



**Girls Level Up: Girl-led Grassroots Advocacy
for Gender Equality and Ending Gender-Based Violence**

Concept Note

**Paper Crown Rwanda
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Background & Context

Despite making significant progress in gender equality since the 1994 genocide, Rwandan adolescents girls still face tremendous challenges at all levels of society. Unwanted teen pregnancy, gender-based violence and discrimination remain persistent problems that severely hinder a girl's ability to realize her full potential, enjoy her rights and ensure a healthy, prosperous future for herself, her family and her community. In addition, girls' mindsets and perspectives, which are reinforced by social and cultural norms that discriminate against them, present further barriers in tackling these issues from all sides.

In recent years, Rwanda has been experiencing increasing rates of unwanted teenage pregnancy around the country. Recent context-specific studies on Rwandan teen mothers show that 87.7% of girls under the age of 18 reported their first experience of intercourse as being a result of sexual coercion.¹ This is a violation of a girl's human rights as well as her sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). Compounding this problem is the fact that 87% of girls report having no knowledge of sexual and reproductive health or rights (SRHR), while 78% of girls report having no knowledge of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In addition, girls' knowledge of human rights and child rights is alarmingly low, at only 23% and 31%, respectively. A 2016 assessment of ten districts in Rwanda with high rates of teen pregnancy revealed that 97% of adolescent girls and teen mothers require education on child rights, SRHR and SGBV.

Paper Crown Rwanda works with youth to transform gender norms, foster leadership and create lasting social change. We understand that gender inequality is created and reinforced by social beliefs about the value and role of girls and boys, men and women, in any given community. These beliefs are passed down through generations, and are some of the fundamental driving forces behind many of the world's most pressing development issues, including persistent poverty, slow economic growth, widespread violence and violations of human and child rights. Despite decades of investment in addressing these problems, the deeply-held beliefs that contribute to them are rarely targeted. In response to this gap, Paper Crown engages adolescent girls in critical conversations around gender norms, gender equality, violence, leadership, sexual and reproductive health, consent, healthy relationships and community development.

Our approach strengthens personal self-confidence, critical thinking and leadership skills, while openly naming the problem of gender inequality and co-designing grassroots solutions directly with girls to tackle the most pressing issues in their lives. Our aim is to break the intergenerational cycle of gender discrimination and violence - because equality that is built to last starts from the ground up.

Formerly known as Paper Crown Institute and registered as a non-profit organization in Canada, Paper Crown Rwanda has now fully transitioned to become a locally registered Rwandan NGO. As part of our mission and vision for the future of Rwanda, *Girls Level Up* takes a girl-led approach that tackles gender discrimination and violence against adolescent girls, while empowering them in terms of knowledge and understanding of SRHR, SGBV and child rights.

¹ Report on early/unwanted teen pregnancy for under 18 years in 10 districts of Rwanda. CLADHO, 2016.

Girls Level Up (GLU)

Project Model & Justification

GLU is a comprehensive participatory educational model focusing on addressing key persistent issues for Rwandan girls. Through this project, girls will gain deeper understanding on various issues they face due to gender discrimination and join efforts to break the intergenerational cycle of gender discrimination and violence. Recent studies from Rwanda demonstrates that the root causes of sexual coercion and violence are the gender norms that position women and girls as subordinate to men and boys. This discriminatory mindset is prevalent across Rwanda, and needs to be critically addressed and fundamentally transformed, to sustainably eliminate SGBV, and to reduce teen pregnancy caused by sexual coercion. Transforming harmful gender norms together with increasing SRHR knowledge offer a sustainable solution to tackle the increase of unwanted teen pregnancy in Rwanda. In the Rwandan context, teen pregnancy leads to school drop-out, the perpetuation of poverty at the family and community level, early/forced marriage, social rejection from families, school and peers, and intense community stigmatization. Further, teen mothers face tremendous health risks in terms of maternal mortality and complications from early pregnancy and/or childbirth that can be fatal or debilitating, for both mother and child. The lack of support that teen mothers face, both social and economic, leaves them uniquely vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence, including increased exposure to HIV.

Rwanda's abortion laws remain restrictive and present another barrier for unwanted teen pregnancy. Some progress has been made recently due to a new Ministerial Order that allows for abortion in cases of rape, incest, forced marriage, child defilement or a threat to the life of the mother or the baby.² The most significant change here is that girls who have been raped or defiled (technical term for rape of a child under 18) no longer require a court order to access an abortion; they can simply inform the health centre of their situation and be granted an abortion at a designated facility with a qualified medical practitioner. (However, if it is later discovered that the girl has falsified her report, she can be criminally prosecuted.)

It is important to note that while Rwanda has laws and policies that are meant to protect girls' rights, widespread discriminatory gender norms and beliefs still define and influence the actual limitations, vulnerabilities and freedoms girls experience in real life. Paper Crown seeks to address the more immediate situation on the ground that is putting girls at risk on a daily basis gendered power dynamics that subordinate girls to men and boys, and a severe lack of SRHR knowledge and awareness.

