2022-2024 GEP Evaluation in Bangladesh

Endline Report

Moulvibazar

Dhiraj Anand[1], Global Research, Monitoring and Evaluation

[1] Dhiraj.anand@roomtoread.org

Executive Summary

Across Bangladesh, while progress is being made in schooling outcomes, deep gender disparities continue to affect the education system. Educational attainment and enrollment levels show significant imbalances based on gender. These gaps only widen as children enter adolescence, due to cultural norms and societal influences. The issue grows yet more defined across socio-economic lines, with children in rural and poorer contexts having yet greater differences in school engagement between genders.

Room to Read's Girls' Education Program (GEP) is designed to support adolescent girls as they are entering this vulnerable stage of life, focusing on building life skills, providing mentoring, ensuring material support, and engaging the broader community in prioritizing girls' success. GEP involves a robust life skills curriculum centered on developing participants' competencies in skills like communication, gender knowledge, and emotional resilience. Mentors are sourced from within girls' communities to personally encourage and support participants' development and engagement. Material barriers like school fees are reduced or removed as needed, and parents, teachers and school systems are engaged as collaborative partners in ensuring girls' success.

Room to Read directly implements GEP in Bangladesh, where it has been active since 2009. As of 2023, over 5,869 girls in Bangladesh had received support via GEP in all four core components of life skills education, individual/group mentoring, material support and group engagement. Periodic assessments of GEP's impact in countries of implementation are critical in ensuring that the program is effective, and that participants are enjoying their engagement with the program and find it valuable and relevant.

To that end, the present study was designed to measure GEP's impact in terms of the extent to which it supports participants in life skills development, the extent to which it supports participants in building gender knowledge and attitudes, and the extent to which it supports participants to develop healthy and meaningful life aspirations. Additionally, research methods involved a survey of participants' experience of the program, including an examination of their perspectives of the difficulty of subject matter, the relevance of the subject matter, and the degree to which they feel they improved in their understanding of the GEP-administered curriculum areas.

This study was conducted in the district of Moulvibazar, and employed a repeated cross-sectional design, comparing non-GEP participants with GEP participants who were three years into their GEP curriculum. This design was chosen as a means of reducing the influence of grade- and age-related developmental differences. Data was collected at baseline in 2022 from a cohort of female students at the end of grade 8 who had no exposure to the GEP curriculum, and then again in 2024, at end of grade 8 from girls who had experienced 3 years of GEP.

Results show that GEP participants show significant gains in domains of Emotional Resilience, Collaboration, and Gender Knowledge and Attitudes, when compared with peers

who received no GEP programming. Additionally, GEP participants have higher educational aspirations, broader occupational aspirations, and want to marry later in life. Interrelatedness was found between development of life skills, gender knowledge and attitudes, and changes in aspiration. Finally, GEP participants appreciated and learned on most GEP content areas – the experience of students is highly important in considering program continuation and adjustments.

Ultimately, Bangladeshi GEP participants do experience many of the benefits that the program is designed to engender. The study also offered some takeaways regarding opportunities for adjustments to the GEP curriculum, including adjusting dosing for content strands that participants identified as particularly challenging, such as gender-based violence.

The repeated cross-sectional design does warrant some prudence regarding the interpretation of results in the absence of a control group or randomly assigned groups. This limitation, along with the geographically specific sourcing of the data, mean that causal conclusions cannot be entirely drawn, and they cannot necessarily be attributed across the country of Bangladesh.

Considering these constraints, the study still shows promising results in terms of the impact of the Girls' Education Program, and offers insights into areas of adjustment, improvement and further contextualization, as well as suggesting areas of further research.

Introduction

Despite substantial policy efforts over past decades, schooling outcomes in Bangladesh continue to reflect deep disparities. While the government has prioritized education and made considerable gains in enrollment, challenges remain, particularly in sustaining students through secondary levels. As per World Bank data from 2023, the overall secondary school enrollment rate is 71%, and for girls, it has increased to 77%[2]. The government has also implemented policies to reduce gender disparities. For example, the Female Secondary School Assistance Project (FSSAP) in the 1990s improved girls' enrollment through stipends and tuition waivers. More recently, the Secondary Education Development Program (2018–2022) introduced the Adolescent Girls' Program, which focused on menstrual hygiene, sanitation, and cash incentives to support girls' retention in schools. These efforts have contributed to higher enrollment among girls. However, despite progress in enrollment, completion rates still drop significantly at higher levels today. Only 65% of all children complete lower secondary and just 29% complete upper secondary education. The decline is more severe among children from poor and rural households. For instance, in the Sylhet region, only 22% complete upper secondary education (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2020)[3]. The gap only widens when comparing across wealth levels: across Bangladesh, 50% of the richest children complete upper secondary, while only 12% of the poorest do[3].

