What Girls Need to Grow: Lessons for Social Change Philanthropy

Impact Report No. 2
The Girls’ Project

This important study underscores the tremendous impact that grassroots funding has in supporting girls to overcome existing cultural and institutional barriers to their education and economic opportunity, and, most significantly, how to address the root causes of these barriers. The Global Fund for Women, along with its partner agencies, has recognized the importance of working closely with girls, hearing their stories and daily struggles, and engaging them in the process from program design to implementation. The report’s highlighted strategies for social change philanthropy are pearls of wisdom for all grantmakers, emphasizing a holistic, sustainable approach to improving the lives of women and girls, now and well into the future. These women leaders are our hope to bring about positive social, cultural, economic and political change at a local, regional and national level.

—Ruth W. Messinger, President / Executive Director, American Jewish World Service
The Global Fund for Women makes grants to seed, strengthen and link women’s rights groups overseas. We envision a just and democratic world where women and men participate equally in all aspects of society. We are part of a global women’s movement that is rooted in a commitment to justice and an appreciation of the value of women’s experience. We value local expertise and believe that women themselves know best how to determine their needs and propose solutions for lasting change. The way in which we do our work is as important as what we do. This philosophy is reflected in our respectful and responsive style of grantmaking and fundraising.

BACKGROUND ON THE GIRLS’ PROJECT

This report summarizes and synthesizes the key findings of the Global Fund for Women’s Girls’ Reflection and Evaluation Project (The Girls’ Project). The Girls’ Project is an analysis of the impact of 40 Global Fund for Women grantee organizations on the lives of girls in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia and the Americas. The research was supported by a multi-year grant from the Oak Foundation and conducted during 2001-2002 by Strategic Philanthropy, Ltd. The report was supported by grants from the Oak Foundation and the Summit Charitable Foundation.

The Global Fund for Women is one of few progressive, international grantmaking foundations with a strong focus on advancing the human rights of women and girls. Since 1998, the Global Fund has made significant investments in girls’ education as part of its commitment to achieving gender parity and equal opportunity for all children. Between 1998 and 2003, the Global Fund awarded $1,943,935 to 74 organizations in 37 countries working directly to improve the lives of girls. Seventy-nine percent of monies granted to girls’ educational programs were made possible through support from the Preston Education Fund for Girls. Administered by the Global Fund for Women, the Preston Fund finances efforts to increase girls’ access, retention and achievement in primary school, and improve the quality of girls’ primary school education.
WHAT GIRLS NEED TO GROW:
LESSONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE PHILANTHROPY

Table of Contents

2 Introduction: Girls Hold Up (More Than) Half the Sky—The Girls’ Project

4 The Girls’ Reflection and Evaluation Project
4 The Grantees
5 The Girls

6 The Role of Funders: Listening to Social Change Grantees
6 Key Findings from the Girls’ Project Grantees

7 Learning from Girls: The Impact of Social Change Philanthropy
7 Key Findings from Girls

8 Funding That Really Works for Girls: Challenges and Strategies
8 Challenges for Girls
8 Challenges for Grantees
9 Strategies for Social Change Philanthropy

10 Looking Forward
12 Conclusion
13 List of Girls’ Project Participants

“The education of girls may well be the highest-return investment in the developing world.”
—The World Bank

Note: The anonymous quotations used throughout this report were made by girl participants or staff of grantee organizations who participated in the Girls’ Project survey.
Around the world, girls bear a heavier burden than their male counterparts. Girls are more severely affected by child labor, poverty and illiteracy. They are systematically subjected to forced marriage, bodily mutilation, sexual slavery, violence and a range of other physical and psychological abuses.
- 90% of the world’s domestic workers are girls between the ages of 12 and 17.
- 60 million girls are out of school worldwide.
- By the age of 18, girls have received 4.4 fewer years of education than boys.
- Between 60 and 100 million girls are missing from the world’s population—victims of infanticide, feticide, malnutrition or neglect.


The 1995 Beijing Women’s Conference Declaration and Platform for Action focused the international community on the lives of the world’s girls:

The girl child is the woman of tomorrow. The skills, ideas and energy of the girl child are vital for the full attainment of the goals of equality, development and peace. . . . If women are to be equal partners with men, in every aspect of life and development, now is the time to recognize the human dignity and worth of the girl child and to ensure the full enjoyment of her human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As the Beijing Declaration makes clear, the vitality of societies is intimately tied to the wellbeing of girls.

