Pathways to Resilience

**SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS
IN EAST AND WEST AFRICA'S PASTORAL AREAS**

*Tom Kipruto, Jeeyon Kim, Erick Waga,
Maha Elsamahi, and Esther Musa*

How to cite: [Author name (in this format: Surname, Initial.)] [(Year)] [Title in italics]. [Publication type.] London: Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC) [(URL)].

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

risks, from displacement and resource scarcity to early marriage and social exclusion, that undermine their well-being. These challenges are especially acute in dryland settings, where traditional support systems are strained and access to formal services is limited.

Investing in adolescent girls is not only a matter of equity but also yields broad social and economic returns. Evidence demonstrates that girls' access to education, health services, and economic opportunities is associated with delayed marriage, reduced fertility, higher household income, and intergenerational gains in health and education outcomes (Wodon et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2020). Strengthening enabling factors such as supportive households, community networks, and inclusive policies can amplify these impacts, helping girls navigate crises and contribute to their resilience. Yet in pastoral and fragile settings, the evidence on effective interventions and pathways to resilience remains limited.

This report synthesizes findings from a desk review of 53 sources and 11 key informant interviews with researchers, evaluators, and program implementers, guided by two core questions: *Why invest in adolescent girls' well-being and resilience in fragile pastoral areas of East and West Africa?* And what works to support their well-being and resilience in these contexts? Findings highlight both promising strategies and persistent gaps, with most interventions remaining short-term, narrowly focused, or poorly adapted to mobile and displaced populations. Long-term tracking of outcomes is rare, and resilience pathways are incompletely documented.

Insights from the desk review and key informant interviews highlight four interrelated domains that show promise for supporting adolescent girls' resilience in climate- and conflict-affected pastoral contexts:

Education and Social Norms remain a key enabler of resilience. Evidence from programs such as the Adolescent Girls Initiative–Kenya (AGI-K) suggests that combining conditional cash transfers with community engagement can help delay early marriage, improve school retention, and foster parental and community support for girls' education. Complementary interventions, including safe spaces, life skills training, and sexual and reproductive health education, further reinforce participation. Nevertheless, seasonal mobility, displacement, and entrenched gender norms continue to constrain educational access for many girls in pastoralist settings.

Financial Literacy and Economic Empowerment contribute to long-term resilience. Programs like Girls Improving Resilience through Livelihoods and Health (GIRL-H) integrate financial literacy, entrepreneurship mentoring, start-up support, and reproductive health education, with participants reporting improvements in financial autonomy and greater use of health services. Key informants note, however, that vocational and economic programs often do not fully align with local labor market opportunities, which can limit sustainability and scalability.

Health and Psychosocial Well-Being are fundamental to resilience, yet adolescent-responsive services remain limited, fragmented, and often stigmatized. Integrated approaches, such as AGI-K's inclusion of sexual and reproductive health education or the Trauma-Informed Psychoeducation (TIPE) program for Somali refugee adolescents, show potential for reducing stress, enhancing coping strategies, and improving overall well-being. Despite these promising models, few interventions are designed to reach mobile, displaced, or otherwise hard-to-reach populations.

Community and Systems Support, including engagement at the household and community levels and collaboration with local leaders, is critical to sustaining program impacts. Initiatives such as GIRL-H and community-based girls' clubs illustrate that combining direct support for girls with broader community mobilization can influence social norms around early marriage, education, and girls' economic participation. Without stronger linkages to formal government structures and policies, however, many promising local approaches remain fragile and dependent on donor cycles.

Looking Ahead

The risks facing adolescent girls in climate- and conflict-affected pastoral areas of East and West Africa are likely to intensify. While the evidence base remains incomplete, early findings suggest that multi-dimensional, community-grounded interventions, particularly those that are adapted to local contexts and supported over time, show great potential. This report provides a starting point for identifying promising practices, persistent gaps, and areas where further investment and learning are needed to ensure that adolescent girls are not left behind in efforts to build resilience in fragile settings. Insights from studies and key informant interviews point to five priority areas for future investment, adaptation, and learning:

1 **Localize economic empowerment approaches to pastoralist livelihoods and fragile market contexts.** Programs that combine financial literacy, entrepreneurship training, and start-up support such as GIRL-H demonstrate potential to improve girls' financial independence and economic agency. Tailoring economic interventions to local livelihood patterns, seasonal cycles, and available market opportunities can help girls apply financial skills meaningfully and build sustainable resilience over time.

2 **Expand adolescent mental health and psychosocial support:** Integrating trauma-informed care with life skills, education, and community-based services can strengthen coping strategies, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being, as seen in initiatives like the Trauma-Informed Psychoeducation (TIPE) program. Investments should prioritize culturally adapted, multi-sectoral approaches that address both mental health and social-emotional development alongside education and livelihoods, particularly for mobile or displaced populations.

3 **Strengthen education pathways:** Evidence links education to delayed marriage, improved economic prospects, and intergenerational health and social benefits. Programs like AGI-K show that combining conditional cash transfers with community engagement can enhance school retention and delay early marriage. In pastoralist and displaced contexts, mobility, seasonal migration, and caregiving responsibilities disrupt schooling. Accelerated learning, mobile and remote education options, and reintegration pathways, including for married adolescents and young mothers, can help sustain educational participation.

