



DISCUSSION PAPER

STARTING FROM GIRLS: THEY ARE THE SOURCE TO TRIGGER A CHANGE!

Current and future challenges
for their inclusion in the
global debate on nutrition,
agriculture and food security

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FOREWORD

Today more than ever there is a need to invest in adolescents and youth, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. A demographic boom is expected by 2050, with a rise in Africa's population to over two billion people, making up 25% of the entire global population, compared to 15% of today. This potential presents a unique situation, and planning for it needs to be taken seriously into consideration.

A huge proportion of the population in Africa is made up of adolescents and youth. Among these, girls and young women still face inequalities and discrimination which constantly undermine the process of improving their status, as well as their socio-economic rights. On average, the level of female human development is 13% lower than that of males.

Girls and teenage mothers also represent a high proportion of the labour force of many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the agricultural sector. They are largely engaged in informal work, especially at the household level. However, their role remains near invisible.

This paper poses several questions on how to better promote the role of girls, and why doing so is important. It guides the reader through an interesting and important pathway, indicating what is still overlooked or unknown about girls, their work and their potential, and it suggests possible directions to be followed by policy makers.

Girls are the primary source of nutrition for their babies and also provide nutrition to their communities: they are farmers, and they represent the future. It is our responsibility to make sure that their key role in society is well recognized. We must all work to overcome the 'girl gap' and make efforts to better position these young women in the world. They deserve our attention as well as our commitment.

Finally, I welcome the chance given by the Women for Expo Platform to promote girls and their key role in the agricultural sector because, as the title of this paper indicates, they are the foundation to trigger change!



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Chair
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ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CASP	Common Approach to Sponsorship Programming
CCT	Conditional cash transfer programs
CSONA	Civil Society on Nutrition Alliance
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DAS	Development Assistance Strategy
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DONUTS	Donor Group for nutrition security
EC	European Commission
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ENGINE	Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FISP	Farm Input Fertiliser Subsidy Programme
GAIN	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IAA	Integrated Agriculture-Aquaculture
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MSMSE	Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
MBS	Malawi Bureau of Standards
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
NAIP	National Agricultural Investment Plan
NAP	National Agriculture Policy
NECS	Nutrition Education and Communication Strategy
NNC	National Nutrition Committee
NNPSP	National Nutrition Policy and Strategic Plan
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NSO	National Statistic Office
PAE	Public Agricultural Expenditure
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
ReSAKSS	Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SC	Save the Children
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPRING	Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally
SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
SWG	Sector Working Groups
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
SQAM	Standards, Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Metrology
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Associations
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Innovative youth-driven initiatives and other models of addressing the potential role that adolescent girls may play in breaking the cycle of malnutrition remain relatively new, and hard to draw lessons from. Consequently, the main findings of this paper are limited to a few areas of work.

Specific policies and initiatives to support adolescent girls are still limited. A number of donors have not yet funded programmes specifically aimed at adolescent girls. A significant number of agencies include adolescents as a component of direct nutrition interventions (for instance fortification programmes, health and nutrition support packages to pregnant and lactating women, infant and young child feeding counselling and food security programmes) but without considering girls as a target group (SC, 2014).

There is a need for broader awareness and discussions on this theme at local, national, regional and international level among governments and other stakeholders. It is necessary to create actions specifically for adolescent girls by providing pathways for further opportunities and reinforce social participation and leadership, and to build up links to formal and non-formal education and livelihoods¹.

The analysis, based primarily on experiences in Sub-Saharan Africa, finds that the definition of adolescents as well as youth is too broad across national and international policies in different sectors. There is a need to align these definitions with the UN definition, and clarify in which category youths and/or adolescents will be classified. This would also contribute to face the lack of empirical evidence, and would provide practical experience which could demonstrate the correct modalities to apply when working with this category. An adequate assessment of adolescents is still missing in several countries around the world. The definition of 'girls' must also be clarified, to overcome the risk of missing the chance to consider them as a category of their own.

A huge number of adolescent girls in developing countries are mothers. These young women are still marginalized in the development agenda. Most current policies emphasize the importance of keeping teenage mothers at school, as with other girls. In many cases teenage mothers do not return to school after giving birth because of the burden of domestic work imposed by their family. Stigma and discrimination against girls who have early pregnancies is an additional factor, which inevitably creates a dilemma since teenage mothers are no longer perceived as adults, but nor are they seen as girls/adolescents, and are hence exposed to the risk of exclusion from various strategies and initiatives.

There is a need to reinforce government policies to address girls and teenage mothers not in school. This issue concerning adolescent girls is broad, and must be addressed through a multidisciplinary approach. The lack of specific programmes to target teenage mothers not in school in the agricultural sectors, as well as programmes which focus on girls who have dropped out of education in general, is evident and in need of reinforcement and major attention.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, youth and/or adolescents are often the center of renewed interest in many strategies and policies at national and regional level. However, since there is a lack of a consensus on the definitions as well as a homogeneous approach to youth/adolescents, a fragmentation remains in addressing policies and related implementation.

The 'girl gap' is likely to increase in the coming years. The international momentum is crucial for mobilizing the development agenda towards investing in girls, and leverage new players and partnerships which include the private sector and foundations.

¹ A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Chambers & Conway, 1991).

Outline of the study

The paper is organised as follows: section 1 provides an analysis of the definition of girls and an overview of the relevant literature relating to adolescent girls with reference to existing policies and initiatives; section 2 analyses broad policy issues relating to the work of Save the Children with girls; section 3 analyses a case study in Malawi; and section 4 concludes with the main policy lessons, with a focus on the potential to invest in girls.

INTRODUCTION

Although still ‘invisible’ to a large extent, today’s generation of young people is the largest in history, and half of them are girls. It is estimated that from 2010 to 2030, the global population of adolescents will increase from 1.2 to 1.3 billion, with the greatest increase occurring in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNFPA, 2013). Adolescence is a unique window of opportunity: an educated girl will use 90% of her future income towards her family, while boys will reinvest only 35% (Nike Foundation, 2009).

Although adolescent girls are a population group that is increasing in size, there is still a ‘girl gap’ within the development agenda which has bypassed adolescent girls by grouping them with women or children, but not as a category of their own (Save the Children, 2014). This is also the reason there is a lack of adequate assessment of adolescents in the majority of developing countries (SC, 2014).

Among adolescents, in most cases in developing countries, girls contribute to the family work in the agricultural sector and are engaged in wage labour such as cash-crop production and livestock. Moreover, they are often marginalized with less access to productive assets such as land or financial services. Their vulnerability is also linked to factors such as early pregnancy; early marriages; lack of access to education; poverty; exposure to and being victims of violence; lack of voice and participation; lack of access to information; lack of skills and choices and pathways for livelihoods.

Adolescents are often seen as victims of weak protective environments, but in many circumstances they can contribute to influencing the events that occur around them. They can be resilient in the face of adversity and can in fact help identify problems and find solutions based on their own experiences. Adolescents have the ability to voice their concerns and aspirations and this ability helps them to protect themselves as they enter into adulthood (UNICEF, 2012).

As a consequence adolescents must be valued as an asset to society. It is time to invest in this category, especially in the most marginalized societies, and to identify and test innovative youth-driven models that are cost-effective, scalable and replicable in other similar contexts.

The potential role of girls in breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition: mixing agriculture and nutrition/food security by investing in them

In addressing these questions, this paper refers to the UN definition of adolescents as those between the age of 10 and 19. However, there may be some differences in definition at the country level. As children up to the age of 18, most adolescents are protected under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, their specific vulnerabilities and needs often remain unaddressed.

In developing countries, agricultural growth is required to support the food and nutritional security of growing populations. In most cases employment in agriculture and rural areas can lead to a return in reduction of poverty and improvement of the local economy more than any other type of investment.

Approximately 1.1 billion farmers in developing countries are women, who represent 43 percent of the world’s farmers (FAO, 2011). They are responsible for cultivating the kinds of foods that can alleviate malnutrition and for providing the income to purchase nutritious foods for their households. Despite the increased attention on their role, female farmers still lack access to land, credit, information, and other crucial inputs compared to their male counterparts. Although women constitute the bulk of the labour force in Africa’s agriculture sector, rules governing own-

ership and transfer of land rights are often unfavourable to women in the continent. Although the data are not officially available, it is assumed that most of these women farmers are adolescent girls.

Based on the above, the complexity of this paper is to analyse the key role of adolescent girls involved in the agriculture sector and food and nutrition security. The main challenge raised is to what extent the international community is able to push the agenda of girls by making their work (both formal and informal) more visible.

The main questions to be addressed in this discussion paper are the following: *in the context of promoting adolescent girls through their potential role in breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition i) what are the main characteristics, drivers and constraints of stakeholders (including governments) that address adolescent girls? ii) what are the potential benefits in investing in girls? iii) what are the implications for policy-makers and donors?*

In providing a non-exhaustive overview of the issues, the study highlights certain challenges which occur when promoting the key role of adolescent girls. The main focus utilised is how girls can make a difference in tackling under nutrition by being more involved and empowered in the agriculture sector. This paper is based on desk-research and interviews with several stakeholders from a broad cross-section of actors. To highlight this theme, we provide a case study from Malawi.

BOX I

Food and nutrition security and agriculture

Food and nutrition security:

"Food security exists when all people at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (World Food Summit Plan of Action 1996). As the definition makes clear, addressing under-nutrition is about the availability of, and access to, nutritious food. But it is also about awareness of the importance of nutritional choices, storage and cooking choices, and general health and hygiene - all within the scope of personal food preferences. Ensuring food and nutrition security is therefore about production, consumption, personal behaviour, and supporting frameworks (ECDPM, 2013).

