

WHAT WORKS?

USING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT TO STOP VIOLENCE

**AGAINST ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND
YOUNG WOMEN AFFECTED BY HIV**

ABOUT FRONTLINE AIDS

Frontline AIDS wants a future free from AIDS for everyone, everywhere. Around the world, millions of people are denied HIV prevention, testing, treatment and care simply because of who they are and where they live. As a result, 1.7 million people were infected with HIV in 2019 and 690,000 died of AIDS-related illnesses. Together with partners on the frontline, we work to break down the social, political and legal barriers that marginalised people face, and innovate to create a future free from AIDS.

ABOUT OUR PROGRAMMES

Zero Violence was a six-month project (October 2020 to March 2021) that built and strengthened sustainable legal capacity to address and reduce violence and discrimination against women and girls and LGBT people across the Commonwealth. It was a joint partnership between Frontline AIDS and ActionAid, funded by the UK Government's Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) under the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

READY is a portfolio of programmes that are designed to build Resilient and Empowered Adolescents and Young People; the programme has supported a movement of youth-led and youth-serving organisations working with and for adolescents and young people living with and affected by HIV. The programmes target adolescents and young people in their diversity, to empower them to influence the decisions that affect their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

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The report was informed by the views of partners in Mozambique and Zimbabwe that implement the READY+ and Zero Violence projects, including young peer educators.

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01 SUMMARY



Gender-based violence and discrimination is fuelling the HIV epidemic.^{1,2,3}

Gender-based violence, inequality and discrimination make women extremely vulnerable to HIV. Adolescent girls and young women (ages 15-24) are particularly at risk, even more so if they are criminalised or marginalised, for instance if they sell sex, are gender non-conforming or use drugs.

Supporting all women and girls to gain power is critical to ending AIDS.⁴ And economic empowerment is a key part of this.

When a woman is economically empowered she has access to financial resources and education and opportunities to develop skills. She has a greater range of options to choose from and can transform those choices into actions⁵, including when and how to have sex. She has more control of her health and can challenge the gender norms that excuse and enable violence against her.

The last two decades have seen an increased focus on economic empowerment to reduce young women's vulnerability to gender-based violence and HIV. Here we summarise what kind of interventions work, based on research findings and perspectives from young peer educators and organisations in Zimbabwe and Mozambique that work on gender-based violence and HIV.



GENDER AND AGE: THE FACTS

- Globally, women are more likely than men to be living with HIV, driven by both physical/biological and structural factors.⁶
- In 2019, 30% of all new HIV infections among adults occurred among 15-24 year olds.
- Around 40% of young people who contract HIV in the world each year are young women in east and southern Africa, despite them making up just 4% of the world's youth.⁷
- Young women in east and southern Africa are twice as likely to contract HIV than young men in the region.⁸
- In 2019, 280,000 young women contracted HIV.⁹ This is nearly three times where we should be if we want to end AIDS by 2030.¹⁰
- Around 30% of adolescent girls and young women will experience violence from a partner in their lifetime.¹¹ In some countries, as many as one in two will.¹²



WHAT WORKS?

KEY FINDINGS

Evidence suggests the most promising economic empowerment initiatives to reduce violence against young women are **microfinance schemes, vocational training, and initiatives that change behaviours and attitudes** on gender roles and the acceptability of violence. The most effective interventions are long-term, combine multiple approaches, and work with men, boys and the wider community.

02 HOW GENDER INEQUALITY MAKES YOUNG WOMEN VULNERABLE TO HIV

SOCIAL NORMS

... are shared expectations that govern how people 'should' behave and are a powerful influence on attitudes and behaviours towards adolescent girls and young women.

HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

... limit women's choices, opportunities, and access to information, education, employment, health and social services. For example, bride price (when a man pays to marry a woman) can mean a woman is seen as her husband's property, which robs her of any agency.

GENDER NORMS

... relating to masculinity can socialise men to dominate family decision making and use violence and coercion – including using their financial support - to assert their authority. Norms relating to femininity and age can encourage young women to be passive in their interactions with men and their elders. Gender norms also prohibit young people from fully expressing their gender identity and sexual choices safely and with the support and guidance of their families and communities

NEEDING PARENTAL OR PARTNER CONSENT TO ACCESS SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES.

