

# **Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention and Response Programme**

## Champions of Change Cohort Study Baseline: Key Findings Summary

March 2021

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Tithetse Nkhanza! is a gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response programme, funded by the UK FCDO, working in three districts of Malawi. It is piloting and evaluating prevention interventions with the potential for scale up. One of these prevention models is Champions of Change, an approach developed by Plan International, which is a part of the programme consortium with Tetra Tech International Development and Social Development Direct.

## Who is this paper for?

This paper is for practitioners working with adolescents or youth on the topics of education, gender, social norms and violence. The focus is on Southern Africa, though many dynamics and implications are relevant to a global audience.

This document presents a snapshot of findings from the baseline study from the Champions of Change (CoC) cohort study in Malawi. This study was implemented by the Tithetse Nkhanza! (TN) Programme with the Centre for Social Research, supported by the UK government.

## Study objective and approach

CoC aims to promote positive changes in gender attitudes and behaviours and healthy relationships among adolescents and is being implemented in three districts in Malawi as part of TN's package of GBV prevention and response interventions. This package includes an adaptation that aims to address intimate partner violence (IPV) and harmful traditional practices (HTPs) experienced by adolescent girls. CoC consists of a multi-session curriculum for adolescent boys and girls covering topics related to self-esteem, how to strengthen girls and young women's agency and how to navigate power within their lives, gender equality, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights, addressing harmful practices such as child marriages and positive masculinities. These are complemented by engagement with parents that aims to build their awareness of issues facing girls and gender dynamics within the household. Inter-generational dialogues are carried out with children, parents and community leaders such as traditional leaders with the aim of providing a space for parents, children and community leaders to develop solutions together. Additionally, youth engagement and advocacy as well as peer to peer mobilisation are also critical aspects of the CoC strategy for promoting gender equality and social norms change.

The study aims to understand whether and how the lives of individuals participating directly in CoC activities will have changed as a result of the CoC intervention. This will be done through a longitudinal approach, where data is collected at baseline, midline, endline and post-intervention. Findings from this longitudinal study are also intended to complement the quantitative data collected from CoC participants as part of the TN independent evaluation. Specific research questions used to guide this study are presented in Annex 1.<sup>1</sup>

This paper presents key insights from the baseline data collected in December 2020. This study is based on qualitative data collected from a sample of CoC participants across Karonga, Mangochi and Lilongwe, prior to the implementation of CoC activities. Study locations were selected randomly as a subset of the schools visited by the TN Independent Evaluation team, within which participants were also selected randomly. Data from these same participants through the subsequent rounds of the study will provide a longitudinal analysis of change at the individual and group level.

Overall, 193 people participated in this study (95 men and boys, 98 women and girls),<sup>2</sup> including in-and-out-of-school boys and girls ages 14-18, in-school-boys-and-girls ages 10-13, caregivers, matrons and patrons, and CoC facilitators.<sup>3</sup> Data was gathered through a combination of individual interviews and focus group discussions.

<sup>1</sup> The full study methodology is provided in the CoC Cohort Study Concept Note, available upon request.

<sup>2</sup> See Annex 2 for a full participant breakdown.

<sup>3</sup> Matrons and patrons have roles in the school (generally teachers) and serve as mentors for the programme; facilitators are trained individuals who lead the implementation of the CoC curriculum, but are generally not teachers or school staff.

## Purpose of this brief

This document is intended to capture key insights and takeaways relevant to the CoC intervention specifically and TN more broadly, including:

- **Experiences of and views on violence** to understand the relevance of key topics to the participants and communities;
- **Speaking out** to situate one of CoC's strategies for change in a local context and consider potential challenges;
- **Views of CoC facilitators** to understand the perspectives and priorities of those facilitating the CoC intervention; and
- **Expectations of CoC** to understand the motivations of participants with regard to the intervention.

This report concludes by considering the implications of the findings on these topics for CoC and TN as a programme committed to learning and adaptation.

Note that this document is not intended to provide a full assessment of the study findings at this stage, nor is it able to assess any aspects of CoC delivery or resulting change. A more comprehensive analysis, including consideration of changes over time, is expected following each future round of data collection.

