in Burkina Faso and the national education system in Cameroon we were able to empower vulnerable young people.



Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls - Mali, Niger & Togo

In partnership with Dubai Cares, we are able to implement Aflateen+ across three more West African nations. By providing the core programme as well as the training manual and monitoring and evaluation tools we have reached more vulnerable children and young people. Providing vital access to SRHR information.



Gender-Sensitive Global Citizenship and Life Skills Education for Youth – Indonesia, Nepal and Pakistan

In partnership with Reach out to Asia (ROTA) under Education Above All (EAA), we are on the course to socially and economically empower youth in 8 provinces across these countries by delivering Aflateen+ in formal and non-formal education settings. We collaborate with our local partners and national stakeholders to scale up our efforts to deepen and broaden our reach, including the most vulnerable.



Empowering vulnerable girls with social and financial skills In Benin, Senegal, and the DRC

In partnership with the Nationale Postcode Loterij, we aim to socially and economically empower 26,000 adolescent girls and boys in 3 countries. It will provide them with life skills and financial literacy necessary to make informed choices about their health, finances, and education. Working with governmental institutions and stakeholders is central to the project's success, and to guaranteeing the sustainable inclusion of life skills and gender-sensitive financial education elements in the national school curricula.

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