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## **SWEDD & COVID-19: Opportunities and risks for adolescent girls**

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# **SWEDD & COVID-19** **OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS** **FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS**

May 19, 2020

“The Sahel is the youngest region in the world. As a source of innovation and creativity, youth is an asset that should not be underestimated. Young people and women play an immeasurable role in building the foundations of tomorrow’s world, and we should expect changes in the social norms and values that guide them. Access to education, healthcare, employment, and training will make more of a difference than ever if we want to see the Sahel countries progress towards shared, lasting, and sustainable growth. Harnessing the demographic dividend is an opportunity Africa can’t pass up.”

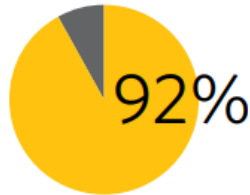


Mabingue Ngom

UNFPA Regional Director

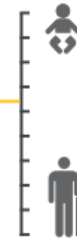
West and Central Africa Regional Office

# SAHEL

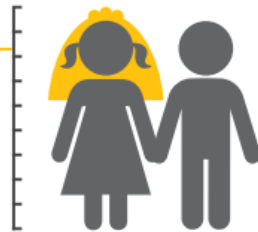


THE RATIO OF  
DEPENDENT CHILDREN  
(<15 YEARS)  
COMPARED TO THE  
WORKING-AGE  
POPULATION

MEDIAN AGE



MEDIAN AGE AT 1<sup>ST</sup> MARRIAGE



USAGE RATE OF MODERN  
CONTRACEPTIVES

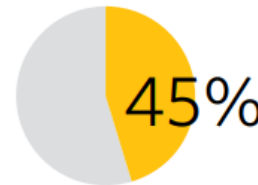


9%

NUMBER OF CHILDREN  
AVERAGE PER WOMAN



6.2



BIRTHS  
ATTENDED  
BY QUALIFIED  
PERSONNEL



606 maternal deaths  
PER 100,000 LIVE BIRTHS

1. Learn from other crises: outbreaks, e.g., Ebola, about disruption of health systems leading to supply shortages, decrease of SRH & other health services, less demand
2. Direct (infection) & indirect (COVID-19 response) threats across sectors
3. Unpack implications for adolescent girls across priority outcome areas: health, education, livelihoods, etc.
4. Consider adolescent girl-specific opportunities & population-wide opportunities inclusive of girls
5. Learn from experiments & experience across regions
  - Distance support for AG including phoning
  - Leverage mentor capacity
  - Work with communities to prepare & adapt to COVID-19 safety regulations
  - Explore safe & feasible adaptations for safe space formats
6. Commit to learning alongside action
7. Ensure safeguarding; don't proceed if chance of increasing risk

# Anecdotal Observations of Risk:

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## SWEDD Region

### Burkina Faso:

« La crise de COVID-19 affecte malheureusement beaucoup les jeunes filles au Burkina. Du fait de cette pandémie, nombreuses sont les jeunes filles qui sont livrées à elles même. A Niangoloko par exemple, village situé dans la région des cascades au Burkina Faso, 60 cas de grossesses ont été enregistré depuis le début la crise.

Un autre exemple pour illustrer; est celui d'une jeune fille désespérée qui, pendant l'année scolaire, se nourrit uniquement des repas de la cantine. Comme les écoles sont fermées, elle est allée négocier des habits à laver chez son voisin afin d'avoir quelque revenu. vous vous imaginez les risques auxquels peut s'exposer une jeune fille en allant laver des habits chez un homme adulte pour être payée afin d'avoir de quoi manger... »

### Mali

“Some girls have access to teleteaching (TT), they have TV and electricity, but many do not follow. The program in Mali is only for exam classes (9th, 12th grades). Some parents consider the school closure as more free time to increase girls’ chores, so they can not “watch” TV [i.e. TT]. Some girls are sent in the market to sell goods (more at risk of harassment and exposure to unhealthy habits, may influence drop out). Some parents and children do not see TT as necessary or useful. Some students don’t have a support system to understand the lessons. The program themselves are flawed (mistakes from English and math). And government did not make much announcement and sensitization.”

# Pathways of COVID-19 risk and opportunity for adolescent girls: Sharing work in progress

- Work of **Adolescent Girl Investment Plan (AGIP)** initiative
  - Plan-International, Population Council, Girls not Brides, ICRW, ODI, others
- Girl-specific work framed within gender equity goals & taking account of political economy
  - COVID-19 effects illustrate (exacerbate) gendered risks for adolescents
- Reflects age-specific needs, risks & capacities of girls at different stages in adolescence & early adulthood
- Recognizes intersectionality: risks not equitably experienced; gendered risks intersect with location (locally/globally), SES, disability, marital status

# COVID-19 affects outcomes seven outcome areas for adolescent girls

Priority risks to:

1. Health
2. Education
3. Livelihoods
4. Violence
5. Water & Sanitation
6. Transport
7. Technology for connectivity

The following slides include illustrative *potential* opportunities to promote adolescent girls' voice, choice & agency & reduce threats, including in the longer-term (“build back better”)

- Encompass both girl-targeted & population-wide approaches that include girls

NOTE: The following slides are in ***DRAFT***.



