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Sarah Engebretsen
Population Council

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CASE STUDY

DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTING, AND EVALUATING A TARGETED EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTION FOR A VULNERABLE SUBGROUP OF GIRLS

A CASE STUDY OF THE *FILLES ÉVEILLÉES* (GIRLS AWAKENED) PILOT PROGRAM FOR MIGRANT ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN DOMESTIC SERVICE IN URBAN BURKINA FASO



SARAH ENGBRETSSEN





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Population Council
One Dag Hammarskjold Plaza
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www.popcouncil.org

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INTRODUCTION

Investing in adolescent girls is crucial in the developing world where a large and growing proportion of the population is under the age of 24. Research has demonstrated that adolescent girls face serious challenges around the time of puberty including withdrawal from (and lack of safety in) public spaces, loss of peers, leaving school, pressure for marriage or liaisons as livelihood strategies, and internalization of harmful gender norms. Investments need to be made at critical moments in early adolescence, when disadvantage is consolidated for more than 600 million girls in the developing world (Engebretsen 2012a).

While policymakers and development professionals have acknowledged the need to make investments in the poorest girls in the poorest communities early enough to make a difference, less is known about *how* to go about reaching them. This case study is intended to demonstrate the steps involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating a targeted, evidence-based intervention for a vulnerable subgroup of adolescent girls. Drawing upon an example of a Population Council research and intervention initiative for migrant adolescent girls in domestic service in urban Burkina Faso—known as *Filles Éveillées* (Girls Awakened)—we illustrate a process that can be replicated in other settings with other vulnerable subgroups of adolescent girls.

STEP 1: Use data to see and select the most vulnerable and neglected subgroups of girls

Program planners need to use data to identify the most vulnerable and neglected subgroups of girls in need of targeted programming. Without a solid understanding of the internal diversity of adolescents, those who are most disadvantaged may be left behind. Data that are disaggregated by age, sex, urban/rural residence, schooling and marital status are critical in making visible the heterogeneity of adolescent subgroups so that decisionmakers, governments, NGOs, and program planners can identify marginalized adolescents, make decisions, and prioritize investments to those in greatest need (Engebretsen 2012a).

National-level data often mask important subnational differences. Therefore it is important to look at indicators on a subnational level to see where there are “hot spots” of vulnerable subgroups. With UNFPA support, the Population Council produced adolescent data guides, which use Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data in order to make visible vulnerable groups of adolescents. These data guides exist for approximately 50 countries and can be found at <http://www.popcouncil.org/publications/serialsbriefs/AdolExplnDepth.asp>

The first step for the Population Council was to examine data from the Burkina Faso data guide to identify where there was the highest concentration of adolescent girls at greatest risk of the worst outcomes. Looking at subnational data, we learned that in the capital city of Ouagadougou, one in five girls aged 10–14 was not in school and not living with either parent. We were interested in designing a targeted program for these girls but first wanted to know that the population we were interested in was sizable enough to merit this investment. So we calculated the number of girls 10–14 years old in the surrounding countries who were not in school and not living with either parent. As the table below shows, more than a half million girls were similar to our target beneficiaries, and there would be great potential to take the *Filles Éveillées* approach to scale if the program were found to be successful.

TABLE 1: Implications for reaching large numbers of girls

Country	Number of girls aged 10-14	Percent not in school and not living with either parent	Number of 10–14-year-old girls not in school and not living with either parent
Benin	553,369	1.40%	7,747
Burkina Faso	987,093	11.90%	117,464
Guinea	617,935	11.30%	69,827
Mali	824,359	11.50%	94,801
Niger	997,839	12.70%	126,726
Senegal	805,530	11.50%	92,636
TOTAL			509,201

Note: Table based on author’s calculations.

STEP 2: Learn about the target population through formative research

Demographic data provide important information at the macro level about the size of a population, but formative research is a critical step in advancing understanding of a target population and its needs. Program planners often become interested in a particular subgroup of adolescents as a result of informal observations. And while these subjective accounts are important, formative research provides additional, objective information to limit program planners' biases. Formative research can utilize a number of different methods but commonly includes focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Formative research provides answers to questions about the target population, their needs, and whether their needs are being met through available services. It also clarifies where there are gaps in services and logical entry points for interventions. Keep in mind that formative research should involve talking directly to girls rather than relying solely on others' inputs. Qualitative information with the gatekeepers in a girl's life may supplement what one hears directly from the girl, but researchers should be mindful that the conversation should start with these vulnerable girls in order to gain a complete picture of who they are and what they need.

