

Save the Children & Very Young Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health: An Overview

Save the Children's Vision

Save the Children recognizes that very young adolescents (VYA) from 10 to 14 years of age represent a unique subgroup of adolescents who are experiencing one of the most critical transitions in life. Physical, cognitive and emotional changes lead to new roles for them in the family and community due to gendered expectations and individual exploration of their sexuality. For too many girls, this transition marks the end of their schooling and the start of gender-based



violence, early marriage and childbearing. Boys are often expected to focus on learning or income generation for their families. Both girl and boy VYAs need knowledge, skills and social support to form the positive behaviors that can affect their current and future health and well-being and prevent risks, including early, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and gender-based violence.

Taking a lifecycle approach, Save the Children prioritizes VYA as a key target group among which to lay the foundation for healthy and safe sexual and reproductive health. Our program portfolio in over 15 countries builds the evidence base for our VYA work by developing and testing innovative, scalable approaches, including puberty education, menstrual hygiene management, anemia prevention, equitable gender norm formation, empowerment of girls, preventative health services and addressing needs of young mothers. At the same time, we strive to strengthen the capacity of multi-sectoral programming within the organization to address the needs of VYA, support research and advocacy, and engage in institutional leadership and partnerships.

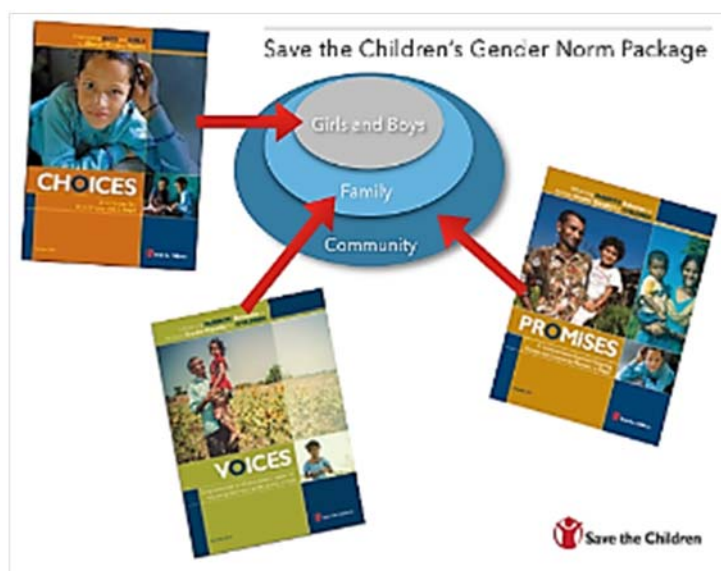
Over the next 10 years, we aim to:

- Innovate and test comprehensive approaches of VYA programming and the most effective way to deliver these programs which will lead to a reduction in early pregnancies and HIV acquisition, gender equity and improved school completion;
- Lead national-level advocacy, raising the visibility of this important life-stage; and
- Develop national-level partnerships with ministries and local organizations to bring programming to scale.

Featured Programs

CHOICES, VOICES AND PROMISES

Throughout the world, girls and women face discrimination on multiple levels by virtue of their sex. Many girls are unable to fully participate in school, family life and economic activities and may be exposed to various forms of physical and psychological violence. Adolescence is frequently viewed as a window of opportunity to formulate positive attitudes and behaviors. Developing gender-equitable norms during adolescence reduces the need to invest in the difficult task of changing behavior later in life. Choices, Voices and Promises is a package of three gender transformative interventions across an ecological model at the individual, family and community levels designed to achieve gender equity. The package applies evidence-based influence principles to achieve change.¹



CHOICES curriculum to improve boys' and girls' access to activities that challenge restrictive gender norms and promote gender equity;

VOICES intervention to increase dialogue between parents and children that improves equity in families through emotion-based videos and mobile technology;

PROMISES intervention to shift norms within the community through community-based advocacy and media to create an environment where boys and girls are valued equally.

Save the Children developed the **Choices** curriculum in Nepal in 2009, the first curriculum of its kind to target very young adolescent boys and girls to help them discover alternative views of conventional gender roles and behaviors. The curriculum includes eight developmentally-appropriate participatory activities that stimulate discussion and reflection on gender and power, expressing emotions and empowering girls to set and reach their hopes and dreams in life. Evaluation results show statistically significant differences in gender attitudes and behaviors between control and experimental groups comprised of girls and boys 10-14 years old.² Locally adapted Choices curricula are now being expanded in Bolivia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Malawi and Zambia.

