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EFFECTIVENESS OF LIFE SKILLS INTERVENTIONS FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Protocol for a systematic review

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November 2022

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11/2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors of this protocol thank the members of the advisory group for their contributions and insights including Tabitha Mulyampiti (Makerere University), Naila Kabeer (London School of Economics), Markus Goldstein (World Bank), Seblewongel Negussie (Green Climate Fund) and Shagun Sabarwal (Women Lift Health). The authors also thank Emma De Roy (previously of the Green Climate Fund's Independent Evaluation Unit) for her contribution to this review. In addition, the authors would like to thank Junior Abdul Wahab (Independent Evaluation Unit, Green Climate Fund) for his careful proofreading of this protocol.

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ABSTRACT

The empowerment of rural women and girls in their households, communities, and society is intrinsic to climate action, equitable and inclusive food systems and, more broadly, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Much has been written to economic growth, poverty reduction, resilient rural transformation and sustainable food systems. However, systematic evidence to guide investments and programme design regarding the effectiveness of various life skills interventions in developing countries remains scarce because existing reviews are different in scope and/or geographical coverage. This systematic review will address four research questions:

1. What is the effect of the life skills interventions on the self-empowerment and social empowerment of women of any age in developing countries?
2. What is the effect of life skills education or training programmes on economic, or political empowerment, and intermediate outcomes like skills measures on women of any age in developing countries?
3. How much confidence can be placed in the findings of included studies?
4. Which factors explain the variation of effects such as intervention setting, location, and level of intervention in improving empowerment outcomes of the recipients of the intervention?

The answers to these questions will provide important contributions to the literature on life skills interventions and the empowerment of women and girls to guide climate and development interventions.

Methods/design: This systematic review will include impact evaluation studies with experimental or quasi-experimental designs. In addition to women of all ages, the target population may also include men of any age in developing countries. The unit of analysis for this review is the individual woman or man of any age participating in the programme. An evidence and gap map that preceded this study developed a typology of interventions and outcomes for the empowerment of women and girls. This systematic review defines interventions, outcomes and moderating variables based on that evidence gap map.

The eligible interventions may include any programmes that provide training to enhance life skills. Life skills are defined as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Any study that evaluates a life skills training programme, even as one component in a multi-component intervention, will be included. Qualitative studies or process evaluations will not be included. The empowerment outcomes will be measured at two different levels. Primary outcomes will include indicators of self- and social empowerment. Secondary outcomes will include indicators of economic and political empowerment. Developing countries for this systematic review are non-Annex I countries as defined by the Kyoto Protocol. The sub-groups of interest include poor and disadvantaged populations, humanitarian/conflict affected settings and people with disabilities. This review will use a set of moderator variables that will facilitate improved policy/programme design by highlighting impact heterogeneity along relevant dimensions. These dimensions may indicate whether conflict was present, whether or not men and/or the community were involved, and whether impacts vary over the rural-urban gradient or depending on the implementing agency. Findings will provide policy-relevant guidelines to improve development in developing countries in terms of climate and development interventions.

Keywords: women empowerment, girls empowerment, life skills training, developing countries, systematic review

A. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Women's empowerment is often proposed as a solution to other development outcomes. In addition to the intrinsic moral value of gender equality, empowering girls and women may result in better development and climate outcomes. From the perspective of climate change, a society in which men and women are equal can better adapt to adversities/shocks posed by climatic change and better manage natural resources.

Life skills interventions have emerged as a popular approach to empowerment, often as a part of a multi-component intervention. Life skills are defined as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Acquiring such skills may enable women to better engage socially, and so directly increase self- and social empowerment, and possibly also contribute to economic and political empowerment.

B. WHY THIS REVIEW IS IMPORTANT

There are currently no existing systematic reviews on life skills interventions for the empowerment of women in developing countries. Existing reviews are different in scope or geographical coverage. The studies in our review will be impact evaluations of life skills interventions to empower women of all ages. The target population may also include men of any age in developing countries. For this systematic review, developing countries are defined as non-Annex I countries under the Kyoto Protocol of the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Existing systematic reviews on life skills programmes mostly focus on young and adolescent populations. The emphasis in these programmes is often on tackling mental health outcomes and risk factors in the immediate environment such as in schools and the community. These programmes may also include an element of preparing young people for adulthood.