Long-term Gender Norms Transformation and SRHR knowledge

Sexual coercion and sexual violence are key drivers of unwanted teen pregnancy; they are also violations of child and human rights, and SRHR. Looking deeper, the drivers of sexual coercion and sexual violence are rooted in gender norms and attitudes that position women and girls as subordinate to men and boys. These norms have to be critically addressed and fundamentally transformed in the mindsets of both adolescent boys and girls, in order to bring about the sustainable elimination of SGBV and to reduce teen

² Rwanda – Details of the Ministerial Order Regulating Abortion. April 8, 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.safeabortionwomensright.org/rwanda-details-of-the-ministerial-order-regulating-abortion/>

pregnancy caused by sexual coercion. However, these efforts must also invest in SRHR education and knowledge of child rights, to equip adolescent girls with the information and understanding they need to make safe and informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, and further contribute to reductions in teen pregnancy that may be a result of this lack of critical SRHR awareness and information.

GLU seeks to engage girls holistically and comprehensively with five key topics of critical importance, topics that are currently not addressed by existing structures in the process of a young woman's personal and professional development.

GLU targets adolescent girls across these critical areas of gender norms, leadership, SRHR, SGBV and child rights, in order to holistically and sustainably tackle the problem of gender-based violence in Rwanda. The project emphasizes girls-led community improvement projects to foster a "ripple effect" of awareness and sensitization around these key issues outward into the surrounding community, including parents, local leaders, community influencers and other youth.

Target Population

GLU targets in-school adolescent girls in Rwanda, aged 14-18 years old. Once core training is complete, these girls are empowered and enabled to further educate and sensitize their peers and adults, through community outreach and activism.

Learning Objectives

GLU aims for all youth participants to achieve the following learning outcomes:

- ✓ Girls are able to more deeply understand and articulate the various barriers they face as a result of gender discrimination, and grow to be able to proactively challenge and address these issues in their own lives, including identifying discrimination and reporting gender-based violence.
- ✓ Girls develop the ability to think critically, ask questions and not be afraid to put forth new or different ideas for fear of not having the "right answer" in advance.
- ✓ Girls develop and nurture their own sense of self-esteem, leadership and personal agency.
- ✓ Girls build friendships with their peers and foster critical social support networks, both among project participants and within their own communities, which research shows is vitally important for them to succeed in life.

Activities and Timeline

GLU is a project consisting of three core phases that build upon each other sequentially: girls capacity building, girls-led community improvement project and advocacy club development.

Phase 1: In-depth capacity building

Phase One consists of seven weeks of in-depth capacity building in the areas of:

- Gender norms and power dynamics, 1 module

- Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, 1 module
- Leadership, 1 module
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, 2 modules
- Community development, 2 modules

Each module is a half day (4 hours), conducted once per week, with girls aged 14-18 years old. Training sessions will be conducted on a Saturday, so as not to interfere with school attendance; sessions will be held in classrooms at the partner school, and participants are provided with bottled water and snacks.

Modules are designed to engage participants in critical thinking and reflection exercises through interactive conversations, activities and games, using a "safe space" approach. A "safe space" simply means that the emotional and physical environment is safe and comfortable for them to engage; in other words, all participants must feel respected and accepted for who they are, everyone must understand that all ideas and opinions have value, and no one should be judged or alienated for their contributions or experiences. In this environment, adolescents are more easily able to open up about and reflect upon their daily lives in terms of gender roles, power dynamics, interpersonal relationships between boys and girls, sexual and gender-based violence, human and child rights and community project development for social change. In most cases, this is the first time these young people have ever been prompted or encouraged to speak openly and honestly about these social issues that have a tremendous impact on their everyday lives. Through this process, their critical thinking abilities develop and further contribute to the growth of their personal confidence, which sets them up well to become strong advocates for equality and influential role models for others.

Phase 2: Community improvements projects

Once core training is completed, girls will work in small teams for the next six weeks to design and implement small scale community improvements projects that draw on key subjects covered during the core training and support vulnerable communities. The aim of these students' projects is to allow girls to practice what they have learned in the real world, build their confidence and agency, and positively transform how girls see themselves and their abilities, as well as how they are perceived in their communities. Student teams will be actively mentored by young Rwandan women mentors as they work towards achieving their community project goals under the supervision of the Paper Crown team.

Phase 3: Youth advocacy club development

Upon completing community projects, student teams will be merged together into a gender equality and SRHR advocacy club over a two-week timeline. Girls will democratically co-design, together with the support of the Paper Crown team and young Rwandan women mentors, their advocacy youth club, including the club name, identity, structure, objectives/goals, roles and responsibilities for members, and an initial 3-month action plan. The intention of this intensive capacity building phase is for the girls to be able to stand on their own as confident and informed advocates, without remaining perpetually dependent on an external organization or person, and empowered with the skills and knowledge they need to successfully influence their families and communities on key issues like gender equality, SGBV and SRHR.

