

Comic Relief Leveling the Field Phase 2 - Midline Evaluation Report

Background

The Comic Relief Leveling the Field Phase (CRLF) 2 project is being implemented in three (3) districts of Zambia; Mongu, Nakonde and Chipata . The project uses a unique partnership among three implementing partners; Grassroot Soccer Zambia, Adolescent Reproductive Health Advocate (ARHA) and Muchinga Corridors (MC). The project's overall aim is to enable 10,125 Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) aged 15-24 years to realize their right to safety, equality and respect. Programming focuses on the use of an integrated sport and human rights-based approaches to address challenges AGYW face which are characterized by poor Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) outcomes.

Within the framework of project activities, AGYW undergo a two-week SKILLZ Girl intervention that builds their knowledge of SRHR and available services and also confidence to report instances of Gender Based Violence. AGYW then are supported to transition into Teen Clubs which provides a platform for continuous peer support and discussions around uptake of SRH. GRS Zambia and its partners also coordinate advocacy efforts around AGYW's empowerment and GBV prevention at multiple levels in partnership with AGYW and their communities. Some of the advocacy efforts include radio programs, stakeholder dialogue meetings and community sensitization meetings with parents or guardians of AGYW.

Muchinga Corridors is a youth-led organization that ensures meaningful youth participation in addressing structural and gender norms that impede AGYWs' rights access in Nakonde district of Muchinga province. Adolescent Reproductive Health Advocates (ARHA) works in Mongu of Western province, to enhance uptake of comprehensive SRHR knowledge and services for both in and out of school youths. Nakonde and Mongu districts have the highest proportion of the population that are poor with about 80 percent[1] , and AGYW face limited social and economic opportunities. For instance, in both districts, as many as 37% of girls aged 15–19 are at risk of teenage pregnancies. Child marriages are predominantly common due to customary practices since both districts are in rural areas. AGYW also face risk of physical or sexual violence due to limited youth friendly and SRH services and information (DHS,2018).

Since the inception of the project, AGYW and their communities have been mobilized to drive actions in favor of their empowerment with 7,413 AGYW and their households. In view of this, in September 2023, GRS Zambia and partners conducted an internal midline evaluation which aimed to gather clear feedback from beneficiaries on their experiences under the CRLTF project and also to inform AGYW programming across the 3 sites of operations. This midline evaluation covers implementation from 1st July 2021 to 30th June 2023.

The overall project evaluation has three objectives, where this midline has gathered feedback to begin addressing the first and third objectives (bolded):

- Explore AGYW perceptions and experiences in their role of designing, leading, and monitoring HRB advocacy efforts, aiming to influence the enabling environment and government policy for GBV prevention and response;
- Identify how AGYW and ABYM discuss, share information, and reconstruct attitudes and beliefs about traditional socio-cultural and gender norms, power, and healthy relationships and what motivates or prevents them from doing this;

- Evaluate the scalability and sustainability of the integration of sport-based GBV prevention and advocacy as well the partnership between GRS, MC and ARHA.

Methods

The midline evaluation employed a mixed methods approach with both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data collection was only conducted in Mongu and Nakonde, and included interviews with key informants that included two (2) parents and three (3) staff from implementing partners. Parents of the adolescents were identified based on their engagement in the program. Interviews were conducted with the partner staff to better understand the scalability and partnership. Focus group discussions were also conducted with adolescent girl participants as well as implementing Coaches.

In Mongu, the adolescent girls were identified from school interventions, while in Nakonde, the adolescent girls were identified from the community intervention to get experiences from both settings. Qualitative methods are show in table 1 below:

Table 1: Qualitative Methods

Data Collection Type	Mongu District	Nakonde District
Adolescent FGD	1	1
Coach FGD	1	1
Parent Interview	1	1
Partner Staff Interview	1	2

To supplement the primary qualitative data that was collected, qualitative feedback from Coaches was retrieved from routine monitoring records, which largely echoed what was discussed in Coach FGDs.

Quantitative data involved a review of routine monitoring data from the GRS Salesforce database, which enabled triangulation with qualitative methods. Some of the quantitative data reviewed included records on attendance, risk assessments, referral and pre/post.

Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involved transcription of recorded interviews and focus group discussions, then notes and key quotes from each data source were captured and categorized using a framework matrix, which also helped to organize key themes. For quantitative data, statistical analysis was conducted using Excel after extracting the raw data from Salesforce.

Results

Acceptability & Participant Views on SKILLZ Girl

The activities that participants most remembered from SKILLZ Girl were discussions on human rights as they helped some of the girls to recognise their rights to say no to early marriages, a commonly practiced culture in Nakonde. One of the girls shared her family practice of girls getting married at age 17, hence the discussions made her recognize her right not to get married but continue with her education. Another take away from the intervention was how girls matter as much as boys do and how they can make better choices without being influenced by their peers to do things they didn't want. For some of the girls, the highlight from the intervention was playing soccer, dancing and singing, including energizers.

We learnt about puberty and how to make choices. We were also told we can make our own choices like going to school, to say NO to sex if you don't want. For instance, I have made a decision to finish school, I go to the university and after that I start working when I become a nurse. I can't allow my family to choose for me to get married because their choices are not my choices. I was taught by my coach all these things. [Adolescent girl, Mongu]

With regards to other topics in the curriculum, the girls remembered being taught against teenage pregnancy, healthy and unhealthy relationships, gender and GBV, which they also recorded as their favorite topics to learn. All participants reported that the content was easy to understand, that they had no difficulty. The SKILLZ Girl intervention provided an opportunity for both coaches and adolescents to not only make new friends but also interact with other girls and discuss issues affecting them, such as healthy relationships, HIV and SRH, in a safe space. The adolescents also liked how the sessions were being delivered by the Coaches as they were able to fully understand what they were being taught. For some of the adolescents, they appreciated that the Coach was willing to wait for them if they were running late.

Implementation of SKILLZ Girl interventions

Coaches highlighted that as part of their roles, they actively participated in the identification of schools and spaces to support the implementation of SKILLZ Girl sessions. Coaches partnered with school guidance teachers, and traditional leaders in the mobilization of AGYW to attend SKILLZ Girl sessions. Similarly, Coaches also reported on their experiences as being facilitators of SRH information and services to AGYW. Coaches used SKILLZ Girl interventions to create [an advocacy platform under which AGYW learnt about their rights and also acquired knowledge on SRH and GBV prevention](#):

"The guidance teacher helped us to mobilize the girls..... The girls were happy about the program and expressed that they learnt something new in all the sessions and their attendance was very good". [Coach, Chipata]

"I will start from saying, umm, telling you people my experience being a coach was awesome, amazing.I met different people in the community and this was one of the opportunities that I had to meet some of the headmasters in schools and the village headman". [Coach, Nakonde]

Participant Reach

According to Table 2 below, project monitoring data demonstrates the extent of AGYW involvement in HRB advocacy via SKILLZ Girl interventions from July 2021 to June 2023: 7,314 AGYW took part