For adolescent girls, the challenges are even more layered. While girls have higher completion rates than boys at the primary and lower secondary levels, this trend reverses for completion of upper secondary levels, with boys completing at 50% higher rates. Regional differences are not as sharp as the socio-economic ones but remain consistent, with divisions like Mymensingh, Sylhet, and Chattogram showing the lowest completion rates across all levels (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2020). This reversal reflects gender-specific barriers that arise as children age, such as early marriage, domestic work, and restrictions on mobility. Social norms often do not support education for girls beyond a basic level. Parents may see more value in early marriage than in continued schooling, and concerns around modesty, reputation, and gender roles limit girls' ability to complete their education. As per another UNICEF report, 51% of young women in Bangladesh were married before the age of 18 (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2020)[4]. While data for Moulvibazar is limited, the Sylhet division, which includes Moulvibazar, has historically shown a lower rate of child marriage than other parts of the country; still, one in three girls there is likely to be married before

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[2] World Bank. (n.d.). *School enrollment, secondary (% gross) – Bangladesh*. The World Bank. Retrieved May 22, 2025, from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.SEC.ENRR?locations=BD

[3] UNICEF Bangladesh. (2020). *Bangladesh education fact sheets 2020: Analysis for learning and equity using Bangladesh MICS 2019. Retrieved May 22, 2025, from https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Bangladesh-Education-Fact-Sheets_V7.pdf*

[4] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2020). *Ending child marriage: A profile of progress in Bangladesh*. UNICEF Bangladesh. Retrieved May 22, 2025, from https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/4526/file/Bangladesh%20Child%20Marriage%20report%202020.pdf.pdf

18[5]. Early marriage often results in school dropouts and early pregnancy, cutting short a girl's chance of continuing education.

Room to Read Girl's Education and Gender Equality Program (GEP)

Room to Read's Girls' Education and Gender Equality Program (GEP) supports adolescent girls to complete secondary education and build essential life skills. The standard version of this program follows a seven-year model, supporting adolescent girls from lower secondary through the end of upper secondary school. The program integrates four core components (life skills education, individual and/or group-based mentoring, community support, and targeted material support) that collectively support girls and their communities throughout secondary education.

The life skills curriculum is delivered through structured sessions that help girls develop competencies such as leadership, communication, emotional resilience, financial literacy, and gender knowledge. This curriculum is regularly updated to stay relevant to the realities of girls' lives, including topics like climate justice, mental well-being, and building inclusive communities. The mentoring component is delivered by trained female social mobilizers (SMs) who work closely with each girl through individual and group sessions. They serve as trusted guides, helping girls navigate academic, social, and emotional challenges throughout adolescence. The third component involves active engagement with families and communities through workshops and events to address harmful social norms and build collective ownership for girls' education. The fourth component involves provision of material resources, ensuring that material barriers, such as the cost of uniforms, transport, exam fees, or school supplies, do not become a reason for girls to drop out.

GEP Program in Bangladesh

Room to Read began implementing GEP in Bangladesh in 2009, starting in the Sirajganj district with an initial cohort of 234 girls. Since then, the program has expanded to additional districts, including Dhaka, Natore, Cox's Bazar, and most recently, Moulvibazar in 2022. By 2023, GEP was directly supporting at least 5,869 girls across these regions.

In Bangladesh, Room to Read oversees the direct implementation of the program. SMs facilitate life skills sessions for girls in grades 6 to 12 and provide mentoring support through both individual and group sessions, based on the needs of each girl. On average, each SM supports 61 girls. Together with staff from the Room to Read Bangladesh Country Office (BDCO), SMs also identify girls requiring additional material support. Community engagement activities include home visits, parent workshops, community awareness events, and school-based events commemorating International Women's Day.

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Room to Read adapted key elements of GEP for remote delivery. Some components, particularly life skills programming via

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5 Iris Group. (2020). *Political economy analysis of child, early, and forced marriage in Bangladesh*. Girls Not Brides. Retrieved May 23, 2025, from https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1614/Bangladesh_PEA_Report_10-10-21.pdf

national television and radio continue to be implemented, with the broader goal of integrating these approaches into national education initiatives. Table 1 below outlines the structure and delivery of GEP in Bangladesh.

Table 1. Characteristics of BD's GEP

GEP Input	Lower Secondary (Grades 6–9)	Upper Secondary (Grades 10–12)
Life Skills Education	15–16 sessions/year Optional clubs	5 sessions/year Optional clubs
Mentoring	6–9 group sessions/year Individual as needed	4 group sessions/year Individual as needed
Family, School & Community Engagement	2 workshops. 1 home visit 2 Community events. 1 school event	2 workshops. 1 home visit 2 Community events. 1 school event
Material Support	Need-based: fees, supplies, uniforms, transport, exams	Same as lower secondary
Remote Programming	Monthly radio episodes TV life skills videos	Monthly radio episodes TV life skills videos

Methods

The 2022-2024 GEP Evaluation in Bangladesh was designed to examine the potential impact of the program in girls' lives. Specifically, this evaluation was designed to respond to the following research questions:

- To what extent does GEP support participants to build life skills, after three years of programming?
- To what extent does GEP support participants to build gender knowledge and attitudes, after three years of programming?
- To what extent does GEP support participants to develop healthy and meaningful life aspirations, after three years of programming?

To respond to these research questions, the team used a repeated cross-sectional design to examine patterns of change among GEP girls in Moulvibazar. The evaluation compared two separate cohorts of students enrolled in the final year of lower secondary school in Grade 8. The baseline data was collected in 2022 from a cohort of Grade 8 girls who were not exposed to the program, while the endline data were collected in 2024 from a different cohort of Grade 8 girls who had participated in the program for three years.

This design was chosen to reduce the influence of age- and grade-related developmental differences. Because both cohorts were assessed at the same grade level, comparisons between them allow for a more focused understanding of potential program-related changes. However, as this was not a longitudinal or experimental design, it does not follow the same individuals over time, nor does it include a control group. The findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative of program-related changes over time among comparable groups, rather than as a measure of causal impact. Table 2 below summarizes the structure of the evaluation across the two time-points.

