

PROTECTION STRATEGY

Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient

Sierra Leone



Table of Contents

EAGER Project Overview	3
Emphasis on Protection	3
1. Support Girls' Safety and Do No Harm.	5
Protection Risks Identified	5
Actions Taken to Mitigate and Respond to Risks.	6
2. Support all Girls without Discrimination	14
Protection Risks Identified	14
Actions Taken to Mitigate and Respond to Risks.	16
3. Support Recovery from Physical and Psychological Harm	22
Protection Risks Identified	22
Actions Taken to Mitigate and Respond to Risks.	23
4. Strengthen Community Responsibility for Girls' Safety	27
Protection Risks Identified	27
Actions Taken to Mitigate and Respond to Risks.	27
Conclusion	31

EAGER Project Overview

Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) is a 4-year (2019-2023) girls' education and empowerment project that was implemented in 10 districts of Sierra Leone with funding from FCDO¹ through the Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) initiative of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC). Through a consortium led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in partnership with Concern Worldwide, Restless Development, and BBC Media Action, EAGER created new learning opportunities for 27,322 of the most marginalised out-of-school (OOS) adolescent girls ages 13-19² who lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills and faced ongoing barriers to learning.

According to the EAGER Baseline Evaluation³ 45.3% of enrolled girls had never gone to school, and 45.2% went to school but dropped out before completing primary school. Many girls were experiencing social marginalisation, stigma, isolation from their peers, and heavy chore burdens due to life circumstances: 44.1% were married, 57.5% were mothers, 14.6% were living with disabilities (60% in whole or part due to anxiety and depression), and 9% were their own head of household. Access to information, resources, services, and opportunities were limited by literacy and financial constraints as well as gender norms impacting girls' self-determination in their homes and communities.

EAGER's Theory of Change guided the programme design around three core outcome areas: learning, transition, and sustainability. This design includes an 8-month integrated Learning Programme encompassing Literacy, Numeracy, Financial Literacy, and Life Skills, followed by an 8-month Transition period during which girls are encouraged to use their new knowledge and skills in different areas of their life. This is guided by an Empowerment Plan in which each girl sets her own learning, household, community, and financial goals. Trained Mentors and Facilitators recruited from the girls' communities guide them through their Learning, Transition, and beyond – serving as role models not only for the girls, but also for the community. To foster sustainability, the project engaged key members of the girls' households and the wider community through structured Community Dialogues and action planning, and produced and broadcast weekly girl-centred radio programmes highlighting the barriers girls face whilst showcasing their agency and positive gender norms. This programme was delivered through two cycles: the first cycle engaged 7,481 girls in a first cohort (Cohort 1), and the second cycle engaged 19,841 girls in a subsequent cohort (Cohort 2).

➤ Emphasis on Protection

As a girls' education and empowerment project, EAGER had limited scope for direct gender-based violence (GBV) response and prevention work. However, given the multiple intersecting vulnerabilities and the high risks of violence, abuse, and exploitation that adolescent girls may face in their homes and communities – plus any additional risks linked to their participation in EAGER – Protection was central to all aspects of programming.

1 The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom.

2 EAGER worked with girls ages 13-17 in the first cohort. For the second cohort, the age range was expanded to 13-19 to allow girls who were 17 during the pandemic to still participate in the programme.

3 The EAGER Baseline Evaluation was conducted in March 2020 by IMC Worldwide and Dalan Associates. The [Baseline Research Policy Brief](#) summarises the key findings.

Protection is defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) as: “...All activities aimed at obtaining **full respect for the rights of the individual** in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. international human rights law, international humanitarian law...).”⁴ According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which are ratified by the Government of Sierra Leone, all adolescent girls have human rights that must be respected. For EAGER, this means all activities must be built around girls’ rights, especially:

- Every girl's right to life, freedom, and safety
- Every girl's right to an education and to learn new skills
- Every girl's right to be protected from harmful practises and to live free from all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation
- Every girl's right to delay marriage and pregnancy until after 18 and to make her own choices about marriage, pregnancy, and use of modern contraception
- Every girl's right to be as healthy as possible and to access the best possible health services
- Every girl's right to privacy and confidentiality
- Every girl's right to take part in important life decisions
- Every girl's right to speak up and be heard

The Sphere Humanitarian Charter outlines four principles relating to Protection that humanitarian and development agencies must follow to ensure accountability to the people they serve. These are:

1. Enhance people's safety, dignity, and rights and avoid exposing them to further harm, **including to the potentially negative effects of humanitarian programmes.**
2. Ensure people's access to impartial assistance, according to need and without discrimination. **Identify obstacles to accessing assistance and provide proportional support.**
3. Assist people to recover from the physical and psychological effects of threatened or actual violence, coercion, or deliberate deprivation. **Provide immediate and sustained support.**
4. Help people to claim their rights. **Contribute to a stronger protective environment.**

The EAGER consortium followed these principles by taking proactive steps to: 1) Support girls' safety and Do No Harm; 2) Support all girls without discrimination; 3) Support recovery from physical and psychological harm; and 4) Strengthen community responsibility for girls' safety. This Strategy outlines the approaches and actions that EAGER took to enhance girls' safety, dignity, and rights alongside the limits of what the project could do based on its design, staffing, and resources.

4 Sphere Handbook 2018: reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Sphere-Handbook-2018-EN.pdf

1. Support Girls' Safety and Do No Harm

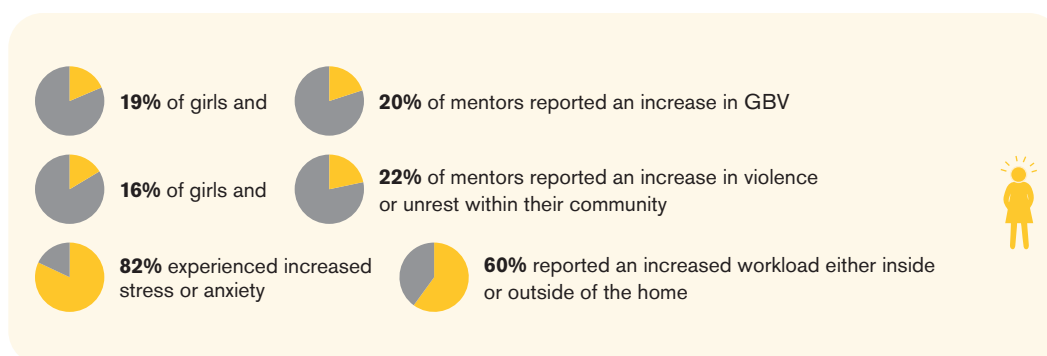
> Protection Risks Identified

The EAGER project aims to enhance girls' overall safety and wellbeing, and must ensure that programme activities do not put girls at greater risk of harm. Do No Harm means that in all aspects of work, all efforts must be made to minimise possible negative effects and maximise possible benefits for girls. During the inception phase of the project, EAGER conducted a risk assessment that included Gender and Do No Harm analyses and outlined protection and safeguarding risks. The risk matrix identified mitigation strategies and has been used to inform the project design and adaptations. Identified risks are noted where most appropriate under the four protection principles below.

