Transforming gender norms through life-skills programming in rural Ethiopia: short-term impacts and emerging lessons for adaptive programming

Amhara case study

Sarah Baird, Rebecca Dutton, Joan Hamory, Abreham Iyasu, Nicola Jones, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and Workneh Yadete

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# 1 Life skills and gender-transformative programming for adolescents

Life-skills programmes for adolescents generally seek to build skills and behaviours that facilitate communication, decision-making, emotion management, relationship development and overall success in life. By either supplementing formal education or providing much-needed opportunities for out-of-school adolescents, such programmes aim to empower adolescents. More recently, programmes have increasingly aspired to be 'gender transformative' as well – that is, to shift gender roles to be more equitable by challenging norms, attitudes, and gendered systems (Gupta, 2000; Levy et al., 2020).

Life-skills programming that takes a gender-responsive approach is well-positioned to both build adolescents' skills and to empower them more broadly. Reviews of the impacts of club-based life-skills interventions in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) find that they improve adolescents' educational, mental health and psychosocial outcomes, but also highlight important evidence gaps, particularly for interventions targeting very young adolescents (VYA; aged 10–14 years) (Marcus et al., 2019; Catino and Battistini, 2018; Haberland et al., 2018; Singla et al., 2020).

The implementation and evaluation of Act With Her-Ethiopia (AWH-E) programming, targeting three diverse populations in Ethiopia, provides a critical opportunity to fill this evidence gap and contribute to understanding of 'what works' to influence adolescents' trajectories. The first phase of AWH-E, which is the focus of this report, is a safe spaces curriculum-based group programme for girls aged 11–13, with additional programming for boys and adolescents' support systems (including parents, community leaders and other community members) and system-strengthening initiatives. The programme aims to help girls and boys build skills and a supportive network through which to navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood, and to support enabling environments for gender norm transformation. The second phase of AWH-E will target older adolescents (aged 14–18) and be

Figure 1: Location of AWH-E programming and research sites
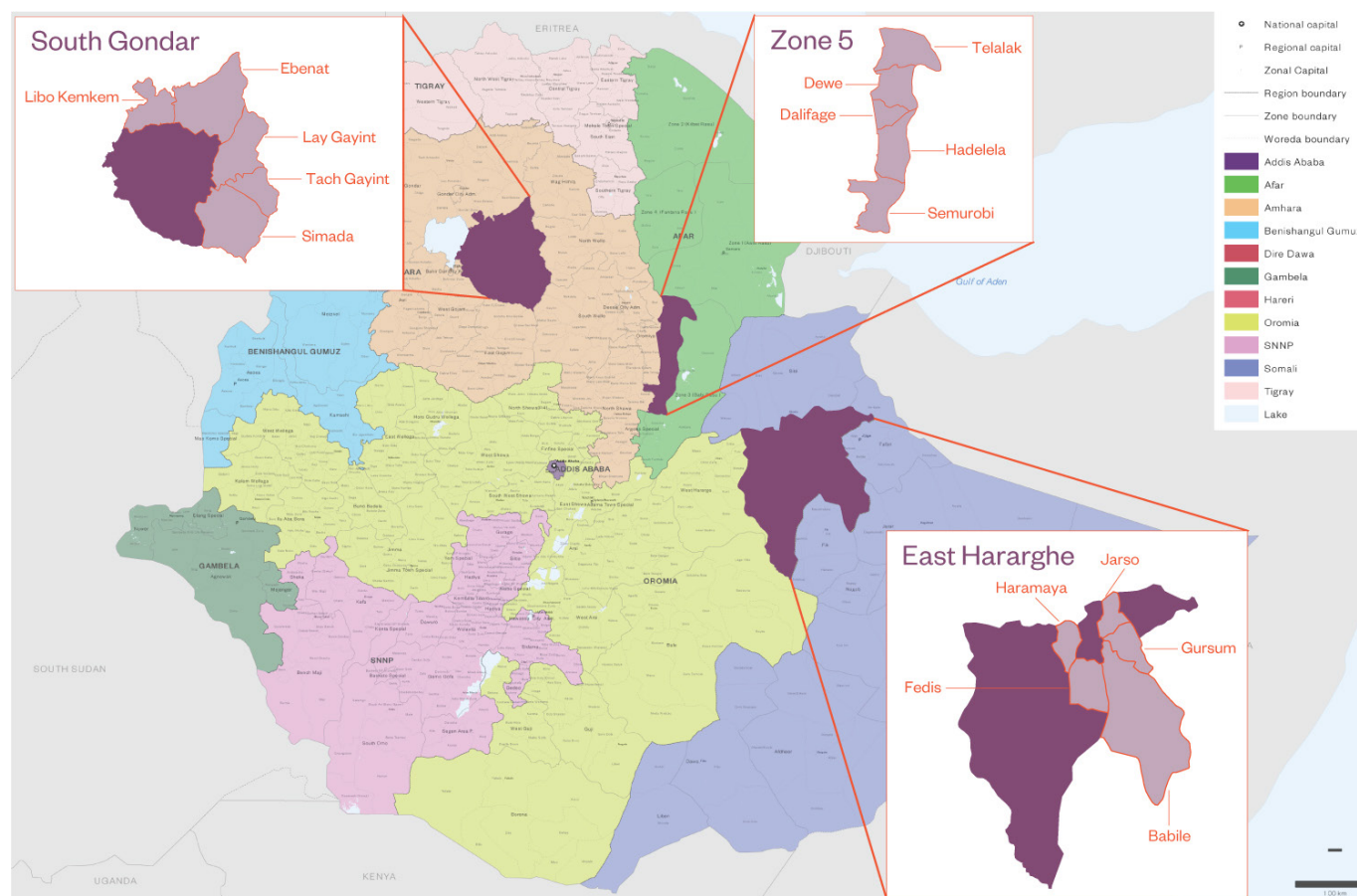
Source: Based on the OCHA/ReliefWeb administrative map of Ethiopia (August 2017) and modified to show the GAGE research sites.

the subject of future work. The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme is carrying out a longitudinal cluster randomised evaluation of the AWH-E programme in three regions of Ethiopia: Afar, Amhara and Oromia (see Figure 1). This report is one of a series of three regional reports. It focuses on findings from South Gondar in Amhara region.