## Violence

As violence is the primary outcome of interest that TN aims to address, exploring participant experiences of and views on violence provides useful context for considering the aims and focus of the intervention.

Overall, few participants in any group disclosed experiencing any form of violence. The exception was married, out-of-school female adolescents, many of whom had experienced some form of IPV. Though most others did not share personal experiences of violence, nearly all adolescent participants cited examples of intimate partner violence (IPV) and non-partner sexual violence (NPSV) that had occurred in their community. When discussing violence, adolescents focused primarily on cases of physical or sexual harm and did not reference examples of emotional or economic abuse when discussing violence.

Participants primarily framed men as perpetrators of violence, with women and girls as the objects of violence. No adolescent boys disclosed perpetrating violence themselves but noted that other men and boys did. No respondent group mentioned violence experienced by men or boys, and no male participants disclosed experiencing violence themselves.

Across adolescents, most respondents also said they had never experienced violence from a peer, though again cited examples of this occurring to others in their community and felt it was common. The minority who had experienced this included both male and female participants, who explained that physical violence primarily resulted from disagreements and gossip, where violence was used as a conflict resolution modality. Though adult caregivers linked alcohol as a driver of peer violence among this group, adolescents themselves rarely shared that alcohol was involved in these incidents.

Adolescent and adult participants diverged in their views on violence committed by teachers.<sup>4</sup> Nearly all girls discussion groups said they knew of instances of sexual relationships between teachers and students, though boys' groups less frequently noted this. This contrasts with the views of parents and facilitators who said that sexual relationships between teachers and students rarely occur in their communities. Rather, caregivers in particular, asserted that such behaviour would be unacceptable, and the community would demand that the teacher leave the area. Instead of focusing on teachers, facilitators and caregivers cited examples of NPSV committed by adult men to adolescent girls, but noted that these men were not teachers. Only in Mangochi did parents identify abuse by teachers as an issue.

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<sup>4</sup> As data with adolescents and caregivers was collected simultaneously, researchers were unable to delve further into whether these discrepancies were the result of a lack of awareness or due to response bias.

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Though adolescents considered physical and sexual violence against girls to be common in their communities, all considered the forms of violence that they were discussing (NPSV, primarily) to be wrong. Boys commonly explained that committing violence was associated with clear negative consequences that affected them personally, such as impregnating a girl, though they did not specifically note possible stigma they may face in the community from committing violence. Boys also noted that girls may face negative consequences like being kicked out of school. Though neither boys nor girls explicitly tried to justify violence, when discussing these topics both groups commonly said that girls often provoke violence through what they wear or how they act.

*'I agree with Participant 8 and Participant 6 in a sense that when you are walking and you haven't dressed properly men will rape us.'* (Out of School Girl, 14-18, Mangochi).

This theme of victim-blaming emerged consistently across discussions with both female and male caregivers as well, many of whom suggested that, though sexual violence was wrong, it was also linked to 'bad behaviour' among girls.<sup>5</sup> These views also manifest in community treatment of survivors, who participants noted were often stigmatised or penalised. In one example from Karonga, a girl who had been abused and impregnated by her teacher was fined MWK 150 for bad behaviour in school by the school administration, while the teacher was released from his job with no fine, as this was the second time the teacher had been involved in this type of incident.

### Speaking Out

Community engagement and speaking out against violence is one strategy by which CoC aims to create change and address violence. At baseline, considering these approaches from the perspectives of both adolescents and caregivers may help identify opportunities and challenges for supporting this activity.

#### Adolescent views

Adolescents explained that though teachers and village leaders do 'speak out' against violence in their communities, they have not witnessed adolescents doing so themselves, nor had they considered doing this previously. Participants were presented with a vignette in which a girl who has experienced sexual violence organises a public demonstration about this issue. When asked to reflect on this action, most adolescents – boys and girls - considered this to be a good idea, with the majority saying they would join such an activity themselves.

*'The reason [I would join] is people who have been raped are similar to me, maybe also myself someone can rape me one day. That's why I can also do demonstrations.'* (In-school girl 14-18, Karonga)

Those who supported this action felt that it would address violence against girls by stigmatising perpetrators, as well as by spreading awareness of what girls face in the community. However, a number of girls also felt that this activity would also reduce violence by creating awareness among girls as to how to dress appropriately, highlighting victim-blaming views among female participants in particular. In-school girls (ages 10-13) in Mangochi were the least supportive of girls speaking out, and felt that speaking out in this way was 'bad behaviour.'