Key risks related to girls' safety and Do No Harm include:

- Sexual, monetary, or labour exploitation and abuse by staff or volunteers
- Reinforcement of harmful and limiting gender norms by project staff and volunteers
- Mentors unable to deliver quality session due to limited literacy and facilitation skills
- Selection of Safe Spaces that are, in fact, unsafe for girls to access
- Harassment and bullying of enrolled girls by other girls, boys, and/or adults
- Backlash from boys related to the prioritisation of girls for the programme
- Backlash from caregivers and/or husbands/partners related to discussions of taboo topics or the disruption of gender norms
- A major disease outbreak that puts girls and volunteers at risk.

The declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 and subsequent response measures in Sierra Leone heightened risks to girls' safety, security, and wellbeing. A survey conducted by EAGER in June 2020 with 585 enrolled girls and 285 Mentors revealed the following impacts and additional risks since the start of the pandemic:



➤ **Actions Taken to Mitigate and Respond to Risks**

Creating Strong Safeguarding Mechanisms

All EAGER consortium partners have in place organisational policies, procedures, codes of conduct, and a Complaints Response Mechanism (CRM) with toll-free phone line, alongside specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for EAGER processes. All EAGER staff, volunteers, and associated personnel are required to review and sign off on these materials during on-boarding and prior to working with girls in person or by phone. Before being offered a position, Mentors and Facilitators must first be validated by girls registered to participate in EAGER to ensure they feel comfortable with these individuals from their community. All HR processes must be followed, and background checks completed to the same extent for anyone engaging with girls in person or by phone. Specific safeguarding risks are included in the project's Risk Register.

It is mandatory to report confirmed or suspected safeguarding concerns (when the perpetrator is a project staff/volunteer) using each organisation's Safeguarding Handling Framework. All protection concerns (when the perpetrator is not a project staff/volunteer) are supported by Mentors (and Life Skills Officers as needed) who are trained on the Psychological First Aid (PFA) approach and familiar with using the tailored Service Directory to link girls to accessible and safe services as needed and based on the girl's consent.

EAGER staff and volunteers are guided to take a survivor-centred approach that respects the survivor's decisions, right to privacy and confidentiality, and right to be treated with dignity and respect, and to ensure that the safety, welfare, and rights of the survivor come first before all other considerations.

The project raises awareness about the CRM phone line through community discussions, as well as an image-based poster that shows a girl borrowing a Mentor's phone to call the line and make a confidential report. This poster includes the specific CRM line of the organisation working in that community, and is displayed in central locations within the community as well as inside the EAGER Safe Space. Girls in the programme are informed about the CRM line and how it works, and are encouraged to call the number if they have any concern, worry, or complaint about anyone or anything related to the EAGER project.

Examining Attitudes and Beliefs

The attitudes and beliefs of EAGER staff and volunteers have the power to make or break the project. There is potential to do more harm if staff and volunteers use the resources and structures around EAGER to reinforce limiting and harmful social and gender norms that disempower adolescent girls. We all inherit our culture's social and gender norms, and may not be aware of how these are limiting or harmful to some segments of society. It takes courage to question or challenge these norms, and to be open to different possibilities. EAGER staff and volunteers must make the difference and be the role models who demonstrate different attitudes, beliefs, and practises that champion and enable girls. EAGER approaches attitudes and beliefs through several channels as outlined below.

Core Principles for Working with Adolescent Girls

These 10 Core Principles are frequently referred to and built into trainings, manuals, and guidelines. EAGER staff and volunteers are encouraged to examine their own attitudes and beliefs, understand the reasons for these principles, and understand that these are the foundation for all of the work in EAGER. These are adapted from the IRC's global resource, *Girl Shine*, and designed to draw team members into greater alignment with a culture and practise of respect for girls' rights.

Mentor and Facilitator Code of Conduct

All EAGER Mentors and Facilitators must sign a tailored Code of Conduct that outlines their responsibilities towards girls and the behaviours that are never acceptable. This Code of Conduct strictly prohibits any actions that may be abusive in any way or may place adolescent girls at risk of abuse. It includes attitudes and behaviours which are not acceptable for anyone representing EAGER, even when these are acceptable within the community as social norms – for example, a male staff or volunteer marrying or having sexual relations with any girl under 18, or a female staff encouraging or condoning the marriage of girls under 18. All volunteers are required to review, understand, sign, and abide by this Code of Conduct. It is incorporated into on-boarding, trainings, and coaching to remind staff of their ethical commitments towards adolescent girls. Alongside the zero tolerance policies, staff violating this code of conduct are released from their role and held accountable for their behaviours based on the type of violation.

Gender and GBV Trainings for Staff and Volunteers

While EAGER is an Education project and trainings must focus on building technical understanding and facilitation skills, EAGER project staff and volunteers are also trained on GBV basic concepts, gender vs. sex, social and gender norms, girls' rights, and gender equality. These trainings are incorporated into technical trainings alongside Safeguarding. They are designed to challenge harmful attitudes, beliefs, and practises related to adolescent girls, and to bring the team into greater alignment with the Core Principles and the gender transformative attitudes and practises needed to ensure that the project does not reinforce harmful gender norms.

All EAGER staff are also trained more intensely on gender, social norms, and use of power in preparation for leading the Community Dialogues. They are led to closely examine their own experiences related to the Gender Boxes, and what it means to challenge the common gender narratives and be gender-transformative. They learn how to identify common resistance patterns that they are likely to see in communities when they lead the Community Dialogues, and how they can respond. EAGER Life Skills Officers and Mentors receive additional training on empowerment as a process starting from within, where we lead girls on a journey to recognise their own inherent value and unique strengths. As they strengthen their self-esteem and self-respect, girls experience a greater sense of power to take positive action in their lives and to use their power with others to create change. As the all-female teams of Life Skills Officers and Mentors better understand and experience this process of empowerment in their own lives, they are better equipped to support girls on this journey.



Establishing Safe Spaces with Community Buy-in and Girls' Validation

Communities that accept the EAGER project are requested to identify Safe Spaces within the community that can be used for the duration of the project. These must be structurally safe and able to be locked up, located in a safe and relatively quiet location where girls will not be disturbed, and large enough for groups of up to 25 girls to meet in. Community leaders are informed that these are to be female-only Safe Spaces so that girls feel safe and at ease during their sessions, and that they as community leaders are responsible to ensure that the community understands this and the girls stay safe. Their responsibilities include ensuring that the spaces are not disturbed during sessions, and girls are not stopped or harassed whilst coming or leaving. If anyone harasses, bullies, or disturbs girls in the Safe Space, or coming to or from the Safe Space, volunteers may appeal to these leaders to intervene.

When a Safe Space is identified by the community, EAGER staff use the Safe Space Checklist to verify whether it meets the criteria for structural safety, surrounding area safety, accessibility, and comfort. The checklist considers accessibility for girls with disabilities, who are pregnant, or have to come with a baby. It also looks at the accessibility of toilet and handwashing facilities. As the project endeavoured to reach some of the most marginalised adolescent girls, many communities in which EAGER works are remote, difficult to reach, and in areas with relatively higher levels of poverty. In many cases, this means infrastructure is limited and existing structures may not be up to the standards specified in the EAGER Checklist. EAGER works with communities to make the most of what is available, and invested funds in rehabilitation to ensure that girls are meeting in a safe structure. Project teams have been resourceful to make the most of what is available and most easily accessible for the girls.

