

Global Fund for Children

Summer 2026 Impact Report

A child painting during an activity
with Las Hijas del Rap in Mexico

Greetings and Happy Summer! In the spirit of the travel season, consider this impact report another way of traveling the world – from West Africa to Mexico – to meet courageous and powerful young leaders who are changing the world.

You'll meet the adolescent activists advancing girls' rights in Côte d'Ivoire, and Mayan girls in the Yucatán Peninsula building futures rooted in their own culture and language. You'll also meet two members of GFC's Youth Leadership Council, Oni Papa and Michael, who are shaping GFC's strategy, programming, and partnerships from the inside.

This work is only possible because of supporters like you who believe young people deserve a seat at the table. **Thank you for standing with them.**

Strength of Girls in Yucatán: Honoring Culture, Building Futures

A girl's path forward shouldn't be blocked by her gender, her language, or where she was born. Yet for generations in the Yucatán Peninsula, Mayan girls have faced steep barriers to staying in school and shaping their own futures – barriers rooted in a long history of colonialism and discrimination against Indigenous communities that persists today. **GFC's U Muuk'il Xch'úupalo'ob (Niñas Valientes/Strength of Girls) Initiative** exists to break the cycle, giving Mayan girls real tools and opportunities to overcome those barriers and pursue an education on their own terms.

This work builds on GFC's two decades of experience supporting educational initiatives and gender equality in Mayan communities across Mexico and Central America and is driven by the belief that a girl's culture, language, and community knowledge aren't obstacles to her success, they're the foundation of it. GFC is investing in a network of 17 locally-led organizations and collectives that advance Mayan children's rights by recovering and strengthening Indigenous identity. Together, we are reaching nearly 1,000 children and adolescents who aren't just attending programs built for them, but helping shape and lead them.





Spotlight: Radio Tuklik

One of these organizations is **Radio Tuklik**, a youth-led collective made up of and led by Mayan youth who are committed to promoting and preserving Indigenous culture. In production booths in Cholul and Tahdziú, young broadcasters use radio as a space to share their language, music, and stories and to address issues in their communities from a local perspective.

This year, with GFC's support, Radio Tuklik opened a third studio in Mayapán – a booth run entirely by young women. At the December inauguration, the team shared:



Every step like this serves as a reminder that community and Indigenous media are strengthened when driven by local communities, local voices, and the conviction that we all have the right to be heard.

Since partnership with GFC includes capacity-building support and organizational strengthening workshops, we were also able to help strengthen Radio Tuklik from the inside out with strategic guidance. The collective recently established a Radio Representation Committee – made up of two members from each booth – to guide internal organization, build partnerships with their peers, and plan for the station's long-term sustainability.

GFC is proud to support organizations like Radio Tuklik that are building new spaces rooted in Indigenous voice, youth leadership, and the belief that every community has the right to be heard.



Take a trip with GFC!

Want to see Radio Tuklik in action? Join GFC's 2027 Learning Tour to Mérida, Mexico this February, and witness firsthand how Mayan girls and the partners who walk alongside them are transforming what's possible for their communities. To express interest, email Rebecca Rubenstein at rrubenstein@globalfundforchildren.org.



Children participating in a radio activity with Radio Tuklik in Mexico.

Investing in Girls' Leadership in West Africa

Across Africa, more than half of the population is under 18. It is a continent with massive potential for youth-led change which is why GFC has been investing in African youth for 30 years. Part of our work in Africa today is supporting a cohort of **15 women- and youth-led organizations across Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea** that are addressing the barriers girls face in accessing education, working to end gender based violence and harmful traditional practices, and helping girls reach their full potential.

The work is centered on a dual goal: meeting girls' immediate educational and safety needs, while facilitating community-led systemic change to reduce gender-based violence. The results have been profound, including changing national policies to allow pregnant girls to stay in school, ending Female Genital Cutting (FGC) practices, and providing menstrual products to keep girls in school.

Since 2022, GFC has hosted the biennial **Adolescent Girls Summit (AGS)** – a convening designed by and for youth, that brings together young leaders, community-based partners, and advocates from across Africa to strengthen leadership, build solidarity, and advance girls' rights. By centering adolescents as decision-makers, not only as participants, AGS creates space for young people to shape solutions to the issues affecting their lives and is a powerful example of youth-led leadership development and advocacy.



This April, more than 200 adolescents from 25 countries gathered in Côte d'Ivoire for the 2026 AGS. Throughout the week, attendees exchanged strategies, strengthened their advocacy skills, and collaborated across borders on the issues that impact them most – from girls' education and child marriage to civic participation and gender equality.