Monitoring, Learning & Evaluation

MLE will be ongoing throughout the project. Baseline and endline KAP assessments (knowledge, attitudes and practices) looking at key topical learning objectives will be conducted throughout. Additional individual evaluations will be collected after each core training session in Phase 1, to assess comprehension and learning, and identify any challenges, key successes or tricky topics that may require further explanation and sensitization. Qualitative focus group discussions with girls, to draw out richer and more nuanced feedback and insights from youth themselves, will be conducted alongside the baseline and endline KAP assessments. Project activities or approaches will be adapted as needed, based on continual learning from ongoing youth feedback and team observations during implementation.

Paper Crown Project Management & Coordination

Clementine Nyirarukundo, Project Manager & Lead Facilitator

Clementine Nyirarukundo will be the Project Manager and Lead Gender Trainer, the local language of Rwanda. Clementine will facilitate all of the training sessions in Phase 1, and manage the process of club development as well as coordinating Paper Crown support for community activities with the club. She is responsible for relationships with school leadership and local partners, as well as the overall project management. As an experienced qualitative and quantitative field researcher, she will organize and contribute to MLE activities throughout the project. Clementine is a vocal advocate for gender equality at the grassroots level, and strongly believes in investing in girls and women to break the cycle of violence and create a better future for themselves, their families, their communities and the world.

Martine Uzamukunda, Project Coordinator

Martine Uzamukunda will be the project coordinator. She will support the Project Manager in planning and coordinating logistics for project field implementation, as well as managing project participants and the host school in the field to ensure smooth implementation of the project activities, and positive partner collaboration. Martine is a passionate activist for gender equality and the meaningful empowerment of women and girls.

Katie Carlson-Akuno, Founder & Technical Advisor

Katie Carlson-Akuno is the Founder of Paper Crown Rwanda and our core technical advisor for project design and overall strategy. She is an international gender specialist and a vocal advocate for the rights of women and girls around the world. Katie has been participating in gender study and feminist activism across many different contexts for over 20 years, and has been working on gender issues in Rwanda for nearly a decade. As an advisor on the Board of Paper Crown, Katie supports the organization with thought leadership and technical guidance for the design and development of projects and interventions engaging Rwanda's young people in gender norms change. As a technical specialist, Katie works with a variety of organizations in both the public and private sector, specializing in gender transformative analysis and mainstreaming for program, strategy and policy design and development, as well as participatory gender capacity building and coaching for adults and adolescents. She is distinctly passionate about gender transformative approaches that bring about lasting, positive social change and are inclusive of men and boys as key players in shifting gender norms. Over the years, Katie has presented

her work at various international conferences and has been academically published for her research regarding the importance of engaging men and boys in dialogue about gender-based violence, as well as contributing to additional published work on the value of women's safe spaces for IPV prevention in Rwanda. Her areas of expertise include gender transformative approaches to equality, gender and youth, gender norms, gender-based violence, gender and agriculture, gender mainstreaming, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, education and engaging men and boys.

Young Rwandan Women Mentors

PCR will work with four young Rwandan women mentors who will support the student teams during community project implementation. These young women mentors have gone through an orientation and foundational training process and have provided hands-on training support. They have experience with training support for all modules and mentoring, and will be overseen by the project manager.

Additional Local Partners and Support

To maximize our impact, GLU will work with female SRHR trainers from Save Generations who have extensive experience in providing SRHR trainings and working with adolescent girls all over Rwanda.

Building Our Team

As a small organization that is growing quickly, there is an urgent need to expand our training team in order to be able to scale up our work across the country. As part of this project, two additional women gender trainers will be recruited and mentored to become high-level, skilled gender facilitators that can facilitate trainings and lead additional PCR projects independently. This is critical for our organizational growth and the expansion of our programs to amplify our transformative impact across numerous communities. Additionally, these Rwandan women gender trainers will serve as role models in their communities, building their economic independence through employment with PCR and contributing to changing harmful gender norms within their own families and communities.

Save Generations Organization

Save Generations Organization (SGO) is a Rwandan NGO dedicated to protecting the rights of children, youth and women, with the aim to prepare, empower and equip future generations. SGO aspires to build a community that is able to raise up generations full of hope, with positive values, dreams, abilities and actions. Their mission is to provide opportunities to children and youth integral to their development and for a healthy life, in order to help them reach their full potential. In particular, SGO works with communities to educate youth on SRHR, as well as with teen mothers to build their economic skills and knowledge to be able to financially provide for themselves and their children.

See Us in Action: Why Paper Crown is So Well-suited for This Work

Paper Crown has extensive experience working with Rwandan adolescent girls, particularly in terms of opening up conversations around often sensitive and taboo topics, such as sexual and gender-based violence and gendered power dynamics on a personal and family level. We also engage boys in these

same conversations, to holistically address the gendered drivers of many of these social problems. To learn more about our work, please visit www.paper-crown.org.

The community level impact we have made in Rwanda is best witnessed in our series of inspiring short videos documenting our project work, which can be viewed at the links below.

The Uwicyeza Project (2015)

https://youtu.be/asOIOXq0_s8

The Queen's Gambit (3 project cycles in 2017)

Cycle #1 – https://youtu.be/Kr20xj1nw_Y

Cycle #2 – <https://youtu.be/v-ZLmA8VP2o>

Cycle #3 - https://youtu.be/o_K5wVc2ufo