

# EMPOWERED AND SAFE

Economic Strengthening for Girls in Emergencies

THEORY OF CHANGE





The humanitarian community urgently needs to intensify investment in adolescent girls in emergency contexts. Adolescent girls made largely powerless in most societies, but given the opportunity, they have tremendous capacity to transform their own lives and catalyze change within their families and communities.

To realize this potential, humanitarian actors need to identify effective approaches to prevent the gender-based violence (GBV) they face. Few program efforts specifically target girls' economic assets, despite evidence that these assets can play a crucial protective and empowering role alongside other asset-building opportunities: social, physical, and human.

This Theory of Change (ToC) is meant to guide the design of interventions that empower and protect adolescent girls by reducing their economic vulnerability. This is one component of a holistic approach to meeting their needs and fulfilling their rights. The ToC is one of three resources developed to promote economic strengthening (ES) interventions to reduce girls' risks of GBV and contribute to their empowerment in emergency settings; the other two are the background paper *Empowered and Safe: Economic Strengthening for Girls in Emergencies* and *Empowered and Safe: A Menu of Program Options*. All three are available at [womenensrefugeecommission.org](http://womenensrefugeecommission.org).

The ToC is based on evidence and insights from the few programs that have sought to empower adolescent girls economically as a means to addressing their vulnerability. To fulfil our collective responsibility to ensure girls' rights to safety, dignity and protection, we need to test the pathways for change the ToC describes. The ToC aims to promote ethical and safe programming and to foster research that will build the evidence base on what works, for whom, and in which contexts.

Building economic assets as a protection strategy should complement, not replace, other multi-sectoral GBV prevention efforts in humanitarian

settings, such as those outlined in the Inter-Agency Steering Committee (IASC) *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, and Aiding Recovery*.<sup>1</sup>

## Background

Humanitarian emergencies only exacerbate the double disadvantage that girls face in being female and young, both which curtail their agency<sup>2</sup> and increase their vulnerability to GBV within the household and the community. GBV is a complex problem with multiple causes and drivers, some of which are structural, such as gender and age-based inequalities held in place by discriminatory social norms. Economic insecurity in particular is a driving factor of GBV that increases in humanitarian crises.

Emerging evidence suggests that building girls' protective assets can improve their health-seeking behavior, reduce their risk of violence and delay the onset of sexual activity.<sup>3</sup> Building girls' economic assets through economic strengthening (ES) interventions can reduce the risk of GBV associated with economic deprivation, such as transactional sex, labor migration and unsafe forms of work.

As well as having a direct positive effect through creating safer livelihoods, ES, combined with other asset building, can lead to greater empowerment and agency for women and girls,<sup>4</sup> which can reduce their risk of GBV by increasing their bargaining power, decision-making and autonomy. Delivering an integrated package of social and economic asset-building services to girls, combined with efforts to create an enabling environment, will help reduce girls' risk of GBV and promote their safety, resilience and agency from the onset of an emergency through recovery and longer-term development.

### Types of Assets<sup>5</sup>

**Natural:** land, water, trees, etc.

**Physical:** agricultural and business equipment, housing, consumer durables, vehicles and transportation, water supply and sanitation facilities, technology and communications infrastructure.

**Human:** education, skills, knowledge, health, nutritional status and labor power.

**Financial:** savings, credit, and accrued private and public transfers.

**Social:** membership in organizations, networks that increase trust, ability to work together, access to opportunities, reciprocity and informal safety nets.

**Political:** citizenship, enfranchisement and effective participation in governance.

### The problem addressed

Conflict and displacement exacerbate economic insecurity and reduce safe livelihood options. As a result, girls may be forced to resort to harmful measures to survive, such as transactional sex, dangerous labor migration or low-paying work in the informal economy, where unsafe work such as collecting firewood or hawking goods on the street carries a heightened risk of sexual violence and exploitation. Economic vulnerability also heightens girls' risk of exposure to sexual exploitation by aid workers, peacekeepers and others in the community. Some girls may resort to trading sex for money or goods, or may even be pressured by their families to do so. Unless the economic dimension of these forms of violence against girls is addressed, eradicating them is difficult.