In 2019, under-18s needed parental consent to take an HIV test in more than 100 countries. This stops many adolescent girls from knowing their HIV status.¹⁵

INEQUITABLE LAWS AND POLICIES

... such as age-of-consent laws, criminalisation of sex work and criminalising same-sex sex, also limit women's choices and agency. Encouraging laws and policies that promote equality, human rights and public health can help women in their diversity understand and change the power dynamics that can occur in intimate, family and community relationships.

DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

... restricts income and prospects and limits young women's decision-making power within relationships, families and societies.¹³ A lack of education is associated with having sex at a young age, getting married at a young age, cross-generational and transactional sex, being economically reliant on a partner, risky sexual behaviours, and limited knowledge on HIV and sexual health.¹⁴ Economic circumstances may force parents to leave their oldest child in charge of the family while they find work elsewhere. This can leave children vulnerable to exploitation, transactional sex and abusive relationships, particularly girls.

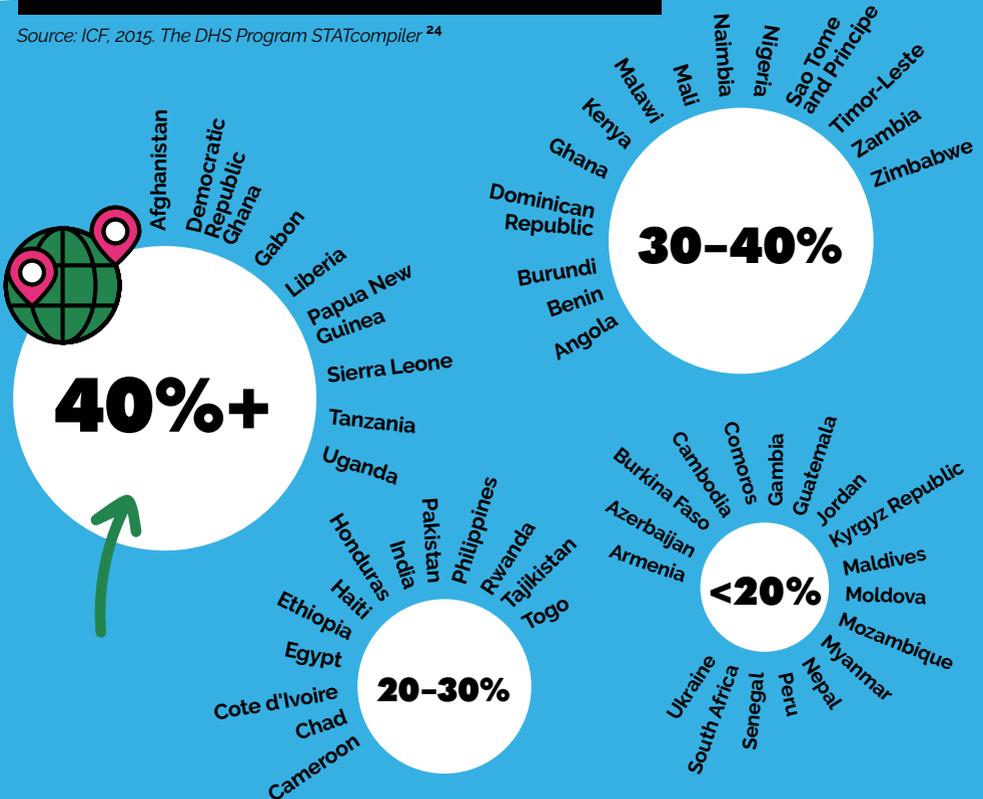
A vicious cycle

Gender-based and intimate partner violence are both a driver, and a consequence, of HIV.

Gender-based or intimate partner violence – or the fear of it – stops adolescent girls and young women from testing for HIV, telling someone they are living with HIV, and starting or staying on lifesaving treatment.^{16 17} Women whose partner is violent towards them are between 1.5 and 4 times more likely to contract HIV than other women.^{18 19 20 21} Women who experience violence are also less likely to negotiate safer sex²², despite the fact that men who are violent towards women are more likely to engage in behaviours that increase their risk of having HIV.²³

The infographic shows the proportion of young women across the world who have experienced violence (physical, sexual or emotional) from a partner

Source: ICF, 2015. The DHS Program STATcompiler²⁴



03 WHAT IS ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT?

Economic empowerment is a process that aims to develop resources and agency.