A systematic review by Kingsnorth, Healy and McArthur (2007) focuses on life skill programmes, emphasizing independent functioning in preparation for adulthood for youth with physical disabilities. Another existing review on life skills programmes in low- and middle-income countries is again confined to adolescents (age 10-19 years) and focuses on mental health outcomes (Singla and others, 2020). A review of school-based programmes is aimed at enhancing the emotional and social skills of youth to promote psychological well-being and academic performance (Sancassiani and others, 2015).

The proposed review's study population will include women with physical disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The empowerment outcomes for this review will be measured as indicators of self-empowerment and social empowerment as primary outcome areas. Economic and political empowerment will be considered secondary outcome areas (as discussed in detail below). Our systematic review is an important contribution to the literature on life skills interventions and empowerment, as we were unable to find any evidence to suggest a systematic review exists on this topic.

Table 1. Selection of intervention type

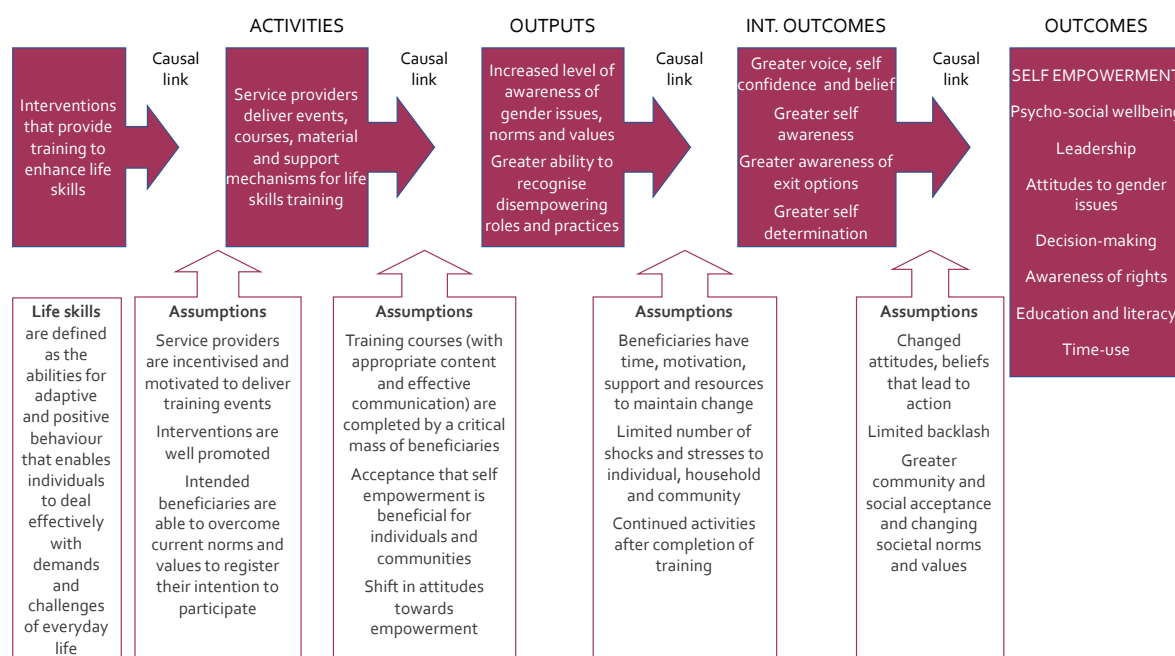
INTERVENTIONS	SUB-INTERVENTION	DEFINITIONS
Capacity building	Life skills training	Training to enhance life skills, which are defined as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

Source: Authors

C. THE INTERVENTION AND HOW IT MIGHT WORK

In this section, we present a theory of change for life skills interventions on both self-empowerment and social empowerment outcomes. Life skills interventions affecting self-empowerment entail certain activities such as service providers delivering events, courses, materials and support mechanisms for life skills training. To implement the activities effectively, one would need to assume that: (i) Service providers are incentivized and motivated to deliver training events; (ii) Interventions are well promoted; and (iii) Intended beneficiaries can overcome current norms and values/culture to register their intention to participate.

