

Speech: The 12+ Adolescent Girls Empowerment Programme (2013-2017)

12+ girls are agents of change, picked as representatives in local and national fora to speak up for girls' rights at school and at community events.

12+ is an innovative and ambitious mentorship and safe-space programme, which aims to empower vulnerable 11 year old girls across Rwanda to become informed decision makers and to have more voice, choice and control over their lives. In a context where girls spend up to 12 hours per week on domestic work, including collection of water and firewood, in addition to their school work, and have few positive female role models to follow, the 12+ programme provides them with an opportunity to develop friendships, play games, learn new skills and build their self-esteem. The programme also teaches girls about safety, prevention of GBV and provides them with knowledge on sexual and reproductive health.

Over a ten month period, groups of 25 girls meet every weekend in safe spaces within their community, where they are guided by two mentors (female role models aged between 18-25) to take part in fun learning activities to cover a diverse curriculum of life skills. These include issues around sexual and reproductive health, financial literacy, gender based violence, nutrition and education, with learning in the safe spaces complemented by 'learning journeys' and visits to local banks, health centres, secondary schools and kitchen gardens.

The program has been managed by the Rwandan Ministry of Health and delivered by three implementing agencies (Imbuto Foundation, World Relief Rwanda and Caritas) across 133 sectors in all 30 districts of Rwanda. With funds from DFID (£6.36m), and with support from the Girl Effect and the Nike Foundation in quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation, the 12+ programme reached 12,000 girls during its initial year (2014-5); scaled up to 40,000 girls in this second year (2015-6), and reached a further 40,000 girls in this third and final year (2016-7). Plans are now underway to develop a second (five year) phase of the programme from 2018-2023, management of which will shift from Ministry of Health to Rwanda's Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion for this second phase.

Results so far are showing positive impacts on girls' self-esteem, confidence, knowledge and behavior. 12+ girls already acting as agents of change, are being picked as representatives in local and national fora, are speaking up for girls' rights at Umuganda, at school, at community events. Out-of-school girls are also seen to be returning to full time education. There is also evidence that parents are changing, participating in learning journeys, supporting 12+ graduates, forming parents' committees, savings groups and friendship circles of their own. A two year evaluation is underway, which is gathering data from a control group as well as girls in

the 12+ programme, and is measuring the extent to which the programme affects girls social, health and economic assets.