The Beijing Declaration was both a turning point and a call to action. Governments have largely failed to incorporate specific Beijing provisions for girls into their national agendas. But as the International Network for Girls (associated with UNICEF) reports:

NGOs worldwide have been working long and hard to bring visibility to the situation of girls. They have worked to create educational programmes, to protect the rights of girls, to advocate with governments to keep their promises and to support the full development of girls.

Organizations that work with girls are often isolated and severely under-funded. They struggle against many cultural barriers and the limitations imposed by local poverty. In this context, the Global Fund for Women commissioned a study to assess the impact of social change philanthropy on the lives of girls and to share the lessons learned with other grantmakers.

The Global Fund for Women’s grantmaking style is based on trust and respect for the knowledge and skills of grantees and the people they serve. In keeping with the spirit of UNICEF’s comments, they would not thrive in the absence of support for girls.

“[I]t is catastrophic when any child is deprived of an education, but the cost is even higher for a girl—and it will be paid not only by the girl herself but also by her family, her society and her country.”

with this core philosophy, the Girls’ Project was designed to privilege the self-evaluations and self-perceptions of grantees and girls. The study actively encouraged local program staff and girls to define success in their own terms within their specific political, economic and cultural contexts.

Social change philanthropy aims to address the root causes of social and economic inequalities.

One of the most interesting results of the study found that girls are often aware that the discrimination they face is rooted in systemic oppression. In the vast majority of surveys, girls situate their self-perception within overall cultural or institutionalized gender discrimination or specific cultural practices toward girls. Their far-reaching understanding helps to create a more accurate roadmap of the challenges and opportunities for donors, and for international aid and development organizations.

The analyses and experiences of Girls’ Project participants make a convincing case for an integrated, multi-issue approach to improving the lives of girls. Traditional or formal school-based education is not enough to empower a girl. This study makes clear that when girls are given access to an integrated program of educational, vocational, psychological, social and cultural support, they are able to make positive changes even in the most challenging circumstances. Funding and supporting girl-oriented organizations whose programs address the entire context of girls’ lives is the key paradigm for social change philanthropy.

In countries around the world, interest and activity on behalf of girls is growing. As the work of the Global Fund Girls’ Project grantees shows, if appropriate interventions are made, the vision of a world in which every girl can experience the full enjoyment of her human rights and fundamental freedoms can begin to be realized.

“To make things different, we need to sensitize the people and also advocate for policy change.”
The Girls’ Project was conducted in 2001-02 by Strategic Philanthropy, Ltd., a women-led consulting group that assists individuals, families, foundations and corporations in designing and implementing strategic giving programs to effect social change. The Global Fund for Women commissioned the Project with multi-year funding from the Oak Foundation.

- Questionnaires were sent to program directors, staff and girl participants from 67 Global Fund grantees working with girls. Forty programs responded. Girls responded anonymously.
- Strategic Philanthropy conducted five on-site, in-depth case studies. These included observations of programs in progress, focus groups with girls, parents and program staff; and in-depth interviews with program directors. During on-site interviews, girls participated in photo-journaling exercises to document their experiences in their own pictures and words.

THE GRANTEES

- Forty organizations from Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and the Americas agreed to participate in the Girls’ Project.
- Together these organizations represent nearly 100,000 girls annually.
- The participant organizations range in size from entire school systems to local grassroots organizations.
- The primary issue addressed by the organizations is girls’ education. One-third of the participant organizations provide formal schooling, including vocational training. Others teach girls about their legal and human rights. Many of the groups work on reproductive health, psychological health, economic opportunity, gender violence and girl-child issues such as early marriage, female genital mutilation and rites of passage. A few organizations engage in organizing and theater or creative arts.

THE GIRLS’ QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Whom do you live with?
2. Why did you first come to the program?
3. How is your life different since coming to the program?
4. When you are a grown woman, what do you want your life to be like?
5. What is difficult about being a female in your community?
6. If you were in charge, what would you change?

PROFILE: Rural Women and Development (RWAD)
Beka Valley, Lebanon

The seven university-trained women who founded RWAD teach girls about their rights from within Islam. Girls learn that Mohammed said, Education is a must for every Muslim man and woman.

RWAD provides vocational training for girls, financial support for education, and human rights education and basic living skills for mothers and girls.

RWAD’s programs exemplify an integrated educational approach.

“We aim at giving [girls] a skill, which builds their self-confidence and economic independence. They become more aware, therefore more immune and strong. We work from within religion, not against it. [Success in a girl’s life is] to build all her capacities to become a full citizen and to know her rights and practice them without alienating her cultural environment.”

