

SYNTHESIS OF LEARNINGS / LESSONS LEARNT FROM GAA PROGRAMME IN AFRICA

GIRLS ADVOCACY ALLIANCE



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**Synthesis of Learnings/Lessons Learnt
from GAA Programme in Africa**

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
APC	Alliance Programme Committee
APT	Alliance Programme Team
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AULO	Plan African Union Liaison Office
AYF	African Youth Front
BOD	Board of Directors
CBOs	Community-based organisations
CCC	Community Care Coalition
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CL	Child labour
CM	Child marriage
CSEC	Commercial sexual exploitation of children
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CT	Child trafficking
DAC	Day of the African Child
DCI	Defence for Children International
EAC	East African Community
EACRN	Eastern Africa Child Rights Network
EALA	East African Legislative Assembly
EAPPCO	Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EE	Economic exclusion
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FIDA	Federation of Women Lawyers
FTE	Final Term Evaluation
GAA	Girls Advocacy Alliance
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GenCED	Gender Centre for Empowering Development
GIMAC	Gender Is My Agenda Campaign
GYW	Girls and Young Women
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
MEMPROW	Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women

MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MRU	Mano River Union
MTR	Mid Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PME	Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
REC	Regional Economic Communities
SGBV	Sexual Gender-Based Violence
STTK	Stop the Traffik - Kenya
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
YNSD	Youth Network for Sustainable Development

Introduction

Background

This publication provides a synthesis and compilation of the significant lessons that have been harvested from the five-year GAA programme implemented in the Africa Regional Program and the six GAA Africa country programmes, namely Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. It specifically documents the following lessons;

- a) How the GAA national and regional influencing processes linked within the alliance.
- b) How effective civil society organisations (CSOs) developed in influencing and advocacy.

In addition to documenting lessons learnt, the publication can also be used as an input for future program design and learning. For example, it can be used in planning the upcoming “She Leads Program”.

The lessons are based on successes, mistakes, challenges, and failures across the programme countries and at the regional programme.

The specific objectives of this learning publication is:

- i. To produce a creative publication with significant learnings on how the GAA national and regional influencing processes linked within the alliance’s operations in Africa. This is based on the successes, mistakes, challenges, and failures across the project countries as well as the regional program. This will offer lessons for

future programming.

- ii. To document how effective CSOs developed in influencing and advocacy as one of the core learning for the future development of different advocacy initiatives.

Methodology

Learning as an organisational culture

An organisational culture committed to continuous improvement and adaptive management will encourage documentation and applying of lessons. Lessons learnt mechanisms communicate acquired knowledge more effectively and ensure that beneficial information is factored into a program’s planning, monitoring, and evaluation (PME) cycle. Figure 1 below defines the framework for this post-facto lessons learnt synthesis and the compilation process.

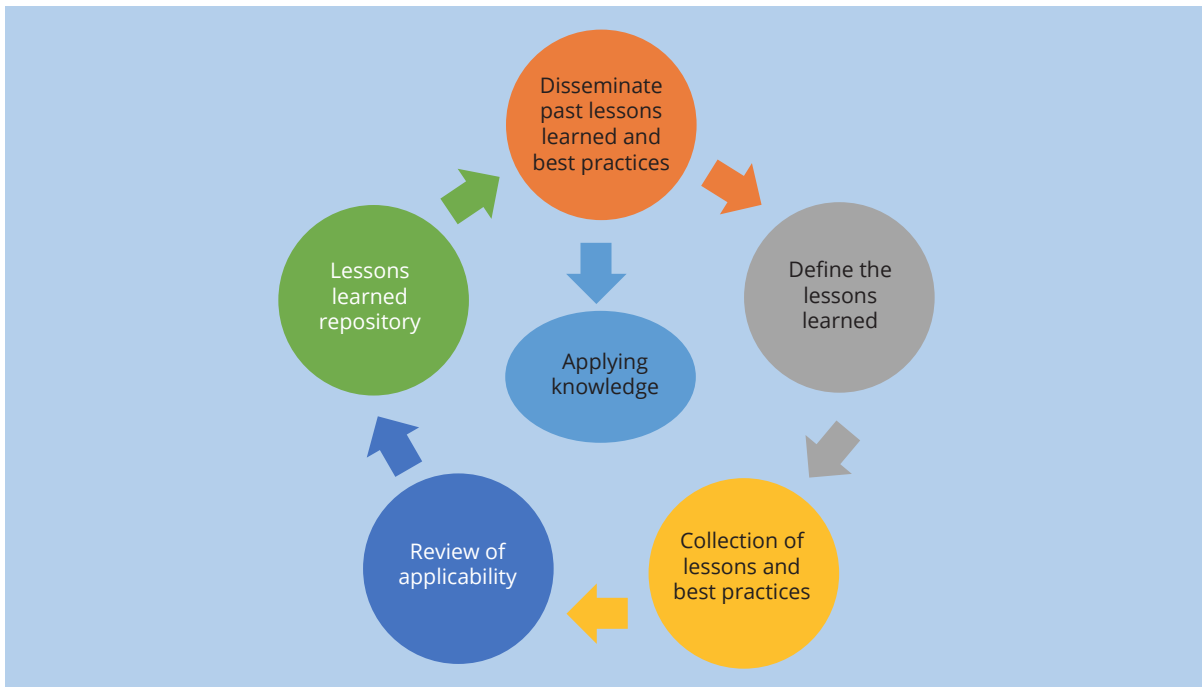


Figure 1. Framework for lessons learnt synthesis process.

To achieve the learning publication objectives, a desk review was undertaken on relevant GAA resources, documenting progress, outcomes, and lessons learnt. The documents reviewed include (but are not limited to);

- i. GAA Inception Report, September 2016
- ii. GAA Annual Reports for 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020
- iii. GAA Advocacy Manual
- iv. GAA Capacity Assessment Results
- v. GAA Midterm Review Synthesis Report, December 2018
- vi. GAA Learning Booklet: Societies in Transition - Learning from Roads to Change, January 2019
- vii. GAA Final Term Evaluation draft report, November 2020.

While several lessons were documented in these reports, not all of them have been included in this publication. The ones that did not provide significant new and contextual knowledge to improve future programming were excluded. Lessons presented in this publication are considered as significant knowledge/understanding gained from experiences during the implementation of the GAA programme in the Africa Regional Programme and the six GAA Africa Country Programmes. These experiences, either positive or negative, should be taken into account for future planning, implementation, and monitoring of similar or related programmes.

Data analysis

The lessons documented in the GAA annual reports, midterm review reports, final term evaluation, and other program documents were synthesized, described, and organised by a defined criterion using content analysis. Consequently, the lessons with common themes/issues on how the GAA national and regional influencing processes linked; and how effective CSOs develop in influencing and advocacy were identified and grouped together.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic posed limitations on the methodology used to collect information for the learning publication. Due to the pandemic, a desk review was used to gather data on the lessons learnt during the implementation of the GAA programme. While it had been proposed that key informants would be interviewed to affirm the findings of the desk review, this was not possible. Therefore, a lot of focus was put on desk reviews to document the lessons learnt.



1

The linkage between GAA national and regional influencing processes within the alliance

Introduction

The GAA operated under a three-tiered governance structure that allowed for strong technical input, clear decision-making, accountability, flexibility, and on-ground coordination. This was constituted by the Alliance Programme Teams (APTs) at the operational level, the Alliance Programme Committee (APC) at the tactical level, and the Board of Directors (BoD) at the strategic level. The governance and management of the Girls Advocacy Alliance Programme are supported by the Alliance Desk.

At the Africa Regional Programme, the APT consists of Plan International Africa Union Liaison Office (Plan AULO) Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Defence for Children Regional Africa, and ECPAT International. GAAs Africa Regional Programme also has Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and the International Federation of Women Lawyers (la Federacion Internacional De Abogadas – FIDA) as regional partners and five sub-regional CSOs with presence in the GAA programme countries. The regional programme aims to influence regional governance bodies in Africa (African Union and Regional Economic Communities) and is complementary to the GAA influencing in the six African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone).

The goal of the five year GAA programme 'Advocating for Girls' Rights' (2016 – 2020) was that by 2020, governments and private sector actors ensure that girls and young women in ten countries in Africa and Asia are free from gender-based violence and are economically empowered. To realize this, the Girls Advocacy Alliance used

two main strategies: The first strategy focused on strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations and networks. GAA specifically used Girls' and Young Women's (GYW) organisations to influence government and corporate/private sector actors to eliminate gender-based violence (GBV) and economic exclusion (EE) of girls and young women. The second strategy builds on lobby and advocacy for increased public support, improved policies and practices of corporate/private sector actors, effective implementation of legislation and public policies, and improved practices of government actors in support of the prevention and elimination of GBV and EE.

Through linkage of the GAA country and regional programmes, these approaches were used to contribute to agenda-setting and to influence policy and practice. At the Pan-African level, GAA targeted several organisations with lobbying and advocacy efforts. These included the AU Commission, the African Union Campaign on Ending Child Marriage (ECM) Secretariat, and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). Others were the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), and the Organisation of African First Ladies against AIDS (OAFILA). At the sub-regional levels, GAA targeted the East African Community (EAC), ECOWAS, and the Mano River Union Secretariats. At the national level, the main targets were national ministries and state departments in charge of gender, education, the Justice, Law, and Order Sectors (JLOS), foreign/regional affairs, and the internal security departments

Learnings in programme planning, implementation and monitoring

Lesson 1: Joint planning among country programmes and the regional programme is a key backbone in monitoring and evaluating the interventions

Mutual planning among the country programmes, the regional programme, and the international and Netherlands' programme components were one of the key lessons learnt. The collaboration was the backbone of the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Girls Advocacy Programme. The joint annual planning that was conducted by APTs and local NGO partners at the start of each calendar year was instrumental in laying out the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the GAA programme at every annual cycle¹.

There are several examples of these joint planning processes leading to success. First, the development of the joint work plan between the national and regional partners in December 2019. The combined efforts successfully led to the lobbying of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) on the East African Community (EAC) bill by both Kenya and Uganda national coalitions at the country level. Secondly, there was a joint work plan and close collaboration between national and regional partners to organise a month-long series of webinars.