Male participants held mixed views across locations. Most boys in all locations supported the idea of girls speaking out in their community, with many saying they would personally support them to do so. Those who objected to girls speaking out did so on the basis that girls might face negative consequences for speaking out, including beating or other physical violence, as well as retaliatory sexual violence by other boys and men in the community.

While some girls echoed similar concerns, their worries focused more specifically on the criticism and stigma that girls might experience as a result of speaking out, including that boys may not want to date them, suggesting that speaking out violates norms surrounding expectations of female behaviour. A minority of girls and boys also worried that speaking out would be counterproductive, as girls may be blamed for provoking violence themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> This applied to both IPV and NPSV.

### Caregiver views

Caregivers were separately presented with a vignette in which girls who experience violence or harassment in schools organise a group of peers to speak with their teachers and boys about the violence they face. The majority of male and female caregivers were supportive of this activity, and felt that others in the community would also view this positively. However, similar to some adolescent girls, a number of caregivers expected that such an activity will reduce violence by changing girls' behaviour.

*'This will help girls and boys on better behaviours. Mostly such happens because of how they dress but can also help them get back on track.'* (Female Caregiver, Lilongwe)

This view reinforces harmful social norms related to girls' behaviour, and places the burden of change on survivors themselves, rather than the broader community or perpetrators. The minority of caregivers who disagreed with this action did so because they felt others in the community would also oppose it. Some explained that violence – particularly sexual violence - is considered a private matter, and others worried that such actions risked creating a negative image of teachers in the community.

While few caregivers felt that the girls would face any opposition when organising this group, the minority who did said that this would take the form of gossip about them and 'beating' from the wider community, including the individuals who perpetrated the act. Such responses were common across all locations and gender groups. Only one caregiver referred to the idea that children would not be taken seriously, noting that some adults may feel that children were 'wasting their time' (Karonga).

Nearly all caregivers said they would support this sort of action in the future. Those who said they would not do so primarily cited the fact that they did not feel that their involvement was relevant or necessary, while others said they preferred for the matter to be dealt with privately, rather than in public.

### Expectations of CoC

Knowledge of CoC among adolescents varied across locations. Few adolescents in Mangochi and Karonga had heard of CoC or knew about the aims of the project. This contrasted to Lilongwe, where adolescents both in and out of school commonly knew of the programme and noted that it related to gender and violence. When asked directly, no adolescents or caregivers had concerns about participating in CoC or about experiencing backlash.

Many participants did not have any expectations for CoC and noted they had been 'selected' to participate by their teachers, rather than opting in, but did not know why they were selected. Those who did share expectations noted that they hope to learn strategies for addressing violence, and that violence in their communities would decrease as a result of the programme. In addition, a number of in-school adolescents across locations hoped that CoC would provide them with information that they could share with peers and parents.

*'I believe you will teach us better ways of fighting against violence, and that is my expectation... The thing is that we are here to learn these things well so that we have real information that we are able to share full to others in this community.'* (In School Boy, aged 14-1, Karonga).

Some male participants also wanted to understand how to conduct themselves better around women in the future (In-school boy aged 14-18, Mangochi).

In contrast to their in-school counterparts, out of school adolescents commonly viewed CoC as a source of general education, and often hoped that it would help them enrol in school. Unlike the other locations, in Mangochi, a majority of both in-and-out of school adolescents expected that CoC would benefit them materially, by providing school supplies and uniforms, money and access to a job later. A minority of caregivers here also shared these expectations.

Caregivers often did not have specific expectations for CoC, though those who did framed these in terms of learning about violence, having skills to better teach and interact with their children, and changing the behaviour of adolescents in their community. Caregivers rarely shared expectations that their own behaviour would change as a result of the

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intervention. Similar to out-of-school adolescents, some caregivers also viewed CoC as a broader source of learning for them and their children.

