

## **Re-writing Stories of Child, Early and Forced Marriages through Vocational and Entrepreneurship Skills: Experience from the “Girls Inspire Project” in Tanzania**

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights experiences of young mothers, victims of child, early and forced marriages (CEFM) as pertaining to their basic rights, social wellbeing and sustainable livelihood four years after their participation in the Girls Inspire project. CEFM is still a critical issue in Tanzania and one of the obstacles toward girls’ and women’s empowerment. Data was collected from six districts in the regions of Dodoma, Rukwa and Lindi between 2016-2018 through the use of questionnaires for a random sample of 367 as well as in-depth interviews with 34 young mothers between 13 to 19 years old who were purposively selected. Other data was generated from the use of focus group discussions for a non-random sample of 137 young mothers. The findings show how the provision of alternative learning through ODL, coupled with skills development in areas of vocation and entrepreneurship can help vulnerable girls and young women be involved in shaping decisions that affect their lives as well as enhance their well-being, employability and sustainable livelihoods.

**Keywords:** Child marriages, teenage pregnancies, gender equality and sustainable livelihood.

### **Introduction**

Tanzania is facing many challenges related to Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) (African Union, 1990; URT, 2017), which is defined as “any marriage carried out below the age of 18, before girls are physically, psychologically and physiologically ready to bear the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing” (Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, 2003). As one of the countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, it is estimated that more than 18 million young women in Tanzania are victims of child marriage and teenage pregnancy (UNICEF Data, 2017).

Given the critical need to promote gender equality and inclusion, while supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged girls and young mothers, this paper sought to highlight the experience of girls and young mothers, or those who are at risk of CEFM, who participated in the Girls Inspire project in six districts of mainland Tanzania, and whose livelihoods were transformed, by exploring the traditional, legal and socio-economic situation underlying the crisis of CEFM in Tanzania.

### **About the Project (Girls Inspire)**

In a bid to improve the quality of life of the victims of CEFM in rural and disadvantaged communities, the government of Tanzania, in collaboration with stakeholders, has taken various initiatives. One of



these was the introduction in 2015 of a three-year CEFM Prevention Programme, branded “Girls Inspire” by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), in collaboration with the Institute of Adult Education and local non-government organisation known as *KIWOHEDE*.

Girls Inspire was a bottom-up empowerment approach, informed by the community felt needs, and was piloted in the six districts of Bahi and Kongwa, Kalambo and Nkasi, Ruangwa and Kilwa and in the regions of Dodoma, Rukwa and Lindi.

The project supported the education and development of skills for the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach girls and young women using Open and Distance Learning (ODL), which employs technology for educating and training them. Teaching was provided in a flexible manner, based on the learners’ locality, and at a time convenient to them, enabling them to fulfil other responsibilities in relation to their family and work. Specifically, teaching focused on providing learners with basic literacy, financial literacy and vocational skills for making soap and batik fabrics and processing food. Girls Inspire also provided teaching on reproductive health and gender equality, as well as entrepreneurship and business communication skills.

The target beneficiaries were in five categories, namely those who had never attended school, dropped out of primary school, completed primary school, dropped out of lower secondary school and those who failed at lower secondary school. The Girls Inspire programme was flexible, enabling girls and young mothers to access learning and skills development opportunities, while fulfilling other responsibilities, such as farming, doing small business, taking care of children and serving the community. Village chairpersons, ward education officers, ward executive officers, traditional leaders and parents were involved in identifying and sensitizing the target learners. A community steering committee was established and trained by the implementing team to identify eligible girls and young mothers and encourage them to join the programme.

The underlying theory of change used by the programme assumes that when girls and young women have sustainable livelihoods, which according to Serrat (2017) are the “capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living” through acquiring education and training, they will be empowered (expansion of abilities) to make their own choices regarding marriage, education, child bearing and other life choices. More than 4,000 girls and young mothers (aged 15-24) who were the victims, or at risk of becoming victims, of CEFM benefited from the Girls Inspire programme (COL, 2016, 2018).