2 Ethiopian context and overview of Act With Her-Ethiopia life-skills programme

Ethiopia has made tremendous progress over the past 20 years in terms of school enrolment, health systems coverage, and sexual and reproductive health services (Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA) and ICF, 2016). Yet despite this progress, the country continues to rank among the top five in terms of absolute numbers of people living in poverty, with women and girls being disproportionately impacted (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Ethiopia, 2018; Katayama, 2019). Even with the continued focus on their education and rights, women and girls in Ethiopia are still less educated and have far fewer economic opportunities than men and boys (CSA and ICF, 2016). More than half of Ethiopia's population is below 20 years of age, providing an opportunity for gender-focused life-skills interventions that aim to shape the trajectory of communities across the nation.
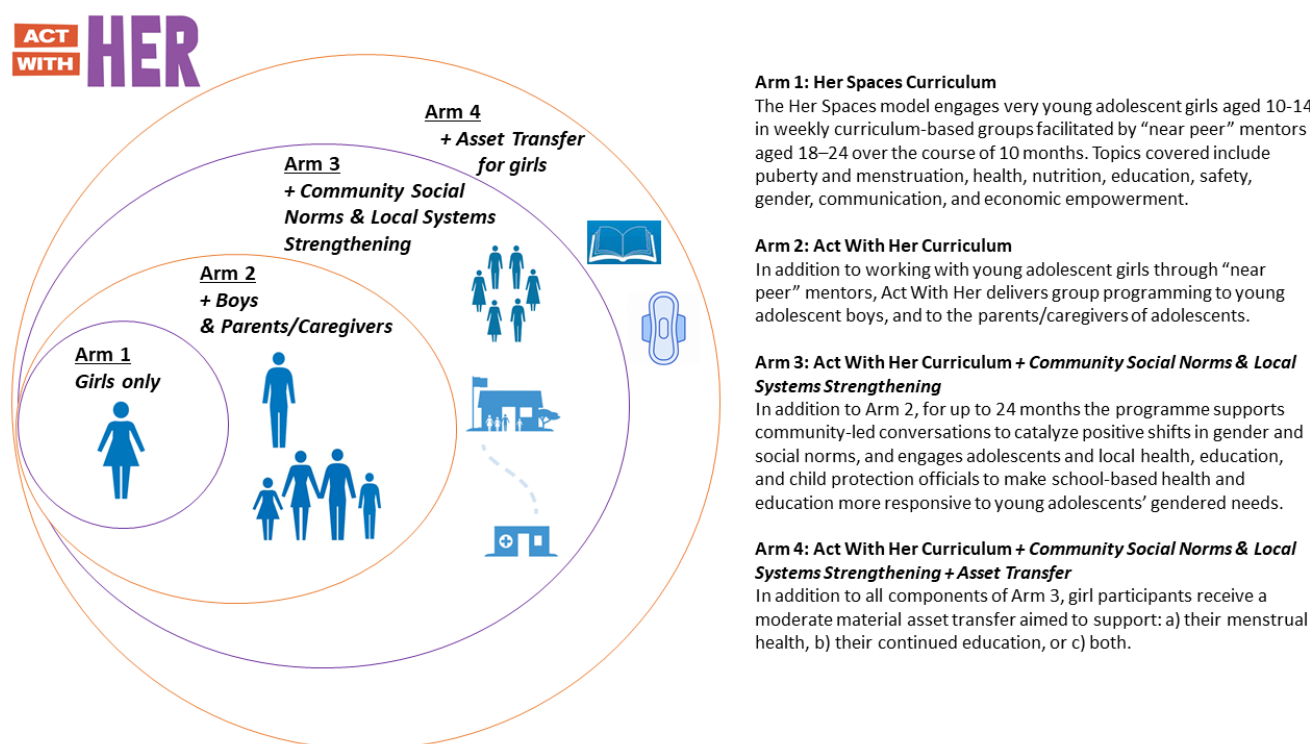
Within this context, AWH-E is designed to contribute to the health, educational and social foundations that adolescent girls and boys need to thrive and navigate healthy transitions to adulthood. The life-skills club format provides structured and safe educational spaces grounded in a defined curriculum guided by a near-peer mentor with whom adolescents can build a trusted relationship (Kågesten et al., 2016; Pathfinder International, 2020). In addition to adolescent girls' club meetings, AWH-E delivers gender synchronous programming with adolescent boys of the same age. Supplementary programming targeting parents and community stakeholders aims at addressing the underlying discriminatory social norms that undermine adolescent girls' educational aspirations and rights to bodily integrity, and reinforce harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM/C. AWH-E's focus on VYAs and their support systems also offers an opportunity to understand how context-sensitive interventions can shape their communities and influence the lives of young people.

Pathfinder International, in collaboration with the Government of Ethiopia, in partnership with CARE International and with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is implementing a five-year umbrella programme to contribute to developing the health, education, economic and social pathways that adolescent girls need to thrive during the transition to adulthood. By 2022, the programme aims to reach 50,000 adolescent Ethiopian girls and boys by scaling up an existing girls' empowerment programme (called Her Spaces) while simultaneously assessing the potential value added of an expanded version (AWH-E). Across Afar, Amhara and Oromia, the programming is delivered in 15 *woredas* and 124 *kebeles*. A total of 544 adolescent groups led by more than 571 trained mentors were established, with over 13,000 adolescents participating (7,532 girls and 6,193 boys). Both Her Spaces and AWH-E engage VYA girls in weekly curriculum-based groups facilitated by 'near peer' mentors aged 18–24 over the course of 10 months. A wide range of topics are covered, including puberty and menstruation, health, nutrition, education, safety, gender, communication and economic empowerment. AWH-E additionally includes mentor-led group programming for male VYA peers, and a series of group sessions with parents or caregivers of the male and female VYAs. In one programme arm (arm 3), AWH-E also partners with local communities to catalyse positive shifts in gender and social norms, and to make key health, education, child protection and other social services more adolescent-responsive. In a fourth programme arm of AWH-E (arm 4), girls also receive a moderate material asset transfer intended to support their menstrual health and continued education (Pathfinder International, 2021) (see Figure 2).

3 Overview of GAGE evaluation methods of Act With Her-Ethiopia

The GAGE evaluation of this programming was designed as a cluster randomised controlled trial (cRCT). Adolescents aged 10–12 were recruited for participation in the evaluation in late 2017 and early 2018 using random selection from researcher-generated community household lists. Baseline data was collected on all households with participating adolescents, and then randomisation into four programming treatment arms was conducted at the community level. In Amhara,

Figure 2: Intervention arms

Arm 1: Her Spaces Curriculum
The Her Spaces model engages very young adolescent girls aged 10-14 in weekly curriculum-based groups facilitated by "near peer" mentors aged 18–24 over the course of 10 months. Topics covered include puberty and menstruation, health, nutrition, education, safety, gender, communication, and economic empowerment.