¹ Robert Cialdini. Influence: Science and Practice (5th Edition) Allyn and Bacon, 2008.

² Rebecca Lundgren, Miranda Beckman, Surendra Prasad Chaurasiya, Bhawna Subhedi & Brad Kerner (2013) Whose turn to do the dishes? Transforming gender attitudes and behaviours among very young adolescents in Nepal, *Gender & Development*, 21:1

An evaluation of Choices in Nepal found statistically significant differences in gender attitudes and behaviors between control and experimental groups.

“PEOPLE USUALLY LAUGH AT A MAN WHO COOKS FOOD IN THEIR HOME. BUT FROM THE DAY WE HAVE TAKEN ‘CHOICES’ CLASSES, OUR BROTHERS HAVE STARTED HELPING AT HOME...” Girl who participated in Choices



The **Voices** curriculum was initially developed in Nepal as a vehicle to engage parents of VYA to challenge rigid and gendered expectations held by their children, while at the same time fostering dialogue between parents and children about gender equity. Voices includes six short emotion-based videos with testimonials of community members who recently adopted the targeted behaviors. Carefully facilitated group dialogues with parents after each video tapped into the powerful emotional drivers of social norms and behaviors to change gender equality in homes. Voices is being expanded to the DRC.

The final piece of the package, **Promises**, shifts community and social norms on girls' education and protection. Specifically, Promises focuses on keeping girls in school and preventing domestic violence to foster communities where individual changes – inspired through Choices – and family changes – catalyzed by Voices – would have a greater likelihood of being sustained. Six billboards are sequentially unveiled by a small group of identified community influencers who catalyze community level dialogue and reflection.



A process evaluation in Nepal found that fathers became more positive in delaying daughters' marriage and that there were fewer conflicts at home. Children reported more optimism about their education and about the willingness of parents to hear their hopes and dreams. The Promises approach has also been used in Uganda.



KEEP IT REAL

Save the Children, supported by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, implements the Keep It Real Project in rural and urban communities in Uganda and Ethiopia. Keep It Real equips very young adolescent girls and boys with the skills they need to make informed sexual and reproductive health decisions and develop gender equitable attitudes. Through Keep It Real, trained teachers and peers deliver age-appropriate Gender and Sexuality Education curricula. Very young adolescent girls and boys are in school and out of school, with some working as street vendors, shoe-shiners, garbage collectors and domestic workers. For very young adolescent girls, extra sessions led by peers increase their confidence to speak up and their ability to make informed decisions. By the end of 2015, 45,000 students in 200 primary and secondary schools, as well as 4,000 out-of-school young people in 190 groups completed the curriculum. Moreover, 9,000 adolescents visited health centers, linked to the project sites. The ministries of health and education approved the materials.



An evaluation found increased age-appropriate knowledge of sexuality, critical life skills and development of gender equitable values, as well as increased self-efficacy in girls, all factors crucial to protecting adolescent development.

“I HAVE LEARNT SO MUCH. MY FRIENDS SAY I AM NOW ACTIVE IN CLASS ...I AM PLANNING FOR MY FUTURE.” – Girl in Uganda

GREAT

Save the Children, in partnership with Georgetown University’s Institute for Reproductive Health and Pathfinder International, developed the USAID-funded GREAT Project – Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations – in Northern Uganda. Guided by a life-course perspective, GREAT supports four separate age groups: VYA, unmarried older adolescents, newly parenting adolescents and adults aged 19+. VYA interventions transform gender norms and attitudes to foster healthier and more equitable behaviors by promoting reflection, dialogue and action among individuals and their communities about sexual and reproductive health, including gender-based violence. Age and stage-specific materials for VYA include storybooks for boys and girls, child club curriculum in the form of easy-to-use activity cards and a life-size board game. Evaluation showed that over 40% of VYA and older adolescents demonstrated significant changes in gender-based violence, SRH and gender attitudes, showing the potential for foundational work with VYA. The VYA components of GREAT are being replicated in the DRC.

