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Power Within Competency Framework for Adolescents and Youth

Acknowledgements

This Power Within competency framework builds on 15+ years of CARE's program design, implementation, and research with young people. Not only has the focus on leadership and life skills proven to be a popular inclusion in our work, but its inclusion is also a multiplier of impact. The more we see young people building these competencies, the more engaged they become in making informed decisions about their futures. We are incredibly grateful for staff, volunteer, partner, donor and, most importantly, participants' input and feedback on the model. Additionally, we are thankful to Carol Boender, who led CARE through a process to update the model based on both CARE's experience as well as evidence and models developed by others.

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Executive Summary

Power Within (PW) is a competency framework which supports young people's (ages 10-24) development by building life skills that help them deal with the challenges and demands of their daily lives. The model contains three primary competency domains: strong self-image, strong mind, and strong voice. The competencies are transferable, which means that they can be applied in many situations, and they can be practiced throughout program activities in most, if not all, of CARE's direct work with adolescents and youth. This approach is similar to teaching Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies in formal education that integrate 'soft' skills into a subject area curriculum. Power Within also aligns with the Positive Youth Development Framework, which prioritizes the development of young people's assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment.

This document begins with background on the model, including its origins in 2008, evidence of its impact, and influences guiding this update and refresh of the model. The PW framework and theory of change are presented, providing guidance for project and program development which include these PW competencies. Following this, there are three sections, one for each domain. Included in each section is an overview of each domain, and in-depth definitions for each of the PW competencies. There are also examples of what the application of each competency can look like, so that progress can be better understood. In addition to sections on each of the three domains, there is also a section on the foundational component of 'wellbeing', outlining the reasons for its inclusion, and what it means when it is successfully included. Finally, as with all programming, especially programming with young people, there is a duty to ensure safer programming. In other words, what are the actions and precautions that can be put in place proactively to minimize risk to those who participate.

As mentioned earlier, the PW model may be used as part of broader programming efforts which promote Social and Emotional Learning, and/or which use the Positive Youth Development Framework as foundations for programming. Annexes 1 and 2 provide mappings of these relationships.

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Introduction

Young people between represent large proportions of the populations in many countries: one in six people are between the ages of 15 and 24 (youth) and nearly half of the world's population is under the age of 30[i]. These formative years are both opportunity-filled and also a finite amount of time to inform the pathway of a young person's future. While much research and emphasis in development pre-2008 focused on children ten and younger, CARE recognized these children quickly out-grew support systems and tailored programs.

In 2008 CARE designed a competency framework for adolescents 10-19, focused on building their leadership development. This model focused on developing a young person's voice, decision making, self-confidence, organization, and vision, with an end goal of young people understanding and acting with others to realize their rights[ii]. These five competencies were known as the leadership development model, as well as Power Within. As this model was layered within development and humanitarian activities to reach adolescents, we saw positive and direct impacts[iii].

Building on these successes, CARE underwent a process from 2022 – 2024 to review the evidence from this competency model as well as those led by others. This led to key recommendations and updates to the competency model.

First, an **expansion of the targeted impact group, from adolescents 10-19 to also include youth 10-24**[1]. This recognizes the critical transition period young people go through as they enter adulthood, pursue livelihoods, and make formative decisions such as the pursuance of advanced education or training, if/when/whom to marry, and childbearing. The expansion of the age range recognizes that youth 20-24 also benefit from the continued development of higher-order leadership and life skills development. It is anticipated that learning and practicing the application of competencies will become more complex as young people grow up because the brain's development is not even in all areas across adolescence and young adulthood. Cognitively, early adolescence brings increased conceptual thinking abilities. By later adolescence, capacity for problem solving, decision making, and planning has greatly expanded. An aptitude for higher level thinking and reasoning continues to grow into adulthood, as young adults increasingly integrate contradictions and synthesize opposing thoughts and feelings.

Second, while the original model focused on the combination of leadership and education, this model recognizes that **young people can and do benefit from life skills development within a variety of programming areas** such as those focused on sexual and reproductive health, financial literacy, microenterprise, climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, water and sanitation, vocational training, social accountability, gender-based violence, child marriage prevention, and formal and nonformal education. This updated model recognizes that building competencies and their application takes place in ways we predict as well as in ways through innovation.

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[1] Adolescence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as between 10-19 years with two stages: early adolescence (ages 10-14) and late adolescence (ages 15-19). 'Youth' is a category that is defined with varying age ranges that extend into adulthood; UNICEF defines youth as ages 15-24 years. 'Young people' comprises all these age groups, 10-24 years.

Third, a recognition that before we begin any competency or skill-building work, **a foundation of wellness and safety must be addressed**. Before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic reminded us that physical wellness and mental health are intertwined, psychology frameworks such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs made it clear that safety and wellness are a pre-requisite for anything else. As practitioners working along the humanitarian and development nexus, we recognize first hand this need and its validity.

Fourth, while the original model highlighted the model's application with girls, this updated model reflects a **gendered application** of the competencies. Although the original model did not exclude boys, it did recognize that often adolescent girls encountered additional limitations in accessing, developing, and practicing the core 5 leadership competencies in a way disproportionate to boys, particularly in educational settings. The expansion of the model beyond educational settings, and an increasingly nuanced reality of gendered differences affecting young people resulted in an explicit inclusion of all genders in this model. Programs which focus on developing these Power Within competencies in young people should understand and address any gendered or other social/normative barriers affecting young people's access, participation, benefits, and/or application of competencies. This may mean adapting content or addressing norms which limit or restrict members of a specific gender or social group.

Fifth, and finally, a recognition of **additional critical competencies beyond the original 5**. This updated Power Within competency framework goes beyond skills frameworks. This expanded model includes an a more articulated focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) in addition to core competencies. Skills frameworks often include both hard and soft skills that can be learned; examples of this are how to use a computer, how to operate a tractor, and how to make a presentation. Competencies take these skills one step further and consider how they are applied. For example, building a competency of 'organization' includes skills such as how to arrange information that advertises a new training program in a logical and easy to understand format. It also includes the effective application of this skill and additional knowledge. In this example, when we combine our knowledge of the target audience's characteristics (e.g. language of preference, literacy levels, types of digital accessibility, relevance to the local context, desirability, etc.) and tailor the advertisement so it is both clear and easily understood, we are practicing or applying the competency of organization.

Evidence in Action

Over the past 15+ years, impact evidence from the inclusion of the original 5 leadership competencies in education and adolescent empowerment programs emerged. For example,

In Timor-Leste, CARE's leadership activities with girls led to a marked increase in girls' retention in grades 5 and 6 in participating schools. Participating schools also experienced better retention of boys[iv].

In Honduras, alternative education coupled with the development of leadership skills among out-of-school adolescents inspired them to create Committees for the Rights and Defense of Youth. With support from community members, the committees won a commitment to increased budget allocations for education[v].

In Zimbabwe, the most marginalized girls and boys were selected for leadership clubs. At the end of the first phase of the project, the differences between club participants and non-club participants reached statistical significance, with those receiving leadership skills development scoring higher in reading and math, attending school more regularly, asking more questions in class, and representing the school in the community more often, sometimes in leadership roles[vi].

In Kenya, girls and boys with higher self-perceptions of leadership competencies, measured using the standardized Youth Leadership Index (YLI), were more likely to use contraceptives, have money savings, be involved in youth groups, and feel confident accessing sexual and reproductive health services[vii].