4 **Invest in integrated, cross-sectoral programming:** Evidence points to the promise of interventions that simultaneously address education, health, protection, and economic empowerment, with impacts at household, community, and systems levels. Programs like AGI-K and GIRL-H show early benefits of linking psychosocial support, SRH education, financial literacy, and life skills. However, much of the literature remains sectorally focused, and long-term tracking of multi-domain outcomes is limited. Scaling up cross-sectoral approaches and incorporating mechanisms to track cumulative outcomes across adolescence will be critical to reinforcing resilience pathways.

5 **Bridge community-driven models with broader systems:** Evidence from the desk review and key informant interviews highlights the role of household and community support in sustaining program impacts. There is an opportunity to link local initiatives with national and subnational policies, embedding adolescent well-being into climate adaptation, education, social protection, and health strategies. Strengthening these connections can enhance durability and scale while ensuring meaningful adolescent participation in decision-making.

Taken together, these priorities highlight the potential of multi-dimensional, community-based approaches to strengthen adolescent girls' resilience in fragile pastoral contexts. Sustained investment, government engagement, long-term donor support, and meaningful adolescent participation will be critical to translating promising practices into durable outcomes, particularly as integrated, multi-scalar interventions are further developed and evaluated.

Introduction

Adolescent girls in climate- and conflict-vulnerable areas of East and West Africa face significant barriers to achieving financial, psychosocial,[1] health, and educational well-being. They are disproportionately affected by the intersecting impacts of climate change and conflict, including resource scarcity, gender-based violence, and reduced access to education and healthcare. Displacement, early marriage, discriminatory norms, and limited resources further constrain their ability to build resilience and thrive.

Defining Adolescents

In line with the World Health Organization, this review defines adolescents as individuals aged 10–19, youth as 15–24, and young people as 10–24 years. Adolescence is further categorized into early (10–14), middle (15–17), and late (18–19) stages based on physical, social, and psychological development. Yet many studies do not disaggregate findings by these stages, limiting insight into how needs and outcomes vary across adolescence. Key informants emphasized that such distinctions are essential for informing interventions that align with adolescents' specific needs. Future research should account for these differences to support more targeted programming.

While investments in adolescent girls' well-being are associated with positive development outcomes, there is limited evidence on how these interventions function in fragile, dryland contexts. Through more frequent droughts, erratic rainfall, and pressure on natural resources, climate change disrupts traditional livelihoods and alters girls' roles within households and communities, often increasing their vulnerabilities. Emerging innovations including integrated financial, psychosocial well-being, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programs; youth-led safe spaces; and community-driven norm change initiatives are expanding the pathways through which adolescent girls can build resilience. By assessing how conflict and climate-related disruptions affect adolescent girls and identifying approaches that show promise, this review offers evidence to inform programs and policies aimed at strengthening girls' resilience and improving well-being in fragile settings.

---

1   This report uses the term psychosocial well-being to encompass both emotional and mental health aspects of adolescent girls' development. This terminology aligns with prevailing usage in humanitarian and development literature and recognizes that well-being is shaped not only by clinical mental health conditions but also by broader social, cultural, and environmental factors. Where we refer to formal service systems, the term mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is applied.

Methods

This report consolidates insights from a desk review and key informant interviews (KIIs) to identify promising practices, persistent gaps, and opportunities for innovation in fragile pastoral contexts. The desk review and KIIs were conducted in tandem, with each approach informing the other. The desk review informed our KII guides and areas for further probing, while the KIIs helped to identify additional resources, triangulate initial findings, and connect with other potential informants.
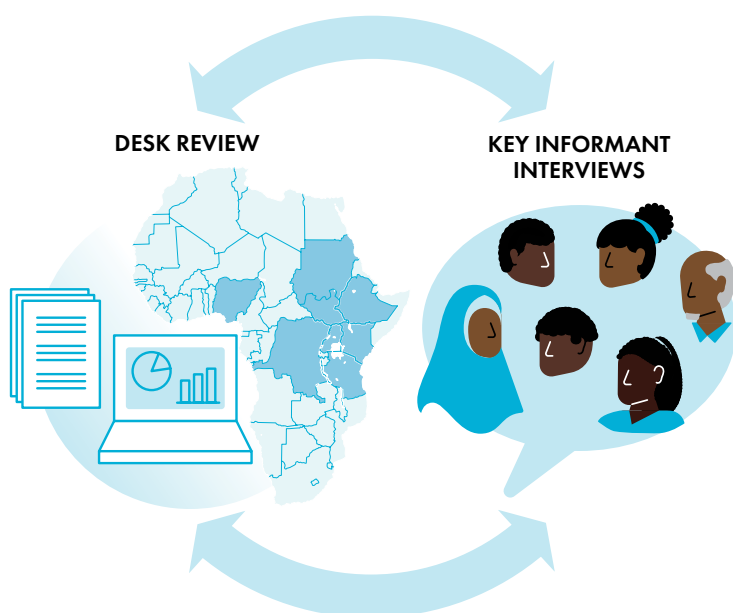
Both approaches were guided by two key questions:

1 Why invest in adolescent girls' well-being and resilience in climate- and conflict-vulnerable pastoral areas in East and West Africa?

2 What works to support adolescent girls' well-being and resilience in these contexts?

DESK REVIEW

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS
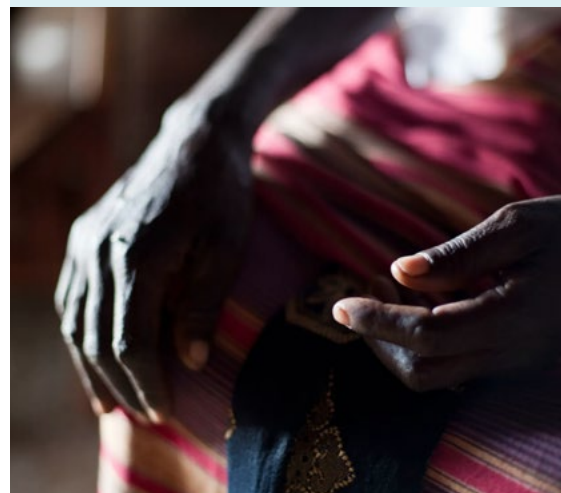
Desk Review: The evidence summarized in this report are drawn from a range of sources. The aim was to synthesize insights from research that was rigorous, focused on adolescent girls, set in climate- and conflict-vulnerable areas of East and West Africa, and examined girls' well-being in some way. Studies that cut across these four criteria is still limited but a growing field of research. In total, we identified 53 documents using a structured protocol focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, evaluation reports and grey literature and synthesized findings from 24 documents that met our inclusion criteria (Annex).

Key Informant Interviews: Between May and July 2024, eleven key informants were identified through the adolescent community of practice. We conducted interviews with researchers, evaluators, and program implementers. Sampling was primarily purposive, supported by snowball techniques to identify additional key informants engaged in adolescent programming. Interviews were thematically analyzed and triangulated with desk review findings.

There are notable gaps in the available documentation on adolescent sexual and reproductive health programs. There is a limited volume of peer-reviewed research, practical tools, and gray literature specifically focused on adolescent-centered interventions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This reflects both the evolving nature of adolescent needs across diverse contexts and the absence of consistent models for supporting adolescent resilience. In some cases, limited sharing of program design, implementation details, and outcomes due to institutional sensitivities or proprietary considerations further constrains the evidence base. Geographically, most documentation originates from a small number of multi-country initiatives in anglophone sub-Saharan Africa, with a primary focus on contraceptive uptake. Despite targeted efforts, relatively fewer resources from francophone West Africa were identified.

Why invest in adolescent girls' well-being and resilience in climate- & conflict-vulnerable areas in East and West Africa?

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **High vulnerability with lasting consequences:** In fragile regions of East and West Africa, climate shocks, conflict, and entrenched gender inequalities limit adolescent girls' access to education, livelihoods, and protection. Vulnerabilities are particularly acute for displaced girls and those in pastoralist communities, where seasonal migration, mobility constraints, and weak local service coverage compound risks to both immediate well-being and long-term opportunities

- **Crises amplify protection and psychosocial risks:** Displacement and climate- or conflict-driven economic shocks sharply increase girls' exposure to early marriage, gender-based violence, and psychosocial stress. Investing in their safety and psychosocial well-being reduces vulnerability and helps them maintain pathways to education, skill-building, and future livelihoods.

- **Need and potential for integrated support:** Building adolescent girls' resilience in the face of climate change and conflict requires integrated approaches that restore education, expand locally livelihood opportunities, ensure production, and provide adolescent-centered psychosocial support. Evidence and key informants highlight the potential of such interventions to yield benefits that reverberate across families, communities, and future generations.

Climate change and conflict are reshaping multiple aspects of adolescent girls' lives in fragile regions of East and West Africa. Eroding livelihood systems, restricted access to education and health services, and heightened protection risks converge with pre-existing gender and social inequalities to limit girls' resources and support. In rural and pastoralist settings, mobility constraints, weak infrastructure, and limited service coverage compound these challenges, undermining girls' immediate well-being and long-term resilience.

Changing weather patterns, including prolonged droughts and erratic rainfall, have disrupted agriculture and livestock rearing, the primary sources of livelihood in many pastoral regions (OECD, 2022). Loss of livestock and declining agricultural yields have increased household poverty and food insecurity. Girls are often the first affected, as families withdraw them from school, assign additional labor, or arrange early marriages to cope with economic strain (Kwauk et al., 2019; Austrian et al., 2020). Evidence from the Adolescent Girls Initiative–Kenya (AGI-K) showed that households facing economic shocks were significantly more likely to pull adolescent girls from school and marry them early (Austrian et al., 2020; 2021).

Displacement driven by climate shocks or conflict increases risks to girls' safety and well-being. In Sudan, a situational analysis found that displaced adolescent girls had minimal access to protection or psychosocial support, while traditional community support systems were weakened or absent (Abdalhai, Mokitimi, & de Vries, 2024). Research in South Sudan similarly found that displaced girls were at significantly higher risk of sexual violence compared to peers in non-displaced areas (Buehren et al., 2017). Among pastoralist communities, displacement also disrupts kinship-based protection mechanisms, exposing girls to exploitation and insecurity during forced migration.

Crises consistently disrupt education, with girls especially at risk of being withdrawn from school and facing challenges to re-enrolment (Austrian et al., 2020). A multi-country study across sub-Saharan Africa highlights how early marriage expectations, safety concerns, and perceptions of limited returns on girls' education constrain their continued participation (Yotebieng, 2021). In pastoralist areas, seasonal migration further undermines school attendance and retention, particularly where education systems are not adapted to mobile populations.

Psychosocial well-being is heavily affected by chronic exposure to violence, instability, and economic stress. Research from Uganda found that adolescent girls exposed to conflict-related trauma experienced high rates of depression, anxiety, and risk behaviors (Okello et al., 2015). Studies in Kenya among displaced youth showed that even short-term psychosocial interventions had limited reach, with access barriers including stigma and weak service infrastructure (Getanda & Vostanis, 2020; Jettner et al., 2017). Reviews of psychosocial support for girls in conflict settings emphasize that services often lack adolescent-sensitive design and cultural alignment (Samuels et al., 2017).

Risks of gender-based violence and early marriage escalate sharply during displacement and instability. A systematic review of conflict-affected settings found that sexual violence often becomes normalized in post-conflict societies, with weakened legal systems offering little protection for adolescent girls (Spangaro et al., 2015). Experimental evidence from South Sudan indicated that early marriage rates rose substantially in conflict-affected areas, driven by a combination of insecurity and household economic strain (Buehren et al., 2017). In Sudan, displaced families facing financial hardship were also more likely to arrange early marriages for adolescent girls (Abdalhai, Mokitimi, & de Vries, 2024).

The combined impacts of disrupted livelihoods, displacement, interrupted education, psychosocial stress, and exposure to violence severely constrain adolescent girls' ability to build resilience. In pastoral areas, where livelihoods depend heavily on natural resource cycles and mobility is essential, the erosion of access to education, safety, community networks, and economic opportunity is particularly acute. Loss of livestock, migration pressures, and the breakdown of traditional protection structures further limit girls' ability to regain stability. Without sustained education, vocational training adapted to mobile and rural economies, or access to financial services, adolescent girls face few opportunities to rebuild resilience and secure safe livelihoods (Austrian et al., 2021; Nchanji et al., 2023).

Addressing the impacts of climate change and conflict on adolescent girls requires integrated approaches that reflect the breadth of disruptions across multiple domains. Strengthening girls' resilience in fragile and pastoralist settings depends on restoring access to education, expanding locally relevant economic opportunities, ensuring protection from violence, and prioritizing adolescent-centered mental health support. Investing in adolescent girls' well-being yields benefits that reverberate across families, communities, and future generations. Access to education, for example, is strongly associated with delayed marriage, lower fertility rates, improved household income, and intergenerational gains in health and education (Wodon et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2020). By adapting strategies to the realities of mobile, rural, and displaced communities, there is potential to bolster girls' resilience and contribute to more inclusive community development in the face of climate and conflict.

What works to strengthen the well-being & resilience of adolescent girls in fragile, climate- & conflict-vulnerable contexts?

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Evidence points to progress and gaps: In fragile, climate- and conflict-affected pastoral areas of East and West Africa, the evidence on interventions for adolescent girls is uneven. Programs often remain short-term, narrowly focused, and poorly adapted to mobile or displaced populations. Coordination across sectors is limited, and few interventions systematically track long-term outcomes, leaving resilience pathways fragile and incompletely documented.

- Promising domains for strengthening resilience: Evidence and key informants highlight four areas with potential for sustained impact: expanding access to education and addressing harmful social norms; building financial literacy and livelihood skills; improving health and psychosocial well-being; and engaging households and communities to provide supportive environments. Integrated approaches across these domains appear most likely to help girls navigate climate- and conflict-related shocks.

- Opportunities for cross-cutting innovation: Evidence suggests potential to strengthen adolescent girls' resilience by integrating interventions across education, economic empowerment, health, and psychosocial well-being, while engaging households, local networks, and community leaders. Such approaches could enhance sustainability, support context-adapted solutions, and link local gains to broader systems change.

In climate- and conflict-affected pastoral areas of East and West Africa, the evidence on what interventions work and under what conditions remains uneven. The desk review and key informant interviews point to promising models but also highlight persistent gaps: interventions often remain short-term, are poorly adapted to mobile or fragile settings, and rarely address the full range of vulnerabilities girls face (Kwauk et al., 2019; OECD, 2022; Lawrence & Falaye, 2020). Coordination across sectors is limited, and few programs systematically collect long-term data on girls' outcomes. Moreover, long-term follow-up on girls' outcomes remains rare. In climate- and conflict-affected pastoral regions of East and West Africa, the pathways to resilience remain fragile and unevenly documented.

Drawing on both the desk review and key informant interviews, four domains emerged as critical to strengthening adolescent girls' well-being and resilience: education and social norms, financial and economic well-being, health and psychosocial wellbeing, and community and systems support. While examples in this report are primarily presented by sector, this reflects the current programmatic landscape and the structure of the evidence base. Studies such as Kwauk et al. (2019) and OECD (2022) suggest that interventions combining education, health, and livelihoods may offer more durable gains across multiple domains. However, in practice, such integrated approaches remain limited, and rigorous evaluation of their long-term effectiveness is still scarce. Key informants echoed this assessment, noting a growing consensus on the value of holistic models, but also pointing to persistent challenges in translating this into implementation. That said, a few programs such as the Girls Improving Resilience through Livelihoods and Health and the Adolescent Girls Initiative–Kenya offer early insights into how integrated, adolescent-centered interventions can lead to sustained improvements when education, health, and economic components are delivered together. These models, while not without limitations, demonstrate the feasibility of cross-sectoral approaches when embedded in local structures and supported by strong community engagement. This section highlights these bright spots and points to opportunities for future innovation across the four domains.

1 Addressing social norms and barriers that limit adolescent girls' access to education and opportunities

Access to education remains one of the most significant determinants of girls' resilience. Girls who complete secondary school are significantly less likely to marry early and more likely to achieve financial independence (Kwauk et al., 2019; Austrian et al., 2020). Yet in fragile contexts, climate shocks, seasonal migration, displacement, and entrenched norms systematically disrupt girls' education pathways. Harmful social norms, including early marriage and gender-based discrimination, continue to limit adolescent girls' access to education and opportunities (Yotebieng, 2021). Early marriage, often driven by economic hardship or cultural practices, removes girls from school, significantly reducing their potential for personal and economic growth and perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

Programs that challenge these norms through community engagement and inclusive education have shown promise. For example, the Adolescent Girls Initiative–Kenya (AGI-K) delayed early marriage by combining conditional cash transfers for school expenses with community awareness campaigns. This dual approach not only kept girls in school but also fostered parental and community support for girls' education (Austrian et al., 2021). Complementary interventions that create inclusive, safe learning environments such as the safe spaces also play a critical role in sustaining girls' participation (Kwauk et al., 2019).

Despite these gains, major gaps persist. Most education programs do not account for the mobility of pastoralist populations or displaced communities. Key informants emphasized that without adaptable education delivery models such as mobile schools, remote learning platforms, or flexible school calendars, pastoralist girls will continue to be left behind. In addition, addressing harmful social norms requires interventions that go beyond awareness-raising campaigns. Policies mandating compulsory education and prohibiting early marriage require stronger enforcement and community accountability structures, while skills training, inclusive curricula, and financial support are needed to offset the opportunity costs of schooling. Ultimately, long-term strategies that address barriers at both household- and community-level are essential for ensuring that adolescent girls in fragile and climate-affected contexts can access and complete their education.

Adolescent Girls Initiative–Kenya (AGI-K):

- **Intervention:** Adolescent Girls Initiative–Kenya (AGI-K)

- **Context and target population:** Urban and peri-urban settlements in Kenya, targeting vulnerable adolescent girls aged 11–14

- **Approach:** Delivered a bundled intervention package combining conditional cash transfers, life skills education, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education, financial literacy training, and community engagement activities to shift harmful gender norms.

- **Evaluation:** Rigorous randomized controlled trial (RCT) with a midline and endline assessment.

- **Findings:** Delayed early marriage, improved school retention, increased savings behaviour, and strengthened decision-making agency among girls (Austrian et al., 2021).

2 Facilitating financial literacy and economic empowerment

Economic empowerment emerged as another cornerstone of girls' resilience. Financial literacy and economic empowerment are pivotal in promoting the long-term resilience and independence of adolescent girls. Key informants highlighted that programs offering financial education, mentorship, and entrepreneurship support play a critical role in breaking the cycle of poverty for these girls. One respondent noted, "Financial literacy programs have empowered girls to break the cycle of poverty and make informed financial decisions for a brighter future."[2]

The desk review supports these insights, showing that interventions such as AGI-K integrated financial education with safe spaces, offering girls practical financial tools, such as savings accounts or home banks, alongside annual incentives to encourage saving habits (Austrian et al., 2020). Moreover, conditional cash transfers under the AGI-K program, which covered school fees, household cash assistance, and schooling kits, delayed early marriage and improved both educational and financial outcomes (Austrian et al., 2021). Similarly, the Girls Improving Resilience through Livelihoods and Health (GIRL-H) program demonstrated the power of combining entrepreneurship training with financial education. Participants received mentorship, business grants, and startup kits, enabling them to become more financially independent and engage in small businesses (Mercy Corps, 2024).

Girls Improving Resilience through Livelihoods and Health (GIRL-H)

- **Intervention:** Girls Improving Resilience through Livelihoods and Health (GIRL-H)

- **Context:** Conflict-affected and drought-prone regions in Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria

- **Approach:** Delivered an integrated package including SRH education, financial literacy, business mentorship, start-up grants, and peer support networks for adolescent girls aged 15–19

- **Evaluation:** Quasi-experimental mixed-methods evaluation design with baseline and endline surveys, with comparison group

- **Findings:** Improved financial independence, increased uptake of SRH services, higher business start-up rates among participants (Mercy Corps, 2024)

---

2   Placeholder for key informant quote reference

Findings align with broader evidence that integrated approaches combining vocational training and financial education enhance girls' economic capabilities, self-esteem, and social networks (Stavropoulou, 2018; Nchanji et al., 2023). However, key informants cautioned that many financial interventions remain disconnected from actual market demands. Vocational training often does not align with local labor market needs, limiting employability. Moreover, many financial empowerment programs lack systems-level strengthening efforts needed for scale and sustainability. Looking ahead, there are opportunities to innovate by layering income-generating activities with financial education, linking programs to social protection, health, and education systems, and engaging families to support girls' financial participation. Interventions that enable girls to build economic assets early in adolescence, supported by community structures and safe spaces, may be especially promising in fragile settings.

3 Responding to adolescent girls' health and psychosocial challenges and needs

Health and psychosocial well-being are foundational to adolescent girls' resilience in climate- and conflict-affected settings, yet they remain some of the least systematically addressed areas. Girls in these contexts face overlapping risks to their physical health, mental health, and safety, driven by displacement, trauma, food insecurity, and the breakdown of community structures. Across the desk review and key informant interviews, there was broad consensus that while integrated, adolescent-centered approaches to health and psychosocial support are essential, they remain the exception rather than the norm. Most interventions are fragmented, short-term, or narrowly focused, limiting their ability to sustain gains across physical and psychosocial domains.