The webinars culminated in the commemoration of the World Day against Trafficking in July 2020 and a side event during the 36th session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). The partnership also led to joint implementation and participation in partner activities, such as the data collection exercise by

Stop the Traffik-Kenya (STTK) and Eastern Africa Child Rights Network (EACRN) that led to the development of a report on child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in Kenya².

The process of joint Theory of Change development promoted ownership and shared understanding of the GAA programme objectives and deliverables

The reports documented other lessons that were learnt from the joint planning, implementation and monitoring processes within the GAA programme. These included;

- The development of the joint theory of change for the GAA programme at the inception stage was indicated as a good opportunity for joint programme design among GAA countries and the regional programmes. This co-creation process among all the GAA stakeholders promoted clear understanding and ownership of key programme deliverables among all implementing partners and formed the platform upon which subsequent monitoring and evaluation of the country and regional programmes were carried out. However, the programme had a significant number of targets (four pathways all with multiple targets) that made it difficult to have a clear focus. From the implementation experience, it was noted that the programme could have been more effective if it had a less complex design and chosen fewer pathways and/or underlying targets. Although efforts were made in 2019 to limit the number of policy areas per program component and to further align advocacy initiatives of the various organisations, this contributed to stronger focus on countries like Uganda but actual adaptive programming proved time-consuming due to (financial) compliance

¹GAA Inception report 2016

²GAA Inception report 2020

requirements at different levels.

- The joint monitoring and capacity development processes that were carried out in the GAA programme created a basis for collaboration, learning, adaptation and exchange of ideas within the GAA programme components. The development and implementation of the adaptive management, sharing of action plans, development of training materials and joint analysis in half-yearly outcome harvesting sessions, tailor-made and locally owned capacity development plans based on the capacity assessments created a basis for collaboration and exchange within GAA programme components. Adaptive programming has therefore proven to be an inclusive and empowering approach and facilitated the timely adaptation of the GAA programme³.
- Joint visioning among GAA members was noted as vital for enhanced and added value of the collaboration. The three Alliance members have somewhat different missions and visions that inform their way of working. From the experiences during implementation, it was noted that it can sometimes be hard to agree on how to approach certain issues, such as the age of target groups and vision on child labour in the countries where GAA partners are collaborating. It is therefore noted that the strength of the GAA programme can be leveraged on complementing visions, knowledge and approaches among the alliance members and country regional programmes. A key lesson is that more exchange and knowledge sharing on each GAA members' underlying assumptions could help to enhance the added value of collaboration.
- While these lessons were instrumental in strengthening the GAA programme's PM&E processes, a key challenge

was that the documentation and sharing of the programme lessons and experiences was not fully done in the first year of the programme's implementation since the programme was still at the inception stage. This was, however, enhanced in 2017 and in the subsequent years of implementation following capacity strengthening of the partners on the documentation processes of learnings.

- More efforts should be focused on linkage and structured learning at various levels of the programme. Creating more space for learning in the country programmes is equally important. Additionally, facilitating cross-country and cross-regional learning, and learning within the GAA overall programme can go a long way. The country programmes can gain

The inadequate clarity about the structure and process to facilitate collective need within the Alliance Partners in the initial period of implementation led to inadequate coordination and exchange of information.

a lot by strengthening the learning mechanisms through collaborative work, such as the development of common position papers and the documentation of lessons on how to undertake lobby and advocacy initiatives⁴.

- In addition, the inadequate clarity about the structure and process to facilitate collective need within the Alliance Partners in the initial period of implementation led to inadequate coordination and exchange of information. The turnover of staff in the leadership of the organisations of the alliance members made it difficult to be consistent in regards to the need of sharing, exchange of information as well as coordination among Alliance Partners⁵.

³GAA MTR report 2018

⁴Ibid

⁵GAA Inception report 2016

- Many of the CSOs did not have solid financial management systems and GAA addressed that through the financial management training and software provided. Resource mobilization was a weakness for some of the CSO partners, depending on a limited number of donor partners, thus, they were unable to sustain and/or scale up the programs they started with communities. GAA training on proposal writing and resource mobilization, as well as the joint annual reflection, helped at least two of the CSO partners to write a successful proposal to other donors to support their child protection programs. However, the development of resource mobilization strategy by the GAA partners took more time than anticipated. (Some CSOs were to finalize their strategies in 2020⁶).
- Furthermore, GAA was not always seen as an entity. Although efforts were made at the alliance level to support joint communication in programme countries, such as branding guideline and communications toolkit, joint communication strategies and messages were not clearly developed. In many cases, GAA members were functioning from their individual NGO background from a pragmatic approach, partly because they are mostly well known for their 'institutional' reputation. Joint public activities were therefore limited⁷.

An analysis of these lessons shows that the success of future programmes that involve alliances should consider the following:

- Joint annual planning for all the partners as central for effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the GAA programme activities.
- Based on the APTs implementation

experiences, future programming should consider fewer pathways and/or underlying targets to be more effective.

- Ensure the development of a joint theory of change that is less complex and that has fewer pathways and/or underlying targets to enable all partners to have a clear focus of the programme.
- Adaptive programming as an inclusive and empowering approach and for timely adaptation of lessons and scale-up of best practices in the programme.
- Strengthening joint visioning among partners to ensure cross-pollination of knowledge and approaches among the alliance members and country regional programmes.
- Drawing from the initial challenges faced by the GAA programme, it is important that clarity about the structure of the programme as well as critical documentation and reporting requirements, resource mobilisation and joint communication plans are outlined and addressed at the start of a similar programme.

Learning in the influencing context of GAA programme

Lesson 2: It is important to understand the influencing context

Nearly all the GAA programme components cited context as a major factor in their strategies and actions. The understanding that context and the web of power relationships within and around each context are important considerations that enabled the GAA programme to make inroads into policy and decision-making processes at national, sub-regional, and Pan-African levels. Granted, at each of these levels, what exists are closed or invited spaces – with their legalities

⁶GAA Mid Term Review Report 2018

⁷GAA Mid Term Review Report 2018

(procedures and norms) of participation. Learning this important lesson enabled the GAA programme to know which strategies work when, where, and for whom⁸.

Besides, while a key lesson for the programme was that planning, monitoring and evaluation in complex settings, such as the GAA programme, entailed a holistic assessment of results, it is important to emphasize the contextual issues in respective countries. Planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the interventions in the

The understanding that context and the web of power relationships within and around each context are important considerations which have enabled the GAA programme to make inroads into policy and decision-making processes at national, sub-regional and Pan-African levels.

context of the GAA programme required more than assessing results against predefined targets. It involved tracking changes based on the systems and contexts. Therefore, the understanding that planning, monitoring and evaluation of the GAA activities involved learning about what worked and what did not, and focused more on outcomes rather than outputs. This was a key lesson that enabled the GAA programme to be on track in achieving its planned outcomes⁹. Furthermore, measuring achievements in the context of the complex and non-linear design of the GAA's approach of lobby and advocacy required contextual specific monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches and a combination of monitoring tools¹⁰.

The transition from a service delivery approach to policy influencing required a rethink on both strategic and operational levels among partner civil society organisations (CSOs) and the alliance partner organisations on how to capture results. The key lesson learnt here was

that the joint programme workshops that applied outcome harvesting methodology were valuable to the CSOs and alliance partner organisations, specifically in understanding and making visible the results of GAA's policy influencing work. Indeed, the bi-annual outcome harvesting workshops reportedly served as moments of joint reflection on the harvested signs of change and offered a space to recognize how the less tangible results stemming from lobbying and advocacy work had been achieved with GAA programme's contributions¹¹.

Understanding of social, political and economic context was essential in the achievement of GAA programme's outcomes. This entailed a thorough analysis and scanning of the contexts of the programme components be undertaken at the design and planning stages for effective achievement of the lobbying and advocacy outcomes. These contexts need to be reviewed periodically and adaptive adjustments made to reflect the evolving scenarios. Prominence should also be put in the design and adaptation of specific monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and tools for capturing data and information of lobby and advocacy outcomes aligned to these contexts.

Lesson 3: Necessity is the mother of invention

The COVID-19 pandemic caught everyone unawares and led to the GAA programme and stakeholders inventing new ways of conducting business. Due to the pandemic, initially planned GAA programme activities at country and regional level for 2020 were adjusted to adapt to virtual meetings as a way of working with partners. Therefore, the need to adapt and maximize the use of technology during these exceptional times to achieve GAA programme outcomes is a key lesson that has been learnt during the pandemic period. The CSOs, policymakers, ministries, RECs and communities have

⁸Ibid

⁹GAA Inception report 2016

¹⁰GAA Inception report 2016

¹¹GAA FTE report Nov 2020

had to hold meetings and even research interviews online and through phone calls to respond to emerging issues facing girls and women such as increased cases of GBV during the pandemic. Some successful initiatives of this online collaboration were the establishment of an East African Community GBV working group, the launch of an online counselling service by the Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women (MEMPROW) that helped save three young women from sexual abuse, the buy-in by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) parliamentarians to champion the adoption of the position paper for girls reintegration in education at the next session of ECOWAS, the inclusion of two young women from Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) youth network to the Africa Youth Front and the development of a policy paper on how youths have been affected by COVID-19 by the African Union Youth Envoy Office among others¹².

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down and posed challenges to successful implementation of GAA's planned activities, the GAA country and regional programmes were resilient to immediately strategize and repurpose activities in a way that is agile and responds to critical girls' rights issues posed by COVID-19, in line with the objectives of the programme. In particular, government measures to contain the pandemic led to a rise in GBV cases as well as domestic violence, child marriage and teenage pregnancies. It also caused an increase in criminal activities, brutality of vulnerable groups, and the disruption of education.

Therefore, in the wake of the pandemic, technology proved to be a vital resource in containing its spread, which disrupted the face to face forums for GAA programme activities. However, the use of online platform meetings proved to be cost-effective and efficient in the achievement of GAA's planned initiatives. This approach

should be explored as complementary to relevant and future face to face meetings following the planned large scale COVID-19 vaccination campaigns across the countries.