Arm 2: Act With Her Curriculum
In addition to working with young adolescent girls through "near peer" mentors, Act With Her delivers group programming to young adolescent boys, and to the parents/caregivers of adolescents.

Arm 3: Act With Her Curriculum + *Community Social Norms & Local Systems Strengthening*
In addition to Arm 2, for up to 24 months the programme supports community-led conversations to catalyze positive shifts in gender and social norms, and engages adolescents and local health, education, and child protection officials to make school-based health and education more responsive to young adolescents' gendered needs.

Arm 4: Act With Her Curriculum + *Community Social Norms & Local Systems Strengthening + Asset Transfer*
In addition to all components of Arm 3, girl participants receive a moderate material asset transfer aimed to support: a) their menstrual health, b) their continued education, or c) both.

https://www.pathfinder.org/projects/act-with-her/

communities were randomised into five evaluation arms (see Figure 2): (a) Her Spaces programming involving a life skills curriculum with girls only (arm 1); (b) AWH-E programming (including boys + girls life skills curricula, and parents meetings) (arm 1); (c) AWH-E programming (girls + boys life-skills curricula, parent meetings, plus community-level social norms and systems strengthening) (arm 2) (d) AWH-E programming with asset transfers for girls (arm 4); and (e) a control group (no intervention). Once community groups had been assigned, Pathfinder International launched the life-skills programming in the treatment communities. Programming recruitment was performed separately from the evaluation recruitment, but researcher-generated community household lists were shared with the implementers in order to find eligible adolescents.

The GAGE evaluation employs a longitudinal mixed-methods design, with baseline data collected in late 2017/early 2018 and midline data collected in late 2019/early 2020. The quantitative survey was undertaken with 4,518 VYAs (1,113 girls and 819 boys in Amhara, 1,190 girls and 878 boys in Oromia, and 298 girls and 220 boys in Afar) and their primary female caregivers in both treatment and control communities.

Further details of the sample are presented in Appendix Table 1a. 100% of contacted adolescents expressed interest in participating in AWH-E programming (among the 94% of the GAGE sample contacted). The survey instrument included modules on six core capability domains in line with the GAGE conceptual framework (see Figure 3). Quantitative analysis of the causal impacts of the programme across these domains utilised multivariate regression methods (details of the specifications are available in the research protocol: Baird et al., 2020). One important thing to note is that these are intent-to-treat estimates, which means that any adolescent who was sampled from a treatment community is considered treated, whether they participated in the programme or not. This is considered the policy relevant estimate as it considers both participation and impact.

The survey data was complemented by in-depth qualitative research with a sub-sample of participants in order to better understand some of the emerging patterns and mixed pictures painted by the survey findings. Broader narratives – from adolescent programme participants (163) and non-participants (85), parents (208), mentors and supervisors (30), service providers and government officials (77) – help explain what is and is not working

Figure 3: GAGE conceptual framework
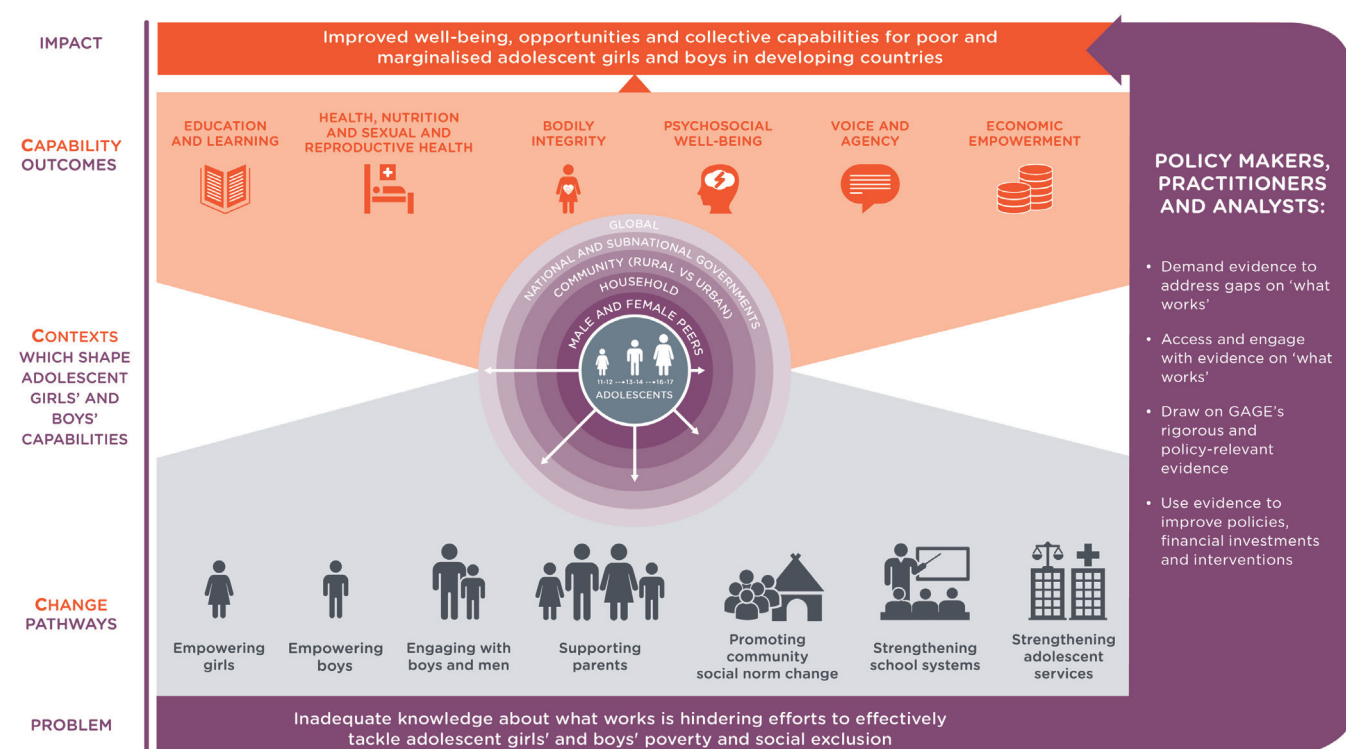
Source: GAGE consortium, 2019.

well. Participants across the treatment and control communities participated in qualitative research. For each region, we selected one *kebele* (neighbourhood) for each programme intervention arm. The interviews were transcribed, translated and coded thematically; the use of quotes is illustrative. See Appendix Table 1b for details of the research sample in Amhara.

It is worth noting that programming was still ongoing when the midline data was collected. In Amhara, all adolescent and parents' groups were completed and the asset transfer had been distributed. The community-level work, however, was only about 25% complete.