The Girls’ Reflection and Evaluation Project
THE GIRLS

- 149 girls responded to the Girls’ Project questionnaire.
- 87% of girls live with their parents or other guardians.
- 76% of the girls have been coming to a Global Fund for Women-funded program for one to three years or longer.
- Girls’ project participants often live in extremely challenging circumstances; they are barely literate, housebound or forced through poverty into child labor, prostitution, early marriages, and subject to a range of institutional limitations on their health and futures.
- Girl domestic workers and sex workers were represented in Africa, Asia and the Americas. A few groups in Africa and the Americas worked with girls who self-identified as lesbians. A number of the organizations in Africa and Asia focused on girls with disabilities. In Muslim countries, girls were coping with the effects of recent civil strife and fundamentalism.
- The girls who participated in the Girls’ Project are articulate about the ways in which gender discrimination and gendered cultural oppression constrained their lives.

“It is very hard to be a woman in our community when one cannot get out of the darkness through education.”

“We are looked down upon as if we are not human beings.”

PROFILE: Asociación Grupo de Trabajo Redes (Redes), Lima, Peru

Redes receives Global Fund support for two of its programs: a drop-in service center and a support project for girl domestic workers. Both projects offer a range of services including help with homework, recreational activities, psychological services, vocational guidance and job placement.

Most of the domestic workers come from the Andes Mountains — the poorest areas in Peru. Some are orphans.

“My mother already died. She has always been my teacher... My father was an alcoholic. He left us. He was imprisoned.”

“[The girls] are courageous persons... They come to an unknown place moved only by their strong desire to progress.”

— Blanca Figueroa, President of the Board of Redes
The Role of Funders

LISTENING TO SOCIAL CHANGE GRANTEES

The Global Fund for Women seeds, supports and strengthens women’s rights organizations and the worldwide women’s movement. Our work is rooted in a commitment to justice and an appreciation of women’s experience. We assist grantees as they contend with the urgent, and sometimes life-threatening, assaults on their constituents’ human rights — economic, sexual, health and educational rights. Our role as a funder is to listen to their analysis of the situation and the solutions they envision. Our grantees also see their mission as not simply to educate girls, but to foster new leaders among the women of tomorrow; not only to provide girls with the job skills and self-esteem they need to succeed economically, but to change the distribution of economic power and resources of communities and nations; not merely to save girls from violence, but to fundamentally alter the conditions that lead to violence.

We share our commitment to positive cultural and economic change with our grantees. They are our partners in fulfilling a vision to nurture a just and democratic world where women and girls participate with dignity and equality in all aspects of society.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE GIRLS’ PROJECT GRANTEES

1. Education is the engine of change.
   Every group surveyed noted the interconnection of education, health and economic deprivation. Education, broadly defined, was seen as the most effective way to give girls access to the economic possibilities and self-esteem needed to overcome both cultural oppression and poverty.
   Not only do program staff point toward education as the key to improving girls’ lives, but also see their educational programs as part of a larger movement to improve the wellbeing of communities and nations.

2. Girls’ education is more than formal education.
   Grantees understand that educating girls is not as simple as teaching them reading and arithmetic, or even useful job skills. Program directors were unequivocal in their conviction that the education girls need to grow and thrive must extend far beyond traditional curriculum or vocational training because girls live within contexts that are hostile to the transformations that education can bring about. To succeed in empowering girls academically and economically, programs have to address the complex realities of communities and cultures.

3. Effective education involves everyone.
   The Girls’ Project focused attention on the effects of traditional family structures on girls. Girls often have little freedom and must stay at home or work at menial jobs. Involving parents, and especially mothers, in educational programs emerged as a vital strategy to lower barriers to the success of girls. Encouraging boys to learn and develop respect for their sisters and classmates is also essential to the longterm success of girls.

4. Success is empowerment.
   All of the Girls’ Project grantees define their organizational success in terms of the empowerment of individual girls and/or larger-scale change and the multiple effects brought about by girls’ empowerment. Grantees view the empowerment of girls as both economic and psychological.

“Our objective is that we wish to educate more girls so that they can speak out on behalf of the 64 percent of women who live in absolute poverty and the 70 percent who cannot read and write.”

“We provide education support, gender and human rights training, parents counseling, teachers motivation . . . and gender training for boys.”

“We engage in training women and their daughters in the same program of rights and awareness from within Islam.”
Learning From Girls:  
The Impact of Social Change Philanthropy

Girls’ desire to learn and to make changes in their lives is very strong. They must overcome vigorous family objections and other barriers such as lack of transportation in order to attend girl-oriented programs. When asked how their lives had changed as a result of participation in programs, the majority of responses pointed to having greater knowledge, confidence and purpose.