## **Social and Legal Contexts**

To underscore the government’s commitment to guarantee and provide for the care and welfare of girls and women, to protect their rights and to ensure their livelihoods are sustainable, Tanzania has ratified many human rights treaties and conventions, which include the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), Dakar Education for All Framework (WEF, 2000) and the UN World Fit for Children (UNICEF, 2002). At the regional and national level, the country ratified the Africa Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Africa Union, 1990), Article 21, which insists that states must take all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices. The Charter also insists that “Child Marriage shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory.” At the national level, the country adopted the Law of the Child Act of

2009 (Mainland) (URT, 2009) and the Children's Act of 2011 (Zanzibar) (RGZ, 2011), as well as developing guidelines to further remove barriers that inhibit girls from accessing education, by providing more alternative learning paths for pregnant school girls to continue with their studies.

The Law of Marriage Act (1971) sets the minimum age at 18 for boys and 15 for girls to marry with parental consent (URT, 1971). The act also licenses both girls and boys to marry at 14 years old with a court's permission, contrary to the United Republic of Tanzania law that clearly defines a child as a person under the age of 18, with no exceptions (URT, 2009).

Despite these developments to support women's empowerment and equality, particularly girls' right to education, many girls and young women are still the victims of CEFM, which affects their access to quality education, welfare and social well-being (URT, 2017).

In addition, pregnant girls still face many challenges even when they have access to and can continue and complete their education cycle after giving birth, due to their many family and child responsibilities (HRW, 2014). It is worth noting that the crisis of child marriage mainly affects girls and young women (Dahl, 2010). Tanzanian women on average get married more than five years earlier than Tanzanian men (URT, 2012). Other evidence indicates that, on average, two out of five girls will be married before their 18th birthday (UNICEF, 2017), with some regions, such as Shinyanga and Tabora, having rates of up to 59% and 58%, respectively, of girls being married before they are 18 (URT, 2017). These crises of child marriage and gender inequality call for multifaceted interventions to ensure that Tanzania achieves the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly goals 4.5 and 6, by improving girls' access to education and promoting gender equality in the country.

## Methods

Purposive and random sampling methods were used to select 260 female victims of CEFM, who were enrolled in the Girls Inspire programme in the six implementing districts. The researcher conducted 40-60-minute, in-depth, open-ended individual interviews with 34 girls and young mothers who were purposively selected, and their informed consent was obtained to quote their words. Other data were obtained from focus group discussions with a non-random sample of 137 girls and young mothers. Each group consisted of 10-15 Girls Inspire beneficiaries.

The respondents volunteered to be interviewed from September, 2018 to October, 2019. The study also benefited from reviewing reports regarding the status, design and implementation of the Girls Inspire intervention in Tanzania. Twenty-seven archival documents were analyzed to ascertain the current status of the issue, including various documents from the Government of Tanzania, Commonwealth of Learning, UNICEF and UNESCO (2000). Other sources of data were obtained from the National Library, Institute of Adult Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children. The archival sources analysed were dated from 2000 to 2019.

A questionnaire was also developed and randomly administered to 304 girls and young women in the selected learning centres in all six pilot districts between April, 2018 and August, 2018 to obtain their experience of child marriage and teenage pregnancy. A total of 260 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 85.5%.

## **Data Analysis**

The study utilised both qualitative and quantitative approaches to triangulate the data collected. Qualitative data from purposively and randomly selected members were analysed thematically to clarify the experience of girls and young mothers. First, the interview data were transcribed, read through and informal notes were made regarding the themes that emerged. The researcher then honed the categories of the themes. Finally, the researcher analysed divergent findings, through deliberating on opposing ideas and agreeing on the meaning of the findings. Inductive analysis was used to get the meaning from the participants and provide descriptive details on the research undertaken. SPSS software Version 21 was used to analyse the quantitative data (self-report questionnaires). The results generated from the questionnaires were disaggregated to establish the difference between the groups. The findings in the following sections are reported in aggregate form.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Social and Demographic Information**

The respondents were mostly (70.8%) aged 18-19. The majority (55.4%) reported being single mothers, 37.7% married, 6.5% divorced and 0.4% were separated. In addition, the majority of respondents (96.7%) reported being married or in a union when aged between 15 and 19, and 67.6% gave birth to their first child between the ages of 15 and 17. Most of the respondents indicated having only one child (50%), while just over a third had two children (35.4%). Therefore, these respondents fell into the category of young mothers aged between 14 and 19.

