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**This is
my right**

A participatory learning
review of the Empowering
Adolescent Girls in
Central America initiative,
2018–2021

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Executive Summary

Global Fund for Children (GFC) provides grantmaking, capacity building, and mentoring services to community-based organizations (partners) across four continents to help children and youth reach their full potential and advance their rights. With support from Dubai Cares, as part of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives, the Empowering Adolescent Girls (ENA) initiative works with 17 community-based organizations to promote gender equity and advance the rights and opportunities of adolescent girls in Central America. The initiative, funded from June 2018 to May 2022, responds to a scarcity of programming meeting the needs of adolescent girls as they confront numerous challenges in Central America, including gender-based violence, lack of access to education, lack of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and information, and early pregnancy.

In the summer of 2021, the GFC Americas team, in partnership with the Learning and Evaluation team, conducted a participatory learning review of ENA. Through this review, GFC sought to learn about the impact, effectiveness, and sustainability of the initiative. Specifically, the learning review explored four questions around partner experiences of the first three years of the initiative, its direct impact on the organizational and programming capacities of partner organizations, and its indirect impact on the adolescent girls and communities the partners serve.

GFC used a mixed-methods approach to collect data for the learning review, including Outcome Harvesting, Key Informant Interviews, and a Theory of Change workshop. The team also analyzed quantitative and qualitative data from partner reports and other documents collected over the first three years of the project. Finally, with support from GFC, ten partners completed Participatory Action Research projects and shared case studies exploring the impact of their programming on adolescent girls and their communities.

Based on the available data, the learning review found that the ENA initiative is meaningfully addressing and advancing its established objectives. Partners are using GFC’s financial and nonfinancial support to build their organizational and technical capacities, as well as expand and strengthen their programs. Partners reported observing many changes in the lives of the adolescent girls they worked with, such as significant increases in the girls’ sense of empowerment, leadership, solidarity, and collective action. In terms of the ENA initiative’s contribution, partners overwhelmingly expressed their appreciation for GFC’s trust-based approach to relationship building and grantmaking. Additionally, GFC’s flexible funding approach allowed partners to build the capacities that they needed most and to dedicate more of their time to meaningful programming. Partners also made good use of the connections that were available to them through ENA, collaborating on projects and sharing information with other organizations both within and outside of the initiative. Finally, partners greatly valued the variety of types of support provided through the initiative, from organizational capacity assessments to emergency and organizational development grants.

Over the next year, the ENA initiative will bring to a close its funding cycle with Dubai Cares, providing partners with the opportunity to conduct final organizational capacity assessments and receive organizational development grants for a second time. GFC will also bring partners together for a final convening and provide continued flexible funding support. GFC will continue to support this cohort of partners as long as possible, with the hope that additional funding will be secured for a more formal continuation of the initiative beyond 2022. The lessons learned from this learning review provide a myriad of ideas for ongoing, dynamic engagement at the grassroots level to empower adolescent girls in Central America.

Introduction

Global Fund for Children (GFC) provides grantmaking, capacity building, and mentoring services to community-based organizations (partners) across four continents to help children and youth reach their full potential and advance their rights. With support from Dubai Cares (as part of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives), the Empowering Adolescent Girls (ENA, from its name in Spanish, *Empoderando a Niñas Adolescentes*) initiative works with 17 community-based organizations in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua to promote gender equity and advance the rights and opportunities of adolescent girls. The initiative, funded from June 2018 to May 2022, responds to a scarcity of programming meeting the needs of adolescent girls as they confront numerous challenges in Central America, including gender-based violence, lack of access to education, lack of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and information, and early pregnancy. Though these challenges are endemic across the region, the risks and opportunities for girls are highly contextual, requiring place- and culture-specific programs that address the girls’ unique needs. In urban environments, girls’ safety and freedom from gang exploitation are primary concerns, while in rural communities, access to secondary education is a high priority, as girls are frequently forced out of school and into informal work or domestic life as young mothers. The intersectionality of gender and ethnicity – particularly for indigenous communities in rural Guatemala and for Afro-descendent groups along the Caribbean coast – deepens girls’ marginalization and further differentiates their needs. Huge gaps in attention to girls’ health, whether due to culture, religion, or simple lack of investment, leave them uninformed about their own bodies and ill prepared for adulthood.

The ENA initiative empowers grassroots organizations that are tackling these challenges at their roots, using relevant, youth-centered programs to make transformational change in girls’ lives. To promote gender equity and advance girls’ rights and opportunities, the initiative seeks to strengthen the local capacity of grassroots organizations to act as vehicles for social change while simultaneously empowering girls as leaders and agents of their own destinies. For the last three years, ENA partners have been carrying out activities centered on advancing the rights and opportunities of girls within GFC’s four focus areas: education, youth empowerment, gender equity, and freedom from violence and exploitation. The ENA initiative will complete four years of dedicated funding in May 2022.

From August 2020 through September 2021, GFC, together with the ENA partners, carried out an extensive participatory learning review of the initiative’s first three years. The team carefully designed the learning review in consultation with partners to be in line with the initiative’s monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan and with GFC’s Theory of Change. The goal of the learning review was to thoroughly examine all that ENA has undertaken, in order to understand what felt most meaningful to partners and what impact their individual and collective activities and programs had on the adolescent girls and communities they serve.

This report presents the overall findings and key takeaways of the learning review, with the hope that these may guide GFC in taking the ENA initiative forward and in shaping GFC’s partnership around the world, particularly with organizations working with adolescent girls.

Objectives of the Learning Review

The overarching objective of the learning review was to assess the efficacy of the initiative’s model during its first three years in order to inform programmatic strategies for the future.

Specifically, the learning review sought to:

1. Assess the extent to which the GFC model is having a positive impact on helping partners advance the rights of and opportunities for adolescent girls.
2. Understand what external factors have helped or hindered progress being made toward program outcomes.
3. Create a collaborative learning experience with and for partners.

In designing the learning review, the team developed the following learning questions to help guide the process:

1. Do partners believe that GFC’s Theory of Change is effective in informing the initiative?
 - 1.1. How is the initiative helping partners develop their organizational and technical capacity to be more effective in their work?
 - 1.2. To what extent does strengthening partners’ capacities lead to a positive impact on gender equity, rights, and opportunities for adolescent girls?
2. To what extent is the initiative contributing to empowering adolescent girls?
 - 2.1. Do partners believe that their participation in the initiative is contributing to expanding opportunities for adolescent girls and increasing respect for their rights?
 - 2.2. Have partners observed changes in attitudes or behaviors of participants and/or their communities with respect to gender equity as a result of their participation in the initiative (either directly or indirectly)? If so, what are the changes, and are they sustainable?
 - 2.3. To what extent has the initiative been successful in supporting adolescent girls in leading and engaging in advocacy activities that help them affirm their rights?
3. What are the particular features of the initiative that have so far made a difference?
4. To what extent have external factors (positive and negative) had an effect on the initiative as a whole and on partners’ work?

In order to examine the learning review questions, the team designed a matrix of research activities and data sources, with several components contributing to each question.

Methodology

The learning review used a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze data. This included a review of qualitative and quantitative data, Outcome Harvesting (OH), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), a participatory Theory of Change workshop, partner-led case studies, and partner-led Participatory Action Research (PAR) projects.

In reviewing the qualitative and quantitative data, the GFC team carefully analyzed relevant information from partner reports, organizational development plans, and the results of three rounds of organizational network analysis. GFC uses organizational network analysis to assess the level of partners’ connections within and beyond the initiative’s network and to understand the extent to which the spaces GFC has created for partners to engage with each other have produced meaningful new connections.

Between January and July 2021, external consultant Dana Preston supported the GFC team by carrying out OH and KII evaluation activities with ENA partners.

