

Evaluation Report Golden Girls Power Programme

An Uweza Foundation Project

Evaluation Protocol

The purpose of this evaluation report is to determine the effectiveness of the Golden Girls Power Programme. This 'effectiveness' could be measured in various ways; evaluators often opt for tools that allow for quantitative outputs such as surveys measuring health status, or tracking financial growth. However, such measurements can be limiting, as they reduce participants of the programme to simple statistics.

Thus, for this evaluation, I use qualitative evaluation tools, basing the definition of 'effectiveness' on definitions given by the creators and participants of the programme. Furthermore, I aim to make stakeholder's observations the main part of this evaluation, as they are familiar with the environment this programme is set in. Stakeholders for this programme are: Atieno (teacher of the programme), Jennifer Sapitro (CEO of Uweza), parents of girls in the programme, and the girls themselves. Identities of the participants under 18 are kept anonymous for their privacy. In addition, I add literature in which research is done in a Kenyan setting. Thus, any statements and recommendations made come from consolidating stakeholder input with such literature. These methods are used in an attempt to inhibit my own (global North) biases.

This approach also aligns with the set up of the Uweza Foundation. The Uweza Foundation, started in 2008, aims to empower children and youth living in Kibera by providing a space for them to develop and use their talents (Uweza Foundation, 2022). With five different programmes designed and implemented by Kibera residents, Uweza works to make long-lasting investments in the lives of the youth they work with (2022). This NGO emphasizes a *community based approach*, in which feedback from participants and their community is highly valued and adjustments are made based on this input (2022).

Background Information Golden Girls Programme

The 'Golden Girls Power' (GGP) programme was started in 2013 by the Uweza Staff and Board, and was named by the participating girls a few years later. The programme was started in response to a large number of boys participating in other existing Uweza programmes at the time (Sapitro).

Prior to starting the programme, girls in Kibera were asked what hardships they struggle with, and the following list was given: "early pregnancy, peer pressure, lack of direction in life, poverty, lack of opportunities for education and/or having to drop out of school, rape" (Golden Girls Power, 2021). These coincide with a recent study done in Kibera, in which youth noted that violence, lack of education, insecurity and drug abuse are the major problems facing youth (Onyango and Tostenston, 2015). In addition, girls are at extra risk in Kibera, as they are significantly less likely than boys to have safe spaces or sources of support, and are at high risk of violence and rape (Erulkar and Matheka, 2007). This, combined with a lack of sex education for girls in Kibera, leads to high counts of early pregnancy. In fact, as of 2015, 50% of girls between 15 -25 get pregnant (Onyango and Tostenston, 2015).

When asked for solutions to these issues, the girls provided the following list: “Assistance with school fees -- making sure girls stay in school; Educate girls about their lives and their roles in society; Ensure girls have security and are protected; Guidance and counselling; Interaction with good role models; Constructive activities for girls-- help girls avoid idleness; Make sure parents play a role in educating and talking to their daughters” (Golden Girls Power, 2021). This list shows what is deemed important by the girls themselves in order to prevent or counteract the effects of the given risks.

Goals of the Programme

Given the list of risk factors and the list of potential solutions provided by the girls at the start of the programme, one of the programme’s main aims is *to provide a safe space and facilitate empowerment* for girls of primary and secondary school age (Golden Girls Power, 2021). Thus, the following goals are presented (Atieno, Sapitro):

1. To have a space for girls to spend their time, socialize, and have fun
2. To increase the number of girls in Kibera that receive accurate information and education on life skills topics that are relevant to their lives
3. To improve confidence, self-esteem, and self-image among girls in Kibera

Together, these goals grant the participating girls with protective factors that can help develop their resilience in the face of the risk factors their environment present. Thus, this evaluation will measure the effectiveness of the programme by how each of these goals are attained, which reflects how well the programme helps reduce the impact of the risk factors mentioned by the girls.

A Place to Spend Time and Have Fun

The GGP programme meets on Sunday afternoons from 2pm-4pm at the Uweza Office in Kibera. This day was chosen to ensure girls would be able to come, as weekdays are filled with school-related activities. The programme is open to girls of any age—the youngest participants are as young as one year old, and the oldest are eighteen years. Though the programme starts at 2pm, girls trickle in of their own volition during the entire 2-2.5 hours. Participation increases by word of mouth, what started with 10-15 girls has now increased to, on some Sundays, around 80 girls joining (Atieno). This is a huge benefit to the community, as it prevents girls from participating in risky activities out of boredom on the Sunday afternoon. A GGP mother states that she is “very glad that [her daughter] goes to Golden Girls on Sunday, because now [she] does not worry that [her daughter] will get into trouble” (Mother wishes to remain anonymous). Her daughter has been going to GGP for seven years.

In addition to being a place to stay out of trouble, participants of GGP report having fun during the sessions. The most obvious joy can be observed when GGP offers the girls dance workshops. After a dance workshop, a young girl (age 12) reports that it is her “lucky day” when she goes to GGP and there is dance. “I am so happy to be here” she says. As of April 2023, Jay Tarrique (dancer and choreographer) has joined the GGP as a volunteer dance teacher, and thus girls have the possibility to dance every week in addition to the other activities planned for those days. Two young girls (ages 7 and 9) exclaim their love of the games that are played during the sessions. Sometimes

the games are new, and they start playing them at school after learning them at GGP. Other activities offered are met with similar enthusiasm, these will be discussed in the sections below.



