

# WOMEN AND GIRLS:

the British Council approach



# FOREWORD

**THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS IN RECENT DECADES IN GETTING COUNTRIES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS, IN ORDER TO PROMOTE GREATER EQUALITY IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEN AND BOYS, WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES AND IN SOCIETY. WHILE THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY RECOGNISES THE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION GENDER EQUALITY CAN MAKE TO POVERTY REDUCTION AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH, IT ALSO RECOGNISES THAT EQUALITY MUST BE, ABOVE ALL, A MATTER OF BASIC SOCIAL JUSTICE.**

Women and girls continue to lag behind men and boys on key dimensions of rights, capabilities, opportunities and well-being, key dimensions of what is essential if people are to realise their full potential. Efforts to address these inequalities must surely be central to the efforts of the international community. At the same time, we must recognise that we are unlikely to succeed if men and boys are not also part and parcel of these processes of change.

There are no instant solutions for dealing with what is one of the most intransigent forms of injustice in the world today. We are all, in a very real sense, in this together, even if the injustices in question may take different forms in different parts of the world.

In the UK, we have had to find ways of reconciling shared values of equality, justice and human rights with the diverse ways in which these values are interpreted within the different cultures that define modern Britishness. We have the experience and learning from this ongoing struggle to share with the rest of the world. Equally, it is from similar struggles elsewhere in the world that we in the UK can learn.

The British Council is uniquely placed to participate in and to take forward this agenda of mutual learning and support. It has been working for more than 80 years to build understanding between different cultures. It has experience of working in complex situations and in areas where there is conflict.

This cultural relations approach means building partnerships and networks, building deep knowledge of the countries in which they operate and supporting locally led initiatives that are contextualised to local culture.

Perhaps in no other area is this commitment to a cultural relations approach as critical as it is in the work on gender equality.

The British Council is able to draw on a wealth of experience and resources in creative ways to promote the agenda of change. Its work in the arts can challenge old and outmoded gender stereotypes and build a renewed vision of what is possible. Education work can be used to strengthen capacity for reflection and critical thinking. The networks across civil society can be engaged to bring different sections of society together for debate and discussion.

Moreover, women and girls, along with their communities, can be drawn in across all programmes – in social enterprise, civil society capacity building, access to justice – in order to contribute to building broad-based support for the gender equality agenda.

This publication offers a brief introduction to the British Council's approach to gender equality globally. It illustrates how vital this theme is across a number of programmes. And it demonstrates how central this work is to the British Council's purpose of supporting the development of more open, inclusive and secure societies, for people in the UK and the rest of the world.



**Naila Kabeer**

Professor of Gender and Development, Gender Institute, London School of Economics, and member of the British Council Society Advisory Committee

# THE BRITISH COUNCIL: A CULTURAL RELATIONS APPROACH TO EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS

**THE BRITISH COUNCIL'S WORK TO EMPOWER WOMEN AND GIRLS BUILDS ON OVER 20 YEARS OF APPLIED EXPERIENCE ON THE GROUND IN AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST, ASIA AND WIDER EUROPE.**

We adopt an approach that understands and reflects international and UK values, priorities and experience, while responding to the priorities of the countries in which we work. We do this through building partnerships, networks, and combining this with a deep knowledge and understanding of the countries in which we work. We develop initiatives that are locally led and contextualised to local culture. And we take a holistic and systemic approach in a way that builds on the trust we have gained through our diverse work in over 100 countries.

The British Council sees issues of equality and diversity as a crucial part of our work in cultural relations. We have adopted a strategy of embedding them in everything we do, through our equality, diversity and inclusion policy.

We recognise empowerment as addressing the fundamental rights of women and girls. But we also believe that achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls has benefits for wider society. Reducing gender gaps in economic life, in leadership and decision making, in education and in health, improves the lives of men and boys as well as women and girls. Evidence shows that more gender-inclusive societies

experience reduced levels of conflict<sup>1</sup>, increased competitiveness and economic growth<sup>2</sup> and more representative governance<sup>3</sup>.

## **BUILDING ON AND EARNING TRUST**

Our research tells us that the British Council is a trusted organisation. This stems from our long-term presence in over 100 countries worldwide, the quality of our services, particularly in English and education, and our status as a politically neutral body. We also aim to build trust through our behaviours and ways of working and as a key ingredient that enables change to happen. This means working with others to find common ground and shared interests as well as address challenging issues. This is particularly important for addressing underlying attitudes and institutions that support gender inequality and restrictive gender roles that hampers the empowerment of women and girls. This also means trusting our partners and collaborators in developing and delivering interventions that address these challenges.