Table 2. Repeated Cross-Sectional Design

	Baseline	Endline
Year	2022	2024
Grade Level	End of Grade 8	End of Grade 8
Years of GEP Exposure	0	3

Sample

The evaluation was conducted across all eight schools in Moulvibazar's sub-district of Juri Upazila, where GEP is being implemented. A census approach was followed at both baseline and endline, meaning that all girls enrolled in Grade 8 during the respective data collection years were included in the study sample.

At baseline, data were collected from 411 Grade 8 students who had not been exposed to the program. At endline, data were collected from 445 Grade 8 students who had participated in the program for three years. While the number of participating students varied slightly

between the two data collection points due to normal fluctuations in school enrollment, the evaluation maintained full coverage across all schools involved in the program. Table 3 below provides a summary of the study population at both points of data collection.

Table 3. Study population

Unit	Baseline	Endline
Schools	8	8
Students	411	445

Data collection

The endline data was collected using a self-administered survey designed to capture changes across three key domains: life skills, gender knowledge and attitudes, and educational, occupational, and life aspirations. The survey was developed in close coordination with BDCO, building on existing measurement tools and prior experience with life skills evaluations.

Item development drew primarily from the first version of Room to Read's Adolescent Life Skills Assessment (ALSA) tool.[6] Additional items related to gender knowledge and attitudes were adapted from Equimundo's Gender Equitable Men (GEM)[7] scale and from relevant content in Room to Read's Life Skills Education curriculum. The final instrument included a total of 57 items distributed across the following sections:

1. **Aspirations** – 5 multiple-choice items assessing students' occupational, educational, and life goals
2. **Gender Knowledge and Attitudes** – 24 items using a 3-point Likert scale (Agree, Not Sure, Disagree)
3. **Life Skills** – 28 items using a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), covering the following domains:
   o Decision making
   o Emotional resilience
   o Collaboration
4. **Curricular Feedback (Endline only)** – 8 items using a 3-point scale (Not at all, Somewhat, Very/A lot), to assess self-reported learning, relevance, and difficulty for each thematic area covered in the curriculum

The survey was translated into Bengali by Room to Read staff, and was pre-tested to ensure clarity and contextual relevance. In October 2024, the BDCO Research, Monitoring and Evaluation team organized a training session for social mobilizers and staff involved in

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[6] See Advancing life skills measurement: The ALSA for Girls Synthesis Report and How-To Guide - Room to Read
[7] see https://www.equimundo.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Measuring-Gender-Attitude-Using-Gender-Equitable-Men-Scale.pdf

administering the survey. The training focused on maintaining consistency with baseline administration procedures and following Room to Read's survey protocols.

During data collection, two trained adults, either BDCO staff or SMs were assigned to each school to distribute and proctor the survey. The same approach was used at baseline to ensure procedural consistency. Following data collection, the BDCO RME team was responsible for compiling and entering the data in preparation for analysis.

Data analysis

The analysis of endline data followed the same procedures and analytical approach used at baseline to ensure consistency. All datasets were cleaned, coded, and processed by the Global Office Research, Monitoring and Evaluation team using Stata. Initial steps included reversing negatively worded items and reviewing item-level statistics to assess internal consistency and the suitability of grouping items into composite measures.

Composite scores were created for three core life skills domains: Decision Making, Emotional Resilience, and Collaboration, as well as for the domain of Gender Knowledge and Attitudes. Items measuring educational, occupational, and life aspirations were not grouped into a composite and were instead analyzed individually to understand the patterns of students' responses. The overall analysis was done through a mix of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the distribution of responses at baseline and endline. To assess changes between baseline and endline, independent-sample t-tests were conducted. These tests helped identify whether observed differences between cohorts were statistically significant. Correlation analyses were also conducted to explore the relationships between different domains of life skills, gender attitudes, and aspirations. For the endline-only curricular feedback section, responses were analyzed using simple frequency distributions. No composite or summary scores were created for this section; the purpose was to examine how students responded to each item individually and understand the spread of responses across the three-point scale.

Students' background (girls' age)

As part of the background analysis, we looked at the average age of students in both the baseline and endline cohorts. At baseline, the average age of girls was 14.07 years (SD = 0.84, n = 411). At endline, the average age was slightly lower at 13.94 years (SD = 0.81, n = 445). A statistical test showed that this difference though small, was statistically significant (t = 2.30, p = 0.021). The actual difference in age between the two groups is approximately 1.6 months.

While this difference is not large, it is worth noting in the context of a repeated cross-sectional design. As the evaluation compares two different cohorts of Grade 8 girls, minor variations in average age are expected. These may be influenced by local enrollment patterns, repetition, and dropout trends that affect the age at which students reach Grade 8.

Findings

GEP participants show significant gains in *Emotional Resilience, Collaboration* and *Gender Knowledge and Attitudes*

Table 4 shows the mean scores by timepoint and domain, as well as standardized gains across timepoints. S*tandardized gain*s are calculated as the difference in means from baseline to endline, divided by the pooled standard deviation. This measure allows for easier interpretation of the magnitude of change in relation to the variability of scores at baseline. The findings are based on composite scores developed for each domain and are derived from student self-reports.