In Tanzania, basic primary education goes from standards 1–7, ordinary secondary education from forms 1-4, and advanced secondary education from forms 5-6. The findings revealed that child marriages in Tanzania occur more frequently among girls who are the least educated. The majority of respondents (81.2%) had completed primary education, while 6.5% had not received any primary education at all. These data confirm that the crisis of child marriage and teenage pregnancy is much more likely to impact poor girls who are less educated and living in rural areas (URT, 2012; Dahl, 2010).

**Table 1: Social and Demographic Information****Age-category distribution**

Age-category	Frequency	Response %
12-14	14	5.4
15-17	62	23.8
18-19	184	70.8
Total	260	100

**Marital status**

Marital Status	Frequency	Response %
Single mothers	144	55.4
Married	98	37.7
Divorced	17	6.5
Separated	1	0.4
Total	260	100

**Age during marriage**

Age during marriage	Frequency	Response %
12-14	4	3.3
15-17	47	39.2
18-19	69	57.5
Total	120	100

**Age during birth**

Age during birth	Frequency	Response %
12-14	2	0.8
15-17	175	67.6
18-19	82	31.7
Total	259	100

**Number of children**

Number of Children	Frequency	Response %
1	130	50
2	92	35.4
3	28	10.8
4	7	2.7
No Child	3	1.2
Total	260	100

**Education level**

Education level	Frequency	Response %
No education	17	6.5
Primary school dropouts	38	14.6
Primary school completers	132	50.8
Secondary school dropouts	41	15.8
Secondary school completers	32	12.3
Total	260	100

## Increased hopes and dreams

The number of adolescents in Tanzania is large and increasing rapidly, with young girls constituting a fifth of Tanzania's population of 46 million (URT, 2017). In the study, it was observed that girls' lack of education, their poverty and cultural bias are the major causes of CEFM. Because of this, many girls fail to achieve their hopes and dreams due to not having the skills necessary for employment. As stated by one beneficiary from the Dodoma region,

I performed well in primary school and was set to join secondary school but I couldn't due to the lack of school fees. I am an orphan and I lived with my grandmother, who was also taking care of three of my siblings. She could not afford to pay for my education as she was struggling financially. As a result, I was forced to get married. I wanted to study and become a doctor. The hard times I experienced forced me to get into a relationship and I got pregnant. However, the Girls Inspire programme gave me hope and the opportunity to start again. Now, through our women's group, I participate in income-generating activities and earn some money. I have become the breadwinner for my family, specifically my two children. Through the programme, I gained basic literacy skills, life-skills and pre-vocational skills, as did other members of my group. Now, I am capable of making batik fabric, soap and nutritious flour to sell at the local market and sustain my life.

## Increased awareness and coping mechanism

Most beneficiaries agreed that the Girls Inspire programme offered opportunities to vulnerable and disadvantaged girls and young mothers in the project areas of Tanzania, as they can now be involved and participate in shaping their lives. Through sensitisation and advocacy capacity development, the Girls Inspire initiative addressed the root causes and real solutions concerning the issues of gender equity and equality, particularly CEFM. As explained by another beneficiary from the Rukwa region,

I was not aware or sensitive of my basic rights and entitlements and had no coping strategies to address them when the challenges emerge. Sometimes I could not afford to meet my basic needs of food and clothes in my locality. In this challenging situation, girls like myself are vulnerable to men who pretend to assist them and offer to buy them things, but they end up becoming the victims of teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