4 Overview of girls' situation in Amhara

Amhara has seen a sea change in terms of opportunities open to adolescent girls in recent years. Their access to education and contraception is up and their risk of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage is down. As a grandmother from a remote community in South Gondar explained: *'It is a good time for children... During this time, the time of my granddaughter, children can access schools close by. The copies and the exercise books are available close to them'* (Jones et al., 2020).

According to figures from the Ministry of Education (2019), nearly all girls in Amhara now attend school. The gross enrolment rate –even for upper-primary school (grades 4–8)– is 99.5%, and nearly two-thirds of girls (62%) enrol in lower-secondary school (grades 9 and 10) (ibid.). Indeed, girls in Amhara are now slightly more likely to attend school than boys.

Alongside increased access to education, there has been an increase in the median age at first marriage. Among adult women aged 20–49, the age at first marriage climbed from 14.4 years in 2005 to 16.2 years in 2016 (CSA and ORC Macro, 2005; CSA and ICF, 2016). The regional context for FGM/C and access to contraception is also improving. While in 2005, 69% of adult women had been cut, by 2016 only 48% of younger adolescent girls (aged 10–14 years) and 62% of adult women had been cut (ibid.). In addition, nearly half of married women were using contraception at the time of the most recent demographic and health survey (DHS) (CSA and ICF, 2016). Despite these positive trends, GAGE's midline underscores that there is much scope for further progress. Over half of older cohort girls (15–19 years) (59%) in South Gondar are married before the age of 18, and enrolled girls are 9 percentage points less likely to aspire to university than their male peers (Presler-Marshall et al., 2021).

5 Findings on initial impacts of AWH-E programming

Given the level of ambition of AWH-E programming, the fact that the systems strengthening components were not complete, as well as the complex environments in which the programme is being implemented, it is not surprising that the findings after just a year of implementation present a mixed picture. Here, we discuss the findings in two broad clusters: promising findings and mixed effects.

As the systems strengthening work was still ongoing, we largely focus our discussion on comparisons between the control communities, Her Spaces communities (arm 1), and AWH-E communities (arms 2 and 3) (combining those in the curriculum-only and community-level social norms and systems strengthening arms). The combined impact of these two arms is what we refer to as AWH-E throughout the rest of this document. We discuss the role of the asset transfers as a stand-alone discussion in the text.

Promising findings

Positive effects on girls' voice

Our findings show that both Her Spaces and AWH-E have a positive and significant impact on girls' voice and agency, including in terms of increased decision-making in the home and increased confidence in self-expression with parents, especially vis-à-vis girls' mothers (for both Her Spaces and AWH-E) and fathers (AWH-E only). Adolescents in the AWH-E group were also significantly more likely than girls in the control group and those in Her Spaces communities to feel comfortable asking parents for their opinion (10.9% increase over control mean) and to ask friends for advice (8.6% over the control mean). In the qualitative research, adolescents also noted that they had increased confidence in the classroom and in their community. A 12-year-old girl, for example, noted that: *'I can speak up in class when I have a comment or question or if I see something wrong in school or in the neighbourhood, I feel I can tell someone and they will listen and can ask adults for help.'* This is also supported by the quantitative data, with a 18.8% increase in an index of speaking up in class for enrolled girls in Her Spaces communities and a 13.2% increase in AWH-E communities. For some girls, this also translated into willingness to speak out against discriminatory practices such as child

> **⫸** Since I joined this [AWH] programme, I understand that child marriage is a harmful tradition. Therefore, I would tell them that I will only marry once I complete my education.
>
> (A 12-year-old girl)

marriage. As a 12-year-old girl explained: *'Since I joined this [AWH] programme, I understand that child marriage is a harmful tradition. Therefore, I would tell them that I will only marry once I complete my education and once I am self-sufficient.'* Quantitative data also shows significant increases in adolescent girls feeling comfortable talking if they see someone that is hurt. These improvements in voice and agency also align with significant improvements in an index of youth resilience that we see among the AWH-E communities, with positive but insignificant effects in Her Spaces communities (Resilience Research Centre, 2019).

It is important to note, however, that these positive effects in terms of voice did not extend to improved mobility for girls, particularly in the AWH-E community. Among the Her Spaces communities (compared to the control communities), there was, however, a 12.8% increase in the proportion of adolescents going to the market – perhaps reflecting the fact that the Her Spaces curriculum involved field trips to local services and market places. The qualitative findings highlighted that adolescent girls highly valued these service visits. As a 13-year-old girl explained: *'We visited a local health post together with our facilitators. We discussed with the health extension worker of the health post about the service provision, constraints and on how she can help girls and women to get the services [sexual and reproductive health services]'.*
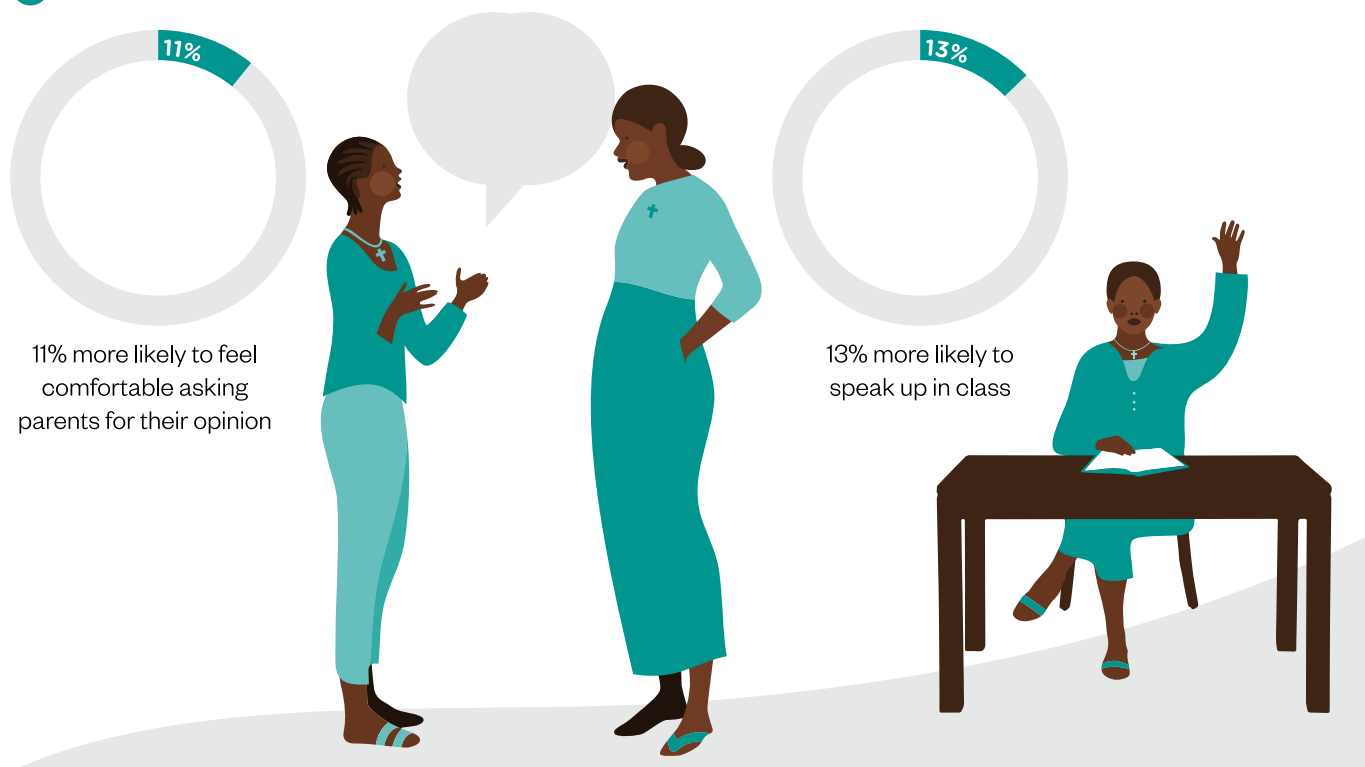
Positive effects on girls' knowledge