During the pandemic period, the GAA programme adopted use of virtual seminars for delivery of the planned activities. some of these online seminars included;

- GAA, through FAWE and PLAN AULO, collaborated with Mtoto News and RTM to organise a Girls Forum in June 2020, entitled "Access to Child Friendly Justice: A Girl's Lens". This vibrant forum engaged 16 girls as both moderators and discussants from around the continent. Notably, a total of 504 people from across Africa joined the webinar via zoom, YouTube and Facebook. The forum explored access to child-friendly justice from the girls' perspective. The recommendations made in the forum were included in the CSO Forum Outcome Statement that was presented to ACERWC. Plan AULO lobbied the Secretariat of the ACERWC to develop an accountability mechanism to help track the implementation of the recommendations from the DAC, particularly, the recommendations from girls. Plan AULO also followed up on the implementation of commitments by Member States in consultation with Plan Country Offices.
- Plan AULO, through the GAA program, successfully organised a high-level webinar in June 2020 themed "Flattening the Gender Inequality Curve: COVID-19 and The African Girl." The webinar was attended by over 500 people on different platforms and aimed at discussing the impact of COVID-19 on the African girl and coming up with solutions to help in the coping of the girls. The panel formatted webinar was made up of Her Excellency Professor Sarah

¹²GAA Annual Report 2017

Anyang Agbor, Commissioner for Human Resource, Science and Technology, African Union; Ms. Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen, Chief Executive Officer, Plan International; Ms. Hannah Agyemang, Youth Ambassador, Plan International Ghana; Hon. Justice Lucy Asuagbor, African Union Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women (ACHPR); Hon. Mme Bineta Diop, African Union Special Envoy, Women, Peace & Security and Dr. Gitahi Githinji- Amref Africa Global Director with His Excellency Ambassador Ama Twum-Amoah, Ghanaian Ambassador to Ethiopia and AU/UNECA giving the opening remarks. Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, African Union Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage/Chief Executive Officer-Rozaria Memorial Trust moderated the session.

- Plan AULO, in collaboration with FAWE, organised the GAA Tweet Chat on “The effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on women and girls in Africa” in April 2020. This was a question and answer session and an online campaign. The campaign’s hashtag #COVID19GenderEffect trended across 23,000 users and many gave feedback on the plight of women and girls during the pandemic. The GAA programme plans to use the information to produce a regional policy brief.

Learnings on linkage of national and regional influencing processes

Development of the Continental Framework for the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index: COVID-19 Recovery and Long-term Implementation and Monitoring Tool

GAA, through Plan AULO, collaborated with the AU Women, Gender and

Development Directorate (WGDD) and Africa Leadership Forum to successfully develop and validate the **Continental Framework for the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index (MPSI): COVID-19 Recovery and Long-term Implementation and Monitoring Tool**. The development of the MPSI provided an important accountability framework to hold Member States accountable for the implementation of measures that safeguard and guarantee women and

Plan AULO’s role in facilitating and moderating the validation of the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index (MPSI), in June , 2020 was instrumental in ensuring linkage and convergence of key representatives of member states and national, sub-regional, regional bodies in the continent that provided useful critique for finalization of the MPSI.

girls’ access to their sexual reproductive and health rights as guaranteed under the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. Once adopted, the MPSI will compel the Member States to resource, protect, and report on efforts they are making to guarantee gender equality and will also provide a framework for CSOs to hold their governments accountable. Plan AULO’s role in facilitating and moderating the validation of the MPSI, in June 2020, was instrumental in ensuring linkage and convergence of key representatives in the continent that provided useful critique for finalization of the MPSI. The representatives were from AUC, ECOWAS, SADC, UN agencies, GIMAC secretariat, key CSO representatives and member states from around the continent while the discussants were Plan International Regional Director for West and Central Africa Region, Acting Director of AU WGDD, CEO and Executive Director of Africa Leadership Forum and Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa. The MPSI also provides a framework for COVID-19 response and Recovery plans by Member States.

However, more lobbying and advocacy efforts are still required to ensure full implementation of the Maputo Protocol across all the Member States. While 42 Member States have ratified the Maputo Protocol, only nine of them have submitted reports on the implementation. In addition, 13 Member States have not ratified the protocol mainly due to issues concerning women and girls' rights on sexual and reproductive health rights, especially in relation to marriage or access to safe abortion and some have put reservations while ratifying the Protocol. The final scorecard also needs to be adopted by the AU Specialised Technical Committee owing to the upsurge of COVID-19 and the fact that women are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and responses that exclude gender equality and women's concerns might have a long-term negative impact on women.

Launch of the Maputo Protocol Scorecard for Ghana

GAA, through Plan AULO, supported the development of **Maputo Protocol scorecard for Ghana**. The scorecard was launched in January 2019, in Accra, in the presence of Ghana Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, CSOs, and private sector representatives. This was significant as the production of the report card is a way in which CSOs can hold governments accountable for the implementation of the Maputo protocol and it supplements the status reporting by governments. The target audience of the report card is the government, RECS, and AU. The tool has clear recommendations on what needs to be done in addressing GBV and economic exclusion issues in specific articles of the Maputo Protocol. It serves as a key advocacy and accountability tool for CSOs engaged

GIMAC Secretariat applauded the CSO scorecard on Maputo Protocol initiative and requested Plan AULO and partners to take the good practice of CSO scorecard forward with other countries.

in girls' rights and gender equality. GAA AULO also supported the development of Maputo Protocol scorecard for Liberia, Kenya and Uganda.

Plan AULO also held a very successful side event on **"Enhancing African CSOs capacity to monitor the status reporting and implementation of the Maputo Protocol among AU Members states"**. This was aimed at training CSOs on the production of Maputo Protocol reporting cards on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Economic Exclusion (EE) of women and girls and benchmark CSOs to strengthen capacities to use regional monitoring and accountability mechanisms and hold their governments accountable. More than 90 African civil society leaders, government representatives, GIMAC steering committee, and youth participated in the event. GIMAC Secretariat appreciated the initiative as the first CSO scorecard on Maputo Protocol and requested Plan and partners to take the good practice forward with other countries.

Launch of the "Getting Girls Equal: African Report on Girls and the Law"

GAA, through Plan AULO, successfully coordinated the launch of the Girls Report which is the first report of its kind to undertake a thorough review of the laws and policies of states and their impact on the rights of girls in November 2019. The report seeks to promote gender-sensitive and responsive laws and socio-economic, especially budgetary policies, and contribute to improved performance by African governments in fulfilling their obligations on the protection and equality of girls throughout Africa. The participants at the launch were drawn from the AU, the Ethiopian government, development partners and UN agencies, NGOs, higher education institutions, academia, girls, and young women. The launch was accompanied by a vibrant panel discussion, which involved Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen, Plan International CEO, ACPF

The vibrant panel discussion and extensive media presence and coverage of the launch of the report on "Getting Girls Equal: African Report on Girls and the Law" ensured wide reach and heightened awareness of the situation of girls in Africa, and the demonstrable need to redouble efforts in law, policy and practice to achieve equity and gender parity for all. The development of the report has been successful in providing a strong basis for evidence based advocacy on law reform, implementation and accountability of state parties.

Executive Director, Netherlands Embassy Deputy Head of Mission, A Laureate Disability Rights Activist, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Commissioner. There was extensive media presence and coverage of the study globally, regionally, and in Ethiopia. This included coverage by "The Guardian" ensuring wide reach and heightened awareness of the situation of girls in Africa, and the demonstrable need to redouble efforts in law, policy, and practice to achieve equity and gender parity for all. Whilst not exhaustive on every dimension of girls' lives, the report gives an overview of major issues that should receive attention from African governments. The development of the report has been successful in providing a strong basis for evidence-based advocacy on law reform, implementation, and accountability of state parties.

The Second African Union Girls Summit

GAA, through Plan AULO, successfully led in co-organising the **Second African Union Girls' Summit**, preceded by a **Youth Pre-Summit** in November 2018; where child marriage and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) were the main themes. The summit brought together high-level personalities from AU member countries, high-level UN dignitaries, women and girls, NGOs, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders. Plan AULO and partner organisations played an active

role in both the Youth Pre Summit and African Girls Summit through participation in four high-level panels on topics ranging from ending child marriage to youth employability and on building young women's leadership through marketable skills building and entrepreneurship.

In addition, during the summit, Plan AULO properly positioned GAA to engage in one of Africa's highest girls' gathering and was the only NGO whose logo was mounted on the grand summit banner prepared by the Ghana Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

Accordingly, Plan AULO in collaboration with Plan International Ghana and Plan WARO and RESA mobilised a critical

Plan AULO properly positioned GAA to engage in one of Africa's highest girls' gathering and was the only NGO whose logo were mounted on the grand summit banner prepared by the Ghana Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

number of girls and youth to actively engage during the Second African Girls' Summit with an objective of taking exemplary action to enhance the voice of girls and youth in regional and sub-regional policy dialogue spaces on ending child marriage. The aim was to enable girls and youth to self-represent, lead, and shape the present and future agenda. It also aimed to affirm their potential, agency, and create opportunities for personal and collective growth.

Youth Pre-Summit- African Girls Summit, November 2018, Accra, Ghana

Further, Plan AULO led in co-organising the Pre-Youth Summit that brought together high-level personalities from AU member states, high-level AU and UN dignitaries, embassies, including the Embassy of Netherlands in Ghana, women, and girls, NGO's, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders



Youth participant at the Youth Pre-Summit

as well as Princess Mable of Orange-Nassau of the Netherlands. During the summit, Plan AULO in partnership with UN Women and the AU organised a side event to launch a compendium of laws on child marriage across 55 African Member States, where GAA through the Project Manager significantly contributed to the organisation of the launch as well as in providing technical inputs to the compendium itself. The compendium is a tool to inform different stakeholders on countries' marriage laws, track child marriage reforms, processes, and best practices across countries, and enable targeted advocacy in countries that require review and reform in their marriage legislation and practice.

GAA's key messages at the African Girls Summit were calling on the Member States to ratify, implement and report on the Maputo Protocol and African Children's Charter, harmonization of national laws in line with the children's charter, and allocation of funds to implement the campaign on ending child marriage.

