



**ADOLESCENT  
GIRLS** COMMUNITY  
OF PRACTICE



**Intentional Design Practitioner Report**

# Implementing the Girl Roster in South Sudan

**By Omar Robles, Dale Buscher, and Aimee Lyons**

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The Adolescent Girls Community of Practice is a project of the Population Council.

<https://buildcommunity4girls.org/>



## About

**The Intentional Design approach has been foundational to the Population Council’s work since 2000, when on-the-ground programs to reach the most excluded girls in the poorest communities greatly expanded. This practitioner report is part of a series of 20 reports reflecting work in sites around the world from 2000 to 2020. The Intentional Design approach was implemented in these sites with nongovernmental and governmental partners who explored the question: Why invest in girls? Once that was understood, the Council offered learning tools to navigate the questions: Where do we work? With whom do we work? When, chronologically, in the girls’ life cycles are the most crucial moments? Which content is meaningful and realistic and builds girls’ protective assets? What does success look like for different segments of girls?**

In 2013, the Girl Roster tool was added when it was clear that many partners lacked the technical and scientific resources to establish the “universe” of girls in the places they had selected to work. Intentional Design tools—with the Roster being the most known and catalytic learning aid—have been utilized in South and East Asia; the Middle East; Central, East, and West Africa; North America; Latin America; and the Caribbean.

The Roster has been adapted for use in an array of sociodemographic contexts including dispersed rural villages, poor urban neighborhoods, conflict zones, refugee camps, densely packed informal/migrant-receiving settlements, high-risk HIV zones, before and after epidemics, as a rebuilding tool, and in Native American reservation communities. In every context, the Roster provided a transformative opportunity to see girls’ lives more systematically, drawing both quantitative and qualitative information. The efforts to estimate and segment the universe of girls has challenged initial assumptions about girls, families, safe and unsafe zones in communities, and the accessibility and relevance of services, even among those who felt they knew their community, including longstanding program staff. Across the board, practitioners report that on-the-ground application of the learning tools generates surprising and useful knowledge vital to shaping their work, assessing its reach, and articulating plans for expansion.

In the 20 reports that comprise this series, our partners share their experiences applying Intentional Design tools and principles. The reports represent just a few on-the-ground projects, but most of our partners report that the Intentional Design approach has taken root. We honor our partners for their honesty and dedication. They inspire us.

Judith Bruce and Sophie Soares

Authors, *Intentional Design: Reaching the Most Excluded Girls in the Poorest Communities—A Guide for Practitioners and Advocates*, from which these reports were excerpted.

# Implementing the Girl Roster in South Sudan<sup>1</sup>

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Findings and Decisions	Implementation Observations and Adaptations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resettlement camp managers had projected that about 10% of girls of school-going age would be out of school, but rostering revealed it was closer to 45%. This led to a full evaluation of using the school as a base through which to deliver vital inputs, including food security and vaccinations, as a high proportion of the most vulnerable were not present.</li> <li>The program assumed married girls had children, but about one-third did not. The childless girls may not have had surviving children because this part of Sudan has catastrophically high infant mortality, particularly among very young girls.</li> <li>The content of the program for married girls needed review as it had little young-female-focused content, was child-focused, and did not provide means to include or support the childless.</li> <li>This experience was a breakthrough for the Women's Refugee Commission, as it was in the context of this field experience that a poor girl came forward to program organizers. As an out-of-school girl, she had not been part of the initial school-based program. She called attention to herself, saying "I'm here," leading to both the naming and crafting of the I'm Here approach, which incorporated the Girl Roster as a key tool.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical aspects of Girl Roster training are relatively easy, but the rapidity of the Roster should not supersede productive community interaction. That is, it is important to advance through the questionnaire quickly while remaining respectful. Finding a balance between reaching all the households in the walkable community and maintaining a positive relationship with community members is vital.</li> <li>The results at the end of Day 1 of rostering were surprising to the rosterers, as they found more girls of school-going age out of school than they had anticipated. Results identified young married girls with and without children.</li> <li>In working in an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, there are important protocols to follow and political factors to navigate. Key humanitarian actors and the host population were apprehensive about activities perceived as assessments or research. It was important to describe the Girl Roster in the proper terms for what it actually is—a rapid response tool that supports effectiveness and quality. Emphasizing this helped increase the trust of the host population.</li> <li>The questionnaire was translated into and applied in Dinka so that the questions could be articulated rapidly and the information effectively sourced.</li> </ul>

## Introduction

This practitioner report outlines the Women's Refugee Commission's (WRC's) pilot implementation of the Girl Roster in South Sudan. In consultation with the Population Council and in partnership with Action Contre Le Faim/Action Against Hunger (ACF) in

South Sudan, Omar Robles, who was a senior program officer at the WRC at the time, coordinated the pilot implementation. On-the-ground pilot activities took place in April 2014, approximately three months after the WRC initially suggested the partnership to several operational humanitarian organizations.