Outcome Harvesting

OH is a participatory evaluation approach that engages stakeholders to collect (“harvest”) significant results or changes in their work and organizations (“outcomes”). This is done by collecting evidence of change and then working backward to assess contribution to that change, describing precisely who changed, what they are doing differently, why it is significant, and whether/how an initiative contributed to the harvested outcome. OH does not measure progress toward predetermined objectives or outcomes; rather, it allows stakeholders to name significant results from their point of view. It is particularly useful in dynamic, uncertain, and complex contexts. OH also encourages the identification of negative and/or unexpected outcomes, leaving room for genuine learning that can inform future programming. The consultant developed four harvesting questions that aligned with the broader learning review questions and conducted three remote workshops with partners in March 2021. Partner participation during the three OH workshops varied, but the activity produced 52 outcomes through the four harvesting questions from 16 of the 17 ENA partners. The consultant prepared a preliminary analysis of the harvested outcomes and presented it to the partners. The next round of analysis removed incomplete or irrelevant outcomes, resulting in 43 outcomes.

Key Informant Interviews

The consultant carried out KIIs with seven ENA partners over Zoom in April 2021. The selection of these organizations (one from Guatemala, three from Honduras, and three from Nicaragua) was based on engaging partners who were not participating in other learning review activities (i.e., case studies and PAR projects). In consultation with the GFC team, the consultant created a KII protocol that included nine questions linked to the broader learning review questions. The process of data analysis was similar to that of OH; the consultant organized information into broad categories and tags in order to talk about patterns among the KII responses.

Theory of Change Workshop

As part of a virtual convening in March 2021, the GFC team conducted a Theory of Change workshop with ENA partners. Participants from each partner organization engaged in three simple games to explore GFC’s Theory of Change and provide feedback on its relevance to their partnership with GFC and the work they do. First, the group was split into five teams, and each team was given a set of virtual cards with the different elements of GFC’s Theory of Change. They were asked to arrange them in the logical flow they thought best represented how GFC works with their organizations. Each team then gave a short presentation of their version of the Theory of Change, and a guest panel declared the team with the most compelling overall presentation to be the winner. Next, participants used virtual stickers to indicate where they saw the girls (and boys) they work with represented in the one-page visual summary of the Theory of Change; where they saw themselves as organizations represented; and where they saw GFC represented. Finally, they were split into three teams that were tasked with “finding the mistake” in a version of the Theory of Change they were given to review. In fact, the Theory of Change they reviewed was not altered in any way, so the teams’ guesses were recorded as feedback, and the guest judges picked the team with the most convincing argument as the winner.

Participatory Action Research Projects

In December 2020, GFC offered its partner organizations the opportunity to apply to conduct a small research project or develop a case study in collaboration with GFC.

Six organizations were selected to undertake research projects, and this group decided collectively to utilize primarily PAR methodologies. They were asked to design PAR activities that would assist in answering one or two of the key learning questions focused on their programming’s impacts on girls. Each organization’s research team participated in group and individual orientation and guidance sessions with GFC, and most also participated in optional workshops on participatory methodologies and qualitative data analysis. Each partner was given \$1,300 to cover research costs, and each produced a report with their methodologies and findings.

Four partners were selected to develop specific case studies of individual girls or groups of girls who had experienced significant change while participating in partners’ programs. These partners also received group and individual orientation and guidance sessions, and they were given \$800 to cover the costs of developing their case studies. Each submitted a summary case study as their final deliverable.

Findings

Drawing upon data from these diverse methodologies, the following sections present the findings of the learning review for each learning question the team pursued. In addition to analyzing large volumes of data, the team relied on many examples and direct quotations that surfaced in the various activities of the learning review. A multi-year initiative engaging 17 partners in three countries is difficult to condense into 15 pages of text, and through an iterative process, the team compiled the findings that felt most important. In answering the research questions, the team members constantly checked in with each other to make sure that their interpretation of the data was correct. The findings below reflect more than a year of collaborative experimentation and learning with GFC partners that the team is excited to share.

I. Do partners believe that GFC’s Theory of Change is effective in informing the initiative?

When engaged in a variety of activities and discussions during a workshop on GFC’s Theory of Change in March 2021, ENA partners expressed a moderate to strong understanding of the Theory of Change. They also expressed an appreciation for the effectiveness of many aspects of the Theory of Change as implemented in the ENA initiative, especially the focus on flexible funding. Several partners commented that the Theory of Change’s long-term goal of equal opportunities and rights for adolescent girls was unrealistic in the context of their work, especially considering the relatively short span of the ENA program, the scale of investment, and the fact that guaranteeing the rights of children and youth is ultimately the responsibility of government. In addition, several partners noted that the Spanish-language version of the Theory of Change lacked inclusive language (referring only to “boys” instead of “boys and girls,” since nouns are gendered in Spanish), and they felt that having the Theory of Change utilize inclusive language was particularly pertinent to the work they do to empower adolescent girls under the ENA initiative.

The workshop began with an activity meant to learn about partners’ perceptions of GFC’s Theory of Change. Participants were divided into five groups and asked to organize virtual sticky notes containing excerpts from GFC’s Theory of Change into what they understood as the logical flow of outcomes, outputs, and inputs. Overall, the five groups’ interpretations of GFC’s approach were very similar to each other and to the version designed by GFC (see Figure 2). The greatest area of divergence within the group was around long-term goals, with two of the groups identifying long-term goals such as child and youth empowerment, access to quality education, and equitable rights for young people, while some groups saw organizational and technical capacity development as the ultimate goal, and one group did not include long-term goals. Interestingly, during a discussion later in the workshop, several partners stated that the long-term goals of ensuring high-quality education and equal rights and opportunities were not their direct responsibility. One partner mentioned that the government was the only entity that could guarantee these rights. Another talked about how their organization could only create opportunities and could not control whether the adolescent girls it served made the most of those opportunities. A third stated that GFC’s role was to support the partners’ work, and implied that the Theory of Change’s focus on long-term changes in equity was outside of that scope.

Overall, the majority of partners understood and agreed with most parts of the Theory of Change. As noted above, the long-term goals of the Theory of Change generated quite a bit of discussion, and were met with some confusion and disagreement, as some partners were surprised to see in GFC’s Theory of Change the activities that their own organizations undertake and the outcomes that they realize.

Considering the diversity of partners’ approaches and their own articulation of their long-term goals, this is not surprising, and their candor speaks to the trust they have developed with GFC. In emphasizing the role of their own work in GFC’s Theory of Change, they demonstrated ownership over their roles in creating change for adolescent girls.

One way for GFC to act on this information is to communicate the Theory of Change more clearly early on in future initiatives. For example, GFC could hold open discussions (similar to the workshop reported on here) within the first year about where the Theory of Change feels the most and least aligned with the perspectives of the partners and the initiative as a whole. Starting this process early may create opportunities for partners to understand and work with each other at the strategic level, potentially strengthening cohesion within the initiative while also helping GFC to interact, communicate, and strategize with partners and vice versa. This workshop was a valuable opportunity for some GFC staff to hear feedback from partners about GFC’s approach. This opportunity, as well as future feedback from similar workshops in other initiatives, should be shared with all GFC staff in a facilitated discussion so it can be responded to and acted on. Additionally, this information could be useful to GFC in its current participatory process to refresh its Theory of Change as well as design its next five-year strategy.