Supporting the adoption and popularization of the ACHPR and ACERWC Joint General Comment on Ending Child Marriage

GAA, through Plan AULO, supported the publication, adoption, and popularization of ACHPR and ACERWC Joint General

Comments (JGC) on Ending Child Marriage (ECM) in Africa. The Joint General Comment on ECM was officially launched in April 2018 in Bamako and Mauritania during the 31st session of the ACERWC and the 62nd session of the ACommHPR respectively. GAA, represented by Plan International, delivered a statement at both events as a key partner and only NGO in the development and popularization of the JGC. Moreover, Plan PAO, in partnership with the Centre for Human Rights, Equality Now, Girls Not Brides, and Human Rights Watch also hosted a panel discussion on the side-lines of the NGO Forum to the ACommHPR on the ECM JGC. Plan PAO, in collaboration with FAWE, organised an evening function as part of the 12th CSO Forum focusing on the status of girls' rights in Africa on the theme: "Leave No Girl Behind: Generating Synergies among African CSOs for Ending Child Marriage in Africa". The outcome of the

The linkage of the national advocacy and the country programs with the regional advocacy of the GAA was demonstrated through Plan AULO's joint collaboration with the Centre for Human Rights, Equality Now, Girls not Brides and Human Rights Watch to host a panel discussion on the side-lines of the NGO Forum to the ACommHPR on the ECM JGC. Plan AULO in collaboration with FAWE organised an evening function as part of the 12th CSO Forum focusing on the status of girl's rights in Africa on the theme: "Leave No Girl Behind: Generating Synergies among African CSOs for Ending Child Marriage in Africa". The outcome of the side-event fed into the recommendations of the CSO Forum to the ACERWC. Plan AULO also delivered a statement at the opening of the 31st and 62nd session of the ACERWC and ACommHPR respectively where it called upon the two mechanisms to continue providing guidance to their Member States towards ending child marriage.

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where it called upon the two mechanisms to continue providing guidance to their Member States towards ending child marriage.

GAA facilitated the process, leading to the adoption of Joint General Comments (JGCs) to end child marriages in Africa¹⁴ by ACHPR and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)¹⁵. During the launch, the Chairperson of the ACHPR spoke of the transformative value of the Joint General Comment, in that it goes beyond providing states with guidance on how to comply with treaty obligations and that it is also relevant to stakeholders in holding States accountable for failure to implement their treaty obligations and the AU Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriages¹⁶ urged states to monitor the implementation of the MP, by giving human right advocates a platform. Plan and FAWE co-organised several high-level dialogues on the JGCs, galvanizing member states' commitment to implement their national strategies and action plans to combat child marriages. Plan, in partnership with UN-Women and the AU, also launched a compendium of all marriage laws in the 55 Member States of the African Union¹⁷, during which GAA and partners provided technical inputs¹⁸. Through its guidance in tracking legislative reforms and best practices, the compendium enables targeted national level advocacy among CSOs.

The ACHPR-ACERWC Joint General Comment, which Plan AULO supported,

The facilitation of the process led to the adoption of Joint General Comments (JGCs) to end child marriages in Africa by ACHPR and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).

also deals with important inclusion aspects. This includes the disproportionate impact of child marriage on children with disabilities and child marriage, which poses a considerable threat to the survival and development of children with disabilities, the need to address poverty among vulnerable groups particularly children with disabilities, and demanding state parties to develop and implement special measures to prevent child marriage among children with disabilities, children affected by conflict, children in child-headed households and children affected by homelessness and internal displacement.

Support the African Union Ending Child Marriage Campaign

GAA, through Plan AULO, as a core member of the African Union Campaign on Ending Child Marriage Technical Working Group, played a key role in supporting the Ending Child Marriage campaign. It supported the country ECM campaign launches, capacity building to regional media, lawmakers and played a key role in providing inputs to the **AU ECM campaign 5-year strategy** as well as facilitating stakeholders inception meeting on the new strategy by August 2019. It also supported validation of the AU ECM strategy for 2019-2023 in Johannesburg, South Africa, and provided substantive inputs through inviting GAA colleagues and religious and traditional leaders from Ethiopia, Uganda, and Zambia. Plan AULO also engaged in the strategy development and review of the accountability mechanism as well as action plan development of the **African Union Saleema Initiative to eliminate FGM**. In addition, Plan AULO's engagement in the development of the AU ECM campaign 5-year strategy was instrumental in

¹⁴https://www.acerwc.africa/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Website_Joint_GC_ACERWC-ACHPR_Ending_Child_Marriage_20_January_2018.pdf

¹⁵<https://www.acerwc.africa/%20News/acerwc-and-achpr-adopt-their-first-ever-joint-general-comment/>

¹⁶https://www.up.ac.za/faculty-of-law/news/post_2675386-official-launch-of-the-joint-general-comment-on-ending-child-marriage-and-the-report-on-child-marriage-in-africa

¹⁷<https://www.aucecma.org/component/content/article/86-press-release/184-a-compendium-of-marriage-laws-launched.html>

¹⁸<https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/03/marriage-laws-in-africa>

forging a successful roadmap to take the campaign to the next level. A few examples of GAA regional programs' engagements are indicated below:

- **Workshop to Evaluate Progress of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage: Reflecting on Country Initiatives to End Child Marriages that was held in October 2016 in Lusaka, Zambia.** As an active member of the technical working group of the AU campaign on Ending Child Marriage in Africa, GAA through Plan AULO participated immensely in drafting the concept note and program as well as in the overall coordination and developing of talking points and advocacy asks. This was important in strengthening accountabilities between the African Union and Member States in implementing and monitoring program to end child marriage. GAA was also instrumental in technically supporting and participating in the Report on Status of Child Marriage in Africa and Evaluation of the Campaign to End Child Marriage. Plan AULO led in providing feedback to the Non-State Actors Assessment, which delivered critical inputs and recommendations for the campaign. The report was adopted by the Ministerial meeting of the Specialised Technical Committee in Algiers.
- **Regional Capacity Building Workshop on Increased Advocacy to Ending Child Marriage through Engagement of the Media – Eastern, Western, and Southern African Stream** that was conducted in November 2016, February and March 2017 respectively. The workshop aimed at enhancing the capacity of the media to better investigate and report on child marriage in Africa with a focus on addressing the root causes and the different facets of the issue and challenging all stakeholders towards ending the practice. It brought

together about 150 journalists and communication experts across the regions. GAA-AULO played a key role in the development of the concept note, program as well as delivering sessions, such as “Gender and the Media”, “identifying ways by which the media can engage different actors working against Child Marriage”, “Enhancing M&E of ECM initiatives” and movie screening as well as overall coordination and the drafting of the Media Action Plan and monitoring framework on Ending Child Marriage in Africa.

- Plan AULO supported high-level advocacy and mobilization that included engaging in the **Regional High-Level Conference on Eliminating Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation held in June 2019 in Cairo, Egypt.** Plan AULO was a key influencer and very visible during the conference and was acclaimed by senior government ministers and development partners for its role in ending child marriage and FGM in the continent. The conference provided an opportunity to highlight and take forward the results of both the 2nd African Girls Summit held in Ghana in 2018 as well as the International Conference on Female Genital Mutilation held in Burkina Faso in 2018. Furthermore, it also provided an opportunity to highlight the urgent need to take action that accelerates the elimination of these harmful practices. Plan AULO also contributed to the development of a well-drafted Cairo Call to Action which was presented at Ministers meeting (STC) as well as incorporated into Head of States ECM and FGM champions reports.
- Plan AULO as a core member of the Technical Working Group of the AU ECM campaign advocated for recognition around child marriage in a humanitarian context to ensure States Parties take all feasible measures to

ensure special protection and care of children affected by conflict and mitigate the effects of conflict on girls, noting that situations of unrest and armed conflict exacerbate the potential for child marriage. To this effect, the African Union Peace and Security Council held its first open session in June 2017 on **ending child marriage entitled “Protecting ‘the forgotten children’ of conflict against child marriages” chaired by the Ambassador of Zambia**. Plan AULO made a statement on behalf of non-state actors.

Supporting East Africa Youth Ambassadors Platform

GAA strengthened its partnership with East Africa Community (EAC) and signed a Memorandum of Understanding in early 2019. Currently, the collaboration and partnership is undergoing in areas of girls and youth engagement. As part of these collaboration, **GAA supported the First High Level EAC Youth Ambassadors Dialogue on Regional Integration on “Harnessing Young People’s Participation in the Political Process”** in November 2018 in Arusha, Tanzania. The forum aimed to provide a collaborative, open and inclusive space for young people to critically and objectively reflect on the progress made so far; challenges encountered; and prospects for enhancing meaningful youth participation in the political process within East Africa. GAA was also be to influence the agenda on enhancing the engagement of young women in decision making process on issues that are of concern within the region. The youth ambassadors urged for the establishment of the EAC Youth Council comprising of Youth Ambassadors and task force team that will be vital for youth representation with the EAC Heads of state meetings and East Africa Legislative Assembly sessions to spearhead the youth agenda within

the community. The recommendations were to presented to the EAC council of Ministers which is the central decision-making and governing Organ of the EAC.

GAA’s frontline role in continental anti-commercial sexual exploitation of children

In order to strengthen ECPAT African Members’ skills in reporting to AU and UN human rights mechanisms, ECPAT organised a training workshop on capacity building and skills preparation for writing reports to UN and AU human rights mechanisms in Nairobi in April 2018. As an immediate result of the training, ECPAT International in collaboration with its members in Benin, Nigeria, Zambia, and South Africa successfully addressed the issues of sexual exploitation of children (SEC) by submitting for the first time briefing papers to the Committee on the sexual exploitation of children in these four countries. The successful submission of these reports ensured the visibility

As a direct result of the successful submission of the briefing papers to the Committee on the sexual exploitation of children, ECPAT International and its members in West and East Africa proposed and successfully obtained a general day of discussion on SEC that was organised during the 33rd ACERWC session in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in March 2019. Never has the African Union gone so far in dedicating a full day of general discussion on SEC.

of issues related to SEC in Africa on the regional agenda. Further and as a direct result of this success, ECPAT International and its members in West and East Africa proposed and successfully obtained a general day of discussion on SEC that was organised during the 33rd ACERWC session in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in March 2019. Never has the African Union gone so far in dedicating a full day of general discussion on SEC.

The advocacy initiated by ECPAT International during the UNWTO CAF meeting in Abuja, Nigeria in June 2018 contributed to the discussion aimed at pushing for specific child protection indicators to be included in the **Statistical Framework for Sustainable Tourism, which was being developed by UNWTO**. During the meeting, Child protection was highlighted as one of the key issues when developing indicators for the Tourism Statistical Framework. Straightening partnership with UNWTO remains at the core of ECPAT International's engagement with a vision to have Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism (SECTT) included in the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the UN Sustainable Development Goals targets that address the sexual exploitation of children.