The Population Council had a particular interest in migrant adolescent girls in domestic service in urban areas of Burkina Faso. While demographic information provided some insight into the proportion of girls who were not in school and not living with either parent, there were gaps in our understanding of migration patterns, daily life for domestic workers, and services available for this target population. The Council conducted formative research in two cities of Burkina Faso—Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso—to supplement what we were able to learn from the demographic data. The formative research consisted of a desk review of literature on adolescent domestic workers and migrant girls, focus group discussions with adolescent domestic workers, and in-depth interviews with employers, *logeurs*¹, and NGOs intervening with adolescent domestic workers and/or migrant girls.

The formative research showed that girls' migration is typically seasonal; girls live and work in cities during the dry season and return home each year to help out with agricultural tasks during the rainy season. Findings revealed that once girls arrive in the city, they typically live with their employers and spend long days performing arduous work. This leaves them with little time for schooling, building social networks, and developing skills necessary for adulthood. Furthermore, the research revealed that the majority of programs designed for this population: intervene after something has gone wrong rather than building girls' protective assets; focus on teaching girls about their rights rather than imparting skills; are not designed around logical age segments; and focus on inputs (i.e., number of radio messages delivered) rather than measurable change at the level of the girl.

¹ *Logeurs*, or landlords, are members of traditional protective networks for migrants in West Africa. *Logeurs* typically originate from rural areas but live in urban areas.

STEP 3: Design the intervention for your target population²

Once you have decided which girls you hope to reach and why, you can begin to design the program approach, thinking carefully about program structure. Recognizing the social isolation and lack of access to public spaces for vulnerable subgroups of adolescent girls, we recommend the safe spaces model. In this model, girls meet regularly in groups in a dedicated space for girls under the guidance of a female mentor. In order to pick a space where girls feel particularly comfortable, we recommend doing a “safety scan” with your target beneficiaries to assess the times, conditions, and situations in which girls feel most safe.³

The next thing to consider is how to recruit the girls, recognizing that the most vulnerable girls are often excluded by traditional recruitment methods such as in-school recruitment. You will then want to think about who will lead girls’ groups and how you intend to recruit and train them. Keep in mind that mentors or facilitators should be older and more experienced than the target beneficiaries, but not so much so that the girls cannot relate to them. Finally, you will want to think about how to best work with critical adults and engage the community.

The Population Council’s first critical decision was which girls to reach. We selected 11–19-year-old migrant adolescent girls in domestic service living in particular catchment areas in Bobo Dioulasso and Ouagadougou. Drawing on the results of the formative research, the Council team designed a program that would run over a period of eight months and provide these girls with weekly two-hour meetings in a safe space, access to peers, and a female mentor. Before the intervention launched, eligible girls were consulted about perceived safety in their communities, and safe spaces were selected for the regular group meetings.

Filles Éveillées is led by female mentors drawn from intervention communities, who are 20–30 years of age, able to speak the local language, and have achieved at least a few years of secondary education. The mentors are both old enough to give advice to girls in the program and young enough so program participants can identify with them. Mentors are trained on a skills-based curriculum that focuses on life skills, health and hygiene, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and financial capabilities. Following training, mentors go door to door to identify girls eligible for program participation. Both participants and employers are asked to sign the program permission form and to consent to girls’ participation in program surveys.

² This case study provides highlights of designing a targeted, evidence-based intervention for a particular subgroup of vulnerable girls. This process is covered comprehensively in a toolkit on the subject (Austrian and Ghati 2010).

³ See Austrian and Ghati (2010) for more information on safety scans.

Our formative research revealed the importance of engaging the community and employers to allow girls to regularly participate in the program. Therefore, in each catchment area, our implementing partner held meetings with community leaders to discuss the goals of the program, respond to their questions, and discuss what the community could contribute to the program. We also held a total of three community awareness sessions in each target community—one before the intervention launched and two during the eight-month program. These sessions were used to describe the program, answer questions, establish a community contract, and in later iterations to hear testimonials from employers and give girls a chance to share what they'd learned to date. Community engagement also entailed three home visits by the mentor to each program participant to meet with her and her employer to establish confidence between the mentor and the employer; resolve potential difficulties between the employer and the employee; and to raise employers' awareness about the participation of girls in weekly sessions. In some program sites, employers were also invited to attend awareness sessions on the importance of allowing their household employees to participate in the program.