Agriculture:

Agriculture is commonly understood to be associated with the production of crops and livestock. A search for the definition of agriculture yielded various results, depending on the products (such as crops, forestry, animals, and fishery), the process of production (science, art, practice, enterprise, or investment), and the purpose (food, fiber, income, leisure, and so forth). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recently issued its flagship report on the state of food and agriculture (FAO, 2012), which defines agriculture as crops, livestock, aquaculture, and agroforestry - differing from the AU-NEPAD definition by excluding wild or captured forest and fishery resources.

In this paper these topics are always considered as interlinked and interdependent.



I. THE AGENDA FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

I.1 Starting with girls - who are they?

The UN definition of adolescent girls refers to girls between the ages of 10 and 19, although this is not considered as a ‘comprehensive’ definition since adolescent girls are not a homogeneous group. They can be differentiated based on several distinctions, from differences in age, schooling enrolment status, participation in formal, informal and domestic work, marital status, whether or not they are teenage mothers, and disability status.

The definition of ‘girls’ poses certain challenges when designing policies and strategies. As mentioned above, adolescents are considered those between the ages of 10 and 19 while, at the same time, youths are considered as people between the ages of 15 and 24 (UN). This results in an overlap of the two definitions. Between the ages of 10 and 24, adolescents and young people make the transition to adulthood as they achieve the age of majority, and via work, marriage, parenthood, etc. Hence, again, the issue of the identification of girls as a unique category arises as a matter of concern; with regard to this paper’s analysis of the need for a ‘research category’ that represents girls, it appears necessary to question the issue at its source: *should ‘girls’ be considered within the category of ‘adolescents and youth’, or should they belong to ‘adolescents’ alone, or just to ‘youth’?*

Based on these complexities, the analysis of girls and their potential beneficial role will be a difficult task without a clear and global recognition about who these people are, and in which segment of life they exist. At the moment there is no standard definition, especially at country level. The lack of data broken down by gender and age exacerbates this gap, which in turn causes an increase of complexity in the formulation of specific policies and strategies aimed at girls. Hence, girls are still too often considered either under the category of ‘children’ or ‘women’. This is backed up by a World Bank observation of the use of ‘adolescent girls’ in different countries and related modification to the term. For instance in Zambia adolescent girls are those between the ages of 10 and 21, while in Mozambique they are defined as being from 10 to 19 years old (S.M. Ziauddin Hyder, WB).

In addressing these questions, this paper will explore issues concerning all girls between 10 and 24 years of age. There is a need to tap into the potential role of girls in development by giving them the opportunity to be empowered with economic assets, good and improving health, education, and opportunities for their future.

Within the broad issue of the consideration of girls as key actors in the development agenda, this paper will focus specifically on the potential role of girls in agriculture and their related impact on nutrition and food security (although not yet measurable).

I.2 Making the case for girls: policy gaps in empowerment

The word ‘empowerment’ is often the starting point for any existing policies and initiatives concerning girls. It may therefore be useful to consider for a moment how the empowerment of girls is expressed. One key element is that ‘empowerment’ is a complex and elusive concept: there is no universally accepted indicator of empowerment, but two definitions are frequently cited in literature. Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as “the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability.” Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland (2006) describe empowerment as “a group’s or individual’s capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes”. These definitions imply that empowerment may be shaped and influenced by culture, social norms and, more generally, context.

The main perception of empowerment is that it implies both a process and an outcome. This paper embraces the multidimensional aspect of the concept, which cannot be captured by purely quantitative outcome indicators. For instance, some measures of empowerment include indicators of access to resources, agency and decision making, fertility,

domestic violence, and other indicators that can enhance or limit women's choices. However, because of its multidimensional nature, to operationalise empowerment is difficult, while at the same time to link it directly to bargaining power is reductive.

By exploring potential strategies to empower girls, there are several dimensions to be considered that are interrelated and interdependent (Box 2). Most of them can be categorised under:

1. Access to decision-making processes in their families, households and countries
2. Economic empowerment - access to resources/assets
3. Access to sexual and reproductive health (health services) and clean water supplies
4. Access to education (at minimum the completion of primary and secondary education)
5. Access to social protection, regulations and legal frameworks.

All of these dimensions require a multisectoral approach and an enabling environment of open and inclusive economies, societies and political institutions. This includes addressing the social norms, regulations and legal frameworks that concern the way in which girls are valued in societies.

BOX 2

What we must know about being a girl in developing countries

- Almost 60% of girls complete primary school, while just 30% have access to secondary school (UNICEF, 2012).
- Every 10% increase in the enrolment of girls in secondary school in low-income countries will save approximately 350,000 children's lives and reduce maternal mortality by 15,000 each year (SC, 2014). It is estimated that half the reduction in deaths of children under 5 over the last 4 decades can be attributed to basic education for girls.
- An educated girl will use 90% of her future income towards her family, while boys re-invest only 35% (Nike Foundation, 2009).
- One in three girls in developing countries is married before the age of 18, and one in nine before the age of 15. Early marriage frequently leads to early childbirth - the leading killer of adolescent girls in Africa (UNICEF, 2012).
- Each year 7.3 million girls below the age of 18 give birth; and complications related to pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls between 15 and 19.
- The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is more than twice as high for females aged 15-24 as it is for males. An estimated 2.2 million adolescents are living with HIV - around 60 percent of whom are girls (UNICEF, 2012).

The lack of evidence and assessment raises questions regarding barriers that lock girls out of economic opportunities and, as a consequence, policy options to address these barriers. There is a gap in understanding how the economic empowerment of girls enhances growth, how growth delivers sustainable economic benefits for girls, and how rapid growth might help overcome gender-based constraints on girls. Policy responses and initiatives have been wide-ranging, but have been relatively narrow, and more focused on education than on access to, and control over, resources.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, youth and/or adolescents often represent the focal point of renewed interest in strategies and policies at national and regional level. However, because there is a lack of a consensus on the definitions, as well as a homogeneous approach to youth/adolescents, the way of addressing policies and related implementation is still fragmented.

The 'girl gap' is likely to grow more in the coming years. The international momentum is crucial for mobilizing the development agenda towards investing in girls, and leverage new players and partnerships which include the private sector and foundations.

I.3 Economic empowerment: investing in girls in the agriculture sector

Global policy debates and analysis of the agriculture sector often mention the importance of involving young people in such mechanisms (males and females), which is not yet followed by a real and adequate engagement. This is valid also in the case of adolescent girls.

Agriculture in Africa remains the largest contributor to national GDP, and in addition to increasing food security and boosting rural income levels, the sector has the potential to provide employment for the growing numbers of unemployed youth. It should however also be considered that employment within an ageing population engaged in the natural resources sector (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, conservation, development and industry) is not being replenished by the young. There are millions of unemployed young people, and no governments have made significant, large-scale effective policies which target this category. If young farmers, foresters and fishery managers do not replace the current ageing producers, there is concern that in the next 10-15 years the sustainability of future situations will be seriously compromised. Meanwhile, general conditions are also increasingly challenging: there is less arable land, dwindling natural resources, a need for more rapidly evolving climate-adapted techniques, greater market pressures, and there are fewer labour opportunities. Additionally, the global population is projected to increase from the current 6.9 billion to 9.2 billion by 2050; global food production will therefore need to increase by around 70 percent to sustain this growing population.

Improving the productivity of resources held by family farmers and smallholders is, in most cases, an essential element of inclusive growth and has broad implications for the livelihoods of the rural poor and for the rural economy in general. Well-functioning markets for food, agricultural inputs and labour can help to integrate family farmers and smallholders in the rural economy and enable the rural poor to diversify their livelihoods, which is critical for managing risk as well as reducing hunger and malnutrition.

The discussion above suggests that among the young, girls (categorised as adolescents as well as youth) must be recognized as key actors in agricultural work where their role is still invisible. Girls and teenage mothers represent a high percentage of the labour force of many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the agricultural sector. They are largely engaged in informal work especially at the household level. Domestic work, moreover, is less likely to be available in surveys and thus the key roles played by these workers may be harder to measure.

Considering that investment in agriculture remains the best opportunity to reduce hunger and malnutrition, there is a need to change the way in which stakeholders think about investment in agriculture and food systems to ensure that it benefits those who need it most, such as girls and their families. In fact in most cases, girls do not have access to land, credit, information, and crucial agricultural inputs compared with their male counterparts.

The vast majority of rural poor in Africa are smallholders, and the majority of these smallholders are young girls and women. Farmers are usually struggling with many constraints such as lack of access to modern technologies, capital investments and supportive research, lack of participation in decision making and vulnerability to natural disasters. In the case of girls, they have an added burden of being young and of being women, hence they may cultivate cash-crops but the overall responsibility remains under men who are still the main decision makers.

Girls need better access to natural resources, land, seeds, and techniques. This implies that the agriculture sector needs to be more open towards girls as young professionals. In order for this to happen, attitudes towards girls must go beyond the rhetoric of youth and/or adolescents. It will also require greater investment in agricultural systems, in direct nutritional interventions, and in social protection. Concerted global action to address growing environmental threats must also be part of these strategies. Most importantly however, there is the need for robust, transparent and participatory governance and accountability mechanisms, with key roles played by the private sector, governments, and civil society.

Collection of data is a fundamental criterion for devising better solutions for girls involved in the agriculture sector. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) recommends the disaggregation of

data by gender and age. Meanwhile public agricultural expenditure (PAE) can be designed to target people or groups of people who may not be in a position to benefit due to limited economic, physical, or social access to agriculture (e.g. elderly, female, and young farmers). According to a 2012 report on patterns and trends only five countries in Africa had targeted budgetary allocations of this kind (NAIPs reflect these types of targeting - see Table 1). However, agricultural public goods and services derived from PAE are by their nature expected to transfer benefits to everyone involved in the agriculture sector or dependent on the sector for their livelihood.

