GENERATION HOPE

STORIES, INSIGHTS and more from our work with young people across Africa.

Planet Earth may be ancient, but its people are mostly young—and in this increasingly uncertain world, **they happen to hold the greatest amount of hope**. Here's what we have been learning from partnering with them.

Although the Earth is over 4.5 billion years old, its future rests in the hands of a generation that's just getting started. And with them, comes the greatest amount of hope. There are now more than 2.4 billion young people, and nearly 90% live in low-and-middle-income countries. They face unprecedented challenges in an increasingly uncertain world.

Young people across the Global South hold tremendous potential, but they face disproportionate risks and barriers that can create challenging transitions into adulthood. Across Asia and Africa, young people—particularly girls and young women—are vulnerable to poverty and exploitation and face limited job prospects.

But evidence shows, when girls and young women are equipped with skills and tools they need, they become architects of change. They transform their lives and communities. At BRAC, we envision a world without barriers, where talents flourish, and where extraordinary accomplishments become the norm. A world that works for everyone.

How are we turning our learnings into action at BRAC?

In this document, we share some of our experiences working with the girls, young women and communities at the heart of BRAC's work with young people.

Are we ready to listen to those closest to the challenge?

We take holistic, evidence-based approaches to scale -

combining social empowerment, economic empowerment, and building supportive ecosystems to enable young people to reach their full potential.

We deliver these approaches through our youth programming which implements the Empowerment and **Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) model**, and our newest programme, **Mastercard Foundation Accelerating Impact for Young Women** in partnership with BRAC - the **AIM** programme.

About our newest programme

The AIM programme builds evidence, expertise and resources of BRAC's long-established development programmes in poverty alleviation, youth empowerment, skills development and agriculture and network of microfinance institutions in Africa.

So, what exactly are we doing?

Creating safe spaces for groups of adolescent girls and young women to gather and interact and learn together. Mentorship from a young woman—a 'near peer'—in the community, who also runs the club

Providing life, social and emotional skills training to equip participants with knowledge that will inform key life choices, including information on sexual and women's reproductive health, gender-based violence and female empowerment

Livelihood training on how to generate income, including financial literacy, goal setting and developing a technical skill in a marketable sector

Creating access to responsible financial services to enable older participants to start or grow their own businesses through microfinance loans

Engaging communities including boys and men, to develop local support for and advocate for the wellbeing and rights of young people, and change social norms related to roles and expectations for adolescent girls and young women

Our ambitious **GOAL** is to equip **1.2M** adolescent girls and young women with age-appropriate entrepreneurship, employability, and life-skills training, empowering them to start and scale their own businesses.

That's enough to fill out **Madison Square Garden** nearly **60** times over OR match the ENTIRE **population of Iceland**

6 countries	420K	6.8K	26K	20K
In Africa Sierra Leone | Liberia | South Sudan Uganda | Tanzania | Rwanda	young people accessed **safe spaces, life skills** and **social** and **economic empowerment interventions**	**mentors** trained to deliver life skills training to youth participants	young women accessed **microfinance** services	**young women** set to start and expand their **livelihoods**

Timeline

BRAC's approach to **powering the potential** of young people, especially girls and young women, **has evolved over 40 years**, through various iterations and learning across different contexts.

1980s — Bangladesh
Non-formal primary education model introduced at a time when **40%** of Bangladesh's primary-aged children **were not in school**

1990s — Bangladesh
BRAC launches an adolescent development programme (ADP) to serve the needs of the many girls who dropped out before secondary school – introducing safe spaces for girls to socialise and learn

2006 — Uganda
BRAC opens the first 100 youth clubs in Uganda, implementing the **ELA model**- which is built on learnings from **ADP clubs in Bangladesh**

2008 — Tanzania
Youth club opens

2011 — South Sudan
Youth club opens

2012 — Sierra Leone
Youth club opens
A randomised controlled trial from Uganda shows outstanding results

2014 — Liberia
Youth club opens
The World Bank and **USAID** announce **large-scale Africa programmes** based partly on the **ELA model**

2020 — 150K+
young people reached through BRAC's youth empowerment programmes across Africa

2023 — 660+
Youth clubs opened in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Tanzania, in the first implementing year of the AIM programme, reaching **70K+** young participants