The Girls Inspire programme provided girls and young women with life-skills that helped to increase their self-awareness, abilities to tackle CEFM and take care of themselves. As a result, girls' and young mothers' socio-economic abilities and coping mechanisms improved, which enabled them to make informed decisions for their betterment. When describing this, one beneficiary from Lindi region said, "Like other vulnerable rural young girls who were unaware of the negative effects of CEFM, I am now aware of its challenges and have the skills to address its root cause and to help other young girls in my community." During the focus group discussion, more than 98% of the respondents indicated that they now feel assertive and self-confident in taking a lead after their participating in the programme.

After being involved in Girls Inspire activities, many respondents became aware of their basic needs and rights, and had the confidence to speak up and demand that these be respected. Girls Inspire utilised some posters, magazines, radio and television programmes and other community outreach campaigns to raise awareness and sensitise communities of the need to fight CEFM. One of the respondents from the Rukwa region, for example, noted that, "Now I can confidently challenge issues concerning my basic rights, including education, marriage and health." Similarly, Girls Inspire

networks of CEFM girls and young mothers managed to deal with seven cases of CEFM in the Lindi, Dodoma and Rukwa regions, between November 2018 and June 2019. Therefore, the programme has successfully enhanced girls' and young mothers' abilities to make informed decisions concerning their health, marriages, and education, as well as other social rights and entitlements.

### **Reduction in harmful socio-cultural beliefs and practices**

From the evidence, the study found that CEFM is still common practice in the six implementing districts. In the Kalambo and Nkasi districts in Rukwa and the other programme-implementing regions, most girls indicated that girls aged 20 and over are considered too old to be married. They face stigma and are commonly referred to as *Wasimbe* among Wafipa (Rukwa), *Wampilime* among Wagogo (Dodoma) and *Mwalindembo* among Wamwera (Lindi). It is worth mentioning that some tribes take pride in girls giving birth at a young age. The coming-of-age ceremonies for young girls when they reach puberty are accompanied by traditional taboos and rituals that encourage them to get married early and become pregnant.

The programme has resulted in changes in attitude and behaviour among communities about CEFM. In other cases, the respondents challenged the way they had been socialised to accept gendered norms. One young mother from Dodoma indicated how she was helping others to challenge the belief that being a female, according to her Gogo tradition, means cooking food, milking cows and obeying everything commanded by her elders, particularly men. Girls and young mothers who participated in the programme maintained that it had changed the way communities think about girls' rights and CEFM, and what action they should take. One young mother from the Lindi region explained how she convinced her father to send her young sister to secondary school, despite his complaint about financial difficulties. All beneficiaries shared the sense of being prepared and able to challenge negative socio-norms and attitudes pertaining to child marriage and the abuse of women. Another young mother from the Rukwa region explained how she was unable to challenge men in public concerning the violation of her rights and entitlement to education, medical care and wellbeing, but now she has been empowered to advocate for and stand up for her rights.

A similar experience was reported by a 17-year-old mother from Lindi with three children, who painfully reported how she fought against the forced marriage of her last-born sibling because her parents wanted to get six cows as a dowry. "I wanted her to continue with her education, and I didn't want her to be married and end up being the mother of an old man's children." She stressed that, although her parents did not value education, she is committing herself to ensure that her daughters and sister acquire education as a basic right, and striving to acquire vocational and entrepreneurship skills to help rewrite her story and get rid of poverty. Similarly, one respondent from the Lindi region reported, "I argued against my parents' decision to find me a man to marry because I hadn't passed the primary school leaving examination and was just staying at home idle."