Participation in both the Her Spaces and AWH-E programmes had positive, large and significant impact on girls' knowledge across a range of domains. Both programmes increased knowledge around the legal age of marriage for girls (38.6% increase in Her Spaces communities and 52.4% increase in AWH-E communities) and where to get help for violence (61.0% increase for Her Spaces and 52.8% increase for AWH-E). As a 13-year-old girl explained: *'If a girl is raped, they told us that she has*
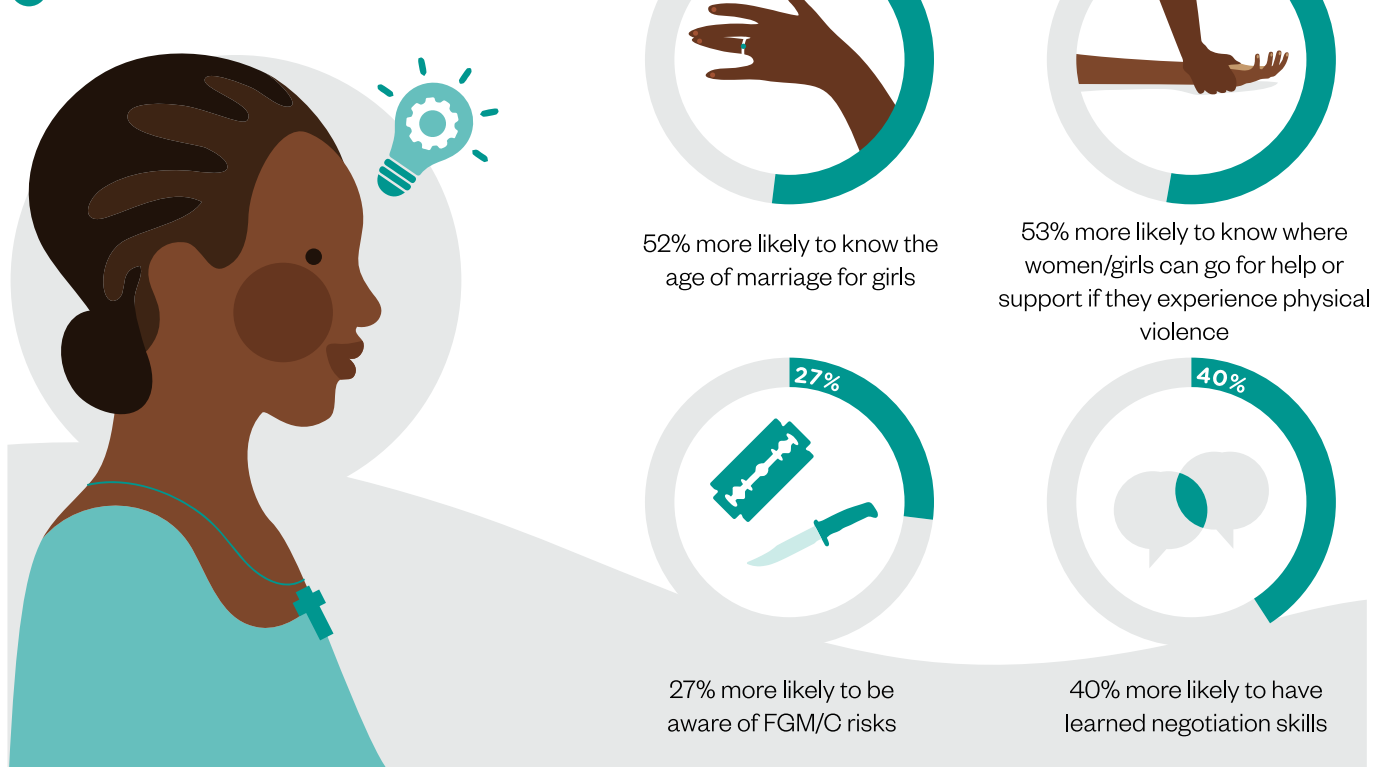
Girls in Amhara

Effects on communication, voice and agency

⬆ Positive effects:

11%

11% more likely to feel comfortable asking parents for their opinion

13%

13% more likely to speak up in class

Effects on knowledge

⬆ Positive effects:

52%

52% more likely to know the age of marriage for girls

53%

53% more likely to know where women/girls can go for help or support if they experience physical violence

27%

27% more likely to be aware of FGM/C risks

40%

40% more likely to have learned negotiation skills

▶▶ I would be ashamed when I had my menstruation and become absent from school. But after I joined Pathfinder, I understand that menstruation is nature's gift and I don't get ashamed.

(A 13-year-old girl)

to get an examination at the clinic'. AWH-E also improved girls' knowledge of the risks of FGM/C (26.7% increase) and their negotiation skills (40.1% increase). Mothers recognised the positive changes in their daughters' knowledge and recommended scaling up the programme to reach more girls in the community and also to extend the duration of the programme in order to cement and deepen the changes. As one mother emphasised: *'We think it will be important for girls to be given these lessons on a more permanent basis'.*

Normalisation of menstruation

Findings suggest that Her Spaces and AWH-E are helping to prepare girls for menarche by improving knowledge and normalising menstruation. Quantitative data shows a 30.5% increase in knowledge of menstruation frequency among Her Spaces communities and a 27.1% increase in AWH-E communities, both compared to the control. In the qualitative data, girls report less shame and better knowledge, both of which should contribute to better menstrual hygiene. *'I would be ashamed when I had my menstruation and become absent from school. But after I joined Pathfinder, I understand that menstruation is nature's gift and I don't get ashamed,'* explained a 13-year-old girl from South Gondar. This shift in attitude was also echoed by boys who explained that the programme has helped boys to reshape their perception towards menstruation and refrain from teasing girls when they have their periods at school.