**HEALTH THREAT:** Disease pandemic w/out vaccine or cure; potential to overwhelm health services; novelty causes urgency; longer-term systemic health system threats.

## RISKS TO AGs



COVID-19 transmission from home caregiving; generic messaging doesn't address girls' PPE need



Heavy domestic care burden for girls exacerbates time poverty



Disruption of non-COVID health services & products including SRH increases infective disease, suppresses demand for health services



Long-term reliance on girls as caregivers



Extended limits on safe abortion

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGs



Girls/young women-cum-jr. community health workers, handwashing promoters, case detectors, distributors of face masks, etc.



Girl group programming as platform for health education, behavior change promotion, life skills, resilience



More investment in community health worker programs & non-facility-based primary/SRH care & self-care

**EDUCATION THREAT:** School closures; longer-term, dropouts & decreased girls' enrollment.

**RISKS TO AGs**



Poor quality of/limited access to alternative learning (radio, online).



Girls lose social support of school-mates.



Income & gender disparity in access to alternative/online learning, tutoring, etc.



More child marriage in absence of schooling



Increased early/unintended pregnancies & exploitative relationships



Where school scarce resource, increased gender disparity in enrollment

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGs**



Tailor alternative learning to promote girls' participation



Community & teacher/ principal education & mobilization on girls' right to education, support to legal advocates



Informal schooling for CSE & on-ramp to school; additional supports to continue girls' schooling including schooling stipends

**LIVELIHOODS THREAT:** Lockdowns cause business closures, unemployment; longer-term economic threat from unemployment, diversion of funds from social programs.

## RISKS TO AGs



Exacerbates/reifies inequitable distribution of household reproductive labor, time poverty



Girls as “everyone’s credit card”; push into informal sector w/less security, more risks from work & labor migration; less attention to long-term skills-building or training

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGs



Jobs for young women as community preparedness agents; new cadres of community-based workers encompassed in public works programs



Girl group programming as platform for market-driven income generation.



Community roles may improve perceived value of girls/ normative effects

**VIOLENCE THREAT:** More violence especially at home; justice, medical, social services limited & informal social support/sanctioning out of reach (differs for married girls).

## RISKS TO AGs



Travel restrictions, lockdowns, quarantines exacerbate risk of many forms of violence & perception, also fear of violence



Threats to safety, bodily integrity, mental health; fear of retribution/reluctance to intervene w/out justice measures



Breakdown of social cohesion in communities leads to fear of community violence, restrictions on girls' movement & access to resources



Increase in harmful traditional practices due to family concerns re. shame, stigma in health-care seeking, diversion of enforcement against FGM/C.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGs



Increase access to violence hotlines for reporting, safe homes/shelters & transportation; increase support for legal services; tailor SGBV survivor care to adolescent girls.



Girl-centered planning for safe access to community resources



Development of community GBV response/ reporting/ support strategies

**WATER & SANITATION THREAT:** Prevention emphasizes hand washing; lack of community resources, water shortages, inequitable access to supplies/resources.

## RISKS TO AGs



COVID infection risk in homes (esp. w/hygiene threats in caregiving) & crowded water points



Generic messaging fails to address girls'/other caregivers' increased water use needs, equipment distribution privileges male users & excludes girls



Heightened work burden on girls for gathering water



Demand on scarce water sources increases other health risks

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGs



Girls/young women as handwashing educators & promoters



Equipment distribution targets girls as primary users



Women in leadership roles in community-based WASH infrastructure investments & or training, employment in WASH management; encompass in public works programs



Increased commitment to safe, equitable access to community water sources; development of community mobilization strategies

**TRANSPORT THREAT:** Lockdown limits transportation; longer-term public transportation disruption from economic effects, austerity measures.

## RISKS TO AGs



Travelling long, isolated distances using riskier-than-usual forms of transport increases sexual violence



Reduces married girls' recourse/ options in face of intimate partner violence

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGs



Incorporate provision of safe transportation into services for SGBV survivors



Investments in woman-managed transportation (e.g. safe rides & woman-run taxi companies) contribute to increased safe earning opportunities, enable young women to participate in training or employment further from home



Gender & age-responsive transport-oriented public works employment targets young women

**TECHNOLOGY THREAT:** Digital connectivity is a lifeline under lockdown; digital gender & context divides exacerbate inequalities.

## RISKS TO AGs



Girls are low in household power w/less mobile, internet access



High cost of data/airtime & electricity increase girls' dependence on men for access



Increasing gender, SES, etc., inequity in info. access, social connections, electronic media skills

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGs



Innovation in interventions for critical media literacy, safe social media use interventions for adolescent girls.