### **Increased gender equity and equality**

Although Tanzania has managed to achieve gender parity for girls in primary schools, many girls are experiencing difficulties in accessing secondary education (URT, 2016a, 2016b). Specifically, in some remote rural settings, girls are more likely to drop out of school and experience gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination (HRW, 2017). Girls who get pregnant in Tanzania are forced to leave the formal school system, as getting pregnant is considered their own fault. For example, one

young mother explained that when she was 14 years old, she dropped out of school because she was pregnant. “I felt hopeless and useless because I loved learning and believed that education was a good thing for me and my family. As women in our Girls Inspire groups, we constantly address the need for gender equality. We know that gender-bias and discriminative practices affect our academic performance and prevent us from reaching our full potential and achieving a sustainable livelihood. This also leads to more girls dropping out of school and getting pregnant or married, as well as increased poverty in our communities.”

### **Increased access to learning across time and space (technological assets)**

Another experience was of a 17-year-old girl who described how ODL and technology had enhanced her learning, when she described how the long and risky trip to and from school had affected her studies,

I loved education and strove hard to get it. I used to travel for more than an hour to get to school and return home, because I believed that education is the engine to a better life and prosperity for myself and my family. Because my dad was tough and didn't want me to come back late, I met a rider of a motorcycle (in Swahili known as boda boda) who gave me a free ride from school to near my home to help me return home early from school. After two months of free rides, we had sex 3 times and I found myself pregnant at 16 years old.

Stories of girls getting pregnant and dropping out of school in Tanzania have been rampant, as the country has one of the highest adolescent pregnancy rates in the world (Mnubi, 2017; Pamoja Tunaweza Alliance, 2014). The report of the Centre for Reproductive Rights (2013) indicated that over 55,000 adolescent girls were forced to drop out of formal school because of pregnancy between 2003 and 2011. In addition, Human Rights Watch (2017) reported that some 8,000 pregnant girls are forced to leave school each year, which has a major impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of girls, including stigmatization, exploitation and poverty (Pamoja Tunaweza Alliance, 2014).

The Girls Inspire programme enables girls and young women to learn at their own pace and location, and at a time convenient for them. Girls Inspire has overcome the challenge of distance and time by developing an alternative, flexible, safe and gender-sensitive programme to enable girls and young mothers to benefit from the opportunity to learn how to develop a sustainable livelihood. Girls Inspire has established 28 safe learning centres near the homes of girls and young women and their communities, and they have been able to safely access and use multimedia materials via the radio and other communication devices, thereby, giving them the right to and benefit from the education they had been denied. For example, in 2019, of the thirteen Girls Inspire beneficiaries, who studied via ODL, five passed the form two (grade 8) national examination and eight passed the form four (grade 10) national examination, having been unable to continue with their formal schooling due to pregnancy. As a result of this achievement, Girls Inspire beneficiaries have become role models in their communities, encouraging and mentoring other girls and young women.



## **Reduction in cases of early maternity and motherhood**

Many factors cited by girls and young mothers have led to an increase in the number of child marriages and teenage pregnancies in Tanzania. In several incidents, the respondents reported that the lack of education on sexual and reproductive health was one of the main causes. One young mother from the Rukwa region noted that,

I grew up knowing that my body is changing from my own and my friends' experience. Because of my lack of knowledge of sexual and reproductive health I found myself pregnant. I was pushed out of school when I was in form one at 16 years old, and my father also kicked me out of our home. As a teenage mother, I then struggled to work as a house maid to feed and shelter my daughter. But Girls Inspire has given me skills to be self-reliant by producing and selling peanut butter and bar soaps. Meanwhile, Girls Inspire incorporated comprehensive sexual health training in its programme, that I learned and enjoyed.

As many studies indicated, girls who marry and give birth before their bodies are fully developed are more at risk of maternal mortality and morbidity (URT, 2017). In addition, there are many negative consequences for them, including an increase in domestic and sexual violence, the health of their infants being put at greater risk, an increased danger of contracting HIV/AIDS, and their inability to cope with married life at a young age. The Girls Inspire programme gave its beneficiaries the knowledge and skills to be champions of change to inspire and educate others on sexual health issues. For example, one young mother from Rukwa explained, "At the end of each month, we conduct sensitisation and public campaigns to reach young women in our communities to teach them about sexual health and related issues. We have established a bond and support system among women so that we can share our experiences and help each other."

## **Increased education opportunities**

Another young mother from Dodoma responded that, "My life was full of challenges as I struggled every day to feed and shelter my child." She explained, "I cried terribly when I found myself pregnant at the age of 14. I needed to be educated, but there was no structure to accommodate me and enable me to resume my education after I gave birth." Education is a national development as well as a human rights issue (URT, 2017). All the girls and young mothers believed that acquiring education was the most powerful empowerment tool for them and their families.

Through Girls Inspire, girls and young mothers were provided with an alternative path to continue with their secondary education through the ODL mode of delivery at learning centres, commonly known as open schools. Open and non-formal schooling is one of the government interventions to support young people who have dropped out of, or missed out on, formal education for several reasons, including pregnancy. This is an alternative learning pathway for learners wishing to return to school. For example, one young mother from the Bahi district, who is now back at school, reported that,

I wanted to continue with secondary education, but my parents were unable to afford the costs of my education. I cried and talked to them about the need and importance for me to continue with my secondary education, but they told me that they could not afford to pay for my secondary education while there are other children in the family to take care of, but through the Girls Inspire project, I am now able to resume my studies through ODL. I am now in form two [grade

8], having passed my qualifying test last year and am ready to take the form four national examination [grade 10] in 2020.

In the same vein, in 2016, a young mother from the Kongwa district reported how she had completed her primary education but was unable to afford or get support to continue with secondary education. In her own words, she exclaimed, “I was so delighted and happy to be in secondary school, looking forward to transforming my livelihood as well as that of my family.” Girls Inspire learners had a similar story to that of a young mother whose dream was cut short in form two, due to her family’s financial crisis, which meant that her parents could no longer pay for her secondary education. Therefore, she explained that,

I became pregnant six months after I left secondary school. But through Girls Inspire I am now at the Institute of Adult Education centre in Rukwa region to continue with my education. I am also able to cover my educational costs while taking care of my children, through selling bars of soap, batik fabrics and processed food at the local market during the evening while attending classes during the day. I am confident that I will pass my examination[s].

In explaining her story, a 17-year-old mother of twins from the Dodoma region emphasised that she is now ready to challenge some negative cultural beliefs that, “boys are worth educating more than girls.” In relation to her social activism, life experience and girls’ right to education, this young mother said,

When I completed my primary education, my parents told me that they could not afford to pay for my secondary education, and so I would be better off being married. My parents were worried that I might become pregnant while I was at home, which would bring great shame on the family, hence I was forced to marry at the age of 16. In the Gogo tradition, when a man pays a dowry for a woman, you no longer belong to your family as the man automatically becomes your sole keeper. But the project inspired me to return to school and I am now in form three now.

### **Increased economic independence and self-reliance**

Poverty and family crises are the key drivers of the increasing number of CEFMs and teenage pregnancies in many communities, particularly in rural settings, where girls are seen as an economic burden as regards school fees and a source of income as marriage dowries. Poverty can be defined in various ways, such as lack of opportunities and choice regarding those things that are basic to human development (e.g., food, shelter, education, medical care and security) (UNDP, 2009). In rural Tanzania, for example, being free from poverty has been defined as the ability of people to be healthy, to be free from hunger, to be able to afford all the necessary services, including education, and to participate in shaping decisions that affect their communities (Kadigi, Mdoe & Ashimogo, 2007). Therefore, the level of poverty experienced by rural girls and young mothers has been one of the driving forces increasing the number of child marriages in Tanzania.

The interviews revealed that about 75% of young mothers were either married or pregnant when they completed standard seven in primary education with no opportunity to go on to secondary education. Data from the field indicate that family poverty is the main cause of girls dropping out of or not attending formal school (83.8%).

It is also a concern that after giving birth, evidence from the field indicates that it is the young mothers themselves, together with their parents, and not the fathers of the children, who provide care and

support to the mother and children. More than 63.4% of young mothers reported supporting themselves, together with their parents, as opposed to 28.8% who support the child together with the biological fathers, (see Table 2 below). A young pregnant girl (about 37 weeks and due to give birth) stated that,

Ever since I got pregnant nine months ago, I haven't seen the father of my expected child, nor any of his relatives to support me, and his family has refused to be involved in this matter. Therefore, I have applied the socio-economic skills I acquired from the Girls Inspire programme, and now I am so happy I can take responsibility for enhancing my livelihood.

In another incident, a young mother from the Lindi region reported that,

I completed standard seven when I was 14, but was unable to go on to secondary school. I feared staying at home being idle, doing nothing, as I had no educational or economic opportunities, and so I fooled around and was impregnated by a man who said he would marry me, but he ended up marrying another girl. Therefore, I had to stand on my own feet, and so I participated in the Girls Inspire programme to sustain myself and my children, whose health and wellbeing have improved through the help I received from the programme that enabled me to start a small business selling batik fabrics and soap.

In the same frustrated but hopeful tone, one young woman, aged 17, who was the victim of rape, explained that, "I was dismissed from school in 2016 when I was in standard seven due to pregnancy at the age of 15." Her painful story was like that of many young girls, who were stranded and left alone in the world suffering from despair and hopelessness but then they were shown how Girls Inspire could come to their rescue. She described how, when on her long and risky journey back from school she was raped by a gang, her parents were unwilling to do anything when she told them what had happened, because they considered it brought shame on the family, and so they remained silent. However, she explained, "I now no longer stay silent, as Girls Inspire has given me strength to champion and support other young mothers who have gone down the same path as me. I share the challenges of my fellow women and encourage them to go back to school, to learn how to start a small business and to stand up for their socio-economic rights." All the respondents shared the feeling that their ambition to have a sustainable livelihood, which seemed to have collapsed, has now been restored through the Girls Inspire programme. Similarly, another respondent from the Lindi region noted how she had been socialised to fulfil certain gender roles and expectations, which limited her participation and ability to perform but was able to assert, "I now know I want to be economically independent and stand up for my rights, which is why I make and sell soap, batik fabric and processed food."

All the girls and young mothers strongly believed that they had benefited greatly from the Girls Inspire project, to the extent that they felt themselves to be economically independent, because they had been empowered to advocate for their educational, health and socio-economic needs, and stand up for their rights and entitlements. They have increasingly employed appropriate political and social strategies for seeking redress over the violation of their perceived rights, often by involving local community leaders and established women's groups. One young mother from the Rukwa region explained that, "We decided to establish a business network for girls and young mothers, where we can discuss various socio-economic issues and exchange ideas in regard to our livelihoods and the environment, and now we have a constitution and run our own businesses." This has increased the

confidence of the girls and young mothers to speak out concerning their need to sustain their livelihoods.

### **Increased opportunities for financial accessibility**

In this connection, one young woman from the Dodoma region argued that, “We decided to go to the District Executive Director to obtain information on the issue of 50 million Tanzanian shillings allocated to every village, in addition to the 10% of the annual district revenue allocated to female and male youths. We knew this was our socio-economic right to be empowered and positively contribute to members of our communities and families.” The Tanzanian government has tasked the Community Development Department to monitor the livelihoods and socio-economic wellbeing of vulnerable groups, such as youths, women and people with disabilities, and so the District Executive Officers in all the regions implementing ODL must ensure that these groups receive proper guidance and support when it comes to accessing loans, and producing and marketing their products. In addition, one girl from Lindi region reported that, “We have developed a strong bond with local businesses, such as food vendors and tailors, as well as with village community banks (known as VICOBA) and shops to make them aware of our needs and seek their support for starting a business.” In all the regions, girls and young women have formed and officially registered their business groups, such as the Msanzi and Mwanguta Womens' Group, meaning a woman is a pillar of the nation, in Rukwa, and Mwandimata and Bahi Womens’ groups in Dodoma.