TABLE 1 - 2012 RESAKSS ANNUAL TRENDS AND OUTLOOK REPORT

Budget Allocation by target population (percent of total NAIP Budget)	
Country, plan duration	Commodities and budget allocation
Liberia, 2011–15	Women and youth = 4.8%
Nigeria, 2011–14	Smallholder farmers = 35.5% Commercial farmers = 9.6%
Senegal, 2010–15	Youth = 48.8% Men and women = 40.3% Women = 0.6% Men = 0.2%
Tanzania, 2012–16	Mainland = 92.6% Zanzibar = 7.4%
Uganda, 2011–15	Northern region = 2.4%

Source: ReSAKSS - Authors' calculation based on national agricultural investment plans

The issue revealed by this analysis is that girls are too often targeted as a vulnerable and marginalized group. The international community and key stakeholders need to understand the specific issues facing young women farmers (and smallholders in general) and develop policies that enhance their rights while meeting their needs (box 3). For instance, most international organizations consider reinforcing policies and strategies against school drop-outs to be a fundamental strategy to address these issues - yet even commencing formal education is still not an option for many girls.

BOX 3

Gender Gap in the agriculture sector

The disparities affecting women are a root cause of reduced food production, lesser income and higher levels of malnutrition. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that by providing to women and girls access to the same resources as men, could reduce the number of malnourished people in the world by 100 - 150 million.

Closing this gender gap by making productive resources available to both men and women could increase women farmers' yields by 20 - 30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 percent. Such increased output would reduce the number of undernourished people in the world by 12 to 17 percent, improving the nutrition of 150 million people, more than the populations of France and the United Kingdom combined.

When women have control over household resources, they tend to spend more on food, education and health care for their children and families, reaping broad benefits for society and future generations. From a macroeconomic perspective, sustained economic growth depends on the productivity contributions of women – more women in the labour force means higher income per capita and higher GDP. Where women are unable to contribute fully to the labour market, the economic consequences are enormous – with estimated losses as large as 27 percent of GDP in some regions.

USAID has developed monitoring and evaluation tools to measure the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index and Gender Global Learning and Evidence Exchange on food security.

To help close the gender gap in agriculture, Cargill, Inc. has over 800 Women's Clubs for women farmers in Zambia, which serve to empower these women by providing key inputs such as seeds, technology, credit, and training to invest in their farms. These kinds of efforts, like other efforts underway, can help empower women to alleviate global malnutrition within households, communities, and the marketplace.

Getting girls into school and learning is correct, but it may be addressed through other solutions. For many disadvantaged girls and teenage mothers, non-formal education is the main route to learning, but non-formal education as a key pathway is not always available. Girls often have limited access to educational programmes that address their specific needs, such as practical courses related to water management for agriculture and safe livelihood opportunities. When young, girls can prove more open to the kinds of new and innovative production techniques that could help raise agricultural productivity. They also tend to be more flexible when adjusting to new income-generating activities which are increasingly important in rural settings.

There is no evidence about the impact of nutrition and food security from the unpaid work of adolescent girls. This is mainly due to insufficient attention paid in the past to improving the nexus between agriculture and nutrition but it is also due to the aforementioned lack of data on girls. Nevertheless, what appears evident is that agriculture is one of the best-placed sectors in which to address the crucial underlying determinants of malnutrition and can be a vector to positively orient food production, income and the consumption of the nutritious foods required for healthy and active lives.

In parallel, girls also suffer from disadvantageous cultural and social norms, domestic violence, and lack of political representation. They are often victims of tradition and cultural norms such as early marriage, which undermine efforts to improve their wellbeing. These practices still trap 15 million girls a year in a cycle of poverty, ill-health and inequality. They also usually lack adequate access to sexual and reproductive health services, to social protection and protective legal policies. Unequal gender distribution of wealth, income and resources (including food and healthcare) within households, adversely affects adolescent girls and may result in nutritional deficiencies, among other negative outcomes.

In general, it is important to support a pathway towards an enabling environment, to discourage discriminatory social norms such as child labour (box 4), child marriage, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation (Maria Grazia Panunzi, AIDOS). The elimination of violence against girls is central to equitable and sustainable social and economic development and must be prioritised in the agenda for development after 2015.

Gender inequality will put more girls at risk for HIV and AIDS. The two conspire to entrench poverty and lack of economic development. Adolescent girls and teenage mothers are disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS, which is linked to gender inequality and, as a consequence, to poverty outcomes including malnutrition. HIV prevalence is higher among women than men. Specifically, the HIV prevalence rate among female adolescents (15-19 year olds) is 4.2% compared to 1.3% for their male counterparts. For instance, despite the development and enactment of the Gender Equality Act 2013, gender equality continues to be a major challenge for Malawi. HIV and AIDS exacerbate poverty and inequality, and inequality is manifested more in girls and women in Malawi. The country's National Statistics Office (NSO) reports that poverty is high at 50.7% (2012), and is higher among women - especially in households headed by women.

BOX 4

Child Labour

Employment legislation must comply with the Minimum Age Convention adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1973. The convention has adopted minimum ages varying from 14 to 16 and requires ratifying States to pursue a National policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work. Worldwide, 60 percent of child labour can be found in agriculture. The ILO estimates that globally there are 215 million child workers between 5 and 17 years old, with just over half of these children estimated to work in the worst forms of child labour. In Sub-Saharan Africa, one quarter of all children aged 5-15 are estimated to be working. Almost 50 percent of all employed youth in the age-group 15-17 are involved in forms of child labour, often in the agricultural sector. In Africa, 200 million people are aged between 15 and 24 years, comprising more than 20% of the population. At present, three out of every four young people live on less than US\$ 2 per day lacking the resources and skills to be competitive.

1.4 Making the case for teenage mothers

Most girls still face discrimination, oppression and lack of opportunity in too many countries, which are interrelated with early marriages and early pregnancies. Becoming a mother in a girl's teenage years increases exponentially the rates of child death and probabilities of children being born with nutritional, cognitive and physical deficits compared to children born to older and more developed women². This burgeoning issue is rarely addressed, though, and therefore there is almost no specific data on teenage mothers available.

Given the profound link between adolescent girls and malnutrition, girls and their communities must be supported for improved nutrition, for access to food, and to delay early marriage and unwanted pregnancies. The 2013 *Lancet Series on maternal and child undernutrition* highlighted the importance of adolescents to societal health and wellbeing, and identified them as a key neglected group in current research and programming. As mothers, girls determine the nutritional status of their children. At the start of life, a child's nutrition depends on his or her mother being well-nourished before, during, and after her pregnancy. When a woman is malnourished before and during pregnancy and while breastfeeding, her child may experience physical and mental problems. The valuable role of mothers in ensuring their children's nutrition also continues after early childhood.

1.5 Mixing business and girls

The private sector can potentially play numerous roles in addressing the role of girls (box 5). For instance, the Coca-Cola Company has recently established the so called '5by20' initiative to empower five million women entrepreneurs by 2020 in more than 40 countries in the world. The Company has agreed with the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) to invest nearly £ 7 million in the Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE) initiative. The main goal of ENGINE is to establish over 170 learning spaces where girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 19 can learn. Approximately 5,400 girls who are still in school will receive after-school tutoring, as well as training to advance their leadership and entrepreneurship skills. Additionally, a vocational training programme focused on business and employment readiness will be offered to approximately 12,600 young women who are currently out of school. Young women who complete the vocational training programme will have the opportunity to choose from a variety of employment opportunities, including receiving assistance to set up their own businesses as micro-retailers of Coca-Cola and d.light products. This investment is the result of an agreement between the UK Government's Girls' Education Challenge and the '5by20' initiative. The Mercy Corps non-governmental organization will manage the implementation of this initiative with support from the Nike Foundation, the d.light Solar Social Enterprise and other partners. This constitutes one of the first partnerships between DFID and the private sector.

More recently, public-private partnerships (PPPs) have been emerging around the topic of adolescent girls. They can be instruments to create awareness and demand for action by the international community, including the United Nations and its member states. Models based on PPPs ensure a multisectorial approach which is key due to the complexities and multi-level nature of their 'girls' theme. It may thus still be difficult to draw lessons from PPPs focused on girls, and therefore this pathway must be explored through developing strategies towards strengthening interventions and also mobilization of domestic resources (UNFPA, 2014). At present, the PPP between Barclays, Plan UK, and CARE International is one example of how to empower people (and particularly young people) through the Banking on Change programme. In summary, Banking on Change aims to establish youth savings groups across 173,000 youth members aged 10-35, with a focus on 16-24 year olds; to provide them all with financial education so they can better manage their money; and provide a subset of participants with entrepreneurship skills and employability skills, to support them to start and grow income-generating activities and to viable jobs. Banking on Change also aims to link more than 5,000 informal village savings groups to formal banking products and services. It has been demonstrated that when young people start saving early, they increase their potential to develop a savings habit that can carry into their adult lives, strengthening their financial capabilities as they begin to face increased financial and social responsibilities.

² The sixteen million adolescent girls giving birth each year are more likely to die themselves during childbirth, or be left nutritionally depleted (WHO).

While it is too early for a comprehensive evaluation of the role of the private sector and PPPs in investing in girls, some aspects stand out. Key recommendations highlighted by interviewees have included the need for a model based on cost-sharing among partners through strong government support. There remains a continuing need to build commitment and understanding of the importance of investing in girls.