Figure 1. Life skills theory of change for self-empowerment outcomes



Source: Authors

These interventions are expected to increase their ability to learn, to communicate and engage with others, and do the day-to-day tasks expected of young people and adults. The intervention may also directly raise awareness of gender issues, norms and values, and increase the ability to recognize disempowering roles and practices. Key assumptions would need to hold for these activities to lead to expected outputs: (i) The training courses (with appropriate content and effective communication) are completed by a critical mass of beneficiaries; (ii) There is an acceptance that self-empowerment is beneficial for individuals and communities; and (iii) There is a shift in attitudes towards empowerment.

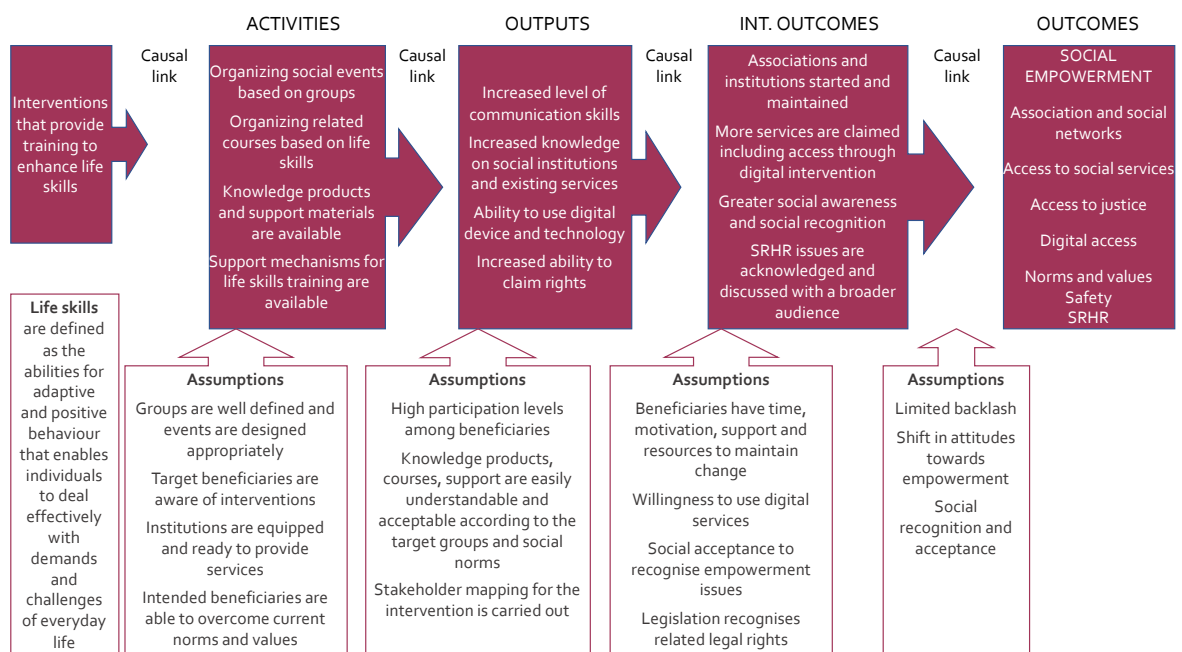
The outputs highlighted above are expected to lead to intermediate outcomes. These outcomes include greater voice, self-confidence, self-worth, self-awareness, awareness of options to exit from an abusive situation and self-determination (these are self-empowerment outcomes). Achieving these intermediate outcomes is based on several assumptions, including: (i) Beneficiaries have the time, motivation, support and resources to maintain change (ii) There are a limited number of shocks and stresses to the individual, household and community; and (iii) Activities continue after completing the training.