Once Safe Spaces are identified and confirmed, they must be validated by the girls enrolled in EAGER. This is done using a simple tool that asks about their feelings of safety, comfort, and access. Girls in every Safe Space are asked these same questions once every quarter to ensure they still feel safe there, or to note any changes so the team can respond. After Life Skills Officers lead this validation with girls, they conduct their own observations of the Safe Space against the same Checklist criteria to note any changes or safety concerns. After documenting their own observations, they also discuss the condition of the Safe Space with the Mentors. The Safe Space Quarterly Review tool is designed for accountability to the girls, and includes spaces for documenting the areas that need follow-up and for recording action plans. This helps to create a more systematic feedback loop to ensure that EAGER is protecting girls' physical and emotional wellbeing.

In some communities, Literacy and Numeracy sessions are held in local schools or other community facilities rather than in the Safe Space. EAGER had less control over the maintenance of these facilities, though the teams aimed to meet the minimum standards for safety, accessibility, and comfort. To fulfil our commitment to girls' physical and emotional safety in these spaces, a female Mentor is always present.

Anticipating and Mitigating Backlash

While the initial project design included sessions for boys to make them feel included and to mitigate backlash and violence against girls, Covid-19 disruptions led to implementation delays, programmatic reprioritisation, reallocation of funds, and overall budget cuts. These circumstances, alongside learnings about the limited capacity of volunteers and the need to repivot resources to address this, forced the team to cut this activity. However, this risk has informed the way other key materials have been designed. Girls' safety is the first consideration in all programme approaches and materials. For example, girls are encouraged to think about their own safety and practise assertive rather than aggressive communication to mitigate conflict escalation. Girls reflect together on the safe/unsafe places in their community and are encouraged to think proactively about practical actions they can take to stay safer. Girls are regularly reminded that they can speak with their Mentors in private anytime they want to speak with a Safe Person they can trust.

By engaging community leaders in identifying Safe Spaces and in the Community Dialogues, the project also seeks to cultivate more allies for girls at this higher level as a strategy to mitigate backlash from within the community. As community members see their leaders being more supportive of girls and taking action to more directly support and protect girls, the hope is that bullying and violence from boys and husbands/partners will not be ignored or tolerated.

Following the [Midline Evaluation](#) and learnings from the implementation of Cohort 1, as well as requests from programme staff working in the communities, the project decided to run two parallel Community Dialogues in each community during Cohort 2: one for community leaders and other influential persons, and one for the caregivers of EAGER girls. This enabled the project to engage twice as many members of the community in these discussions focused on the rights, specific barriers, and needs of adolescent girls. It also gave the project a way of engaging more systematically with girls' caregivers so that the impacts of these learnings would be felt more immediately by the EAGER girls through changes at the household level during the Learning Programme.



Creating a Buddy (*Padi*) System Between Girls

In their first Life Skills session, girls identify an EAGER *Padi* (Krio word for friend) who will be their supportive friend for the programme. This is someone who lives close to them so they can call each other and come together to sessions. The aim is for each girl to feel more strongly connected to at least one other girl in the group, and through this, to the group as a whole. Strengthening girls' social network is a protective factor not only for their psychosocial wellbeing and resilience but also for their physical safety.

Designing Life Skills with a GBV Lens

The EAGER Life Skills curriculum is adapted from the IRC's Girl Shine curriculum, which is a global tool designed to empower adolescent girls to safely transition to adulthood by equipping them with knowledge and skills to recognise GBV, understand the consequences, and know how to seek support services. Girls are encouraged to proactively plan for their safety to mitigate risks, and to stop and think before making decisions or taking action so they can best protect their health, safety, and wellbeing. Given the high levels of GBV in Sierra Leone, as well as the high levels of early pregnancy, maternal mortality, and harmful traditional practises, this lens is vital to ensure that girls are empowered with key knowledge, skills, practise, and support to make smart decisions and stay as safe and healthy as possible.

The EAGER curriculum starts with a focus on building Trust, then moves through many sessions covering Social and Emotional Learning, then transitions into rights-based sessions on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Safety, and finally Visioning for a positive future. All sessions hold girls' safety and wellbeing at front and centre.

The more sensitive sessions use storytelling and positive role modelling to teach girls about sex, pregnancy, consent, safe sex, family planning, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The Safety session covers sexual violence, emotional violence, early/forced marriage, exploitation and abuse, trafficking, safety planning, and responding to violence. An adolescent girl name Bintu is the lead character throughout all of the stories, and girls see how Bintu and her friends navigate and respond to risks that girls might face, including early/forced marriage, intimate partner violence, and sexual exploitation. They role model talking to trusted friends and adults, making safety plans, using assertive communication to say No when they felt unsafe, and seeking support and services in cases of GBV. Bintu assures her friends that they are never to blame for violence they have experienced.

While these are difficult topics, if girls cannot recognise violence, they may not seek physical or emotional support services and may suffer greater long-term consequences. When girls blame themselves for their experiences of violence, they may shut down or withdraw to a greater extent. By breaking the silence on these topics in a safe group setting, EAGER is building girls' knowledge about their rights and supportive social networks that allow them to reach out to Mentors and/or friends if they want to talk about something they experienced. This supports girls to navigate a safe and healthy transition into adulthood where they are protected from GBV and supported by peers and caregivers to claim their rights.

To support Mentors with low literacy levels and little or no facilitation experience to deliver quality sessions, the curriculum uses a straightforward format, simple language, bullet points, and repetition. All activities are embodied and none require girls to be literate. For example, singing is used for memory retention of key points such as the girls' Group Promise and the five critical times for handwashing.

Ongoing Capacity-building for Mentors

Mentors receive training on the Life Skills approach, sessions, and facilitation skills, as well as how to create a safe and inclusive space for girls to learn and grow in, how to check in with girls before and after sessions, and how to be available to girls who want to speak with them in private. Their training emphasises listening without judgment, good communication skills, and their responsibility for the overall wellbeing of girls in their group. They learn how to respond to difficult situations that might come up in sessions in ways that do not cause more harm to girls. They also learn to share facts from the Life Skills Mentor Guide, rather than their own opinions, and to seek support from their supervisor whenever they have questions or need additional guidance.

Life Skills Officers also draw groups of Mentors from different communities together into monthly Learning Clusters, where Mentors continue to build their skills and learn from each other. These focus on key themes where Mentors need to continue building their knowledge and skills, including how to be a Safe Person to girls, and how to support girls on their Empowerment Plans. Learning Clusters also create a space for Mentors to exchange challenges, solutions, and best practises with their peers.