## **COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP AND THE HEART OF OUR APPROACH**

Respect for women's human rights has been enshrined in international agreements for decades. However, considerable inequalities between women and men persist worldwide. Gender equality is an enduring global issue, which requires international collaboration and exchange of ideas and experience. This is core to the British Council's role. Collaborating internationally, building new partnerships and approaches to addressing gender inequality and empowering women and girls are crucial to meeting global commitments to equality and human rights. Within all our interventions we work with a range of partners that can bring expertise and innovation.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT**

Our history puts us in a unique position to address societal challenges, including gender inequality. We understand that empowering women and girls and achieving gender equality is a long-term and complex process, requiring change at a number of levels. It involves many actors,

1 Hudson, V et al. (2012) *Sex and World Peace*. Colombia University Press.

2 World Economic Forum Gender gap report 2014. [www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR\\_CompleteReport\\_2014.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR_CompleteReport_2014.pdf)

3 World Bank (2012) Gender and Development. <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf>

including the state, civil society and the private sector, as well as women, men, girls and boys. Opportunities for women and girls worldwide are limited by culturally determined gender roles and social norms. These norms are shaped by national and local cultures, which in turn impact on group and individual identities and relations. Addressing women's and girls' empowerment, therefore, means challenging deep-rooted cultural and social norms. This requires an understanding of the context in which change might be possible and developing long-term relationships with those who can make a difference. The development of approaches and interventions led by national stakeholders, and drawing on UK and global learning and practice, is central to our approach.

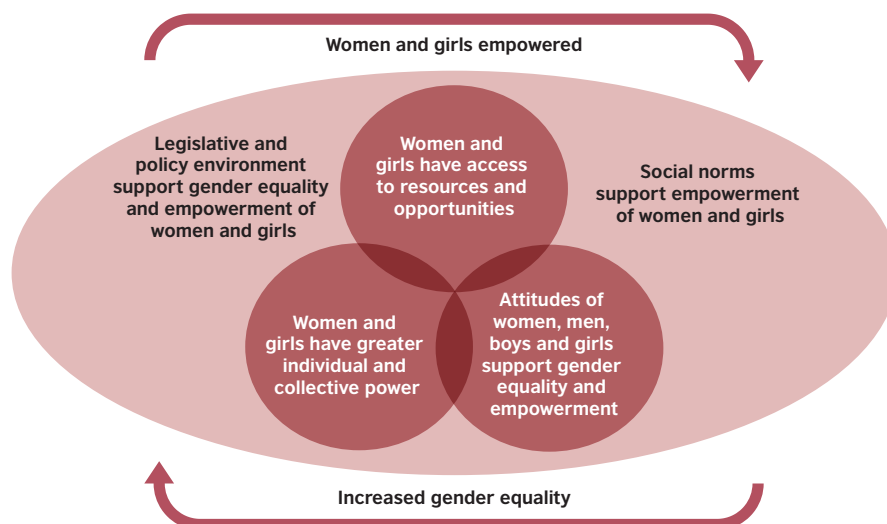
## A HOLISTIC AND SYSTEMIC APPROACH

There is no easy way to ensure interventions lead to greater empowerment for women and girls, or to achieve long-term and sustainable change. It requires a holistic approach, which tackles gender inequalities and seeks to empower women and girls from a number of perspectives. This demands action from a number of stakeholders. Change is needed to support women's and girls' awareness, capacities and abilities, as well as creating opportunities and an enabling environment for empowerment. These complex change processes are represented in Figure 1.

Supporting women's awareness, confidence and ability to change and improve their lives is an important element of empowerment. We provide opportunities, through the creation of spaces in which women and girls can grow and thrive. Many of these deliver real change in a woman's confidence, self-perception and ability to make decisions that will affect her life.

We also recognise that women's empowerment does not rest with individual women alone; working collectively to achieve change is crucial.

**Figure 1: A holistic approach to increasing gender equality and empowering women and girls**



We build collaboration and networks between women and women's organisations, as well as influencing and building alliances with other stakeholders.

In order for women and girls to be empowered they must be able to access resources and opportunities including key services such as health, education, employment and justice, as well as decision-making and political processes. We work with partners from different sectors to influence institutional and organisational level policy and practice, create more opportunities for women and girls, including representation in decision making and influencing how their priorities are met through the provision of public goods, services and information.

A supportive legislative and policy environment is vital for achieving gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment. We work with partners to influence legislative and policy change to support empowerment and promote gender equality and ensure that this is implemented. This means working directly with policy makers; however, we are also creating partnerships with civil society and the private sector to influence the policy and legislative processes.

There is increasing recognition that attitudes, beliefs and social norms, have an important influence on women's and girls' empowerment<sup>4,5</sup>. Through our work we seek to understand, explore and change attitudes and create opportunities for influencing social norms in the longer term.

In all our work, we aim to connect with UK and local partners to design and implement solutions that bring real and lasting change. We believe this delivers for women and girls on the ground, but we also believe it contributes to more secure, inclusive and prosperous futures for all.

**‘Gender equality is an enduring global issue, which requires international collaboration and exchange of ideas and experience.’**

4 DFID (Department for International Development) and Girl Hub (2012) ‘Adolescent Girls’. Technical Experts Meeting on Adolescent Girls, London, 17–18 October.

5 Paluck and Ball (2010); Fekadu and Kraft (2002).

## SUPPORTING WOMEN AND GIRLS AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE IN ETHIOPIA

The British Council delivers the Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP), a capacity development programme designed to support Ethiopia's civil society and its contribution to the country's national development, poverty reduction and advancement of good governance.

Our work empowers people and organisations that are often hardest to reach in society, including those with a marginalised status, such as women and girls. Our innovative programme of support offers grants that encourage innovation and creativity in civil society organisations, to develop capacity, and foster collaboration and trust among various stakeholders, including government.

Through this work, we strive for safe, secure and equal societies. A particular emphasis is placed on supporting gender equality, and on reducing violence against women. To date, almost 70 per cent of the grants awarded by the Civil Society Support Programme have direct benefits for women in Ethiopia, including strengthening their livelihoods, and supporting girls to remain in school.

We work with local people and civil society partner organisations, including Harmee Education for Development Association (HEfDA), to develop a deep understanding of the multifaceted realities in Ethiopia. HEfDA, located in Munessa, has benefited from capacity development and grant funding to address the low benefit women and girls receive from development support and low female participation in schools due to domestic violence, migration and family duties.

The project has achieved results by adopting a whole-system approach to tackle the factors affecting girls'

education, including migration and abduction. This included building trusted relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, including women and girls, men and boys, the local community, traditional groups (idir) and government.

The first project focused on improving girls' attendance and results at school. A deep understanding of the local context revealed that migration and abduction were key issues in the Munessa community. Many girls from Munessa have migrated to the Middle East – some as young as 12 years old – and there are numerous stories of young girls forcibly taken from their families, abused, raped, and coerced into marriage.

Support was offered to abducted girls, by creating support structures, and undertaking awareness-raising activities amongst the community to prevent abduction for marriage. When the project was started, there were 18 reported cases of abduction in the district and many more unreported. In 2014, there were only two.

Local girls were empowered through the organisation of girls' clubs in schools, where girls share their life experiences, discuss problems and act as a support group for other girls. Since the project's inception, there are now 20,000 girls from 61 schools organised into girls' clubs. Local government was engaged to establish a task force for women that meets monthly to discuss and address the

challenges women and girls face in education.

The project subsequently turned its attention to gender-based violence. Over 14,000 local women were organised into women's groups to engage regularly with the taskforce, sharing their experiences to help influence local decision-makers. One notable achievement has been to embed anti-violence into local legislation, by working with well-respected idir community groups. This traditional custom, which has been around for more than 100 years, sees community members come together to support each other in a variety of ways. These groups are structured in their decision-making and have a designated chairperson, treasurer and secretary. Idirs also have their own by-laws; these now preclude violence against women.

Through our support, HEfDA's multi-dimensional approach to combating girls' migration, abduction, school drop out and violence is yielding real benefits. Involving men and boys in youth employment initiatives is proving invaluable – many of the young men involved were formerly engaged in abduction and trafficking. Our cultural relations approach – based on a deep local understanding, collaboration and trust – has enabled communication among all parties and generated alternative livelihoods to ensure that young people are encouraged to choose activities that support local social and economic development.

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**'Through this work, we strive for safe, secure and equal societies.'**

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## STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

The Middle East and North Africa region has undergone huge turbulence and change over the past four years. Despite differences between countries, there has been an emerging agenda to increase women's participation in elections, legislative processes, policy influencing and decision-making at all levels. Yet despite immense political and social changes during this time, there is still a need for greater progress on gender equality.

With support from the UK Government's Arab Partnership Fund, the British Council runs the programme Women Participating in Public Life. This operates in countries in the region that have either witnessed change of power, such as Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, or are going through various reform agendas, such as Morocco. The programme aims to build capacity among women to engage with, and act upon, issues that affect their community, and to build up a broad base of support within society for women's participation in political processes.

Our understanding of women's political participation goes beyond simple political empowerment; it encompasses how women can engage in and influence political processes through alternative means, and how they can influence the policies and delivery of services. This broader view of political participation underpins our strategy of a longer-term approach to building the capacity and confidence of women and women's organisations to influence change.

The programme has worked at three levels: local, national and regional. At the local/community level we have built the confidence and ability of women to affect change – their agency – and to build support and networks within their communities for doing so.

At the national level, we support existing and emerging coalitions working to achieve increased participation of women in public life. There is evidence that coalitions have been effective in the Middle East, in particular the Jordanian Coalition for Protection of the Family against Violence. This was supported by the British Council under the DFID Family Protection Project and the CEDAW coalition in Egypt. Clear lessons from these cases include the need for local ownership and a focus on relationship building between the various actors. As well as supporting organisations to collaborate in each of the countries, we have brought in technical expertise to support the vision and objectives of the coalitions to be more effective at influencing change.

The development of networks within country, through coalition building, has been augmented by support for regional networks. This has been particularly important for countries where there are rapid changes. It is clear that new organisations and emerging social leaders have a lot to share with, and learn from, each other.

Action research is a major part of Women Participating in Public Life. This approach has been built into the implementation of the programme

so that evidence can be gathered on how women can be more successful at effecting change at a local level. Working with UK experts and national partners, we can ensure that evidence is being used both as a learning tool, and as a base to influence the work of national organisations and the regional network.

In all of the focus countries, the project has had an impact on the self-confidence and sense of agency of individuals in those involved in its implementation. Those individual transformations, whether related to self-confidence, or acquisition of new skills, are being sustained.

But as with all our work in this sector, this is about more than the individual. For example, participation in the programme enabled Heda Abel, (through action research, sharing and learning both nationally, regionally and internationally) to advocate more effectively on enshrining gender equality in the new Egyptian constitution. That way, we are working towards long-term change that allows more women across the region to participate in and contribute to public life, for the benefit of all in their societies.

**'It is clear that new organisations and emerging social leaders have a lot to share with and learn from each other.'**



## DEVELOPING WOMEN AND GIRLS AS PEACE BUILDERS

Through the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), the British Council, with our partners, supports Nigerian efforts to reduce violent conflict and promote stability, peace and reconciliation. We work to encourage non-violent conflict resolution and reduce the impact of violent conflict, particularly on women and girls. We support actors and institutions at the federal, state and community levels to address drivers of conflict, to improve co-ordination and accountability, and to provide mediation support in some of the most affected states.

Our women and girls programme area works towards 'increased and more influential participation by women and girls in institutions and initiatives relevant to peace building, with reduced prevalence and impact of violence against women and girls'.

Despite being affected by violent conflict and being vulnerable to gender-based violence, women are often absent from peace building and conflict management mechanisms. The exclusion of women from these processes, whether formal or informal, means that their expertise and capacities are missing.

Through NSRP, we support the increase of women's participation in peace building and initiatives that reduce violence against women and girls. We are also building a more conducive environment for women's and girls' participation.

By publishing and disseminating research reports, including lessons learned on conflict prevention and management, we are influencing policy makers. A study on the 'Role of Women in Peace Initiatives in Nigeria' confirmed that women in Nigeria have a powerful role to play in conflict resolutions, and that gender discrimination and violence often hinder their participation. The report was presented by the

Government of Nigeria at the 57th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the principal global policy-making body dedicated to setting standards and policies for gender equality and advancement of women.

NSRP also delivers technical assistance to government ministries, departments and agencies, community leaders, and development and civil society partners to support them to work in more effective, inclusive and conflict-sensitive ways.

We supported the federal government to develop and implement a national action plan to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 – an international legal framework that addresses not only the impact of war on women, but also the pivotal role women should and do play in conflict management, conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

We work with civil society organisations, offering technical assistance, capacity building and grants to implement innovative projects to address the drivers of violence and the impact of violent conflict, particularly on those most marginalised, vulnerable and affected.

Crucially, we are facilitating the ability of women's civil society and their networks to intervene in conflict, engage in peace

building and build evidence about how women's participation supports conflict management.

We supported the establishment and co-ordination of Women, Peace and Security Networks at the federal level and in eight states. The groups co-ordinate action and raise awareness about gender and peace building initiatives. Strengthening the relationship between civil society, government and state agencies has been crucial to facilitating the domestication and implementation of the UNSCR 1325.

