

# Gender-transformative sexual and reproductive health programming for very young adolescents in Kinshasa, DRC: Impact assessment findings from Growing Up GREAT!

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## BACKGROUND

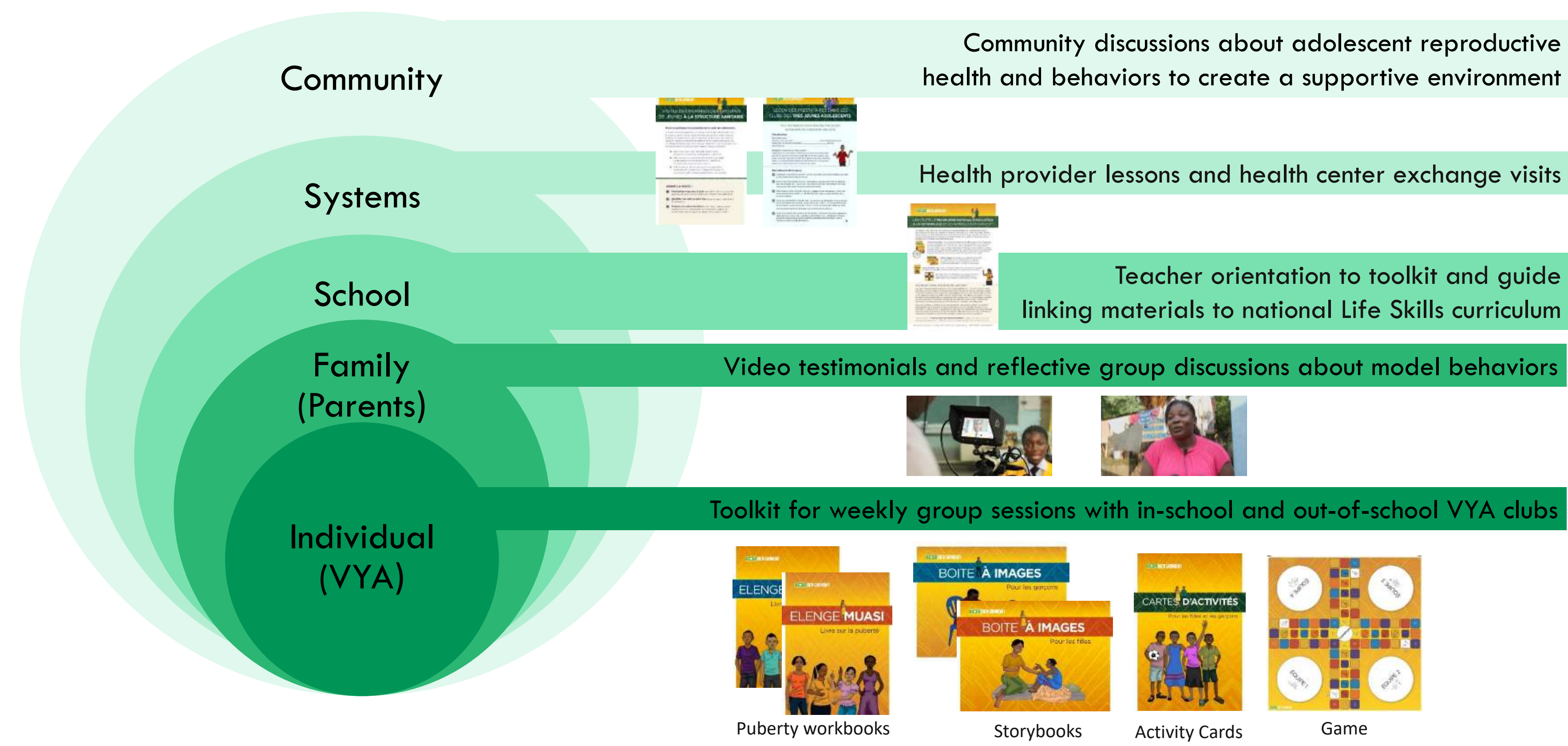
Very young adolescents (VYAs) ages 10-14 years face immense biological, social and cognitive change as they enter puberty.

During this time, intensifying social norms about gender and sexuality shape VYA attitudes and behaviors related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH), including family planning (FP).

This developmental period is therefore a critical window in which to intervene to improve SRH knowledge and support more gender equitable norms and attitudes for impact across the life course.



## GROWING UP GREAT! INTERVENTION



Growing Up GREAT! is a multi-level gender-transformative sexual and reproductive health program for VYAs in Kinshasa, DRC, designed to address gender norms and promote SRH and gender equity. It was piloted from September 2017-May 2018 in two poor communes of Kinshasa.



Resources & Tools  
www.geh.ucsd.edu/  
growing-up-great/

## STUDY AIM

Conduct an outcome evaluation to assess Growing Up GREAT's impact on four intermediate outcomes in the lives of adolescents: SRH knowledge and communication, assets and agency, gender-equitable attitudes and norms, and gender-equitable and non-violent behaviors.



## METHODOLOGY

The impact evaluation was conducted by the **Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS)**, a multi-country longitudinal study exploring gender socialization and its implications for adolescent health and wellbeing.

GEAS used a **quasi-experimental design with an intervention and a control arm**, each divided into two subgroups: in-school (IS) and out-of-school (OOS) adolescents.

**Baseline:**  
2,842 VYAs (n=2,016 IS, n= 826 OOS)  
June-November 2017

**Endline:**  
2,533 VYAs (n=1,815 IS, n=704 OOS)  
September-December 2018 (three months after Growing Up GREAT ended)

Surveys examined VYAs' social context, health, gender attitudes, behaviors and norm perceptions.