In Somalia, 97% of Girls' Empowerment Forums, which include a focus on developing leadership skills, included minority girls. In 2022, 82% of these Forums conducted youth-led action to: enroll out-of-school girls, follow-up on absenteeism and dropout of their peers, prevent early marriage, and address discrimination[viii].

The Power Within Model

Competency Domains

The model contains **three competency domains with stacked competencies and a fourth, foundational domain of wellbeing** (Figure 1). The competencies included are primarily transferable, which means that they can be applied in many situations, and they can be practiced throughout program activities in most, if not all, of CARE's direct work with this impact group. This is similar to a common approach to teaching SEL competencies in formal education that integrates 'soft' skills into a subject area curriculum. **The three domains are: strong self-image, strong mind, and strong voice**.
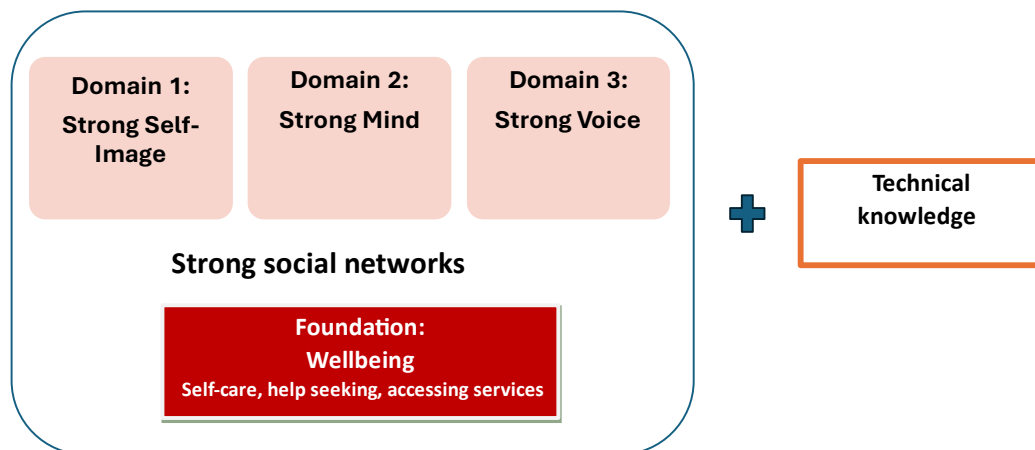
Figure 1: Power Within Domains

There is another dimension to the model recognizing that **competencies may be applied individually—by one young person—or collectively—by a group of young people** with a common aim or interest. The description of each competency includes examples of individual and collective applications.

Strong social networks refers to expanding networks and social circles and their effects not only in strengthening development of competencies but also, and perhaps more importantly, fostering healthy patterns of social interaction, exposure to a wider range of people, and friendships, and where contextually appropriate, fostering positive interactions and collaboration between girls and boys to challenge negative gender norms. Particularly for the most isolated young people—such as girls with disabilities, youth displaced by conflict, very rural young people, or members of marginalized groups—a safe space that validates each person's right to belong can be transformative in and of itself, and the relationships grown there become the heart of the program. For these reasons, it is important to foster friendships in clubs, groups, or classes doing competency development by building in time for informal interaction and, when safe to do so, encouraging connections and collective action outside the group.

'Technical knowledge' in the model refers to the knowledge that program participants gain in sectoral programs, such as financial management, literacy and numeracy, or facts about human reproduction. Technical knowledge may be used as subject matter in teaching the competencies (for example, decision-making about microenterprise investment, communication with partners about contraceptives, organizing for action about WASH facilities in school).

'Wellbeing' in this model is a foundation. The development of other competencies is dependent on participants building wellbeing. As a construct, wellbeing is a sliding scale that is defined by each participant individually. While not objectively assessable as a standard minimum threshold, efforts to build and protect wellbeing amongst participants is a pre-requisite.
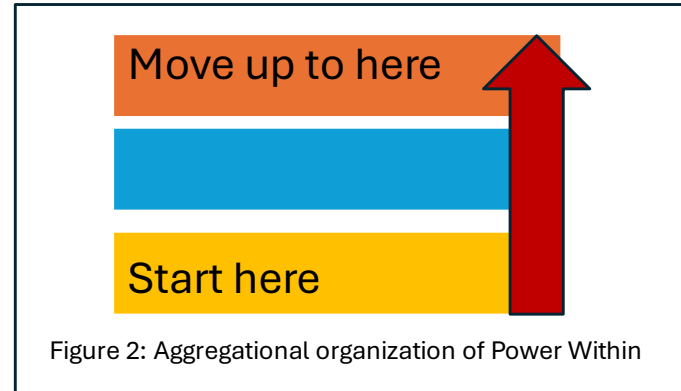
Aggregational Hierarchy

Power Within is a competency model designed for adolescents and youth 10 to 24 years old. It is a **progressive model**, with a stepwise aggregation of competencies that build on each other, as seen in Figure 1. In other words, one competency supports the development of others. The higher order competencies in the model are those that are more likely to be applied by older individuals, either because of their cognitive and emotional developmental stage or because the application of the competency tends to happen in circumstances and activities that are more likely to occur as one grows in life experience. However, the order of competencies presented here should not be understood to mean that an individual needs to achieve a certain standard in a more foundational competency before starting to develop a more aggregational one. Learning is rarely linear and certainly more complex than can be captured in a model.

Figure 2: Aggregational organization of Power Within

Furthermore, **the adolescents and youth CARE works with are diverse and, group by group and individual by individual, will start at different points in their personal and social development**. The acquisition and application of competencies may differ with the gender identity of the individual, intersectionalities with ability, ethnicity, class, religion, linguistic group, urban/rural location, and other social markers and life experiences. For example, girls and boys may begin a competency development process at very different points, particularly where girls have limited access to experiences outside the family or are at lower levels of education. Young people displaced by conflict or in other situations of chronic stress may be more advanced than age peers in positive skills necessary for survival but less advanced in other areas. Program design needs to take these factors into consideration when planning a trajectory of learning for young people. It is important to start where they are, not where the model is.

Finally, **there are considerable overlaps and synergies across the competency domains**. For example, decision making and critical thinking can reinforce a young person's perseverance; self-value contributes significantly to the ability of self-advocacy; and envisioning facilitates organizing for action[ix]. The mutually reinforcing nature of the competencies encourages adoption of the model as a whole.