KEY FINDINGS FROM GIRLS

1. **Girls understand the impact of gender discrimination.**  
Most girls connected systemic sexism to the most serious impediments in their lives. A phenomenal 67 percent of girls named cultural oppression against women and institutionalized gender discrimination as the most difficult thing about being female.

2. **Girls want (MUCH) more than formal education.**  
Girls want to learn about human rights. They understand the necessity of acquiring trade skills or studying academic subjects in concert with learning about the issues that affect them psychologically and culturally. They want to be prepared to meet the challenges presented in all aspects of their lives. Girls eloquently speak of the entire spectrum of problems that contribute to their lack of opportunity, ranging from poverty to sexual violence, to restrictive marriage customs, unwanted pregnancies and low self-esteem. While skills training and education help them achieve economic betterment, the majority of girls’ responses suggest that they most deeply value the kinds of learning that gives them greater dignity and self-worth.

3. **Girls are leaders.**  
Girls’ plans for the future are not limited to achievement at the personal level, but include a commitment to their communities and to the lives of other women and girls. Sixty-five percent of girls see themselves as leaders and believe that leadership skills are important components of their programs. A majority of girls now see themselves as capable of positively affecting their families, friends and communities. Twenty percent of girls feel that, through the programs, they had learned to take formal leadership roles such as educator, volunteer or community activist.

4. **Success is contributing.**  
Girls’ desire to take charge of their own lives, to create change and to be able to make a contribution to their communities and to other girls is inspiring. While the question of survival, both social and economic, is crucial to girls, girls call attention again and again to the positive impact that knowing about their rights to be treated as full human beings has on their sense of what is possible for them and their societies.

“I came so I can have an opportunity to work and I can show my potential.”

“We had nothing to do, nowhere to go and we barely knew how to read and write.”

“I learned a lot about my body, society, that we women are capable and have rights.”

“Everything is interesting; our self-image was very bad, but now we know that we can succeed in life, learn how to be independent, get out of difficulties, solve problems, have a job or even a trade.”

“I coordinate all activities. I have learned to be self-confident and have self-assertive skills... I have learned to educate my peers.”
Funding That Really Works for Girls: Challenges and Strategies

CHALLENGES FOR GIRLS

Girls express great enthusiasm about the programs. Eighty-eight percent of the older girl participants feel that their hopes and goals for the future had positively expanded as a result of their involvement with grantee groups. Yet girls encounter significant barriers to participation. These barriers sometimes prevent, limit or cause girls to cease participation in a program.

- Family objections are difficult and painful to overcome.
- Girls are expected to stay at home or work at subsistence-level jobs.
- Girls are under-fed and overworked to such an extent that they are simply too exhausted to attend programs.
- Girls give up. They are too overwhelmed by how difficult it is to change their lives within communities and cultures that are not supportive of their efforts.

CHALLENGES FOR GRANTEES

Grantees see the Global Fund for Women as a partner and often as the sole source of support for girls’ programming. Grantees want more contact, more feedback and more opportunities to learn about other funders and other service organizations.

- Funding is limited for grassroots organizations, especially those who challenge the established order.
- Organizational capacity cannot increase without stable funding.
- Cultural barriers make it more difficult to reach girls and deliver services. None of the programs could identify more than one or two characteristics of their cultures and communities that had a positive influence on girls.
- Organizations often feel isolated in their attempts to change girls’ lives.
- The poverty of communities hinders community development, which in turn thwarts organizational stability, outreach and community participation.

“Being a female in my community, I feel really low. People in my community don’t see me as someone with high status. I have a low status because they see me as a girl who will soon get married.”

“We are not given equal opportunities with our brothers.”
STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE PHILANTHROPY

The philanthropic community can learn critical lessons from the experiences and expertise of both grantees and girls.

Key Strategies for Supporting Girls’ Programs

- Seek ways to involve mothers and communities in program activities that are dedicated to parental development and support the learning of their daughters.
- Support programs that offer “safe spaces” for girls.
- Support programs that foster connections between girls and women, especially young women leaders and other role models.
- Support programs that develop girls’ leadership skills, especially programming that is girl-driven from design through evaluation.
- Assist organizations in identifying gaps in the spectrum of services provided so that they support girls to make changes in their lives within the entire context of family, community and culture.
- Assist girls to work and grow within their existing cultural framework and to create alternatives to harmful cultural practices.

Key Strategies for Organizational Development

- Ensure longterm and sustainable funding to organizations that operate within funding-poor, culturally inhospitable environments. Funders should strive to make multi-year grants so that grantees can maintain and grow their commitment to girls over time.
- Develop donor networks or funding collaboratives to support holistic approaches to girls’ education.
- Smaller organizations are less likely to understand the requirements for applying for grants. Offer technical assistance in developing additional funding streams.
- Offer technical support for building organizational capacity, including the capacity to advocate for change at the policy level.
- Create opportunities for networking within regions by disseminating contact information and funding regional meetings.

“Before I came here, I thought I would be a street kid. Now I will not be.”
“I came because it has the only girls’ club in our community that empowers girls.”
“I train other girls on how to take care of themselves against men. I have learned that I have equal rights like a boy child.”
“I feel that my life is not useless. I am happy that I can help my people and family and am hopeful for a bright future.”
Looking Forward

The Girls’ Report informs the Global Fund’s own efforts to redesign its grant-making work related to girls. From 1998-2000, the period covered by the study, a significant part of Global Fund support for girls’ programs was made possible by the Preston Fund for Girls’ Education. This fund was focused on groups working to advance girls’ participation and access to primary education in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Grants made with Preston Funds in large part provided support for direct service programs and covered costs such as teacher salaries, books, materials, uniforms and classroom construction and furnishings.

The key findings from the Girls’ Report emphasized the need to view education holistically and gave credence to a more multi-layered approach that goes beyond formal education to truly address the complex realities of local communities and cultures. The Global Fund believes that ensuring access to education for girls and women at all stages of their lives is critical to advancing their human rights.

In keeping with the findings of the report, we plan to take the following steps in our programmatic and public outreach over the next few years:

- Increase our support of those initiatives that challenge the systemic barriers to girls’ education and participation in society, which include:
  - parental and community attitudes,
  - early marriage and pregnancy,
  - economic exigencies, and;
  - childcare responsibilities within the family.

- Share the lessons we have learned about girls’ programming with peer organizations, such as Youth Philanthropy Worldwide, the Global Fund for Children, Girls Inc., the YWCA’s international chapters, and affinity groups of the Council on Foundations, such as the International Human Rights Funders Group and the Reproductive Rights and Health Funders Group.

- Discuss the findings and lessons of the report in public for audiences that may not yet understand the benefits of an integrated, holistic approach to girls’ programs.

- Consult our broad network of program advisors in regional council meetings on the most effective ways to implement the lessons from the Girls’ Project.
The Global Fund for Women will emphasize the relevance of a human rights approach or framework in designing and implementing programs for girls. A core component of successful programs is the inclusion of the voices and input of girls themselves in the design and implementation of activities. It is only by doing so that the leadership and decision-making capacity of girls can be strengthened. Finally, we will continue to pay special attention to the most marginalized populations of girls—girls that face multiple discrimination based not only on gender and age, but also on race, caste, class, disability, national origin, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.
Conclusion

“For the girl child to develop her full potential, she needs to be nurtured in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual and material needs for survival, protection and development are met and her equal rights safeguarded.”

—1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The findings of the Girls’ Project affirm and expand on the Beijing Declaration. Girls do not separate the economic and political from the educational or health issues affecting their daily lives. The overwhelming majority of girls and program staff view their successes as a result of the integration of educational and other programs that recognize and try to address the cultural discrimination and multiple barriers that girls face. The Girls’ Report urges social change philanthropists to learn from those who know: directors, staff, and of course, girls themselves. It is only by acknowledging this collective expertise and experience that funders can hope to succeed in empowering girls to reach their full potential in their communities and in the world at large.
The Global Fund for Women would like to thank the following organizations for participating in the Girls’ Project:

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Guatemala

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Brazil

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Mozambique

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Mali

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Ethiopia

Bahia Street
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Papua New Guinea

Centar za devojke
Serbia and Montenegro

Center for Education & Counseling of Women
Croatia

Comité International des Femmes Africaines pour le Développement
Côte d’Ivoire

Disabled Women’s Network & Resource Organization
Uganda

Forum for African Women Educationalists
Uganda

Gambia Committee On Traditional Practices
Gambia

Girl-Child Network
Zimbabwe

Grupo de Trabajo Redes
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Uganda

Ntanira na Múgambo Tharaka Women’s Group
Kenya

Productive Women in Transition
Albania

Role Models Club
Kenya

Rural Women & Development
Lebanon

SECDO Women Development Centre
Sri Lanka

SOS Hotline & Centre for Girls
Serbia and Montenegro

Teenage Mothers and Girls Association of Kenya
Kenya

Teens in Action
Jamaica

Vacha
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