Life Skills Officers also observe each Mentor's session twice a quarter and follow this up with a feedback and coaching session to empower the Mentor to continue strengthening her skills and knowledge to lead quality sessions for girls. These layers of continuing professional development for Mentors are designed to build their confidence to best support and empower girls, support programme quality, and ensure the project does not inadvertently do more harm.

Defining Covid-19 Safety Protocols for Safe and Learning Spaces

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic that hit Sierra Leone in March 2020, EAGER used Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) communications materials to raise awareness of the virus, how it spreads, and how to stay safe. These key points were built into EAGER communication materials adapted to the programme, with specific and clear safety protocols and guidance for staff and volunteers to follow while conducting household visits to keep in contact with girls and while implementing sessions.

The EAGER Covid-19 Safety Guide was printed and distributed to every Safe Space for Mentors and Facilitators to review and follow. The guidelines emphasise personal responsibility, how to clean the Safe and Learning Spaces, how to set up the Safe and Learning Spaces to support distancing, and what rules must be enforced for entering the spaces. Every girl was provided a set of cloth face masks, and handwashing stations with water and sufficient soap supplies were set up in front of every Safe Space so everyone could wash their hands before entering. The Safety Guide includes facts about Covid-19 and responses to Frequently Asked Questions and to rumours, so that all staff and volunteers are equipped with correct information and do not perpetuate harmful myths about the virus. These key facts were shared with girls to build their understanding of the virus at the beginning of the Life Skills sessions and again at the midpoint when they were learning about how to protect themselves and others from germs and communicable illnesses.

Creating a Keeping in Contact Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

In response to Covid-19 and interdistrict lockdowns in April 2020 that put the Learning Programme on hold for five months, EAGER created a Keeping in Contact SOP to guide ongoing communication and psychosocial support to girls. The SOP outlines key considerations and protocols to ensure EAGER staff and volunteers could continue to safely communicate with girls through in-person visits, unstructured 2-way communication by phone, structured 1-way communication by phone, and the CRM phoneline. This enabled EAGER teams to continue providing care and support to girls and offer PFA as needed. It allowed the teams to make sure girls had vital information about Covid-19 to stay safe, and to fill any gaps in understanding. Teams were also able to reassure girls that they were still part of EAGER and would be called when sessions restarted. The SOP can be reactivated or updated for new emergencies.

Creating Safe Distribution Guidelines

Before distributing any items to girls, the EAGER project developed Safe Distribution Guidelines highlighting potential risks and outlining strategies that will be taken to mitigate these risks. These were developed for and distributed to the key senior-level staff members within each consortium partner who oversee the distribution process from a management level, as they are required to make sure these strategies are followed. In addition, EAGER developed related guidelines and key talking points for the Officers who oversaw and were responsible for the actual distribution in the communities. These two layers of communication helped to ensure that key messages designed to mitigate risks and backlash were communicated within the communities, and critical guidelines for protecting and safeguarding girls were followed. Examples of distributions these were created for include reusable menstrual hygiene kits, Empowerment Packages, and the Conditional Cash Transfer at the end of the Learning Programme.



99% of girls reported feeling safe at their Safe/Learning Space.
- Midline Evaluation, 2021



99% reported that they felt comfortable speaking to their Mentors.
- Project monitoring, 2022



96% reported that they are using their life skills outside the Safe Space.
- Endline Evaluation, 2022



96% reported making one or more new friends they could trust in their group since joining EAGER.
- Midline Evaluation, 2021



93% reported discussing what they had learned in their Life Skills sessions with others.
- Project Monitoring, 2022



Resources

- [EAGER Core Principles and Actions for Working with Adolescent Girls](#)
- [EAGER Code of Conduct for Mentors and Facilitators](#)
- [EAGER Life Skills Mentor Guide](#)
- [EAGER Covid-19 Safety Guide](#)
- [EAGER GBV Posters](#)
- [EAGER Keeping in Contact SOP](#)



2. Support all Girls without Discrimination

> Protection Risks Identified

The EAGER Baseline assessment identified several subgroups of girls as being at greater risk than their peers, including girls with disabilities, girls who were married, girls who had children and/or were pregnant, and girls who were their own head of household. Key risks are outlined below:

Girls with disabilities



Potential barriers and risks include:

- Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours from other girls and community members, including neglect, isolation, and exclusion.
- Rights are not acknowledged, including their right to participate in the programme.
- Capabilities may be underestimated by their families, community, and volunteers.
- Strong stigma attached to particular disabilities such as epilepsy.
- Documented high levels of anxiety and depression amongst girls may limit their engagement in sessions and with other girls and lead to low learning impacts or dropout.
- Staff and volunteers may reinforce discriminatory norms, not respect their right to learn, and deliver poor quality instruction that fails to meet their needs.
- Global evidence confirms that girls with disabilities are 4-5 times more likely to experience sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse.*

* For further details, please see: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/side_events/Fact%20sheet%20%20VAWG%20with%20disabilities%20FINAL%20.pdf and www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6998:2012-childrendisabilities-more-likely-experience-violence&Itemid=135&lang=en

Girls who are their own head of household



9% of girls reported that they were their own head of household at Baseline

These girls carry full adult activities, and are more likely to work outside the home.

Potential barriers and risks include:

- Greater vulnerability to economic shocks as the primary earner for the household.
- Greater vulnerability to exploitation and may resort to risky activities for income.
- More likely to miss sessions, have lower learning outcomes, or drop out of the programme altogether due to socio-economic/work burdens and household/childcare chore burdens.

Girls who are married or living with a partner



44% of enrolled girls were married or living with a partner at Baseline, and more got married, particularly during Covid-19 disruptions.

According to the 2019 Sierra Leone Demographic Health Survey:



61% of ever-married women reported having experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence from their partner



50% had experienced violence within the previous 12 months



69% of women with only a primary education have experienced physical violence since age 15

Global evidence suggest young married girls are at greatest risk for intimate partner violence due to their age and lack of power in the household.

Potential barriers and risks include:

- Girls' husbands may block them from regular attendance or force their dropout due to household responsibilities or anger about the programme content.
- Topics relating to girls' empowerment and rights may lead to backlash and increased violence against girls in the household.
- Married girls are likely to experience early pregnancy and associated health risks.
- Staff and volunteers may reinforce discriminatory norms, not respect their right to learn, and deliver poor quality instruction that fails to meet their needs.

Girls who have children and/or are pregnant



58% of girls had at least one child and



7% were pregnant at Baseline

More pregnancies were noted during the Covid-19 disruptions.

Potential barriers and risks include:

- According to the WHO, pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19 years globally.
- May be more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and risk-taking as they seek to secure their children's wellbeing.
- Economic or household priorities and/or childcare responsibilities may keep girls from attending and lead to dropout or lower learning outcomes.
- Families may not support childcare, or children may be at risk when left with other caregivers.
- Staff and volunteers may reinforce discriminatory norms, not respect their right to learn, and deliver poor quality instruction that fails to meet their needs.

➤ Actions Taken to Mitigate and Respond to Risks

Enrolling Girls with Disabilities

Girls with mild to moderate disabilities were mapped and encouraged to enrol through house-to-house visits and awareness-raising about the project in communities. This includes girls with physical, hearing, visual, intellectual, developmental, communication/speech, and psychosocial disabilities. The project had limited technical or financial resources to accommodate girls with profound disabilities. Where these girls are identified during mapping or community engagement, they are linked to existing disability services wherever possible and with consent.

Creating Inclusive Safe Spaces

Safe Space criteria include considerations for girls with disabilities and funds for minor rehabilitation to improve safety and access as needed. As much as possible based on the existing structures within communities, EAGER teams select Safe Spaces that all girls will be able to access. Every Safe Space includes a mattress so that girls who have to bring their babies with them can lay the babies down. This offers girls more freedom to fully engage in the sessions. Each Safe Space also includes several cushions to support girls who are pregnant to sit more comfortably for the duration of the session. Once a quarter, girls in each EAGER Safe Space are asked a series of questions about their feelings related to physical safety, access, comfort, and emotional safety in the Safe Space. Through this simple and repeated validation exercise, staff can note any red flags that require further investigation and follow-up.



Establishing Access to Learning Fund

The project design includes an Access to Learning Fund, which supports adolescent girls with disabilities to enrol in and consistently attend the EAGER Learning Programme. The purpose of the fund is to remove specific barriers to attending and learning that girls with disabilities may face. It is designed to be used on a case-by-case basis, and is flexible to meet girls' needs within the guidelines provided. The fund is allocated equally across districts so it can be used as specific needs are identified by project staff and volunteers in the communities. Possibilities include support for mobility/physical impairment (cane, crutches, wheelchair, doctor visits, etc.); support for vision (glasses, large-print materials, doctor visits, etc.); support for hearing (basic hearing aid, doctor visits, etc.); support for psychosocial disabilities (counselling, doctor visits, etc.); and support for physical injuries sustained during childbirth (fistula, etc.). These criteria were updated during the pilot phase of the project to be able to address not only long-term disabilities, but also short-term disabilities due to acute injuries in cases where these are likely to prevent girls from attending sessions for several weeks – for example, broken bones restricting mobility or eye injuries.

Creating a Disability Strategy

EAGER's Disabilities SOP outlines the core areas where the project aimed to standardise approaches for inclusive programming for girls with disabilities across the consortium and strengthen the inclusion and visibility of girls with disabilities across all aspects of the project. It aimed to guide how the project was engaging, empowering, and monitoring girls with disabilities to the best of our capacity within the project design and resources available.



The SOP clarifies definitions, reflects on the local context and stereotypes to strengthen awareness, and outlines steps for proactively enrolling girls with disabilities into the programme. It provides guidance on supporting girls with disabilities within a low-resource context where specialised services are not generally available, and advises on inclusive facilitation practises for staff and volunteers who have not had specialist training. It also outlines inclusive monitoring practises and processes for girls with disabilities. This content was developed based on a blend of global best practises and resources, programme learning from the ground up, and staff inputs during trainings and workshops. The content was then incorporated into subsequent trainings and learning clusters with staff and volunteers.

Tailored Trainings for Staff and Volunteers

The EAGER project recognises that disability is not simply an impairment, but also the social constructs and beliefs about the impairment that create barriers to opportunities. To protect the rights of girls with disabilities to learn and engage, EAGER worked to transform harmful attitudes that enable discrimination and to strengthen awareness on inclusive practises. This was incorporated into technical trainings and reinforced through ongoing continuing professional development. Staff and volunteers were encouraged to examine their own attitudes and beliefs about girls with disabilities, and guided towards a rights-based approach that demands respect and non-discrimination towards all girls.

Inclusion of all girls is a strong theme that runs across all trainings and coaching. This includes the girls noted above (girls with disabilities, married, with babies, known to be heads of households) as well as girls who are especially shy and quiet, younger than the others, and who are not actively participating in sessions.



Both Mentors and Facilitators learn that they are responsible for welcoming, valuing, and including all girls in the group and are encouraged to think practically about inclusive practises based on the specific needs of girls. Strong emphasis is placed on ensuring that Mentors and Facilitators do everything they can to proactively engage girls with babies in the sessions, and to not discriminate against them. During trainings, they exchange ideas and best practises for managing this. During session observations, Officers carefully monitor the use of inclusive practises and then work to strengthen best practises through specific feedback and coaching.

For Mentors, frequent reminders to use inclusive practises are built directly into the Life Skills Mentor Guide because many do not have any facilitation experience prior to EAGER. Mentor training and coaching strongly emphasises creating a safe emotional space for all girls by being kind, supportive, and accessible to all girls both whilst facilitating and outside of sessions.

Creating Responsive Life Skills Content

In response to findings about high levels of affective (mood) disorders amongst EAGER girls, the Life Skills curriculum has a strong focus on social and emotional learning and particular emphasis on skills to build resilience and agency. Sessions acknowledge and normalise difficult emotions and guide girls to recognise, safely express, and manage difficult emotions. By adding a storytelling component to each session, girls have a central character, Bintu, to identify with and follow through the sessions. Girls see Bintu and her friends experience difficult emotions and work through them. The girls are encouraged to value each other, be a good friend, and create a safe space for each other.

The Life Skills curriculum also includes a session on Different Abilities to encourage girls to value and treat each other without discrimination regardless of their abilities. This session seeks to foster respect for the rights of girls with disabilities, as well as empathy and friendship. The Life Skills and BLN curricula include a character named Titi who is a close friend of Bintu. Titi uses crutches, and is teased and targeted for abuse. She gives girls a glimpse into her challenges, and is a role model for assertive communication, good friendship, and successful entrepreneurship as she has her own microbusiness.

A session on early/forced marriage emphasises the risks of marrying under 18, whilst not judging girls who are already married. It aims to prevent additional girls getting married early by telling them about their rights and actions they can consider if they are being pushed to marry. Girls learn about how pregnancy happens and the risks of early pregnancy. As protective mechanisms, girls learn about their right to give consent for sex, about Safe Sex, about various modern contraceptives that are locally available, about STIs, and about the benefits of delaying sexual activity. Girls are encouraged to think critically about these decisions, and to always seek medical care for pregnancy and delivery, contraception, STIs, and in cases of sexual violence.

Adjusted Time Demands for Learning Programme

EAGER learning sessions were scheduled in each community by the girls, Mentors, and Facilitators to meet the needs and availability of the girls. Initially, sessions were to be held 4 days a week – Literacy and Numeracy on 3 days, and Life Skills on 1 day.

Recognising that many girls carry chore burdens in their household, whether married or unmarried, and that girls who are their own head of household may have even less time than others, the project adapted its Learning Programme to minimise the number of hours of attendance required each week whilst still covering key content and not compromising on core learning outcomes. Girls were asked to attend 3 days a week – 2 days for Literacy and Numeracy, and 1 day for Life Skills. These expectations were clearly communicated during the enrolment process so that all girls knew what they were committing to from the start. Caregivers and partners were informed of the same expectations to ensure their support for the girls' regular attendance for the duration of the Learning Programme.

The entire EAGER Learning Programme was shortened from 11 to 8 months to increase girls' ability to commit to the entire programme and complete it alongside their other responsibilities.