ACERWC consultation with RECs on Agenda 2040 and Cross Border Issues affecting children

GAA supported the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) consultation with RECs on Agenda 2040 and cross-border Issues affecting children. A workshop was organised by ACERWC and hosted by the East African Community (EAC) in Arusha, Tanzania in October 2018. The workshop was part of a series of workshops scheduled to take place in all the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The participants included representatives of the Partner States, representatives from the East African Community (EAC) Secretariat and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare

GAA Plan AULO's and other partners financial and technical support of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) consultation with RECs on Agenda 2040 and Cross Border Issues affecting children was instrumental in fruitful popularization of Agenda 2040 and identification of cross border issues in relation to children's rights and the aspirations of the Agenda.

(ACERWC), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the EAC, and other stakeholders in the sub-region. The workshop was geared towards popularizing Agenda 2040, and also identifying main priorities, challenges, and possible strategies for the implementation of the Agenda. It also aimed at identifying cross-border issues in the EAC in relation to children's rights and the aspirations of the Agenda. Plan AULO alongside GIZ and Save the Children provided both financial and technical support for the workshop¹⁹.

GAA also supported the ACERWC follow-up mission that was conducted to monitor the implementation of its concluding observations and recommendations to the Republic of Liberia in November 2019. The purpose of the mission was to monitor the level of implementation of the concluding observations and recommendations issued by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC/the Committee) to the Government of Liberia in 2013. This followed the consideration of the latter's initial report on the implementation of the African Children's

GAA's financial and technical support was instrumental in enabling ACERWC follow-up missions that were conducted to monitor the implementation of the concluding observations and recommendations to the Republics of Ethiopia and Liberia in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

Charter. The mission provided an opportunity to the Government of Liberia to appreciate its progress in implementing the recommendations and thereby learn best practices that can be used by the ACERWC in its further engagement with other State Parties.

It was noted that even though the Government has finalized preparations to submit its periodic report to the UNCRC, it has not taken any steps towards submitting its periodic report to the ACERWC²⁰.

¹⁹<https://www.acerwc.africa/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Report-EAC-Workshop-Oct-2018.pdf>

²⁰<https://www.acerwc.africa/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Liberia-follow-up-mission-report.pdf>

GAA, through Plan AULO, also supported the ACERWC's mission to the Federal Republic of Ethiopia in October 2018. The aim of the mission was to assess the implementation of its concluding observations and recommendations forwarded to the State Party in 2015. The committee was informed that the concluding observations and recommendations of the committee had been translated and disseminated among stakeholders and partners. However, there was no clear framework and coordination for the implementation of the recommendations. Despite the fact that the recommendations had been translated, non-governmental stakeholders were not permitted to publish and disseminate the concluding observations and recommendations in the translated versions²¹.

Linkages on addressing children's, girls' and women's rights

Lesson 4: Instead of advocating on behalf of girls, empower them to lead the change they want-The shoe wearer knows best where it pinches

Working with girls advocates as ambassadors of change in the lobby for girls' rights and meaningful participation enables government officials, locals, national and regional institutions to understand the importance of meaningful participation and contribution of girls and young women in local, national, and regional fora and conferences, and for the girls to lead the change that they want²².

The engagement of a critical number of girls and youth to actively participate in the second African Girls Summit contributed to the enhanced voices of girls and youths in regional and sub-regional policy dialogue spaces on ending child marriage²³.

The linkage of the national advocacy

²¹<https://www.acerwc.africa/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Ethiopia-mission-report-with-NV.pdf>

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and the country programs with the regional advocacy of the GAA

was demonstrated through the coordination and mobilization by Plan AULO of all GAA countries in Africa to participate through the engagement of girls from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ghana was a key lesson for the GAA programme as the collective voices of the girls across Africa influenced policy dialogue spaces on ending child marriage. During the forum, several girls from Ghana, South Sudan, Uganda, Niger, and Liberia were provided with speaking slots on several parallel sessions and High-Level Dialogue sessions, which helped to shape policy dialogue on ending child marriage in the continent.

Further linkage was demonstrated through Plan AULO's collaboration with the Centre for Human Rights, Equality Now, Girls Not Brides and Human Rights Watch to host a panel discussion on the sidelines of the NGO Forum to the ACommHPR on the ECM JGC. Plan AULO in collaboration with FAWE organised an evening function as part of the 12th CSO Forum focusing on the status of girls' rights in Africa on the theme: "Leave No Girl Behind: Generating Synergies among African CSOs for Ending Child Marriage in Africa". The outcome of the side event fed into the recommendations of the CSO Forum to the ACERWC. Plan AULO also delivered a statement at the opening of the 31st and 62nd session of the ACERWC and ACommHPR respectively where it called upon the two mechanisms to continue guiding their Member States towards ending child marriage.

²²GAA FTE report Nov 2020

²³GAA Annual report 2018

²⁴GAA annual report 2017

The side events held during AU summits provided opportunities for girls to share their individual experiences and offer advice to youth who were not able to make it at the Pre-Summit²⁴. One of the most effective advocacy intervention was through a workshop that was organised by Save the Children as a side event during the January 2017 Africa Union Summit. During this side meeting, girls got an



Snapshot of youth participants and an interactive session led by GAA PAO and Kenya at the Youth Pre-Summit.

opportunity to listen to two child-mother survivors from Zimbabwe. The girls present hoped to use the lessons learnt back in their countries to educate their peers on the forms of sexual violence, including sexual harassment at home and in schools. Media houses present at the African Union interviewed some young women on economic empowerment. This helped the girls and young women to share their experiences with the world besides offering pieces of advice to their peers who were not able to make it to the pre-summit.

Besides, the Girl Advocacy Alliance and a local CSO (Songtaba) in Ghana helped girls to develop and share messages on their rights. GAA organised meetings between the girls and leaders, making sure they got the opportunity to be heard. Hearing the negative effects of child marriage from the girls themselves was noted to have

had a major impact on traditional leaders. A good example is an engagement with the local leaders like the paramount chief of Sagnarigu in the Northern region of Ghana. The impact of these efforts culminated in a positive response from traditional leaders²⁵. For instance, in one case involving the final push for action, shortly after receiving a petition from the girls, a group of traditional leaders in Ghana spoke out against child marriage.

GAA successfully used various platforms to empower girls to lead the change they want. These platforms which can be scaled up in the upcoming “She Leads Program” include:

- Engagement of girls and youth to actively participate through the provision of speaking slots in regional fora such as the African Girls Summits for enhanced voice at national and regional policy dialogue spaces.
- Championing girls to lobby and advocate by helping them to develop, share their messages, and stand up for their rights through the engagement of local and traditional leaders that influence and/or shape socio-cultural practices and behaviours in local communities.
- Use of side events and parallel sessions during national and regional fora as platforms for girls to cross learn among peers and share their experiences on economic empowerment and forms of sexual gender-based violence.

The involvement of girls was instrumental in the advocacy activities in ending CT and CSEC. Girls from Kenya and Uganda were able to articulate several issues on COVID-19 and particularly in relation to CT and CSEC.

²⁵Societies in Transition: Learning from Roads to Change, Jan 2019

Lesson 5: Joint sessions of regional bodies providing a platform and a step towards better coordination and collaboration with human rights treaty commissions

Joint sessions among the regional AU bodies was mentioned as being a pivotal platform for better coordination and collaboration among the AU human rights treaty bodies. There are several examples where joint sessions provided platforms for better coordination and collaboration for implementation and achievement of the GAA regional lobby and advocacy initiatives. These included;

- The first joint session of the African Charter held in Banjul, Gambia in 2016 established the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). This was important for the GAA as it provided a platform and a step towards better coordination and collaboration among the three AU human rights treaty bodies²⁶. It was also an opportunity to have many regional, sub-regional and national CSOs working on children's rights and women's rights and gender equality coming together. It was also important in supporting the consideration of state party reports as well as CSO reports for the committee and the commission, which is an important accountability mechanism for states on delivering on children's and girls' right. During the session, both the GAA Plan African Union Liaison Office (AULO)

and Defence for Children International (DCI) - Sierra Leone made inputs and remarks during the presentation by the Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriage²⁷.

- The strong engagement of CSOs with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and African Committee of Experts on the Rights

Joint sessions among the regional AU bodies provided pivotal platforms for better coordination and collaboration for implementation of GAA regional lobby and advocacy initiatives.

and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) was an encouraging sign that CSOs can support and influence the child rights, girls' rights, and women's rights agenda and commitments²⁸. The engagement of CSOs in the discussions around developing a "Ten Year Action and Implementation Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights" was also important in advocating for prioritizing children, girls' and young women issues. Plan International AULO and GAA participated in the discussions and provided expert inputs to the process.

- Besides, strengthening and streamlining child rights advocacy interventions of CSOs and CSO networks within the Mano River Union (MRU) Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was a useful platform for the shared analysis of children's rights issues in the sub-

The linkage of the national advocacy and the country programs with the regional advocacy of the GAA was also demonstrated through the case of Kenya during which GAA International provided technical support during the drafting of the questions for the list of issues, prior to the drafting of the NGO report, during the meeting between the Committee and the Kenyan CSOs as well as providing a briefing on follow-up within the GAA program. The Kenya APT felt that the most important aspect of this process was that it created a link between GAA International and the country specific program. The Kenyan APT noted that they had been unsure as to the added value of GAA International until they participated in the review process in Geneva. They also felt that they would not have seen the significance of CEDAW had GAA International not explained the relevance to their work.

²⁶GAA Annual report 2016
²⁷Ibid

²⁸Ibid

region, exploration of opportunities for collaboration and learning across borders, and identification of key and common issues that could be dealt with in a framework of an inter-country or sub-regional network or coalition²⁹. The CSOs and CSO networks needed a common and increased understanding of recent developments in the realm of child rights within the ECOWAS and MRU region so that they could streamline their interventions based on regional visions. For example, DCI Sierra Leone organised the convening of the child rights CSOs from the Mano River Union and the other ECOWAS states in December 2018 that provided the pedestal upon which identification and collaboration on common issues on child rights in the region were done and followed up.

- A key lesson learnt for Plan AULO, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Uganda was that the enhanced partnerships with CSOs, AU bodies, Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC), and other key partners provided a crucial platform and space to speak on CT and CSEC. The partnerships built with Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation (EAPPCO) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) desk were all platforms that were otherwise initially difficult to penetrate and lobby³⁰.