Power Within Competency Model

Domain 1: Strong Self-Image	Domain 2: Strong Mind	Domain 3: Strong Voice
Perseverance	Critical thinking	Organization
Visioning	Decision making	Interpersonal communication
Self-value	Gender and power awareness	Self-advocacy

+ Technical knowledge

Strong social networks

Foundation: Wellbeing
Self-care, help seeking, accessing services

← Prerequisite
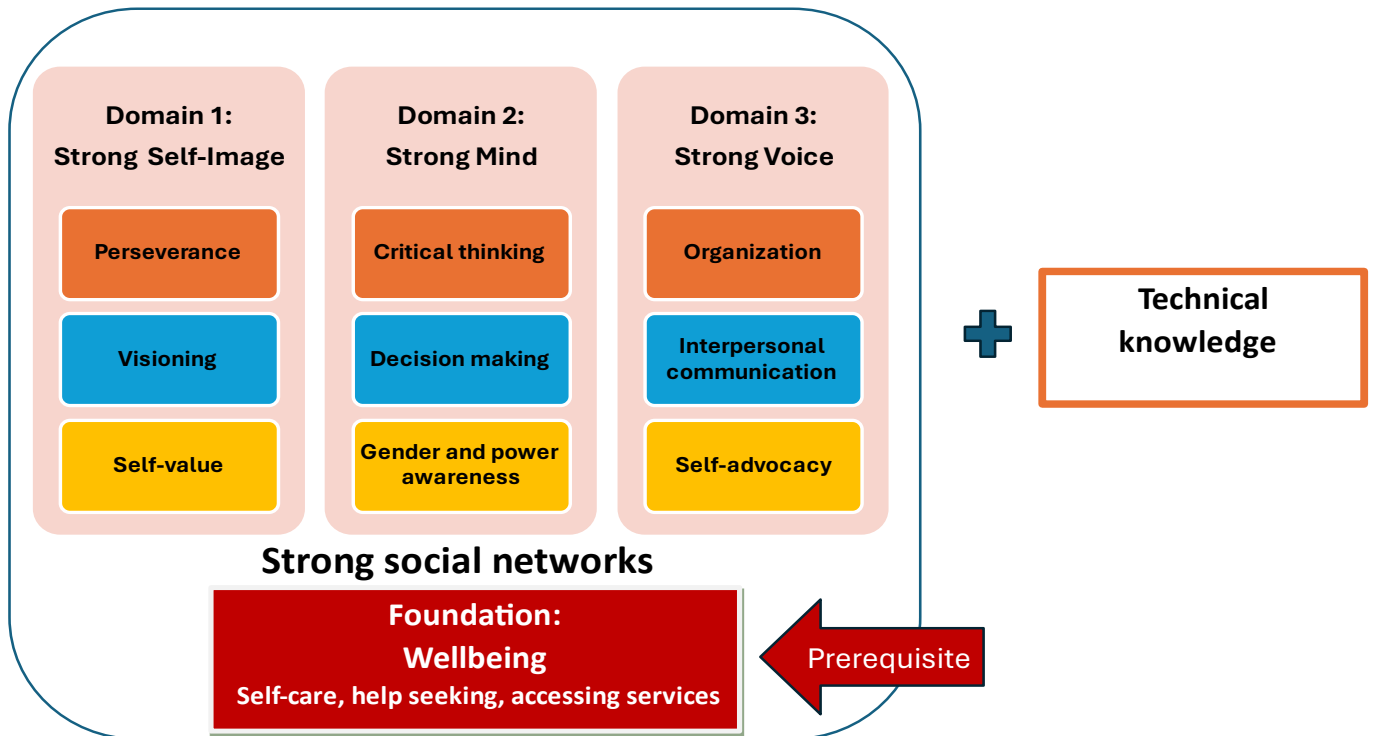
Figure 3: Power Within Competency Model

The model as a whole is also similar to **USAID's Positive Youth Development (PYD) Agency domain**: Youth perceive and have the ability to employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their own decisions about their lives and set their own goals, as well as to act upon those decisions in order to achieve desired outcomes[2].

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[2] Annex 1 provides a visual that illustrates the relationship between Power Within and the USAID Youth Power Positive Youth Development (PYD) model.

Power Within Theory of Change

The competencies which comprise the Power Within model can be built at the individual and/or group levels. However, they are only part of the picture. We know that for young people to build, practice, and put into practice these competencies, they must also be supported throughout this process. **CARE's global work to save lives, defeat poverty, and achieve social justice requires work at three levels: at the individual or agency level, at the relational level amongst people, and at the structural level focused on institutionalized change at the norm or legal levels** (Figure 4).

BUILD AGENCY
Building consciousness, confidence, self-esteem and aspirations (non-formal sphere) and knowledge, skills and capabilities (formal sphere).

CHANGE RELATIONS
The power relations through which people live their lives through intimate relations and social networks (non-formal sphere) and group membership and activism, and citizen and market negotiations (formal sphere).

TRANSFORM STRUCTURES
Discriminatory social norms, customs, values and exclusionary practices (non-formal sphere) and laws, policies, procedures and services (formal sphere).
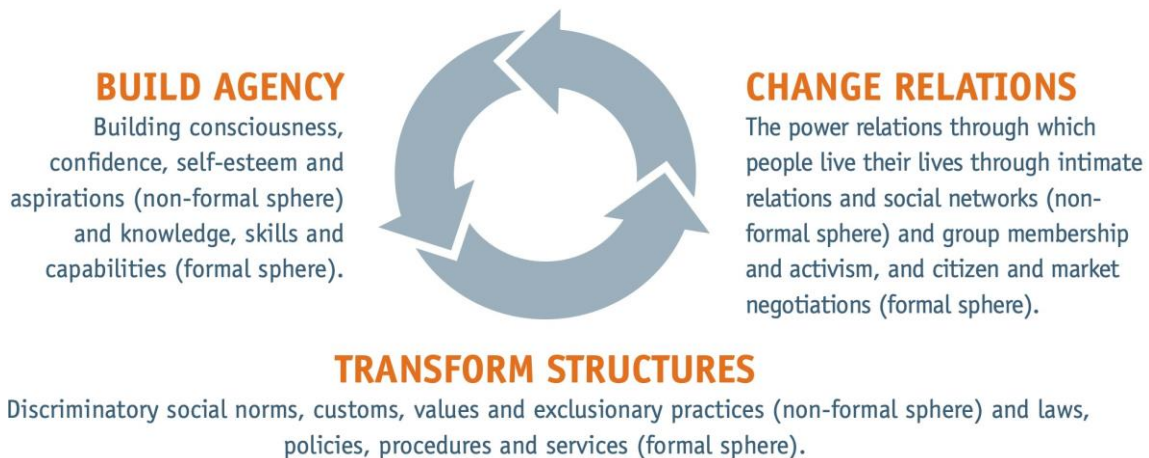
Figure 4: CARE's Gender Equality Framework

Building from this, the Power Within competencies neatly provide a framework for building individual or group agency. CARE's 'Girls in Action' model neatly compliments Power Within by articulating concrete strategies for transforming structures and changing relations in support of young people. Annex 2 provides a comprehensive visual of these complimentary models. The Girls in Action model provides strategies for building girls' agency, as well as strengthening the relationships and structures which influence norms, access, and laws which create an enabling environment for girls and young people to practice or apply their agency.