Starting Mother/Female Caregiver Groups

In response to the high number of girls with children and the challenges they face securing childcare, the project started informal Mother/Female Caregiver Groups that met on a periodic and as-needed basis during the Cohort 1 Learning Programme. Through these groups, the project communicated vital information about the programme and held these female caregivers more accountable to the pledge they made during enrolment to support girls to attend learning sessions by helping with childcare and reducing household chores on sessions days. Female caregivers played a key role in ensuring attendance and mitigating the risk of girls dropping out.

Based on the positive outcomes from this engagement, the project invited both female and male caregivers of EAGER girls to form their own group for the Community Dialogues. Leading them through the seven dialogues enabled more strategic engagement with the caregivers and enabled their direct participation in these discussions about the challenges girls face. It also enabled them to engage in action planning for girls in response to the concerns that girls had shared through the Listening Sessions that were held with them prior to the Dialogues (see Section 4 of this Strategy for more details).

Creating Inclusive Radio Episodes

The EAGER radio programme, *Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap*, includes dedicated episodes about girls with disabilities and invites girls with disabilities to participate in many episodes through interviews and other pieces in the magazine-format radio episodes. Many sessions include interviews with girls who have babies, who are married, and girls who are heading their own households. The overarching approach for all episodes is giving girls a voice and showing the audience what the world looks like through the eyes of girls – both the challenges and the visions – and demonstrates how valuing, listening to, and supporting girls to make decisions and take action in their lives enables them to create positive changes for themselves and those around them (find out more in the EAGER Social and Behaviour Change Communication Strategy, see link under Resources at the end of this chapter).

Inclusive Financial Empowerment

As part of a holistic approach to empowerment, the project guides every girl in EAGER to create her own Empowerment Plan that brings together what she has learned in her Literacy and Numeracy, Financial Literacy, and Life Skills sessions. With support from her Mentor and Facilitator, every girl sets her own Learning, Household, Community, and Financial Goal, and thinks about the steps she needs to take to reach her goals. Once her Empowerment Plan is completed and signed, every girl receives an equal amount of cash as a conditional cash grant to use toward her Financial Goal. This does not need to be a business idea – the cash can be put toward any goal that she feels will empower her to bring positive changes in her life. This approach ensures that every girl can use her cash for her own priorities, and that no girl is excluded. It recognises that girls face individual protection risks based on their different life circumstances, and ensures that no girl is pushed into business or any other activity that will put her at risk (find out more in the EAGER Transition Strategy, see link under Resources at the end of this chapter).



93% of Mentors and Facilitators demonstrated inclusive teaching practises.
- Project monitoring, 2022



92% of girls who confirmed having girls with disabilities in their group reported that their Mentor made sure that girls with disabilities felt safe and comfortable to participate.
- Project Monitoring, 2022



94% of girls agreed "a lot" that their Facilitators made them feel welcome.
- Midline Evaluation, 2021



99% of girls reported that Mentors and Facilitators encouraged all girls to actively participate in sessions.
- Endline Evaluation, 2022



Resources

- [EAGER Access to Learning Fund](#)
- [Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap](#) and [Listening Guide](#)
- [Kotoku Baray](#) and [Listening Guide](#)
- [EAGER Empowerment Plan](#)
- [EAGER Girls Empowerment Plan Mentor Guide](#)
- [EAGER Numeracy and Financial Literacy Facilitators Guide](#)
- [EAGER Safe Space Quarterly Review Tool](#)
- [EAGER SBCC Strategy](#)
- [EAGER Disability SOP](#)



3. Support Recovery from Physical and Psychological Harm


> Protection Risks Identified


Global evidence tells us that by the onset of puberty, many girls experience the following risks:⁵

- Increased social isolation
- Limited knowledge about sexual health, needs, maturation, and menstruation
- Rigid, confining expectations of roles and opportunities because of sex and age
- Disproportionate burden of household work, caregiving
- Withdrawal from, and lack of safety in, public spaces
- School dropout and limited life and/or vocational skills
- Gender-based violence, including sexual violence
- Harmful traditional practises such as early/forced marriage
- Limited opportunities to earn and save income, migration for work


The EAGER risk matrix, Baseline Assessment, and local statistics highlight the following risks:

- High levels of GBV documented in Sierra Leone, according to the 2019 Demographic Health Survey:


 **61%** of ever-married women reported having experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence from their partner

 **61%** of females ages 15-49 have experienced physical violence by anyone since age 15

This is higher in certain districts where EAGER operates:

 **81%** in Port Loko

 **76%** in Kambia

 **75%** in Western Area Urban

- **High levels of sexual violence:** Rainbo Initiative, a network of one-stop centres for GBV survivors, reports that in 2020, they provided services to 3,584 survivors (3,339 for cases of sexual assault, 209 for cases of physical assault).

5 Factors Specific to Girls by Age 12 (Bruce, J. 2010).

- **Physical consequences of sexual violence:** Rainbo Initiative reports that in 2019 and 2020, 16% of reporting survivors became pregnant and 75-80% contracted STIs as a result of the assault.
- **Adolescent girl survivors may be unable to access any services due to lack of information, distance, and lack of money for transport and services.** GBV response services in Sierra Leone are few and far between, and difficult to reach from many of the rural, remote communities in which EAGER is working.
- **Poor quality of services:** If girls can reach services, they may experience poor quality care, stigma and discrimination, lack of respect for their rights and dignity, and potential retraumatisation. Very few agencies provide GBV case management services, medical services may lack basic resources needed for GBV cases, protection services may not keep confidentiality, and there is extremely limited access to mental health care and psychosocial support.
- **Disclosures of violence:** As girls learn about GBV in Life Skills sessions, some may want to share their experiences of violence and will require care and support.
- **Risk of retraumatising girls who have experienced violence through discussing these topics:** The EAGER Baseline found that girls had high levels of anxiety and depression, hostile attribution bias, and moderate levels of emotion dysregulation. While there is no evidence directly linking these findings to experiences of violence, overall high rates of GBV across the country suggest possible linkages.
- **Chronic stress amongst girls may have negative impacts in girls' health, wellbeing, and engagement in the programme:** In June 2020 as Covid-19 left its imprint in Sierra Leone, EAGER surveyed 585 enrolled girls across 10 districts. Of these girls, 82% said they had experienced an increase in stress and anxiety since the pandemic started.

➤ Actions Taken to Mitigate and Respond to Risks

As an Education project, it was beyond the scope and capacity of EAGER to provide quality response services for GBV survivors. To try to do so would risk doing further harm because:

- Mentors are not trained or equipped to provide quality case management services;
- The project does not have the resources needed to hire case managers or to provide Mentors with the intensive training and ongoing supervision required to ensure quality;
- Mentors have many other responsibilities and do not have sufficient time to provide quality case management and follow-up;
- Safe Spaces do not have the minimum requirements for keeping confidential case files; and
- EAGER is not a GBV response service on the referral pathway and does not have the formal mechanisms for safely passing on details to other service providers.

However, the project took several key steps to support girls to recover from physical and psychological harm as described below.