1.6 Current and incoming policy initiatives - any missing opportunities for girls?

The complexity of scaling up initiatives and policy decisions concerning girls necessitates working in an enabling environment, where all key actors are clearly able to play an important role. To engage in such an agenda requires collaboration and coordination across a wide range of governmental and non-governmental actors.

Although still in their infancy, there are some strategies and policies which offer a solid platform for taking the agenda forward (box 5). For instance the 'Girl Declaration' (box 6) was recently launched to support and promote the agenda of girls, who as a group were overlooked in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Declaration sets out five goals for girls around education, health, safety, economic security and citizenship.

BOX 5

Development Partner Policies and Initiatives for Girls

The Strategic Vision for Girls and Women is one of the six Structural Reform Priority (SRP) commitments in DFID's Business Plan for 2011 - 2015, to: "lead international action to improve the lives of girls and women". The main focus of this strategy is about access to education for about 11 million girls and boys in school, especially in fragile and conflict-affected states. The initiative is implemented in collaboration with the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) strategy and in collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charities and the private sector. Additionally, DFID's Research and Evidence Division has just launched a Global Girls Research Initiative (GGRI) (up to £31 million 2014-23) that will generate new evidence on what works to transform the lives of poor adolescent girls to enable them to move out of poverty.

The UK in collaboration with UNICEF, hosted the **Girl Summit 2014** which focused on advocating globally against harmful practices such as forced marriages and female genital mutilations through social media and secured over 450 signatories for the Girl Summit Charter ('An Agenda for Change'), including from key countries such as Brazil, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, France, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

The Girls not Brides network, is a global partnership of more than 450 civil society organisations from over 70 countries working to address child marriage. Members are based in different countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas, and are working to bring child marriage to global attention, in order to build an understanding of what it will take to end the phenomenon. They are calling for specific laws, policies and programmes to be put in place which could make a difference in the lives of millions of girls.

The Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) Project is a five-year USAID-funded cooperative agreement to strengthen Global and Country efforts to scale up high-impact nutrition practices and policies and to improve maternal and child nutrition outcomes. SPRING is a joint programme with the Nike Foundation and USAID, and it is based on the idea of transforming the lives of adolescent girls by creating sustainable markets for life-enhancing products and services. The project works as a business accelerator, identifying and supporting early to mid-stage ventures with products which help girls to learn, earn, protect their earnings and be safe from harm. A five-year programme, SPRING will kick off first in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda in the coming year, before rolling out to five more countries across Africa and Asia. The project is managed by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., with partners Helen Keller International, The Man off Group, Save the Children, and the International Food Policy Research Institute.

Feed the Future, the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative, also has a 'girls' component which aims to facilitate and support girls' enrolment in secondary school.

The **Girl Declaration** is a call for actions developed by more than 25 Organizations to advocate for girls in view of the post-MDGs Agenda. In Italy, the Girl's Declaration was translated in Italian and brought before to the President of the Senate and the President of Parliament as well as being introduced to civil society organizations and communities (Maria Grazia Panunzi, President of AIDOS).

With the UN Resolution 66/170, in 2011, the United Nations General Assembly declared the **11th of October as the International Day of the Girl Child,** to recognize girls' rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world.

In 2009, in Addis Ababa, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) declared the years 2009-2019 to be the Decade of Youth Development in Africa. Consultations with rural youth and their organizations have been undertaken by FAO and ILO in close collaboration with youth representatives, who requested to be active contributors to the rural development processes of their countries as well as to be formally involved in national development agendas including through the implementation programmes of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

In 2014, the African Union's 'Year of Agriculture and Food Security', AU heads of state and governments adopted the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. The focus broadened beyond spending and production, with concrete targets for 2025, and among various commitments it created a youth-oriented target: to create job opportunities for at least 30% of young people in agricultural value chains. In the declaration there was also an emphasis by African leaders to establish and strengthen PPPs "with strong linkage to smallholder agriculture". The translation of commitments into action is something that must be monitored.

BOX 6

The goals of the Girl Declaration

Goal 1: Education - Adolescent girls reach adulthood with relevant skills and knowledge to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life.

Targets:

- I. Ensure all girls globally transition to and complete free, quality secondary school, prioritizing the most marginalized (e.g. rural, poor, married and at risk of marriage, disabled, conflict-affected).
- II. Ensure all girls achieve recognized and measurable learning standards.
- III. Eliminate violence, sexual exploitation and harassment at schools.

Goal 2: Health - Adolescent girls have access to safe, age-appropriate health and nutrition information and services and possess the confidence they need to make healthy transitions to adulthood.

Targets:

- I. Reduce by 50% the number of girls who become pregnant before the age of 18 by 2030. Nearly 13 million adolescent girls give birth each year in developing countries.
- II. Provide, monitor and evaluate universal access to youth-friendly health information and services, including comprehensive life-skills-based sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health, for all girls - in and out of school, regardless of marital or pregnancy status.
- III. End harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation, for all girls.

Goal 3: Safety - Adolescent girls are free from violence and exploitation and are supported by enforced laws, strong and adequately resourced child protection systems, and their communities.

Targets:

- I. Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against girls.
- II. Ensure all girls have access to a "girl-friendly space".
- III. Ensure all states have national and sub-national mechanisms to identify, refer and report sexual violence against adolescent girls.
- IV. Stop trafficking and exploitation of girls by passing and enforcing laws and policies that hold perpetrators - not victims accountable.

Goal 4: Economic Security - Adolescent girls know how to build and protect their economic assets and transition to adulthood with the skills, including technical and vocational, needed to earn a safe and productive income. Governments, communities and the private sector respect and uphold girls' economic rights.

Targets:

- I. Increase by 50% girls' savings and access to financial services by 2030.
- II. Ensure all girls receive quality financial literacy training.
- III. Reform laws so that girls can open bank accounts and have equal rights to secure land tenure.

Goal 5: Citizenship - Adolescent girls have equal access to services, opportunities, legal rights and personal freedom, and thus are able to fully participate as citizens of their communities and countries.

Targets:

- I. Eliminate child marriage globally by 2030.
- II. Ensure all girls have access to free and universal legal identity, including birth registration, formal identification, citizenship and the right to pass citizenship on to spouses and/or children.
- III. Collect and disaggregate data by age and sex.
- IV. Ensure all girls feel that their views are listened to, respected and included in decisions about their lives.



2. SAVE THE CHILDREN: GIRLS, A NECESSARY FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

As a global movement, Save the Children increasingly recognises the role of girls, although as a target group it still remains at margin of most of the Organisation's initiatives and advocacy strategies. For example, the international campaign Every One has a focus on mothers and children under five, particularly with regard to nutrition for babies - notably within a critical 1,000-day window of opportunity - and highlighting the importance of breastfeeding as part of nutrition-specific interventions. In the case of teen pregnancies, teenage mothers are considered a segment of the campaign, which aligns with the definition of children as being up to the age of 18. From a programmatic perspective, a further distinction is made between young adolescents (10-18) and very young adolescents (10-14) although these groups are not formally defined in initiatives and programmes. The Organisation as a whole is establishing its thematic work under five core areas: Education, Child Protection, Child Poverty, Child Rights Governance and Health & Nutrition. 'Youth' is a cross-target group whose needs are tackled from different perspectives: secondary education and vocational training, access to economic opportunities and financial education, and sexual and reproductive health among others. In some countries, such as Malawi, initiatives involving girls are under the overall 'Child Poverty Strategy'. This poses challenges in tracking down data about adolescents (both male and female) and assessing impacts.

Save the Children embraces a multidimensional definition of poverty, with a focus on child poverty. There are ongoing discussions around the importance of reaching a common definition, both at country and at regional level, of the age span that encompasses 'youth' within the organisation. This also extends to joint programming, as well as an increasing investment in support packages for entrepreneurial start-up which partially includes young people. These initiatives include vocational training, financial literacy, business development services, financial support (for example group lending through village savings and loans schemes) with a strong gender component. Although this attention is focused on youth in general (though not yet specifically on girls), this group is considered cross-sectorial, touching on all areas from food security to access to secure income and social protection.

While adolescent girls are a component of many initiatives and programmes, the global strategy remains focused on women and children. Nevertheless, the movement has recently started a mapping exercise based on Save the Children's global work with adolescent girls with the aim of collecting data and recording all available evidence.

Clearly there is an overall recognition of the importance of increased work with adolescent girls, and this is indeed an upcoming area of interest for Save the Children. While there is a growing awareness of the need to work with girls, there is also a dilemma linked to the organisation's ethical principles and child labour policies. The main question that has arisen is to what extent it may be possible to increase the visibility of formal and informal work performed by girls. Save the Children is against harmful labour practices and in favour of child education and vocational training. The challenge remains about how to institutionalize the key role of girls; at the same time, it is also considered a fundamental requirement to begin a debate about a programmatic approach towards this target group.



3. MALAWI CASE STUDY

While the above discussion highlights some of the key issues around girls and their potential role in the agricultural sector, this section provides more details using an illustrative example. This chapter is based on informal interviews undertaken in April 2015 in Malawi with different stakeholders. The main goal was to collect information about adolescent girls in Malawi and solicit views of policy makers on the potential role of girls in the development agenda. An emphasis was also given to the work of Save the Children Malawi.

3.1 Context

Malawi is one of Africa's most densely populated and least developed countries, ranked 171st out of 187 countries in the 2011 Human Development Report. The country has a population of approximately 16.3 million, of whom 45.1% are under the age of 14. The majority of the population (80%) live in rural areas and depend on subsistence farming for their livelihoods. The main characteristic of the population is its young age structure, with 54% of the total population under the age of 18 which has implications for socio-economic development in the country.