Average scores improved across all measured domains, between baseline and midline data collection. For the Decision Making domain, the average score increased from 3.12 (SD = 0.55) at baseline to 3.17 (SD = 0.51) at endline. This change was small, with a standardized gain of 0.11 SDs, and was <u>not</u> statistically significant. In contrast, there was a statistically significant improvement in the Emotional Resilience domain, with scores increasing from 2.75 (SD = 0.46) to 2.99 (SD = 0.49). This change was significant at the $p \leq 0.001$ level and standardized gain of 0.50 SDs, indicating a substantial improvement in girls' ability to manage and express emotions over the three-year program period. For the Collaboration domain, scores improved from 3.18 (SD = 0.56) at baseline to 3.29 (SD = 0.54) at endline. The gain was statistically significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level, with a standardized gain of 0.20 SDs.

Significant improvements were also observed for the Gender Knowledge and Attitudes measure, where mean scores rose from 12.80 (SD = 4.61) at baseline to 15.65 (SD = 4.84) at endline. This difference was statistically significant at the $p \leq 0.001$ level, with a standardized gain of 0.60. Overall, these gains show that participants gain significant skills and knowledge after three years of exposure to the program.

Table 4. Life Skills Development Among Girls (Baseline vs. Endline)

Skill	Sample Size (Baseline/Endline)	Baseline (Mean, SD)	Endline (Mean, SD)	Standardized Gain (x times SD)
Decision Making	312 / 400	3.12 (0.55)	3.17 (0.51)	0.11
Emotional Resilience***	330 / 398	2.75 (0.46)	2.99 (0.49)	0.50
Collaboration**	309 / 391	3.18 (0.56)	3.29 (0.54)	0.20
Gender Knowledge and Attitudes***	411 / 445	12.80 (4.61)	15.65 (4.84)	0.60

* p-value < 0.05; ** p-value < 0.01; *** p-value < 0.001

Meaningful improvements in terms of Gender Knowledge and Attitudes among GEP participants are observed at the item level. At endline, GEP participants endorsed positive statements at higher rates (see Table 5) and disagreed at higher rates with statements that

reflected restrictive gender norms (see Table 6). For instance, GEP participants believe that "Girls should be encouraged to discuss sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV with teachers and parents" at much higher rates than non-participants surveyed at baseline (78% vs 64%). In another instance, 73% of GEP participants rejected the idea that "boys should get more opportunities for education than girls," up from 69% at baseline. Moreover, the percentage of girls disagreeing with the statement that "It is okay for a family to force a girl to marry" increased to 75% at endline from 63% at baseline, indicating a positive shift toward recognizing agency and autonomy in education and marriage-related decisions.

Table 5. Changes in Responses to Positively Framed Gender Items

Question Framing	Items	Agree (%)	
		Baseline	Endline
+	Men and women should be equally responsible for making household decisions.	83%	84%
+	Daughters should have a similar right to inherit property as sons.	75%	83%
+	I feel responsible to do something if a female friend is being mistreated	80%	87%
+	Daughters should have just the same chance to work outside the home as sons.	75%	83%
+	If a boyfriend wants to touch his girlfriend, the girl has the right to say no.	71%	81%
+	Menstruation is normal and healthy for girls/women.	79%	88%
+	Menstruation is a sign that a girl can get pregnant if she has sexual relations.	41%	54%
+	Girls should be encouraged to discuss sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV with teachers and parents.	64%	78%

Table 5. Changes in Responses to Negatively-Framed Gender Items

Question Framing[8]	Items	Disagree (%)	
		Baseline	Endline
⊖	Only men should become engineers or scientists.	63%	73%
⊖	Men are better at managing businesses than women.	46%	64%
⊖	Women cannot become as good leaders as men can.	55%	62%
⊖	A good wife obeys her husband, even if she disagrees.	22%	39%

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[8] (-) means that the question is negatively framed and is reversed for scoring.

⊖	Household work/chores should only be a woman's job.	46%	62%
⊖	Wives should be less educated than their husbands.	67%	72%
⊖	Boys should get more opportunities for education than girls.	69%	73%
⊖	Boys are naturally more outspoken than girls	43%	64%
⊖	It is alright for a man to beat his wife if she is unfaithful.	51%	65%
⊖	A woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together.	49%	66%
⊖	It is always acceptable for boys to tease girls in school.	73%	77%
⊖	A woman without a husband is worthless.	30%	48%
⊖	A man using violence against his wife is a private matter that shouldn't be discussed with others.	22%	46%
⊖	Boyfriends should dictate whom girls should spend time with.	71%	79%
⊖	It is okay for a family to force a girl to marry.	63%	75%
⊖	Women cannot achieve as much as men because of tradition and cultural values.	34%	54%

GEP participants have higher educational aspirations, broader occupational aspirations, and want to marry later in life, compared to counterparts

One of the aspects revealed by the evaluation results is that GEP participants' educational aspirations are considerably more ambitious than those of counterparts (see Table 7). GEP girls' educational aspirations are more concentrated at higher levels than baseline counterparts. Table 7 sh0ws a sharper difference in the proportion of girls intending to stop at the upper secondary level, which was 16.2% at baseline and 10.9% at endline (GEP girls). This decrease of over five percentage points is statistically significant at p <0.05 level. At the same time, GEP participants show almost twice the interest in vocational training than counterparts who were not exposed to the program (3.9% vs 2.1%). However, both participants and non-participants were similar in terms of their interest in attaining medical degrees.