Service Mapping and Directories

Early in the project, the EAGER consortium conducted a service mapping exercise across 10 districts to identify service providers that could offer Health, Protection, Legal/Justice, and Case Management and/or Psychosocial Care for GBV survivors. After collecting key details about each service – including contact persons and numbers, location, operational hours, and types of services provided – these services were organised by Chiefdom and turned into informative summary sheets for easy reference. Then they were further sorted according to distance from each community, so that each team of Mentors could easily inform girls about the nearest services according to their specific location.

Where appropriate based on location, these directories include the five Rainbo Centres. These are the only one-stop GBV response services that offer comprehensive and free medical and psychosocial support services for survivors. They also include the Aberdeen Women's Centre in Freetown, which offers the best quality of care for injuries caused by rape or sustained during childbirth.

During Cohort 2, EAGER teams in each district used the existing information to follow up with service providers and input the updated service and contact details into a database. They also collected the same information for new areas of implementation. This database enabled the project to review the data more efficiently and to print the list of services by Chiefdom for each Mentor. These printed directories were delivered across the 10 districts for the Mentors' reference, and left with them after the close of the project so that the girls and the rest of the community would continue to have access to this information.



Incorporating Psychological First Aid

In the absence of GBV case management services, the EAGER project trains Mentors on the Psychological First Aid (PFA) approach of Look, Listen, and Link. This is framed as being a Safe Person for girls, and emphasises non-judgment, non-blaming, and using healing statements. This complements other Mentor trainings and guidance in the Life Skills curriculum, which all emphasise the guiding principles of safety, respect, confidentiality, and non-discrimination, alongside kindness, empathy, active listening, and positive body language. By encouraging reflection on what it means to be a Safe Person, Mentors are encouraged to be more aware of their own attitudes, beliefs, and responses. They have a critical role in whether girls feel safe enough to approach them for support, and whether a girl feels supported or blamed, shamed, judged, or further traumatised by her experience.

Establishing a GBV Fund

The project design includes a GBV Fund, which supports adolescent girl survivors of GBV to access response services. The purpose of the fund is to remove key barriers girls may face in seeking response services, including transport costs, medical fees, accommodation fees, and food while receiving services. The GBV Fund is designed to be responsive to individual cases, and is flexible to meet girls' needs within the guidelines provided for cases including sexual violence, physical violence, emotional violence, forced marriage, denial of basic resources or services, and emergency support for a safe delivery. Services can include Health, Legal, Protection, Psychosocial Support, Case Management, or Shelter. The fund was allocated equally across districts so it could be used to respond as cases were reported. To enable rapid response, particularly in cases of sexual violence, a small portion of the fund was kept at the community level to be used for transport costs, and a larger portion was kept at the district level to be used for all other services provided to the survivor. A trusted adult was encouraged to accompany the girl, with these costs also covered by the fund.

To enable a rapid provision of services once a girl arrives at the services, EAGER Consortium partners created Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with the key service providers in their areas. This MoU pledges that whatever costs are incurred for the treatment of the survivor, the agency will pay back the service provider within a short time period. This is to ensure that the girl receives immediate services rather than having to wait for an EAGER staff member to arrive. Before departing her community, Mentors give the girl survivor a letter to carry with her that verifies her name and participation in the EAGER project. Clear guidelines are provided on the use and management of these funds. A simple log is kept by Mentors to track the amount given and when, but contains no other identifying information.

Incorporating Stress Management Practises

In June 2020 as Covid-19 left its imprint in Sierra Leone, EAGER surveyed 585 enrolled girls across 10 districts. Of these girls, 82% said they had experienced an increase in stress and anxiety since the pandemic. In response, EAGER developed a set of eight simple stress management practises that Mentors could use to teach girls how to release stress. There were built into all of the Life Skills sessions during Covid-19. In Cohort 2, they were integrated into the Life Skills curriculum beginning in Session 17 as girls start more sensitive sessions relating the sexual and reproductive health, and continue through the end of the Life Skills curriculum.

Girls were invited to practise together at the very beginning of the session before moving into the topic. Mentors were trained on the stress management practises and encouraged to practise them at home and with each other so they could directly experience how they work.

To support Mentors who did not feel confident to translate and lead the stress management practises for girls, the project worked with consortium partner BBC Media Action to translate the eight practises into Krio, which is widely spoken as a lingua franca across the districts (though not everywhere). The Krio versions were then audio recorded in the BBC Media Action studio and distributed to Mentors on USB sticks. Every community has a Bluetooth speaker that can be used for the Literacy and Numeracy and Life Skills sessions, and Mentors can play the stress management practises directly for girls using this speaker.



99% of girls reported having someone they felt comfortable talking to if they felt stressed or needed support, and Mentors were named most frequently as a source of support.

- Project Monitoring, 2022



88% of Mentors confirmed that at least one girl had come to them in private for support.

- Project Monitoring, 2022



99% of girls and **99%** of Mentors reported that the stress management practises were either very or a little helpful to girls, citing improvements in emotional wellbeing from using them in times of stress or anger.

- Project Monitoring, 2022



Resources

- [EAGER Service Tree Template](#)
- [EAGER Service Directory Example](#)
- [EAGER Psychological First Aid Orientation](#)
- [EAGER PFA 1-pager](#)
- [EAGER GBV Fund Template](#)
- [EAGER Stress Management Practises](#)



4. Strengthen Community Responsibility for Girls' Safety

> Protection Risks Identified

- Lack of support from the community for girls' participation, education, safety, or empowerment.
- Lack of support from caregivers or husbands/partners for girls' participation and consistent attendance in sessions.



At baseline, **66%** of girls reported that they are subject to the decisions of other people in their lives and cannot choose their own education path.



At Baseline, only **3.7%** of girls demonstrated awareness of the gender norms that underpin and control their lives, suggesting that gender norms are strongly internalised and girls are likely to limit themselves to the familiar patterns of behaviours and activities they see around them.

- Husbands/partners not allowing girls to make decisions or increase their education.
- Baseline interviews with men and especially male partners emphasised the value of education as a means of increasing household income, but did not approve of changes that would alter traditional gender norms.
- Community acceptance of girls' autonomy and decision-making power does keep up with girls' increasing levels of confidence in their own capacity and rights. Prevailing gender norms and roles continue to create barriers to girls making their own decisions.

> Actions Taken to Mitigate and Respond to Risks

Engaging Communities in Dialogues

The EAGER project created seven Community Dialogues to engage community leaders in examining and better understanding the challenges that adolescent girls face in their community, and taking action to address these specific challenges in meaningful ways that best support girls. These align with one of the 10 Core Principles: *The community is responsible for girls' safety and must work together to keep girls safe from violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation.*

The Community Dialogues use posters, activities, stories, and role plays to shine a spotlight on the problems girls are facing, spark insight, and encourage critical thinking and discussion that can lead to positive change for girls. The dialogues are built around seven themes, each ending with a call to action:

1. **Girls' Opportunities:** What changes can we make now so girls have equal opportunities?
2. **Girls' Barriers:** What changes can we make now to remove the barriers girls are facing?
3. **Girls' Education:** What changes can we make now so girls can access education?
4. **Early Marriage:** What changes can we make now to stop early and forced marriage?
5. **Early Pregnancy:** What changes can we make now to protect girls from early pregnancy?
6. **Violence Against Girls at Home:** What changes can we make now to stop violence against girls inside the home?
7. **Violence Against Girls in the Community:** What changes can we make now to stop violence against girls in the community?