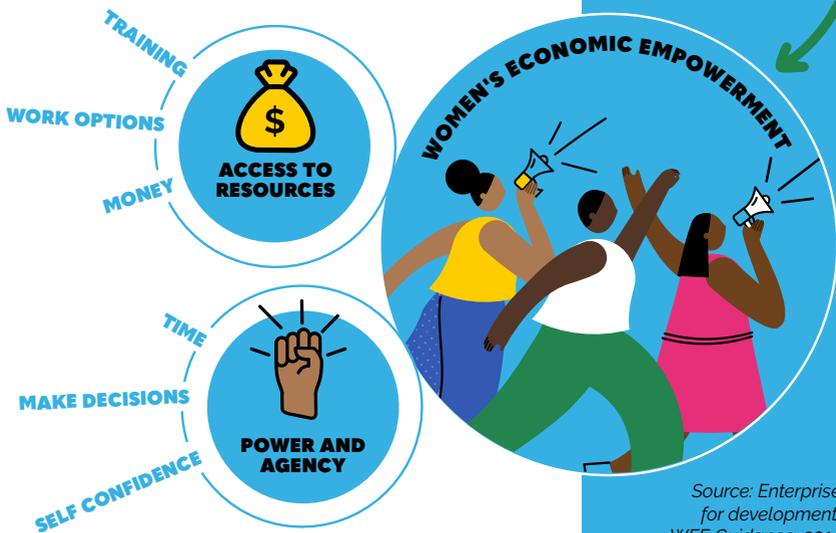
Having agency means being able to act to achieve your goals, including being able to make decisions about (and control) resources. It also means having self-confidence, information, autonomy and self-esteem.²⁵

Resources include human capital (e.g. education, skills and training), financial capital (e.g. loans, savings and income), social capital (e.g. social networks and mentors), and physical capital (e.g. land and machinery).

For adolescent girls and young women, economic empowerment is about expanding current and future abilities.²⁶ Young women stand to benefit significantly by gaining access to education and skills, even if these benefits may not be fully realised until they are older.²⁷



Main components of economic empowerment



Source: Enterprise²⁸ for development. WEE Guidance, 2014

04 HOW ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT CAN PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

When a woman has access to financial resources and education it can create change in many ways.

FOR INDIVIDUALS IT CAN:

- Strengthen a woman's self-worth
- Provide a woman with the means and the resilience to leave an abusive relationship
- Reduce the need to agree to unsafe sex, particularly in the context of transactional sex and sex work
- Increase a woman's autonomy and decision-making powers

WITHIN HOUSEHOLDS IT CAN:

- Reduce economic stress, often cited as a factor in domestic violence²⁹
- Increase a woman's say in how household resources are allocated³⁰
- Increase other household members' appreciation for the woman
- Improve communication and negotiation skills between partners³¹

Less financial strain within households can keep adolescent girls and young women in school, reduce their need to engage in transactional sex, choose whether to get married, who to marry and when, and be more equal in their relationships.



WARNING

Some research suggests men's violence can escalate when unequal power is addressed through economic empowerment.^{32 33} Longer-term initiatives found violence reduced overtime as men and the wider community became accustomed to changing roles. This shows how important it is to avoid short-term or one-off interventions options (see next page).



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WHAT WORKS?

SCHOOL BASED INTERVENTIONS

Education gives adolescent girls and young women greater confidence, wider social networks, and a greater ability to use information and resources and become economically independent.³⁴

Data from 44 countries suggests that completing secondary education significantly reduces a woman's personal risk of partner violence, particularly in countries where partner abuse is more common.³⁵ A Ugandan study found that a one-year increase in grade attainment led to a 9% reduction in the likelihood that a woman would experience sexual violence.³⁶ But it is important to note that education by itself does not necessarily stop gender-based violence, as educated women also experience abuse. While level of education has a protective relationship with gender-based violence, many other factors make power relations between men and women unequal.³⁷

WHAT WORKS?

MICROFINANCE

Microfinance (sometimes known as microcredit) includes loans, savings, insurance, transfers (remittances) and other financial support. Often central to these interventions is the creation of village savings and loan associations, which increase saving opportunities and capital acquisition for people who are normally unable to access formal banking services (for example, because they lack collateral for loans).³⁸ Microfinance programmes are often combined with gender or life-skills training, and/or education, services and community engagement on sexual and reproductive health and HIV. Evidence from a number of large-scale interventions suggests microfinance is effective at reducing gender-based violence.

THE EVIDENCE

In Limpopo, rural South Africa, the Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (IMAGE) programme³⁹ offered women and girls loans alongside a course on gender and HIV, which covered topics on gender roles, cultural beliefs, relationship communication, and partner violence. Community mobilisation initiatives targeted adolescent boys and men to address gender norms. After two years, women's risk of intimate partner violence had more than halved (55%)⁴⁰ and attitudes condoning intimate partner violence had fallen by 67%.⁴¹ Women were also more likely to leave violent relationships and support other women who were experiencing abuse.