### Approach to change

The strategy for preventing GBV against adolescent girls in emergencies is to facilitate preparation for and access to safe and dignified livelihood opportunities and build girls' social and human assets to increase their self-worth, resilience, social position and bargaining power to exercise their rights.

Programs must be carefully designed, monitored and evaluated. Findings must be disseminated to build knowledge and evidence for which interventions work best to protect different girls in different settings and contexts. Interventions must be age- and developmentally appropriate to avoid causing school dropout and harmful child labor, and tailored to the phase and type of emergency, as well as to wider community and national development efforts.

In line with a holistic approach recognizing the need to focus not only on building girls' assets – particularly economic ones – but also the social ecology in which they live, the ToC reflects changes needed in three domains: girls' agency; the family and community environment; and the wider humanitarian response. Taken together, changes across these domains confer a protective effect against certain forms of GBV.

### Guiding principles

#### 1. Minimize risk of harm from interventions.

Humanitarian action must not inadvertently cause harm to individuals, groups or communities. Reducing risk of harm requires careful, reflective practice, risk assessment and planning, as ES for girls carries potential risks that must be identified and addressed from the outset and monitored on an ongoing basis.

#### 2. The humanitarian community has an obligation to protect girls' rights and to ensure their participation.

The humanitarian community has an obligation to protect and promote girls' rights to protection, safety and dignity in emergencies, as enshrined in international humanitarian and human rights law. Respecting girls' right to meaningful participation in assessment, design, monitoring and evaluation will lead to better programming and outcomes.

### **3. Programs should be integrated, comprehensive and inter-sectoral.**

Strategies aimed at building girls' economic and social assets need to complement rather than replace other approaches to GBV prevention, such as those outlined in the IASC *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, and Aiding Recovery*. Protecting girls is a shared responsibility and requires coordination across sectors.

### **4. Interventions must be tailored to girls' needs and circumstances, and to each context.**

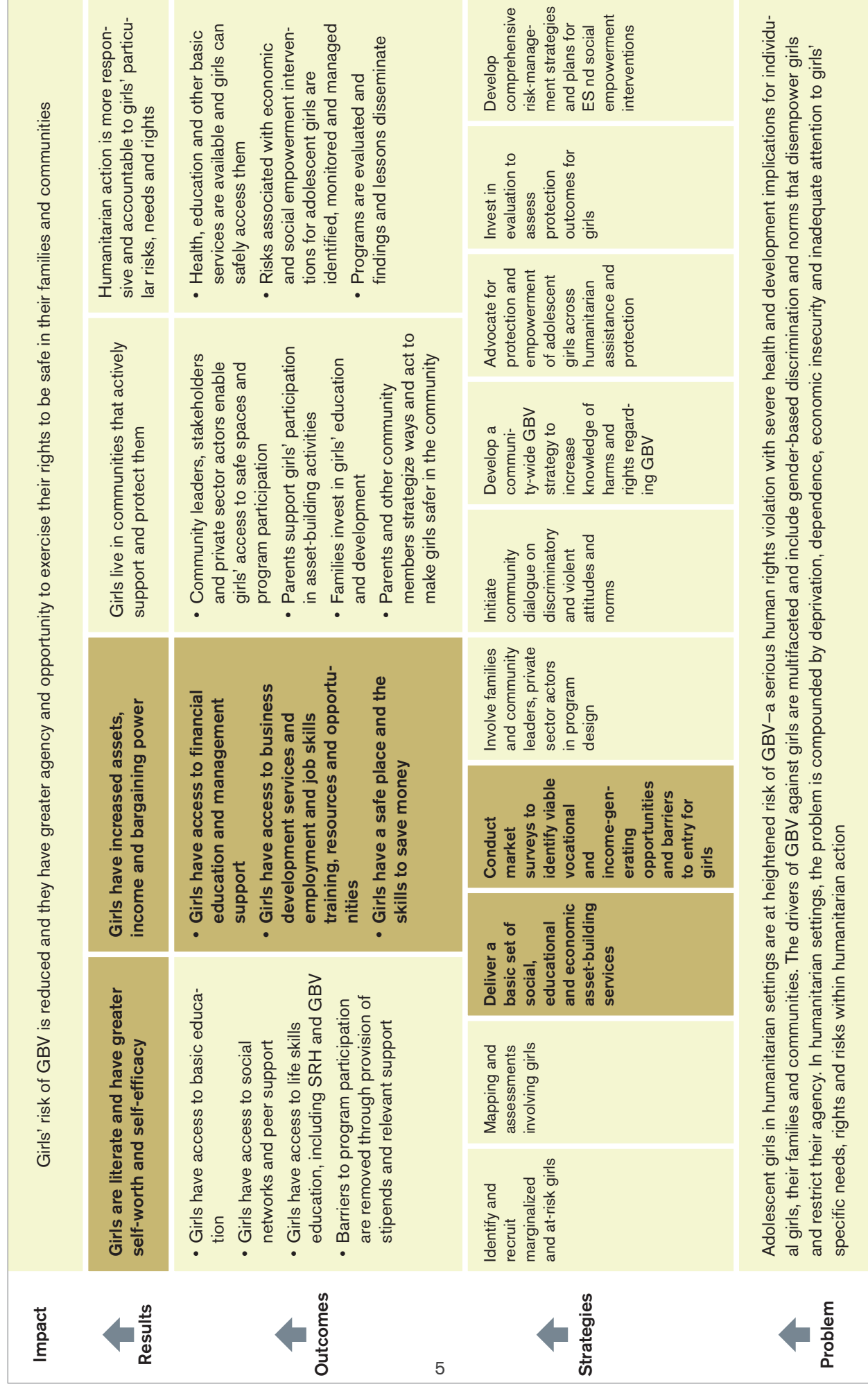
Adolescent girls are not a homogenous group and ES interventions must cater for different developmental stages reflecting the different capacities, needs and roles of girls in early and late adolescence, and different social and economic circumstances, such as girls' education, poverty and marital status, among others. Interventions must also be tailored to the type of emergency, relevant national policies and programs, and market realities. They should contribute to broader national and community development efforts.