All the groups have opened bank accounts and about five of them have received a low interest loan from financial institutions, such as banks, micro-finance companies, VICOBA and the revolving funds of District Councils. For example, Msanzi women’s group received one million Tanzanian shillings as a soft loan from the Small Industries and Development Organisation (SIDO).

To ensure that what they learnt was sustainable, one young woman from Rukwa region noted that, “The materials for making batik fabrics, soap and peanut butter, as well as the training we received on entrepreneurship, were relevant to our environment.” This shows that the ODL curriculum was appropriate for where she was living. Many young women, who have taken the initiative to improve their socio-economic situation and be independent, were inspired and encouraged by the Girls Inspire programme to stand on their own feet, as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Socio-economic support**

<b>Source of support</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Response %</b>
Myself	105	40.4
My parents	75	28.8
Myself and the father of the child	60	23.1
Relatives	20	7.7
Total	260	100

### *Improved skills for networking and marketing products*

Girls and young mothers now have a market for their products, as well as having access to micro loans to boost their business, while developing their capacity to expand it. It is worth noting that the ODL training they received enabled them to use computers and access the Internet, giving them an

added advantage in running their business. One young mother from the Dodoma region, like many others in the group, pointed out how participating in the training linked them to other business groups through social media (WhatsApp and Facebook), while connecting them with and securing apprenticeship opportunities. "I have acquired specific skills for making batik fabric and soap, which I now utilise to improve my life," added one young mother from the Rukwa region.

## Conclusion

Evidence from the field suggests that many cases of child marriage and teenage pregnancy occur when girls, particularly in rural settings, complete primary education with no prospect of moving on to secondary school, due to parents' inability to pay the fees or their desire to marry them off to obtain a dowry. This prevents them from reaching their potential and fulfilling their desire to obtain a good education, leaving them to look for an alternative, thereby, exposing them to the risk of harassment, exploitation and even violence.

The worrying trend is that more than 8,000 teenage girls in Tanzania drop out of school every year due to pregnancy (Human Rights Watch, 2018), which is why the strategic intervention of the Girls Inspire programme has been so beneficial for disadvantaged girls from poor homes, because without the skills imparted to them by the programme, these girls would have remained vulnerable to exploitation or been forced to marry and face ongoing socio-economic challenges. Girls Inspire has, to a great extent, enabled girls and young mothers to make their voices heard when it comes to their rights and entitlements. They have been socially and economically empowered and provided with soft skills and leadership skills that will enable them to make their livelihoods sustainable.

However, despite the successes witnessed in the implementing regions, Girls Inspire have faced several challenges, including having to relocate some learning centres, which affected learners' attendance. In some cases, the lack of electricity prevented the use of multimedia and other technologies. Since farming was the main economic activity in the implementing regions, some learners stopped attending classes to focus on farming and harvesting their crops, and so some groups were forced to meet only twice a week. Meanwhile, at the initial stages, some groups faced difficulties in selling their products as the communities were doubtful of the quality. However, their perceptions changed once they experienced the quality of the products and saw how well the groups performed at regional and national events, such as Nane Nane or National Farmers' Day, which acknowledges farmers' contributions to national socio-economic development.

This study has shown that the theory of change can be successfully put into practice, as evidenced by many girls and young mothers who have taken action that has produced effective socio-economic outcomes, including increased educational and employment opportunities, as well as their ability to participate in development and make informed decisions. This demonstrates the need to invest more in developing basic skills that could be transferable, such as vocational and entrepreneurship skills, conduct more advocacy capacity development programmes concerning the importance of gender equity and equality to improve the confidence and self-esteem of women and to offer micro-training, loan access, management and peer support for girls and women to start their own business. This also highlights the need to advocate for funding increases and the raising of priorities that will centre on training girls and young mothers, especially the disadvantaged, vulnerable and unemployed, with practical entrepreneurship skills to enter today's work force, achieve socioeconomic independence

and sustainable livelihood, which is on the national agenda, to provide women with leadership skills and life opportunities and equip them to make sound socio-economic decisions as the nation strives to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

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