Figure 1: Partners’ responses to questions regarding the relevance of GFC’s Theory of Change

Representatives from each partner who participated in the workshop were asked to rate their agreement, on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 10 (completely agree), with three statements about the relevance of GFC’s Theory of Change to them, the ENA initiative, and their relationship with GFC:

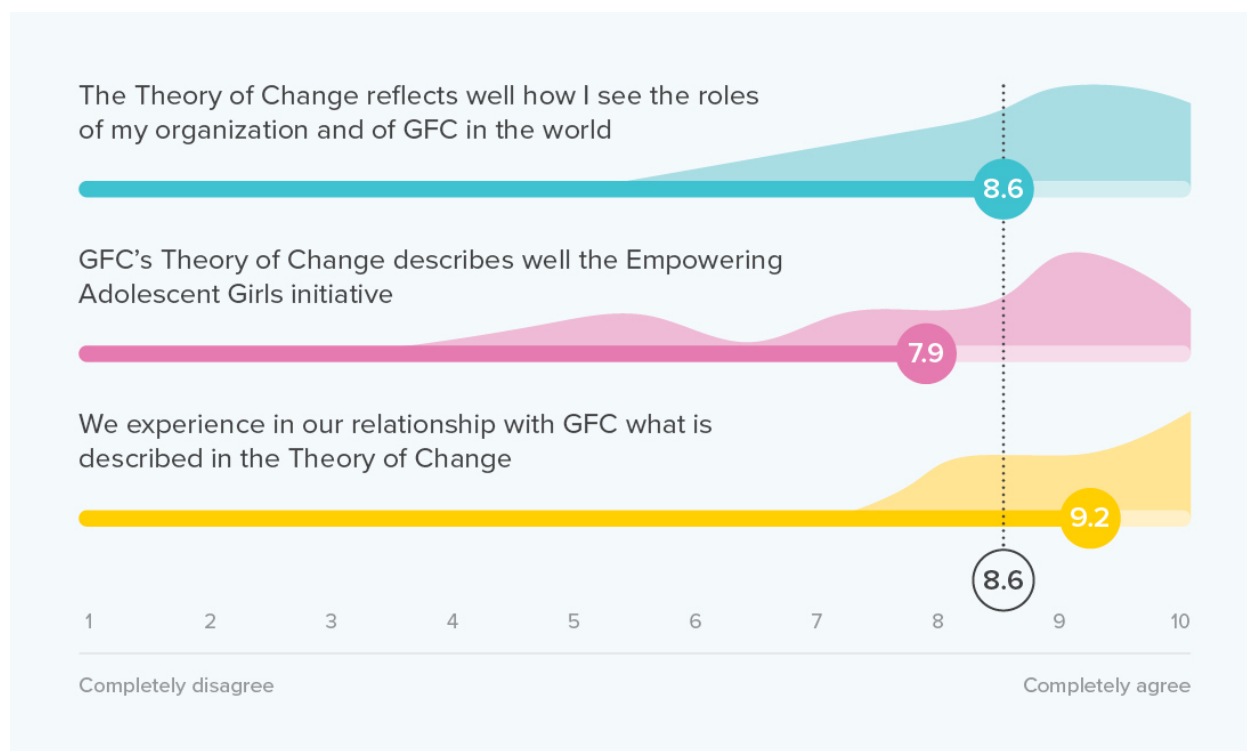
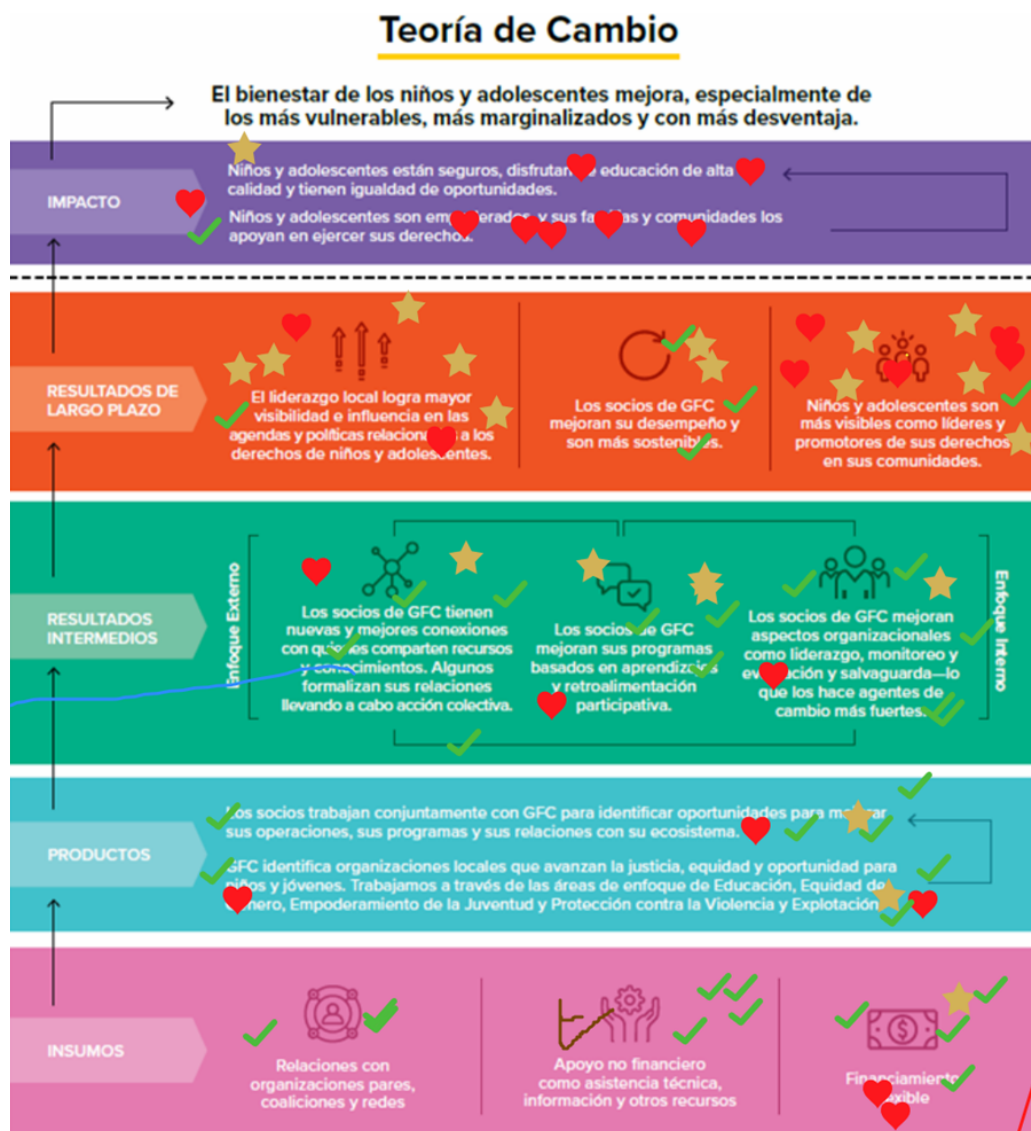


Figure 2: Partners’ understanding of GFC’s Theory of Change

Partners used hearts to mark where they saw the children and adolescents represented, stars for where they saw their organizations represented, and check marks for where they saw GFC represented. (An English version of the Theory of Change can be viewed at <https://globalfundforchildren.org/theory-of-change>.)