Borno was the first of eight states to implement the national action plan and establish a civil society network. The Women, Peace and Security Network was the first national group to issue a public statement condemning the abduction of girls from a secondary school in Chibok. The statement was considered a catalyst for the ongoing national and international campaign for the release of the abducted girls.

By supporting the development of a strong policy framework for women's participation and by building trust and communication between civil society, government and state agencies, we believe that conflict is more likely to be managed non-violently, and that peace building efforts will be more sustained.

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**'We are facilitating the ability of women's civil society and their networks to intervene in conflict and engage in peace building.'**

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## EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH SPORT

Policy makers and practitioners increasingly value the positive impact that sport can make on gender equality. In partnership with the Premier League, the British Council's Premier Skills programme embraces this drive to empower women and girls through sport.

Premier Skills uses football to develop a brighter future for young people around the world. It concentrates on providing training for grassroots coaches and referees, giving them the skills and support to develop their own community football projects. The programme also works with local partners in selected countries to set up and support community projects that address specific needs and engage marginalised or at-risk youth through regular football sessions.

At its highest level, Premier Skills aims to have a minimum participation rate of 50 per cent girls and women in the countries in which it operates by 2016.

To support this aim, we have introduced modules into the core training programme for community coaches that explore the barriers for women and girls. This has resulted in a number of new gender-focused initiatives under the programme. For example, after developing a successful partnership with the Lagos State Football Association, women teachers in Nigeria were trained to run a football programme focusing on girls' rights and child protection in six centres in Lagos. To date, the pilot has reached 230 girls and the model is now being developed through establishing after-school clubs in an extended network of public schools in Lagos.

At the policy level, Premier Skills is working with government departments, governing bodies, such as national

football associations, and others to explore how gender issues can be addressed systemically. In March 2015, the British Council organised an international event in Cairo that focused on empowering women and girls through sport. Journalists, educationalists and representatives from ministries and football authorities from Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia worked alongside practitioners from Premier League clubs in England and local coaches who had been trained under Premier Skills. Together, they explored how football, and sport in general, could be used as a tool to inspire women and girls to positions of leadership, and to challenge barriers to equal opportunity.

The sustained focus on empowering women and girls within Premier Skills has led to the development of a new partnership with DFID in Kenya. A pilot programme, Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls through Football, launched in Kenya in March 2015. Initially focusing on the Mount Elgon region, the programme is working with young people to address some of the behaviours and attitudes that give rise to high levels of violence against women and girls. Local grassroots coaches receive training from qualified Premier League club coaches and then go on to deliver community football activities for young people, which accompany a contextualised curriculum on the prevention of gender-based violence. A selected

group of the local coaches will be trained to become coach educators, equipping them to deliver training to other Kenyan coaches, ensuring the programme's sustainability.

The programme aims to work directly with 96 community football coaches, 4,000 young people and 120 community stakeholders. It aims to engage 10,000 members of the target wider community through tournaments and awareness-raising events and hopes to reach a wider audience through the development of a targeted advocacy campaign supported by high profile champions from sport and beyond. In addition to the impact on the ground, the programme will generate an evidence base for how football can work with both boys and girls to challenge gender-based violence, creating a powerful tool for designing future gender-based sport programmes.

Sport makes a powerful contribution to building trust and opportunities and the values of sport, at their best, help build trust and engagement between people worldwide. By focusing on gender equality in Premier Skills, our aim is that practitioners and institutions are more capable and more willing to support the empowerment of women and girls through sport, ultimately strengthening the role of, and creating more opportunity for, women and girls in wider society.

**'The programme will generate an evidence base for how football can work with both boys and girls to challenge gender-based violence.'**

**OUR WORK IN SOCIETY HELPS PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS CONTRIBUTE TO MORE SECURE, INCLUSIVE AND PROSPEROUS SOCIETIES. WE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN AREAS SUCH AS SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AND INVESTMENT, WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE, AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND RULE OF LAW.**

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**Find out more:**

+44 (0)161 957 7755

[general.enquiries@britishcouncil.org](mailto:general.enquiries@britishcouncil.org)

[www.britishcouncil.org/society/womens-and-girls-empowerment](http://www.britishcouncil.org/society/womens-and-girls-empowerment)

**Contributors:**

Tamara Alkhas, Gill Cowell, Susanna Carmody, James Keegan, Hans Meusen, Christine Wilson, Marisa Zawacki