The overall economy of Malawi is based on the export of tobacco, sugar, tea, coffee and cotton, followed by manufacturing and tourism. In recent years, efforts have been made to invest in other sectors such as mining and service. The economic environment in Malawi remains volatile with high inflation and a depreciated local currency (box 7).

As a small country with limited resources, a high population density, a large agricultural sector that is predominantly rain-fed and combined with frequent droughts and floods, Malawi has always been vulnerable to food insecurity (IFPRI, 2014). The frequent occurrence of damaging weather conditions impacts negatively on food security, and the food situation and the nutritional status of the population remain alarming. There is also a lack of a substantial support for nutrition-sensitive agriculture.

While the country signed the CAADP compact in 2010 and it has already surpassed the CAADP's target of investing 10% of its national budget to address agriculture and food security-related issues, there is still chronic malnutrition. Systems in place to better coordinate nutrition at the national level, such as Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), are not yet functioning with a multi-dimensional approach to nutrition and food security. Although the importance of family farming and smallholder activities is emphasised by the CAADP process, the country's dialogue with the nutrition sector is still lagging. Governmental authorities agree on the importance to keep nutrition coordination at a high level, but the country has recently moved responsibility for the nutrition sector away from the office of the President and Cabinet. This change poses further challenges in dealing with chronic malnutrition, and ministries such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, do not communicate with each other sufficiently (Felix Pensulo Phiri, Director Nutrition, Government, Chairperson National Nutrition Committee).

BOX 7

Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS II)

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS II) for 2011-2016, is the country's overarching national development strategy, and a key document for Malawi's development partners, succeeding the first MGDS (2006-2011). The overall objective of the MGDS II is continued poverty reduction through sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development. The Malawi Development Assistance Strategy (DAS) formulates policy and strategies to achieve the goals of the MGDS II and is a key element in coordinating and aligning aid with national priorities. The Sector Wide Approach (SWAp), with corresponding Sector Working Groups (SWGs), is to provide coherent programming. SWAp is the central mechanism through which the DAS and MGDS II will be implemented. The MGDS II is based on key thematic areas such as Sustainable Economic Growth; Social Development; Social Support and Disaster Risk Management; Infrastructure Development; Governance; and Gender and Capacity Development as an additional theme. From these themes, the MGDS II derives nine key priority areas which are central to the achievement of sustainable economic growth and wealth creation. These key priority areas are: Agriculture and Food Security; Energy, Industrial Development, Mining and Tourism; Transport Infrastructure and Nsanje World Inland Port; Education Science and Technology; Public Health, Sanitation, Malaria and HIV and AIDS Management; Integrated Rural Development; Green Belt Irrigation and Water Development; Child Development, Youth Development and Empowerment; and Climate Change, Natural Resources and Environmental Management. Within the Social Development theme there are six sub-themes: population; health; education; child development and protection; **youth development and nutrition**. Health, education, child development, and youth development have been isolated as key priority areas. In terms of nutrition there is an emphasis on children but not on youth. Girls are mentioned under the recommendation: "advocating for girls, education and delayed marriage and construction of secondary school boarding facilities for girls". There is a major emphasis upon education and early marriages. Within the **framework of youth and development, the strategies include**: promoting early childhood development and pre-primary education; protecting children against abuse; eliminating harmful cultural practices; improving youth's technical, vocational, entrepreneurial and life skills; and improving youth's access to credit facilities for entrepreneurship.

Nevertheless, nutrition remains a key strategic issue in a country which is so strongly linked with agriculture (box 9). In recent years, there has been an increase in maize production and productivity. Despite improvements though, the agricultural sector still faces several challenges including low productivity, overdependence on rain-fed farming, low levels of irrigation development, and low uptake of improved farm inputs. Furthermore, there are high transport costs, inadequate farmers' organizations, insufficient extension services, inadequate markets and market information, limited access to agricultural credit, inefficient input and output markets and low technology development and transfer. Economic environment in Malawi remains volatile with high inflation and a depreciated local currency.

BOX 8

The nutrition sector in Malawi

Nutrition is led by the National Nutrition Policy and Strategic Plan (2007-15) (NNPSP) which is currently under the Ministry of Health. Malawi's policy is mainly focused on community-based action, with the '1,000 Special days' movement of the national Nutrition Education and Communication Strategy (NECS), prioritised for the period 2012 - 2017 to reduce stunting through behaviour change and awareness raising. National Nutrition strategies targeted children up to 12 years old for treatment of acute malnutrition with a specific focus on under-five and babies within their first 1,000 days. Individuals from 6 to 16/18 years old (school age) are included in national school and health nutrition strategies including home-grown school feeding. This approach makes it difficult to reach those girls who are out of schools including teen mothers (Kathrine, SC Malawi). Even within the NNPSP the girl child is not specifically considered.

The nutrition sector was formerly under the responsibility of the Prime Minister's office, and this high-level commitment towards nutrition was strongly supported by several stakeholders. There is the National Nutrition Committee (NNC) chaired by the Secretary for NU/HIV/AIDS (both under the MOH) and Nutrition Technical Working Groups. Save the Children Malawi is a member of the infant-feeding working group. The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement was joined in 2011 and is composed of various actors such as donors, UN Agencies, and the Civil Society Organization Nutrition Alliance (CSONA). The CSONA is composed of different actors including Save the Children. The Donor Group for Nutrition Security, (DONUTS) works through a troika arrangement comprising UNICEF, USAID and WFP. A business platform has been established through the Malawi Chamber of Commerce, and is a member of the National Fortification Alliance.

Looking at SUN, which is the main mechanism to tackle undernutrition, the focus is mainly on children. This is in line with the mandate of the SUN Movement that was designed to reduce infant and child mortality (Patrizia Fracassi, SUN).

80% of people who work in agriculture are women, and the sector is mainly based on smallholders (box 9). Among them, adolescent girls still suffer huge disparities in their access to and control over agriculture production resources such as land, credit, extension services, farm implements and inputs (such as fertilizers³ and seeds). The Ministry of Agriculture is mainly focused on rural farm households and it is not yet able to provide figures regarding the actual engagement of girls in the informal agriculture carried out at the household level (Erica Maganga, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Water Development).

Although the role of girls is prominent in the agriculture sector, it is challenging to measure the impact of the rural work of girls on nutrition and food security. While the overall category of gender equality continues to be a major challenge in a country where the UN's Millennium Development Goal 3 is still off track, it will be difficult to advocate for girls. Additionally, gender disparities and inequalities relate not only to Goal 3, in which gender equality is the subject in its own right, but also to most of the other goals.

Women's access to land is controversial. The average landholding size for female-headed households is about 0.803 hectares, while for male-headed households it is 1.031 hectares (Yananda Madhlopa, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Bunda College, 2015). According to certain group discussions undertaken in Zomba, some women have access to land through the matrilineal system and in this case, once married, the husband will leave his village to join the wife in her property (Yananda Madhlopa). In these contexts, women seem to share the power in decision making, while in other cases, women do not have any power to decide about the management of lands. A recent study conducted in Malawi (Journal of Gender, Agriculture and Food Security, 2015) indicates that kinship structures affect the decision-making roles within many rural households when it comes to agricultural decisions. In patrilineal households participating decisions are made more often by the husband alone compared to in matrilineal families, where there is a more shared decision-making process. Beyond these systems, however, male authority is the

³ Fertilizer is expensive to most Malawian smallholders, especially in more recent times with a weak exchange rate and fertilizer prices at record-high levels, i.e. up to four times the price they were in 2000 (World Bank, 2013).

norm in Malawi, and women are largely marginalized. Although a few chiefs are women, most are men and, most female chiefs are seen as ‘placeholders’ for a male relative. This demonstrates that gendered aspects of agricultural-based development remain poorly understood and gender gaps in income from farming still represent a big challenge.

BOX 9

The Agriculture Sector in Malawi

The Government has signed the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) compact in 2010. The Malawi’s National Agriculture Sector Wide Approach (ASWAp) strategy is aligned to the CAADP pillars and the overarching MGDs II. Malawi is already investing over 13 percent of its national budget to address agriculture and food-security-related issues, surpassing the CAADP’s target of 10 percent. Focus areas are food security and risk management, agri-business and market development and sustainable land and water management. Other key areas include technology generation and dissemination, and institutional strengthening and capacity building. **In 2011, Malawi launched Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), a partnership that unites national leaders, civil society, bilateral and multilateral organizations, donors, businesses and researchers in a collective effort to improve nutrition.** In 2013, the country joined the *New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition*, a partnership between African heads of state, corporate leaders and G-7 members to accelerate implementation of CAADP strategies. In 2012, the US government’s *Feed the Future* initiative exceeded its targets in supporting smallholder farmers, new private sector investment, and application of new technologies and management practices.

Farm Input Fertiliser Subsidy Programme (FISP). This programme targets about 1.5 million of all Malawian smallholder households, with its primary focus on maize production subsidy, although it also includes support measures for the tobacco, coffee, tea, and cotton subsectors, and currently includes a legume component. Youth-headed household are not targeted in FISP.

In terms of policies there is high responsiveness to gender issues in the agricultural and rural sector. For instance, the *National Agriculture Policy (NAP)* claimed the objective to “*promote coordinated strategic, applied, demand-driven, gender responsive and market oriented, environmentally and user friendly research that will generate information and technologies which can be directly utilized by the estate and smallholder farmers of various gender categories to solve their technical production problems, improve agricultural productivity and reduce environmental degradation*”. The NAP recognizes the need for gender equality as a fundamental value in the provision of agricultural services to ensure equal participation of all gender categories.