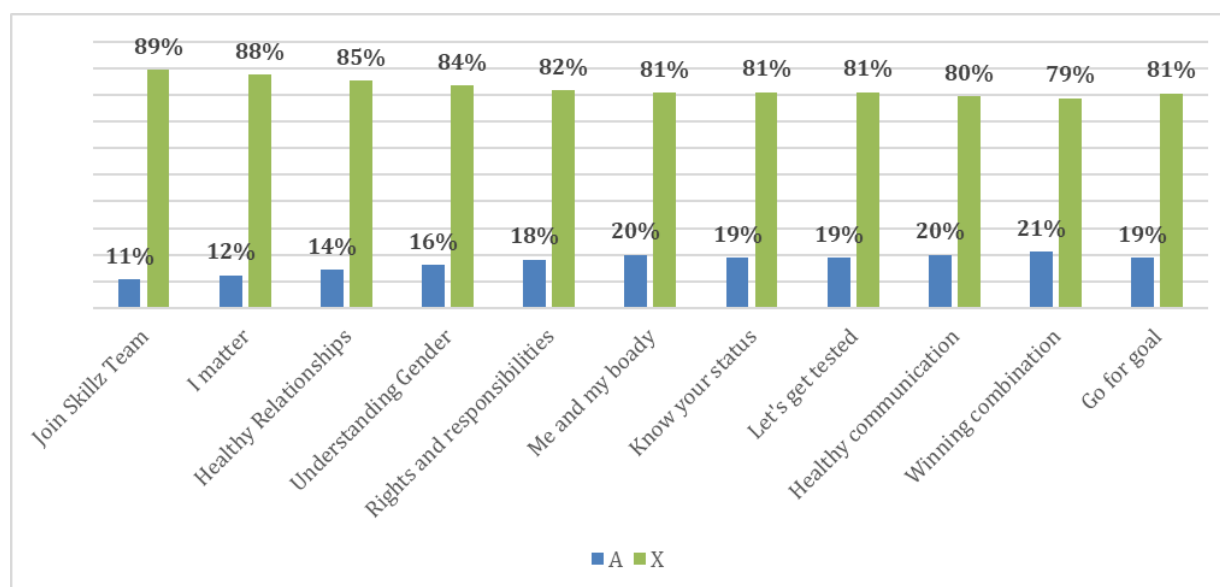
in SKILLZ Girl interventions, of which 6,047 graduated, representing a graduation rate of 83%. Chipata had the highest reach of AGYW with 3,887 participants and Mongu had the lowest with 1,555 participants. Teen Clubs activities were also implemented across all sites with 788 participants reached, of which 684 graduated (86.8%).

Table 2: Participants and Graduates in SKILLZ Girl

Site	SKILLZ Girl curriculum	
	Participants	Graduates
Chipata	3,887	3,094
Mongu	1,555	1,378
Nakonde	1,872	1,575
Total	7,314	6,047

In Figure 1, a distribution of attendance to SKILLZ Girl sessions shows that AGYW had a consistent attendance across all sessions with the highest observed at 89% for sessions on joining the SKILLZ team and lowest at 79% for winning combination.

Figure 1: Distribution of SKILLZ Girl sessions attended by participants



Views on other project activities: community events, radio, HRB training and advocacy

Adolescents mentioned not having participated in community health events or advocacy activities beyond SKILLZ Girl sessions, some of the Coaches and staff have engaged in GBV advocacy which was often done through radio programs and community outreach. From the outreach activities, the participants reported an increase in knowledge on GBV as well as access to services, such as HIV testing, during the community health events. In one of the community events, over 500 people tested for HIV.

"So maybe the changes that we've seen is that they've been increasing information and access to GBV services because during the Community health events we have service providers that are present and whoever wants to access your services, who are able to get them from the, from the personnels or from the health personnel that we are directly available during the program then". [Partner Staff, Nakonde]

"I started a radio program where we talked about the types of GBV, like physical, sexual, neglect and emotional and verbal. We introduced the project and talked about the types of GBV and some of the solutions on overcoming GBV like involving the parents. Now I see that people have information on GBV and are about to stand up for their rights. We had one participant and staff from ARHA when we were doing the radio program". [Coach, Mongu]

Impact on participants

The SKILLZ Girl program appears to have had positive effects on adolescent girls in the district, where most of the girls reported having increased knowledge on GBV, HIV and their rights as observed from the 19% change from the pre-post results. The most reported change was improved self-concept, which can also be seen in the 18% change that was established from the pre-post test. During the discussion, adolescent girls shared how they were not confident before attending the sessions, which wasn't the case any more. Adolescents were now able to open up and speak out on certain issues that mattered to them such as their right to finish school and abuse.

In gathering thoughts from the Coaches, parents and partner staff, the participants attest to the change that they had observed from the adolescent girls. The parents shared how their children were now able to make better choices unlike before which led to them appreciating the program and encouraging their children to continue attending the program.

"The girls used to show up every after school session. I had fun with girls and the tool was just okay for me. Now the girls are able to make their choices of life, they know their rights and how to make right choices and how to support a positive living..... Parents said it was really nice teaching their children about HIV so that they can know how to keep themselves free from HIV". [Coach, Mongu]

"The girls were very happy to learn about "ME AND MY BODY" because their parents don't get to talk about it, hence they were interested to learn more. They wanted to know their HIV status, some have never tasted because. The girls were very active and requested for more days but unfortunately the school administration could not allow it". [Coach, Mongu]

"The parents were happy to hear about the program that their children are participating in at school. They also encouraged us to include other children below the age of 15. When delivering

the pre-challenge participants did not have enough knowledge on sexual reproductive health and rights but I noted when they wrote post-challenge that they had gained knowledge. The change was observed because they learnt and some of their favorites topics include, 2,6 and 11, and the participants were free to ask question. Most of the parents I visited loved the program and were happy, they said we should continue to help children to focus on their education in order to reach their goals in life". [Coach, Chipata]

Table 3: Pre/post results for AGYW

2022 Prepost results	Pre	Post	% Change
Adolescents showing improved self-concept	78%	92%	18%
Attitudes and beliefs regarding gender norms	63%	79%	25%
Change in participants who feel supported in their life	87%	95%	9%
Change in participants with increased comprehensive knowledge of HIV and other SRHR Services	80%	95%	19%
Decision regarding contraceptives, sexual relationships, reproductive healthcare	76%	88%	16%

Participants additionally reported sharing what they learned in SKILLZ Girl with others outside their intervention groups. They reported sharing with friends and sisters, and highlighted key topics that they shared, including how to avoid pregnancy, understanding your rights (to make decisions, avoid early marriage, and go to school), and how to choose good friends.

Impact on Coaches

Coaches in both Mongu and Nakonde reported that being a SKILLZ Girl Coach had a positive impact on their lives. In both areas, Coaches reported improved self-confidence as one of the main benefits they experienced:

"I have seen a lot of change in myself. Before the training I was somebody who never used to talk. I would ignore some of the things happening in my community but now am able to voice out and share the benefits of the programme". [Coach, Mongu]

"I never had the confidence of standing before a lot of people, especially youths, but after being a Coach I have improved"... [Coach, Mongu]

Specifically, they reported that where they previously may have been shy or quiet, they now feel comfortable talking to a group and to older adults. Some Coaches also highlighted that being a mentor and role model for participants led them to reflect on their own behavior, and consider making changes.

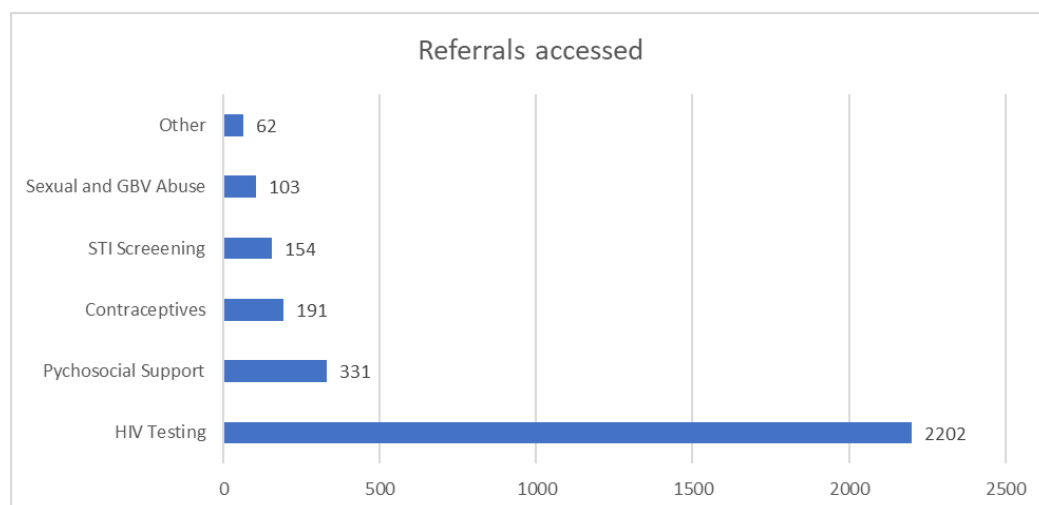
Forming positive relationships with participants was another benefit that Coaches experienced, as several Coaches highlighted. They spoke of participants seeking them out to learn about when the program is happening again, and of participants and parents visiting them at home to seek guidance:

*“I formed relationships with the girls in the SKILLZ sessions. I am now their friend and they are able to call me any time. Some call to ask me how I am doing and when I am coming back to teach them about our sessions... I still meet them when I go back to their school at [site]”.
[Coach, Mongu]*

Coaches in both sites noted that they acquired new skills as a result of implementing SKILLZ Girl, including public speaking, making friends, and even learning more about football. One Coach also reported that she had an increased motivation to continue working with youth as a result of her role in SKILLZ .

Service access

Figure 2: Distribution of referrals by type among AGYW



In Figure 2 above, distribution of referrals by type showed that the majority of AGYW were referred for HIV testing services accounting for 2,202 participants. Other services that participants were referred for included sexual and GBV abuse, STI screening, contraceptives, and psychosocial support.

In terms of service access, the adolescents indicated that the Coaches were willing to escort them to access health services at the clinic, of which they were able to access the services. The most commonly accessed services were HIV testing and SRH commodities such as contraceptives. In an interesting finding, one of the adolescents shared how adolescents are sometimes sent away by caregivers and recommended that partner staff engage caregivers so that they are not sent away. In other instances, some girls are still too shy to access services from the health facility, in case they find older people at the facility while others indicate the need to get consent from their parents to access contraceptives.

“My coach told me that we can go for services after our sessions and she told us that if we want contraceptives we can always call her and she will support us to go get at the clinic. But there was one time when my friend went to the clinic and she told me she was shouted at by the nurse. Most of us want to get contraceptives to avoid getting pregnant but we are always stopped because we need to ask our parents.” [Adolescent girl, Mongu]

In Table 3. A further review of risk assessment data from 3,860 participants who were assessed showed that common SRH vulnerabilities among AGYW such as teen pregnancies and HIV infection with about 20% of those who indicated being sexually active indicated having unprotected sex. Additionally, only 37% reported knowing their HIV status and 18% of AGYW mentioned having sex with a partner whose HIV status is not known. AGYW also shared having experienced some form of GBV which was mainly emotional GBV despite having some referred for sexual and GBV abuse.

Table 3: Distribution of risks by type among AGYW

Risk area	Chipata	Mongu	Nakonde	Average
Sexually active	36%	39%	23%	33%
Unprotected sex	23%	25%	13%	20%
Sex for cash	5%	12%	4%	7%
Know HIV status	36%	57%	31%	37%
Sex with partner-HIV status unknown	19%	17%	12%	18%
Most abuse experienced	16%	16%	20%	18%

Total screened 3860 (Chipata 3082, Mongu 330, Nakonde 448)

Implementation Successes

Partner staff reported multiple successes and challenges of the project implementation. Muchinga corridors staff praised the design of the SKILLZ Girl curriculum, where the near-peer delivery model was seen as very useful, and the fun activities were appealing to participants. Continued stakeholder engagement was also highlighted as a success, where keeping community stakeholders like village headmen, section chairmen, and school principals and teachers involved was critical to amplify project aims and promote sustainability.

ARHA staff also alluded to the integration of HRBA within the SKILLZ Girl programming, as a success in empowering rural girls to be able to demand for their rights. The girl lead approaches that utilized peer mentorship enhanced the role of coaches in enabling AGYW to realize their rights and stand up.

Implementation Challenges

Muchinga Corridors staff cited incomplete referrals as a main challenge of the project implementation, where the services requested by adolescents were not available at times convenient for them, or where parents were reluctant to have their child go with a Coach to receive services. Coaches leaving to pursue other opportunities was also noted as a challenge, as were far distances to travel for home visits and reported high costs of printing paper M&E tools. While not exactly an implementation challenge, multiple staff and Coaches cited the lack of activities for boys as a challenge to the project, where boys were being left out.

Coaches additionally reported that time was a challenge for them to complete intervention sessions, especially conducting registration and the pre-challenge in the first practice. Additionally, one challenge reported by staff and Coaches was the expectation of money or other benefits by participants and community stakeholders. Coaches reported that there was a very high turnout when they began implementation, because participants and their families thought they might receive money or food. Staff also reported that some parents, school, and community leadership expected some project funds to go to them, rather than be managed by the implementing partners.

Adolescents recounted starting the practices late sometimes, which resulted in them reaching home late or spending longer hours at the meeting site while hungry. In speaking with the Coaches, the Coaches highlighted the sessions would conflict with the classes at times because the classes would be extended by the teacher. In Mongu, the adolescents expressed concern with attending sessions while tired from class as they would transition immediately to the intervention sessions, this also made it difficult sometimes to enjoy the practices.

Finally, a unique challenge reported by one Muchinga Corridor staff member was that some older participants did not want to participate in SKILLZ Girl activities that they viewed as being for children. This was reported as a challenge in more rural areas, where participants were not comfortable playing games.

GBV risk and reporting

Views on Reporting GBV

Risk assessment data showed an existence of GBV risk among adolescents with dominance of emotional GBV, followed by physical abuse and also sexual abuse. Interestingly, it was noted that despite the form of GBV, the majority of the adolescents felt confident to advise a friend whose experienced GBV on where to get support from. The adolescents were able to identify people or places in their communities where the GBV victims could get support from, some of them being GBV Clinic, Victim support, Chief and other gatekeepers in the community such as section chairmen, village headman and elderly people in the community. However, a few adolescents indicated not being aware of where GBV cases can be reported.

"I know where to report the victim support, where they will take the person who has raped her. In the community I can report to the chief Libunbu others say, I have just heard a girl who has reported that she was a victim of rape." [Adolescent girl, Mongu]

Particularly in Nakonde, GBV cases are more prominent, with most of the perpetrators being family members or breadwinners. This often results in GBV victims failing to report these cases. Other

reported reasons include girls being shy to report, fear of being shouted at or blamed in cases of rape. For some of the girls who experience sexual assault, they are often threatened by the perpetrators hence not reporting the cases.

"Others have fear to say if they go to report their parents, maybe if I report them, they will stop supporting me. Others it's just shy to talk if they are not used to talking too much". [Adolescent girl, Nakonde]

The most common form of GBV that adolescents related to was sexual violence in terms of reporting, which still leaves room to question their ability to report other forms of violence that would still require them to report such as physical abuse. Nevertheless, the willingness of the adolescents to advise GBV victims on where to get support from, as well as being able to identify different structures where the victims can get support from, speaks to the effectiveness of the program.

Sustainability and scalability of partnership & project

According to Muchinga Corridors staff, SKILLZ Girl and the other project activities are well-aligned with the goals of the organization. For example, Muchinga Corridors is youth-led, so a project focused on addressing the SRHR needs of AGYW fits well in the organizational plan. Muchinga Corridors staff also noted that the engagement of multiple levels of stakeholders built into the project has been beneficial to the organization, and helped them increase their visibility and reach in different communities.

Muchinga Corridors staff highlighted several recommendations that could promote sustainability of the project, for example: in Teen Club implementation, they suggested integrating income-generating activities such as gardening or chicken rearing in order to motivate participants to continue attending. They also recommended that GRS conduct a training of trainers for Muchinga Corridors, so that more Coaches can be trained without the need for travel by GRS staff.

Similarly ARHA staff also reported that the integrated model layered in on SKILLZ Girl programming is an approach that fits well within the organization's objectives and there is willingness to extend the concept beyond the current project. Additionally, ARHA staff also alluded to how the SKILLZ Girl programme is an avenue under which the organization is able to tackle some of the vulnerabilities AGYW face.

Every time we look at this partnership we look at how SKILLZ girl does fit in our thematic areas around advocacy for rights of girls, teenage pregnancies and child marriages. We were convinced that this program fits in what we have been doing for a long time and also an opportunity to increase scope of our work. Yes, we would like to see more SKILLZ girl interventions. [ARHA Staff, Mongu]

ARHA staff alluded to the need for intensified technical support visits and joint fundraising opportunities to keep project activities ongoing beyond the current funding.

For me if we had a way, we should continue to provide support for the coaches to support the continuous implementation of the programs. Jointly solicit for funding so that implementation can continue and also ongoing capacity building in relation to how SKILLZ Girl programming can be further modified and also quarterly support and visits from GRS Zambia. [ARHA Staff, Mongu]

Respondent recommendations for improvement

While most respondents had very favorable views on the project as a whole, they reported numerous recommendations to make the project better, covering a variety of areas. Some of the recommendations gathered included the following:

- Provide refreshments for participants to tackle some of the challenges that coaches faced where participants reported being hungry during sessions.
- Support with additional logistic support for coaches with provision of ID badges and also stipends to cover for transport refunds for visits in distant locations. For participants there is a need to consider the provision of Tshirts.
- Ensure that participants registration and administration are separated to reduce work-load on coaches.
- Allocate more time for sport based activities in each session.
- Ensure scalability of the SKILLZ Girl interventions to other locations and also increase the duration of the sessions.
- Provide additional training for coaches around sport and right based and MEL programming for coaches.
- Ensure that GRS Zambia conducts training of trainers in the SKILLZ programming to support sustainability.
- Expand inclusion of out of school adolescents in the integrated sport and right based programming.
- Beyond teen clubs consider the inclusion of adolescent boys and young men with focus on supporting a dedicated curriculum for boys alone.
- Strengthen engagement of parents in the integrated sport and right based programming with considerations of more radio awareness to reach more parents.

Conclusions and recommendations

This midline evaluation of the Leveling the Field project includes quality feedback from a range of stakeholders as well as routine program data aligned with the project goals. The SKILLZ Girl intervention appears to be highly acceptable and relevant for participants and parents in Mongu and Nakonde, where both participants and Coaches reported positive effects of their participation. Quantitative pre/post results support the qualitative data in the areas of self-concept/self-confidence and attitudes and beliefs around gender equitable norms. SKILLZ Girl participants reported learning about their rights and how to exercise them in the areas of marriage, attending school, and choosing friends and relationships.

AGYW were involved in the design and monitoring of HRB advocacy as evidenced by their participation in the SKILLZ Girl interventions which provided a platform for strengthened GBV prevention and response. Existence of teen clubs also showed that although limited by reach, AGYW and ABYM had a platform under which they discussed, shared information and reconstructed attitudes and beliefs regarding socio-cultural and gender norms. In relation to scalability and sustainability of the integration of sport-based GBV prevention and advocacy as well the partnership between GRS, MC and ARHA, it was noted that partners expressed positive feedback on the extent to which the integrated model aligns well with their current programming and their organizational goals. However, engagement of stakeholders such as teachers and traditional leaders was noted as a key for ensuring sustainability of this approach. Partners proposed other approaches

such as joint fundraising opportunities and income generating activities as part of providing a pathway for sustainability of project activities.

Further conclusions/summary

Considering the results of this midline evaluation and taking into account the recommendations of participants, Coaches, partner staff, and parents, we present the following overall lessons learnt and recommendations:

- AGYW led SKILLZ Girl sessions by GRS coaches remain relevant in the empowerment of AGYW and there is need for further expansion to other remote sites within the project sites.
- Strengthen teen clubs' activities to ensure engagement of more ABYM in project activities with also a consideration of implementation of SKILLZ Boy to complement SKILLZ Girl implementation and engage boys in the same program areas.
- Although participants reported positive impact around activities of the integrated model, there is a need to strengthen GBV programming, as not all respondents were aware of these taking place.
- Stakeholder engagement led by coaches was highlighted as a successful component of implementation and hence there is need for further integration especially on GBV focused activities beyond SKILLZ Girl.
- Although, partners are on course with implementation of project activities especially those on SKILLZ Girl programming. There is still need for additional refresher training for Coaches, Coach Academy sessions, and potentially a training of trainers in the future.
- Teachers and traditional leaders key in mobilization of SKILLZ Girl activities and as hence there is need for their involvement in the management of teen clubs.
- An exit strategy will be needed to ensure ongoing existence of the integrated model among partners beyond this current funding.