Figure 5 provides the **Theory of Change for Power Within**. Wellbeing is a multiplier for Power Within competency development; if there is no wellbeing, the competencies cannot be developed. Change at the relational and structural levels are also multipliers for change at the individual level; if any of these are missing, the empowerment journey of young people is likely to not take place or stall. The end result is a young person who has the power to make their own informed choices, use their agency to plan their futures, pursue opportunities to realize their aspirations, and lead the change they desire for themselves and their communities[3]. As young people build and practice these competencies, they are developing their Power Within.
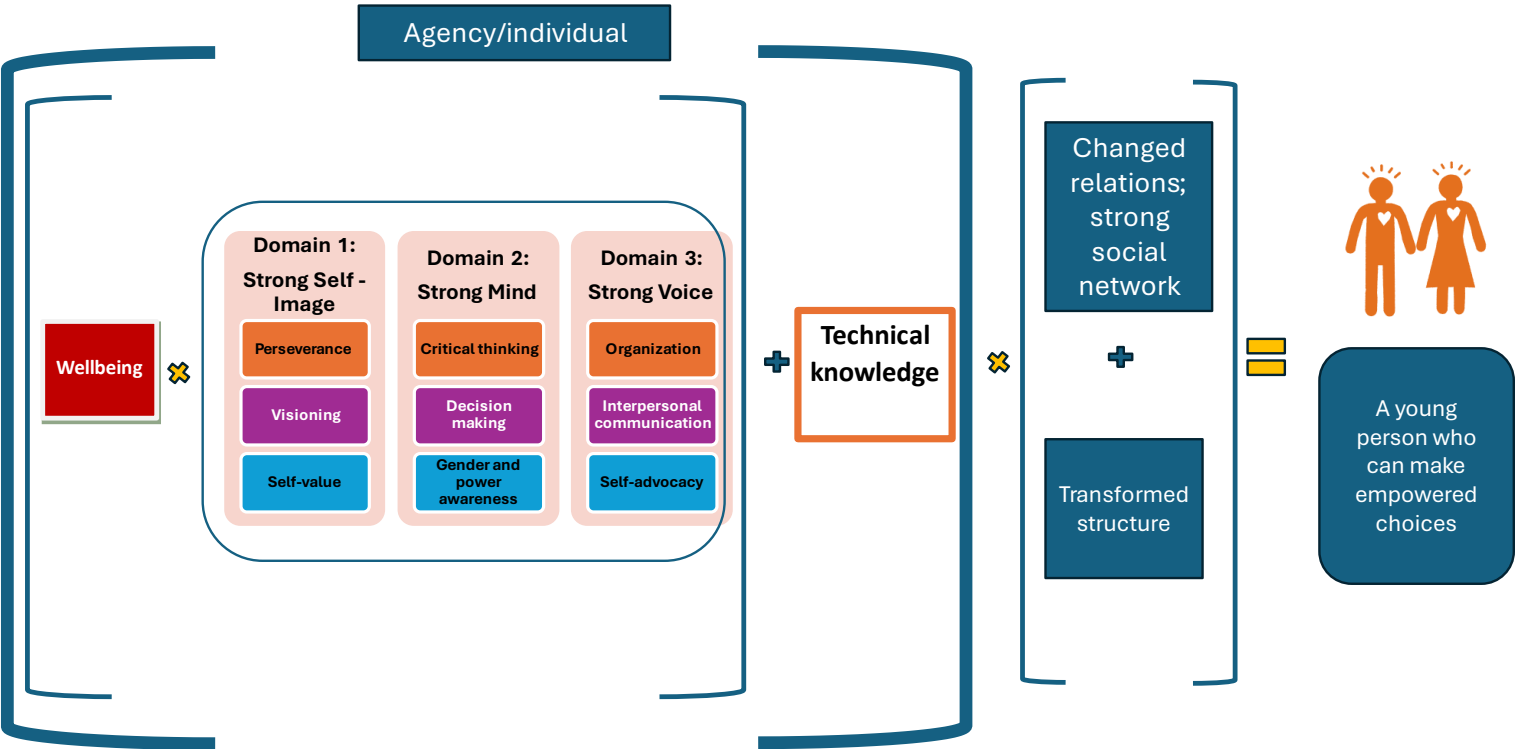
Agency/individual

| Wellbeing | | Domain 1: Strong Self - Image | Domain 2: Strong Mind | Domain 3: Strong Voice | | Technical knowledge | | Changed relations; strong social network | | A young person who can make empowered choices |

Domain 1: Strong Self - Image
- Perseverance
- Visioning
- Self-value

Domain 2: Strong Mind
- Critical thinking
- Decision making
- Gender and power awareness

Domain 3: Strong Voice
- Organization
- Interpersonal communication
- Self-advocacy

Changed relations; strong social network

Transformed structure

A young person who can make empowered choices

Figure 5: Power Within Theory of Change

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[3] The final result definition here is in alignment with CARE's empowerment model for adolescents and youth in its 2022 publication, CARE's Work with Adolescents and Youth: Capacity Statement.

Layout of the remaining sections

The remaining sections in this document provide detailed descriptions of each of the nine competencies in domains one through three, as well as wellbeing. Here you will find a definition for each competency as well as examples and outcome statements. The outcome statements provide an array of examples highlighting how a young person may describe themselves after applying these competencies. A separate 'Activity Toolkit' will provide projects with sample activities for each competency across sectors and ages; the intent is for project managers to be able to adapt the activities to best engage the young people in their projects.

A note on outcome statements: each individual young person may choose to practice or apply these competencies in different ways, and therefore it is important not to create one objective or standardized definition form of measurement. Rather, we recommend developing measures that show change over time using both qualitative and quantitative tools for a comprehensive understanding of impact. For example, CARE's Youth Leadership Index (YLI) provides a set of 21 quantitative questions which allows a young person to assess their own level of leadership[4]. This may be paired with qualitative activities such as story vignettes which allow respondents to react to a story prompt with their recommendations; changes in the types of recommendations can be tracked over time, illustrating how young people are deepening their understanding and confidence in applying competencies such as leadership. A young person's direct actions can also be tracked over time to understand their application of these and other competencies. For example, we can assess the application of decision making, self-value, visioning, self-advocacy and interpersonal communication through the tracking of a young person's development of a life plan, their articulation regarding if and when to have children, as well as their related actions negotiating for and the use of contraceptives. It is recommended that changes in these competencies be reported at aggregate or group level rather than at the individual level. This is to avoid ranking or comparing the scores of individual respondents, since each individual will choose to apply the competencies in their own way.

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[4] The YLI was developed by CARE and the MIDEC consortium comprised of the University of Minnesota and Miske Witt and Associates. It has a high internal consistency measure, with Cronbach Alpha scores consistently above 0.90 across nearly two dozen countries. It measures changes in self-perceptions of leadership competencies and is a strong predictor of impact. As illustrated in the 'Evidence in Action' box earlier in this report, those with higher self-perceptions of leadership are statistically significantly more likely to have higher learning outcomes, to self-advocate for the use of contraceptives, and are more likely to stay in school and transition.

Strong Self-Image

The 'Strong Self-image' domain focuses on psychological empowerment, relating to a young person's positive self-concept and emotional resilience for now and in the future. Adolescents and youth with a strong self-image believe they have value. Their confidence in their worth and abilities provides the foundation for developing aspirations, envisioning possibilities in their futures, and persevering through difficulties. These young people are aware that they have a right to independent thoughts and opinions.

Self-value[5]

Self-value, or self-esteem, is the belief in one's inherent worth, regardless of circumstances. Adolescent girls, in particular, are undervalued in many societies, and girls and young women may have been taught that they are burdens, unworthy of education, or incapable of contributing to the broader good. At the same time, success they experience may be perceived as belonging to the family, with the expectation that they employ it to provide for others rather than prioritizing their own needs. As a competency, self-value requires adolescents and youth to affirm themselves and their abilities beyond their earning potential and reproductive capacity. Self-value at a group level means validating each other as individuals and as members of an affinity group.

Activities might include identifying strengths, peer validation, love bombing, and creating affirmation statements.

Outcome statements:

- I can name three things I am good at.
- I believe that I contribute to my friends, family, and community through who I am as a person.
- I believe that I am successful in life.
- I can name at least one person who values me the way I am.
- I like to try new things.
- I encourage others to value themselves.