The life skills interventions are expected to affect final outcomes related to psycho-social wellbeing, leadership, attitudes to gender issues, decision-making, awareness of rights, education and literacy

and time-use. Once again, certain assumptions are necessary, including changed attitudes and beliefs being able to lead to action, limited backlash and greater community and social acceptance, and changing societal norms and values.

Life skills interventions affecting social empowerment may entail organizing social activities for participating groups, organizing joint courses, preparing knowledge products and support materials and ensuring the availability of support mechanisms for life skills training. But for effective implementation of the activities, certain assumptions must hold: groups should be well defined and events designed accordingly, target beneficiaries have to be aware of the intervention, institutions need to be equipped and ready to extend the services, and intended beneficiaries must be able to overcome current norms and values.

Figure 2. Life skills theory of change for social empowerment outcomes



Source: Authors

These interventions are expected to improve communication skills, increase knowledge of social institutions and existing services, enhance the use of digital devices/platforms, upgrade technology and increase beneficiary engagement. This theory of change is based on several key assumptions: (i) Groups are well defined and events are designed accordingly; (ii) Target beneficiaries are aware of the intervention; (iii) Institutions are equipped and ready to extend the services; and (iv) Intended beneficiaries can overcome current norms and values.

The outputs highlighted above are expected to lead to a number of intermediate outcomes. These include greater interaction and association with the social institution providing the training, a greater number of services being claimed and improved access to digital services. Intermediate outcomes will also include greater social awareness and recognition, while sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues will be acknowledged and discussed with broader audiences and within wider platforms.

These intermediate outcomes would be achieved based on the assumption that beneficiaries have the time, motivation, support and resources to maintain change; there is a willingness to use digital services; there is social support for raising empowerment issues; and that legislation recognises the related legal rights.

The final outcomes the life skills interventions are expected to affect are those related to association and social networks, access to social services, access to justice, digital access, norms and values, safety and SRHR. Once again, certain assumptions such as limited backlash, a shift in attitudes towards empowerment as well as social recognition and acceptance are important for these outcomes to be realised.

D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This review will address the following primary research questions:

1. What is the effect of the life skills interventions on the self-empowerment and social empowerment of women of any age in developing countries?
2. What is the effect of life skills programmes on economic, or political empowerment, and intermediate outcomes like skills measures on women of any age in developing countries?
3. How much confidence can be placed in the findings of included studies?
4. Which factors explain the variation of effects such as intervention setting, location, and level of intervention in improving empowerment outcomes of the recipients of the intervention?

E. INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

1. TYPES OF STUDIES

Studies with experimental or quasi-experimental designs will be included in this systematic review. Eligible designs include where a control or comparison group is present and one of the following is true:

- Participants are randomly assigned (using a process of random allocation, such as a random number generation).
- A quasi-random method of assignment has been used and pre-treatment equivalence information is available regarding the nature of the group differences (and groups generated are essentially equivalent).
- Participants are non-randomly assigned but confounding factors are controlled for through relevant demographic and socio-economic characteristics (using observables, or propensity scores) and/or according to a cut-off on an ordinal or continuous variable (regression discontinuity design).
- Participants are non-randomly assigned, but statistical methods have been used to control for differences between groups (e.g. using multiple regression analysis, including difference-in-difference, cross-sectional using single differences, or instrumental variable regression).

Mixed-method studies with any of the above methods of allocation of participants to the intervention are also eligible. Studies with any follow-up duration will be included. Qualitative studies or process evaluations will not be included.

2. TYPES OF PARTICIPANTS

The target populations may include women and men of any age from developing countries as defined as non-Annex I countries of the Kyoto Protocol. The population could include poor, disadvantaged people and people with disabilities.

3. TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS

The eligible interventions may include any programmes that provide training to enhance life skills, which are defined as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. This definition of life skills comes from the World Health Organization. We are aware that for empowerment purposes, a life skills training programme can be one component in a multi-component intervention. Any study that includes a life skills component with other intervention components (such as technical and vocational training interventions, or business and mentoring interventions) will be included in this review. We know from our existing evidence gap map that there are interventions to improve sexual and reproductive health or interventions to prevent interpersonal violence that also involve a life skills component. We will not include these specific interventions.

4. TYPES OF OUTCOMES

The eligible outcome categories have been classified as primary and secondary outcomes as follows:

- Primary outcomes: Self-empowerment outcomes (such as psycho-social wellbeing, self-confidence, self-esteem, leadership, self-efficacy, ability to make decisions, awareness about rights, attitudes to gender issues, time-use, education and literacy) and social empowerment outcomes (such as norms and values, access to justice and social services, association, and social networks). See Table 2 for the definitions of outcome areas under these primary areas.
- Secondary outcomes: Economic empowerment outcomes (such as employment status, income and expenditure, assets including land, finance, and business), political empowerment (participation including voting, political representation and legal and institutional frameworks and rights), and intermediate outcomes such as skill measures.

Table 2. Distribution of main roles

DOMAIN	INDICATORS	DEFINITIONS
Self-empowerment	Psyco-social wellbeing	Psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, self-efficacy, sense of inclusion and entitlement
	Leadership	Ability to lead, manage, and mobilize
	Attitudes to gender issues	Opinions concerning gender norms, roles and relations
	Decision-making	Role in decision-making matters, such as allocation of household resources and sexual and reproductive health
	Awareness of rights	Knowledge of rights, exercising rights, and rights awareness; collective awareness of injustice
	Education and literacy	Competence in educational matters; knowledge and know-how; women's literacy and access to a broad range of educational options
	Time-use	Indicators that measure time spent by women in different activities and may indicate work hours of women and time spent on leisure activities, if any (recognizing multi-tasking)
Social empowerment	Mobility	Women's access or restriction to places and spaces
	Association and social network	Representation in associations, participation in social networks or groups outside the family that support women
	Access to social services	Access to different public services including those that support women or particularly vulnerable groups

DOMAIN	INDICATORS	DEFINITIONS
	Access to justice	Access to legal services or legal advice and equality before the law
	Digital access	Access to and ability to use digital tools and services
	Norms and values	Beliefs and ideals about women's role in the community or society
	Safety	Refers to a safe environment, community, or society for women
	SRHR	Women's control over their sexual identity and behaviour, and knowledge of sexual rights and information

Source: Singh and others (forthcoming)

5. TYPES OF SETTINGS

All settings will be eligible with studies being conducted in developing countries as defined by the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The target group of the eligible interventions will be women and girls of any age and may also include men and boys of any age.

F. INFORMATION SOURCES

The systematic review utilizes searches of databases, relevant websites and citation tracking of included studies. The search for this systematic review is from the companion evidence gap map on the effectiveness of interventions for women empowerment in developing countries. A systematic search of the following electronic databases was conducted:

- CAB abstracts
- EconLit with full text, Political science complete, Soc-Index complete, Social science full text, Education source APA PSYC Articles (EBSCOhost platform)
- JSTOR
- ProQuest
- PubMed
- Sage journals database
- Scopus, and
- Web of Science

Search strategies were customized as per each of the databases mentioned above. Search terms are listed in Appendix 5. Systematic searches of the following databases and websites were also conducted:

- enGENDER IMPACT
- EPPI [Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre] systematic reviews, EPPI knowledge library
- International Centre for Research on Women
- IDEAS/Repec
- National Bureau of Economic Research
- Social Science Research Network
- UN Women
- United States Agency for International Development
- 3ie (International Initiative for Impact Evaluation) and

- Campbell Systematic Reviews Library

The search terms included Boolean operator AND designs eligible for the evidence gap map (EGM). Country filters were used where available. Boolean operator AND was also used for women's of the following academic journals were also completed.

- Asian Journal of Women's Studies
- Development and Change
- