

HEART

HIGH-QUALITY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR RESULTS



SUPPORT TO SIERRA LEONE ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT (SAGE) PROGRAMME: Scoping and design report

Authors: Dr Caroline M. Roseveare and Simitie Lavalay

27 March 2018

Acknowledgements

The consultants would like to thank all stakeholders who made time to meet with us and share their thoughts and ideas. Special thanks to the staff of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Concern Worldwide, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and Save the Children for facilitating our field missions, and to the Salone Adolescent Girls Network for hosting a round table discussion with its member organisations. We would also like to thank the Salone Network members who completed the short questionnaire providing information about their programmes.

This assessment is being carried out by HEART, a consortium of: Oxford Policy Management, EDT (Education Development Trust), IDS (Institute of Development Studies), HERA, WEDC, University of Leeds and LSTM (Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine), AGUA Consult, Mannion Daniels, Open University, Wise Development, Nutrition Works and supported by DFID. This report was managed by Oxford Policy Management.

The project manager is Meg Chappell and Team leader is Caroline Roseveare. The remaining team member is Simitie Laval. For further information contact Meg Chappell meg.chappell@opml.co.uk.

The contact point for the client is Rachael Freeth r-freeth@dfid.gov.uk The client reference number for the project is A1352.-

HEART

Clarendon House
52 Cornmarket St
Oxford OX1 3HJ
United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0) 1865 207333
Email: HEARTforEACDS@opml.co.uk

Executive summary

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) Sierra Leone Support to Adolescent Girls Empowerment Programme (SAGE) is an integrated programme to improve the lives of adolescent girls, responding to the multiple and interrelated disadvantages they face. It comprises two components: component one: delivery of integrated services for vulnerable adolescent girls through a safe spaces approach, including enhancing their access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education and services; and component two: support for the elimination of harmful traditional practices (HTP).

The overall objective of this assignment is a focus on component one and ensuring that SAGE redesign and implementation plans are based on a thorough understanding of the evidence base on adolescent girls' empowerment and the Sierra Leonean context. The methodology used combined a desk review of documentation and extensive stakeholder consultations at national, decentralised district and chiefdom levels to collect information about adolescent girls' programmes. Eliciting the views of the adolescent girls themselves was a priority.

The programmes being delivered by BRAC in Port Loko, Concern Worldwide, and Matei Empowerment Programme for Sustainable Development (Matcops) in Tonkolili, IRC in Kenema, and Save the Children in Freetown/Western Urban were explored in depth through two field missions. Together with information gathered at national level, the five programmes have been used as case studies. In addition, findings from a round table conversation with smaller civil society members of the Salone Adolescent Girls Network and the results of a short follow-up questionnaire provide insights into smaller relevant programmes.

The review of global and other country evidence shows that:

- the most effective safe space/girls' club interventions include a community engagement component. This not only ensures parental and community support for the safe spaces/clubs and for the girls participation in such, but can also contribute to changes in the way communities regard and treat girls;
- safe space/girls' clubs that combine interventions for building girls' social, health, and economic assets (rather than focusing on one or the other) have most to offer in terms of positive outcomes for girls; and
- changes in the wider legal and policy environment can be effected through girl-led advocacy and influencing interventions and social campaigns. These also enhance the collective capacities of girls by strengthening their leadership and mobilisation skills.

Evidence from our case studies demonstrate that international non-governmental organisation (INGO) adolescent programmes are reaching vulnerable adolescent girls (and, in one case, boys) through life skills training (LST) in and outside safe spaces/clubs in priority districts (i.e. localities where girls face significant social, health, and economic challenges). Funding permitting, most are in the process of attempting to expand their safe spaces/clubs.

Some key findings are:

- each of the case study programmes demonstrates different strengths and weaknesses, varying points of emphasis, and some interesting innovation;
- the quality of LST is variable, with some facilitators and safe space/club mentors demonstrating more knowledge and skills than others. Influencing factors are the experience and age of the individuals, the training they have received, and the LST materials they have to hand. Most are

following the national curriculum, even though the manuals with accompanying facilitators' guides have not yet been widely distributed; and

- some programmes are investing in interventions such as community conversations and outreach to secure broad based engagement in adolescent empowerment processes, including interventions to address HTPs.

Smaller Sierra Leone non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also delivering safe spaces/girls' clubs, but are constrained in terms of the funds they can command. The Salone Network itself lacks the necessary human and financial capacities at present to deliver its members' expectations. However, it is playing an important leadership and coordination role with technical and other support from the Population Council (PC), drawing also on its strategic partnership with Purposeful Productions (PP), which is providing some seed grants for network members.

Despite the rich landscape of adolescent girls' programming in Sierra Leone, a number of gaps have been identified:

- **an integrated approach to community engagement** whereby community members (particularly men and boys), traditional and religious leaders, and other community-based opinion leaders, potential Champions or 'trend setters' participate in tailored outreach sessions and facilitated community conversations around key issues such as teenage pregnancy, child marriage, and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Such an approach is being used, for example, by Concern and IRC, and could be extended under SAGE;
- **behaviour change communications campaigning** to change social norms about gender equality and adolescent girls' rights: an isolated and concrete example is the embryonic 'Pledge for Equality Campaign', which is being fostered by Concern in Tonkolili district. Due to its formative nature, it is not possible to evidence any impact on communities yet. However, the community we visited was enthusiastic about the fledging initiative. SAGE might consider investing in it with a view to broadening and upscaling it. This would be a cost-efficient way of piloting a small-scale, bottom-up behaviour change communications/ campaigning intervention to challenge negative public perceptions of adolescent girls, promote gender equality; and
- **national level influencing** to change law and policy towards a more conducive external environment does not appear to form a key part of adolescent girls' programmes. However, some of our international case study NGOs are members of the newly-established 'Community of Practice on Violence against Women and Girls', an informal coalition that is lobbying government and key decision makers to create more enabling policy and legal frameworks in Sierra Leone to better protect women and girls.¹

Rather than suggesting an alternative model to the safe space approach, our findings point to a SAGE model that is broader in focus and includes interventions to:

- a) **strengthen national-level capacities** (governmental and non-governmental) to lead, coordinate, and oversee adolescent girls' empowerment programming in Sierra Leone. Here, we recommend that SAGE strategically partners with the National Secretariat for the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy (made up of a number of relevant line ministries), and, with the Salone Network, given its rich membership base and coordination potential;

¹ The COP comprises IRC and other members of the Irish Consortium on GBV in Sierra Leone, the 50/50 Group and the Rainbo Initiative. It describes itself as "an alliance of committed partners collectively advocating to the Government of Sierra Leone and key decision-makers on creating positive change for women and girls in Sierra Leone, and providing information and evidence for high level advocacy inputs into the Parliamentary action committee on ending Violence Against Children and Women launched in August 2016". (Terms of Reference, 5 August 2017).

- b) **invest further in the creation and quality functioning of safe spaces/adolescent clubs** (possibly by building up from the base of existing or planned interventions), with a view over the life of SAGE to upscaling and/or replicating those which are identified through robust Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) as yielding the most positive outcomes for adolescent girls; and
- c) **broaden out SAGE to meet the above identified gaps**, i.e. integrated community engagement; girl-led influencing towards a more enabling environment; and a pilot behaviour change communications campaign possibly building on the above-mentioned Pledge for Equality Campaign.

Overall, rather than seeking to create a totally new programme, our recommendation is that SAGE **build on and broaden** existing programmes and structures, introducing additional or new approaches and interventions where there are gaps either in geographical coverage or approach. A number of specific recommendations are made in the report about the targeting of safe spaces/clubs; the content of training (both of mentors and girls); the inclusion of boys in adolescent girls programming; and the importance of establishing both quality standards and robust MEL systems, particularly where SAGE may decide to pilot particular interventions or approaches.

In terms of **delivery modalities and mechanisms**, our analysis suggests that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for one organisation to deliver SAGE single-handedly; and that for SAGE to draw full benefit from the rich diversity of programme approach and intervention mix, an adaptive model has much to commend it. Various options are presented and analysed in the report, with the recommendation that SAGE be managed by a management agency or consortium that includes a Grant Fund (possibly two-tiered) to meet the very different needs of the larger, mostly international, NGOs delivering adolescent girls programmes in the country, and Sierra Leone civil society organisations (CSOs) that are operating on a much smaller and sometimes more experimental scale. Although we see significant leadership and coordination roles for both the Teenage Pregnancy Secretariat and the Salone Network, and believe these will be invaluable partners for SAGE, neither is in a position currently to manage large funds.

Throughout the report recommendations are made for inception phase activities, including a more participatory and inclusive exercise to refine and develop the Preliminary Theory of Change (TOC) for SAGE, which is found at the end of the report.

Additional data and analysis is found in Annex A from the short questionnaire and consultations with stakeholders at national and decentralised levels.

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	i
Executive summary	ii
List of abbreviations	vi
1 Background and context	1
1.1 The SAGE programme	1
1.2 Design and scoping SAGE	1
1.3 Adolescent girls programming: some evidence	2
1.4 Government support to adolescent girls programming	4
2 Map and description of adolescent girl programming in Sierra Leone	6
2.1 Note on evidence collected	6
2.2 Safe spaces/girls' clubs	6
2.3 Salone Adolescent Girls Network	7
2.4 Capacity-building needs of potential SAGE IPs	8
3 Effectiveness of interventions: positive outcomes for adolescent girls?	10
3.1 Evidence of effectiveness	10
4 Shaping SAGE	15
4.1 Gaps in current programming and SAGE	15
4.2 Strengthening and enlarging the safe spaces model	16
4.3 Specific programme content recommendations	17
4.4 Recommended delivery mechanisms and delivery models	20
4.5 SAGE Theory of Change	20
Bibliography	24

List of abbreviations

Adolescent Friendly Services	AFS
Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Programme	AGEP
Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health	ASRH
Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee	BRAC
Basic Education Certificate Examination	BECE
German federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development	BMZ
Child Rights Act	CRA
Civil Society Organisation	CSO
Community Conversation Officer	CCO
Community of Practice	COP
Department for International Development	DFID
Council of Churches in Sierra Leone	CCSL
District Health Management Team	DHMT
Emerald Leadership Initiative Africa Network	ELI Africa
Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescent Girls	ELA
End Child Marriage	ECM
Fambul Initiative Network for Equality	FINE
Family Planning	FP
Family Support Unit	FSU
Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting	FGM/C
Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence Project	GAGE
Gender-Based Violence	GBV
Gina's Children Foundation	GCF
Girls' Access to Education	GATE
Girls' Education Challenge	GEC
Government of Sierra Leone'	GOSL
Harmful Traditional Practices	HTP
Health, Opportunities, Protection, Empowerment	HOPE

Implementing Partner	IP
International Non-Governmental Organisation	INGO
International Rescue Committee	IRC
Intimate Partner Violence	IPV
Life Skills Training	LST
Men's' Action Group	MAG
Matei Initiative Empowerment Program for Sustainable Development	MATCOPS
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	MEST
Ministry of Health and Sanitation	MoHS
Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs	MSWGCA
Monitoring and Evaluation	M&E
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning	MEL
National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy	TP Secretariat
Non-Governmental Organisation	NGO
Oxford Policy Management	OPM
Primary Health Unit	PHU
Promoting Rights and Obligations, Transformation, Education, Commitment, and Tolerance	PROTECT
Purposeful Productions	PP
Strengthening Accountability and Building Inclusion	SABI
Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	SGBV
Sexual and Reproductive Health	SRH
Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights	SRHR
Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey	SLDHS
Sierra Leone Adolescent Girls' Empowerment	SAGE
Sustainable Development Goal	SDG
Teenage Pregnancy	TP
Technical Assistance	TA
Theory of Change	TOC

Terms of Reference	TOR
Technical and Vocational Education Centre	TVEC
United Nations Children's Fund	UNICEF
United Nations Population Fund	UNFPA
Village Loans and Savings Associations	VLSA
Violence against Children	VAC
Violence against Women and Girls	VAWG
Voices 4 Change	V4C
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	WASH
West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination	WASSCE
Women's Action Groups	WAG
Youth Action for Self-Development	YAS

1 Background and context

1.1 The SAGE programme

DFID's overarching policy in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment is set out in its new *Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: Her Potential, Our Future* (DFID, 2018). The Vision calls for a sustained focus on existing commitments for girls and women, along with a greater focus on ensuring no girl or woman is left behind, including those with disabilities. It demands a more effective response to gender equality across the board, contributing to accelerated delivery of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and development outcomes.

Improving the lives of girls and women is a priority for DFID Sierra Leone and its standalone programme: SAGE is designed to provide an integrated programme to improve the lives of adolescent girls, responding to the multiple and interrelated disadvantages they face. As set out in the Business Case Addendum, SAGE comprises:

- component one: delivery of integrated services for vulnerable adolescent girls through a safe spaces approach, including enhancing their access to SRH education and services; and
- component two: support to the elimination of HTP, largely through support to the Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL)'s National Strategy for the Reduction of FGM/C.

SAGE is expected to complement and support linkages with other sizeable DFID Sierra Leone investments in adolescent girls, particularly the Saving Lives and Girls' Access to Education (GATE) programmes, by reaching girls who are not in schools and linking them with adolescent-friendly SRH services in primary health units (PHU).

1.2 Design and scoping SAGE

A description of the scoping and design process is found at Annex B. As outlined in the Terms of Reference (Annex C), the overall objective of this assignment is a focus on component one and ensuring *that SAGE redesign and implementation plans are based on a thorough understanding of the evidence base on adolescent girls' empowerment and the Sierra Leonean context*. The methodology combined a desk review of documentation and extensive stakeholder consultations at national, decentralised district, and chiefdom levels (Annex D List of Institutional Stakeholders Consulted). Consultations allowed the team to ascertain the views and perceptions of adolescent girls and members of their communities. In total, 41 key institutional stakeholders and 304 beneficiaries were consulted (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: Number of stakeholders and beneficiaries consulted by forum

FORUM	Nat- ional	Port Loko	Tonkoli li	Tonkoli li	Kenem a	Wester n Urban	SUB TOTAL
National-level stakeholders consulted	29						29
District-level stakeholders consulted		3					3
Other NGOs consulted at district level		0	0	0	1		1
Implementing partner (IP) field officers		2	2	1	1	2	8
Safe space mentors		2		4	2	2	10
Adolescent girls- safe space members		37		119	20	19	195
Parents/community stakeholders		11	33	0	18	8	70
Mixed sex adolescents (Concern youth committee members)			25				25
Concern community volunteers/community conversation officers			4				4
SUB-TOTALS	29	55	64	124	42	31	345

Safe space/adolescent empowerment programmes delivered by BRAC in Port Loko, Concern Worldwide and Matcops in Tonkolili, the IRC in Kenema, and Save the Children International in Freetown, were explored in depth. A round table conversation was convened for the team by the Salone Adolescent Girls Network (Salone Network) with the representatives of its smaller civil society member organisations.

A preliminary TOC for SAGE component one has been developed and is found at the end of this report.

1.3 Adolescent girls programming: some evidence

1.3.1 Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE)

The GAGE project (2017a)² rigorous review of safe spaces and clubs, life skills programmes, and girls' wellbeing outcomes found 'substantial evidence of the positive impact of these programmes on girls' self-confidence and self-efficacy, their levels of knowledge of key issues, and on their attitudes to gender equality' (GAGE, 2017b:3).³ In addition, the review found evidence that a) some clubs had a positive impact on school retention and attainment; b) those with a focus on improving economic wellbeing through boosting savings or vocational training were largely successful, with some evidence to recommend inclusion of a life skills education component to boost the effectiveness of economic-focused activities; c) some evidence of club participants engagement with local officials in advocacy for improved services or to report the perpetrators of GBV; and d) programmes with most impact on gender-discriminatory practices (such as child marriage) worked with girls' parents and other community members to achieve change and boost girls' confidence and negotiating skills. GAGE makes a number of key recommendations that are relevant to SAGE design. These underline the importance of investing in the scale-up of safe spaces/girls' clubs and

² GAGE is a nine-year longitudinal research programme generating and communicating knowledge on good practice initiatives and policies that support adolescent girls in diverse contexts.

³ The review considered 63 studies into the empowerment impacts of 44 girls' or youth clubs and gender-equality-focused life skills programmes.

building in and sustaining engagement with family members to secure commitment to girls attendance and change discriminatory norms within communities. Essential, too, is support of adolescent boys' clubs and the encouragement of some mixed sessions with girls; this helps prevent negative backlash and challenge discriminatory attitudes, norms, and practices within the next generation of men. To sustain the new knowledge and confidence adolescent girls gain from their participation in clubs, training them as mentors or establishing alumnae groups or events should be explored (GAGE, 2017b:3).

In terms of building the economic assets of adolescent girls, GAGE found that interventions with a focus on improving economic wellbeing through boosting savings or vocational training were largely successful (GAGE, 2017b:1). It cites some evidence that including LST in the safe space/girls' club intervention boosts the effectiveness of economic-focused activities. More effective programmes typically use 'hooks' such as vocational training to encourage adolescent girls to join clubs and then to remain interested in them. The 'hook' is a spur to enhance skills and knowledge-building, maintains commitment to the programme, and creates a space for education on gender equality, rights, and empowerment processes (GAGE, 2017b:6). A full summary of the GAGE findings is found at Annex E.

1.3.2 Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Programme (AGEP): Zambia

Useful to the design of SAGE are a number of the findings from the summative evaluation of AGEP in Zambia, funded by DFID and implemented by the Population Council.⁴ Although this found inconclusive evidence of AGEP's impact on building adolescent girls' social assets, its findings suggest the importance of customising the curriculum to different contexts and age cohorts, of developing strategies to motivate attendance, of increasing inclusivity and supporting the role of mentors, and of ensuring community engagement. The importance of community and parental sensitisation work is also emphasised if health assets are to be built. In terms of economic assets, the evaluation found strong evidence that savings had a significant beneficial effect on both younger and older adolescent girls, although it was difficult to link this to the 'Girls' Dream' savings accounts and the distance to banks was found to be a key barrier, especially for rural girls. Key lessons include the importance of maintaining high-quality mentorship and of addressing challenges of sustained participation and community engagement (Mott Macdonald, 2017:3–4).

1.3.3 Voices for Change (V4C): empowering women and adolescent girls in Nigeria

This five-year V4C programme in Nigeria is described as being 'unique in the DFID portfolio', working to strengthen the enabling environment for women's and girls' empowerment by using innovative approaches to change social norms.⁵ Targeting a population of three million young men and women aged 16–25 across four states, interventions included a) the creation of physical and virtual safe spaces for adolescent girls and young women; b) an extensive programme of behaviour change communications using a popular social marketing approach centred around a lifestyle brand 'Purple' to promote gender equality; c) new forms of digital engagement; and d) targeted advocacy for changes in law and policy. There has been no independent summative evaluation as yet, but V4C's own results data show that the programme was effective in changing the gender attitudes and behaviours of 2.4 million youths (89% of the target population) at scale in at least one of three behavioural areas measured. It was most effective in changing attitudes and

⁴ AGEP was implemented in four provinces over a 24-month period, targeting 10,000 vulnerable adolescent girls in two age cohorts (10–14 years and 15–19 years). It included 'safe spaces' for life skills and financial education; vouchers for accessing age-appropriate ASRH services; and 'girl's dream' savings accounts.

⁵ With a budget of over £26 million, the five-year DFID-funded project is regarded by many as being a flagship gender equality programme.

behaviours towards women taking leadership positions and women's involvement in household decision making. V4C has generated a huge and invaluable resource base with a wide range of reports and evidence summaries. It is not clear; however, how much of the impact achieved is attributable to the particular package/mix of interventions used in the particular implementing contexts. Therefore, it is not easy to judge how amenable to replication it might be, or indeed whether or not impact might be achieved through adapting some of the specific interventions in Sierra Leone.

1.3.4 Lack of evaluation evidence: Sierra Leone adolescent programmes

It is important to stress that only BRAC and Restless Development (2017) provided us with any evaluation evidence. Most organisations informed us they have not conducted evaluations of their AGEPs. UN Agencies say they are not at liberty to share information concerning the performance of their IPs. The absence of evaluation evidence is reflected in the recommendations.

The above mentioned study by Bandiera *et al.* (2017) on the impact of the BRAC Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescent Girls (ELA) clubs on education and schooling for adolescent girls during the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone indicates that in Port Loko, Kambia, Moyamba, and Pujehun the intervention mitigated against the adverse impact of Ebola-induced disruptions and helped a significantly higher number of girls return to school once the crisis abated. The most important group to benefit was girls aged 12–15, whose enrolment dropped by 20% in control villages but remained unaffected in ELA communities (Bandiera *et al.*, 2017:3). The study concluded that this was due to the impact that the programme had on girls' control over their bodies and reduced exposure to sexual abuse and engagement in transactional sex. The loss of livelihoods brought by the crisis meant that a large number of very young girls had to engage in income-generating activities to support falling household incomes. In ELA villages, however, fewer girls were forced to resort to this coping strategy, and there was more investment in human capital after the crisis. The study concluded this was largely due to fewer girls permanently transitioning from education to employment, in that more ELA girls engaged in both education *and* employment (Bandiera *et al.*, 2017:15).

1.4 Government support to adolescent girls programming

As the lead Ministry for the promotion of gender equality and child rights, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) is committed to adolescent empowerment. However, it is hampered by the size of its mandate combined with low budgetary allocations, insufficient staff and equipment, and frequent changes in Ministerial leadership. Hence, the government has delegated most oversight and implementation for adolescent programming to the National Secretariat for the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy (TP Secretariat) set up in 2015.

The TP Secretariat is implementing the multi-sectoral National Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy (2013-2015), under the leadership of the President (GOSL, 2013) and has coordinated development of another National Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage (GOSL, 2017) which awaits Presidential sign off. Aside from setting a clear strategic direction, a key achievement is development by the Secretariat and the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS), with UNFPA support, of a full national curriculum for Life Skills Training (LST). There are two versions of the 'I am Somebody: Life Skills Manual' and accompanying Facilitators Guides launched in December 2017.⁶ The modules cover a wide range of different topics, including critical thinking, solving conflicts, hygiene, reproduction and sex, sexually-transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence (GBV), leadership and money matters. To date, the TP secretariat estimates that 482 people (some of whom are classed as

⁶ The manuals are segmented by age (9–13 and 14+) comprising between 10 and 11 modules, with each module extending to +/- 100 pages. The Facilitators Guides are +/- 124 pages each.

'Master Trainers') have been trained on how to use the life skills manuals and it is working with more than 40 NGOs, including the Salone Adolescent Girls Network, to train others. Some of our case study programmes had already developed their own LST materials before the TP secretariat's manuals were finalised, but are now incorporating the standardised messages and components into these. The Manuals do not yet contain specific modules on child marriage or Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (FGM/C). And, there are resource constraints impeding wide scale distribution of the manuals and facilitators guides. However, we believe that there is a need to synthesise these in a more 'user-friendly' style and format if they are to be used to train LST facilitators and safe space/club mentors. SAGE might consider investing in this process, engaging members of the Salone Network, and drawing on supplementary materials developed by Concern and IRC, for example.

The TP Secretariat lacks a budget quota, and has minimal staff (only one Coordinator and five support staff) with an office situated on MOHS premises. Nonetheless given the multi-faceted nature of adolescent girls' empowerment programming and the multi-sectoral nature of the TP Secretariat, we recommend that DFID SL considers it as the primary Government partner for SAGE implementation.

2 Map and description of adolescent girl programming in Sierra Leone

2.1 Note on evidence collected

Annex A to this report presents three tables as follows:

- **Table 1** maps safe spaces/girls' and boys' clubs by organisation, location, number, and sex of club members.
- **Table 2** information about the five case study programmes we looked at in depth during the field missions plotted against the Salone Network draft standards for safe spaces, including how adolescent safe space members were selected and the types of curriculum followed.
- **Table 3** summarises some relevant findings of the Sierra Leone Demographic Health Survey 2013 and plots these against geographical locations.

2.2 Safe spaces/girls' clubs

2.2.1 Fast-changing operating environment

A key finding is that adolescent girls programming using the safe spaces approach is volatile and changing fast. This is due to changes in donor priorities and the availability of funding and is evidenced by the changes that have taken place since the Salone Adolescent Girls Network (Salone Network) produced its map of safe spaces/girls' clubs in early 2017 and our scoping exercise undertaken a year later, in early 2018 (as detailed in Table 1 Annex A).

The Salone Network map estimates that the largest implementer of safe spaces/girls' clubs is **BRAC**. In 2017, BRAC provided 149 of the total 365 clubs (primarily in Pujehun, Moyamba, and Port Loko districts). It has now established/is in the process of establishing a total of 160 clubs catering for 4,800 adolescent girl members. The number of **Matcops** clubs has also increased significantly from 80 to 120 in the same Tonkolili and Koinadugu districts; currently catering for 2,400 members, with a planned increase to 3,600 members in 2018, funding permitting.

At the same time, **Restless Development**, which was the second largest implementer of safe spaces in 2017 (with 108 out of the 365 total number of clubs located across Sierra Leone), has decided to stop delivering these due to changes in its funding base combined with concerns about the sustainability of the safe space model. Other organisations that do not feature on the 2017 map are currently implementing clubs, including Gina's Children Foundation, the Children and Advocacy Forum, Pekin to Pekin, the Elmira Leadership Institute, Masterpiece Sierra Leone, and Youth Action for Self-Development, all members of the Salone Network.

2.2.2 Numbers of adolescent girls reached

Findings pertaining to national/Sierra Leone NGO programming are drawn primarily from the results of a short questionnaire (see Annex F) sent to Salone Network members, supplemented by the round table conversation we had with them. Matcops, which is delivering one of the five programmes we looked at in some depth, is also considered in this category because it is registered as a Sierra Leone NGO. However, in terms of the total number of girls reached (2,400), Matcops sits in third place among organisations reaching the largest numbers. The BRAC ELA clubs remain in first place, aiming to reach 4,800 girls; Concern Worldwide is second, reaching an estimated 3,663 girls.

2.2.3 Targeting the most vulnerable adolescent girls

All five interventions considered in depth have targeted particularly vulnerable adolescent girls and (in the case of Concern) boys. As can be seen from Table 2 at Annex A, some used the Population Council Girl Roster Tool, often verifying the suggested selection with their own methods, mainly to reduce numbers to manageable or affordable proportions. The Save intervention in Murray Town specifically targets adolescent mothers who had dropped out of school due to pregnancy. Concern has criteria to target vulnerable adolescents for participation in its LST. It specifically aims to include people with disabilities, and focal staff is trained in the use of sign language. However, it does not seem that there are as yet many direct beneficiaries of adolescent programming with disabilities; it will be important for SAGE to consider how best to ensure their active inclusion. We found that a significant proportion of the adolescent girls in all clubs were orphans (i.e., had lost their birth mother and father) or semi-orphans (i.e., had lost one or both parents), often as a result of the Ebola epidemic. Most clubs had a number of adolescent mothers among their members and had not separated them in the way that Save the Children does.

2.2.4 Funding for safe space approaches

In terms of funders, Save the Children is unusual in that three of its four projects to empower adolescent girls are funded by Private Donors or Trusts and Foundations (as is the BRAC ELA safe spaces intervention). Irish Aid is a significant funder of four large programmes, either directly or through UNFPA. Currently, DFID is funding Concern through an accountable grant that ends in December 2018, but conceivably could be continued in some form under SAGE. Relatively few organisations report having secure funding beyond 2018 or 2019. Hence, in terms of the INGOs and large Sierra Leone NGOs, there is scope to consider SAGE funding to enable some safe space and related adolescent programming to be up scaled in some districts and/or replicated in others. Although Save the Children funding appears to stretch further into the future because its programmes in this area are mostly young, even here there is scope to look at additional SAGE funding for some innovative interventions with 'married' (loosely defined) girls and adolescent mothers. Of the Sierra Leone NGOs, only Matcops supplied funding information: its adolescent girls' clubs are funded exclusively by UNFPA (July 2016–July 2018) under the ending child marriage (ECM) programme. Other much smaller (in terms of the scale of their safe space and spread of their operations) were quiet on this front, although the issue of the funding challenges many of them face was raised at the round table conversation.

Although we were unable to visit a Restless Development Youth Friendly Resource Centre to assess them more closely, it also appears they represent an interesting existing resource that, with further investment, might serve as an innovative pilot model. Certainly, we were impressed by the overall approach of Restless Development as a forward-thinking youth-run volunteer organisation.

2.3 Salone Adolescent Girls Network

With technical assistance (TA) from the Population Council and from UNFPA, the Salone Network was formed in 2016. It serves as a platform for local/Sierra Leonean and INGOs working with adolescent girls in the country. As part of the TP Secretariats' 2015 strategy, it aims to collaborate, share experiences, and adopt and test innovative methodologies and interventions (Salone Network, 2016). There are currently over 70 member organisations delivering safe spaces and clubs. As mentioned above, the Salone Network has developed draft standards for safe spaces, which we used as part of our scoping (see Table 2 Annex A). It has a Terms of Reference for its steering committee that includes representation of member organisations and international development partners, such as UNFPA, which currently hosts network meetings.

However, the Salone Network is resource-strapped, employing only a part-time coordinator/chairperson based in Freetown. She is a dynamic and quietly inspirational leader who also acts as a resource for the Population Council and PP, who provide office space for her. The network relies heavily on the Population Council for its own TA and for the TA it provides to members. The Population Council has, for example, been working intensively with Salone Network members around piloting the Girls Roster tool to select priority communities, safe space/club members, and facilitators nationwide.

As many of the network members are small and/or less well-profiled CSOs, they lack secure funding. This is a gap that the registered charity PP, led by a Sierra Leonean Co-Founder and Executive Director, is seeking to fill. Funded primarily by an American philanthropic foundation (NoVO), PP (for example) has recently provided seed grants through 'calls for proposals' to organisations operating in its two target districts, Moyamba and Koinadugu, for programmes focused on education, child marriage, and teenage pregnancy. As a strategic partner of the Salone Network,⁷ PP also works closely with the Population Council.

Member organisations envisage an expanded future role for the Salone Network. However, if SAGE is to support the network in fulfilling any of its members' wishes, a number of issues need to be explored in more depth, including:

- **Leadership and composition of the Salone Network secretariat:** a full-time coordinator to lead the network would be desirable, and there may be scope for considering the inclusion of adolescent girls in the secretariat, who with mentoring and on-the-job exposure could possibly assume future leadership roles.
- **Strategic partnership between the Salone Network and PP:** investment in the currently small grant-making function of the latter may be beneficial to smaller civil society network members, but this requires deeper appraisal than is possible here.
- **Meeting the Salone Network's need for technical assistance:** as above, there may be benefits to considering funding TA inputs to the Salone Network under SAGE, but this would need further appraisal, including of the Population Councils' continuing role in this regard.

2.4 Capacity-building needs of potential SAGE IPs

2.4.1 INGOs

An overall **key finding** is that three of the four INGOs with offices and adolescent empowerment programmes in Sierra Leone that we considered in depth currently have the requisite human, organisational, and infrastructural capacities required and established to implement adolescent empowerment programmes effectively. Their main constraint is insecure funding, as outlined in the previous section. In addition, most of these INGOs work in designated districts across Sierra Leone (for example, Concern in Tonkolili, IRC in Kenema, Kono and Kailahun, Save the Children in Pujehun and Kailahun, etc.), where they mostly have small field offices and programme staff; their capacity to upscale their programmes to new districts would require further appraisal. Certainly as things stand, none is in a position to take on a nationwide AGEP single-handed. However, as can be seen from Table 1 in Annex A, the organisations implementing our case study programmes

⁷ The current part-time coordinator of the Salone Network is also the network coordinator of PP. See <https://www.purposefulproductions.org/about-us> (accessed February 2018). PP describes itself as 'a movement building hub for adolescent girls in the global south' with three strategic focus areas: a) insights and influencing; b) convening and micro-grants; and c) media and communications.

have pretty good coverage of the priority areas between them (against the Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey (SLDHS) data (Table 3 Annex A).

BRAC represents a slightly different case in that it is still in the process of establishing its ELA girls' club programme in many of the priority districts. Before the Ebola epidemic it had worked at community level in some of these and plans to start up in a significant number of new localities. Hence, it might be in a position to deliver a nationwide girls' club programme alone. However, this would be on the basis of two assumptions: a) that SAGE is narrowly designed as a girls' club project only; and b) that SAGE focuses primarily on economic livelihoods (investment in increasing the economic assets of adolescent girls). While the economic assets component is a critically important one and there is some global evidence (from GAGE and BRAC's independent MEL unit) to suggest positive outcomes, we do not recommend that SAGE adopts such a narrow focus. Moreover, the evidence emphasises the importance of broader based community outreach and engagement which INGOs with a longer established presence in their select communities are arguably in a better position to provide on the basis of the trust already built.

2.4.2 National Sierra Leone NGOs

It is important to note that Matcops is registered as a Sierra Leone NGO, but in many ways the organisation more closely resembles a small INGO. Matcops is currently a UNFPA IP under the ECM and FGM/C global fund. The organisation appears to have the capacity (staff, skills and offices) to implement programmes to scale provided funding is provided in a timely manner. Currently, Matcops operations are confined to Koinadugu and Tonkolili districts; it is focusing quite narrowly on girls' clubs, with some potentially interesting community outreach work.

In terms of smaller Sierra Leone NGOs, many are currently delivering adolescent safe spaces/clubs; others not considered in any depth are engaged in relevant programming on adolescent and youth empowerment, including work with youth using the arts. With some institutional strengthening and capacity-building, it is expected that a number of these smaller local organisations will be able to contribute effectively to SAGE outcomes. It will be important to assess how the very recent PP 'call for proposals' for small grants pans out.

A key finding is that all IPs (regardless of their size or whether they are national or international) are struggling with the funding approach used in particular by the UN agencies. This is largely because this funding modality, which relies on 12-month work-planning (activity level), inhibits them from developing strategic, longer-term approaches to issues and problems that demand long-term solutions. Stop–start funding, many believe, detracts from effective programming.

In the event that DFID opts for our recommended management agency/consortium delivery model for SAGE, we recommend that the Terms of Reference specify undertaking a full capacity assessment during the inception phase. This would look at individual skills as well as at how to strengthen organisational and institutional capacities, including leadership and management (financial and programme) MEL systems.

3 Effectiveness of interventions: positive outcomes for adolescent girls?

3.1 Evidence of effectiveness

As assessment of the effectiveness (outcomes for adolescent girls) of interventions to promote AGEF, especially through the creation of safe spaces is challenging. As stressed above, there is a serious lack of evaluation evidence. This may in part be attributable to the fact that some organisations are implementing programmes on the basis of annual work-plans reporting against which is largely at activity rather than outcome level. In addition, much AGEF, particularly that using safe space approaches, is in a formative stage or being reintroduced following a necessary pause during the Ebola epoch.

3.1.1 Key findings: adolescent SRH

Findings from our consultations and case studies concerning adolescent SHR (ASHR) outcomes suggest the following:

- The five case study programmes all have ASRH components built into their interventions with adolescent girls, but these are more prominent in some than others depending on the overall focus of the programme. The ASRH topics are primarily delivered as part of LST except in the case of Concern where the programme itself is centred on ASRH.
- The quality of the ASRH life skills that are being 'taught' is variable. These are of poorest quality in safe spaces/ clubs that are newly created and/ or employ newly selected mentors/facilitators who are younger and less experienced. The age and experience of safe space/girls' club mentors appears to be an important factor influencing the quality of ASRH inputs.
- The duration and quality of mentor/ facilitator training varies, with some interventions including a standard mentor induction programme of +/- five days' duration in addition to some refresher training. The mentors of some safe spaces/ clubs have participated in learning exchanges with sister clubs which they rate highly since this provides opportunities to share experiences and ideas. The intensive ASRH facilitator training delivered by Concern is comprehensive in that the facilitators participate in a ten-week training programme on ASRH topics themselves before training others.
- There is a need to achieve a good balance between investment in training of mentors/ facilitators and the imperative to reach large numbers of adolescent girls through safe spaces/ clubs at speed.
- The use of innovative means to convey ASRH messages to girls in clubs such as 'community theatre'/drama, singing and dancing are positive in terms of raising girl's confidence and self-esteem.
- Opportunities for girls to discuss ASRH issues in depth appear to be greater in safe spaces/ clubs and other venues where sessions are delivered to segmented age groups and inputs are intensified for older girls (i.e. girls aged 14-19). Of the case study programmes only Concern provides ASRH training to boys and girls and it is of interest to note that some participants hold the view that all sessions should be conducted with both sexes jointly so that boys understand the issues in full.
- Our case study programme implementers informed us that a major challenge they face concerns the lack of availability of services to meet newly generated demand, in particular for contraceptive commodities and STI/HIV treatment, counselling etc. Major supply challenges were widely reported to exist in government health facilities (hospitals and PHUs). As a result a

number of safe space/ club providers are partnering with Marie Stopes or the Family Planning Association to ensure that adolescent girls have access to these commodities if they so choose.

- A good practice example is Concern's short term response to the chronic shortages of contraceptive supplies across Tonkolili which was to collaborate with Marie Stopes International to provide commodities through mobile outreach services to adolescent boys and girls in two communities where the LSF rollout was being conducted. This was complemented by a longer term strategy whereby Concern presented monitoring data to a DHMT meeting on the issue of stocks of STI drugs and contraceptive supplies at health facilities (Concern, 2017, p:3).
- District Health Management Team (DHMT) personnel in Port Loko confirmed the severe shortage of contraceptive commodities and other essential drugs which are in particular demand from adolescents. They also informed us that it is sometimes difficult for the "adolescent friendly" services to access what small supplies there may be because adolescents are not viewed as a priority.

3.1.2 Key findings: GBV prevention and response

Evidence from our discussions with institutional stakeholders at national, district, and community level suggests the following.

- The current emphasis of most organisations delivering adolescent girls programmes has shifted away from GBV/violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevention and response to ECM and preventing teenage pregnancy. However, most organisations are dealing with GBV as it arises in individual cases coming to the attention of its club mentors. This is most obvious with organisations such as **IRC**, where GBV prevention and response has been a major programme focus for many years.
- In individual cases of sexual violence, there appear to be systems in place for safe space/club mentors to make referrals to the Family Support Unit (FSU). In some cases, the FSU visit the clubs on a regular basis to discuss GBV. The FSU is also reported to have joined some community outreach sessions to review referral pathways for the survivors of sexual violence with communities. A greater number of challenges surround intimate partner violence (IPV) and wife-beating, to which (as evidenced in the 2013 SLDHS) adolescent girls, especially young wives, are particularly vulnerable. At present there is a tension between the law and practice. The Domestic Violence Act specifies that it is for the courts to decide which cases should go to alternative dispute resolution, but on the ground only extreme cases of violence (where there is bleeding, broken bones or wounding) are referred to the FSU, in addition to sexual violence cases, which are now said to be more routinely referred to the police.
- It will be important for SAGE to ensure that LST facilitators and safe space/club mentors are provided with information about the existing domestic violence and sexual offence laws and the rights these give young women and girls, as well as on the appropriate referral mechanisms and how best to support affected club members. A simple guide could be fairly readily developed under SAGE in partnership with an organisation such as IRC, which has particular expertise to share here.

3.1.3 Key findings: education and schooling

In terms of the effectiveness of safe spaces/clubs in encouraging girls into school, especially the transition of adolescent mothers back to school, information was obtained from our case study organisations, stakeholder consultations, and Salone Network members. The following **findings** have implications for SAGE design.

- Given the poor quality of some LST provided in some girls' clubs, even if the intervention contributes to the improved school enrolment of girls, this does not necessarily mean that re-enrolled girls will perform well when back at school. It is important therefore for SAGE to find some way of tracking the progress of club girls who transition back into school and those who enrol in school for the first time. Hence, the emphasis on using safe spaces/clubs as a vehicle to encourage girls into or back to school differs across providers, in part depending on their primary objectives (e.g., less emphasis is given to this in clubs established primarily to build economic assets or to improve SRH outcomes for adolescents).
- Currently some adolescent programmes include material or financial support to some school girls who are members of safe spaces/clubs with variations in the types and level of this support. A **programme policy decision** is needed on whether any form of material support should be provided to club girls who are school-goers, and, if so, who will benefit from it. The best ways to communicate the policy to minimise tension follow on from this. It could be argued that since girls' safe space/club members are in most cases selected on the basis of their vulnerability, the policy should provide some form of material support to *all* those who transition back to school, or to none. This decision needs to be made for the SAGE programme, having appraised the cost and budgetary implications of different options and their relative social costs and benefits. For example, some safe space/club implementers believe that this support provides a real instrumental incentive for girls participation in the clubs; others hold the view that participation should be driven by other motives, such as the desire to acquire new knowledge and skills and benefit from socialisation with peers.

3.1.4 Access to economic assets, including vocational skills training

Some **key findings** and implications for SAGE design are as follows.

- Several of our case study NGOs are implementing vocational skills training as a component of their girls' clubs and are encouraging small-scale savings and loans schemes among older adolescent girls. We noted, however, that virtually all the skills training is centred on traditional, gender-stereotyped skills such as tie dying, soap making, hairdressing, catering, and tailoring. Little thought appears to have been given to what modern, marketable skills out-of-school adolescent girls might need to enable them to earn sustainable incomes. In the main, skills development interventions provide an alternative to enrolment on a government accredited vocational skills training course.
- Some safe spaces/clubs are already implementing small-scale savings and loans schemes with their members (e.g. Save the Children). Others have relevant past programme experience of Village Loans and Savings Associations (VSLA) and support for small-scale, community enterprise (e.g. IRC working through its women's action groups). Yet others plan large-scale programming in this area, (e.g. BRAC ELA).
- Care will need to be taken under SAGE to ensure that the types of skills learnt on vocational training programmes match the income-generating expectations of the adolescent girls concerned. Otherwise many are likely to be disappointed. Some of Oxfam's project ideas bring an innovative new dynamic into the traditional skills training sphere and deserve further consideration once SAGE is up and running, as do examples trialled by Restless Development.

3.1.5 Key findings: ECM and FGM/C

Some **key findings** and implications for SAGE design are as follows.

- A number of our case study programmes and those of the Salone network members embed elements to address HTP (such as a child marriage and FGM/C) in their wider adolescent

empowerment programmes (in particular Concern Worldwide) and safe spaces/clubs (Matcops, IRC).

- It is important to note that, of the seven Sierra Leone NGOs and smaller Salone Network members delivering safe spaces, for which we have information, five explicitly state that they are working to reduce child marriage; two of these five (Child Welfare Society and Lift Sierra Leone) say they are also working to reduce FGM/C or to promote zero tolerance of FGM/C.
- Building on existing examples (and there are likely to be more from DFID's Global Fund programme), an inception phase task of SAGE should be to review these more comprehensively to identify entry points where traction could be achieved fairly easily. Integrating or embedding interventions to address FGM/C in particular into wider programmes has the benefit of allowing the complex interrelationships between different harmful practices themselves (such as child marriage and FGM/C) to be addressed. Closely-linked issues, such as adolescent pregnancy and violence against adolescent wives/partners, can then also be tackled holistically.

3.1.6 Key findings: attitudinal, behavioural, and social norm change

Some **key findings** are as follows.

- Many of the organisations we considered for this SAGE scoping and design are attempting to change established patterns of behaviour. Girls are being encouraged to avoid pregnancy and protect themselves from sexually-transmitted infections; to say no to early marriage or to FGM/C; and to choose to return to school or to embark on a vocational training course. Adolescent boys in Concern's life skills programme and associated structures (e.g. the youth committee) are changing their attitudes and behaviour with positive effect, as the data from its annual donor reports and our observations from the field mission indicate. This also holds true for the boys in the clubs delivered by Fine Salone, although no evaluation data is available.
- While the emphasis on the prevention of GBV, child marriage, and FGM/C is rightly placed, we noted some challenges with use of this concept in relation to teenage pregnancy. We were concerned to see negative messaging at play in some girls' clubs in that, for example, adolescent mothers were singled out as 'bad examples' of behaviour that should not be repeated or emulated. Such stigmatisation clearly does not help raise the self-esteem of the individuals concerned, which is badly needed given the negative attitudes some of these girls and young women encounter in wider society and at school. More emphasis could be given to the concept of the 'right to choose' (for example, in relation to contraception), which is more empowering in this context than that of 'prevention'.
- More broadly, some IPs (especially IRC, Concern, and Fine Salone) are working consistently with men and boys in the wider community to change attitudes and behaviour. Save the Children has just completed a baseline survey for its new programme of safe spaces targeting only 'married' adolescents in Pujehun (defined loosely to include intimate relationships), looking in particular at social norms and behaviour. Once out, the results of this survey will serve as a useful resource to inform wider programming around adolescent empowerment and safe spaces/clubs.

Implications for SAGE

- We noted that both the messages delivered to adolescents in safe space/clubs and the confidence and assertiveness of their members is influenced by the approach of their facilitators and mentors. Behind them, no doubt, is the approach of the NGO that trains and 'employs' them. This underlines the importance of selecting the right IPs and facilitators or mentors and 'getting mentor training right' to ensure the most positive SAGE outcomes.

- We found little evidence that gender transformational, social norms change approaches are being systematically employed in interventions to change attitudes and behaviour. This is a gap that warrants further consideration for potential integration into SAGE. So, too, does the importance not simply of promoting male engagement but of assessing different 'men and masculinities' approaches for possible integration. These are possible SAGE inception phase tasks.

4 Shaping SAGE

4.1 Gaps in current programming and SAGE

This scoping and design process has suggested complementarities between SAGE (the main purpose of which is *to support the social and economic empowerment of vulnerable adolescent girls in Sierra Leone*) and current adolescent girls' empowerment programming.

We have also identified a number of gaps, as follows.

- The Salone Network draft standards on the design and operation of safe spaces⁸, which are under development with Population Council support and TA, emphasise the importance of **community engagement** at the start of safe space programme implementation when identifying potential locations and members. However, our findings suggest that the emphasis on community engagement needs to be present at the outset and sustained throughout safe space/adolescent club implementation. This approach is endorsed by the global and country specific evidence presented above. It implies more than periodically convening 'parents' or care-givers of adolescent safe space/club members. Rather, it calls for an integrated approach whereby community members (particularly men and boys) and traditional, religious, and other community-based opinion leaders, potential champions, or 'trend setters' participate in tailored outreach sessions and facilitated community conversations around key issues such as teenage pregnancy, child marriage, and FGM/C. Such an approach is being used, for example, by Concern and IRC, and could be extended under SAGE.
- A second gap is the absence of **behaviour change communications campaigning** to shift social norms and behaviour impeding gender equality and respect for adolescent girls' rights. An isolated and concrete example is Concern's embryonic 'Pledge for Equality Campaign' in Tonkolili communities, an idea emanating from the communities themselves. Each has an Equality Committee, with members identified by the community, providing a link to the campaign. The idea behind it is very simple: a large board is nailed to a wall, and individuals voluntarily put paint on their hands and make an imprint on the board whilst making an open pledge for equality in the way women/ girls, men/ boys treat each other. Concern has such a board on its office premises, and we saw a similar one in the Makelleh community when we visited. Due to its formative nature, it is not yet possible to evidence any impact on communities, but the community we visited was enthusiastic about this initiative. However, global DFID guidance on shifting social norms emphasises that public pledges can play an important part in efforts to change negative social norms since they "directly address individual beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour within a group" (Alexander-Scott, 2016:24). Moreover, it suggests that coordinated pledges are effective as they encourage groups to make a collective pledge to change. SAGE might consider investment in this initiative with a view to broadening and upscaling it. This would certainly be a cost-efficient way of piloting a small-scale, bottom-up behaviour change campaigning intervention. However, this would be different from the above mentioned V4C intervention in Nigeria, for example, which hinged on the expertise and input of an expert social marketing entity.
- Most interventions of the programmes we have considered are focused at the community level, which is important, because this is where adolescent girls are located and face daily barriers to achieving their full potential. However, the wider legal and policy environment exerts a powerful, albeit sometimes more remote and less tangible influence on them. We did not find examples of adolescent girls' programmes that are seriously investing in **influencing** work to

⁸ The Draft Standards cover all aspects of a safe space intervention, including community selection and entry; meeting spaces; selection, remuneration and induction of mentors; age segmentation of participants; regularity of sessions; attendance; curriculum; and management and supervision.

change national law and policy. PP cites one of its three core areas of work as being 'insights and influencing'. It produces research reports summarising the stories and experiences of disadvantaged girls and uses these to advocate for girls rights at the local, national and global levels.⁹ The IRC 'Raising Voices: Promoting Solidarity and Leadership for Women and Girls in Sierra Leone'" project in collaboration with the 50/50 Group aims to empower adolescent girls through community based advocacy training to pursue their potential, free from violence and inequality. In addition, the newly-established 'Community of Practice to Prevent VAWG' is an alliance of committed partners collectively advocating with Government and key decision makers to create positive change for women and girls. It also aims to provide information and evidence for high level advocacy inputs into the Parliamentary Action Committee on ending VAWG, launched in August 2016.¹⁰ Bringing these initiatives together with a clear focus is something to be considered under SAGE and could draw on the successful experience of DFIDs V4C programme in Nigeria. This combined influencing activities aimed at policy and legal reform alongside wider social norm change. The focus was on enactment of legislation outlawing traditional harmful practices (THP), including FGM/C and wife beating; and Gender and Equal Opportunities (Alexander-Scott, 2016:26).

- The Life Skills Manuals do not have specific modules on child marriage, FGM/C, or the three Gender Acts.¹¹ Bearing in mind political sensitivities, this is a gap SAGE might help to fill once the GOSL strategy paper on the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage has been signed off (GOSL, 2017).¹² In the meantime, LST facilitators and safe space/club mentors should be encouraged to incorporate these topics into their curricula using materials already developed by organisations such as IRC.

In addition to the above, we recommend some improvements to current delivery of the safe space model below.

4.2 Strengthening and enlarging the safe spaces model

The Terms of Reference for this scoping and design allow the consultants to consider possible alternatives to the safe space approach. However, rather than suggest such an alternative, we believe the available evidence points to a model for SAGE that includes the following elements, which are broader than a focus on safe spaces/clubs:

- strengthening national-level capacities** (governmental and non-governmental) to lead coordinate and oversee adolescent girls' empowerment programming in Sierra Leone. Here, we recommend that SAGE partners first and foremost with the TP secretariat (which is made up of a number of relevant line ministries) and, second, with the Salone Network, given its rich membership base and coordination potential;
- investing further in the creation and quality functioning of safe spaces/adolescent clubs** (possibly by building up from the base of existing or planned interventions) with a view over the life of SAGE to upscaling and/or replicating those which are identified through robust MEL as yielding the most positive outcomes for adolescent girls; and

⁹ See <https://www.purposefulproductions.org/insights-influencing> [accessed March 2018].

¹⁰ The COP comprises IRC and other members of the Irish Consortium on GBV in Sierra Leone, the 50/50 Group and the Rainbo Initiative. It describes itself as "an alliance of committed partners collectively advocating to the Government of Sierra Leone and key decision-makers on creating positive change for women and girls in Sierra Leone, and providing information and evidence for high level advocacy inputs into the Parliamentary action committee on ending Violence Against Children and Women launched in August 2016". (Terms of Reference, 5 August 2017).

¹¹ The Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2009, the Devolution of Estates Act 2007, and the Domestic Violence Act 2007.

¹² Following reviews in 2017 of conflicting child marriage provisions in the law, a National Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage has been developed and is awaiting signature by the President.

- c) **broadening out the safe space/girls' club model to integrate additional components:** first, incorporating systematic approaches to community engagement into the basic programme model. This implies an early (inception phase) review of different approaches to community engagement and effectiveness in terms of their potential to change negative social norms and behaviour. The review would draw, not only on evidence from other countries, but also on the experience of the relatively small number of NGOs in Sierra Leone working intensively with specific communities from a long established base of trust. Second, we recommend that SAGE invests in the community-based Concern Pledge for Equality Campaign as a community driven behaviour change communication intervention. The rationale for this is that evidence from other countries¹³ demonstrates that combining peer-to-peer activities with a community based, behaviour change communications intervention is more effective in developing gender equitable ideas among adolescents than the former delivered in isolation (Alexander-Scott, 2016:28-29). This does not necessarily mean that SAGE should not also consider the relative costs and benefits of a larger scale investment in a national level behaviour change communications/ social norms marketing campaign such as the “colour purple” campaign under V4C in Nigeria.¹⁴ Third, a policy influencing component should be integrated into SAGE starting once again at the community level and drawing on IRC expertise and experience.

4.3 Specific programme content recommendations

The scoping and design process we have undertaken suggests that SAGE will provide continuity in adolescent girls' empowerment programming. However, rather than seeking to create a totally new programme, SAGE should rather build on and in some cases broaden existing programmes and structures, introducing additional or new programme approaches and interventions where there are gaps either in geographical coverage or approach.

4.3.1 Safe spaces/clubs

Target districts: in terms of geographical locations, **Koinadugu** (North) and **Pujehun** (South) feature prominently as disadvantaged districts in the SLDHS 2013. **Moyamba** (South) has also been identified by the Population Council Girls' Roster tool as a key district. In addition, the South and Eastern regions display high rates of teenage pregnancy and early motherhood. The map in Table 1 at Annex A also highlights the fact that there are few, if any, safe spaces/clubs in **Bonthe** (South), **Kenema** (East), **Karene** (North West), **Falaba** (North West), and **Western Urban** districts. It is therefore recommended that SAGE consider these nine districts as options for the implementation of new interventions.

Target group: Although it is not yet clear what direction the DFID GATE programme will move in, it seems sensible for SAGE to focus on safe spaces/clubs for out-of-school girls. Identification of the most vulnerable girls in different communities is possible using the Population Council Girls' Roster tool or by relying on SLDHS 2013 data. All the safe spaces and wider programmes we looked at in depth which had used the Girls Roster tool appeared to have selected the most vulnerable girls in terms of fragmented family structures, early marriage, and the effects of the Ebola epidemic.

¹³ Program H and Program M have been positively evaluated in Brazil, Jamaica, Mexico and Nicaragua for their ability to change attitudes and behaviour among youth. Results of a small quasi-experimental study of different combinations of Program H in three low-income communities in Brazil found that: a) at the intervention sites a significantly larger proportion of respondents support gender equitable ideas at six months and one year post intervention, compared to the control group; and b) the change was often greater for those exposed to the combination of group education activities and the community-based behaviour change communications/ social marketing campaign.

¹⁴ The concepts of community based “behaviour change campaign” and “social marketing campaign” tend to be used synonymously.

Age segmentation and mentors: best practice requires that the spaces be age segmented, preferably into two groups (aged 9–13 and 14–19). There needs to be a mentor for each group, and we recommend the mentor should be at least 19 years old, since younger mentors appear to lack the necessary maturity and experience to perform their roles effectively and we doubt that this can be significantly tackled through any amount of training. We also recommend that the mentors receive a monthly stipend of a set amount and that all organisations delivering safe space interventions agree and then adhere to this sum. Ongoing training, supervision (performance management) and feedback, increased opportunities for learning and experience, and exchange with others is essential to ensure improved delivery of LST by young mentors, peer educators, and facilitators of adolescent clubs. The more experienced organisations implementing this could be encouraged to share their learning, skills, and experience with smaller, less experienced organisations (and *vice versa*). This might be accomplished through the creation of a learning forum, for example.

4.3.2 Programme interventions

In addition, to the recommendations we have made in terms of broadening out the scope of SAGE so that it is not limited to safe spaces alone, our findings suggest the following:

(i) Training components for safe spaces/clubs: the SAGE supported safe spaces should ideally include LST (including age appropriate ASRH), basic literacy and numeracy, financial literacy, information on the Gender Acts, HTPs, and the complex social norms underpinning them, and advocacy components. Depending on the target group, additional topics could be included from the IP's own resource materials. The existing TP secretariat national curriculum and Life Skills Manuals are a valuable resource and could be the starting point for developing new streamlined training materials for SAGE safe spaces. A decision is needed about whether to make these materials available in audio format in local languages. The programmes that have included information about the Gender Acts (IRC, Matcops) and advocacy appear to produce more rounded and assertive adolescent girls. Also, the Concern ASRH programme shows that, when topics and programmes are taught in a holistic manner, underlying social norms can be gradually addressed.

(ii) Time for games/sports and socialising: the above-mentioned systematic review by GAGE found that successful programmes allowed sufficient time for girls in safe spaces/clubs to relax and socialise in addition to providing structured learning. Games and sports also made the programmes more interesting and improved attendance rates (Marcus *et al.*, 2017a:3). The BRAC spaces include this component, which is appreciated by the members.

(iii) Economic empowerment/skills training: GAGE found that programmes encouraging economic activity are most effective with older adolescents, although savings programmes are appreciated across a wider age range (Marcus *et al.*, 2017a:2). Skills training could be targeted at girls who cannot go back to school and should be wider, more imaginative and better orientated to local markets than the traditional, gender-stereotyped training currently provided. Oxfam and Restless Development's innovative ideas on skills and new business ideas could be considered. Oxfam has several schemes (i) providing their women beneficiaries with solar powered motorised tricycles for use as mobile catering shops; (ii) setting up a commercial motorbike company with all female riders; and (iii) buy charcoal wonder stoves for women to use for catering. RD is running a "launchpad champion" project at community level whereby the adolescent girls sell sanitary pads at cheap prices for minimal profit.

(iv) Inclusion of interventions targeting boys and men: it is important that SAGE also includes activities for boys. The Restless Development review strongly recommended that boys should also have the opportunity to benefit from SRH services (Restless Development, 2017:6). FINE Sierra

Leone's approach demonstrates how boys can help to create a safer environment for girls. Further, regular meetings for parents/guardians, community stakeholders, and the husbands or partners of school girls are equally necessary as suggested by the GAGE review. This is particularly important in changing perceptions of clubs as places for girls to gossip or as a threat to local cultures and traditions to being seen as valuable places for learning new skills and knowledge (Marcus *et al.*, 2017a:2). This positive perception was also observed in the Concern ASRH programme and mentioned at the IRC meeting at Largo.

(iv) Strengthening the Salone Adolescent Girls Network: our findings suggest that a civil society coordinating body or another support structure is needed to help provide consistent, coherent, and effective support for adolescent girls in Sierra Leone. The Salone Network, although its secretariat is presently understaffed and under-resourced, does have the potential to take up such a role with some investment to build its capacities. As stated by the network members during the round table conversation, it could provide coordination and information-sharing, capacity development for smaller member organisations (through linking into more established member organisations), and standard setting and guidance in terms of the evidence-based requirements of quality interventions (including, but not necessarily limited to, safe spaces). There is already a draft Safe Space standards document that could be developed and refined into a policy document.

The outcome would be more open, consistent, quality programming for adolescent girls. SAGE would be required to provide funding to support a small, but effective adolescent girl-led Salone Network Secretariat with a budget to cover its running costs as well as the costs of convening learning fora and exchanges, etc. The Salone Steering Committee membership would need to be revised so that regional representation is included; the inclusion of international development partners/funding agencies should be reviewed to allow for an appropriate balance between autonomy and national ownership on the one hand, and TA and other support on the other.

(vi) Greater use of social media: although not mentioned by stakeholders as an important and popular tool in adolescent empowerment programming, **Restless Development** is pioneering some interesting work on this front under its Strengthening Accountability and Building Inclusion (SABI) project to monitor service delivery within priority sectors in communities. **Concern** also advertises its own use of social media and requests others to link in. Given the high usage rates of mobile phone technology in Sierra Leone, the use of social media warrants more attention under SAGE in terms of a medium for peer to peer interaction (e.g. formation of whats app groups for those who have mobile phones) and behaviour change communications and campaigning. Such interventions will need to be carefully assessed during the inception phase.

(vii) More robust MEL: evidence from other programmes, especially the V4C programme in Nigeria, suggests that any attempt to change social norms and behaviour requires adaptive programming, including flexible and robust systems to capture learning, use evidence to influence the programme direction and influence policy makers and decision makers. What shape or form such MEL systems might take in Sierra Leone is a bigger question. Restless Development, for example suggests an enhanced role for local academic institutions in contrast to BRAC which has its own 'independent monitoring and evaluation (M&E) arm'. IP perceptions about how best to capture evidence differ. Some believe that qualitative 'story telling' has more to offer than randomised control trials. Different approaches and methodologies have different contributions to make, but these are limited when they are organisation/intervention specific. A key future role for a more capacitated Salone Network may well lie in coordinating sector wide approaches to capture learning from different types of intervention and intervention packages and provide credible quality control.

4.4 Recommended delivery mechanisms and delivery models

4.4.1 SAGE delivery mechanisms

From the analysis presented above, it is clear that it would be difficult (if not impossible) for one organisation single-handedly to deliver SAGE. This is especially so if the programme is to include investment in the quality and perhaps quantity of safe spaces/clubs, in addition to behaviour change communications and national level influencing work.

A multi-faceted AGEP could, in theory, be delivered through a Memorandum of Understanding with a UN agency. However, it would still need a range of different IPs if the rich diversity in approach that is already evident is to be captured and put to good use. A number of DFID-managed accountable grants with larger (mostly international) NGOs is a real option. However, this would require additional DFID personnel to manage effectively, which seems improbable given tight DFID administration budgets. . Moreover, the creation of a Grants Fund under a management agency/consortium has the potential to broaden the scope of partners able to contribute to different components of SAGE by including smaller, more local organisations, especially if this has a two-tiered structure (i.e. small and larger grants).

4.4.2 SAGE delivery models: some options

Bearing in mind the above and the findings of this scoping and design exercise, we have considered four options or models whereby the SAGE programme could be delivered. These are as follows: (1) DFID management; (2) contracting out to a managing agent/consortium; (3) a memorandum of understanding with UNFPA and/or UNICEF; or (4) a hybrid model combining elements of (1) and (3).

Option (2) is preferred. Overall, it is judged this will meet SAGE needs and deliver the requisite combination of strong programme management; the ability to manage a relatively complex programme with multiple partners of different capacities using different approaches; the flexibility to deploy technical expertise, additional programme staff and resources as needed; and greater value for money overall, given performance-based contracting and the ability to rely on short-term experts.

The rationale is also influenced by our view that delivery of an integrated programme would be enhanced if the two SAGE components are treated as interrelated and complimentary. In programme terms, this makes sense, as it is difficult to separate out or isolate HTP (such as child marriage and FGM/C) either from each other or from broader issues affecting the wellbeing of adolescent girls in Sierra Leone, especially their SRH and formal schooling, which are impacted by early marriage and pregnancy. Indeed, the evidence we have gathered suggests that some organisations are already addressing these issues through LST discussions and related community outreach work. From the perspective of delivery, therefore, an integrated and holistic model drawing together the two SAGE components and positively exploiting natural synergies appears to have most to offer.

4.5 SAGE Theory of Change

The Preliminary theory of change (TOC) for the SAGE programme is presented in both narrative and diagrammatic form below. We recommend that a SAGE inception phase activity is to refine and develop this together with IPs.

Essentially, the SAGE programme TOC is that, by working at the outcome level to strengthen the social, health, and economic assets of adolescent girls, SAGE will effectively contribute to the medium term impact of *social and economic empowerment of vulnerable adolescent girls in Sierra Leone*. Over a longer timeframe, it will thereby also contribute to reduced rates of early marriage, GBV, teenage pregnancies, FGM/C, and gender-based violence.

To achieve effective outcomes for adolescent girls, a number of different, interrelated interventions (i.e. a package of interventions) is needed. These interventions are summarised below.

Safe spaces/clubs: interventions to boost the number and quality of out of school safe spaces/girls' clubs will specifically target vulnerable adolescent girls. They will be segmented appropriately according to age; employ well trained voluntary mentors and use a robustly-designed curriculum. In addition, on a smaller scale SAGE interventions will target adolescent boys (e.g., through interventions to create or sustain adolescent boys' clubs or similar).

Community engagement: interventions to secure wider community engagement, understanding, and support are also necessary. These will include work to engage and inform key gate-keepers such as teachers, health workers, customary and religious leaders, and the police in the adolescent girls' empowerment programming. By broadening the reach of the individual interventions and conceptualising them as dynamically interrelated, the programme theory is that girl safe space/club members will be able to enjoy more positive and egalitarian relations with their male peers (i.e., adolescent boys, partners, and husbands) and male adults at home and in their communities. These broader interventions will help positively change the way girls are regarded and treated at home and in their community.

The proactive participation of adolescent girls in influencing: the programme theory also holds that interventions to enhance adolescent girl's participation in influencing for changes in the wider legal and policy environment will increase their confidence and give them a louder voice and strengthen girls' collective capabilities. It will also help to make their specific needs and aspirations more visible as these are gradually but increasingly reflected in government policy and law making.

Community based behaviour change communications/ campaigning: interventions will help to change social norms governing how adolescent girls (and indeed boys) are perceived in the family and wider community and enable progress to be made towards more gender equitable ideas. Using community radio and publicity materials including social media as communications tools would widen the audience reach.

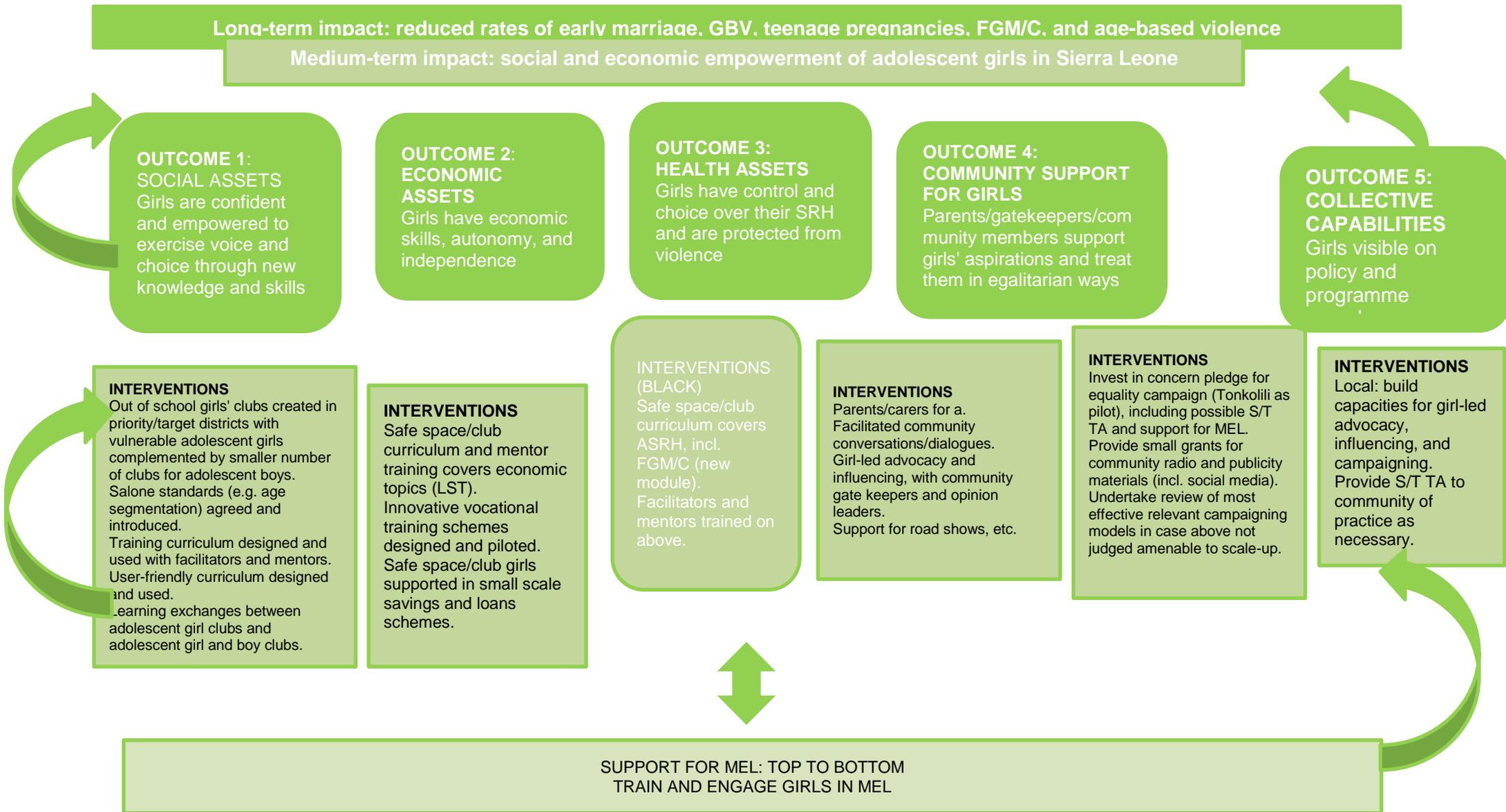
Leadership, coordination, and standard setting: this is essential if maximum programme effectiveness (at outcome level) and impact is to be achieved. The Salone Network needs to function effectively so that the adolescent girls programme as a whole in Sierra Leone translates into 'the sum of the parts adding up to more than their individual elements'.

The programme theory holds that the above interventions will contribute to the five outcomes:

1. *social assets:* adolescent girls are confident and empowered with knowledge and skills, to exercise voice and choice. Adolescent boys are gender sensitive and understanding of girls needs and aspirations;
2. *economic assets:* adolescent girls gain economic skills, autonomy and independence;
3. *health assets:* adolescent girls have more control and choice over their SRH and are protected from violence;

4. *communities*: parents/carers and community members support adolescent girls needs and treat them in egalitarian ways; and
5. *collective capabilities*: adolescent girls are visible on policy and programme agendas.

The diagram below sets out the Preliminary SAGE Programme TOC.



Bibliography

- Alexander-Scott, M. *et al.* (2016) 'DFID Guidance Note: Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)', London, VAWG Helpdesk. Available from www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/507845/Shifting-Social-Norms-tackle-Violence-against-Women-Girls3.pdf [accessed February 2018].
- Bandiera O.N. *et al.* (2017) 'Women's Empowerment and Aggregate Shocks: Evidence from an RCT in Ebola-hit Sierra Leone', Report for International Growth Centre, October.
- Bransky, R. *et al.* (2017) 'Child Marriage In Sierra Leone and Guinea Cultural Roots And Girl Centred Solutions', Purposeful Productions. Available from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/1770d8_a9bc1ddb4c8a4c1c8c72b41626002932.pdf [accessed March 2018].
- Concern Worldwide (2017) 'UK Aid Direct Annual Review, April 2016–March 2017', April.
- Concern Worldwide (2017) 'Draft Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health Mid-year narrative report', April–September 2017, October.
- DFID (2017) 'Annual Review, November–December 2015', December. Available from <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-202370/documents/> [accessed February 2018].
- DFID (2018) 'Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: Her Potential, Our Future', March 2018. Available from www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-strategic-vision-for-gender-equality-her-potential-our-future [accessed March 2018].
- Fine Sierra Leone (2017) 'Hope Project: Annual Report, 2016/17'.
- Government of Sierra Leone National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy (2013) 'Let Girls be Girls, Not Mothers: National Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy', Sierra Leone. Available from http://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/Sierra_Leone_National_Strategy_for_the_Reduction_of_Teenage_Pregnancy.pdf [accessed January 2018].
- Heise, L (2011) What Works to Prevent Partner Violence? (Version 2.0), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London.
- Innovations for Poverty Action. (undated) 'Study Summary: Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents in Sierra Leone'. Available from www.poverty-action.org/printpdf/7481 [accessed February 2018].
- Inspiring a Generation (2017) 'Voices for Change, 2013–2017'. Available from www.v4c-nigeria.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/1630-V4C-IAG-Brochure_FINAL-for-web.pdf [accessed February 2018].
- International Growth Centre (2015) Available from www.theigc.org/project/Ebola-impact-economic-lives-of-adolescent-girls/ [accessed February 2018].
- Marcus, M. *et al.* (2017a) 'Girls' clubs, life skills programmes and girls' wellbeing outcomes', GAGE Rigorous Review, Overseas Development Institute, London, September. Available from www.gage.odi.org/publications/rigorous-review-girls-clubs-life-skills-programmes [accessed February 2018].
- Marcus, R. *et al.* (2017b) 'Girls' clubs and life skills programmes: positive potential, unanswered questions', GAGE Policy Brief, Overseas Development Institute, London, September. Available from www.gage.odi.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GAGE%20Girls%20Club%20Policy%20Brief%20-%20WEB.pdf [accessed February 2018].
- Mott MacDonald Evaluation Team (2017) 'Adolescent Girls' empowerment Programme, Zambia: End Term Evaluation Report', Volume I: Main Report, Mott Macdonald, January. Available from www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/607393/Evaluation-of_Adolescent-Girls-Empowerment-Programme.pdf [accessed February 2018].

- Purposeful Productions. See: www.purposefulproductions.org/about-us [accessed February 2018].
- Remme, M. *et al.* (2015) 'Approaches to scale-up and assessing cost-effectiveness of programmes to prevent violence against women and girls', *What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls: Evidence Reviews*, Paper 4, September.
- Restless Development (2017) 'Health, Opportunities, Protection, Empowerment Programme Final Project Assessment', September.
- Salone Adolescent Girls Network (2016) 'Concept Paper'.
- Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF International (2014) 'Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2013', Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: SSL and ICF International. Available from <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR297/FR297.pdf> [accessed February 2018].
- UNICEF (2014) 'Sierra Leone Country programme document, 2015–2018'.