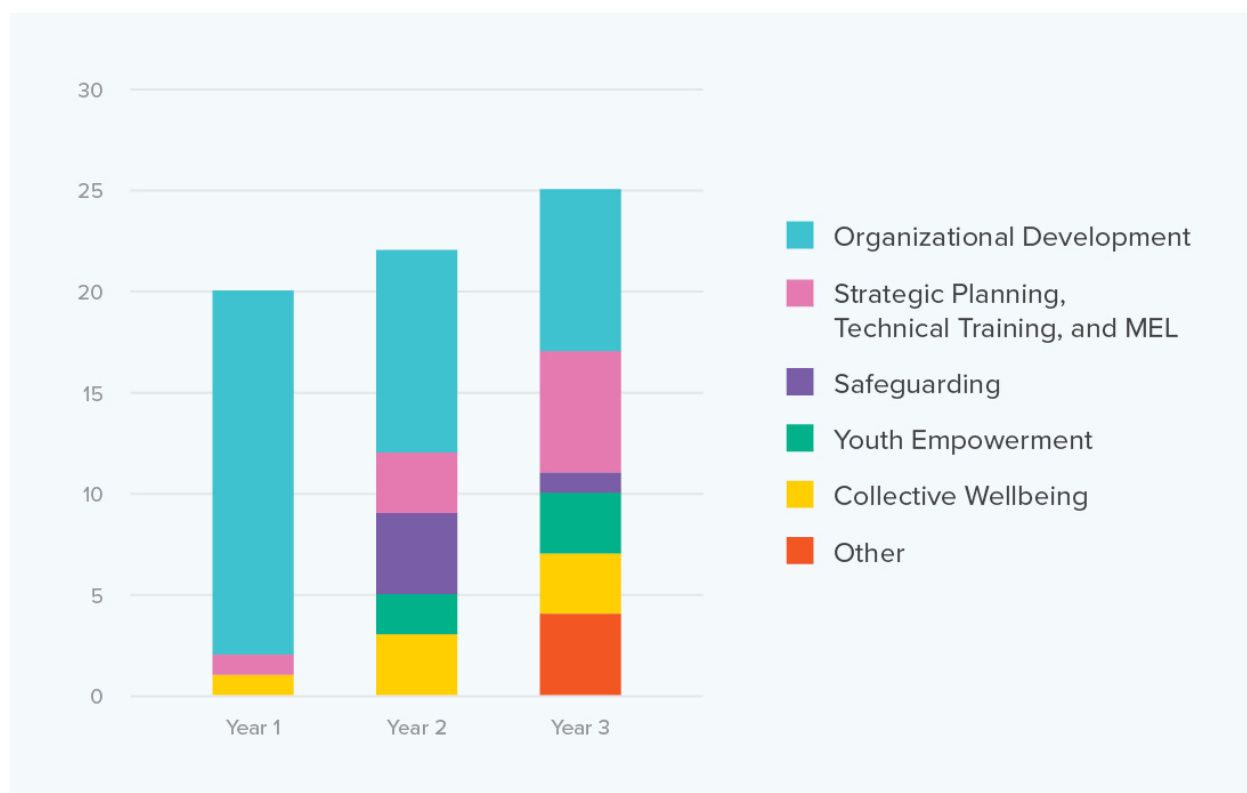
1.1. How is the initiative helping partners develop their organizational and technical capacity to be more effective in their work?

Through OH, KIIs, and data collected from partner reports, the learning review found a wide range of positive changes in partners’ organizational and technical capacity across the three years of the ENA initiative. Partners attributed many of these changes to the actions and services provided by GFC and the ENA team.

Programming capacity was the most commonly reported improvement. Thirty-three percent of the partner organizations that participated in the KIs reported that they were better positioned to grow their programming as a result of their participation in the ENA initiative. This included the ability to launch new programs, expand and scale existing programs, and continue programming when they otherwise may not have been able to. Four of the seven partners who participated in the KIs reported an increase in their capacity to think strategically about their programming and to develop and utilize tools to support their programs. In both the KIs and the OH, the most common example of programming capacity growth was through the inclusion of adolescent girls in program decision-making.

Partner reports underscored and quantified the improvements in programming that were identified through the KIs and OH. Over the three years of the initiative, ENA partners conducted 67 activities around organizational and technical growth with direct funding or other support from GFC (see Figure 3). Over half of these activities focused on strengthening and consolidating internal systems, processes, and methodologies, which is a type of activity not generally supported by traditional grantmaking. This is an area where GFC’s flexible funding approach can support types of organizational capacity development such as hiring additional staff or improving internal processes, whereas traditional funding approaches tend to be more restricted.

Figure 3. New capacity development activities completed by partners with GFC’s support, by issue area



The reports also revealed that partner organizations launched 80 new or modified programs over the three-year period, over half of which involved workshops and trainings with youth, family, and community members. These workshops and trainings covered a wide range of topics. For example, one partner in Honduras held a training on how to include adolescents in the creation of public policy on sexual

harassment, with GFC funds paying for transportation and food at the event. Another partner in Nicaragua used GFC funds to support a program aimed at preparing adolescent girls for higher education in Managua. A third held a workshop where adolescents of all genders could express their feelings and reenact real-life events through theater.

Establishing new connections, as well as maintaining and strengthening existing connections, was another important way that partners in the ENA initiative grew in their organizational capacity over the first three years of the initiative. The organizational network analysis revealed that from January 2019 to April 2021, the number of connections partners had to each other and to outside organizations grew from 196 to 354, almost doubling. The density of the partner network itself, which measures if organizations are realizing the total number of potential connections available to them, rose from 8.2% to 14.7% in the first year of the initiative, before flattening out during the COVID-19 pandemic. On their own, these numbers suggest that the organizations in the ENA initiative are thriving and are continually reaching out to establish new partnerships, collaborations, and information-sharing opportunities. In fact, partner reports revealed that partners directly attributed at least 75 of these new connections to being a part of the ENA initiative. One partner in Honduras, for example, met and exchanged information with several organizations at a convening of partners hosted by GFC, including an organization from Guatemala that had expertise in community communication using radio and social media. The latter ultimately guided the initial partner through starting its own radio show to raise awareness about COVID-19 and increase its impact on children and adolescents.

Overall, the ENA initiative succeeded in growing the organizational and technical capacities of partner organizations through direct funding, capacity development support, and expanded networks stemming from convenings and other meetings organized or supported by GFC. Additionally, eight partners reported that GFC helped them obtain funding from other donors, further boosting their organizational and technical capacity. Together, these mechanisms of action overlap and can greatly improve the quantity, quality, and sustainability of programming aimed at adolescent girls.

1.2. To what extent does strengthening partners’ capacities lead to a positive impact on gender equity, rights, and opportunities for adolescent girls?

The ENA initiative’s work to strengthen partners’ capacities had a positive impact on both adolescent girls and the rights and opportunities available to them in several ways. Programming capacity was the most directly impacted, as the addition of new programming (made possible by funding and other support provided through the initiative) greatly increased the number of adolescent girls that partners were able to serve, as well as the quality of the activities in which they participated.

As mentioned above, the OH and KIs found that programming was the most common type of capacity growth that partners attributed to their participation in the ENA initiative. In particular, many partners used support from GFC to make their programming more participatory and inclusive. For instance, adolescent girls gained experience by taking on facilitative and leadership roles within partner organizations and were involved in the design and implementation of programming. The ENA initiative contributed to this by facilitating partners’ exposure to new participatory methodologies and providing the funding needed to develop activities that incorporated those methodologies.

“We have achieved the inclusion of girls: they themselves are developing the programming and activities in the municipalities; they base them on their own learned experiences. They

feel more empowered and taken into account because of it. Now they have a different vision of their own lives.” – Partner, Honduras

Based on the findings of the KIs, the approach to inclusion significantly differed between partners. For some, inclusion meant implementing participatory practices with girl children and adolescent girls during program design. For others, inclusion was improved through gender-specific methodologies. Staff at one partner organization said that the adults had assumed the role of facilitators, identifying and encouraging implementation of the goals and priorities of adolescent girls.

Not only did partners report an increase in their capacity to incorporate adolescent girls into decision-making, but many noted deep transformations among the girls participating in their programs. In both the OH and KIs, partners reported that many girls in their programs started embracing leadership qualities over time and were more comfortable speaking up and making choices about their lives, representing an increase in both empowerment and autonomy. One partner noted that the adolescent girls in their programs seemed less embarrassed when speaking about their rights.

“Adolescent girls now recognize when their rights are abused. Now they aren’t embarrassed to speak in public. They give their opinions. They know about their rights now. Now they can speak out and say, ‘No.’”
– Partner, Nicaragua

Partners generally partially attributed these outcomes to GFC’s support. Based on both OH and KIs, GFC’s grantmaking style and approach contributed to the strengthening of many interconnected capacities that helped lead to improved gender equity, rights, and opportunities for adolescent girls.