STEP 4: Describe your population with baseline research and decide where you would like them to be at the end of the program

Before you begin your intervention, you will need a solid understanding of the target population with respect to knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Understanding where girls are before the program begins will allow you to develop a vision of where you would like them to be at the end of the program, solidify your program approach and content, and create baseline measures that will allow for measurement at the level of the girl over time. Before you design the survey instrument, you will want to carefully consider the domains where you plan to effect change and develop survey modules accordingly. Be mindful of the availability and privacy of your beneficiaries and design the interviewer qualifications, training, and data collection accordingly. An important thing to keep in mind is that you should not collect more information than you intend to analyze. We suggest preparing a comprehensive list of survey questions and then reducing it to the most essential ones. You will also want to pre-test the survey to ensure that questions are clear and appropriate for the cognitive level of your beneficiaries.

While designing the survey instrument and planning for data collection, you will want to work with implementing partners to gain understanding of what health, social, and economic assets you would like your program beneficiaries to have and by what age. Rather than focusing on the problems that girls face, focus on what they need or what they should have (Austrian and Ghati 2010). Assets, or stored values, are things that a girl can use to reduce vulnerability and expand opportunity. The asset exercise—

described in detail in the Girl-Centered Program Design toolkit—helps you decide which assets you think girls in your program should have and by what age (Austrian and Ghati 2010). Program content and activities can then be created to ensure that girls develop desired assets by a given age.

The *Filles Éveillées* research team used a pre-test, post-test design to measure potential changes in program participants over time. The closed-ended survey included sections on socio-demographic characteristics, life skills and social capital, health and hygiene, sexual and reproductive health, financial capabilities, and gender. Given the somewhat sensitive nature of the survey topics, female interviewers administered the surveys. Minimum qualifications included having a university education; ability to speak the local language; experience with quantitative data collection; sensitivity to questions related to vulnerable adolescents and gender; and ability to work as a member of a team. The program used interviewers who were relatively young (24 to 26 years old) to put adolescent girls at ease in answering questions. Interviewers participated in a comprehensive training on the goals of the program, important interview techniques and role-plays, translating the questionnaire into the local language, the need for privacy during data collection, and the importance of confidentiality. Following this training, baseline interviewers pre-tested the questionnaires in periphery neighborhoods in order to refine any questions or response categories that eluded respondents. A few slight modifications were made to the questionnaire before administering it with the target population for the pre-test and post-test. Findings from the first and second cohorts of *Filles Éveillées* can be found in technical reports (Engebretsen 2012b and 2013a).

The Population Council and its implementing partners, Association Tié and Association d'Appui et d'Éveil Pugsada, jointly conducted the asset exercise before launching the *Filles Éveillées* intervention. In small groups, the project team decided which health, social, and economic assets migrant adolescent girls in domestic service need and by what age. This was an important step in values clarification and helped us move from the facts to planning appropriate content. For example, we knew that migrant girls begin domestic work in households as early as age 11, many return home during the rainy season, and some get married and don't come back to the city. We decided that if some girls would get married as early as the next rainy season, we had to develop sexual and reproductive health assets for girls as young as age 11. Some of our partners had initially said we should wait to introduce sexual and reproductive health information until participants were 17 years old, but since we knew they were getting married and sexually initiated earlier, we knew we had to move upstream and reach these girls with important information and skills before they went off track.

STEP 5: Prepare program content and program monitoring tools and launch the program

The first step in preparing program content is selecting appropriate themes, such as sexual and reproductive health or financial capabilities. Keep in mind the program cannot realistically take on 8–10 themes, so prioritize those that your population needs most and that your program team is best suited to deliver. Begin by asking why this theme is important for your target population and where they may have relevant background knowledge. Then research what content already exists. Keep in mind that a lot of program content is exclusively focused on transferring knowledge rather than imparting skills. We recommend thinking through what the girls will be able to *do* at the end of a given session rather than what they will *know*. Once you have your key themes established, draft possible topics that could go under that theme and refine the list until it contains only those that are most critical for your target population. Next, develop drafts of each session within a particular theme and include session objectives, materials needed, session outline, time required, advance preparation, background notes for the mentor, and step-by-step instructions on that session's activities. Remember to make activities interactive and to vary instruction methods. Some possibilities include: brainstorming, personal stories, pictures, group discussion, mini-lectures, role-plays, and visits from providers in the community.

Once your program content is well established, develop monitoring tools to be used throughout the program. Pilot programs are geared toward testing the feasibility and acceptability of an intervention model. To measure the successes and challenges faced during program implementation, the careful use of well-designed monitoring and evaluation tools will be essential. Monitoring tools can be directed toward a number of different actors within your program: the beneficiaries themselves, the mentors or program facilitators, the organizations in charge of program implementation, and those supervising the program implementers. This will depend on your program's staffing and leadership structure. Monitoring tools can supply information on multiple important issues including program attendance, participants' understanding of program content, gatekeepers' level of support for the program, and mentors' ability to deliver program content. Once the program content and monitoring tools are in place, you are ready to launch your program.

In the context of *Filles Éveillées*, the Population Council and its partners created a comprehensive curriculum consisting of 30 lessons that address life skills, hygiene and health, sexual and reproductive health, and financial capabilities. The Council drew upon existing curriculum materials in these domains in other settings and adapted the core content to focus on adolescent girl migrants living in urban areas and working in domestic service in West Africa. The four modules and 30 sessions were chosen based on needs revealed by the formative research and on time constraints of the target population. The curriculum was written in French and key words were translated into

Dioula and Mooré, the two primary languages spoken in Bobo Dioulasso and Ouagadougou, respectively. Each session began with clear objectives for what program participants should be able to do by the end of the session and was designed to be interactive to encourage participation and engagement. The curriculum was developed over a period of several months and went through multiple rounds of review from curriculum specialists as well as program managers familiar with the context. The program content was pre-tested with the target population, and a few slight adjustments were made. The comprehensive curriculum—including key themes, session topics, and individual lesson plans—can be found at http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/2011PGY_BurkinaMentorGuide_fr.pdf

The Council and its partners developed and refined a package of monitoring and evaluation tools to be used in the context of *Filles Éveillées*. We wanted to strike a balance between tools that provided important information without becoming too cumbersome to fill out. Multiple tools were developed including: reports on activities and sessions written by mentors, attendance data for each session, individual forms for home visits, mentor supervision sheets, supervision sheets for implementing organizations, quarterly reports from the implementing organizations, and curriculum feedback by mentors and implementing organizations.

STEP 6: Once the intervention is underway, conduct qualitative research to learn more about the target population

Quantitative data provide important baseline measures against which you can track participants' progress over time. However, closed-ended surveys inevitably leave researchers with additional questions about their target population. Qualitative methods are therefore needed to fill gaps in our understanding. Researchers can use in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to triangulate the findings gleaned from quantitative sources. For example, quantitative data may tell you the primary reason a girl decided to migrate but do not fully capture the multiple motivations of migration and the related decisionmaking process. In-depth interviews will provide a more nuanced picture of the migration experience.

After completing the baseline survey, the Population Council team was left with additional questions about its target population. In particular, the Council team wanted to better understand the social networks of migrant adolescent girls in domestic service and how they may have helped girls gain access to employment and other opportunities in the city. Likewise, the quantitative survey assessed girls' savings behaviors but did not address how girls prioritize their short- and long-term financial goals. Both of these topics were explored through follow-up in-depth interviews with some *Filles Éveillées* participants, and the results are written up in a

report on the subject (Kabore 2012). Recognizing that *Filles Éveillées* intervened in only one stage of the migrant girl's journey, the Population Council team wanted to understand what life was like in migration sending communities. The Council conducted in-depth interviews with former domestic workers to understand pre-migration decisionmaking and reintegration into village life following their experiences in the city. Results of this qualitative study can be found in a report on the subject (Kabore 2013).