Visioning

Visioning the future means identifying aspirations for oneself that may or may not reflect what society and family expect. Many adolescents and youth are discouraged from thinking of themselves as having choices in the course of their lives and have only seen people like themselves fill a limited number of roles. Identifying a vision, dream, or goal requires practice imagining future possibilities and their alignment with interests and aptitudes. 'You can't be what you can't see' is a common belief; we want young people to believe they can be things they strive to be, whether or not they have seen a model for this in their lives. Young people may practice envisioning when they imagine the future they wish to create for themselves and their peers and what they would change to make their community better for all of them, such as a safe market for women venders or an adolescent-friendly health center. 'Envisioning' feeds into 'organizing for change' by defining the desired endpoint.

Activities might include exposure visits with accomplished community members, role modeling, visioning exercises, observing/engaging in community governance events, and role plays of the future self.

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[5] This competency is similar to 'self-confidence' from the original leadership development model.

- I have a dream for the future.
- I believe that I have choices in the direction of my life.
- I talk to others about how our community/school could become a better place.
- I can share a vision for a better future with people in my community.
- I understand the different roles I could play in my community.
- I think about possibilities for a career.

Perseverance

Perseverance means persisting through challenges. As a competency, perseverance requires generating the inner motivation to carry on when things become difficult and managing emotional responses to hardship, such as anxiety, with coping skills. Adolescents and youth need perseverance to adapt to changing circumstances and to try new ways of looking at and addressing a problem when something is harder than they expected. Building on 'self-value' and 'aspirational thinking', 'perseverance' supports mental and emotional resilience in adolescents and youth. At the collective level, it provides necessary stamina in social change movements or campaigns.

Activities might include perspective taking, reframing, positive self-talk, relaxation methods, mindfulness, and pivoting plans.

Outcome statements:

- I can adapt my plans when setbacks happen.
- I try to finish tasks that are important to me, even when they are difficult.
- I know that it is okay if reaching a goal takes longer than I thought it would.
- When I feel defeated, I remind myself of all my accomplishments.
- I know three ways to calm myself when I am stressed.
- I use healthy techniques for dealing with stress and managing emotions.
- I seek support from others when I feel discouraged about life.
- I encourage others to keep working towards their goals.
- I pursue my dreams despite the challenges of my situation.

Strong Mind Competencies

The Strong Mind domain relates to cognitive empowerment and capabilities for higher level thinking. Adolescents and youth with a strong mind are aware of how they fit into their communities and societies, including: the impact of gender barriers and other forms of exclusion; stereotypes based on class, ethnicity, or ability; and power inequities. They know how to make the decisions that are right for them and exercise agency within options defined by their context, expanding those options when safe to do so. They think critically about new information and understand other people's motivations and biases.

Gender and power awareness

Gender and power awareness means understanding how gender shapes women's and men's, girls' and boys' roles, norms, expected behaviors, and our assumptions about others. It also encompasses a broader conception of diversities in society across economic class, ability, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and the formal and informal hierarchies of power associated with them. Awareness of the relationship between social group and power helps adolescents and youth challenge gender, ethnic, and other stereotypes and, especially for girls and more marginalized young people, navigate social and interpersonal dynamics to get their needs met and achieve goals. Understanding that these dynamics are socially constructed and therefore changeable is key to working towards more equitable communities.

Activities might include values clarification, diversity, bias awareness, human rights, gender vs. sex, mapping stereotypes or norms, bodily integrity issue analysis, and art depicting rights in international conventions.

Outcome statements:

- I am aware of stereotypes in my community based on gender, ability, ethnicity, or background.
- I can identify who has more and less power in my community.
- I believe that people in my community should be treated equally within families, schools, businesses, government, and institutions.
- I practice awareness of my own biases about different kinds of people.
- I put myself into situations where I can learn from persons who are different from myself.
- I recognize how my gender, socioeconomic status, ability, culture, and background have shaped opportunities and disadvantages in my life.
- I know that communities and societies can change to become more equal for all people.

Decision making[6]

Decision making is the process of choosing a course of action. Cognitively, it involves considering risks and rewards of various options for solving a problem or choosing an aim to work toward. Good decision making relies on sound judgment of your situation, how it might change or develop, how other people are likely to behave, and potential consequences of actions to yourself and others. For adolescents in particular, decision making is a key part of risk reduction. A degree of risk taking is a sign of normal, healthy adolescent development because it allows the exploration of new experiences necessary for a person to understand themselves and the world. Yount people need to be equipped for risk assessment and, when the risk cannot be avoided, for making choices that reduce risk for themselves and others. Decision making strategies are also essential for major life decisions, such as career choices and when, whom, and if to marry. Although adolescents and youth may not be allowed to make such decisions for themselves, competency in weighing the potential outcomes of different pathways better equips them to influence parents and guardians. Collective decision making, such as a youth organization choosing a strategy to change the local government's budget allocations, is bolstered by skills in communication (e.g., negotiation and consensus building), gender and power awareness, and envisioning.

Activities might include information gathering, mapping pathways, decision making rubrics, scenario analysis, risk-benefit evaluation, and priority setting.

Outcome statements:

- I can analyze the risks and benefits of possible choices when faced with a decision.
- I can describe how my actions and behaviors affect others around me.
- I know that it is important to gather information about a situation before deciding what action to take.
- I set priorities in my life that influence the choices I make.
- I can describe how different courses of action may lead to different outcomes in a situation or problem.
- I can work with others to generate alternative solutions to problems.

Critical thinking

Cognitive Importance of Adolescence

During adolescence, there is a different pace of neurological development between brain regions whereby the pre-frontal cortex, in charge of executive functioning, is still under development. The adolescent brain becomes hyper-sensitive to anticipated rewards from having fun and/or taking risks. This can lead to adolescents struggling to balance impulsiveness with thoughtful decision-making in certain situations. While risk-taking and pleasure-seeking are often associated with negative activities and outcomes for adolescents – such as sexually transmitted infections, traffic accidents, participation in violent groups or gangs, and substance abuse – it is this tendency to take risks that can also lead to innovation and out-of-the-box thinking, civic participation, leadership and academic achievement. Hence, the need to provide adolescents with sustained and safe opportunities for positive risk-taking as well as to model and mentor them through decision-making pathways.

Source: UNICEF programme guidance for the second decade: Programming with and for adolescents, page 7

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[6] 'Decision making' was one of the original competencies in the leadership development model.

Critical thinking is the ability to evaluate information, judge its value, and interpret it with regards to existing knowledge. It also helps a young person understand alternative perspectives and factors that influence social norms, attitudes, and the behaviors of others. This competency is applied in a wide variety of ways in daily life and enables independent thought. As access to and the influence of the internet and social media continue to expand throughout the world, adolescents and young adults need to be able to recognize potential bias in information, assess the likelihood of sources being trustworthy, and consider the implications of a new piece of knowledge. Together with gender and power awareness and decision-making skills, critical thinking supports youth, especially girls and young women, to understand other people's motivations and interact safely online and offline. Individually and collectively, critical thinking is also a key part of developing arguments for needed changes in a community, school, or other system.

Activities might include media bias analysis, problem solving, debate, mock parliaments, logical frameworks, and behavior analysis.

Outcome statements:

- I understand issues and concerns of people on multiple sides of an issue.
- I can identify multiple sources of information for a topic.
- I can distinguish between fact and opinion.
- I know how to question the validity of new information before drawing conclusions.
- I can critically analyze the foundation of practices and norms in my community or school.
- I can recognize the weaknesses in the reasoning of family, friends, and peers.