### **5. Ending GBV involves tackling harmful gender-based discrimination and social norms in the community.**

Ending discrimination and harmful gender norms is at the heart of ending GBV against women and children. Preventing GBV involves promoting gender equality and promoting beliefs and norms that foster respectful, non-violent attitudes, behaviors and relationships.

## **Notes**

1. See [www.gbvaor.net](http://www.gbvaor.net)
2. The capacity to make decisions about one's own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution or fear.
3. Paik, K. (2014) *Strong Girls, Powerful Women: Program Planning and Design for Adolescent Girls in Humanitarian Settings*, Women's Refugee Commission, New York. [www.womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/document/1036-strong-girls-powerful-women-report](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/document/1036-strong-girls-powerful-women-report)
4. Asset ownership has been linked to increased bargaining position for women and girls, increased voice in household decision-making, reduced malnutrition among their children, reduced rates of marital violence and fewer restrictions to leaving situations of domestic violence. See for example, Quisumbing (2003) in Quisumbing, A. and Kovarik (2013) (note 4); Allendorf, K. (2007) "Do Women's Land Rights Promote Empowerment and Child Health in Nepal?" *World Development* 35(11): 1975-1988; Marcus, R. (2014) *Gender Justice and Social Norms: Towards a conceptual framework*, Overseas Development Institute, Sussex. [www.odl.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8831.pdf](http://www.odl.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8831.pdf)
5. Adapted from Quisumbing, A. and Kovarik, C. (2013) *Investments in Adolescent Girls' Physical and Financial Assets: Issues and Review of Evidence*, Girl Hub, London. [www.girleffect.org/resources/2013/3/investments-in-adolescent-girls-physical-and-financial-assets/](http://www.girleffect.org/resources/2013/3/investments-in-adolescent-girls-physical-and-financial-assets/)





The **Child Protection in Crisis (CPC) Network** undertakes innovative research and builds evidence to effect change in child protection policy and practice. At the country level, the CPC Network brings together policy makers and practitioners to determine learning priorities and ensure the results of these endeavors are put to good use. Globally, the CPC Network works with coalitions of UN, nongovernmental, private sector and government actors to generate evidence and link research findings to global practice.

The **Women's Refugee Commission** is a research and advocacy organization based in New York. It identifies needs, researches solutions and advocates for global change to improve the lives of crisis-affected women and children.

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** is the main UN organization defending, promoting and protecting children's rights.

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