Positive impacts on economic empowerment

Our quantitative findings suggest significant improvements in an index of economic empowerment in the AWH-E arm, with improvements on some variables among Her Spaces participants, but not on the main index. In both Her Spaces and AWH-E communities, girls report increased control over money, with rates more than doubling in both arms compared to girls in the control (11.2% of girls reported an increase in having control of money in the past 12 months in control communities, compared with 23.5% in Her Spaces communities and 25.7% in AWH-E communities).

Moreover, in AWH-E communities we see a significant increase of 21.8% in having savings for the future.

The qualitative findings indicate that these improvements are linked to AWH-E's focus on supporting adolescents' saving habits. Adolescents reported that they are saving cash for longer-term needs, including education. A mother explained the change in her children as follows: *'My child began saving money... They learn in the Act With Her training by mentors... She [the daughter] asked me for money and I gave her money – for instance, I gave her 10 birr when she opened a bank account.'* It is also worth noting that this is one domain where AWH-E with systems strengthening (Arm 3) has larger impacts than the AWH-E curriculum-only intervention (Arm 2).

Positive effects on mentors (qualitative only)

Qualitative findings suggest that mentors (from both AWH-E and Her Spaces) in South Gondar are pleased with their own personal growth. Several highlighted that the stipend money that they get from the project has helped them to save money for their education, and even to start small businesses (e.g. kiosks) in their localities. Others mentioned that they were learning not only hard skills such as money management but also soft skills such as perseverance and communication techniques. For example, a female mentor from South Gondar noted: *'The change is not only for the trainee girls but also for myself... When I was in school and also before I joined Act With Her, I was so shy; I was not even sharing ideas with others. However, after I joined this programme I began to communicate with everyone without fear and shyness.'* Several also underscored that through the project engagement they have learned on how to find alternative solutions from problems and on how to set achievable goals. In line with the emerging literature that life-skills mentors value and benefit from the opportunity to participate in their communities, a number of mentors highlighted that they enjoyed being able to 'give back' to their communities. As one explained: *'What makes me happier is children laughing and getting happier due to the training. They never want to go home even after we complete the time of our sessions. Always I remember children's happiness during the training.'* Mentors also emphasised that they were gaining from the curriculum content around sexual and gender-based violence prevention and gender norm change, especially shifting norms about girls' and women's inferior social value.

Mixed findings

Mixed effects on girls' education and learning

Qualitative data found that girls reported having learnt techniques for convincing their parents to allow them to schedule housework around schoolwork. As a girl from Abena noted, *'If they're planning to make me skip school so that I'll do something for them, I'll tell them whatever it is they want me to do, I'll get it done after school.'* Some girls added that mentors had supported them to start their own small businesses, so that they could cover their own educational costs. *'I am growing* gesho *[a plant which is made into a local alcoholic drink] in our backyards. I will be able to cover my educational expenses using the income earned from selling* gesho*,'* explained a girl from Jeman. Adolescents also mentioned that the programme has increased their awareness in terms of setting concrete goals and aspirations, especially in terms of the education level they will need to achieve to fulfil these aspirations.

The quantitative data, however, did not show any significant effects on girls' education. This is in part because of high overall aspirations for higher than secondary education (97.9% in the control group) and high levels of enrolment (98.6% in the control group). Findings also suggest that adolescents may have been substituting formal schooling with participation in these programmes, with declines in enrolment of 5.9 percentage points among Her Spaces communities and 4.1 percentage points among AWH-E communities. There are, however, improved attitudes towards gender stereotypical roles, with regard to study time and education, with girls significantly more likely to agree that 'girls and boys should share tasks equally' and disagree that 'girls should be sent to school only if they are not needed to help at home' (AWH-E only). These mixed findings do leave open the possibility of positive longer-term results.

Mixed effects on parent–adolescent communication

While the survey found significant impacts on girls' voice, qualitative data suggests that this finding should be treated with some caution. Girls report being able to speak up at home and at school, in line with the survey findings. However, girls also overwhelmingly report being more obedient. As one girl noted: *'I think the problem was*

⏸ I used to say no and be rebellious... But now... I will always say yes.

(A girl)

that we weren't appreciative enough when it comes to our mothers... We weren't able to show affection for our mothers,' which includes through support with household chores. Another girl explained: *'I used to say no and be rebellious... But now... I will always say yes.'* Their parents agree that there has been improvement, leading to smoother relationships. This is potentially problematic, though, as it is not building the independence and critical thinking skills that could support girls' wider social and (eventually) political participation in the longer term. The quantitative data does hint at this as well, with significant increases among both treatment communities in the number of girls agreeing that 'girls are expected to be humble'. This finding, however, may also reflect an increased awareness of the gender norms in the community by girls.

That said, girls' obedience does seem to be fostering closer mother–daughter relationships – and those may be contributing to the improved resilience that the survey findings show. However, in terms of fathers' involvement, in South Gondar the qualitative data suggests that fathers had limited engagement with the programme, with some mentors reporting that fathers do not attend sessions. This appears to be due to at least three factors: (1) women are the primary caregivers and are therefore more proactively targeted by AWH-E; (2) fathers' time is taken up with farming activities, making participation in programme activities more difficult; and (3) the girl-focused framing of the programming appears to have the unintended effect of limiting interest among fathers, who are unable to see direct benefits from their participation. It is also because the programme is not addressing concerns they have about risks facing their adolescent sons, including around substance use.

A minority of fathers did, however, report changed attitudes towards discriminatory practices like child marriage, which suggests that if fathers do attend sessions then the impacts can be positive. As one father noted: *'I have two daughters who are now in school. If someone asks me for a marriage, I will reply that she has to complete her education. Though it is our culture, I have a firm stand so as not to marry my daughters before completing their education.'* Another noted that it has also improved attitudes towards gender-based violence: *'As a result of the training, husbands are no longer punishing their wives, which is mainly due to the advice that we got from our sons [participating in the programme].'*

Boys in Amhara

Effects on knowledge

➡ No effects on knowledge:

- Of menstruation frequency

- That early pregnancy is bad for health

- That boys are not biologically smarter
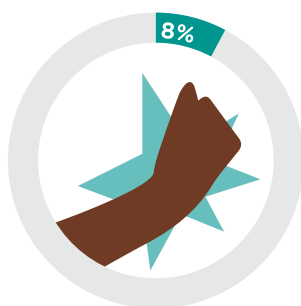
- That FGM/C has risks

⬆ Positive effects:

- Scored 12% higher on index naming iron rich foods

Effects on violence

⬆ Positive effects:

8%

8% more likely to indicate that they did not perpetrate peer violence in the past 12 months
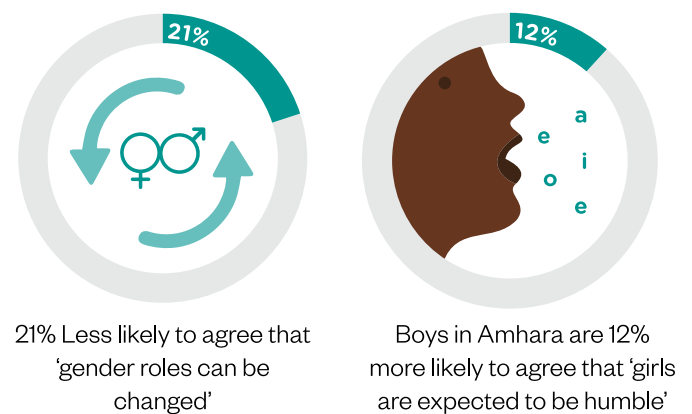
Effects on gendered traits

⬆ Positive effects:

⬇ Negative effects:

7%

7% More likely to agree that 'boys should be able to show feelings'

21%

21% Less likely to agree that 'gender roles can be changed'

12%

Boys in Amhara are 12% more likely to agree that 'girls are expected to be humble'

Other parents hoped that the programme may have a positive effect on adolescent boys' behaviour and reduce the likelihood of involvement in risky behaviours, including substance use. As one male mentor noted: *'Parents asked us to train their sons every Sunday and Saturday, because they fear that their sons may go to nightclubs and engage in evil acts like drinking alcohol, spending in bad places.'* In one community there was also appreciation of the positive role models that mentors were providing to their sons and, in turn, improved behaviour. As one father noted: *'My son was a gambler and has been playing billiards, he was also disobedient. But after he got this training with the Pathfinder programme, my son's behaviour has been improving, he stopped gambling and billiards and he became obedient, so I benefited a lot from this training for my son.'*

▶▶ My son was a gambler and has been playing billiards, he was also disobedient. But after he got this training with the Pathfinder programme, my son's behaviour has been improving.

(A father)

Mixed effects on gender attitudes

The findings on gender attitudes are, in many ways, the most diverse and challenging to disentangle. We see a strong and significant improvement in an overall index of gender-equitable attitudes for girls in the AWH-E communities (driven by impacts in communities with community-level social norms and systems-strengthening arms (arm 3)). This impact is largely a result of improvements in attitudes around gender stereotypical roles, a scale adapted from the Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS) (WHO, 2021), including – as already mentioned – agreeing that girls and boys should share tasks equally and disagreeing that it is okay to tease a girl who acts like a boy, or vice versa. On the other hand, we find no impact on an index of gender stereotypical traits for girls, a second scale adapted from the GEAS, and in fact find negative impacts on some measures, with girls in AWH-E communities more likely to disagree that 'boys should be able to show feelings' and to agree that 'girls should be humble'. We similarly find no impacts on an index of gender consciousness that includes measures such as 'I think about gender roles' and 'It is possible to change people's reaction to my gender'. We also find no overall impact on an index of gendered attitudes towards education. The qualitative findings suggest that this is

▶▶ **They told us to help our mothers… I just sit by the side of the fire… I haven't helped… There are girls.**

(A 13-year-old boy)

partly because the curriculum appears to teach girls how to more effectively juggle household responsibilities and education, and often at the expense of their own leisure time, rather than shifting parents' attitudes towards the importance of girls' education. As a 12-year-old girl explained: *'Now we allocate our time that we used for playing, to studying and household jobs'.*

For boys, there are similarly mixed findings. The quantitative findings show a negative and significant impact on an overall index of gender-equitable altitudes in the Her Spaces communities, and a negative and insignificant impact in the AWH-E communities – both of which again mask substantial underlying heterogeneity. While we see significant improvements among boys in AWH-E communities on some attitudes, such as agreeing that 'boys should be able to show feelings,' we also find some suggestion of negative impacts, such that boys in AWH-E communities are significantly more likely to agree that 'girls are expected to be humble' and significantly less likely to agree that 'gender roles can be changed'.

The qualitative findings also reflect these mixed findings for boys. For example, a 13-year-old boy noted that his views on the gender division of labour within the household remained unchanged: *'They told us to help our mothers… I just sit by the side of the fire… I haven't helped… There are girls.'* Others, however, reported more positive effects on the sharing of household tasks between boys and girls. For example, one boy explained how his thinking had shifted as a result of programme participation: *'I had accepted community stereotypes about managing household jobs. I associated caring for kids as being a woman's job only… I used to refuse to help my sister… as I wanted to play instead… But I am now getting involved in different jobs and we are helping each other.'*

These mixed findings may partially stem from measurement, as gender attitudes are challenging to measure, particularly quantitatively. They may also reflect the fact that gender attitudes take considerable time to change, and thus perhaps the longer-term findings will paint a clearer picture. Finally, they may indicate an increased awareness of the gendered environment in which they live.

Mixed added value of asset transfer arm

Of the different programme arms, the arm that included the asset transfer component (arm 4) exhibits the most varied impacts on adolescent well-being. The strong positive impacts on adolescent voice, agency and knowledge are still present, and the economic empowerment impacts are strongest in this arm. We also find a positive and significant impact on the primary female caregiver indicating that the household assists with or supervises the girl's schoolwork – a finding that is not seen in the other arms. But we find no overall impact on gender-equitable attitudes, a null finding that masks considerable heterogeneity. Girls in the asset arm are significantly more likely to agree that 'girls and boys

▶▶ **Why they made a gap between females and the males? We were feeling very angry. Everybody feels angry when they give the solar lamps to the girls only.**

(A 12-year-old boy)

should share tasks equally' and to disagree that 'a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together'. On the other hand, they are significantly more likely to agree that 'girls are expected to be humble' and that it is 'important for boys to show they are tough'. This may be due (at least in part) to some boys feeling jealous that girls' received the backpacks and solar lamps designed to incentivise school enrolment and attendance (as the asset transfer went to girls only). As one 12-year-old boy emphasised: *'Why they made a gap between females and the males? We were feeling very angry. Everybody feels angry when they give the solar lamps to the girls only.'* There is also a negative and significant impact on the gender-equitable attitudes of primary female caregivers in the asset arm that is not seen in the other treatment communities.

6 Conclusions and implications for future programming

Our findings on the short-term impacts of the Her Spaces and AWH-E programming in Amhara suggest it is having a range of positive impacts on adolescent girls' well-being that could be further leveraged to achieve more sustainable change. It is also having a positive impact on the lives of the youth mentors involved in the programme. However, impacts on boys, parents and the wider community remain muted; further investment is needed if the broader environment in which girls interact is to become more adolescent- and gender-friendly. Our findings point to the following implications for future programming.

1 Strengthening impacts for girls

- Girls are gaining some knowledge on menstruation and sexual and reproductive health but there are still considerable knowledge gaps in terms of understanding conception, contraception and consent, indicating that girls would benefit from more in-depth sessions.
- Field trips to local service providers provide valuable learning opportunities – as demonstrated from the experiences of Her Spaces participants – and could be usefully integrated into the curriculum of AWH in future rounds.
- Targeting and messaging around asset transfers needs to be rethought given the backlash by communities; it would appear important to provide transfers to all programme participants and to clearly explain the purpose of the asset transfer.
- Knowledge of how to report cases of sexual violence has improved but GAGE qualitative evidence highlights that the risk of rape and sexual harassment remains widespread in the zone (Presler-Marshall et al., 2020a), and thus greater attention is needed in the life-skills curricula, in the community discussions and also with government stakeholders in order to strengthen awareness, reporting and prosecution of cases free of interventions by elders (who tend to favour monetary compensation for the family of the survivor of sexual violence rather than justice for the girl).

2 Improving impacts for boys

- While boys noted some improvements in knowledge (especially regarding setting goals and aspirations, savings and the importance of gender equitable division of labour in the household), overall the depth of messages was limited on account of less frequent sessions. Gender synchronous programming should ensure equal inputs for girls and boys if gender attitudes and norms are to be transformed.
- The evaluation findings suggest that the curriculum content needs to be more inclusive of boys and their gendered needs, and address some pressures to engage in substance use and gambling, as well as encouraging boys to speak out against sexual and gender-based violence that may be condoned or even encouraged by other youth.
- Providing asset transfers to girls only appears to undermine curriculum messaging around gender equality and therefore either messaging should be strengthened as to the rationale for supporting girls (i.e. to address longer-term educational disadvantages) or given to both girls and boys.

3 Enhancing engagement with parents

- Programming that targets mothers needs to focus on communication with daughters rather than simply obedience.
- Fathers need to be more proactively engaged and sessions held at times they can attend, and the curricula should assist them to focus on the gendered needs of both their daughters and sons, supported by a local male champion of these ideas.
- Joint sessions with both mothers and fathers to discuss how parents can jointly support their adolescents and help them to navigate this transitional period in the life-course successfully could also be beneficial.

4 Building on positive outcomes for mentors

- Programme outcomes should explicitly include mentor growth and development.
- Mentors need enough mentorship and support to both successfully deliver the programme and ensure they fully understand programming plans so they do not make inaccurate promises to the VYAs about future programming, and in particular with regard to the receipt of asset transfers.

- In terms of programme sustainability, it is important to encourage mentors to continue in their role as champions of change and to promote gender equality in their communities even beyond the duration of the programme.

5 Investing in an adaptive programming approach to shift community-level gender norms

- To shift social norms, community engagement needs longer-term adaptive investments (i.e. beyond the limited number of discussion sessions provided by AWH-E) and active involvement of religious leaders from the outset given their role as powerful influencers in rural communities. In this regard it is important to work in-depth with community leaders to ensure that they have internalised key gender norm change messages rather than disseminating sound bites only.

- Multi-pronged investments with community leaders and service providers are needed to tackle sexual and gender-based violence risks facing girls, as well as child marriage and FGM/C.
- Programme implementers should advocate for and support improved access to local communities by government service providers and district officials (for instance, through investing in transportation) so that they can engage more regularly with communities and support change processes.

Adolescent boys from Amhara who attend secondary school © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE

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Appendix Table 1a: Quantitative research sample in Amhara at baseline, 74 communities n=1521

Panel A: Household level variables									
	Her Spaces	AWH Curriculum Only	AWH	AWH & Asset Transfer	Control				
HH size	5.883	5.610	5.899	5.898	5.653				
HH head literate	0.409	0.385	0.339	0.387	0.375				
HH currently receives PSNP benefits	0.301	0.320	0.263	0.280	0.330				

Panel B: Individual level variables										
	Her Spaces		AWH Curriculum Only		AWH		AWH & Asset Transfer		Control	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Age	10.845	10.947	10.938	10.816	10.965	11.006	10.933	10.993	10.968	10.981
Enrolled in school during most recent session	0.957	0.934	0.962	0.901	0.965	0.871	0.952	0.868	0.975	0.899
Reported having control over money in past 12 months	0.097	0.132	0.076	0.066	0.079	0.052	0.076	0.164	0.092	0.082
Has savings	0.053	0.039	0.048	0.033	0.030	0.032	0.062	0.066	0.039	0.039
Has not experienced or witnessed HH violence in last 12 months	0.262	0.276	0.252	0.305	0.248	0.284	0.367	0.290	0.343	0.277

Note : Each intervention arm contains 14 communities, the control arm has 19 communities.

Appendix Table 1b: Qualitative research sample Amhara region

Community	AWH arm type	Number of interviews and participants														
		Participants		Non-participants		Focus group discussions (FGDs) AWH adolescents		FGDs AWH parents and community		AWH mentors key informant interviews (KIIs)		Service providers KIIs		District-level bureau KIIs	
		Nodal girls (IDI)	Nodal boys (IDI)	Nodal girls (IDI)	Nodal boys (IDI)	No of interviews	No of partici-pants	No of interviews	No of partici-pants	No of interviews	No of partici-pants	No of interviews	No of partici-pants	No of interviews	No of partici-pants
1	Curriculum	3	4	6	2	2	15	2	17	2	2	3	3	8	21
2	Full	3	3	3	-	2	13	3	17	2	2	2	3		
3	Her Spaces	2	-	4	3	2	10	3	18	2	2	3	3		
4	+Assets	2	3	5	2	2	13	3	21	3	4	1	4		
5	Controlled	-	-	10	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Total		10	10	28	13	8	51	11	73	9	10	9	13	8	21
		112 adolescents						73 parents		10 mentors		34 key informants			

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