Together, they co-created the 2026–2028 Adolescents' Action Plan, a youth-led roadmap outlining the commitments they will carry out in their communities over the next two years. Young people pledged to lead peer education and advocacy campaigns on gender justice, to build and strengthen safe spaces where girls and young women can meet, collaborate, and speak freely, and to hold governments and institutions accountable for delivering on their commitments to adolescent health, rights, and wellbeing.

Among the adolescent leaders was **Abigail, an activist from Nigeria.** For Abigail, the Summit was a catalyst for action. She returned home determined to challenge the acceptance of child marriage in her community and to help end the cycle of girls being pushed out of school. Abigail is creating accessible tools to help young people understand their rights while advocating alongside community leaders and youth groups for stronger systems of support and protection.



“Every girl deserves the right to be the architect of her own life. [...] To my fellow young leaders: The ‘wait your turn’ era is over.” – Abigail

Abigail's story is one of hundreds emerging from this year's AGS. Whether advocating for policy change, leading peer education initiatives, or creating safer spaces for girls, AGS attendees are transforming the momentum of the Summit into lasting change – demonstrating that when young people are trusted to lead, they become powerful agents of change for stronger, safer, and more equitable communities.

Click [HERE](#) to see more faces from the Summit.



Abigail speaking at the 2026 Adolescent Girls Summit

Youth Power in Action: GFC's Youth Leadership Council

As you might expect, at Global Fund for Children, we don't just listen to young people – we share decision-making power with them at the highest levels. **The Youth Leadership Council (YLC) is a dynamic group of young leaders from around the world who help shape GFC's strategy, programming, governance, and partnerships.** As ambassadors and changemakers, YLC members ensure that young people's perspectives are embedded across our work, strengthening our accountability to the communities we serve and helping GFC lead with authenticity. YLC team members shape GFC's global and regional strategy and represent the organization in external spaces. Additionally, co-chairs of the YLC serve as members of the GFC Global Board of Directors, ensuring youth perspectives are embedded in the organization's highest level decision-making.

Meet members of the YLC:

Michael Nabieu, Sierra Leone

A youth climate advocate from Sierra Leone, Michael is Co-Founder and Executive Director of FAIECY-SL, a youth-led organization advancing environmental sustainability and climate resilience. FAIECY-SL works with farming communities on climate-smart agriculture and renewable energy solutions, such as using solar-powered dryers to reduce post harvest food loss and strengthen food security in the face of increasingly unpredictable rainfall and flooding. He brings this experience working alongside communities on the frontlines of climate change to GFC's work.



Earlier this year, Michael joined the GFC Africa team's regional retreat in Nanyuki, Kenya where he led a session on integrating climate resilience across GFC's programming in Africa. His expertise helped shape conversations about how GFC can better support community-based organizations responding to the growing impacts of climate change.

Contributing to GFC's regional strategy taught me that youth leadership isn't about being heard, it's about being trusted to lead and shape decisions. The Kenya retreat showed me what that trust looks like in practice, and I hope more organizations are willing to build it."

– Michael Nabieu

Maria Veronica O. Papa (“Oni Papa”), Philippines

A youth advocate from the Philippines, Oni Papa has dedicated her career to advancing meaningful youth participation in climate action and democratic governance. She serves as Global Communications Co-Lead for UNEP's Children and Youth Major Group, the UN's formal mechanism for youth participation in environmental policy and governance. Additionally, as Program Manager for the Asia Region at the International Federation of Liberal Youth, Oni Papa connects young leaders across the region working on shared policy and governance challenges. As Co-Chair of GFC's Youth Leadership Council, Oni Papa brings these lived experiences and priorities directly to the GFC Global Board.

This year, GFC sponsored Oni Papa's participation in the Women Deliver Conference in Melbourne, Australia, one of the world's leading gatherings on gender equality and the rights of women and girls. The conference provided an opportunity to connect with youth leaders, advocates, policymakers, and funders from around the world.



[At Women Deliver,] I rooted as many stories as I could in community, its memory, and in every brave story that some of our young people never had the opportunity to tell. Behind me stood my generation, my people, and the future generations whose freedom to dream we are collectively trying to protect. This is the weight GFC has chosen to place on sharing power with the youth."

-Maria Veronica Oni Papa

GFC is proud to have incredible youth activists such as Michael and Oni Papa helping to lead GFC from the top, shape our strategy, and to continue to push for change in their country and globally.

You can read more about the other YLC members [HERE](#).

Thank you for your commitment to young leaders who are creating a safer and brighter future for their communities!



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