Emergence of tech. innovations, solar power sources, etc. for girls to leverage for empowerment & development.



Increased importance of social media/technology during crisis as opening for engaging caregivers in new programs to support girls' access & safe use of tech

# **What is being done to support & protect AGs during COVID-19 Crisis?**



## What's being done: Adapt to the 'New Normal'

- Trialing modified safe space format to protect mentors and participants
  - Benin, Batonga Foundation
    - Pilot testing modified safe space “mini clubs” which meet outside, where participants sit far apart in circle, with mentor in center.\*
    - Mentors wear masks
    - Activities and games do not involve touch
    - Additional information distributed via weekly radio broadcasts (mentors and girls using their voices to record messages)
    - (New pilot, results not available)

*\*Note: in Benin, community transmission is limited to Cotonou (economic capital); these groups are not conducted in Cotonou*

# What's being done: Connecting by phone

- Engaging with AGs from program beneficiary pool by phone
  - Ethiopia, Population Council (Biruh Tesfa For All)
  - Bangladesh, Population Council
  - Mozambique (Girl Move Academy)

## PILOT TEST OF CALLS TO GIRLS WHO PROVIDED THEIR OWN PHONE NUMBER

- Received contact numbers (with complete information) from 1,728 girls
- Only 13% of girls said the number was their own
- Pilot-tested calling 71 girls\* who said number was their own:
  - 22 (31%) were willing to talk and rescheduled a session
  - 23 phones were off
  - 7 phones were not answered
  - 6 phones were a wrong number
  - 6 phones were invalid number
  - 4 phones girls were away (and not with their phones)
  - 3 refusals when someone else answered the phone

\*Based on data collected by Population Council at registration

### Interviewer notes from pilot test of calls:

*[Beneficiary] is able to talk anytime of the day. The background was very noisy. She seems excited about talking more.*

*The former employer of [beneficiary] owns this number. [Beneficiary] left her job about 4 months ago. The lady did not want to give me [the beneficiary's] current phone number although she has it. The woman became very abrupt when she heard I was connected with the project.*

*[Beneficiary] did not seem very comfortable speaking but she said that she is able to talk anytime of the day and confirmed that the number is her own mobile.*

*[Mother of beneficiary] told me that she gave up her daughter up about 6 years ago to the government because she could not raise her anymore. [She] called back later and said she has another intellectually disabled daughter and that she is sorry she didn't disclose this during our initial phone call.*

# Lesson from Biruh Tesfa For All: Caution in phoning AGs

## USING MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES IS NOT ALWAYS FEASIBLE OR IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF GIRLS

- Patterns of mobile phone ownership vary significantly across settings and sub-groups
  - Programmers should not assume mobile phone ownership, let alone smart phones
  - Frequent power outages and challenge to keep phones charged
- Contacting marginalized girls such as child domestic workers through mobile phone may create additional risks
- More than availability of soap and water: Information needed on marginalized girls and household dynamics :
  - Are previously confined domestic workers being sent out of the house in the time of COVID-19 and face additional risk?
  - Are girls expected to care for sick family members or employers?
  - How is economic hardship during COVID-19 affecting child domestic workers? Are they losing their jobs? Not being paid? Given less to eat?
  - More details on mobile phone contact collected up front (owner of phone, best times to call, permission to receive calls, ability to keep phones charged, etc.)

Keeping in contact guidance from DFID/Girls' Education Challenge: [https://dfid-gec-api.s3.amazonaws.com/production/assets/36/GEC\\_Keeping\\_in\\_Contact\\_with\\_Girls\\_-\\_COVID-19\\_guidance.pdf](https://dfid-gec-api.s3.amazonaws.com/production/assets/36/GEC_Keeping_in_Contact_with_Girls_-_COVID-19_guidance.pdf)

- Mobilizing mentors to engage communities safely
  - Mozambique (Girl Move Academy)
    - Distribution of health info, hygiene kits and plans for crisis communication (prior to lockdown)
    - Delivery of health messaging via loudspeaker
  - US Indigenous Populations, Population Council (IMAGEN)
    - Mentors using social media to connect with AGs and combat misinformation about COVID-19 prevention/cures
    - Conduct mapping to target supplies to households in need (testing, food, hygiene etc.)

## What's being done: Support Communities

- Mobilizing to provide communities with logistics and support to protect themselves
  - Haiti, Center for the Arts in Haiti
    - Installation of hand washing stations in communities and providing information on good hand hygiene
    - Sewing face masks to be distributed
    - Conducting seminars on COVID-19

# Recommendations to take account of adolescent girls in current pandemic

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- Essential to consider gender & role of gender norms, inequitable power relations
- Accommodate AG differences based on age, socio-economic status, location; recognize intersectionality of risk
- Unpack pathways of COVID-19 risks for adolescent girls
  - Direct risks of infection & indirect risks of response
- What works for adult women may not work for adolescents; mitigate risk of increasing vulnerability
- Commit to evidence & learning



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