STEP 7: Allow time for a process evaluation so that improvements can be made to the structure, implementation, and program content

Implementing programs is a learning process, and some of the most successful programs take stock of where they are and make course corrections. In addition to learning throughout the process, we suggest building in explicit time for a process evaluation. The process evaluation can entail reviewing information already collected (i.e., through program monitoring tools) and collecting primary qualitative data from direct and indirect program beneficiaries as well as program staff and key stakeholders. To remain objective, the process evaluation should not be conducted by key members of the program team. However, we suggest that you select someone familiar with the program to eliminate investing too much time in explaining the program model and key actors.

Filles Éveillées was structured so that each cohort would last over a period of eight months, coinciding with the dry season when girls live and work in cities. This design provided a natural period of time in which the program team could reflect on what worked well with the first cohort and where course corrections were needed. The process evaluation, which took place in mid-2012, sought to evaluate several aspects of the *Filles Éveillées* program before the second cohort began later that year. Specifically, the process evaluation sought to assess: 1) elements of the program that were or were not implemented as planned and obstacles to implementation; and 2) improvements that could be made to the structure, implementation, and program content in order to more effectively reduce vulnerability of the target population and increase their opportunities.

The process evaluation consisted of a thorough review of all program monitoring and evaluation tools as well as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with program participants, community members, implementing organizations, program mentors, employers, and the lead organization. A comprehensive report on the process evaluation methodology, findings, and study instruments can be found elsewhere (Jarvis and Kabore 2012). The process evaluation was conducted by a

consultant and a graduate student familiar with the program but who had not participated in its design or implementation. Some of the key changes resulting from this process evaluation included: simplifying the SRH program content; reordering the modules and introducing financial capabilities earlier so that girls had ample opportunities to practice savings behavior; providing program graduates with toolkits (designed for illiterate populations) so that they could teach key program information and skills to other girls like them; and reinforcing the importance of sessions that bring community service providers—such as nurses and financial service providers—to the girls to teach them about local resources. These course corrections resulted in more fluid program implementation with the second cohort and likely contributed to the program’s effectiveness with the second cohort.⁴

Step 8: Collect endline data and measure changes over time at the level of the girl

Collection and analysis of endline data is a critical step in evaluating how successful a program was in effecting change at the level of the girl. Endline surveys should ask the same questions as baseline surveys (unless you determine that a few of the baseline questions need to be removed due to a lack of clarity). This design will allow you to measure potential changes in girls’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in key program domains. While a more sophisticated research design such as a randomized controlled trial will allow you to attribute changes to the intervention itself, these designs are not always possible given funding constraints, donor interests, and technical capabilities of your team. Some endline assessments also gather data on attitudes toward the program itself. As with baseline data collection, we encourage you to be mindful of the potentially sensitive nature of the questions and to select interviewers and place of interviews accordingly. If your resources permit, we encourage you to look at program graduates over time to assess whether changes from pre-test to post-test persist long after program closure.

A pre- and post-test design was used to explore the extent to which participants’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors evolved over the course of the eight-month *Filles Éveillées* intervention. Population Council evaluated both program cohorts by assessing changes in participating girls’ social capital as well as life skills, health and hygiene, sexual and reproductive health, and financial capabilities. In the analysis phase, variables were created to measure constructs such as social capital, self-confidence, and gender and to assess participants’ knowledge in a particular domain (i.e., awareness of modern contraceptive methods). In the evaluation of the second cohort of participants, statistical tests were run to assess whether intended outcomes

⁴ An evaluation of the program’s second cohort can be found in Engebretsen (2013).

were significantly different between pre-test and post-test. Results from both cohorts show measurable changes at the level of the girl in all outcomes of interest and are addressed in two separate reports (Engebretsen 2012b and 2013a). In addition to the pre-test/post-test design, The Population Council administered a follow-up survey (one year after program completion) to a subsample of participants from the first cohort of *Filles Éveillées*. The follow-up survey was designed to assess the durability of girls' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in key program areas. A report provides additional information on the follow-up survey's methodology, findings, and implications (Engebretsen 2013b).

► **The last thing to keep in mind when designing, implementing, and evaluating a girl-centered program is the need to be open-minded. Be prepared to challenge your assumptions, refine your approaches, and make course corrections along the way. A pilot project is a learning process, and documenting the challenges is equally as important as documenting the successes. Remember that reaching the poorest girls in the poorest communities with targeted, evidence-based programs is not easy, but it is possible if you follow the right steps.**

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