2024 — 2,000+
new clubs open, **reaching 200K+ new participants** in AIM's second year in **five countries**, including Rwanda

2025 and beyond
Using **learning** and **evidence** from programmes currently being implemented, BRAC aims to further deepen and **scale the impact** of our partnerships with young people and communities

The numbers are grim

In a baseline survey with **more than 6,300** of BRAC's youth club participants **across 6 countries** - Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda - we found:

More than 60% of respondents reported having **faced gender-based violence** in their lifetime

1 in every 8 participants aged 15-17 in Liberia and Uganda have been pregnant or were **pregnant** at the time of the survey

Only about **1 in 5** adolescent girls and young women (**19.8%** of 1,265 surveyed) have a **source of income.**

55% of adolescent girls currently in school **report challenges in continuing their education**

But HOPE is not lost

"My mentor could never freely talk about her reproductive or sexual health. Not even with her parents. Both her parents and teachers believe these topics were taboo," says Doris a young woman attending an AIM club.

Doris, who is much younger than her mentor says they may have grown up at different times, but the same old taboos have remained in her hometown in Uganda.

But a safe space in their community is now allowing both of them to speak freely about these sensitive topics, cutting through the shame and stigma that typically surround such conversations.

Social and economic barriers prevent girls from learning about menstrual hygiene and sexual and reproductive health and rights, and seeking protection and support for sexual and gender-based violence. As a result, many girls miss out on school, and opportunities for skilling and employment in the future.

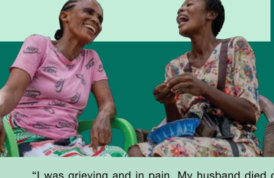
"I was in the classroom when I had my first period. My classmate saw the blood, panicked and told me to go to the headmaster.

The headmaster was shocked and told me to immediately go home to my mother. He had no idea what to do. Back at home, my mother told me I was turning into a woman but did not give me any further information. She ripped off the end of her skirt and gave me the torn piece to use as a sanitary cloth. There were no sanitary napkins available. And that was all I was told about menstruation.

I learnt about menstrual hygiene for the first time when I started going to the club sessions. My own daughter had her period a few weeks after I joined the AIM clubs. I was able to be more open and explain the changes her body would go through – that it is normal and there should be no shame associated with this. I gave her sanitary pads, and also spoke to her about menstrual hygiene," says Pamhadar.

35-year-old Pamhadar

lives with her 13-year-old daughter in Kakata, near the central coast of Liberia. She joined the AIM club in her community in March 2023, and completed her six month-long social empowerment curriculum under her mentor, Susan.



"Pamhadar would not speak at all when she joined the club. She never even smiled."

"I was grieving and in pain. My husband died during the COVID-19 pandemic. My daughter and I lived with my mother, who supported us. She also died soon after. It was all so difficult, and I could only feel anger. I thought no one would understand what I was going through.

I decided to keep going to the club and a few sessions in, I started to feel more comfortable. I was making friends. I was learning so many new things. For example: The tree of life – which shows me where I come from, my history, the relationships in my life that support and nurture me. I learnt about our emotional jugs – and how to find calm when that jug overflows. I realised these coping tools were helping me feel relaxed, more hopeful.

It has been months since our club sessions ended, but I still stay in touch with my mentor, Susan. I am also raising two pigs now - Kuma and Tapoa. I am hoping there will be some piglets in a few more months. I decided to learn how to rear pigs after the club sessions ended, so I got training from the programme and got these two.

My mother used to raise goats before, so I felt I could raise pigs if I learnt. After my mother died, my daughter and I had to find a way to keep earning. She helped me out after school. We would take my wheelbarrow and walk around the village trying to sell soft drinks.

A lot has changed for me and I feel like I have a new lease on life. I am not going to waste the opportunity to build a better life for me and my daughter. I want her to be good, and be able to take care of herself and other people. I want her to grow up feeling like a valued member of the community."

About 72 million young people in Africa are not in education, employment or training - two-thirds of whom are young women. They are often the hardest hit by conflicts, inequalities and the impact of climate change.