*My interest is that, maybe this project might bring change to our community, since most of the children have dropped out of school, they cannot even write down their own name. So, this programme will help our child to have knowledge whenever they are doing things. (Female Caregiver, Mangochi)*

Nearly all matrons and patrons articulated the concepts behind CoC, and hoped to address violence and gender inequality. Some identified maintaining the interest of adolescents as a challenge to this work, noting that school leaving is common, and many others lose interest if material support is not provided. In Karonga, one matron noted that this risk stems partially from the perception that NGOs are likely to come and go in their community.

*The drive to participate for children is low because of the other NGOs that just vanish, not any impact. This is the challenge we are facing in Champions of Change, less interest for children. (Matron, Karonga)*

When asked directly, few matrons and patrons expected to experience challenges as part of CoC. Those that did noted that maintaining parental involvement may be challenging due to lack of interest and competing demands on adults' time.

### Facilitator views

This study also explored the views and expectations of the two CoC facilitators in each location.<sup>6</sup> Facilitator views provide a basis from which additional support may be provided to the individuals working directly with adolescents and parents, and identify challenges that may be taken into account ahead of implementation.

Across locations, facilitators highlighted distinct challenges facing girls and boys in their communities. For girls, facilitators focused on violence in general, and NPSV in particular. In Lilongwe, one facilitator related the impact of these experiences on girls' education.

*These adolescent girls might not manage to go to school because of being raped... Some parents become abusive by not allowing their daughters to go to school when they reach marriage age. (Male facilitator, Lilongwe)*

Despite the fact that a number of married adolescent girls had experienced some form of IPV, facilitators did not cite violence within a relationship as a challenge facing girls.

In Mangochi in particular, facilitators focused on the risk of sexual abuse of girls by teachers. Most facilitators referred to early marriage and school leaving as a general challenge facing girls, with facilitators in Karonga specifically referring to the practice of *kupimbira*, in which a girl is forced to marry at an early age in order to settle the debts of her parents or guardians. No other harmful traditional practices were mentioned in these discussions.

Facilitators often identified challenges facing boys as related to leaving school. This was often framed in terms of 'needing' or being forced to contribute income to the family, by parents. Others mentioned the tendency for boys to become involved in drinking or drug use, though one female facilitator felt that boys faced no challenges and were rather the abusers of women.

Facilitator views diverged when considering any form of physical violence in the family. Two female facilitators did not believe that violence in families was occurring. Others focused on economic violence among men toward women, primarily in the form of neglect and abandonment. Though facilitators noted parents drive decisions for girls to marry at young ages, they did not frame this as violence, nor did they refer to corporal punishment as a form of violence in the home.

Unlike other study participants, facilitators did not overtly express views that could be construed as victim blaming or reinforcing specific gender inequalities. When probed on gender equality, facilitators in all locations framed this in terms of

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<sup>6</sup> This includes one male and one female facilitator in each location; these individuals will be working with the adolescents and parents in this study.

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the division of household tasks between men and women, equal opportunities to earn money, and equal opportunity to attend school. Only one facilitator linked violence to gender equality.

*Most of the times women face gender-based violence, so there is a need of gender equality between men and women by giving them the same opportunit[ies] and civic education. (Mangochi, Female facilitator).*

Facilitators in Karonga specifically related gender inequality to unequal expectations that girls marry young and leave school early.

When considering sources of influence, all facilitators felt that involving chiefs and village heads was critical for any local change processes. They noted that these individuals have the platform to share information with communities. As justice providers, their personal views also affect how cases are handled and female survivors are treated. Facilitators also suggested involving other teachers and the school committee as influential people in the change process.

Facilitators were primarily interested in participating in CoC in order to encourage adolescents to stay in school. A number also wanted to share knowledge with CoC groups in general, and about violence specifically. Most expected to contribute to girls becoming aware of their rights. Half the facilitators connected this process to building self-confidence in particular, noting that they felt doing so would both reduce violence and also contribute to girls staying in or re-joining school, though they did not provide deeper explanation as to how this would occur. Some believed that adolescents also had the power to change the views and behaviours of their parents and family members by sharing what they had learned related to violence.