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Strong Voice Competencies

The Strong Voice[7] domain primarily represents relational and social empowerment. The concept of 'voice' captures dimensions of visibility, participation, assertiveness, and influence that can extend from individual personal relationships to collective movement building. It is therefore included as a suite of competencies, rather than a competency itself. Adolescents and youth with a strong voice communicate what they need and express their thoughts. Combined with a strong core, these young people develop healthy patterns of communication with those around them, resolving conflicts respectfully. As they grow, they increasingly participate in shaping their communities, organizing peers and adults as needed.

Self-advocacy

Self-advocacy means expressing what you need from others and negotiating to get those needs met. Adolescents and youth, especially girls, have limited control over their day-to-day lives, where they can go, how they spend their time, and whom they interact with. Learning to identify needs and wants and how to communicate them to others who influence the conditions of an adolescent's life, such as family members, teachers, siblings, partners, etc., is essential for personal safety and positive outcomes. At the collective level, this competency appears in displays of solidarity, such as a girl's friends accompanying her to persuade her parents to let her continue schooling, or bringing in allies and peers in other ways to support a young person's expressions of needs, rights, and bodily autonomy.

Activities might include assertiveness training, refusal skills, middle path, negotiation, and boundary setting.

Outcome statements:

- I can state my wishes, needs and personal boundaries.
- I can tell my parents when I need time to study to meet with others.
- I can discuss things that matter to me with my family.
- I support others expressing their needs or standing up for themselves.
- I can advocate for my rights and the rights of my peers with relevant adults.
- I share my feelings, thoughts, issues and problems with decision makers.
- I tell my family about my hopes for the future and ask for their support.

Interpersonal communication

Interpersonal communication includes self-expression and listening. Self-expression refers to sharing your thoughts, feelings, and opinions in verbal, nonverbal, or creative ways. Listening is more than waiting for your turn to speak; it is processing the information being shared and the feelings behind it, if any. The exchange of viewpoints and ideas and for reaching agreement between two individuals or between and among groups is an essential element of human society, and communication is integral to the practice and development of other competencies. Young people need strong communication skills for healthy relationships, employability and entrepreneurship, organizing for change, violence prevention, accessing services, and mental health.

There are a large group of skills associated with this competency, including negotiation, refusal, cooperation, conflict resolution, empathy, and participation. Targeted skills should be selected based on the needs and strengths of the participating young people and program goals. For example, a sexual and reproductive health

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[7] Voice was included in the original LDM as a competency. Here, it is included as a domain in order to unpack the concept into related competencies.

program might focus on negotiation as essential for communication between sexual partners about contraceptives and HIV. Empathy facilitates conflict resolution and is an important skill for young people living in communities affected by civil unrest. Cooperation is necessary for team-based work environments and initiatives like youth savings and loan groups.

Activities might include active listening, expressive art, teamwork in games or sports, conflict resolution, group problem-solving, giving and receiving feedback, empathy, intergenerational/ intergender communication, and body language.

Outcome statements:

- I know ways to resolve conflicts or misunderstandings.
- I am confident negotiating with a sexual partner about contraceptive use.
- I strive to understand others' points of view.
- I can say no when asked to do something that I do not feel safe doing.
- I can listen attentively to the concerns, feelings, needs and perspectives of others.
- I can constructively disagree with what someone is saying.
- I can communicate with persons who are different from myself.
- I promote cooperation in groups and teams.

Organization[8]

Organization, or 'organizing for change' means building on the skills of 'advocacy' and 'communication' to bring people together with a common vision, and to undertake actions to change what needs changing. It includes social movements, such as for gender equality, climate justice, or land rights, but also refers to the informal gathering of allies for specific aims such as convincing a family to delay a girl's wedding or a schoolmaster to waive fees for a student who cannot afford them. As a competency, organizing for action requires influencing and inspiring others, forming plans—whether short- or long-term—and recognizing affinities across differences. It also involves the development of plans, steps from one point to another until the goal is reached. Organizing for change draws on many of the other competencies in the model, at a minimum, envisioning to identify desired goals, decision making and critical thinking for designing strategies, and perseverance and resilience for summoning endurance and revising plans when barriers are encountered.

Young people should be accompanied by adults and older peers in their social change efforts to manage risks associated with public action, such as backlash or retribution. Safer programming principles are especially important as youth navigate power dynamics and explore how to effect change in their contexts.

Activities might include consensus building, persuasion, action plan formulation, community mobilization, networking, group facilitation, and identifying allies and champions.

Outcome statements:

- I can work with people who come from different backgrounds to solve a common problem.
- I can describe opportunities and challenges for young people to practice leadership in my community.
- If I want to see a change in my community, I can plan steps to make that change.
- I know participatory methods and techniques for facilitating activities in groups.

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[8] 'Organization' was included in the original leadership development model.

- I can plan, organize, and manage my time to keep making progress towards an aim.
- I can motivate family, friends, peers, and other community members to work towards a goal together.
- I know how my community or school is governed and who makes important decisions.

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Wellbeing

The wellbeing domain is different than the other domains in that wellbeing is a foundation and prerequisite of youth psychological, physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development. The constructs here are better described as points of knowledge and functional skills rather than competencies. **The wellbeing domain also differs because it encompasses the enabling environment for healthy, holistic development**. Communities, families, and governments have a duty to young people to provide basic needs, services, and protection. The young person's role is to be proactive in caring for themselves, others, and pursuing fulfillment of their needs and rights.

Adolescents and young adults who are aware of the importance of individual and collective wellbeing monitor their physical and mental health. They reach out to support networks and allies when they recognize problems. They seek services as needed and know where and how to access them to pursue the fulfillment of their rights to health care, protection, legal status, age-appropriate livelihood, and education. This requires that young people pay attention to their physical and mental health, seeking assistance from trusted adults and peers when needed, and understanding how to access available services in health, education, protection, legal status, and other areas.

Self-care, help seeking, accessing services

While it is not a young person's responsibility alone to prioritize and protect wellbeing, adolescents and youth should be proactive in caring for themselves, others, and pursuing fulfillment of their needs and rights. This requires paying attention to their physical and mental health, seeking assistance from trusted adults and peers when needed, and understanding how to access available services in health, education, protection, legal status, and other areas.

Wellbeing should be a part of any program that works with young people, given the global crisis in youth mental health, especially among girls and young women, and the mandate to empower youth holistically. Wellbeing skills can be taught explicitly; modeling positive behaviors through routine practice and demonstration is also important. For example, mentors, facilitators, community workers, and program staff can:

- Check in with program participants individually and in groups, providing the time and space for their self-evaluation and encouraging them to practice mindfulness.

- Make clear that support is available for matters that fall outside program activities and emphasizing that it is ok to seek help from trusted adults.

- Map the scope of services available in the community for adolescents and youth, in particular protection and health care services but also educational, financial, and other services. Every program should know the referral pathways for response to violence, abuse, and exploitation at a minimum, and confirm in advance they are safe spaces with trusted adults who can support young people appropriately. Legal services may also be essential knowledge, particularly for migrant and displaced groups or young people facing discrimination in access to services or unjust treatment by officials.

- Introduce young people directly to service providers by taking them as a group to visit facilities or points of service as a routine practice with new groups, whether or not anyone has reported an issue. For example, bringing young people who have never been to a health center to meet staff and demonstrate how a visit is conducted gives them some familiarity with the process and the individuals there, so that presenting themselves for health care when they need it might be easier for them, especially if they are not youth-friendly services. Likewise, being introduced to the community child protection worker facilitates their access to protection if they are uncomfortable reporting abuse to a closer adult. Other service providers are relevant depending on the circumstances of the program participants or the program's goals, for example, financial, educational, or social protection services.