Table 7. Differences in Educational Aspirations Among Girls (Baseline to Endline)

Educational Level	Baseline (%)	Endline (%)	Difference (pp[9])	Trend

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[9] Percentage points

Lower secondary	2.57	1.14	-1.43	▼ Decline
Upper secondary*	16.20	10.93	-5.27	▼ Decline
Vocational training	2.06	3.87	+1.81	▲ Growth
University degree	34.19	35.54	+1.35	▲ Growth
Medical degree	40.87	42.37	+1.50	▲ Growth
Engineering degree	4.11	6.15	+2.04	▲ Growth

* p-value < 0.05; ** p-value < 0.01; *** p-value < 0.001

In turn, several differences were observed in terms of occupational aspirations. Girls were asked to share where they saw themselves professionally at age 25. The data revealed both continuity in traditionally popular roles and gradual shifts toward non-traditional fields, with a particularly notable decline in aspirations tied to domestic roles. The most significant change was observed in the reduction in the percentage of girls aspiring to become homemakers, which declined from 4.04% at baseline to just 0.92% at endline, a statistically significant drop (p ≤ 0.01). At the same time, medical professions continued to dominate girls' aspirations, increasing from 35.6% to 39.9%.

Table 8: Differences in Career Aspirations Among Girls (Baseline to Endline)

Career Aspiration	Baseline (%)	Endline (%)	Difference (PP)
Government service	19.19	10.55	▼ -8.64
Medical professional	35.61	39.91	▲ +4.30
Home maker**	4.04	0.92	▼ -3.12
Teacher	13.64	16.74	▲ +3.10
Artist	0.25	2.06	▲ +1.81
Technician	0.76	2.06	▲ +1.30
Police	16.92	18.12	▲ +1.20
Banker	2.27	0.92	▼ -1.35
Engineer	2.78	3.67	▲ +0.89
Businessperson	1.52	1.84	▲ +0.32
IT Professional	0.25	0.46	▲ +0.21
Farmer	0.51	0.69	▲ +0.18
Airhostess / pilot	1.77	1.61	▼ -0.16
Armed forces	0.25	0.23	▼ -0.02
Social worker	0.25	0.23	▼ -0.02

* p-value < 0.05; ** p-value < 0.01; *** p-value < 0.001

Last, girls' aspirations also changed importantly in terms of perspectives on ideal marriage age, when compared to baseline groups. The data show positive shifts, particularly in girls'

personal aspirations, reflecting evolving ideas around life planning and autonomy (see Table 9). Girls' preferred age for their own marriage increased significantly from 22.9 years at baseline to 24.3 years at endline. This is a statistically significant increase of 1.4 years (p ≤ 0.001). The ideal age girls reported for their sisters or other female family members rose more modestly, from 21.0 to 21.6 years (p ≤ 0.05), whereas the ideal age for male family members increased from 24.7 to 25.1 years, showing more stable perceptions of men's marital life decisions.

Table 9. Changes in Aspirational Marriage Age Among Girls and Family Members

Relationship Category	Baseline Average Age (SD) in Years	Endline Average Age (SD) - Years	Difference in Years
Self ***	22.9 (3.7)	24.3 (3.9)	▲+1.4
Sister/Female Family Member*	21.0 (3.3)	21.6 (3.8)	▲+0.6
Brother/Male Family Member	24.7 (3.9)	25.1 (4.0)	▲+0.4

* p-value < 0.05; ** p-value < 0.01; *** p-value < 0.001

GEP participants appreciated and learned on most content areas

When asked about different content strands, GEP girls tended to view gender-based topics as more difficult than life skills topics (see Table 10). Among the topics assessed, gender-based violence was most frequently rated as "very difficult," with 19.2% of respondents selecting this option. Gender norms and stereotypes were also perceived as more complex, with 11.0% of girls rating this content as "very difficult" and more than half (52.9%) selecting "somewhat difficult." While most life skills content was deemed easier, only 40.5% rated resilience content as "not difficult," while 46.6% found it "somewhat difficult" and 12.9% selected "very difficult."

Table 10: Girls' Perceived Difficulty of GEP Content Areas at Endline (%)

Content Area	Not Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult
Gender norms and stereotypes	36.1	**52.9**	11.0
Gender-based violence	45.3	35.6	19.2
Menstrual and sexual health	**66.1**	24.9	9.0
Collaboration	**83.1**	9.5	7.4
Communication and leadership	**71.0**	22.8	6.2
Decision making	**63.3**	30.6	6.0
Resilience	40.5	46.6	12.9
Financial planning	**65.8**	24.1	10.1

Bold: *categories selected by more than half respondents*

In terms of relevance, the majority of GEP participants surveyed expressed that all topics were "very important." A high proportion of girls rated collaboration as "very important" (83.8%), the highest among all topics. Menstrual and sexual health was also rated "very

important" by 82.7% of girls. Similarly, 78.4% of girls rated decision-making, and 77.8% rated financial planning as "very important." Communication and leadership skills followed, with 73.3% of girls rating them in the same category. These five content areas received the highest proportion of "very important" responses across the curriculum.

Content related to gender-based violence was rated as "very important" by 69.1% of girls, while 20.0% considered it "somewhat important," and 10.9% rated it as "not important." Gender norms and stereotypes were rated "very important" by 59.6% of girls, while 29.3% considered them "somewhat important," and 11.0% reported them as "not important." Resilience was rated "very important" by 54.9% of girls, the lowest among all domains, while 35.8% rated it as "somewhat important" and 9.3% as "not important."