Changes in programming during the first three years of the initiative also led to positive changes for adolescent girls in the communities where partners work. For example, 29% of the examples on empowerment reported in OH related to a change in community leaders’ attitudes and behaviors, and 21% of the KI examples talked about a change in the willingness of families and mothers to support issues affecting girls. As part of the ENA initiative, partners gained access to trainings and information about methods for building trust with the families of children and youth. Several partners reported improved trust from the adolescent girls’ families and improved support by families of their children’s participation in programming.

Beyond changes in programming, the connections provided by GFC’s network and the chance to connect with fellow ENA partners opened up opportunities both for the partners themselves and the adolescent girls they serve. Three partners were able to support travel for their program participants based on connections they made through the initiative. For example, two partners in Nicaragua were able to send two girls who had participated in their leadership programs to London to accept the With and For Girls Award on their behalf. Four partner youth representatives also participated as young leaders in the national online WOW (Women of the World) Festival.

The change in the number of adolescent girls who participated in partner programming across the three years of the initiative is a good indicator of the potential impact of the initiative. For the group of 11 partners who joined in the first year of the initiative (seven more joined in year two), the number of

participants increased from 2,998 in the first year to 4,343 in the second. In both years, over half of the participants were adolescent girls, and adolescent girls constituted the majority of the increase. While the partners did not talk directly about this increase during KIs or OH, they repeatedly connected their participation in ENA with an increase in their ability to strategize, improve, and expand programming and to adapt to crises. Based on this, it is likely that the boost in the number of participants overall, and adolescent girl participants in particular, was at least partly a result of the strengthened capacity resulting from partners' participation in the ENA initiative.

Between year two and year three, there was a slight increase in the total number of adolescent girls served across the entire initiative, though several individual partners saw a decrease. This stagnation was most likely a result of government restrictions, public safety measures, and care taken by families of the girls in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the partners located in Honduras, a country that had one of the most severe pandemic lockdowns, saw a much steeper decline in participants than the other organizations. Overall, given the challenges faced by ENA partners during these compounding crises, continuing to grow the number of participants served, even by a modest amount, was no small success.

The partners are on track to reach the initiative's goal of serving 20,000 participants, 68% (13,500) of whom should be adolescent girls, by the end of the fourth year. Across the initiative's first three years, partners reached 18,400 participants, of which 48% (8,796) were adolescent girls.

2. To what extent is the initiative contributing to empowering adolescent girls?

ENA substantially contributed to an increase in empowerment among the adolescent girls who participated in partner programming. Based on the qualitative and quantitative data gathered through OH, KIs, partner reports, and other documents, as well as research conducted by the partners themselves, the initiative contributed most significantly by providing flexible funding and support from GFC staff that many partners relied on to expand their programming. As mentioned above, partner organizations used GFC's support to integrate participatory methodologies into their programming and organizational processes. This helped them provide more responsive services, and it empowered adolescent girls to have more say in the programs in which they participated. Additionally, ENA provided opportunities for partners to connect with each other and establish collaborative programs and activities, access each other's networks, and share knowledge and resources. Partners also felt, though to a lesser extent, that GFC's staff-led workshops on using technology during the pandemic, trainings in participatory methodologies, and assistance with conducting organizational capacity assessments all supported their work and, ultimately, the adolescent girls they serve.

When examining the data gathered through OH, of the 21 examples of change in the behaviors and attitudes of adolescent girls as identified by partners during the exercise, 71% referred to an increase in empowerment. This finding was also supported by the KIs, with 79% of the examples containing evidence of increased empowerment in program participants. Examples of empowerment that partners observed included changes in attitudes, prioritizing education, increased self-worth, delaying marriage and pregnancy, speaking out, life planning, and openness to therapy. The most common type of empowerment was adolescent girls speaking out and being more comfortable about making decisions regarding their lives. Partners described adolescent girls who were once quiet and shy who are now outspoken. The second most common type of empowerment was adolescent girls making decisions that prioritized their education. One partner reported a steady increase in applications over the past two years from girls for

the small education stipends their organization offers. Two of the PAR projects corroborated this. One found that several parents of adolescent girls had noticed their children increasingly prioritizing their studies after engaging with the partner’s programming. The other heard directly from the adolescent girl participants that they understood the importance of education in helping them achieve their life goals and become professionals.

In addition, two of the partners that conducted case studies explored the question of how the initiative has contributed to empowering adolescent girls. One partner examined the changes in attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge that eight adolescent girls who participate in its programming experienced during the two years that the organization had been involved in the ENA initiative. The study found that all eight girls improved their self-esteem, their self-care behaviors, and their knowledge about gender equity. In addition, the girls engaged in a number of advocacy activities to promote gender equity, including initiating face-to-face community campaigns about specific gender equity issues, using sports as a vehicle for education about gender equity, and providing contraceptives and information about early pregnancies to their peers in their communities. The study also noted that ENA’s financial support allowed the partner to respond to the COVID-19 health crisis by providing food and hygiene supplies to the communities in which it works. This helped families meet their basic needs and allowed their children to participate in the partner’s programming.

The other partner’s case study focused on examining a new leadership-building project that was set up with support from the ENA initiative. The study found that the girls who went through the program experienced a significant increase in self-esteem and an improved sense of community with each other over the course of the project. They learned about violence prevention and particularly about the importance of rejecting the normalization of sexual violence. Most significantly, given the program’s focus on leadership, they grew in their belief in and commitment to creating a better situation in their communities for young and adolescent girls. The support of the initiative helped facilitate these changes. Moreover, ENA provided the partner with trainings and financial support that helped the organization incorporate more feedback from the adolescent girls in its programming and build its evaluative and technical capacities, both of which improved the relevance and effectiveness of the program. Finally, participation in the initiative helped the organization train its staff in communication strategies and publicize its services more effectively so that more girls could join the program.

2.1. Do partners believe that their participation in the initiative is contributing to expanding opportunities for adolescent girls and increasing respect for their rights?

Based on the OH, KIs, and qualitative data from partner reports and other documents, partners connect their participation in the initiative with the positive changes they are seeing in the opportunities available to adolescent girls and the changes in their families and communities, which lead to a greater respect for girls’ rights. They reported that participation in ENA has provided them access to funding, organizational strengthening, and resources and connections. These have allowed them to reach more adolescent girls with their programming, conduct more family- and community-focused programs, and better support girls in educating their communities and in leading activities and groups of their own.

Community outreach activities and public awareness campaigns are some of the most direct ways that partners can influence the environment in which their program participants live. Based on the qualitative data collected from partner reports and other documents, in the first year of the ENA initiative there were no new partner-led activities or public awareness campaigns about sexual and reproductive health, gender equity, or the rights of girls. By the third year of the initiative, partners attributed 19 new partner-led community education programs to the flexible funding, staff mentoring, and partner convenings

organized by the initiative. Many more programs and activities that were not directly related to community education were also designed by partners to create a change in community institutions and families. For example, one partner in Guatemala held specialized workshops on preventing teen pregnancy with the student governments at local schools. Another held a workshop for parents on building the confidence of their adolescent children.

Beyond new activities that seek to create change in the community, the KIs and OH showed that partners observed changes in the attitudes and behaviors of a variety of local actors. Almost 30% of the outcomes and examples measured by the two methods showed positive changes in community leaders and community members, including increased sensitivity to issues affecting girls, and leaders speaking out against early marriage. Over 20% mentioned improvements in family attitudes and behaviors, including families placing more trust in ENA partners, mothers improving communication with daughters on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and families prioritizing daughters’ education over income-generating activities.

“Before, mothers would control their daughters; they wouldn’t let them participate in our activities. The belief was that girls are meant for domestic chores. There’s so much false information in the communities. Now families that have participated with us are starting to understand, they get that this belief is not right. Before, they didn’t let girls play, especially sports. It was tough, but the girls started to say, ‘No, this is my right.’ Now the families give them more freedom. Now they understand they’re not just meant for the kitchen.” –

Partner, Nicaragua

In Guatemala, partners even saw evidence of municipal governments changing their behavior by beginning to invite adolescent girls to participate in decision-making spaces.

The number of new partner initiatives aimed at educating communities, including GFC-supported community outreach and public awareness activities, suggests that the ENA initiative played an influential role, along with other external factors.

Technology was another way that partners saw their participation in ENA as directly supportive of expanding opportunities for adolescent girls. As COVID-19-related lockdowns and social distancing measures were enforced across the partners’ countries, GFC hosted a series of online conversations for partners to share technological tools for engaging participants remotely and held three workshops on program facilitation in virtual spaces. The OH and KIs revealed that several partners passed this information on to their program participants through dedicated activities. One partner in Nicaragua also used the COVID-19 emergency funding to buy cell phones for staff and the adolescent girls who participated in its programming, opening up opportunities to participate in school during lockdown and even to access jobs that require fluency with communication technology.

Education is an area where partners’ work significantly expands opportunities for adolescent girls. Of the six PAR projects conducted by partners, three found evidence that the adolescent girls in their programs had begun to set objectives and goals for their futures, and almost all found that program participants were more dedicated to their education than they had been when they arrived at the program. The ENA initiative contributed to these changes by providing flexible funding and staff support that helped partners grow their programming and reach more adolescent girls. It also contributed by organizing convenings,

which resulted in several education-related collaborations between partners. Overall, while the initiative did not directly conduct education-specific workshops or trainings, its support directly led to an expansion in education-related programming and indirectly contributed to the increase in adolescent girls prioritizing their futures and their dedication to their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic, when education became even more difficult to access.

2.2. Have partners observed changes in attitudes or behaviors of participants and/or their communities with respect to gender equity as a result of their participation in the initiative (either directly or indirectly)? If so, what are the changes and are they sustainable?

Over the three years of the initiative, partners have seen many changes in the attitudes and behaviors of the adolescent girls they work with. Almost all partners reported seeing an increase in gender equity as demonstrated by greater empowerment among the girls they serve, and many saw an increase in the girls' engagement with advocacy and leadership activities. Many partners reported that the connection between the initiative's activities and these changes were significant.

As part of the exploration of the initiative's impact on empowerment and gender equity, four partners' PAR projects found that adolescent girls in their programs experienced an improved sense of self-esteem and increased confidence in speaking up to advocate for themselves and others. For example, one partner in Guatemala surveyed participants during a workshop and found that the girls who had participated in the organization's programming were no longer afraid to talk about their positive qualities. The partner also found that responses from girls and boys were roughly the same – an excellent indicator of gender equity – and that all participants expressed a deeper understanding of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Three of the PAR projects also found that participants were sharing information from partner programming with their peers. For example, one PAR project found that adolescent girls were using their leadership skills to set up spaces for their peers to discuss sexual and reproductive rights.

As mentioned in the response to learning review question 2 (“To what extent is the initiative contributing to empowering adolescent girls?”), the OH and KIs corroborated this finding, with 71% of the OH outcomes and 79% of the KI examples containing evidence of increased empowerment in program participants. In the OH and KIs, the most common examples of advances in gender equity centered around adolescent girls having an increased recognition of self-worth and being more willing to speak up. During the lockdown in Honduras, for example, several adolescent girls who had participated in partner programming found the confidence to use their voices in the form of an online video campaign encouraging their peers to speak up about domestic violence. The second most common example of empowerment regarding gender equity was in prioritizing education. For example, one partner reported on an annual activity where girls write stories about their future aspirations, and noted that an increased number of girls were writing about continuing their studies and getting jobs as professionals such as teachers and lawyers. These examples of girls using their voices and choices to prioritize their education at an individual level is critically important, as it paves the way for increased and more equal participation and leadership in society.

Two of the six PAR projects found that program participants improved their focus on their studies and their participation in school. Both reported that the adolescent girls in their programs were setting objectives and goals for their futures, with aspirations for higher education and/or jobs that require special training and are often seen as reserved for men, such as becoming lawyers or working for the police. In Nicaragua, one of these partners saw an increase in the number of participants who stayed in and graduated from secondary school, despite increased pressure for them to stay home to help support the family during the pandemic.

ENA indirectly contributed to these outcomes in that its support helped make possible the programming that directly contributed to the reported changes. Based on qualitative data collected from partner reports and other documents, partners attributed at least eight new youth leadership and activism-related activities in part to their participation in ENA since the initiative began. Moreover, looking at empowerment and its ties to gender equity, most of the 72 new programs and activities that partners reported creating using ENA support had features meant to empower participants. Additionally, a few partners began collaborations on empowerment-related programming with other partners that they met through ENA-organized convenings. Overall, ENA had a large impact on the number of programs and the number of participants that the partners were able to engage with, and therefore contributed proportionally to the outcomes that partners felt stemmed from their programming.

2.3. To what extent has the initiative been successful in supporting adolescent girls in leading and engaging in advocacy activities that help them affirm their rights?

In numbers, the levels of engagement with advocacy activities among program participants varied significantly across the three years of the initiative. The lowest levels were recorded during the spring and summer of 2020, and the compounding crises of that time and particularly the COVID-19-related restrictions on public and private gatherings undoubtedly played a significant role. However, as mentioned in the section above, with support from the ENA initiative, partners continued to reach large numbers of adolescent girls with their programming even during these periods. While the steep rise in advocacy activities around the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021 may have had other causes, the adolescent girls who engaged in these activities were well prepared by the partners’ continued programming throughout the pandemic. The flexible funding, trust-based relationships with staff, mentoring, and many other types of support provided by GFC during such an unpredictable time reinforced this programming. Across the three years, 12,492 of the partners’ participants under age 24 engaged in advocacy activities in support of girls’ rights and more than a quarter of these participants (over 3,000) were adolescent girls. (Note that individuals who participated in advocacy activities in multiple years were counted separately for each year.) This number only included activities that were either directly advocating for girls’ rights or were led by girls.

Beyond these overall numbers, OH and KIs both found that the second most observable and significant change in program participants over the three years of the initiative, after empowerment, was an increase in adolescent girls engaging in advocacy and leadership activities.

Nearly a third (29%) of the OH outcomes that partners identified showed an increase in participation and leadership from adolescent girls, which was also supported by findings from the KIs. In this review, participation and leadership included changes in behaviors, engagement with political advocacy, self-organizing, serving as a role model for others, and in one instance, starting a radio program. The most mentioned improvement was in adolescent girls’ engagement with political advocacy and self-organizing. Several partners shared examples of adolescent girls



A partner in Guatemala supported ten girls who participated in its youth empowerment and advocacy program in meeting with the Congressional Commission for Education, Science, and Technology to advocate for a law to guarantee free internet access in rural areas.

influencing local officials and prominent community members. The second most mentioned change was in adolescent girls acting as role models for their peers, organizing activities and helping to guide others through difficult situations.

The examples that partners gave varied widely. In some cases, they observed increased leadership skills through changes in adolescent girls’ behavior, like serving as a role model for their peers, being more willing to talk about strengths, and overall improved self-confidence. Several partners reported that adolescent girls in their programs began creating their own activities, such as mentoring and life planning workshops, for other girls in their communities. In other cases, they observed program participants engaging in political advocacy and self-organizing. For instance, one partner in Guatemala reported that several of its participants formed multiple groups to advocate for a response from local authorities to gendered violence, ultimately resulting in concrete actions being taken by the local government, such as providing free self-defense classes for girls. Another partner shared the story of a 13-year-old girl who

suffered serious health problems after surviving sexual violence. She decided to speak publicly at a partner’s event as a way to prevent other girls from experiencing similar violence.



A partner in Nicaragua helped its girl leaders organize a virtual forum called “Girls’ Voices Count” to share their agenda for preventing violence against girls and women and early pregnancies during COVID-19.

The significance of these reported outcomes cannot be understated in the context of the historical and systematic marginalization of adolescent girls’ voices, rights, and autonomy, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and prolonged political, economic, and social instability. These examples represent solidarity and youth-led action among girls going through their own individual processes of empowerment.

To determine the extent of ENA’s contribution, it is helpful to look at the activities that partners implemented to prepare adolescent girls for taking on leadership roles and engaging in advocacy. Based on partner reports and other documents, over the three years of the initiative, the partners implemented eight new activities that focused on building leadership and advocacy skills with the support of GFC. For example, one partner in Guatemala collaborated with three other organizations across Central America to create a convening led by and for adolescent girls from their programs. In Nicaragua, another partner brought adolescent girls into the organization’s decision-making spaces as a way to make its program planning and evaluation processes more responsive to these young people’s needs. In Guatemala, a third partner set up nine new local coordinating committees tasked with building up the leadership skills of adolescent girls in their communities.

Ultimately, despite increases and decreases in the total number of program participants who engaged in advocacy during each year of the initiative, partners were continually reaching large numbers of adolescent girls with programming that was made possible by the partners’ participation in the ENA initiative and that aimed to build empowerment, leadership skills, self-esteem, and advocacy skills. Observations from OH, KIs, and two partner-led case studies confirmed that the adolescent girls who participated in these programs experienced increases in self-esteem and were more open to speaking up, acting as role models for their peers, and taking on leadership roles.

Beyond strengthening advocacy skills, partners’ work to build empowerment in adolescent girls is an essential prerequisite to political engagement. During the three years of the initiative, eight partners implemented a total of 15 new programs and activities focused on youth and girl empowerment with the support of GFC and the ENA team. These activities ranged from building participants’ self-esteem to providing participants with actual practice in leadership and facilitation positions. One partner, for example, aimed to build up leadership by starting a program where adolescent girls set up, planned, and led meetings with other peer organizations. Another focused on building self-esteem and confidence through theater, with adolescents acting out scenes from their lives to help process and express their emotions.

Two partner organizations in Guatemala carried out case studies to examine the extent to which the initiative has been successful in supporting adolescent girls in leading and engaging in advocacy activities that help them affirm their rights. One partner’s case study focused on the experiences of over 20 young leaders from a program that involved nine community-based and peer-elected groups of young leaders and activists who worked to empower and protect their peers. The partner found that after engaging with the organization’s programming, the adolescent girls experienced profound changes in their confidence, leadership skills, and self-esteem. Importantly, they reported that their increase in self-esteem made it more comfortable for them to participate in advocacy and lobbying activities, including community scholarships, the establishment of a rural computer center, the administration of a survey about the protection of rights in the community, and leading two marches. They were also in charge of overseeing the construction of an educational center in a rural community where many students, particularly adolescent girls, had been unable to attend school since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This achievement required significant lobbying efforts, and had the partner established this program without GFC support, the extent of the changes in the adolescent girls participating in this program and the impact that they made on the community would not have been possible.



Anabella speaks to a reporter during a conference held with the Vice President of Guatemala and the Procurator of Human Rights on the challenges facing girls and adolescents in Petén.

The other partner’s case study focused on the journey and growth of Anabella, a young Mayan woman who started participating in the partner’s programming at age 19 and who now works at the organization. Through this experience, the young woman grew her self-esteem and leadership skills and began advocating for victims of domestic and sexual violence. Her work was recognized at the national level, and her hard-won confidence ultimately contributed to the establishment of a national review board tasked with strengthening the institutional framework around the response to adolescent girl victims of violence. The organization attributed the establishment of the young woman’s current project in part to its participation in the ENA initiative.

3. What are the particular features of the initiative that have so far made a difference?

According to partner reports and OH, partners considered funding to be the most impactful element of the initiative, specifically mentioning GFC’s flexible funding approach as well as the organizational development grants and emergency grants that were available to ENA partners. Forty-three percent of the harvested outcomes related to ENA’s contribution mentioned flexible funding. In their reports, eight partners talked about the different ways in which their organizations were able to develop their internal capacities because of both flexible funding and more targeted organizational development grants.

“The flexible use of funds allows us to respond to the changing dynamics of the communities and adolescents we serve by enabling us to engage in tactical and strategic improvements without losing sight of our overall objective.” – Partner, Guatemala

Of the eight partners that received organizational development grants, three were able to modernize their website and create a communications plan, one was able to open a second office, and others were able to make structural changes to their offices, which made them more useable and in one case helped the adolescent girls they work with feel safer. Some partners used the organizational development grants to carry out activities aimed at promoting a culture of safeguarding and wellbeing within their organizations. All these actions were especially important during a time when the COVID-19 pandemic made it dangerous for people to gather inside without adequate space.

*“Flexible funding contributes to the mission and vision of our organization by helping us maximize our resources and prioritize the needs of our beneficiaries in an increasingly challenging social and political context.”
– Partner, Nicaragua*

“The flexibility of these funds allows us to solve emerging situations, which, at the same time, enables the proper functioning of our organization.” – Partner, Honduras

Several partners also mentioned how rare it is to get support for these kinds of activities.

Flexible funding was not the only type of support that partners found helpful. Many of the partner reports expressed appreciation for the opportunities that the initiative provided to network and collaborate with like-minded organizations, both with other partners in the initiative and with outside organizations. For example, three partners reported learning about new methodologies and/or types of activities that they eventually adopted. One organization learned from a peer how to expand its advocacy and education efforts through creating a radio program. Ten partners started or improved collaborative activities through connections made through GFC, with one partner starting a collaborative television program that broadcast across Honduras to promote sexual and reproductive rights. An additional three partners reported that they were forced to delay collaborative activities with other organizations because of the need to social distance, focusing instead on building relationships for future collaboration.

An organizational network analysis conducted at the beginning of the initiative and updated each spring strongly supports the conclusion that the networking activities of ENA were impactful. As previously discussed, the partners’ network density saw an increase of nearly 80% and their reported connections also steadily increased over the three rounds of the organizational network analysis.

Although the KIs and OH did not contain as many mentions of collaboration, the OH confirmed some of what the partner reports said on the subject. Of the 33 OH examples of the ENA initiative contributing to partner work, four specifically mentioned the convening activities. Convenings are one of the primary ways that the initiative gives partner organizations opportunities to connect, build relationships, and collaborate.

A key element of the ENA initiative has been supporting partners in conducting organizational capacity assessments. Partners can use these assessments to inform how they pursue internal capacity development and how they propose to use available organizational development grants. While not as dominant a theme as the appreciation for GFC’s flexible funding, partners found organizational capacity assessments helpful. With continuous support from GFC, 16 of the 17 partners have created organizational capacity development plans after participating in organizational capacity assessments. Out of these 16 partners, ten have received organizational development grants to support capacity development activities in their plans. Of the 33 OH examples of the ENA initiative contributing to partner work, 18% involved organizational capacity assessments.

4. To what extent have external factors (positive and negative) had an effect on the initiative as a whole and on partners’ work?

To answer this question, the learning review team looked at the transcripts from the KIs, the outcomes harvested by partners, and partner reports. Unsurprisingly, these sources showed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on partners’ programming and their ability to interact with the adolescent girls they work with. In the latter half of the initiative’s second year, which corresponded to the beginning of the pandemic in Latin America, 13% of the 38 new activities and programs started by partners were related to COVID-19. In the third year, the percentage of new activities and programs related to COVID-19 rose to 53%. COVID-19-related programming addressed both direct and indirect effects of COVID-19 on the lives of adolescent girls, from sharing information about how and why social distancing was important to educating partners’ communities about the many ways in which the pandemic was exacerbating the existing challenges facing adolescent girls. Across all partner activities and programming, adaptations were made to improve adolescent girls’ access to the partners’ services during times of extreme social distancing. This was especially true for partners in Honduras, where social distancing rules were severe and were strictly enforced by the government. One partner in Honduras reported being unable to work with adolescent girls in person at all, not even when following safety measures such as meeting outdoors, socially distancing, and wearing masks.

Despite the degree to which COVID-19 reshaped programming, partners talked very little about it in the KIs and the OH. When they did, many statements about the pandemic emphasized positives, like the creative ways that they adapted their programming to provide the essential support that many children and adolescents needed during the pandemic. For example, some found engaging with adolescent girls online to be an opportunity to develop technological skills. Some partners that were able to provide in-person services spent time traveling to the homes of the children and youth who had previously come to their offices, and through that, developed closer ties with families and the community in general. Three partners reported establishing new connections through their work educating the community about

COVID-19. One of these partners established partnerships with three separate organizations based around its work educating the community on the ways in which the pandemic can increase adolescent girls’ vulnerability to violence. Additionally, three partners received pandemic-related emergency funding from new donors as a result of their access to GFC’s network or GFC’s support of the grantmaking process. The lack of negative comments around COVID-19 may reflect partners seeing it as simply one more external challenge, which only makes their work of protecting and empowering adolescent girls more important. Another explanation could be that the OH and KIs were conducted well into the pandemic, when even the most difficult adaptations in partners’ work had become normalized.

While the pandemic was a shared external factor across the entire initiative, several political events and natural disasters affected subgroups of partners. For example, all three of the Nicaraguan partners who participated in the KIs talked about the 2018 uprising and the subsequent government crackdown on civil society organizations as severely impeding every aspect of their work, from their ability to receive international funding to their ability to advocate for the rights of adolescent girls and do outreach. Partners in Nicaragua and Guatemala also talked about how their countries’ economic crises and persistent poverty meant that young girls had to spend more time helping their families earn money and were less available to participate in programming.

“Poverty persists in many communities, and parents force their daughters to work in the fields. The expectation is that they contribute economically, or with manual labor. This becomes a barrier to the girls participating with us.” – Partner, Guatemala

Other factors that partners referenced included environmental disasters, such as the eruption of the Fuego Volcano in Guatemala in 2018 and hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020; opposition from local political leaders; and opposition from church leaders.

The external factors described above impacted the ENA initiative and partners’ work, but GFC’s flexible support and the partners’ own creativity, adaptability, and resilience limited the negative effects to some extent. Many partners expressed appreciation for GFC’s emergency grants and other forms of support during crises. One partner in Nicaragua particularly appreciated GFC’s willingness to rush the grant disbursement process when a new policy threatened to prevent the organization from receiving the funds. This flexibility is essential for many of the partners facing continually shifting political contexts.

Takeaways

Relying on the findings in the previous section of the report, this section presents a discussion of the main conclusions from the learning review, as well as certain actions GFC can undertake in the ENA initiative going forward and/or in its partnerships more broadly.

Based on the learning review activities and the data the team analyzed, the ENA initiative is meaningfully addressing and advancing its established objectives. With GFC support, partners are developing their organizational and technical capacity and are expanding and strengthening programs geared toward empowering adolescent girls. Throughout the review, GFC’s approach not only to grantmaking but also to building relationships with partners was consistently recognized as essential to the success of the initiative.

Some of the changes that partners reported in the adolescent girls they work with were an increased sense of empowerment, leadership, solidarity, and collective action. Moreover, some ENA partners remarked that some of their program participants were feeling hopeful about their future.

“The girls are facing such an incredibly adverse and difficult context. And yet, we see they have hope and ideas for a feminist future.” – Partner, Nicaragua

The relationship is at the root of success. In various learning review activities, partners expressed profound appreciation for GFC’s style and approach. The support of GFC staff; their availability; and their deep concern for the partners, their work, and the adolescent girls they serve played a particularly important role in the evolution of the initiative. At the heart of GFC’s approach is building genuine trust-based relationships with partners. Though this element of the initiative is not easily quantifiable, it was frequently referenced in different contexts within the learning review. Partners valued this approach nearly as much as the flexible funding and organizational capacity support. The return on this kind of investment appears to be significant and to benefit not only the partners but also the adolescent girls they serve.

Flexible funding is essential, and it needs to be multi-year. The benefits of multi-year flexible funding have steadily received more attention in international development, humanitarian, and philanthropic spaces. Flexible funding was the most mentioned and appreciated form of contribution to the ENA partners’ work, and partners reported that the freedom to decide what to spend the money on allowed them to focus on things that mattered most to the adolescent girls and the communities they serve. Flexibility was particularly important during the incredibly difficult and unpredictable time of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and GFC strongly believes that flexible funding needs to become a widespread practice beyond the current crisis. To make real, lasting, community-driven impact possible, funders need to scale back the requirements they place on local organizations, trust them, and ensure that they have the necessary support and services to serve their communities. Funders also need to make longer-term funding available. It is unrealistic and unsustainable to expect local organizations to create lasting change over the course of just one or two years. That is why in the search for continued funding for the ENA initiative, GFC will keep advocating for multi-year flexible funding.

Emergency grants are increasingly vital. GFC plans to continue to build its emergency grants approach, including through establishing connections with other donors and funders that can provide

emergency funding, and to integrate that approach into its initiatives. GFC and the ENA initiative adapted quickly to the pandemic, swiftly reallocating and disbursing emergency funds. However, with the ongoing crisis of the pandemic, a changing climate that is leading to increasingly unpredictable weather throughout Latin America, and an unstable political situation in Nicaragua, GFC needs to be ready to provide similar levels of emergency funding in the future.

Building networks is an ongoing process. Given the growth in partners’ networks over the course of the initiative, there are likely many potential new connections that other partners in the network are not taking advantage of. GFC plans to focus on providing more spaces (either virtual or in person) for partners and, perhaps, outside organizations to come together so that partners can make the most of each other’s extensive networks. It is also a regular practice at GFC to connect partners with other funders and expose them to external opportunities such as participation in events and conferences whenever possible. GFC will continue to make relevant introductions and present partners with other opportunities for collaboration.

Diversifying the types of support is important. From what partners reported in the different learning review activities, the combination of the different types of financial and nonfinancial support offered by GFC was important to them. On the financial side, in addition to the flexible funding GFC provides, partners had access to organizational development grants and emergency grants to fund specific needs as they emerged. As mentioned in the methodology section, partners were also invited to conduct their own research projects contributing to the learning review, for which they were offered small grants. As for nonfinancial support, investing resources in expanding other ways of supporting capacity development could help partners make more informed decisions about how to best use their grants. Partners mentioned both staff mentoring and organizational capacity assessments as very useful. These are complementary types of support, as more staff support can help partners operationalize their organizational capacity assessment results. Increasing the amount of support around organizational capacity assessments and/or GFC staff time to support partners in this and other endeavors would make the initiative’s funding model even more valuable.

Finally, more information needs to be collected about the intersection of flexible funding and other types of support, particularly those that inform how partners use those funds. Answering questions like “Did the organizational capacity assessment actively change how partners used flexible funds?” and “Would offering more-specific assessments, such as gender-transformative approaches, be helpful?” has the potential to greatly benefit the efficiency of this and other initiatives.

Participatory methodologies have power. Throughout the learning review, the majority of partners celebrated the fact that the ENA initiative introduced them to participatory methodologies and activities to use with their program participants, especially adolescent girls. It helped them create more inclusive programming with a gender-based and/or youth-based lens for their work, resulting in more responsive and relevant approaches. Based on the overwhelming mentions of integrating participatory tools and methodologies into their work, partners became more girl centered during the ENA initiative. In the future, it may be worthwhile for GFC and partners to develop a toolkit of the various participatory methodologies and activities applied in the initiative by individual partners and at the collaborative sessions supported by GFC. Such a guide could then be built upon and used by other initiatives at GFC. It may also be instructive to have a deeper exploration with the ENA partners on what truly makes an activity or process participatory; specifically, ensuring that adolescent girls’ input and participation is actually guiding and informing programming.

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