In Tanzania, a similar programme (MAISHA) reduced physical intimate partner violence by more than a third (36%) and sexual partner violence by 20%.⁴² Trials in Cote d'Ivoire⁴³, Zimbabwe⁴⁴, and Burkina Faso⁴⁵ found intimate partner violence reduced when village savings and loan associations were established.

A review by the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded that microfinance combined with gender transformative approaches, such as behaviour change communication and girls clubs, is a promising way to reduce gender-based violence. But it found that microfinance programmes alone can increase violence when male partners feel threatened.^{46 47}

In Cote d'Ivoire⁴³, women members of VSLA attending more than 75% of intervention sessions on gender dialogues with their male partner were less likely to report physical IPV.

MICROFINANCE:

The view from Mozambique and Zimbabwe

Microfinance projects are popular and help to improve the status and self-esteem of young women in households and communities. There is a need for microfinance interventions to address self-empowerment, for example by providing life-skills training, to enable women to make the most out of the opportunity.

”

...viral load is much reduced in the youths that are taking part in economic empowerment initiatives. Self-esteem is also greatly improved.

Peer educator,
Zimbabwe

WHAT WORKS?

CHANGING HARMFUL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

These interventions try to make people aware of harmful gender roles and norms, think about how they can make things more equal, change individual and collective views on damaging behaviours, and present alternative attitudes and ways to act.⁴⁸ Some interventions focus on communities, others on couples or specifically on men. Behavioural interventions can be effective, although results vary between approaches. Interventions that engage men and boys, whether alone or in mixed groups, have the most impact.⁴⁹



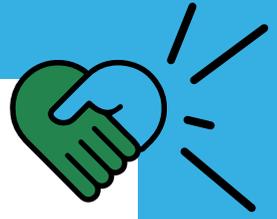
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1

THREE WAYS TO CHANGE BEHAVIOURS AND ATTITUDES

WORK WITH MEN AND BOYS

This can be done with individual men or in male-only groups and mainly happens in schools or community settings. Men are encouraged to reflect on masculinity and how it can make dynamics in households and communities unequal. Men are supported to develop skills in conflict resolution, express their feelings without using violence, and approach intimate relationships in fairer ways. There is compelling evidence that this approach works in preventing violence against women^{50 51 52 53}, and can change harmful behaviour and attitudes relating to sexual and reproductive health, maternal newborn and child health, and also reduce violence between men.⁵⁴



2

COMMUNITY MOBILISATION

... includes community meetings, door-to door discussions, dramas, poster discussions, collective action (e.g., marches and petitions) and training or sensitisation sessions with different community members. This approach shows promise.^{55 56}



SASA!, a community mobilisation approach developed by Raising Voices in Uganda, worked with men and women as well as police officers, healthcare providers, institutional leaders and local governmental and cultural leaders.⁵⁷ Four years after implementation intimate partner violence had halved, and both men and women saw violence against women as less socially acceptable.⁵⁸

3

COMMUNITY AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

... use television, radio, newspapers, online and social media to shine a light on negative behaviours or practices, and weaves educational messages into entertaining content to reach large numbers of people. Evidence is limited, but an evaluation of *Soul City*, an 'edutainment' programme in South Africa, the *Somos Diferentes, Somos Iguales* (We Are Different, We Are Equal) campaign in Nicaragua, and Programme H in Brazil found they increased people's awareness of violence, but they did not change attitudes on the acceptability of violence.⁵⁹

SAFE SPACES

These are female-only physical spaces.⁶⁰ They are places where adolescent girls and young women who are vulnerable to violence can make friends, build social networks, and feel comfortable participating in programme activities.⁶¹ Although safe spaces are rarely stand-alone interventions, creating a place where young women can positively interact with their peers can increase the effectiveness of other interventions.⁶²



WHAT MIGHT WORK

SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Some initiatives aim to prevent violence in schools and act as an entry point for reducing gender-based violence in the community. This takes the form of information, delivered in standard lessons or special sessions, possibly combined with life-skills training on how to respond to violence and links to services. These interventions are effective at reducing the risk of violence (most evidence relates to this rather than reducing violence itself).^{63 64 65 66} Other interventions address the things that stop girls from going to school. They may remove school fees, reduce indirect costs like transport or uniforms, provide cash transfers for attendance or improve school facilities, such as toilets. Although limited, there is promising evidence that these interventions reduce gender-based violence and risk factors, such as early marriage, particularly when combined with life-skills training, community conversations and mentorship.^{67 68 69 70 71}