Figure 1: Jay Tarrique teaches dance and self confidence. (Image taken from Britte Kloppers).

Furthermore, every GGP session ends with juice and cookies for all participants. Girls report highly enjoying this snack moment, which is funded by Uweza and facilitated by the older girls of the programme. Great care is taken by these leaders to ensure every participating girl is given a snack, fostering a caring relationship between the girls. All guests present (interns, workshop leaders) participate in this moment too, providing a moment of connection with the participants that is separate from the activities done before.

Increased Accessibility of Education

The second goal of the GGP programme is to increase the number of girls in Kibera that receive accurate information and education on life skills topics that are relevant to their lives. In doing so, GGP also aims to reduce misinformation and myths among girls in Kibera (Sapitro). For instance, in Kibera, misinformation is given about menstruation, in which the topic is still a taboo (Chebii, 2018). Other misinformation is given in topics such as mental illness and sexual health practices, which also stem from taboos (Atieno).

The curriculum is created by Atieno, the GGP teacher. She has been coteaching since 2018, and is the sole teacher since 2020 (Atieno). Atieno, who is known to the girls as “teacher V” grew up in Kibera, and uses her experiential knowledge to connect with and educate the girls. Sessions are taught in Kiswahili to make them accessible to all. At the start of the year, a session is held in which

the girls discuss the activities they would like to do, and Atieno does the work of seeing what is possible. Thus a yearlong plan is made and followed in collaboration.

These topics and activities include: art therapy, beading, hair dressing, taekwondo, and education about important (life skills) topics such as peer pressure, leadership, female safety etc. (Golden Girls Power, 2021). Some topics Atieno teaches herself, and for others brings in workshop facilitators. For instance, Lawry Achieng, a registered psychologist and yoga instructor, is occasionally brought in to provide yoga and mental health classes. Furthermore, when girls come to Atieno with personal problems that require extra psychological care, Lawry is hired to provide this. In this way, the programme ensures girls are given access to a secure environment in which they can learn how to navigate the difficulties they face.

The girls give a variety of responses when asked what they have learned from GGP. Fatna, who has been part of GGP since she was 13, reports she has “through golden girls learnt [sic] a lot about girls early pregnancy and prevention, and girls health... the list is endless.” Some younger participants report learning most from the skills workshops, such as hair dressing. Once a year, GGP goes on an educational trip, a highlight of the programme according to several participants. Rafsa mentions that through GGP she gets to “visit places [she] had never visited.”

Additionally, being part of GGP has led to school scholarships for certain participants. They come into contact with Uweza through GGP, and are then able to join the Bright Futures programme offered by Uweza, which offers scholarships for high school and university aged students. Fatna recounts: “Through golden girls I was able to complete my highschool education, the organisation catered for my fees.” Thus, GGP focuses on education within the programme, but also increases accessibility to it for girls who need extra financial help.



Figure 2: Girls learn how to attach hair extensions. (Image taken from Britte Kloppers).

Menstrual Hygiene Day

A topic important to the programme is menstrual health. Every year in May world Menstrual Hygiene Day is celebrated, and this is a significant day in the GGP calendar too. It is important to the programme to “increase access to menstrual products and reduce the stigma around menstruation” (Uweza Foundation, 2023). On this day, participants wear red in support of menstrual awareness (see figure 3), and guests are invited to speak about women’s health rights. In addition to this annual celebration, menstrual products are distributed to girls who need them every Sunday, financed by Uweza.

Menstruation is a topic that is still considered taboo in Kenyan society (Chebii, 2018). Girls in Kibera report often feeling isolated or excluded from social spaces in and out of school (Chebii, 2018). Accessing sanitary products is also still a hardship. Thus GGP provides solutions to these reported issues by creating an environment that celebrates menstruation and hygiene, and provides the necessary education and products needed to reduce the stigma that exists in Kiberan society.



Figure 3: Girls wear red and are given red ribbons in support of Menstrual Hygiene Day (Uweza Foundation, 2023).

Improved Confidence and Self Esteem

The last goal of the programme is to improve confidence, self-esteem, and self image among girls in Kibera. A study done among youth in Kibera found that one third of the participating youth (male and female) felt worthless. About the same amount indicated feeling no hope for the future. Furthermore, girls were significantly more likely to report feeling less intelligent than their peers (Erulkar and Matheka, 2007). This study came out around the time that Uweza Foundation was

started (2008). Such findings influence how the GGP programme was set up, focusing not only on creating a safe space, but also encouraging empowerment in the girls that participate.

To encourage girls to speak up, Atieno often starts a session asking each girl to say how they are doing, either to the group or to another participant. For some girls speaking in front of others is very difficult; Atieno mentions seeing a change in this over the course of several years, where girls are becoming more comfortable speaking loudly in front of their peers. Empowerment classes are also given. In April 2023 the girls learned to chant: "I have power, I have strength, and I am confident" with Jay Tarrique in order to raise their voices and self image. Additionally, girls learn taekwondo, dance, and life skills in order to further raise their confidence, as they improve in the activities they do and gain physical strength.