At present there is a lack of formal and institutionalised mechanisms for access to financial services by girls and young women. Globally, it is well recognised that one of the strategies to empower girls is the support for micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs), through inclusive business models which contribute to poverty alleviation, as well as expanding access to goods, services and livelihood opportunities for the marginalized and the poor. Often businesses run by women have the potential to positively impact on women and girls, empowering not only women entrepreneurs themselves but also acting as positive and inspiring role models for women and girls in their communities and societies. With access to money, girls and young women can have access to decision-making processes such as which type of food they would prefer to cultivate or to buy. This can bring important change in a country where the participation in household decision-making processes is 64 percent by men and 36 percent by women (Yananda Madhlopa).

In addressing the issues above, the main challenge remains the lack of disaggregated data on gender. It is difficult to measure the proportion of adolescent girls involved in smallholder farming activities, and hence to analyse successful strategies and how they can be scaled up. It is also challenging to measure the impact of the rural work of girls on nutrition and food security.

3.2 Girls in Malawi - a tentative overview

This (non-exhaustive) analysis of the status of girls in Malawi has faced a shortage of information about them in both the formal (schools; universities; government) and informal sectors (families, households, communities). Despite the absence of specific data, girls are clearly facing several challenges and often suffer from additional vulnerabilities such as domestic violence. In Malawi, one in five females aged between 18 and 24 years experienced at least one incident of sexual abuse before turning 18.

Girls are insufficiently addressed in key national policies across different sectors. For instance, the National Nutrition Policy does not give any specific attention to this group even though there is national recognition of the importance of increasing this commitment (Felix Pensulo Phiri). Currently the emphasis on nutrition for girls falls within the education sector, to influence policies within school curricula and support specific interventions such as iron supplementation.

Educational standards⁴ for adolescent girls are still low. Less attention has been paid to the immediate benefits of education for girls during adolescence. Most will leave school if they fall pregnant. Overall, the Government, as well as stakeholders such as various UN agencies, is committed to allowing girls who gave birth during adolescence to return to school. However, it is too late to reach women once they are mothers (Chrispin Magombo, SC, 2015). By then, they will have missed out on access to education and have had no chance to accumulate assets, start businesses, pay for higher education, or save for the future. As a consequence it is crucial to invest more in non-formal education for girls.

Girls do not have access to health services that respond to their particular needs, such as specialised nutrition. Nutritional programmes have a tendency to target pregnant and lactating mothers, hence teenagers are targeted only if they are mothers (Yananda Madhlopa) or they continue to be targeted under the 'child' category.

Financial services remain largely out of reach for girls. Save the Children's experience of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) reveals a savings-led microfinance approach that provides an accessible system for the rural teenage mothers to save, obtain loans and invest (box 10). This approach is one of the few initiatives which include young women, and among them teenage mothers. Nevertheless, young women and girls in Malawi still face discriminatory cultural and gender stereotypes that can limit their opportunities to grow their businesses.

BOX 10

Save the Children's best practice in supporting teen mothers: the Village Savings and Loan Association, VSLAs

Savings groups are a key strategy employed by several international NGOs such as Save the Children to enhance the economic security and resilience of poor households. VSLAs are also utilized as an instrument for teenage mothers to gain access to financial assets. VSLA groups share an average of 25-50 cents per dollar with each member. Members are encouraged to take out loans from these savings and utilize them in various businesses which will improve their livelihoods. They are expected to pay off their loans every two weeks although there are variations in the administration of these funds. During group discussions in Chiradzulu, some teenage mothers reported that through these savings they have managed to build houses, purchase maize for household consumption, pay school fees, purchase household supplies such as clothes for their children and buy fertilizers. This year the production of this area was affected by rains which destroyed most of the crops, thus increasing food insecurity. Despite this, these teenage mothers were able to manage the emergency situation by using the mechanism of loans. They claimed that they used savings to purchase food for household consumption (Jemi Numeri & Emanuel Banda, SC Malawi). Although this model does not focus solely on teenage mothers, it has been recognised as best practice in improving the food security of households and improving decision-making processes for young women.

⁴ In Malawi there is a chronic shortage of teachers. DFID has supported a new teacher training college that will increase the number of newly qualified and competent teachers by 300 each year (50% of whom will be female).

There was general consensus among stakeholders interviewed on the importance of investing in girls. Mary Shawa, Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Gender, highlighted the key role played by girls and the need to start investing in specific initiatives with girls at the core. As a starting point, Dr. Shawa recommended the collection of data on girls from each ministry. The Ministry of Agriculture currently omits youth and girls from its agenda as they are considered merely a component of households. The conservation agricultural division of the MoA focuses on youth, but only through education programmes addressing primary and secondary schools. Girls also continue to have limited access to agricultural markets due to lack of transport, technology and price negotiation skills.

There is also a growing attention on youth and their role in the agriculture sector. Recently, a national youth conference was held in Lilongwe with a focus on youth involvement in the agriculture sector. The National Youth Council stated that agriculture is a potential area in which youth can play a role, but there are no specific policies yet in place for youth. Even models such as SUN do not consider the potential role of youth (Aubrey Ghibwana, National Youth Council). The National Youth Council recommends to recognize the ‘informal’ role of youth (males and females) in the agriculture sector, by making land, equipment and extension services available to them. Microfinance aspects are also considered relevant for the empowerment of young farmers, but there is still resistance to giving them access to financial loans.

The project *Farmer-to-Farmer Agroecology* supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) aims to strengthen the farming practices of more than 30,000 smallholder farmers in organic farming, and has developed a pilot component through the support for youth-led small businesses in order to ensure the supply of nutritious foods on the local market while supporting youth livelihoods. The project aims to train 6,000 farming households on sustainable agroecological methods, nutrition, and gender issues, and to provide technical support to farmers in production and cooperative development. The initiative also supports 200 farmers in a pilot project for the growth of local yellow maize seeds to improve vitamin A deficiency in young children. In addition, this project aims to train 200 young people and 100 farmers in small business operations and market development, food processing, and preservation methods.

3.3 Making the case for teenage mothers

Teenage mothers who have dropped out of school represent a vulnerable group in Malawi, although there are no data yet available. The most prominent model for supporting teenage mothers is embodied by conditional cash transfer programmes (CCTs). These programmes are based on different types of interventions with teenage mothers: 1. those directed towards their family and 2. those that are directed at girls themselves. For instance in Malawi, the Zomba Cash-Transfer Programme is an ongoing CCT intervention targeting young women, which provides incentives (in the form of school fees and cash transfers) to current schoolgirls and recent dropouts to stay in, or return to, school. An average offer of US\$10/month conditional on satisfactory school attendance - plus direct payment of secondary school fees - has led to significant declines in early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and self-reported sexual activity among programme beneficiaries after just one year of programme implementation. For programme beneficiaries who were not in school at baseline, the probability of getting married and becoming pregnant declined by more than 40% and 30%, respectively. In addition, the incidence of the onset of sexual activity was 38% lower among all programme beneficiaries than among control group. Overall, these results suggest that CCT programmes not only serve as useful tools for improving school attendance but may also reduce sexual activity, teen pregnancy, and early marriage (Baird S, Chirwa E, McIntosh C, Ozler B, 2009).

3.4 Youth-oriented policies

There is an overall recognition of the potential that young people have in fostering economic growth, and the government has included *Youth Development and Empowerment* as a key priority area in the development strategy (Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II, box 7). This is important especially in light of the fact that in 15 years, 370 million young people will enter Sub-Saharan Africa's labour markets, making it necessary to create many more jobs and opportunities for savings and investment (OECD, 2015).

While the MDGS II assigns a key role to youth, there is still a lack of clarity about the age span for this category. Generally, youth policies considered youth as from 10 to 35 years of age, whereas in the MDGS II, youth are considered to be aged between 10 and 29. The lack of clarity is due to the absence of a clear youth policy and strategy, although a few initiatives have been undertaken. Due to social, economic and cultural challenges facing youth and youth labour, it has become necessary to formulate a national youth policy. There has been an effort by the government to empower youth economically through the establishment of the Youth Enterprise Development Fund and the Rural Development Fund. Both initiatives offer loans to young people in rural areas to engage in small-scale business ventures. However, there are still several challenges to this, particularly due to a lack of transparency in the selection process (Yananda Madhopla).

3.5 Government policies in favour of adolescent girls

In February 2015 the Parliament of Malawi passed the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill⁵ which increases the legal age of marriage to 18. Previously, girls in Malawi were allowed to marry at 16 or, with parental consent, at 15. In addition to the new minimum marriage age, the bill also has strong protections for married women, giving equal status to both parties in a marriage.

This law is a milestone towards protecting adolescent girls from child marriage and educating young mothers to help break the cycle of poor nutrition status. Addressing child marriage requires recognition of the various factors that contribute to the perpetuation of the practice such as: economic factors (e.g., the need to support many children, paying a lower dowry), structural factors (e.g., lack of educational opportunities), and social factors (e.g., sense of tradition and social obligation, risk of pregnancy out of wedlock, avoiding criticism whereby older unmarried girls may be considered impure). Furthermore this law will protect women, young, old and the girl child, against any form of abuse or violence - emotional, physical, or otherwise - that is related to marriage, sexual relations and family. It will also hold those parents, who marry their children off below the age of 18, accountable to the law and ensure their prosecution. This law can be also an entry point to better define the category of girls (Alice Shackelford, UN Women).