LIVELIHOODS/VOCATIONAL TRAINING

This builds adolescent girls' and young women's ability to generate income, including skills relating to self-employment, business development and management, financial literacy and job seeking. It also covers apprenticeships and internships. This type of training is usually integrated with other empowerment strategies, such as building young women's awareness of their right to have control over their bodies and sexual and reproductive choices. There is mixed evidence on how effective vocational training is at reducing gender-based violence,^{72 73 74} but combining it with gender training significantly increases its impact.⁷⁵

”
Helping young women seek internships and practical experience is more effective than training on skills alone

Peer educator,
Zimbabwe

CASH TRANSFERS

... provide money or essentials, like livestock or food. They can be non-conditional or linked to certain behaviours, such as keeping girls in school.⁷⁶ A global review of cash transfer schemes found 70% reduced intimate partner violence, 20% had no impact and 10% had mixed results.⁷⁷ When cash transfers conditional on reduced risky sex behaviours are used to increase school attendance, they can have a significant impact.^{78 79}

”
By just giving cash or just giving food you are not promoting sustainability... income generating projects are much more beneficial... programmes need to bring out the best that an individual holds.

Peer supporter, Zimbabwe

PROMOTING WOMEN'S PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE RIGHTS

Discriminatory inheritance laws or customary practices mean women are often denied access to – and control over – land, housing, livestock and other assets.⁸⁰ These interventions advocate against discriminatory laws and practices, educate women on their rights, provide legal services when these rights are violated, and work with police, judiciary and other government officials to stop rights violations.⁸¹ Although interventions in this area exist, none have been evaluated. What we know is that women who own land or property are less likely to experience violence than women who do not⁸²⁻⁸³, and owning land and assets can help women leave abusive relationships.⁸⁴



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DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON WHAT WORKS

The **UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office** recommends microfinance combined with gender-transformative approaches (such as IMAGE), community mobilisation to change social norms, working with couples, and engaging boys and men (with women and girls) through group education.⁸⁵

In **Mozambique and Zimbabwe**, the consensus from those working to prevent HIV and gender-based violence is that interventions should focus on building young women's knowledge and skills, which increases her ability to earn, and improves her self-esteem and status within the household, while engaging men and the wider community to change norms and attitudes.

TEN KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



1 Start by actively involving the adolescent girls and young women in the communities you are working with. Do not do anything until you understand the realities they are living, their sociocultural context, what challenges they face in relation to gender and violence, what they need, and the strategies they use to respond to domestic conflicts and violence.

2 Initiatives that focus on financial capital, such as microfinance and cash transfers, are more effective if they also include training to build participants' livelihood and life skills.

3 Economic empowerment strategies are more effective when they are combined with activities that address gender inequality in the wider community, including through awareness raising.

4 Take a broad and systematic approach: work with all family members, and offer appropriate support not only to women, but also to the children who may witness or experience violence. In multi-generational family households, where the power of young women is particularly constrained, providing the entire family with economic empowerment and gender transformative interventions will strengthen outcomes.

5 Establish safe spaces for adolescent girls and young women so they can feel comfortable accessing the support on offer. They also provide an important space for adolescent girls and young women to share experiences, become critically aware of the issues affecting them, and receive mentoring.

6 Safe spaces for men are also important for information sharing, discussions and counselling, particularly for perpetrators of violence. Engaging with groups of men, such as football teams, can be a good strategy.



7 Engage men constructively, without judgement. This will help to address the underlying gender power imbalances, norms and attitudes that drive violence and make it easier for men and women to adjust to change without causing conflict.

8 Attitudes and behaviours are deep-rooted; short-term interventions do not work. Initiatives should be implemented for a sufficient length of time to enable change.

9 Don't forget young women in rural communities. Economic empowerment initiatives often take place in urban areas, but harmful norms and practices tend to be more pronounced in rural places.

10 Young women often have limited awareness of the schemes available to them. Utilise social media, social spaces and networks and run awareness campaigns to encourage young women to participate.

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The UN Sustainable Development Goals: sdgs.un.org/goals

2001 UN General Assembly Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS www.unaids.org/en/aboutunaids/unitednationsdeclarationsandgoals/2001declarationofcommitmentonhivaids

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