<sup>1</sup> This practitioner report is special because it was foundational in the creation of the Women's Refugee Commission's (WRC's) I'm Here approach, the product of much iteration between the Council's Intentional Design team and WRC. At the time, the WRC took an extraordinary role in bringing to earth the Girl Roster, as part of the broader Intentional Design approach, in extremely challenging circumstances. Because this field experience happened in an earlier phase of the Roster's testing and evolution, this report focuses more on the technical understanding and adaptations of the Roster and includes commentary on how learning tools must be deployed differently in humanitarian settings, not only because of security concerns in those settings but also because of the sensitivities and protocols around research. Not only are implementing organizations sensitive to this but the refugee population has grown distrustful of entities that collect information about them. The Council observed this same sensitivity in the United States paradoxically where our partners used pen and paper, because US authorities with tablets had become threatening. The Council is grateful to the WRC and Mercy Corps for being earlier testers and adapters of and collaborators on the Girl Roster tool and its application.

## Experience with Girl Roster Technology

Rosterers' familiarity with smart phones—including the swiping gesture, among other features—varied significantly in South Sudan, and the team consisted of only four people. The concept of (GPS-linked) mobile applications was foreign and took time to get accustomed to through an applied exercise. Overall, the process of using the phones and the mobile apps is accessible and user-friendly. For staff at headquarters who might pitch in and/or provide technical support to their colleagues in the field, the information-collection process and the steps to produce the Output Tables are even more user-friendly.

If ease of use is measured, as well as the operational setup, the experience is positive. Operational setup includes: setting up and modifying the questionnaire, uploading the questionnaire to “Ona,” downloading the required applications, setting up the phones, testing the applications, uploading collected information, interpreting the outputs, and managing technical challenges.

## Challenges to Implementation

The main (and only significant) challenges that the team in South Sudan encountered involved: translation to Dinka, and producing the Output Table. The first challenge was overcome by rosterers' patience and willingness to translate every question, and the meaning and language being reviewed during the one-day simulation training. The second challenge was resolved with technical support from the Population Council. Apart from this specific glitch, the information gathering went smoothly.

Another challenge was the impact of the process on rosterers' attentiveness. Given that the Girl Roster is based on a household/tent-to-tent approach, which can feel redundant, it was important to keep the rosterers energetic, to maintain a rapid yet respectful pace in asking questions, and to ensure that, collectively, the team made a reasonable and ethical effort

to reach all tents. This commitment was also impeded by time-of-day factors, e.g., the dates and time of day when rosterers use the tool impacts both the number of people, and who within the household rosterers could reach to collect information, as some people were simply not home.

Another takeaway from implementation in South Sudan was that when using the I'm Here and Intentional Design approaches, some geographical consideration about where to start is important. That is, do not begin to roster near/around the school or existing child-friendly space (CFS), as this starting point is more likely to result in identifying girls who can access these resources because they are more conveniently located and likely do not reflect the priority segments, which are those girls with restricted mobility/access to public space. It does not mean you do not roster the whole walkable community, merely that your priority should be in low-resource areas.

Last, in South Sudan a considerable number of heads of households did not know girls' exact ages, and in some families, had a number of girls in the same general age cohort (e.g., 6–9). Girls could be fitted loosely into a cohort, but for enumeration purposes they were assigned a letter code within their household to avoid double counting. When the raw information was accessed to better understand into which categories these subsets of girls fell, most of these girls (whose ages were unknown) fell into categories of heightened vulnerability/risk, i.e., off-track girls.

The South Sudan implementation occurred at an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp. This context is different from a refugee camp setting where UNHCR has more protocols and oversight, and where there may be apprehension about activities that are perceived as assessments of management or response.

All of these challenges, though, do not factor in the added security considerations and local context that provide their own challenges.

## Approach to Introducing the Roster and Bridging Community Access

Several key points are important to pitch WRC's I'm Here approach, of which the Girl Roster is an integral part. In the humanitarian context, it is important to avoid terms that may arouse suspicion, territorial response, or imply that the project involves research. These include "assessment," "research," "information," "questionnaire," "survey," "evaluation," and "accountability." Instead, framing the Girl Roster as a rapid response tool that supports effectiveness and quality taps into colleagues' desires to do their jobs well. One phrase that has been effective is that the "Girl Roster helps to generate actionable information."

The rostering team was comprised of four people: three non-ACF staff members and one ACF program staff person. In this context, rostering is defined as applying the questionnaire and using the mobile phones and applications. The three non-ACF staff were hired consultants; they were individuals who had previously worked for ACF as "hygiene promoters" and who could speak English and Dinka.

For more information, please review our report: [https://s333660.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Im-Here\\_2016-Update.pdf](https://s333660.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Im-Here_2016-Update.pdf).

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