Regional political, social and economic commitments

Lesson 6: Spaces for policy change exist – at national, sub-regional, and pan-African levels

Given the fact that African countries have signed up to several internationally agreed commitments and targets, the

GAA partners learnt that spaces for policy change exist at national, sub-regional, and Pan-African levels. Besides, the GAA partners learnt that in as much as these commitments were important, facilitative, and provided political spaces to the countries, the regional economic blocs, and the AU, their implementation remains a problem³¹.

To be effective in working with government or inter-governmental agencies, GAA partners must understand that while bureaucrats may be supportive of change, this is only possible to certain limits allowable by the bureaucracies that they work for. Several GAA country programmes cited sound and credible intelligence, personalized or institutionalized contacts with bureaucrats, continuous relationship building, and indications of value-added towards the specific mandates of these agencies as important considerations for influencing policy change.

Working in closed or invited spaces often

To be effective in working with government or inter-governmental agencies, the GAA partners learnt that whilst bureaucrats may be supportive of change, they can only do this within the limits allowable by the bureaucracies they work in.

spawns its challenges. Even though the GAA programme has not overtly been confronted with these circumstances, the programme needs to be alert to a type of participation that reduces its role to supporting form over function, as highlighted in political-economic studies on African policy and governance initiatives³². An assessment of which policy space adds the most value to advancing the rights and protection of girls and young women needs to be done regularly so that the GAA does not lose its authenticity and distinction as a credible advocate for these rights. However, scaling up the results from local to the national level is not automatically possible for the GAA programme without

²⁹GAA Annual report 2018

³⁰GAA Annual report 2017

³¹GAA MTR report 2018

³²ibid

leveraging international processes such as Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)³³.

However, the general narrowing of

A key lesson learnt on the linkage of the national advocacy and the country programs with the regional advocacy of the GAA was that better linkage with processes and opportunities at the national level can scale up GAA outcomes further by making use of the experiences and pieces of evidence from the local communities. The GAA programme learnt that to achieve sustained outcomes at sub-regional and regional levels, more focus and linkages with processes and opportunities at national levels should be explored and implemented. The focus should be shifted to influencing policies at the national level such as policy formulation, implementation of action plans and budget allocations. The GAA programme realized that achieving practice change at African Union or Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) level is especially challenging since practice change is only realized at country levels, and not at the level of regional bodies.

civic space in some of the GAA African countries sent an alarming signal for the implementation of lobby and advocacy programmes as such constraints on civic space are becoming the 'new normal'. The fact that the July 2016 AU Heads of State summit in Rwanda Kigali was closed for civil society participation was taken as one sign to show political spaces for CSOs were somehow shrinking at regional and country levels. This posed challenges in enhancing regional CSOs coordination during the period. In addition, the ACPHR session held in Egypt in April 2019 where several CSOs were denied entry into Egypt, hence couldn't lobby and engage in various high-level meetings, was considered as a sign of shrinking civic space and suffocation of CSOs advocacy engagements³⁵. In Uganda, CSOs were labelled as perpetrators of political

violence, and the licenses of five NGOs were suspended. This led to a delay in programme implementation. Similarly, the reshuffle by the Government of Uganda affected the coordination of programme activities and weakened already existing strategies. The opening up of these spaces is pivotal for enhanced implementation of GAA's lobby and advocacy processes.

Ending Gender-Based Violence

Lesson 7: Peer-to-peer support is an effective approach of assisting victims of child marriage (CM), Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), Child Trafficking (CT), and Child Labour (CL)

Peer-to-peer support was noted as an effective approach in assisting victims of CM, CSEC, CT and CL³⁶. However, it was also noted that in urgent situations, direct support for victims, such as support to; re-join school, shelter, psycho-social care, legal services and alternative skills-building for empowerment, including economic empowerment, had to be provided even though these services could not be provided through the GAA programme.

A key lesson learnt was that linkages had to be established with local institutions and organisations that provide services, such as the IGA programme by Plan International Kenya, or by seeking cooperation with other NGOs or other service providers to assist victims³⁷.

Lesson 8: Greater awareness leads to more willingness to take action

An important lesson learnt in many GAA communities was that as a result of increased awareness, more perpetrators of CM, CSEC, and CT were arrested and prosecuted than before the programme was initiated. More cases were also reported to the authorities by community members. In a few cases, perpetrators

³³Ibid

³⁴GAA Annual report 2016

³⁵GAA Annual report 2017

³⁶GAA MTR report 2018

³⁷GAA MTR report 2018

were penalized through the legal system³⁸. This was related to changing legislation and enforcement of laws in some of the GAA countries. This also implied that services and referral systems must be in place and existing structures must be active, responsive and well-functioning for perpetrators to be arrested and persecuted.

This implies that while future programmes should focus on increased awareness of the community members on CM, CSEC, and CT, complementary efforts also need to put on lobby and advocacy for legislation and enforcement of the laws to facilitate increased arrest and prosecution of perpetrators.

Strengthened partnerships and networks

Lesson 9: Joint voices are stronger voices

In several GAA countries, working in partnership provided an opportunity to push the government for change without being pinpointed as a single organisation and to make it appear as a collective desire rather than the agenda for an individual entity³⁹. For example, being part of a Dutch Strategic Partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)

Working in partnership provided an opportunity for the GAA country programmes to push the government for an agenda change without being pinpointed as a single organisation and to make it appears as a collective desire rather than the agenda for an individual entity.

provided a certain level of 'protection' to the GAA partners. Information exchange and joint analysis of political context were happening with the Netherlands Embassies in Accra (also about Liberia

and Sierra Leone), Ethiopia, and Uganda.

Moreover, the joint efforts contributed to added value in the GAA programme during the youth advocate training in Sierra Leone, whereby Plan International conducted the training, assisted by colleagues from Plan Sierra Leone and DCI- Sierra Leone. At the same time, GAA communication staff (working at DCI) joined a journalist and photographer in their visit to Sierra Leone to make an article and photo reportage about youth advocates⁴⁰.

Working with CSO networks was noted to yield more results and immediate benefits vis-à-vis the objectives of the GAA programme and contributed to improved lobby and advocacy. In the first year of the GAA programme, in some GAA countries, a wide range of local CSOs were approached to promote the broader GAA agenda and elaboration and inclusion of gender-sensitive policies in institutional policies. Subsequently, the strategy shifted towards more focused collaboration with like-minded CSOs and thematically related networks⁴¹. The networking and linking with CSOs outside of the GAA programme were strategic as it enabled the partnerships formed in 2019 to sustain throughout 2020. They were especially key in the commemoration of the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons and child participation in the Eastern Africa Child Rights Network(EACRN) training, Day of the African Child (DAC) celebrations, training with GMT, the CSO Forum, and the 35th and 36th sessions of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)⁴².

In addition, networking and linking were identified as one of the most effective strategies for the programme's outcomes. For example, through networking and linking, the GIMAC youth network was institutionalised and African young women were able to engage with AU leaders and initiatives⁴³. Networking and linking were also effective because the

³⁸Ibid
³⁹Ibid
⁴⁰Ibid

⁴¹Ibid
⁴²GAA Annual report 2020
⁴³Ibid

GAA programme was able to reach out to CSOs in other countries to support the advocacy on child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children⁴⁴. Networking and linking of GAA CSOs with key AU advocacy platforms also enhanced their knowledge and skills to be able to hold their governments accountable on resolutions passed at the AU level. For instance, CSOs were able to follow up on the AU campaign on ending child marriage implementation at country level and the avenues for engagement with the Africa Development Bank CSO division and projects at country level⁴⁵.

During these partnership processes,

Working with CSO networks was noted to yield more results and immediate benefits vis-à-vis the objectives of the GAA programme and contributed to improved lobby and advocacy outcomes.

some of the challenges noted were that building relationships and engaging with key stakeholders was important but time-consuming. In addition, working within new structures, partnerships, procedures and using relatively new approaches and methodologies, including the exclusive focus on lobby and advocacy as opposed to service delivery was a challenge for

ATPs during the inception phase. This calls for similar programmes to initiate collaboration and partnership processes at the design stage or project inception for adequate time in the partnership engagement processes.

Lesson 10: Research is a key driver for impactful CSOs' lobby and advocacy outcomes

Collaborative research and evidence-based advocacy and influencing have been key throughout the implementation of the GAA programme for the last five years. A key lesson learnt was that increased research and collaboration among CSOs led to the availability of more data that helped to lobby policymakers for improved service delivery within the region⁴⁶. This was witnessed through different pieces of works that African Union Liaison Offices (AULO) was engaged and that resulted in

Increased research and collaboration among CSOs led to availability of more data that helped to lobby policy makers for improved service delivery within the region.

bringing together the most important and key decision-makers in the continent to be part of the advocacy and influencing initiative. One example is the development



GIMAC young women in a discussion group at the 22nd GIMAC youth training on key AU and GIMAC processes.

⁴⁴Ibid
⁴⁵GAA Annual report 2020

⁴⁶GAA Annual report 2017

of the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index Framework⁴⁷. The Maputo Protocol scorecards helped CSOs establish gaps in legislation and implementation of girls' and women's rights. CSOs used the findings from the scorecard as entry points for advocacy. For instance, MEMPROW learnt of the lack of specialised courts to try GBV cases in Uganda and successfully influenced the Ministry of Gender to end the 12 years long gap in producing a state party report on Maputo Protocol⁴⁸. Also, the development and launch of the groundbreaking research on "Getting Girls Equal: The African Report on Girls and the Law" provided a strong basis for

evidence-based advocacy on law reform, implementation and accountability of state parties⁴⁹.

Therefore, the role of research in generating sound evidence for advocacy efforts for future programmes cannot be gainsaid. More collaborative efforts will need to be put in strengthening the capacity of partners through training, exchange visits, sharing of information and alliance to generate and use research-based evidence to influence policymakers and achieve enhanced lobby and advocacy outcomes.



⁴⁷GAA Annual report 2020
⁴⁸ibid

⁴⁹GAA Annual report 2019

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How effective CSOs develop in influencing and advocacy

This section includes a synthesis of the learnings/lessons learnt on how effective CSOs develop in influencing and advocacy categorized in various themes.