Differences seen between study arms across baseline and follow-up were assessed using a weighted **difference-in-differences statistical approach**. We stratified analysis by school status and tested for interactions by age (<12 vs. >=12) and sex.

## FINDINGS

SRH KNOWLEDGE	EFFECT OF INTERVENTION RELATIVE TO CONTROL GROUP	
	IN-SCHOOL	OUT-OF-SCHOOL
PREGNANCY KNOWLEDGE INDEX	✓ MEAN SCORE DIFFERENCE 0.44 (0.15, 0.73)**	✗
HIV KNOWLEDGE	✓ MEAN SCORE DIFFERENCE 0.17 (0.04, 0.30)**	✗
WHERE TO GET CONDOMS	✗	✓✓ OR=2.03 (1.37, 3.01)*** (ESPECIALLY GIRLS)
WHERE TO GET INFORMATION ABOUT MENSTRUATION (ASKED OF MENARCHAL GIRLS)	✓ OR=2.10 (1.34, 3.29)**	✓✓ OR=4.18 (1.95, 9.00)*** (ESPECIALLY GIRLS <12 YEARS)
WHERE TO GET CONTRACEPTION (ASKED OF GIRLS ONLY)	✗	✓ OR=2.66 (1.31, 5.42)**

### SRH Knowledge

Growing Up GREAT! increased:

- Pregnancy-related knowledge and HIV knowledge among IS adolescents;
- Knowledge of where to get condoms among OOS adolescents;
- Knowledge of where to get information about menstruation and contraception (asked only of girls), especially among younger VYAs (<12 years).

GENDER ATTITUDES, ROLES & TRAITS	EFFECT OF INTERVENTION RELATIVE TO CONTROL GROUP	
	IN-SCHOOL	OUT-OF-SCHOOL
SEXUAL DOUBLE STANDARD	✗	✗
GENDER-STEREOTYPICAL ROLES	✗	✗
GENDER-STEREOTYPICAL TRAITS	✗	✗
GENDER EQUALITY IN HOUSEHOLD CHORES	✓✓ OR=1.95 (1.49, 2.56)***	✓✓ 3.46 (2.21, 5.43)*** (ESPECIALLY FOR GIRLS)
DECREASED ACCEPTANCE OF GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION	✓	✗

### Gender Attitudes & Norms

Growing Up GREAT! had mixed effects on gender attitudes & norms.

- Gender-equitable attitudes towards chores sharing increased over time, especially among OOS girls.
- No intervention effects on other normative perceptions.
- Gender-based discrimination increased among IS boys.

CONNECTEDNESS, COMFORT AND COMMUNICATION	EFFECT OF INTERVENTION RELATIVE TO CONTROL GROUP	
	IN-SCHOOL	OUT-OF-SCHOOL
CAREGIVER CONNECTEDNESS	✓ MEAN SCORE DIFFERENCE 0.09 (0.00, 0.18)**	✓ MEAN SCORE DIFFERENCE 0.22 (0.07, 0.38)**
COMFORT WITH PUBERTAL DEVELOPMENT	✗	✗
BODY SATISFACTION INDEX	✗	✓ (GIRLS ONLY) MEAN SCORE DIFFERENCE 2.79 (1.43, 4.15)**
COMMUNICATION ON... BODY CHANGES	✗	✗
COMMUNICATION ON... SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS	✗	✓ 2.03 (1.11, 3.69)** (ESPECIALLY GIRLS)
COMMUNICATION ON... PREGNANCY	✗	✗
COMMUNICATION ON... CONTRACEPTION	✗	✓ (FOR <12/O ONLY) OR=14.12 (2.64, 75.46)**

### Assets & Agency

Growing Up GREAT! increased:

- Caregiver connectedness among all VYAs;
- Communication about sexual relationships and contraception among OOS adolescents, especially among girls and younger VYAs.
- Body satisfaction among OOS girls, though it had no effect on body comfort.

GENDER-EQUITABLE AND NON-VIOLENT BEHAVIORS	EFFECT OF INTERVENTION RELATIVE TO CONTROL GROUP	
	IN-SCHOOL	OUT-OF-SCHOOL
BROTHER HELPED (FROM SISTERS' PERSPECTIVE)	✗	✗
HELPED SISTER (FROM BROTHERS' PERSPECTIVE)	✗	✓ OR 2.50 (1.15, 5.46)**
EXPERIENCED TEASING AND VERBAL BULLYING	✗	✓ OR=0.61 (0.42, 0.90)**
EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	✗	✗
PERPETRATED VERBAL OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	✗	✗

### Gender-Equitable and Non-Violent Behaviors

Growing Up GREAT! had limited effects on behaviors:

- Gender-equitable chore sharing (as reported by boys) increased among OOS adolescents.
- Teasing and verbal bullying decreased among OOS adolescents.

## KEY FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

Growing Up GREAT! improved SRH knowledge, key assets and gender-equitable attitudes, but ultimately did not shift a broader spectrum of gender norms.

- Results **affirm the potential of early intervention to improve SRH outcomes** for adolescents.
- Mixed results on gender-equitable attitudes and norms, also reported in other SRH programs for adolescents, reflect recent evidence showing **young people hold a complexity of gender outlooks**.



Growing Up GREAT's experience points to potential innovations.

- There is a need for **improved segmentation and understanding of VYAs' needs** by gender, age, school status and other key socio-demographic markers.
- More programmatic and research **efforts are needed to better understand how to engage adolescents' key influencers across different levels of the socio-ecological model** to achieve norms change. Growing Up GREAT! engaged caregivers, teachers, and health providers, but more time for targeted strategies to reach these adult influencers may be needed.