

GENDER EQUALITY AND YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



All children and young people deserve equal rights to opportunities that will prepare them to work and thrive in the global economy as they transition to adulthood. Adolescence is a pivotal stage in life, as it is the time when young people gain more independence. But it is also when gender gaps widen and norms about work and power solidify, leading to lifelong barriers for young people who are impacted by inequality – especially adolescent girls and young women.

Our **Framework for Gender Equality and Youth Economic Empowerment** defines our commitment to design, implement, and learn from programs that help youth achieve economic agency and autonomy. Given the profound effects of gender inequality on economic freedom, the Framework emphasizes the unique circumstances of adolescent girls and young women.

THE INTERSECTION OF ADOLESCENCE, GENDER, AND POVERTY

For many young people facing difficult situations rooted in poverty, adolescence can mean dropping out of school, unsafe and exploitive labor, early marriage and parenthood. Such circumstances leave them at high risk

of deprivations and violations of their rights. One in five young people are neither in employment, education, nor training. Young women are more than twice as likely to fall into this category.

Adolescence is also when gender gaps typically widen and discriminatory gender norms are internalized and reinforced. There is a critical need to address gender-based power imbalances that prevent young people from disrupting these inequalities and breaking the cycle of poverty.

OUR PROGRAM FRAMEWORK FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

There are three gears in our Framework that are driven by **transformative power** – the dynamic force that influences systems in ways that benefit everyone:

- Accumulation of capital (human, social, financial and physical)
- Individual agency
- Change across spheres of influence

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER

- **Bargaining power** is achieved when adolescents and youth accumulate capital and have something useful to offer to the family, community or the economy. This power, paired with actions to address the underlying constraints of systems, norms and institutions, enables individuals to take advantage of opportunities and resources.
- **Internal power** comes from within. It enhances a person's agency by giving them confidence in their ability to aspire, make life choices and act upon them.
- **Collective power** is the act through which people who are negatively impacted by a system or institution work together to transform and change it.
- **Representative power** is the power of being seen, heard, and having influence in the institutions that make decisions that affect young people.

Accumulation of capital

Capital is a critical element in the journey to self-determination and autonomy. Having capital provides young people, especially adolescent girls and young women, with the choices to engage in economically valuable and decent work and enhances bargaining power.

Individual agency

Agency is having choices, being aware of them, and making decisions or acting on them. The act of asserting one's agency is an assertion of internal power. It relies on the individual or group recognizing their inherent rights, value, and dignity, as well as the systems around them that are standing in their way of upward economic mobility and equity.

Change across spheres of influence

Young people's identity, sense of self, agency, and ability to accumulate and use capital is influenced by peers and families; religious, government, business and civic institutions; legal systems; social and gender norms; and cultural beliefs. Family and community are often the biggest influencers, and where adolescents may first experience gender norms or biases. Because young women often have a disproportionate share of household chores, we engage males to promote the equitable division of responsibilities and serve as role models in families and the community.

KEY GENDER BARRIERS WE SEEK TO ADDRESS AND TRANSFORM:



Safety: Social norms about women's value and power lead to gender-based violence to keep adolescent girls and young women at a lower status



Bodily autonomy: The principle of security and control over one's own body, which is fundamental to the empowerment of adolescent girls and young women



Time: Women and girls bear a disproportionate burden for unpaid care and household work, reducing the time available to spend on economic activities.

HOW WE APPLY THE FRAMEWORK

Through partnerships and design: Successful program design includes transformative power and all three gears. We develop local partnerships and involve women-led and youth-led organizations, which contributes to sustainable transformation of social and gender norms. Program design is informed by gender equality and social inclusion analysis and/or market assessment.

Through implementation: We expand choices for decent, safe and regular work while also supporting young women entrepreneurs to close the gender gap in representation. Skills training activities are demand-driven, evidence-based and focused on self-determination. We transfer knowledge and strengthen the capacity of institutional partners to break down barriers to access for young people.