Within GAA, CSOs play an important role in promoting the GAA agenda by facilitating girls and young women to participate in lobby and advocacy processes around themes that concern them. Experience has shown that working with CSO networks has yielded more and immediate benefits and contributed to improved lobby and advocacy outcomes.

Within GAA, collaboration is mostly focused on existing CSO networks, like-minded CSOs, and thematically related networks, such as commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and child rights organisations.

The programme is implemented by more than 60 local NGO partners and networks of Plan International Nederland, Terre des Hommes Netherlands and Defense for Children - ECPAT Netherlands with their respective networks in the countries and regions.

CSOs capacity development initiatives

Lesson 1: The 'insider' approach, training of and working with government officials creates possibilities to advocate for the implementation of the GAA agenda

The high level of rotation among government officials required frequent refresher training, relationship building, and maintenance, which were noted as important success factors for achieving the GAA lobby and advocacy goals. From

the GAA implementation experience, this also entails long-term investment in time and thematic knowledge, ability, and capacities to engage with the government officials in policy formulation processes in an early stage⁵⁰.

The combination of capacity development of GAA implementing partners with awareness-raising and training of other actors contributed to the effectiveness of the lobby and advocacy outcomes.

In addition, the review noted that the combination of capacity development of GAA implementing partners with awareness-raising and training of other actors contributed to the effectiveness of the lobby and advocacy outcomes. The other actors included CBOs, communities, key leaders, community groups, and girls' and young women and advocacy, and key stakeholders and duty bearers (local, district, and state-level officials) on key GBV and economic exclusion themes and legislation and enforcement⁵¹.

At the start of the programme, many of the CSO partners only had knowledge of general child rights and conducted more awareness-raising than advocacy. GAA programme provided additional knowledge on GBV issues, child marriage and child sexual exploitation. The GAA programme also built the capacity of the CSO partners in lobbying and advocacy in order to build their competency levels to successfully promote GAA issues at the community and district levels⁵².

In addition, a key challenge noted in the implementation of the programme was inadequate capacity among the partner CSOs to strengthen programme interventions to effectively work with

⁵⁰GAA MTR report 2018

⁵¹Ibid

⁵²GAA Final Term Evaluation November 2020

international accountability mechanisms and to support the integration of human rights mechanisms into country programmes. The APTs did not fully exploit opportunities for joint lobby actions. There is, therefore, room to strengthen the visibility of similar programmes at the international level, which could contribute to better coordination and strengthening of the effectiveness of the advocacy efforts⁵³.

With regards to organisational capacities of contracted partner CSOs, a key lesson was that the capacity of the partner CSOs to adapt and self-renew required most attention, more specifically to better understand and navigate the policy processes in the public sector. The capacity development of the Alliance Programme Team (APT) organisations, as well as contracted partner CSOs, was identified as crucial for lobbying and advocacy outcomes. It was, therefore, important to organise regular refresher training and provide new staff members of all implementing organisations with insights into the operation and opportunities of the GAA programme. These capacity development initiatives need to be more practical, for example, through coaching, mentoring, peer-to-peer support, and webinars⁵⁴.

Furthermore, the different capacity development mechanisms and training informed CSOs on how to engage local and national stakeholders more constructively in lobbying and advocacy. For instance, the engagement with Parliament/Legislators for the ratification of the African Union Youth Charter was an eye-opener on how CSOs can navigate ways for better engagement than using the traditional approach⁵⁵. The training of CSOs on the production of Maputo Protocol Scorecards also helped CSOs to produce scorecards that they have used to unearth gaps on governments tackling GBV and economic exclusion issues. For example, lack of funding for the GBV

fund in Ghana, lack of guiding policies to address GBV in Liberia, need for the establishment of special courts to try GBV perpetrators in Uganda, and failure by Kenya government to produce a state party report on Maputo Protocol. These findings suggest that key considerations for similar programmes, such as “She Leads Program” should include;

- Frequent refresher training for government officials and relationship building and maintenance with the government officials for sustained success factors in achieving envisaged lobbying and advocacy outcomes.
- Complementary awareness-raising and training of other key actors on core GBV and economic exclusion themes and legislation and enforcement for the effective lobby and advocacy outcomes.
- Organise regular refresher training for partner CSOs and provide staff members of all implementing organisations with insights on public policy processes. Staff members also need to gain knowledge on how to engage local and national stakeholders more constructively in lobby and advocacy initiatives.

Strengthening capacity of youth advocates and youth-focused CSOs

Lesson 2: The rise of youth-led and youth-focused CSOs is complementary in influencing their respective governments to enact, implement and monitor existing treaties, policies, and protocols

The rise of youth-led and youth-focused CSOs is complementary in influencing their respective governments to enact, implement and monitor the existing treaties, policies, and protocols on issues

⁵³Ibid
⁵⁴Ibid

⁵⁵GAA annual report 2020

on girls and young women⁵⁶ worked well and was identified as a key lesson for the GAA programme. For instance, in Ghana, youth advocates initially had low confidence in their ability to change the vulnerable situation of girls. Training by GAA programme subsequently provided them with knowledge on the rights of children, and skills in public speaking, networking, engaging with authorities and seniors, and advocacy⁵⁷. Working with youth advocates, therefore, generated a lot of dynamism within the GAA programme, and contributed to the active role of girls and young women⁵⁸.

Capitalising on and building stronger coalitions of dedicated organisations, including young women in CSO movement and investing in CSO collaboration was therefore noted as a foundation for impact at scale.

It was noted that deliberate efforts in capacity building of young people for youth-led advocacy gives not only effective but also sustainable push for changes as exemplified by their continuous lobbying for providing funds from local governments⁵⁹. Capitalising on and building stronger coalitions of dedicated organisations, including young women



Youth Ambassadors from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Uganda discussing Regional Landscape for Youth Participation in decision making in EAC.

⁵⁶GAA Annual report 2017
⁵⁷GAA FTE report Nov 2020
⁵⁸GAA MTR report 2018

in CSO movement and investing in CSO collaboration was therefore noted as a foundation for impact at scale⁶⁰.

It is also important for youth advocates to prepare adequately before any advocacy event. For example, one youth advocate was invited to be part of the girls' presentation of amendments to the Child's Act in Ghana, but he did not have any idea regarding the amendments.

It was also noted that advocating at high-level events has adverse effects. Young girls speaking up on sensitive topics, such as GBV and economic exclusion at high-level events can face dangerous repercussions back home. This needs to be taken into account. In the first two years, negative or unintended signs of change were hardly noted by the programme, which could point at a blind spot for the negative side effects of lobby and advocacy on GBV. The empowerment of girls creates the responsibility to ensure their safety⁶¹.

Lobby and advocacy

Lesson 3: Issue framing is key, especially when engaging in closed spaces

How an issue is framed can potentially alienate and close off any further engagement with government officials. A good example is a lesson learnt by the Youth Network for Sustainable Development (YNSD), a partner of FAWE in Ethiopia. To get issues of girls and young women on the agenda of the government, the issues were framed as entitlements, not as "rights". This simple twist in semantics opens up space – albeit limited – for engagements and considerations of issues, where framing them as rights would have made it impossible to engage with government officials⁶².

⁵⁹GAA FTE report Nov 2020
⁶⁰Ibid
⁶¹Ibid
⁶²GAA Annual report 2018/GAA MTR report 2018

Besides, a key experience drawn from the implementation of the programme was that good understanding of the policy influencing context, coupled with good networking in policy circles, such as good 'know-who', were noted as key success factors for the lobby and advocacy activities of the GAA partners. Most of the organisations participating in the GAA programme have operated in their spaces for quite some time. This has come with institutional networks, relationships and track record. In many policy spaces, GAA partners are respected voices, evident particularly in GAA partners' participation in task forces and technical working groups at different levels. Furthermore, authentic constituency representation, salient and currency of issues the GAA programme is working on coupled with passionate and committed staff are some of the success factors for the GAA partners⁶³.

Lesson 4: Bring the local message to stage

A local viewpoint is often more credible and accepted more broadly than an external one. One important lesson in Ghana was that the GAA and a local CSO (Songtaba) did not bring in external agents of change or an external message. They identified

Good understanding of the policy influencing context, coupled with good networking in policy circles, such as good 'know-who', were noted as key success factors for the lobby and advocacy activities of the GAA partners.

champions of change from within the community itself. The champions of change were trained and received help in crafting their message. But it was their message, communicated using their own words. For example, religious leaders use their sermons to share their anti-child marriage message⁶⁴.

In Liberia, participatory development of gender-mainstreamed community by-laws

put the protection of women and girls on the agenda of intervention communities. The development of community by-laws that outline penalties on GBV helped to reduce GBV in intervention communities in Liberia. The by-laws are being developed

Participatory development of gender-mainstreamed community by-laws put the protection of women and girls on the agenda of intervention communities.

through a participatory process, where all community members come together to establish laws that will protect young women and girls from exploitation and abuse. The coming into effect of these by-laws has elevated GBV issues from being the concerns of individuals to the collective responsibilities of communities to protect women, young girls and children from abuse⁶⁵.

In Ethiopia, it was observed that the participatory design of programme enhances the identification of capacity needs at each level and tailoring of interventions. Religious leaders, iddir representatives, Community Care Coalition (CCC) which are grassroots community institutions and school club leaders in Ethiopia confirmed that they were approached at the programme's planning stage and asked for their inputs on the major challenges of girls and young women. However, at the end of the programme, its relevance to needs received some more critical remarks. Since the beneficiaries consider that economic exclusion is one of the root causes of the most acute challenges that girls and young women face, they felt the programme had not brought them tangible and visible benefits. It was noted that combatting economic exclusion using tangible service delivery would have been in line with the stated needs of girls and young women, however, this was deliberately not been part of the programme's approach⁶⁶.

Another key lesson was that national

⁶³GAA Annual report 2018

⁶⁴Societies in Transition: Learning from Roads to Change, Jan 2019

⁶⁵Liberia MTR report 2018

⁶⁶GAA FTE report Nov 2020 (Ethiopia)

developments or international agreements are not always the best entry point for discussions on local change. CSOs need to think from the perspective of the lobby target. For example, for Songtaba, a local CSO in Ghana, using national laws to start discussions often

According to the representatives of the beneficiaries, while the programme has raised the awareness of community and government institutions regarding the challenges of GYW, it has neither offered direct support in economic empowerment nor delivered services, as per the overall programme design and approach.

led to resistance from traditional leaders. Other paths, such as the use of local platforms, proved much more effective. For example, the Girl Advocacy Alliance's in collaboration with a religious scholar who has worked on reinterpreting the Qur'an. He looked further than the fact that Mohammed had a child bride and focused on the consequences of child marriage and what the Qur'an says about this. This resulted in fierce discussions but also helped people see the issue from a different perspective⁶⁷.