Table 11. Girls' Perceived Importance of GEP Content Areas at Endline (%)

Content Area	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Gender-based violence	10.9	20.0	**69.1**
Gender norms and stereotypes	11.0	29.3	**59.6**
Menstrual and sexual health	8.1	9.2	**82.7**
Collaboration	5.9	10.3	**83.8**
Communication and leadership	5.9	20.8	**73.3**
Decision making	8.3	13.3	**78.4**
Resilience	9.3	35.8	**54.9**
Financial planning	6.9	15.4	**77.8**

Bold: *categories selected by more than half respondents*

Last, when asked about how much they learned on each topic, most girls declared "learning a lot" on most of the content areas. The highest proportion of girls who reported "learned a lot" was observed for menstrual and sexual health (88.2%) and collaboration (87.6%). These two content areas also had the lowest proportion of girls reporting "learned nothing" (2.3% each). Financial planning was marked as "learned a lot" by 80.3% of girls, followed by decision-making (76.7%) and communication and leadership (73.9%).

Content related to gender-based violence was reported as "learned a lot" by 67.4% of girls, while 26.6% selected "learned a little" and 6.1% "learned nothing." For gender norms and stereotypes, 62.0% reported "learned a lot," 31.4% "a little," and 6.6% "nothing." Resilience had the lowest proportion of girls reporting "learned a lot" (60.1%) and the highest proportion selecting "learned a little" (34.0%).

These responses align with the aforementioned patterns observed in perceived importance and difficulty. Content areas that had higher percentages of girls rating them as "very important" and "not difficult," such as collaboration and financial planning, also tended to have higher proportions reporting "learned a lot." Conversely, areas with more mixed

responses, such as gender norms, resilience, and gender-based violence, had comparatively lower proportions of girls selecting "learned a lot" and higher proportions selecting "learned a little" or "learned nothing." This suggests that students' perceptions of content relevance and ease may be associated with how much they believe they learned.

Table 12. Girls' Self-Reported Learning Gains by Program Content Area (%)

Content Area	Learned Nothing	Learned a Little	Learned a Lot
Gender-based violence	6.1	26.6	**67.4**
Gender norms and stereotypes	6.6	31.4	**62.0**
Menstrual and sexual health	2.3	9.5	**88.2**
Collaboration	2.3	10.1	**87.6**
Communication and leadership	2.8	23.3	**73.9**
Decision making	3.9	19.4	**76.7**
Resilience	6.0	34.0	**60.1**
Financial planning	3.2	16.5	**80.3**

Bold: *categories selected by more than half respondents*

Interrelatedness in skill development and changes in aspirations

Table 13 shows the correlations between scores across different domains, at endline. The strongest observed relationship is between Decision Making and Collaboration (r = 0.72). This indicates a strong positive association, where girls reaching higher levels of Decision Making tend to show stronger Collaboration skills. This is consistent with earlier findings wherein both domains showed similarly high composite scores. A moderate positive correlation also appears between Emotional Resilience and Collaboration (r = 0.44). A smaller but still meaningful correlation exists between Decision Making and Emotional Resilience (r = 0.35). Gender Knowledge and Attitudes show a moderate association with Emotional Resilience (r = 0.43) and with Collaboration (r = 0.37). The correlation between Gender Knowledge and Attitudes and Decision Making is slightly weaker (r = 0.24).

Table 13. Correlations Between Measured Domains – Only Significant Correlations Shown (p-value < 0.05)

Variable	Decision Making	Emotional Resilience	Collaboration	Gender Knowledge & Attitudes
Decision Making	1.00			
Emotional Resilience	0.35	1.00		
Collaboration	0.72	0.44	1.00	
Gender Knowledge & Attitudes	0.24	0.43	0.37	1.00

Table 14 displays correlations between domains and background characteristics, if statistically significant. Correlations with age show negative relationships with Decision Making (r = -0.11) and Collaboration (r = -0.20). Marriage age perceptions also show distinct patterns. Girls' aspirational age for their own marriage shows a positive correlation with their views on the ideal marriage age for brothers (r = 0.49) and with the ideal age for sisters (r = 0.37). The correlation between the ideal marriage age for brothers and sisters (r = 0.49) is also positive and of similar magnitude than between self and brothers. These correlations point towards changes in aspirations that are stable across family members and gender.

Table 14. Correlations With Age and Marriage Age Perceptions – Only Significant Correlations Shown (p-value < 0.05)

Variable	Age	Marriage Age, Self	Sister Marriage Age	Brother Marriage Age
Age	1.00			
Marriage Age (Self)	-	1.00		
Marriage Age (Sister)	0.12	0.37	1.00	
Marriage Age (Brother)	-	0.49	0.49	1.00
Decision Making	- 0.11	-	-	-
Collaboration	- 0.20	-	-	-

Discussion

The 2022-2024 GEP Evaluation in Moulvibazar examined changes in life skills, gender knowledge and attitudes and aspirations after three years of programming. Endline data revealed that GEP participants expressed progressive views on gender equality, rejecting early marriage, male dominance in education, and social acceptance of harassment. The gains in Gender Knowledge and Attitudes were particularly strong. In addition, GEP participants showed improvement in life skills, particularly Collaboration and Emotional Resilience. While these results are promising, they must be interpreted with caution. The evaluation used a repeated cross-sectional design without a comparison group, meaning observed changes cannot be attributed directly to program exposure. Nevertheless, the consistent direction and significance of several key indicators suggest that sustained programming may be contributing to shifts in how girls view themselves and their roles in society.