A supportive ecosystem is key to ensuring equitable opportunities. This means working with families and communities to understand the importance of girls' education, the dangers of early marriage and pregnancies, and building their skills and confidence so they can hope and plan for the future they want.

Why do so many families prefer boys over girls? Let's embrace equity. If a boy can go to school, so can a girl. If a boy can pursue his dreams, so can a girl. Let's stop holding her back. Let her live her dreams.

DID YOU KNOW?

Uganda is a young country with children between the ages of **0- 17 years** making up more than **half of the population**, and youth between the ages of **18-30** comprising **22.7%**.

"Everything you see here - the clothes, bags, toys, and homeware - my mom and I made them ourselves. And many of them are made out of recycled materials!

My father died when I was two. My mother made a small earning through simple tailoring jobs that she did from our house. It was difficult to manage the family with her sole income, so there wasn't much stability. I ended up dropping out of school after Senior-4.

Growing up, one of my most vivid memories was watching my mother practise at her sewing machine, getting better at it as the days went by. My mother, thankfully, had siblings who helped her take care of us. In fact my sister, who is now a nurse, and my brother were both cared for by our maternal uncle, who helped pay for their education.

As I did not finish my schooling and had no income, I got married when I was quite young. We have since separated. We have two children together.

I had joined the AIM club while I was still living with him. Our marriage was so difficult and I was completely shattered during the separation. My mentor and friends at the club were my strength and gave me courage during the separation. They even raised 70,000 UG shillings (USD 19) to help me through the process of moving out with my children back to my mother's. Through this turmoil, the club became my place of rest and peace. I went there to free myself of my worries. At the club, we learned about emotional regulation, stress management, and most importantly for me, found a thriving support system.

Now 30, I'm a single mother of two young children. We live with my mother, and her mother my grandmother. My shop is a short walk down the dirt road beside our house.

I am an entrepreneur and an environmentalist. I reuse discarded scraps of cloth, bottle caps, wires and plastic bags to make my products. My products started getting a lot of attention within the first few months of opening. I now make a profit of 300,000 UG shillings (USD 81) each month.

I started my business with 750,000 UG shillings (USD 200) which I received after being trained on small business management. At the clubs, I was focused on learning the basics of business, using the internet for marketing my products, and also the importance of saving. Unlike many of my friends, I had access to a smartphone. So, I took a lot of interest in the lessons on using the internet and social media platforms like Instagram, Tiktok and Facebook to help my business. I started marketing my products online.

I plan to keep saving money from my business and want to return to school. I want a professional degree to become a nurse - something that I have dreamt of for a long time.

To be able to dream again is no easy task for me. When my sons first enrolled in school, I did not have the means to make them uniforms. Once my store was running and I started making profits, I immediately bought fabric and tailored uniforms for them. When I went to drop them off at school dressed in their new uniforms, the school authorities reached out to me. They gave me a contract to make uniforms for all their students. These tiny acts of kindness and recognition help me keep moving forward.

I feel excited these days - to grow my business, to save more money, to keep educating my children and to go back to school myself.
- Sarah Ntale

"I walked door to door to nearly 400 homes, conducting surveys to identify eligible participants in the community. This was one of my first tasks after joining as a programme assistant."

- Nancee, Programme Officer

But Nancee met only two young women with a higher education degree out of the 400 households she visited. Instead Nancee found out that most girls above the age of 15 were mothers to at least one child.

"These girls face so many challenges. Their families and community members play a big role in encouraging them to be more independent, to work towards a better future. We also work closely with members of the community to make sure they are safeguarding the wellbeing of young people in the community," says Nancee.

Soon after the household surveys were completed, Nancee and her team worked with the two mentors to form youth development committees (YDC) to familiarise them with the interventions of the AIM programme. They were shown the curriculums developed for the club sessions to ensure there is transparency within the community. The YDCs are usually formed with elderly and respected members of the community, school headmasters, parents of the young girls and women attending the clubs.

"All the 300 girls and young women who have been attending our clubs have shown remarkable progress in just the span of a few months. I feel so proud of them. When I met many of them the first time, they were so quiet and shy. And now they are so confident, so vocal," says Nancee.

"I tell young people - keep your hope alive and nourish your mind. Your future will depend on what you do today," says Ibrahim, a headmaster at a private school.