Before starting the dialogues, girls are engaged in a Listening Session where they highlight their key challenges, needs, and aspirations and what points they want to be shared with community leaders during these dialogues. These points are incorporated into each dialogue so that community leaders are accountable to the needs of girls during their action planning.

For the first round of Community Dialogues in each community, consortium partners identify 25-30 community leaders and influential persons who are regularly involved in meetings and decision-making for the community. These are the ones with power at the highest levels of the community to drive changes and influence others. Where one round of Community Dialogues was already conducted, EAGER teams engaged a second group of participants for a second round of dialogues – this time inviting more older adolescent boys, male partners, and other influential persons to participate.



Engaging Caregivers in Community Dialogues

Seeing the value of directly engaging with Mothers/Female Caregivers during Cohort 1 to support girls' attendance in sessions, the project decided to hold a separate Community Dialogue with girls' female and male caregivers during Cohort 2. By building caregivers' understanding of the challenges and aspirations of their adolescent girls, the project aims to encourage greater support for girls within the household. This has potential to motivate caregivers to support girls' consistent attendance in EAGER sessions, and to ensure that caregivers respect and support girls' autonomy to choose their Financial Goal for their transition. When girls receive their conditional cash transfer at the end of the learning sessions, they must be free to use this for their Financial Goal without any pressure from their caregivers.

Engaging Communities through Radio

The EAGER weekly radio programme created and produced by BBC Media Action, *Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap*, presents issues that are relevant to girls through the eyes of girls and the voices of girls, and showcases girls' agency through the episodes. Many episodes are produced with a girl co-presenter who conducts some of the interviews and sits in the studio with the main presenter, and many girls are interviewed from different parts of the country and different walks of life and with different life experiences. The programme is designed to inspire and empower girls as they hear and reflect on the voices of many girls like them from across the country who have overcome challenges, accomplished goals, and improved their lives in a wide variety of ways.

The primary audience, however, is the community around these girls – the parents/caregivers/guardians of girls, husbands/partners of girls, boys and young men in the community, as well as others in the community who interact with girls. The episodes approach harmful attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions about girls by inviting listeners to see the world through the stories and experiences of girls and demonstrating what girls are capable of doing and achieving when the people and community around them are supportive. This includes things like creating a safer environment for girls, engaging girls in decision-making, taking action to remove barriers that girls face in their daily lives, and expanding opportunities for girls so they can make their own choices.

Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap was broadcast on more than 60 partner stations around the country. In addition, BBC Media Action provided mentoring to teams in 18 local stations – training and supporting them to produce their own local versions of the factual show, which was broadcast on their stations immediately after the national programme. These local shows link the issue explored in the national programme with the surrounding community, giving local examples and case studies, pointing to local solutions and sparking local discussion. To ensure quality, safeguarding, and alignment with a gender transformative lens, mentees in each station produce this content with close training, support, and supervision from their mentors. A second round of broadcasting started at the end of Cohort 2 to continue sharing this important content.

To explore sensitive topics without putting girls at risk or inadvertently encouraging disclosures of personal stories of violence, BBC Media Action also developed a radio drama series called *Kotoku Baray* to complement the factual show. These dramas explore relationships, consent, safe sex, family planning, early and forced marriage, and intimate partner violence through fictional characters. As with the factual show, the dramas are girl-led, following central characters ages 13-17 and exploring issues through their eyes and experiences.

Following from episode to episode, listeners can follow the choices these girls make, and see the consequences. They also hear the perspective of secondary characters – parents/caregivers/guardians, husbands/partners, and others who influence the girls' lives.

Each episode of the drama points to a clear talking point; for example, when and how a caregiver might talk to adolescent girls and boys about relationships and sex. These talking points were used to guide community-based discussions, which were prerecorded and broadcast immediately after the drama. The 15-minute drama and 15-minute discussion show are designed to work together to mobilise behaviour change that protects and supports adolescent girls.

BBC Media Action also used social media to amplify and expand the impact of these messages by engaging more community members, especially young men and women with access to these technologies.



98% of girls reported feeling safe and supported to make decisions about their education.
- Project Monitoring, 2021



95% of girls reported feeling safe and supported to make decisions about their life.
- Project Monitoring, 2021



97.4% of girls reported feeling that they are listened to within their home.
- Endline Evaluation, 2022



Approximately 1.1 million (**21%** of the 15+ population) has listened to at least every other episode of the EAGER radio programmes, defined as regularly reached.
- BBC Media Action Endline Evaluation, 2022



98% of respondents who were regularly reached by *Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap* agreed that the programme helped them better understand girls' learning, skills development, and education opportunities.
- BBC Media Action Endline Evaluation, 2022



74% of those regularly reached strongly agreed that girls and boys should have the same right to an education.
- BBC Media Action Endline Evaluation, 2022



54% of those regularly reached reported having taken an action in support of girls as a result of listening to the EAGER radio programmes. Of these, **61%** reported that they had sent a daughter/girl to school, and **48%** that they send a daughter/girl back to school after having a child.
- BBC Media Action Endline Evaluation, 2022



Resources

- [EAGER Community Dialogues](#)
- [Kotoku Baray](#) and [Listening Guide](#)
- [EAGER SBCC Endline Report and Brief](#)
- [EAGER SBCC Strategy](#)



Conclusion

The EAGER project aims to engage some of the most marginalised and vulnerable adolescent girls in Sierra Leone and is designed to protect their rights, safety, dignity, and wellbeing. The multiple approaches and actions outlined above have been developed through a highly responsive process of learning and adaptations since the early stages of the project. The project made many direct adaptations in response to the Baseline findings as well as the first volunteer assessments, which highlighted that their capacity was lower than anticipated. This included rewriting the Life Skills curriculum, redesigning all training and coaching materials, and starting monthly Mentor Learning Clusters. However, this process of learning and adaptation did not stop there. It has continued throughout the life of the project to its closure.

This has been a core strength of the project, and has enabled teams to pivot and strengthen different areas to ensure that we as a project are doing everything within our power and resources to protect and empower girls. As specific learnings were gleaned through formal assessments, field monitoring visits, trainings, regular conversations with programme teams all the way down to Mentors and Facilitators, and conversations with many girls in the Safe Spaces, the project used these feedback loops to design new materials and approaches in response.

Whilst there was a framework for protection from the beginning of the project, the ability to respond to these learnings and roll out new adaptations, resources, and tools down the various steps to reach the Mentors and ultimately benefit the girls, has filled in this Protection Strategy to ensure that it is truly responsive to the needs and vulnerabilities of the girls. This is a reflection on strong teamwork across the EAGER consortium, and a coherent sense of motivation across the team to put girls' rights, safety, dignity, and wellbeing at the centre of everything we do.



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