Access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services offers one critical entry point for strengthening resilience. Programs like the AGI-K integrated SRH education into safe spaces, leading to delayed sexual debut, improved menstrual hygiene practices, and strengthened decision-making skills (Austrian et al., 2020). Similarly, the GIRL-H program combined SRH education with financial literacy, nutrition support, and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention activities to holistically address girls' needs (Mercy Corps, 2024). Key informants emphasized that when SRH education is delivered in girl-centered spaces, it fosters agency and self-efficacy: "Comprehensive sexual reproductive health education has empowered girls to take control of their bodies, make informed choices, and prioritize their health." However, girls often face barriers to accessing adolescence-focused SRH services while stigma and mobility constraints further limit their reach in fragile settings. Integration of SRH services with education and economic empowerment initiatives remain uneven, with few adapting their programming for the specific realities of pastoralist or displaced populations.

Mental health support is an equally critical dimension of resilience but remains even less consistently addressed. Chronic exposure to conflict, displacement, and climate shocks severely affects girls' psychosocial well-being, with studies linking these experiences to heightened rates of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and risk behaviors (Okello et al., 2015; Abdalhai, Mokitimi, & de Vries, 2024). Yet across the literature, services for adolescents are described as limited, fragmented, and often inaccessible - particularly for mobile and displaced populations.

Emerging interventions demonstrate promising models for strengthening psychosocial well-being. The Trauma-Informed Psychoeducation (TIPE) program, for instance, delivered structured emotional skills-building sessions for Somali refugee adolescents, supporting improvements in coping strategies and significant reductions in PTSD symptoms (Jettner et al., 2017). TIPE's evaluation also underscored the need for tailoring psychosocial interventions to the specific needs and experiences of participants, highlighting the limitations of one-size-fits-all approaches.

Key informants reinforced that psychosocial interventions must extend beyond isolated counselling sessions to be meaningfully embedded within broader support systems. One noted, "Psychosocial interventions have been instrumental in helping girls overcome past traumas, build confidence, and thrive in their personal growth journeys," but cautioned that fragmented services without community integration are unlikely to yield lasting impact. Another emphasized the persistent gap between emergency psychosocial programming in crisis settings and the long-term, community-based support girls need for sustained recovery.

Trauma-Informed Psychoeducation (TIPE)

- **Intervention:** Trauma-Informed Psychoeducation (TIPE)

- **Context:** Somali refugee adolescents in displacement settings

- **Approach:** Group-based trauma-informed psychoeducation sessions focused on emotional regulation, coping strategies, and resilience-building

- **Evaluation:** Pre- and post-program assessments measuring PTSD symptoms, coping abilities, and psychosocial functioning

- **Findings:** Significant reductions in PTSD symptoms and improved psychosocial outcomes among participants; highlighted the importance of adapting interventions to individual needs (Jettner et al., 2017)

Despite promising innovations, critical gaps remain. Longitudinal evidence on the durability of psychosocial gains is scarce, and very few programs are adapted to the realities of displacement, pastoralist mobility, or fragile service systems. Stigma around mental health continues to act as a major barrier to care-seeking. As key informants stressed, future efforts must prioritize multi-sectoral, culturally grounded interventions that address trauma, empowerment, and resilience simultaneously, rather than in isolation. Looking ahead, strengthening adolescent girls' health and psychosocial well-being will require investment in integrated, scalable approaches that account for the intersecting risks they face. Health, education, and protection programming must work together to build sustained psychosocial resilience, ensuring that girls can recover, adapt, and thrive despite ongoing adversity. Without such coordinated investment, progress on girls' well-being will remain partial and fragile.

4 Leveraging community structures, engaging local leaders, and collaborating with adolescent girls in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions

Building adolescent girls' resilience requires a multi-scale approach that engages households, communities, and broader systems. In fragile, climate-affected contexts, strong social networks, inclusive institutions, and protective policies are critical enablers of well-being. Evidence from the desk review and key informant interviews shows that when household members (e.g. parents, caregivers, and spouses) are engaged alongside local leaders through girls' clubs, community advisory committees, or norm-shifting dialogues, girls are more likely to stay in school, delay marriage, access services, and participate in economic life (Austrian et al., 2020; Bergstrom & Ozler, 2021).

Community-Based Girls' Clubs

- **Intervention:** Community-Based Girls' Clubs

- **Context:** Conflict-affected and climate-stressed pastoral areas in East Africa

- **Approach:** Established safe spaces for adolescent girls to receive vocational skills training, financial literacy education, peer mentorship, and referrals to services, while also engaging families and local leaders.

- **Evaluation:** Quasi-experimental design with comparison communities; qualitative assessments of community perceptions and support.

- **Findings:** Increased financial independence among girls, enhanced community support for delaying marriage, improved peer networks, and greater access to local services (Bergstrom & Ozler, 2021).

Across literature and interviews, there was broad agreement that adolescent-focused interventions are most sustainable when grounded in robust household and community support. Leveraging existing structures, such as local organizations, traditional networks, and informal support groups, helps embed programs within the social fabric of target communities. Engagement of local leaders, often trusted gatekeepers, ensures culturally relevance and community buy-in, increasing reach and effectiveness. Yet, these approaches are inconsistently applied, and many programs remain fragmented or narrowly focused on girls as individuals, limiting durability and long-term impact.