The 2002 National Land Policy is yet to be translated into implementing legislation and land registration systems that will fully support economic growth and poverty reduction, while ensuring that the rights of rural women, especially those heading households, are fully recognized. The draft Malawi National Land Policy was discussed by the cabinet and parliament in 2002. A special law commission was set up in 2003 to review all land-related laws and to conduct a further series of consultative workshops with civil society. Since then, the draft land policy has continued to be a subject of public debate, and it has still not been passed into law. Malawi is based on a strong patriarchal society and gender issues relating to land rights are still considered taboo. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity in the land policy of the new President. Given the complexity and diversity of customary tenure systems in Malawi, detailed assessments may be necessary to ensure that systems unique to one area or population group are adequately addressed in broader legislation, and that the role of local traditional governance structures is clarified. Land reform will prove particularly crucial for increasing access to land, including by women, which is necessary to decrease inequality in land distribution and to ensure security of tenure.

⁵ This bill brings Malawi in line with international standards for the minimum age of marriage, such as the African Charter's Maputo Protocol and the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child.

3.6 The role of the private sector

The private sector is not yet a strong actor in the development agenda in Malawi. Although it may be considered as a key partner, there are not yet any success stories particularly in the agriculture, nutrition and food security sectors.

Although smallholders play a key role in the agriculture sector - and as a consequence in the nutrition and food security sectors - they still struggle to enter the market. The Malawi Bureau of Standards (Consumers Association of Malawi) signed a Memorandum of Understanding under the project ‘Development of a robust Standardization, Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Metrology (SQAM) Infrastructure in Malawi⁶ for a Sustainable and Equitable Economic Growth and Food Security’. The SQAM project (September 2012-September 2016) funded by the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme and the Malawi Government, with a total allocation of US\$12,710,911 was created with the inclusion of this specific outcome: ‘*Women, youth, people with disability and households benefit from decent employment, income generation and pro-poor private sector growth by 2016*’. Among expected outputs there is also support for increasing the capacity of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), and particularly female and youth-led enterprises, strengthened to comply with quality requirements. Nevertheless, it is not yet possible to collect information about the female and youth-led small enterprises that benefit from this program.

Currently, the Malawi Bureau of Standards (MBS) selects and trains small producers in capacity-building to comply with standards as there is a strong perception that international market demand for conforming services is higher than currently available. Exporters from Malawi are at present disadvantaged by the lack of internationally-accredited testing facilities for certification of products for export. Certificates from the MBS are only accepted in the local region, and exporters still sustain high costs to obtain certification in wider international markets. Implementing SQAM is a real opportunity to improve and reinforce the capacity of small producers. The MBS has also agreed specifically to engage young women, as well as having a more general attention on youth. However, the criteria for selection do not state any particular age span, or include more vulnerable groups such as young women. Even if there is an explicit demand to work with youth and women, this aspect of the SQAM project could be seen as a missed opportunity.

In terms of approaches, the Consumers Association of Malawi has claimed that while there is growing attention on SMEs, it lacks specific focus on gender (John Kapito, Consumers Association of Malawi).

⁶ The ‘Development of a robust SQAM Infrastructure in Malawi’ project was established to enhance the ability to export goods from Malawi.

The project aims to reduce the need for re-testing, re-inspection, re-certification abroad through acceptance of measurements, tests, conformity assessment results issued in Malawi. The main goal is to contribute to a more adequate, effective and sustainable national quality infrastructure in Malawi in accordance with international and regional principles and practices (e.g. the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, COMESA and the Southern African Development Community, SADC). This will have direct implications in terms of benefits for Malawian enterprises through improved business services provided by the National Quality Infrastructure (and also indirectly), and in the long term, in terms of improved protection of consumer rights of Malawian citizens.

3.7 Initiatives with girls - Save the Children Malawi

Save the Children's office in Malawi is implementing a sponsorship programme with the overall goal of supporting children in the Zomba District of eastern Malawi. The sponsorship programme started in 2013 by targeting children from birth to 18 years of age. The programme implementation is guided by the Common Approach to Sponsorship Programming (CASP) which provides a framework for programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The key components of the programme are: i) early childhood care and development; ii) basic education; iii) school health and nutrition; iv) adolescent development and livelihood. The sponsorship programme also has a component regarding adolescent girls (aged from 10 to 18) and teenage mothers (from 13 to 19). This component aims to: increase access to, and availability of, adolescent-friendly services; improve quality of services as well as opportunities of adolescent and teenage mothers; develop capacity (knowledge and skills) in adolescent sexual reproductive health; economic opportunities and education; strengthen social and policy environment to support adolescents.

Two aspects of note of this programme are livelihood-oriented components regarding training in agribusiness and conservation agriculture for women and teenage mothers. These components are also part of the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) mechanism. The agribusiness activities are based on the creation of groups and further training about selection of crops, support in planting, and empowering negotiation in pricing mechanisms. Women will purchase seeds for food and cash crops including fertilizer at the cheapest prices. Conservation agriculture training is based on the principles of how to manage natural resources such as water, and how to conserve the soil used in food production. This training also includes a module about responding to emergency situations. Additionally teenage mothers are taught how to prepare meals, how to diversify local resources, and the kinds of local foods to be utilized to prevent moderate malnutrition.

The two-year Women Arise Project mainly focuses on women, although not specifically on the category of girls. The aim of this programme is to empower 2,500 women of childbearing age to increase food and nutrition security through sustainable food production and economic development. The core areas are: i) agriculture production and productivity, ii) agribusiness, iii) village savings and loans, iv) food and nutrition programmes and v) gender mainstreaming. It has been observed that women in Malawi have little influence on decisions at household level.

There is an overall emphasis within the Save the Children Malawi projects on crop diversification. This process is an important income-generating activity, but in terms of specific nutrition objectives, the income-generating aspects of crop diversification are often considered secondary to improved quality of intake. This is especially true in Malawi, where 70% to 83% of agricultural production is primarily for home consumption (Stanley Chitekwe, UNICEF).

3.8 Save the Children Malawi's work with girls - main findings

- Teenage mothers are targeted under the overall 'Child Poverty Strategy' but there are no disaggregated data developed for this group.
- Currently, there is a breakdown of data based on the gender of beneficiaries (female and male) without a disaggregation by age. Girls are part of many initiatives but exist among other beneficiaries.
- Save the Children Malawi already works with teenage mothers that are out of school, but there is a need to formalise and institutionalise this target group across all programmes (education; health & nutrition; livelihoods & social protection).
- During the group discussions in Zomba and Chiradzulu most of the women expressed the desire to return to school to finish their education. However, due to child bearing, financial constraints and marriage obligations they are not in the position to go back into education. On the other hand, programmes such as adult literacy, are aimed at illiterate individuals, therefore girls who drop out of school do not fit the qualifying criteria for inclusion.
- Various teenage mothers involved in projects in Zomba mentioned that before marriage their parents allocated them a plot of land. Girls are permitted to grow anything on this land (power to decide) but once they are married, such decisions are made in collaboration with their husbands.

3.9 Conclusions

General lessons

What the analysis finds is an overall recognition in Malawi of the importance of targeting girls. There are also certain sparse initiatives on girls, but no data or evidence available on them. This is associated with a gap in knowledge about girls' needs, as well as in understanding what girls are capable of, and as a consequence which kind of interventions are appropriate. National policies contribute to this lack of attention and do not reflect the needs of adolescents in Malawi.

Lessons to be drawn from working with girls remain limited, and there is often an intricate relationship between social institutions (formal and informal 'rules of the game') and girls' personal and economic empowerment. Girls do not have enough access to assets in general. Family traditions and norms in Malawi do not provide autonomy for girls, who are largely seen as dependants in the household setting. VSLA is a good mechanism to empower them, even though specifically targeting adolescent girls is not yet implemented. Additionally, at present, gaps in the formation of VSLAs and support for out-of-school youth (such as teenage mothers) still remain to be explored.

Girls play a key role in the agriculture sector but their access to decision-making processes is still too limited, as well as their access to resources and services such as land, credit, extension and training in agricultural technology. This suggests a challenge presented by the gender dimension in intra-household decision-making which needs to be recognized and taken into consideration by policy makers and researchers.

There do not appear to be enough programmes that target teenage mothers out of school through non-formal education in the agricultural sector. Teenage mothers often miss out on school as they are seen as adults, but missed out on livelihood programmes because they are seen as children. Furthermore, there is strong discrimination and stigma linked to early pregnancy which in turn leads girls to drop out of school. By engaging with teenage mothers, the Save the Children Sponsorship Programme provides a good case study of how these young mothers can contribute towards nutrition and food security through their key role in the agriculture sector in Malawi.

The definition of 'youth' is too broad within national policies and across different sectors. There is a need to align policy to the UN definition of 'youth', and to clarify in which category young people will be placed. The challenge observed in this paper is that it has differing definitions: national youth policy defines a young person as someone between 18 and 35 years old, the constitution of Malawi defines a young person as someone under the age of 18, other sources define youth as someone under the age of 21. The multiplicity of definitions makes targeting youth in Malawi particularly hard. Additionally, the national registration system in Malawi is weak and needs to be supported in order to amass better figures.

Policy implications

The government of Malawi needs to clarify and better define the category of adolescence and youth by age. Designing specific indicators is also a key action to be explored.

A support policy and legislative reforms might be reinforced to create an environment for investing in girls. For instance, donors could support the consultative processes that could help to advance efforts towards establishing a system of property rights and resource governance that promotes growth while protecting the rights of individuals as guaranteed by the Constitution of Malawi.