Rafsa is a good example of how GGP builds confidence: "Being new to golden girls, I was a very shy girl but currently even if I say I'm shy, I have some level of confidence because I kind of know who I am and I'm always ready to stand up for me. All thanks to golden girls." Rafsa has since graduated high school and is working in a course on programming, and ready to enter university next year. She and the other just graduated girls are well aware of their own intelligence, and aim to continue learning.

Atieno employs the larger girls as mentors for the younger girls too. She does this by, on some Sundays, dividing the group, and teaching the older girls about certain topics. She then asks them to teach the younger girls about this topic, catering to what the younger girls can understand. This facilitates learning to teach, but also learning to understand (Atieno). The girls learn to lead, increasing their self esteem as they improve this skill (Atieno).

Final Evaluation

At the start of this evaluation paper I said that I would define the effectiveness of the programme given the definitions of it used by the stakeholders interviewed. The effectiveness of the programme, according to participants, is established by meeting the goals mentioned above, which together work to create a safe and empowering environment for the girls. In this GGP has been highly successful. "Golden girls is my safe space" says Rafsa, "we are together like a family" adds Fatna. To Atieno, the programme is a way to "relive her life" as "growing up in Kibera such spaces were rare."

Thus the programme receives glowing reviews. Here I want to address what factors have created this success – *why does GGP do so well?*

Firstly, since Atieno grew up in Kibera, she has a intimate relationship with the girls and their environment. This facilitates understanding between them, and *trust* in her from the girls. In fact, not one girl had anything but praise to give about Atieno as their teacher; "Teacher V, she's always with us in every situation."

Secondly, the girls are treated with respect and equality; the programme takes *a community approach*. This can be seen in Atieno's emphasis on letting them decide with her which topics are necessary to discuss. Since the start of the programme, the input of the girls has been of utmost importance. Stakeholder input in the making of a programme leads to a programme that fits their

needs – and thus they keep coming back. Girls of all ages have a say – “everybody is treated the same” (Fatna).

Thirdly, the programme caters to the immediate needs of the girls. Not only the need for a safe space, but also needs such as hygiene products, mentoring and/or therapy sessions, education, physical exercise, and a social network. This *holistic approach* influences various parts of the girls’ life.

Lastly, the programme has good *support* from Uweza Foundation, financially – “the office helps with supplies and any request I make to enable smooth facilitation of the sessions” (Atieno), but also by creating connections with other programmes that provide other services such as scholarships.

Recommendations

The goals set by the programme have all been met. However, in some areas within these goals some recommendations were given by different stakeholders. Firstly, the programme started by asking girls about current issues they face in Kibera, and solutions to these. One girl, who has been in the programme for 7 years, indicates that this could be done again, to update what risks the girls face in the current year. I believe this could be easily incorporated into the yearly calendar creation – asking girls not only what they would like to do, but also what issues they currently face in Kibera, and what they think could be solutions. These may well be the same as one decade ago, but there may also have been changes. This could influence what kind of topics are discussed in sessions.

Some girls indicate that though they are happy about everything they learn at GGP, they sometimes feel uneasy being grouped together with the younger kids (indicated by girls 14 and above). This makes them hesitant to discuss topics in detail, for fear of making the younger ones uncomfortable. “I suggest that they split into groups in relation to ages” says one participant. Since girls age 1-18 are grouped in a small space, there is also no easy way to do this. This might mean doing two sessions, or allowing for more of the office space to be used so that girls can split up if needed.

When interviewing parents about the GGP, many refused to be interviewed, or addressed only being happy the girls were safe on Sunday afternoons. According to the original solutions posed by the girls, making sure parents play a role in educating and talking to their parents was deemed highly important. Parents and/or caregivers are a vital part of the social network of these girls, and some girls indicate not feeling safe in their homes. Including parents in the programme where possible could increase the contact between the girls and their parents, especially in regard to discussing difficult topics. It would fit with the holistic approach taken by the programme. This too would be best discussed with the girls themselves – how would they like to include their parents in the GGP?

Lastly, I have now taken a large qualitative approach to evaluating the programme. This means, however, that I do not get input from every participant. In order to determine the wellbeing in GGP of every girl, I recommend an annual survey or questionnaire, or periodic focus groups. These could include questions about the goals given above, to see how well the programme matches its goals, and if these goals still serve the needs of the girls of the group. Since many girls are not at an age where they can read and write comfortably, I would recommend to also have some one on one

interviews, as I have done here, to gauge how well they are doing in certain areas, such as self esteem development.

Conclusion

To conclude, I will pose the answers given to the question: what else would you like to say about GGP? "I am very grateful for all the things that golden girls offers to us." "Golden Girls is the best place to be." It is "the best safe space for girls in Kibera." "I LOVE golden girls, I love to dance and play games." "I like the biscuits and juice very much." "I am glad my daughter goes to Golden Girls." These reflect the other positive answers given, and the overall positive evaluation drawn above.

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