*'When children get the information and bring it into their communities, there will be that component of meetings where facilitators of the children will be meeting other people and when the message is spread, violence will slowly end.'* (Male Facilitator, Lilongwe)

Facilitators also shared few challenges they expected to face over the course of CoC. Two younger women (ages 17 and 19) noted that they may not be taken seriously by their students, many of whom were close in age. Another in Karonga was concerned about the need to walk long distances and noted a bicycle had been promised that had never been delivered. Another male facilitator noted that the numbers of female students exceeded the males and was concerned that his female colleague may require additional help.

## Implications

This study has provided an overview of findings relevant to CoC implementation at baseline. It has considered views on violence, speaking out, expectations of CoC and the views of facilitators. These findings provide a number of implications for CoC as it moves into the implementation phase, as well as for TN's work more widely.

**Addressing victim blaming** | Though most participant groups opposed violence against women and girls, narratives related to victim blaming emerged strongly as a way of making sense of this violence. These are based on gender inequality, stereotypes, and views of women's low status in society, and expectations of 'correct' behaviour for women. Female participants in particular held these views. The strength of this theme highlights the need for specific messaging to address this belief, while also shifting norms related to the responsibility held by boys and men who perpetrate violence. It is also essential that sessions ensure facilitators are trained to identify and challenging victim-blaming views throughout the implementation of curriculum, keeping in mind that sometimes girls and women hold these views most strongly. CoC should also seek to identify these views among facilitators, and support them to shift them when they are present.

**IPV and NPSV** | Study participants focused primarily on NPSV, with relatively little mention of IPV, which may suggest that IPV is not considered violence and is expected or tolerated. CoC may consider how to support facilitators to better understand local patterns of IPV and its impact on adolescent girls and boys, either through direct experience or witnessing. Recognising that IPV most commonly occurs within marriage, the programme should also consider how to ensure that information about sharing and coping strategies are also relevant to IPV which may face girls in the future, as this is driven by somewhat distinct justifications and beliefs. CoC should also consider how it is targeting and supporting married adolescents, who may be among the most vulnerable to IPV, and strengthen the healthy relationship aspects of the curriculum. Additional support to ensure facilitators understand the risks adolescents face related to IPV may also be important, as this may challenge commonly held beliefs that this form of violence affects older women exclusively.

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**Economic and emotional violence** | The CoC curriculum should also ensure that participants are familiarised with the definition and examples of other forms of violence – particularly economic and emotional. Though these forms of violence were not mentioned explicitly, shifting the framing of such experiences will provide an important basis from which participants may seek to address them by speaking out, intervening, or shifting wider expectations and norms. As the study provided indications of child work and labour, particularly among male participants, this framing may provide an entry point for understanding these experiences as violence.

**Highlighting the role of adult participation** | Though many caregivers were supportive of adolescents, many saw themselves as separate from the process of change and events in their lives. This underscores the need to involve caregivers in the CoC process, as well as the need for specific messaging as to why adult participation on processes led by adolescents or in schools is critical for success. The extent to which this can be done beyond CoC direct adult participants should also be considered.

**Engaging with violence perpetrated by teachers** | Adolescents consistently cited the role of male teachers in perpetrating sexual violence, while this topic was largely absent from discussions with adults.

- For facilitators, CoC should consider how to support facilitators to better understand the sources of violence facing adolescents, and how school administration may address these actions.
- For caregivers, this issue may also be included in caregivers' sessions, as many were not aware of or did not want to disclose instances of sexual violence perpetrated by teachers, limiting their ability to be allies if their children or others they know experience this and reducing the likelihood that girls will disclose their own experiences of violence. These sessions should also cover how to support and empower adolescents to understand this issue and navigate risks they may be exposed to.
- For adolescents, CoC may also consider how to provide adolescents with a clear understanding of how to address these issues, including options for safely reporting and speaking out more widely. Facilitators should be equipped with information for each community that helps adolescents make their own, informed decisions about if and where to report these forms of violence and seek help.

**Interest in learning** | Out of school adolescents and caregivers clearly valued the opportunity to learn provided by CoC. Building on this interest, CoC may consider how these individuals may be supported to access broader forms of learning, as well as possibilities to re-join some form of formal or non-formal education.

**Facilitator understanding** | While facilitators' reasons for joining CoC are consistent with its broader aims, their understanding of forms and drivers of violence as well as the specific recognition of the challenges facing boys, may require further support. This support may also be required to help facilitators recognise and engage with violence within families, as well as the forms of violence that boys and men may experience. Facilitators may also require support to deal with challenging questions and situations that may arise during the sessions, beyond teaching the curriculum.

**Local influencers** | The influence of village chiefs and headmen noted by participants underscores the validity of the TN strategy of engaging these individuals in gender transformative training. The fact that teachers were also identified as influential suggests that including teachers in TN activities may also be valuable, beyond those involved in CoC.

**Speaking out** | The findings also highlight a strong interest in community-level action among adolescent participants, reinforcing the validity of this CoC approach. A significant proportion of parents also supported this, with those who did not support often concerned about the implications of this action on girls' image in the community. This concern suggests that CoC activities encouraging girls' participation may also consider ways to shift broader norms related to these activities. This may include work with chiefs or other leaders to lend public support for girls who speak out; along with engaging men more broadly to reframe this work as an effort to improve the community rather than harm or vilify men, while ensuring that blame shifts away from victims. Such activities should also consider any danger associated with participating in these interactions, and ensure that adolescents have the tools, protection and public support to do so safely. It may also highlight the need to expand safeguarding assessments and measures in relation to these activities in particular.

**Measuring experiences of violence** | This study highlights that while individual participants may be reluctant to disclose personal experiences of violence, discussions of violence that happens to others, as well as broader communal norms



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related to violence are more commonly spoken about. Though this is consistent with research on sensitive topics (including the formative research carried out by TN in 2019), this may pose a challenge for assessing outcomes related to experiences of violence within the programme. The MLA team should take account of this challenge and ensure that other, more intermediate measures, of the success of CoC and other interventions are taken into account.

**Expectations of CoC** | The study finds that most participants do not know about CoC, nor why they were chosen. While it may not be reasonable to expect participants to have a full understanding of CoC at the outset, the programme should ensure that all participants understand the aims of the programme and their role in it, to ensure that all participation is voluntary. Similarly, expectations of material benefit and assistance re-enrolling in school do not match CoC's provisions. CoC should ensure that all participants understand what will and will not be provided by the programme, to ensure that all participant expectations are in line with the scope and ambition of the intervention.

**Creating safe spaces** | The fact that most participants did not disclose personal experiences of violence, and that adults framed violence as a private issue, highlights the importance of creating safe spaces for adolescents to discuss these topics. Facilitators should be supported to ensure that CoC sessions are safe spaces for such discussion, and that adolescents themselves also internalise this.

## Annex 1: Overall research questions

1. To what extent have CoC participants become more active in their schools, families and communities on issues related to gender equality and VAWG prevention as a result of participating in CoC?
2. To what extent have CoC participants adopted more gender-equal attitudes and behaviors in the home and toward their peers? What factors have driven this change? i.e. changing attitudes, new knowledge, examples of positive deviance, etc.
3. To what extent are CoC participants less supportive / accepting of violence and unequal treatment of women and men (gender inequality)? This may include violence at home and in school.
4. To what extent are CoC participants more supportive of survivors of violence? This includes attitudes towards survivors' help-seeking behavior and willingness to assist a survivor.
5. How have beneficiaries experienced CoC activities/interventions? What were the most beneficial and challenging aspects in their view?
6. Have beneficiaries experienced any backlash as a result of participating in CoC? How have beneficiaries handled this?
7. To what extent did CoC contribute to these changes?

## Annex 2: Breakdown of baseline study participants

Segments	Study Participants			Total
	Karonga	Lilongwe	Mangochi	
Boys, In school ages 10-13	8	8	8	24
Boys, In school, ages 14-18	15	16	16	47
Boys Out of school, ages 14-18				
Girls, In school ages 10-13	8	8	8	24
Girls, In school, ages 14-18	16	16	14	46
Girls, Out of school, ages 14-18				
Female care givers	8	4	10	22
Male care givers	8	7	3	18
CoC Facilitators*	2	2	2	6
Matrons	1	1	1	3
Patrons	1	1	1	3
<b>TOTAL (maximum)</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>63</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>193 (95 MALE, 98 FEMALE)</b>			