Programs such as GIRL-H illustrate the value of pairing direct support to girls with broader community engagement. Alongside SRH education, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship support for adolescent girls, the program engaged parents, caregivers, and community leaders through dialogue sessions and training workshops aimed at fostering enabling environments. These efforts helped shift attitudes around girls' education, early marriage, and financial independence, contributing to improved household support for girls' participation (IPSOS, 2024). Similarly, Community-Based Girls' Clubs created safe spaces that extended beyond individual skill-building to broader community mobilization. In pastoral and drought-affected regions, clubs provided vocational training, financial services access, and psychosocial support, while linking girls to community champions advocating for their protection and rights (Bergstrom & Ozler, 2021). Evaluations found that where clubs were embedded within existing community structures, their effects were stronger and more sustainable.

Key informants emphasized the fragility of community-based models when they are not linked to formal structures. One noted, "Community-based approaches have been essential in building trust and creating safe spaces where girls can learn, grow, and acquire practical skills at their own pace," but stressed that without stronger links to government systems, "these gains often fade once the project ends." Many community engagement strategies rely on short-term project cycles and lack the institutional backing to ensure continuity and scalability. Sustainability was viewed as tied to both community ownership and institutional support. As one informant shared, "Community ownership is key, but without government buy-in and funding, many of these initiatives can't survive beyond the project phase."[3]

Despite local successes, formal government uptake remains limited. Even when community-driven models succeed locally, they rarely influence policy reforms or secure integration into national systems. Weak inter-ministerial coordination, underfunded adolescent programs, and competing political priorities in fragile contexts present persistent barriers. Without stronger policy linkages, effective models risk being siloed or short-lived.

Looking ahead, more deliberate integration of adolescent resilience objectives into national development strategies, sectoral policies, and decentralized governance structures is needed. Building local government capacity, linking successful community initiatives to district-level planning processes, and advocating for adolescent-specific budget lines could help bridge the gap between community success and systemic change. Strengthening these linkages will be critical to ensuring that investments in adolescent girls' resilience endure beyond individual project timelines.

---

3   Placeholder for key informant quote reference

Looking Ahead

Strengthening the well-being and resilience of adolescent girls in climate- and conflict-affected pastoral areas of East and West Africa requires sustained investment in approaches that are evidence-based, context-responsive, and capable of addressing the layered risks these girls face. Insights from the desk review and key informant interviews highlight promising strategies across education, financial inclusion, health and psychosocial well-being, and community and systems support.

Looking ahead, five areas stand out as priorities for future investment, adaptation, and learning:

1 **Adapt and localize economic empowerment models:** Align vocational training with local labor markets and livelihood cycles, and ensure adolescent girls can meaningfully apply financial skills in their own contexts. Models should be responsive to the constraints and opportunities of pastoralist and fragile environments.

2 **Expand mental health and psychosocial support:** Develop integrated approaches that combine trauma-informed care with life skills, education, and community-based services. Strategies should address stigma and accessibility barriers, particularly for mobile and displaced populations, while exploring innovative ways to improve engagement and effectiveness.

3 **Strengthen education pathways:** Prioritize girls at risk of exclusion due to displacement, early marriage, or caregiving responsibilities. Interventions could include accelerated learning, mobile or remote delivery, and reintegration pathways for young mothers and married adolescents.

4 **Invest in integrated, cross-sectoral programming:** Address the interconnected needs of adolescent girls across education, health, financial, and protection domains. Programs should incorporate mechanisms to track cumulative impacts over the life course rather than focusing solely on short-term outputs.

5 **Bridge community-driven models with broader systems:** Strengthen linkages between local initiatives and policy or institutional frameworks to enhance durability and scale. Engage national and subnational systems to prioritize adolescent well-being in climate adaptation, education, social protection, and health strategies, while ensuring adolescent participation in decision-making.

Further research is needed to refine and test integrated models, particularly those linking psychosocial support with education and economic empowerment. Localized studies can help tailor interventions to diverse cultural and pastoralist contexts. Sustained government and donor engagement will be essential for scalability; programs that build on trusted community structures are more likely to gain acceptance but require broader policy support and long-term financing to ensure impacts endure.

Meaningful participation of adolescents in program design, implementation, and evaluation also emerged as a key priority. Interventions grounded in girls' lived experiences and aspirations are more likely to be relevant, effective, and sustainable. Longer-term studies will be critical to understand lasting impacts and inform adaptation over time.

The risks facing adolescent girls in climate- and conflict-affected pastoral areas of East and West Africa are likely to intensify. While the evidence base remains incomplete, early findings suggest that multi-dimensional, community-grounded interventions, particularly those that are adapted to local contexts and supported over time, show great potential. This report provides a starting point for identifying promising practices, persistent gaps, and areas where further investment and learning are needed to ensure that adolescent girls are not left behind in efforts to build resilience in fragile settings. Abdalhai, K. A., Mokitimi, S., & de Vries, P. J. (2024). Child and adolescent mental health services in Khartoum State: Sudan a desktop situational analysis.

REFERENCES

Austrian, Karen and Eunice N. Muthengi. 2013. "Safe and smart savings products for vulnerable adolescent girls in Kenya and Uganda: Evaluation report." Nairobi: Population Council.