GEP participants showed differences in educational, occupational, and marriage aspirations, when compared to baseline non-participants. GEP participants who received three years of programming aspired to complete higher educational levels than their counterparts. This trend is particularly important in the context of Moulvibazar, where only a very small percentage of girls completes upper secondary education.[10] In addition, their occupational aspirations were more varied, and fewer GEP participants were interested in

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[10] Ending child marriage: A profile of progress in Bangladesh. UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/reports/ending-child-marriage

being home makers than their peers. While aspirations to traditional professions like medicine and teaching remain strong, there is visible movement away from interest in domestic roles and initial signs of diversification into careers. Last, GEP participants expressed interest in marrying considerably later in life than non-GEP peers. The gap between GEP girls' own preferred marriage age (24.3 years) and that for their sisters or female family members (21.6 years) may be interpreted in different ways and should be explored further. For example, it is possible that participants feel more confident to overcome their perceived norms, but it could also mean that they understand that it takes skills and time to successfully challenge them. Future evaluations should explore these interpretations in more depth.

Correlational findings elucidate the interplay between different domains of development. The strong associations between skills, and between life skills and gender knowledge and attitudes, suggest that these domains may reinforce each other and grow in tandem. However, the small but negative correlations between age, Decision Making and Collaboration raise important questions such as why older girls might report slightly lower capabilities in these areas compared to their younger peers, or how age or other contextual factors may shape program experiences. These patterns may reflect increased domestic responsibilities, academic pressure, or shifting attitudes among older participants, and warrants further investigation. Finally, successful skills development seems to be associated with motivational factors. As reported by participants, their perceived ability to learn a given skill/topic is associated with their perceived difficulty and relevance. While these perceptions did not fully match our quantitative analyses (e.g., their gender knowledge did grow significantly, despite lower levels of self-reported learning), they suggest potential value in curricular revisions. For example, gender topics could be introduced in a way that emphasizes more clearly their relevance for girls and their communities, and difficult topics such as gender-violence or resilience could be expanded in terms of dosage. Program and curriculum experts need to review the program and explore potential modifications as they see fit.

Despite the useful insights generated, a few limitations must be acknowledged. More notably, a repeated cross-sectional design does not support causal conclusions: there are cohort-level characteristics and school-level characteristics that cannot be controlled via traditional regression analyses. In the absence of a proper control group – and randomly assigned groups – the conclusions expressed in this report cannot be taken as causal evidence. The findings are also drawn from a single geographic area and may not generalize to other districts or regions of Bangladesh. Even with these constraints, the study contributes valuable evidence on how girls engage with life skills content and navigate gender norms in a setting where structural challenges such as early marriage, low secondary completion, and entrenched gender expectations remain persistent. These findings underscore the importance of continued investment in programming that integrates life skills, gender equity, and family engagement, while identifying areas for further research on age-related differences, content delivery, and long-term outcomes

Annexes

Survey

Part 1: Aspirations and Attitudes

In this part of the survey, we want to understand your general aspirations for yourself and life. Please answer these questions truthfully, there is no right or wrong answer – we just want to know your opinion. Please note that none of your answers will affect any of your grades or school performance. Also, we will never share your responses with anyone at your school or in your household/family.

	Questions	Responses (Circle the Response that suits you the most)
B1	What is the highest level of education you would like to complete if finances and the opportunity of school/post-secondary education are available? *Note: Please tick the relevant box on the right. Please specify your answer if the option "Other" is chosen*	☐ Lower Secondary ☐ Upper Secondary- ☐ Post-Secondary-Technical/Vocational ☐ University ☐ Medical Degree ☐ Engineering Degree ☐ Other (Please Specify)_____
B2	What occupation do you expect to have when you are 25 years old? *Note: Please tick the relevant box on the right. Please specify your answer if the option "Other" is chosen*	☐ Home Maker ☐ Farmer/agricultural work ☐ Self-employed/Entrepreneur/Freelancer ☐ Businessperson ☐ Medical Professional ☐ Armed-forces/Military ☐ Police ☐ Engineer ☐ Government service ☐ Accountant/ Banker ☐ Any kind of technician ☐ Development/Social worker ☐ Pilot/Airhostess ☐ IT related professions ☐ Performance artist (actor, singer, etc.) ☐ Teacher ☐ Others (Please specify)------

B3	At what age would you like to get married?	
		(Please specify)-------
	Note: Please mark your answer on the right	
B4	At what age do you think your sister or female cousin should get married?	
		(Please specify)-------
	Note: Please mark your answer on the right.	☐ NA
	If you do not have a sister or female cousin, then mark NA	
B5	At what age do you think your brother or male cousin should get married?	
		(Please specify)-------
		☐ NA
	Note: Please mark your answer on the right.	
	If you do not have a brother or male cousin, then mark NA	

Note: Thank you for answering the questions. Next, you are going to read some statements. Please circle the response that you think best describes your agreement/preference/understanding.

No.	Statements	Response (Circle your preference)		
C1	Only men should become engineers or scientists.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C2	Men are better at managing businesses than women.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C3	Women cannot become as good leaders as men can.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C4	A good wife obeys her husband, even if she disagrees.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C5	Household work/chores should only be a woman's job.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C6	Men and women should be equally responsible for making household decisions.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C7	Wives should be less educated than their husbands.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C8	Boys should get more opportunities for education than girls.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure

C9	Boys are naturally more outspoken than girls	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C10	Daughters should have a similar right to inherit property as sons.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C11	It is alright for a man to beat his wife if she is unfaithful.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C12	A woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C13	I feel responsible to do something if a female friend is being mistreated	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C14	It is always acceptable for boys to tease girls in school.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C15	Daughters should have just the same chance to work outside the home as sons.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C16	A woman without a husband is worthless.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C17	If a boyfriend wants to touch his girlfriend, the girl has the right to say no.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C18	A man using violence against his wife is a private matter that shouldn't be discussed with others.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C19	Boyfriends should dictate whom girls should spend time with.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C20	It is okay for a family to force a girl to marry.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C21	Women cannot achieve as much as men because of tradition and cultural values.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C22	Menstruation is normal and healthy for girls/women.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C23	Menstruation is a sign that a girl can get pregnant if she has sexual relations.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
C24	Girls should be encouraged to discuss sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV with teachers and parents.	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure

Part 2: Life Skills

Next, you will read some statements. For each statement, please circle the numbers 1 – 4 to indicate whether it is *not true, slightly true, mostly true,* or *completely true* for you.

1) **Not True** means that you feel the statement I read is not true at all for you.
2) **Slightly True** means that you feel the statement I read might be true sometimes, or a little bit true, but is mostly not true for you.
3) **Mostly True** means that the statement I read is true most of the time, or in most situations, but sometimes it might not be true for you.
4) **Completely True** means that the statement is completely true for you, in all situations all the time.

	Not True	Slightly True	Mostly True	Completely True

D1	I know how to plan for my education.	1	2	3	4
D2	I feel confident that I will be able to manage money/finances for my education.	1	2	3	4
D3	I am confident to stand up to others in case one is teasing me.	1	2	3	4
D4	I feel confident in my abilities to achieve the things I set my mind to.	1	2	3	4
D5	I am always able to stop myself from panicking when I am nervous before exams.	1	2	3	4
D6	I can freely convince my parents if I do not like something they are asking me to do.	1	2	3	4
D7	I can never control my anger if someone is not nice to me.	1	2	3	4
D8	I feel ashamed to express my emotions in front of others.	1	2	3	4
D9	When I feel nervous or scared, I don't know how to calm or relax myself.	1	2	3	4
D10	When I am upset, I manage my feelings before I take any action.	1	2	3	4
D11	I am aware of how my feelings change my behavior.	1	2	3	4
D12	I never share my feelings with members of my family.	1	2	3	4
D13	I would stand up for my friends if another person was causing them trouble.	1	2	3	4
D14	I feel extremely confident talking in front of a group.	1	2	3	4
D15	I ask my teachers for help when I need it.	1	2	3	4
D16	If I get angry with a friend, I can talk to them and make things better.	1	2	3	4
D17	I can freely talk to my parents if I have any personal problems.	1	2	3	4
D18	I can collaborate well with others.	1	2	3	4
D19	I ask questions when I do not understand what someone is telling me.	1	2	3	4
D20	I am comfortable telling my friend to stop if my friend is harassing someone.	1	2	3	4
D21	I enjoy working on challenging tasks.	1	2	3	4

D22	When I set a goal, I remain focused on it.	1	2	3	4
D23	I always have a plan for accomplishing my goals.	1	2	3	4
D24	When I do something, I work hard at it.	1	2	3	4
D25	New ideas or projects sometimes distract me from the previous ones.	1	2	3	4
D26	Big difficulties do not discourage me. I try again.	1	2	3	4
D27	I make sure that I finish whatever I start to do before starting something new.	1	2	3	4
D28	I am very clear on how fear changes my behavior.	1	2	3	4

Part 4: Feedback about the program

Instructions

Next, we will present you with each of the topics that have been covered in the Life Skills for Equality Program. You will be asked to rate each topic in terms of different characteristics such as their relevance or their difficulty.

E. Difficulty

Please rate each topic in terms of how difficult they were for you. Please select one option for each topic.

	Topic	Not at all Difficult (1)	Somewhat Difficult (2)	Very Difficult (3)
E1	Gender norms and stereotypes	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult
E2	Gender-based violence	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult
E3	Menstrual and sexual health	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult
E4	Collaboration	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult
E5	Communication and leadership	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult
E6	Decision making	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult
E7	Resilience	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult

		Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult
E8	Financial planning	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult

F. Importance

Please rate each topic in terms of how important they are to you. Please select one option for each topic.

	Topic	Not at all Important (1)	Somewhat Important (2)	Very Important (3)
F1	Gender norms and stereotypes	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
F2	Gender based violence	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
F3	Menstrual and sexual health	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
F4	Collaboration	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
F5	Communication and leadership	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
F6	Decision making	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
F7	Resilience	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
F6	Financial planning	Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important

G. Learning

Please rate each topic in terms of how much you have learned from each topic throughout the program. Please select one option for each topic.

	Topic	Learned Nothing (1)	Learned a Little (2)	Learned a Lot (3)
G1	Gender norms and stereotypes	Learned Nothing	Learned a Little	Learned a Lot
G2	Gender based violence	Learned Nothing	Learned a Little	Learned a Lot
G3	Menstrual and sexual health	Learned Nothing	Learned a Little	Learned a Lot
G4	Collaboration	Learned Nothing	Learned a Little	Learned a Lot

G5	Communication and leadership	Learned Nothing	Learned a Little	Learned a Lot
G6	Decision making	Learned Nothing	Learned a Little	Learned a Lot
G7	Resilience	Learned Nothing	Learned a Little	Learned a Lot
G8	Financial planning	Learned Nothing	Learned a Little	Learned a Lot