Lesson 5: A balanced role is key

In Ghana, the ability for civil society to exercise its watchdog function is considered one of the best on the African continent. Civil society organisations in Ghana, therefore, had a good starting point for advocacy work, both in terms of formal (government) and informal (traditional leadership) decision-making systems. It is, however, important to realize that a balanced role is essential given that ultimately the government and its institutions remain responsible for upholding the rights of girls and young women and the laws that protect them. Being aware of the steps taken and strategy of the government and taking this into account is crucial⁶⁸.

While constructive engagement with

⁶⁷Societies in Transition: Learning from Roads to Change, Jan 2019

⁶⁸Ibid

government is arduous, it pays off in the long-run. Engaging with the government based on an informed understanding of the institutional limitations that particular officeholders face is important. Even more important, working with holders of public office in resolving such institutional limitations in ways that enhance their mandate and image has higher dividends than engaging in confrontational advocacy. Constructive engagement with the government by Gender Centre for Empowering Development (GenCED) helped to build relationships and trust, and government officials willingly provided information for the status report. It would have been very difficult to get this information if a confrontational advocacy approach had been pursued. Moreover, working with the government in this way helped to cement goodwill and entrench ownership, critical elements in building the capacity of a state agency.

Lesson 6: Planning around government structures has its risks

Government structures in Africa are highly unpredictable, even between elections. Officeholders often change. This is compounded by the fact that there is a very weak institutionalisation of policy processes and policy decisions in general. It makes sense, and it is more pragmatic to identify government officials who are progressive and supportive of certain policy proposals, with the hope that policy changes created in partnership with these officials can be institutionalized within their tenure. However, sudden changes in government structures and ministerial portfolios can mean that several months or even years of preparation go to waste

While constructive engagement with government is arduous, it pays off in the long-run. Engaging with government based on an informed understanding of the institutional limitations that particular office holder face is important.

because new holders of office might not be too enthusiastic to see through changes initiated by their predecessors. It is a dilemma that every CSO that seeks to influence government by lobbying individual bureaucrats must live to.

Lesson 7: Strategic behind the scenes lobbying is at times more preferable to highly visible public or media advocacy

It is important to understand what is politically feasible in each advocacy context. Where inaction on the part of bureaucrats may not be the result of vested interests, lethargy, or apathy – but instead institutional limitations – putting bureaucrats on the spot might have quite the opposite of intended outcomes. Public advocacy in such cases might push bureaucrats into a defensive mode, being aloof or engaging in counter-advocacy that simply frames CSOs as trouble makers or puppets of foreign interests. Strategic behind the scenes lobbying, however, is less threatening to bureaucrats and makes them feel they are in charge and are simply receiving support from CSOs to fulfil their mandates.

Lesson 8: Change is a slow process and takes time

Working continuously and regularly with key leaders proved a valuable approach for the Girl Advocacy Alliance in Ghana. It took many visits to the same leaders to convince them of the importance of speaking out against child marriage. The local partner (Songtaba) made use of existing structures to ensure regular contact. By using the access granted through the traditional leaders' weekly public consulting session, the local CSO and the champions for change could bring across their message ⁶⁹.

CSOs working with religious leaders were, therefore, noted as an effective way of realizing change as they are key influential leaders in changing social norms and possess a great ability to shape and influence the opinion of the community ⁷⁰. They are catalysts of and gateways to change⁷¹.

The traditional and religious leaders have not only become aware of GBV and economic exclusion issues, such as agenda-setting, but also actively and openly express themselves against the negative consequences of GBV issues, specifically in the field of ending child marriage and commercial sexual exploitation of children. In Ghana, such leaders are respected and listened to⁷². Within communities, they have an arbitration role and due to awareness-raising, they are now able to identify GBV issues with criminal intent and take relevant actions. Traditional and religious leaders now direct people to statutory bodies to make complaints and religious leaders demand more often birth certificates when they are in doubt of the age of the bride.

It is, however, important to be prepared for surprises. Even the most carefully planned advocacy processes can stall, at any time along the process, and quite suddenly. In the case of the Gender Centre for Empowering Development (GenCED), a change in office just when the report had been completed threatened to stall the process. The lesson here was that it is important to be modest in expectations and to be prepared for surprises, during the implementation process.

It is important to be prepared for surprises. Even the most carefully planned advocacy processes can stall, at any time along the process, and quite suddenly.

⁶⁹Ibid

⁷⁰GAA FTE report Nov 2020

⁷¹Ibid

⁷²Ghana MTR report 2018



Conclusions

The linkage of the GAA national and regional influencing processes was demonstrated through various initiatives implemented by the GAA programme, including the linkage of the national advocacy and the country programs with the regional advocacy of the GAA. The GAA programme actively engaged in national, sub-regional, and continental influencing spaces. The programme also participated in a number of platforms, provided inputs in strategic reports, such as the Joint General Comments (JGC) on Ending Child Marriage (ECM, and engaged in high-level advocacy efforts on girls' education and economic opportunity for young women, including recommendations on setting up African Youth Fund. While these linkages were largely successful in influencing lobby and advocacy outcomes at national, sub-regional, and regional levels, more efforts are required in ensuring visibility of similar programmes and ensuring that national and regional programmes are working as an entity in influencing advocacy outcomes at various levels.

The joint annual planning and collaboration processes by the GAA national and regional programmes were instrumental in laying out the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the GAA programme at every annual cycle. Scaling up these joint annual planning processes in future programmes is imperative for enhanced common understanding, visioning, focus, implementation, and monitoring of complex programmes such as the GAA programme. There is, however, need to ensure that the programme designs are less complex for the common understanding of the programme's path for change among all implementing partners.

While consideration for influencing local context and adoption of customized

PM&E tools is paramount for the successful lobby and advocacy initiatives, it's important to complement these with global perspectives and synthesis of best practices on what has worked in other similar settings. The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to harm the implementation of programme activities across countries. With the upsurge of the pandemic, necessity has become the mother of invention. Similar programmes should expand the use of technology and online platforms for continued implementation of activities and use face-to-face meetings for the relevant lobby and advocacy initiatives while ensuring adherence to the required health precautions.

Working with girls' advocates as ambassadors of change for girls' rights and their meaningful participation is pivotal in enabling girls to lead the impactful and sustainable change that they want. All relevant platforms that girls can use to lead these change processes need to be replicated and considered in similar future implementation. Strong partnerships with and among CSOs provide an opportunity for programmes to collectively push the government for an agenda change as well as accelerate the achievement of GAA lobby and advocacy outcomes.

Within the GAA programme, CSOs played a pivotal role in influencing and advocacy on key themes and issues that girls and young women are faced with. The combination of capacity development of GAA implementing partners with awareness-raising and training of other actors contributed to the effectiveness of the lobby and advocacy outcomes. However, the organisational capacities of the partner CSOs to adapt and self-renew still require the most attention. Similarly, these capacity development initiatives need to be targeted based on

the organisational capacity assessment findings and more practical oriented with the inclusion of approaches such as coaching, mentoring, peer-to-peer support, and webinars.

The increase of youth-focused CSOs is complementary in influencing and advocacy on existing treaties, policies, and protocols on issues affecting girls and young women. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of young people and youth-focused CSOs for youth-led advocacy in the GAA programme has not only been effective but also enabled active participation of the youth for the sustainable push for changes on issues affecting girls, such as GBV and economic

exclusion. Participatory development of youth initiatives and issues affecting the youth is central in these lobby and advocacy efforts to ensure that the advocacy messages are communicated in the youth's own words. CSOs, therefore, need to think from the perspective of the lobby target. Use of local platforms results has proved to be more effective in addressing issues such as ending child marriages in countries such as Ghana. Also, for the achievement of the lobby and advocacy outcomes, the CSOs' engagement with government officials must be based on an informed understanding of the institutional limitations that particular officeholder faces.





Recommendations

The recommendations are drawn from the synthesis on the linkage of the national and regional influencing processes and how effective CSOs developed in influencing and advocacy relate to areas that need strengthening in the implementation of future similar programmes.

1. Learning from the GAA programme, instead of advocating on behalf of girls and young women, empower them to lead the change they want.
2. Seek efficiency in mutual capacity development of partners. This requires careful attention, at the design stage, to the constellation of each component by partners that have similar missions and advocacy agendas.
3. Working with networks of traditional and religious leaders and CSOs seems to yield more results. The collaboration with traditional and religious leaders can be enhanced with strategic thematic networks working on similar themes.
4. In terms of advocacy towards human rights mechanisms, programmes should develop strategies and targets to address the challenges that increase conservatism pose to the political context, for example by targeting less politicised arenas and by combining evidence-based research with lobby and networking with like-minded lobby organisations.
5. For similar programmes in future, there is a need for hands-on support to develop effective policy influencing through strategic advocacy.
6. There is a need to unremittably strengthen regional and sub-regional CSOs and key partner's capacity; more campaigning, awareness-raising, and media advocacy on the implementation of the existing laws and policies so far enacted and further entrench the partnerships built with the regional bodies.
7. There is a need to develop a capacity-building package that is tailored for each organisation's challenges and promote an interactive session for peer learning and reflections.
8. Make use of the gained knowledge and experience from GAA organisations' 'insider' approach to explore the potential to link advocacy efforts on the local-district-national level.
9. Explore potential to work at the national level engaging in policy formulation and monitoring of the implementation of policies.
10. Strengthen the capacity of implementing partners to influence at different stages in the policy process and share such experiences within GAA.
11. Enhance collaboration with other actors: with traditional partners and non-traditional partners, and other CSOs and NGOs working in the same thematic fields to join efforts to effectively influence policy.
12. Share experiences and approaches of working with youth advocates in different countries and develop a comprehensive approach to youth advocacy.
13. Work towards overcoming focus on only the provision of services, to either gradually transform or replace this with lobby and advocacy towards key actors of the girls and women environment: communities, governments, the private sector, and civil society.

GIRLS ADVOCACY ALLIANCE