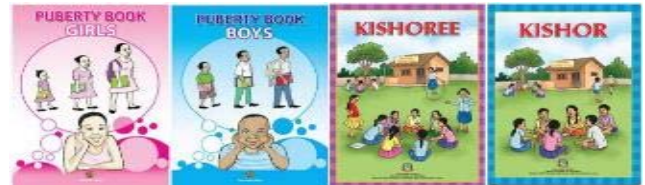


PROTECTING FUTURES

Negative attitudes toward girls' puberty and poor Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) can have serious consequences. As a result of menstruation, girls may be harassed, stigmatized and miss school. The Procter & Gamble-funded Protecting Futures program supported Save the Children to develop a set of materials for teachers, parents and girls to address MHM at the individual, family, school and community levels. Save the Children's School Health and Nutrition and Basic Education units complement this work by improving the girl-friendliness of latrine construction and creating an MHM operational guide that has been used in Bolivia, Philippines and Nigeria and is ready to be rolled out to 16 School Health and Nutrition programs around the world.



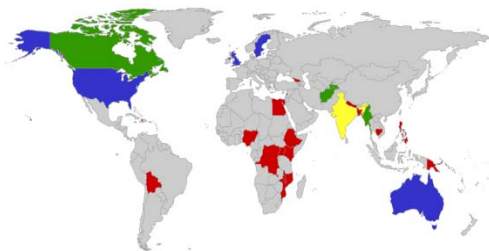
Recognizing that VYA want information to take home and that boys can be powerful allies, Save the Children developed puberty workbooks for girls and for boys to provide information on puberty, MHM and gender.



First adapted from Columbia University's research with girls in Tanzania and from the Choices curriculum, the interactive take-home workbooks now include positive gender socialization for boys and girls and are contextualized to Nepal, Malawi, Bangladesh, Bolivia and Uganda.

ADOLESCENT GIRLS INITIATIVE IN KENYA

Save the Children is the implementing partner of the Population Council-led Adolescent Girl Initiative Kenya project in Wajir County, Kenya. The project is building 11-to-14-year-old girls' resources in health, violence prevention, wealth creation and education using a combination of girl-level, household-level and community-level interventions. Over the next three years, a randomized, controlled trial will assess combinations of interventions and the level of impact on girls.



Save the Children has programs in 19 countries with potential for scaling up proven and emerging best practice in VYA research and programs multi-sectoral platforms.



Institutional Leadership and Capacity Strengthening

SIGNATURE PROGRAM

Save the Children has been demonstrating effective approaches to reach VYA since 2009 and, as an organization, has prioritized VYA sexual and reproductive health in 2013. Since then, the Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit has been working to develop a unifying strategic program framework that brings together multiple program experiences for application in our offices around the world. In 2014, we completed a VYA SRH Programming Guide and two country situational analyses that establish a thorough understanding of policies and programs to underpin comprehensive programs. In 2015, the Programming Guide was verified with national staff in Uganda, which is poised to become a compressive VYA programming demonstration site.

VYA CAPACITY BUILDING

In Nigeria, Save the Children strengthened six local NGOs to address VYA sexual and reproductive health needs with support from the Ford Foundation's West Africa Regional Office. As part of this work, a national consultation brought together UN agencies, ministries, academics and NGOs to review a program and policy scan and prepare a Consensus Statement to guide policy and programming priorities. From this experience, Save the Children developed a guide for conducting national consultations to share good practices and scale up VYA consultation and advocacy efforts. The guide has been uses in Uganda, engaging over 60 national VYA stakeholders.

Research and Advocacy

GLOBAL EARLY ADOLESCENT STUDY (GEAS)

Led by Johns Hopkins University and the World Health Organization, the Global Early Adolescent Study is a seminal exploration of the development of gender norms in early adolescence that predispose young people to subsequent sexual health risks and, conversely, contribute to healthy sexuality. Save the Children is on the advisory committee of the study, where our role is to ensure research findings can and will be translated into implementation. Save the Children is also contributing financial resources to the research in Bolivia and Egypt.

VYA ALLIANCE

Save the Children has been a founding member of the VYA Alliance since 2011, along with the Institute for Reproductive Health, Plan and the German World Foundation (DSW). The VYA Alliance is working to build a movement among civil society organizations around the world to invest in and support VYA, test innovative programs and make program practices, tools and guidelines widely accessible.

**Thank you for your interest in Save the Children's VYA programming.
Learn more. Contact ASRH@savechildren.org**

