



## TECHNICAL BRIEF

### SUPPORTING ADOLESCENTS TO NAVIGATE CRUCIAL TRANSITIONS FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD

#### Background

The world has made great strides in increasing access to primary school for growing numbers of children, yet for all too many, their education – and with it their life choices – stops there. While 87% of girls in developing countries enroll in primary school, only 39% finish lower secondary, and boys are just as likely to drop out as girls.<sup>i</sup> Worldwide, over 200 million adolescents are out of school. This includes at least half of all youth in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.<sup>ii</sup> Unable to access and capitalize on the value of a secondary or vocational education which would give them vital knowledge and skills, they face adulthood severely challenged to sustain themselves and their families, and to contribute to the progress of their communities and their countries as a whole.

While girls and boys are both deeply affected, the impacts are especially significant for girls. Given that girls are developmentally entering adolescence at the time they are transitioning out of primary school, the challenges they face are integrally linked with issues of female health and cultural values and practices associated with puberty and transition into adulthood, which often dictate that a girl should be married as soon as possible when she reaches child-bearing age.<sup>iii</sup> In many societies, these factors create a significant draw on girls away from schooling. Yet when girls are able to remain in school, they are not only more likely to marry later and have fewer and healthier children,

but there are also often increased opportunities for them to develop the skills needed to earn an income that they will invest in their families and communities.<sup>iv</sup>

Home and community environments in many cultural contexts view girls' continuation into secondary schooling unfavorably, creating conditions that 'pull' girls away from school. School related factors, whether in terms of distance, cost or an unsafe environment, create a set of 'push' conditions, which push girls away and discourage their transition to and completion of secondary school. Unfavorable labor market conditions for female participation contribute to the 'push' and 'pull' factors, negatively influencing girls' secondary school participation. In contexts where girls' schooling at the secondary level is particularly challenging, it is a result of these strong 'push' and 'pull' factors acting together.<sup>v</sup> For example, a girl may dream of going to secondary school, but her parents and community urge her to get married. Even though she wants to attend, the school is far, in poor condition, and classes are uninteresting. She, too, comes to believe that her best (and only) option is to drop-out and get married as there are few jobs deemed suitable for women in her community.

A UN Secretary General's report on the progress of the development of women and girls noted that significant gaps still remain with respect to secondary education, which "has been shown to contribute more strongly than primary school attendance to the achievement of gender equality and

women's rights and several positive social and economic outcomes.”<sup>vi</sup> Thus, ensuring that young people, especially girls, have the support they need to navigate the transitional period from childhood through adolescence is vital to their ability to enter adulthood with a sense of purpose and of their own self-worth, equipped with the skills and support to imagine and design a plan for their future.<sup>vii</sup>

## CARE's Approach to Adolescent Empowerment

CARE's approach to adolescent empowerment centers on comprehensive, integrated and rights-based interventions that ensure that young people have access to the information, resources and support they require to build their capacities, plan their futures, exercise their rights, and help their families and communities. CARE works globally to support adolescents in life transitions involving leaving or re-entering school, entering second-chance and alternative forms of schooling, or leaving school and transitioning to work and/or marriage.

CARE considers that relevant, quality education is foundational to empowering adolescents and youth, particularly girls. Acknowledging that adolescents cannot be viewed in isolation from the societies in which they live, CARE works with governments, schools and teachers to ensure that girls and boys receive a quality education, and engages parents and community leaders in efforts to shift gender and social norms that affect participation in education and beyond.

Building upon its Leadership Development Framework<sup>viii</sup>, CARE's education effort enhances basic education by providing unique opportunities for children and adolescents to develop leadership skills, enabling young people to express their opinions and ideas, take action individually

and collectively on issues of personal importance, make healthy decisions, and work towards achieving their self-described goals. Acquisition of these skills is integrated with formal schooling whenever feasible; when necessary, innovative alternative education approaches have been developed, linking vocational training and leadership skills. In Mali, for example, students who participated in a non-formal education and vocational training program are using the academic skills learned (e.g. reading, writing, mathematics) and the inter-personal communication skills to engage in decision-making processes, contribute to community development through civic action initiatives, and to create their own economic enterprises. Participant retention rates have been high, with 85%-95% of students completing the program, and 61% of the graduates currently practicing the trades they learned under the program. The proven curriculum is now being adopted by the government, opening the door to benefiting 1000s of additional adolescents in other parts of the country.

In areas of Honduras marked by extreme poverty and violence, CARE has provided access to an alternative education program for out-of-school adolescents, which included financial literacy, vocational training and leadership skills. When one group of youth identified early pregnancy as a pervasive problem, they worked with local health centers and received training to deliver sexual and reproductive health workshops. Groups of youth were trained in administration and management skills, and formal organized structures (known as CDDs<sup>1</sup>) were established by the youth as lasting vehicles to work for constructive change on a range of social issues. The perceptions that the adults in the community had about adolescents, particularly girls, have changed dramatically as they witness young people exercising their true capabilities as they transition into adulthood.



<sup>1</sup> Comité para la Defensoría de los Derechos de la Niñez



## The Results: Transformational, Long-Term Change

In keeping with our commitment to transformational change, CARE is implementing a number of innovative, multi-sectoral and multi-faceted initiatives to address known barriers to successfully navigating life transitions for adolescents. Our holistic approaches include creating **safe, supportive conditions at schools** (both physical and emotional) that improve the quality of education and foster regular attendance; providing **second chances** for those who are out of school whether as a result of poverty, early pregnancy, lack of school relevance, or lack of family support; and providing opportunities to acquire **vocational skills** that keep up with a changing world. Participating in opportunities for developing and practicing **life-enhancing skills** including leadership skills, conflict resolution, peer mentoring, etc.; engaging in recreational **outlets** for the development of healthy bodies and healthy peer relationships; and acquiring **knowledge and negotiation skills for reproductive health** further enhance adolescents' safety and sense of self-confidence and self-worth. Applying these skills through **participation in the life of their communities**; working collectively with others to **change societal gender stereotypes** which limit choices including opportunities for income producing and contributing to the development of society, and **challenging child marriage** broadens their horizons for an adulthood that supports their

### SUCCESSFULLY BRIDGING THE TRANSITION FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD NEEDS:

- Regular school attendance
- Second chances for missed schooling
- Building key leadership and life-skills
- Recreational opportunities
- Vocational skills that can adapt to changing markets
- Knowledge and negotiation skills for reproductive health
- Active participation in community life
- Changing gender stereotypes

aspirations.

In contexts as diverse and complex as Cambodia, Mali, Nepal, Somalia, Zimbabwe and many others, CARE is investing in opportunities to learn about the vital intersections of education, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and economic empowerment in creating conditions for adolescents to acquire skills and knowledge that will



enable them to navigate successfully the changes from childhood to adulthood and thrive during and beyond their formal school years.

## A Transition Success Story

In the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, CARE has been implementing an intensive, alternative program known as Udaan. A residential program, Udaan allows girls who have dropped out or never been to school the opportunity to complete their primary education in just 11 months. Kavita is one such girl. Coming from a very poor family, Kavita's parents could not afford to send any of their children to school. When Kavita met a girl in her village who had been through Udaan, she was impressed by the girl's confidence, even when being questioned by village elders. "I decided that day that I would also go to Udaan," says Kavita. "I came to Udaan when I was 11 years old and it changed my life completely."

Together with the other students, Kavita studied social issues such as health and governance, as well as participating in practical field trips to the bank and post office, and learned basic life-enhancing skills such as riding a bicycle. For the first time in her life, Kavita was encouraged to explore and share ideas, and to discuss, negotiate and work in groups with other girls from different social castes and backgrounds.

After 11 months of intensive academic, practical and social

learning, Kavita graduated from Udaan, transformed. She returned home to find that her parents had begun making plans for her to marry, but Kavita persuaded them to let her continue her studies. (95% of Udaan participants pass the national exam and 80% move on to lower secondary school.) More recently, her parents found another match for her. She was reluctant because the prospective groom was 30 years her senior. After discussing her situation with her colleagues and other Udaan graduates, with their support, she turned down the proposal.

Now 22 years old, Kavita has transitioned out of childhood, through adolescence, and entered adulthood as a graduate and a trained teacher. She says proudly, "I now teach in a school and use Udaan-style participatory teaching methods to teach other students. My class usually does better than other classes." Kavita has found her inner strength to make informed decisions about her life. She is not afraid to stand up for her dream of a career and a husband who respects her and her wishes.

## References

<sup>i</sup> Winthrop, R & McGivney, E. (2014) *Raising the Global Ambition for Girls' Education*. The Brookings Institution

<sup>ii</sup> UNESCO (2016). *Leaving no one behind: How far on the way to universal primary and secondary education?* Policy Paper 27/Fact Sheet 37. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002452/245238E.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Global Partnership for Education (2013). *Accelerating Transition of Girls to Secondary Education*. Washington, DC: GPE

<sup>iv</sup> USAID (2016) *United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/254904.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Global partnership for Education (2013). *Accelerating Transition of Girls to Secondary Education*. Washington, DC: GPE

<sup>vi</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2014). *Report of the Secretary-General, Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls*. (E/ CN.6/2014/3). [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2014/3](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2014/3)

<sup>vii</sup> [http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/CARE\\_Girls\\_Education\\_Empowerment\\_Workshop\\_Report\\_January\\_2015.pdf](http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/CARE_Girls_Education_Empowerment_Workshop_Report_January_2015.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> CARE USA (2012). *Girls' Leadership Development in Action: CARE's Experience from the Field*. <http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/EDU-GE-2012-Girls-Leadership-Development-in-Action.pdf>

---

### CARE USA

151 Ellis St, NE  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
USA  
[education@care.org](mailto:education@care.org)