Austrian, K., Soler-Hampejsek, E., Kangwana, B., Maddox, N., & Wado, Y. D. (2020). Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya.

Austrian, K., Soler-Hampejsek, E., Kangwana, B., Wado, Y. D., Abuya, B., & Maluccio, J. A. (2021). Impacts of two-year multisectoral cash plus programs on young adolescent girls' education, health, and economic outcomes: Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya (AGI-K) randomized trial.

Bergstrom, K., & Ozler, B. (2021). GIL Top Policy Lessons on Empowering Adolescent Girls.

Buehren, N., Chakravarty, S., Goldstein, M., Slavchevska, V., & Sulaiman, M. (2017). Adolescent Girls' Empowerment in Conflict-Affected Settings: Experimental Evidence from South Sudan.

Getanda, E. M., & Vostanis, P. (2020). Feasibility evaluation of psychosocial intervention for internally displaced youth in Kenya.

Jameel, A. L. (2024). Boosting Adolescent Girls Agency Through Life Skills Training.

Jettner, J. F., Warsame, A. H., Isse, M. M., Khoury, D., & Ross, A. I. (2017). Trauma-Informed Psychoeducation for Somali Refugee Youth in Urban Kenya: Effects on PTSD and Psychosocial Outcomes.

Kwauk, C., Cooke, J., Hara, E., & Pegram, J. (2019). Girls' education in climate strategies: Opportunities for improved policy and enhanced action in Nationally Determined Contributions.

Lawrence, K. C., & Falaye, A. O. (2020). Trauma-focused counselling and social effectiveness skills training interventions on impaired psychological functioning of internally displaced adolescents in Nigeria.

Mercy Corps. (2024). Girls Improving Resilience Through Livelihoods + Health (GIRL-H) Program.

Nchanji, E. B., Kamunye, K., & Ageyo, C. (2023). Thematic evidencing of youth-empowering interventions in livestock production systems in Sub-Sahara Africa: A systematic review.

OECD. (2018). Bridging the Digital Gender Divide; Include, Upskill, Innovate.

OECD. (2022). How fragile contexts affect the well-being and potential of women and girls.

Okello, J., Nakimuli-Mpungu, E., Klasen, F., Voss, C., Musisi, S., Broekaert, E., & Derluyn, I. (2015). The impact of attachment and depression symptoms on multiple risk behaviors in post-war adolescents in northern Uganda.

Richards, J., Foster, C., Townsend, N., & Bauman, A. (2014). Physical fitness and mental health impact of a sport-for-development intervention in a post-conflict setting: Randomised controlled trial nested within an observational study of adolescents in Gulu, Uganda.

Samuels, F., Jones, N., & Abu Hamad, B. (2017). Psychosocial support for adolescent girls in post-conflict settings: beyond a health systems approach. Health Policy and Planning, 32(suppl_5), v40–v51.

Singh JA, Siddiqi M, Parameshwar P, Chandra-Mouli V. World Health Organization Guidance on Ethical Considerations in Planning and Reviewing Research Studies on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Adolescents. J Adolesc Health. 2019 Apr;64(4):427-429. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.01.008. PMID: 30904091; PMCID: PMC6496912.

Spangaro, J., Adogu, C., Zwi, A. B., Ranmuthugala, G., & Powell Davies, G. (2015). Mechanisms underpinning interventions to reduce sexual violence in armed conflict: A realist-informed systematic review.

Stavropoulou, M. (2018). Interventions promoting adolescent girls' economic capabilities: What works? A rapid evidence review

UNESCO. 2020. Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all. Paris, UNESCO.

Wodon, Q., C. Male, A. Nayihouba, A. Onagoruwa, A. Savadogo, A. Yedan, J. Edmeades, A. Kes, N. John, L. Murithi, M. Steinhaus and S. Petroni (2017). Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report, Washington, DC: The World Bank and International Center for Research on Women.

Yotebieng, K. (2021). What we know (and do not know) about persistent social norms that serve as barriers to girls' access, participation, and achievement in education in eight sub-Saharan African countries.

ANNEX: MORE INFORMATION ON DESK REVIEW

The desk review initially identified 53 documents using targeted keywords that were applied across online databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar, as well as partner websites and Mercy Corps' digital library, to capture peer-reviewed articles, evaluation reports, and grey literature. Each document was evaluated to verify that it meets the inclusion criteria established in the review's methodology: relevance to the research question, consideration of adolescent girls' well-being and resilience outcomes, and alignment with the study's geographic scope. The reviewer examined abstracts of all documents, both those initially selected and those set aside, to ensure relevance to the study's objectives. A second reviewer cross-checked the lead reviewer's decisions. Based on this process, we narrowed down to our review to 24 documents. The documents were reviewed through thematic and/or content analysis, where reviewers extracted short summaries or raw information. The summarized insights were reviewed to identifying patterns, trends, and notable findings that are directly relevant to the study's objectives and research questions.

53 IDENTIFIED DOCUMENTS

Number of articles/documents identified and sourced from the Mercy Corps library and online search results

33 ELIGIBLE DOCUMENTS

Number of articles/documents that met inclusion criteria following first screening process and found to be eligible for screening

24 SCREENED DOCUMENTS

Number of articles/documents that focused exclusively on adolescent resilience programming, deemed relevant for review

24 INCLUDED DOCUMENTS

Number of AY programming documents, global guidance documents included in the desk review