Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project Niger: Safe Spaces and Future Husband Clubs

Sector(s): Education, Gender, Health, Labor Markets

Location: Niger

Sample: 395 villages with 6,942 girls

Target group: Men and boys Women and girls Youth

Outcome of interest: Dropout and graduation Earnings and income Employment Empowerment Aspirations Gender attitudes and norms

Intervention type: Coaching and mentoring Information Soft skills Empowerment training Norms change

Partner organization(s): Government of Niger, World Bank, United Nations Population Fund, National Institute of Statistics (INS)

Teaching life skills to young girls may empower them to make more informed decisions over key life cycle events like sex, reproduction, and marriage. However, social norms that constrain women's decision-making power may hamper the effectiveness of empowerment programs for women. Researchers are partnering with the Government of Niger to evaluate the impact of empowerment clubs providing adolescents girls with life skills trainings; gender norms clubs designed to change gender-related norms among young men; or both clubs implemented in the same villages on gender norms and women's empowerment outcomes.

Policy issue

In many countries, gender inequalities begin at a young age and influence individuals' long-term trajectories. In particular, social norms can lead to girls dropping out of school, marrying, and having children early in life, creating a cycle of inequality with limited educational and job opportunities. Can youth development clubs aimed at teaching soft skills for girls and changing social norms among young men address these inequalities at an early age?

Context of the evaluation

Niger ranks next to last on both the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and Gender Development Index (GDI) as developed by the United Nations, suggesting that women in Niger face stark challenges. Gender inequalities begin at a young age as Nigerien girls drop out of school and marry young. In 2016, 28 percent of women aged 20-24 wed before age 15 and 76 percent wed before age 18. Female labor force participation is also one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa, with 40 percent of women over fifteen working.

Limited women's empowerment is especially acute in several West African countries in the South of the Sahel region where Niger is located. Six countries in the Sahel region, including Niger, have established the Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend in the Sahel (SWEDD) project in collaboration with the World Bank and United Nations Population Fund. As part of this project, each country is responsible for designing and implementing three to four programs to support girls between the ages of

ten and nineteen who are at high risk for early marriage and pregnancy. The Government of Niger is implementing a range of programs, including the following two: adolescent development clubs and scholarships for young girls (the latter is undergoing a separate impact evaluation).



A group of girls sitting together.

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Details of the intervention

In collaboration with the Government of Niger, researchers are evaluating the impact of adolescent girls' club, young men's clubs, or both on women's empowerment outcomes.

Espaces Sûrs (ES), or Safe Spaces, provide life skills training for young girls to improve their knowledge related to sex, reproduction, and marriage so that they can make more informed life choices. These clubs host weekly sessions for groups of 25 girls mentored by an older woman. Adolescent girls between the ages of ten 10 to nineteen 19 are eligible to participate, with a focus on girls not currently enrolled in school. In these interactive sessions, girls discuss a variety of topics, including hygiene and health, body and sexuality, managing money and saving, but also self-esteem, decision-making, and public speaking. Additionally, the program involves the community through home visits and community dialogue sessions.

Clubs des Futurs Maris(CFM), or Future Husbands Clubs, introduce young men to topics related to women's empowerment and discuss social norms related to male fertility. The meetings aim to foster attitudes and behaviors that favor women empowerment. These clubs gather non-married men between the ages of fifteen 15 and 24.

From the 395 villages identified by the implementing NGO, researchers randomized villages into four groups:

1. *ES Clubs only*
2. *CFM Clubs only*
3. *Both ES and CFM clubs*
4. *Comparison*

Through surveys, researchers will measure the impact on women's empowerment through various indicators, including marital status, educational and professional aspirations, educational achievements, labor market outcomes, health knowledge and behaviors.

Results and policy lessons

Study ongoing; results forthcoming.