The key role of girls in the agriculture sector and their potential to influence the nutrition and food security of their families and communities must be recognized. Given their prominent role, they must have access to credit, agricultural technologies, assets, resources and services. Girls must also be able to increase their ability to invest in, and control, physical and financial assets. This is linked to the need for better design and implementation of programmes to increase girls' ownership and control of assets. The VSLA model could be explored for application only for girls and female youth.

A mapping exercise and collection of information is needed regarding what is already implemented for young people and adolescents involved in agriculture, nutrition and food security. This might also be associated with the development and maintenance of a database of education programmes for adolescent girls in order to identify promising models appropriate to girls' educational needs in the country.

The creation of non-formal educational programmes must be explored to facilitate and support entrepreneurial skills for girls. There is a need for supply-side strategies to enhance educational access, to produce curricula relevant to adolescent girls that include remunerative and marketable skills, and to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills.

More funds are needed to support evidence-based investments in girls. There is no systematic planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes that target girls. Current initiatives target youth in small pockets without upscaling specific programmes and approaches.



CONCLUSIONS

General Lessons

The international development community is paying increasing attention to girls as key players for development policies. In the last year we have seen an increase in initiatives and calls for action such as the Girl Declaration, with a growing interest of involving different partners across multiple sectors. In Africa, many regional and national strategies emphasize the need to invest more in young people, especially in the agriculture sector, while also envisaging a key role for the private sector. While these high-level initiatives are building up momentum, it is important to examine how to better define adolescents and youth with particular attention on girls. The implications of working across public and private sectors must be also analysed and supported by the African governments in leading these policies and initiatives.

Although there is increasing attention on girls and their potential role in making a difference in the struggle against malnutrition, there remain several challenges and constraints in positioning young and adolescent women and advocating for them. Unless there is an agreed investment in data collection and data depiction, it is not possible to understand what development efforts need to be prioritised and where. Development outcomes can be built only through a commitment between different partners to gather properly disaggregated data. This means that there is a need to create the right criteria at the point of collection, and investment of time and money into extracting data on girls from existing sources. This process, if done, will offer a real picture of the world for girls.

In most cases various partners have failed to understand the link between nutrition for adolescent girls, school dropout, and child and maternal mortality.

The complexity of scaling up initiatives for girls necessitates working in a multi-stakeholder partnership, with the private sector clearly available to play a central role. The existing models of public-private partnerships are relatively new and it is not yet possible to draw conclusions from them. The multi-dimension nature of 'working with girls' requires interventions which address their role in key sectors, such as agriculture, through measures that improve their access to health services, education, natural resources, various assets, legal frameworks and social protection. There is also the need for an enabling environment which leads to major institutional support, as well as better infrastructure, property rights to ensure land tenure, equal access to techniques (in agriculture, livestock and fisheries activities), equal participation in markets, and labour policies. Neither public/civil society nor the private sector can address these single-handedly.

Engaging in such an agenda requires collaboration and coordination across a wide range of governmental and non-governmental actors. Forthcoming key events on the international agenda may offer opportunities to advocate and create synergies. The nutrition, food security and agriculture agendas may be tackled to ensure that the 'girl gap' is addressed. Private sector involvement also offers further chances to invest in entrepreneurial skills for girls.

Lessons are very limited about the different roles and models for different stakeholders, and also for investing in workable strategies and partnerships. The discussion above suggests these will depend on the approach being taken to address the 'girl gap'. For instance, a focus on education requires different support to a focus on agriculture. While there is an evident need to invest through a multisectoral approach, if the main goal is to empower girls by supporting their skills, governments as well as other partners, need to design frameworks which include already-listed inputs. It is important to create a body of evidence upon what works and how, in addressing girls' needs and missed opportunities.

Investment in indicators on girls, also requests to promote their role not only at smallholder level but also in large-scale markets, including regional markets. In Africa most markets are relatively small, and the potential role of girls in the agriculture sector must not be confined only to the domestic/household level, but should be linked to nation-

al and regional initiatives. The potential benefits of this approach could bring positive outcomes to nutrition and food security, but they must be measurable.

Adolescent girls and malnutrition are deeply linked, but insufficient attention continues to be paid to adolescent nutrition. This could be due to the successful focus within the nutrition community on the ‘first 1,000 days’ which concentrates attention and commitments. There still is a lack of nutritional plans for adolescent girls and inadequate assessment of their national needs. Linked with this scenario are the early pregnancies and early marriages which continue to position girls in particularly low and disadvantaged socio-economic status.

Policy Implications

African Governments - increasing the commitment to girls

Governments must better advocate for girls at different levels. They could support the implementation of an improved legal framework for adolescent girls by ensuring laws against discrimination in the workplace, schools, or family and ensure equal access to health services, education, jobs and earnings, credit, and property ownership. Additionally, governments and national and local authorities may have to mobilize communities, families, and men and boys to support adolescent girls.

Given the prominent role of CAADP compacts at national and regional level and the AIPs to address agriculture, nutrition and food security, there is an opportunity to raise and integrate objective and evidence-based mechanisms and programmes to address girls within the ‘youth’ category, in a concrete manner. It is imperative that adolescent girls are also targeted in order to break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition.

Governments need to offer broadly transparent and accountable data which will contribute to improved policy-making, enhanced dialogue, implementations, and mutual learning processes from the CAADP implementation agenda, as well as enhancing these specific issues in the policy agendas of different ministries.

Development partners: investing more in the ‘girl gap’

Given the lack of clarity regarding adolescents and youth, there is need to clarify and better define these two categories by age, and to develop specific indicators. The analysis conducted in this paper suggests the importance of standardising and institutionalising both categories at global, regional and national level. Definitions should be aligned in each country and a consensus should be built among different stakeholders. It must be ensured that youth and adolescents, including girls, become key actors in the development arena.

Donors should support research, baseline studies, and data disaggregation including ensuring targets are met for girls. There is the need to review and align existing policies and strategies about girls and to undertake mapping exercises to capture standards and best practices. It is also important to explore the impacts of girls’ informal/formal work on nutrition and food security.

Even with the growing recognition of the potential role of the private sector, partnerships and lessons from these donors are still limited. The Girl Effect movement appears to offer a good platform from which to take the agenda forward. The focus on investing in girls to increase their potential is an important objective. However within Save the Children, it may be important to understand how to go beyond CSR to core business approaches.

A useful dialogue within the donor community and civil society organizations is needed in order to understand future steps towards the improvement of the current ‘girl gap’. Key issues to be further explored are how public, private and civil society organizations can work together in reaching out to marginalized girls in rural societies who are otherwise excluded from innovation processes and market dynamics.

More investments in adolescent girls' education, including more attention on non-formal education. There is strong evidence to show that girls who stay in school longer marry later, have higher incomes, and have fewer children. Their children are less likely to die in infancy and more likely to go to school than children of women with less schooling.

More advocacy work for increasing the current insufficient policy attention on adolescent nutrition - perhaps as a result of the successful focus within the nutrition community on the first 1,000 days.

The private sector: exploring new partnerships

Regardless of the focus of the partnership, engaging the private sector for investing in girls must overcome the inherent challenges of opening certain themes to a business environment. There is still a mistrust of the private sector, especially concerning certain thematic issues relating to children. Some examples reported, such as Coca-Cola's collaboration with DFID, suggest that instead of perceiving private sector actors as concentrating on their core businesses, they should be perceived as valuable partners who are able to contribute to the success of girls by developing their entrepreneurial skills and abilities in playing a role in small and large-scale markets. In return such companies can reap benefits through reputation effects. There is still lack of a model to which to refer and hence greater attention must be paid to working with the private sector in building trustworthy relationships with the development community.

In general, business must comply with applicable national law and respect international standards on children and youth/adolescent girls' rights. For instance the Children's Rights and Business Principles (the Principles) were designed by UNICEF, Save the Children and the UN Global Compact as a guide for all businesses in their interaction with children (under 18 years old). A similar model can be applied for youth/girls to make sure that all requirements are met and that business will put in place appropriate policies and processes.

Targeting upcoming key events - make the girl agenda more visible

The new agenda for sustainable development must be seen as an opportunity: while the inclusion of adolescents in post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is welcome, it is critical that the commitment will be translated into practice. The SDGs highlight the importance of advancing the rights, participation, and development of adolescents and youth, especially in terms of girls' education, delayed marriage and childbearing, and comprehensive sexual education. Key smart investments are also mentioned as a pathway for the empowerment of girls.

Advocate for girls this year: 2015 is the African Union's Year of Women's Empowerment, aiming for greater attention and commitment towards girls. The declaration, made in Malabo in mid-2014, may be a useful instrument to open new paths for African youth within the agricultural arena, with specific attention on girls. There is a need to re-balance the agriculture sector in order for it to deliver its nutrition mandate and also by reinforcing and recognizing the key roles of women and especially those of girls.

The upcoming twenty-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2015 is an important reminder to highlight the continuing need for progress and the importance of understanding the challenges faced by the rural women and girls who are burdened with heavy domestic and care-giving workloads in most societies⁷.

⁷ In Sub-Saharan Africa, women spend 40 billion hours every year fetching water.

Key Recommendation

There is an overall recognition of the importance of working more with adolescent girls, which is considered to be an upcoming area of interest for Save the Children.

Given the importance of the Women for Expo project, and in order to maximise the inputs from this discussion paper, Save the Children aims to hold a dialogue on the theme of girls, on the 3rd of July in occasion of the event “Starting from Girls” in EXPO. This forum will involve multiple stakeholders, and will share lessons among the full range of partners. It will be an important platform to build trust, and to understand how best to support girls and young women at the international level.

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We work in 119 countries to achieve breakthroughs in the way the world treats children.

Our vision

A world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation.

Our mission

To inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.