Services that programs should be aware of, if they exist:

- Health care
  - SRHR
  - Health insurance
  - Psychosocial
  - Nutritional support
- Protection
  - GBV response
  - Child protection
  - Social protection and safety net programs
- Legal
  - Birth registration
  - Marriage registration
  - Identity documents
  - Case management
- Education
  - School enrollment and transition
  - Nonformal/ remediary education
  - TVET
  - Scholarships and material support
- Age-appropriate livelihoods
  - Market access and cooperatives
  - Extension services (agricultural, veterinarian, etc.)

Adults, including project staff, should be prepared to help adolescents and youth individually if possible. Many times, the primary barrier to youth accessing benefits they are entitled to is knowledge of the registration process or discomfort entering public offices and navigating paperwork. It should be noted that services must always be risk assessed to ensure they are safe for young people, particularly those under the age of 18. Informed consent from parents/guardians and assent/consent[9] from adolescents and older youth is needed to partake in any activity. Any potential negative stigma attached with seeking services or support should inform the consent and assent process. Avoid assuming that services do not exist without investigating. Often social services are so under-resourced that the individuals operating them are dispersed and hard to find.

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[9] It is widely accepted that due to their developmental stage, young people under the age of 18 do not have the knowledge or developmental ability to fully assess risk and therefore cannot consent to their participation; rather, they can assent. As a young person grows older, their developmental stage allows for more informed decision making and consent is possible. Adults working with young people should assess risk alongside them, inform them, and take into account their abilities. For individuals with developmental delays or disabilities, turning 18 may not indicate they can fully comprehend the decisions or tasks at hand. In these cases, additional care should be taken for safer programming and protection.

Safer Programming

The first principle of working with anyone, particularly young people, is to 'Do No Harm'. Despite the best of intentions, programming implemented without the assessment and mitigation of risks to participants has the potential to expose young people to threats to their safety or other kinds of harm and abuse. When choosing how to approach competency development, consider how, where, when, and with whom activities should be done to protect participants and reduce risk of harm and abuse. For example:

- Should activities be done in single sex or mixed sex groups? Organizing mixed gender activities in cultures where adolescent girls and boys are strictly segregated may stigmatize participants and result in punishment by their families or communities. Marital status may also be necessary to consider, as in some communities, unmarried girls' social interactions are carefully guarded, while in others, married girls and young women are more segregated from men and boys.

- Can participants reach the activity space safely? For example, travel from their homes or schools to the site should not mean passing through mined zones, dangerous terrain, or areas where robbery, assault, or sexual violence occur, or those risks should be mitigated by moving in groups, offering vehicle transportation, scheduling activities to avoid dangerous times of day, or other actions. In some communities, these steps may be necessary for women and girls to avoid being stigmatized for leaving the home alone. The risks and mitigation plans for participants with disabilities may also look different.

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- What are sensitive topics locally? Young people will gain the most from competency development activities if they are done in safe spaces, where they feel free to speak openly and try new things. However, in low-resource settings, completely enclosed indoor spaces are hard to find. What qualifies as a sensitive topic can be different from community to community, so it is important for any outsiders involved in the program to investigate how, for example, sexual and reproductive health, gender and power, female economic empowerment, or other subjects should be approached. In some settings, even encouraging adolescents and youth to develop aspirations for their futures can be controversial.

- What community reactions can you expect when adolescents and youth talk about their rights or seek to exert influence? This can be dangerous in places with limited tolerance for free expression and should be very carefully thought out.

- Is there risk that participants react in a way that causes harm to themselves or others? As earlier discussed, the ages of 10-24 are a time of rapid physical and mental development as young people transition into adulthood. With this comes increased risk-taking behaviors. As participants build these competencies, their 'Power Within', we need to understand if their increased agency may open additional risks; for example, prostitution, joining armed groups, drug and substance abuse, human trafficking, hazardous labor, etc.

Mapping referral pathways and resources available in case sensitive information is shared, and/or participants need follow-up support or care. This may include physical as well as psychological and emotional care. For further details, see *CARE's Safer Programming: Embedding Safeguarding and the Protection from Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse, and Child Abuse into our Programmes*.[10]

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[10] https://www.careemergencytoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Safer-ProgrammingEmbedding-Safeguarding-into-Programmes.pdf

Annex 1: Power Within mapping against the Youth Power 'Positive Youth Development' Framework

Within development programming supported by USAID and others, the Positive Youth Development (PYD) Framework provides strong guidance for programming with adolescents and youth. When designing Power Within, evidence and programming examples from the application of PYD were explored, informing the ultimate design of Power Within. It is noted that 'Strong Self-Image' covers the same abilities as PYD's Agency. The domain of 'Strong Voice', overall, reflects the area of (youth) Contribution, but PYD includes interpersonal skills (such as communication) under Assets. Not all of the constructs under PYD's Assets are competencies, but higher-order thinking skills echoes the Strong Mind domain. PYD's Enabling Environment is a very broad category that would include the Well-being domain.
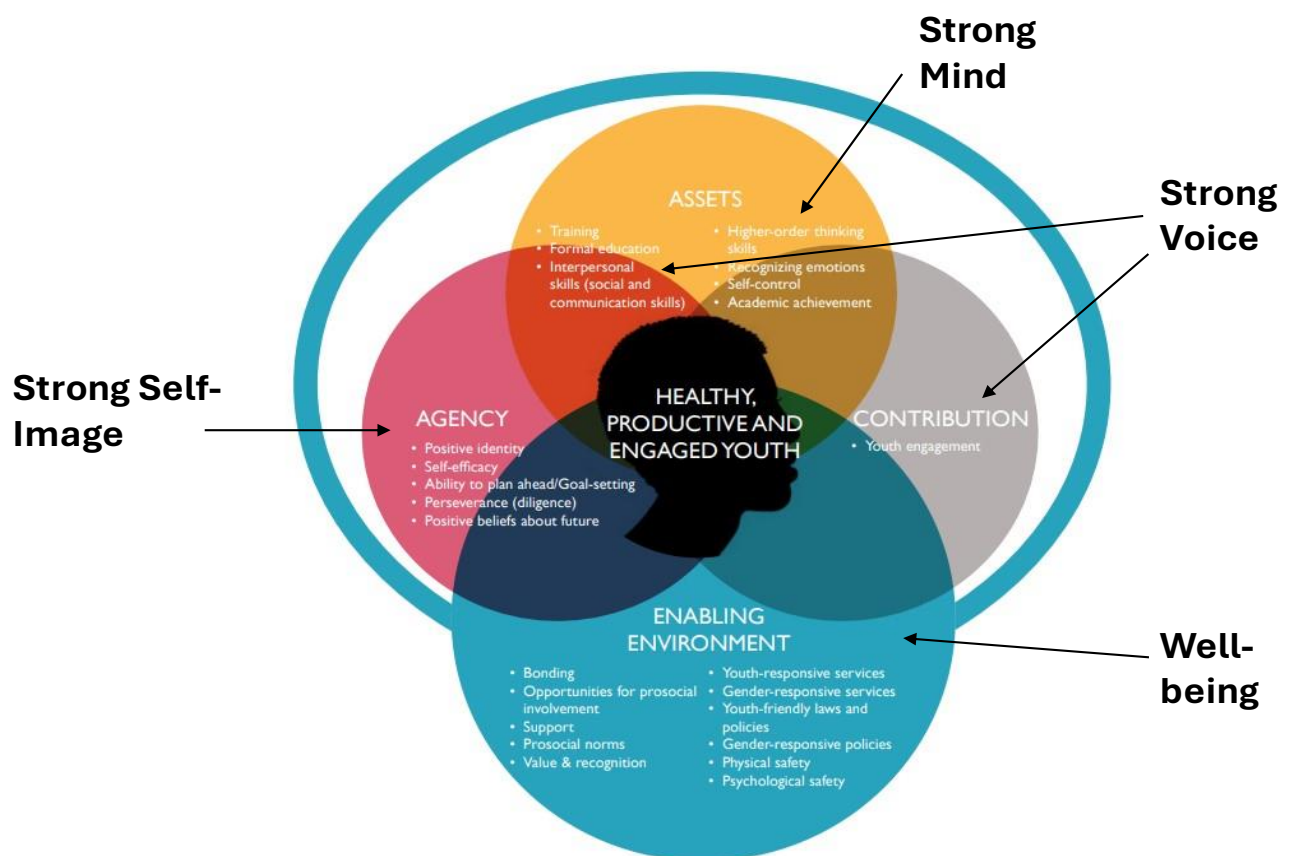
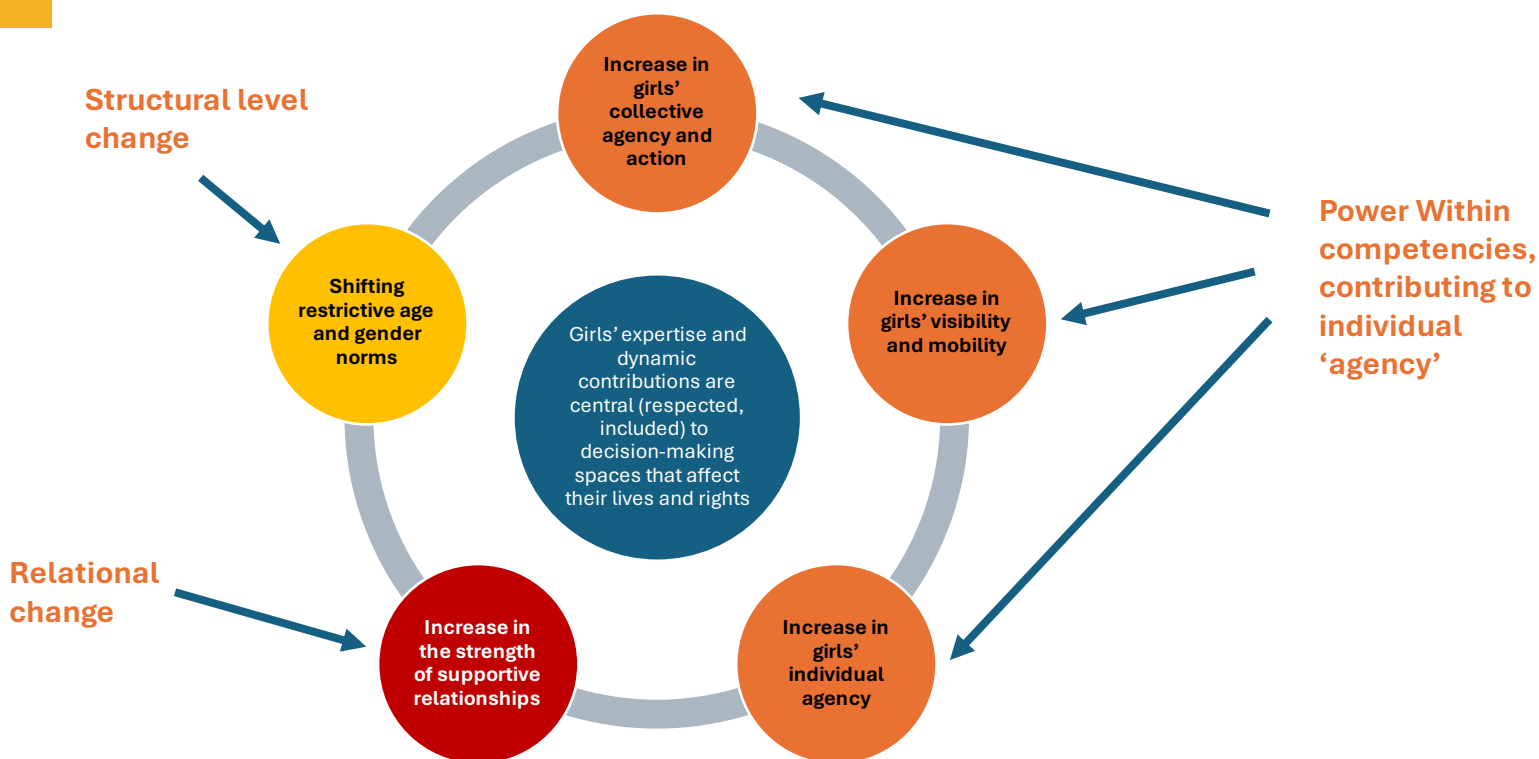*Positive Youth Development Framework*

Annex 2: Power Within mapping against the Girls in Action model

'Girls in Action' is CARE's model for girl-led action to shift social norms. It helps girls voice their choices and opinions and come together as a movement to advocate for their rights. Working with mentors drawn from their own communities, girls are taken through a four-step process where they decide what they wish to address and together are supported to implement their actions, monitor progress and evaluate their efforts.

Power Within compliments the Girls in Action model by providing an expanded competency-based model for girls to build their agency and action, and apply it in settings that also ensure structural and relational change and support. For more information on the Girls in Action model, check out the technical brief, Girls in Action: Supporting Girls to Lead Change Their Way[11].

In the graphic below, the outcome of Girls in action is represented in the middle of the image, and is surrounded by the five core components of Girls in Action model. These five components have been mapped against CARE's Gender Equality and Empowerment theory of change, which emphasizes that long term change in support of empowerment requires change at the individual (agency), structural, and relational levels. The three components of Girls in Action which align with building individual agency can be built through the development of Power Within competencies.

Structural level change

Relational change

Increase in girls' collective agency and action

Shifting restrictive age and gender norms

Girls' expertise and dynamic contributions are central (respected, included) to decision-making spaces that affect their lives and rights

Increase in girls' visibility and mobility

Increase in the strength of supportive relationships

Increase in girls' individual agency

Power Within competencies, contributing to individual 'agency'

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11 https://www.care.org/our-work/gender-equality/gender-expertise/girls-in-action/

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iv CARE. 2017. *Fostering Leadership Development for Adolescents*. Page 3.

v CARE. 2022. *CARE's Work with Adolescents and Youth: Capacity Statement.* Page 21.

vi CARE Zimbabwe. 2019. *Acquisition of Life Skills for Sustainable Learning for the Most Marginalised Girls in Zimbabwe.*

vii CARE. Undated. *PCTFI Leadership and Life Skills Thematic Brief.*

viii CARE. Undated. *AGES- Improving Education Outcomes for Minority Girls.*

ix For a discussion of the interdependencies among competencies often included in life skills frameworks, see UNICEF MENA, 2017, *Reimagining Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa: A Four-Dimensional and Systems Approach to 21st Century Skill - Conceptual and Programmatic Framework*, pages 39-44.