Ibrahim has been the headmaster of a private school for over six years, and currently heads the youth development committee in his community. He monitors the clubs and talks to the participants and their parents on a regular basis. The YDC meets every few months to discuss issues affecting young participants.

"At first, they didn't seem very serious about coming to the clubs. But soon they started making friends there and that encouraged them to keep going. I can see a lot of positive changes in those who go to the clubs," Ibrahim says while speaking about the participants who were attending the AIM clubs.

"When you see me, I may not look too confident but once you get to know me, you will see a very different side to me."

- Jamira, Mentor

"At the start of the sessions, we take turns in talking through the club rules - no discrimination, no judgemental comments, and no sharing of anyone else's personal stories that they trusted us with."

When we first met, Jamira was explaining the female reproductive system to the participants in her club in Uganda's Iganga, pointing at a hand-drawn poster, explaining the function of each part.

Her voice commands everyone's attention and the moment she senses a dip in participation, she gets everyone to stand up, shake it off and dance. The room erupts in happy voices of women who cheer each other on.

"I was a mentor in an ELA club for two years from 2018 to 2020. And now I am a mentor for an AIM club. What I enjoy most is mentoring the youngest age group – 12 to15-year-olds participate most actively, and their curious minds are always ready to learn, no matter how difficult the topics are. I try to ensure that my club is a safe space where participants can express themselves freely."

Jamira's days are long and start with strenuous physical activity early in the morning. She goes to households who have farms, and digs for two hours each morning for a small sum of money. Sometimes, the families she works for give her seeds which she farms on her small patch of land in her backyard. Sometimes they also give her their produce - beans, cassava, maize. She returns home and makes breakfast for everyone in the family.

The club sessions don't start until afternoon. "It takes me 15 minutes to walk from my home to the club. Before my sessions, I revise the curriculum and prepare for the day's topic. I call my supervisor whenever I have a problem understanding something in the workbook."

Jamira is one of more than 6,800 mentors who have been rigorously trained to manage club activities and deliver a comprehensive life skills curriculum. Mentors are recruited from communities based on their educational qualifications and leadership skills. They serve as role models and help connect members to resources in the community.

"I consider my work a calling, and that is what gets me going every morning."

As a club mentor, I run sessions with 15-19 year old boys in my community. I want to help them make better decisions for their future. I want to help them understand that their life should not be wasted away. I want them to be confident and chase after their dreams."

Mwinidadi Bahari is an AIM club mentor for the group of adolescent boys and young men (15-19 years). As a mentor, he guides his participants through various topics - safeguarding, positive and healthy relationships, emotional management, health and hygiene, and savings and budgeting.

What have we been learning?

A snapshot of evidence

In Uganda, RCT results from 2008 to 2012 revealed double-digit, village-wide impact on girls on a wide variety of indicators:

- A 48% rise in income generation
- 34% drop in teen pregnancy in villages with ELA clubs
- The share of girls reporting sex against their will in these villages dropped by close to a third
- These results were published in American Economic Journal: Applied Economics in January 2020

"Adolescent empowerment at scale: Successes and challenges of an evidence-based approach to young women's programming in Africa" (2023) provides an overview of the history, impact and challenges faced by BRAC in its implementation of ELA in multiple countries over 17 years.

Research from South Sudan and Sierra Leone shows these results can be replicated in other contexts.

Studies show ELA is an effective intervention even in disaster settings, where the programme has a different but still positive impact. In both cases, the programme inoculated girls against the worst effects of the outbreak of disease and war. In Sierra Leone, where Ebola broke out in the midst of the RCT, researchers found that the epidemic caused post-crisis school enrollment to drop more than 20 percentage points. Participation in this programme offset that almost entirely. Similarly, in South Sudan, where civil conflict re-emerged between baseline and endline, the violence caused conflict-affected girls to stop going to school, but ELA counteracted this effect. ELA therefore, effectively inoculated girl survivors against many of the worst long-term impacts of both crises. An evaluation in Tanzania, meanwhile, showed the impact of layered interventions, including goal-setting for girls and interventions for boys, which have further shaped the redesigning of the ELA programme.

We are grateful to our partners for joining us in powering the potential of young people and their communities.

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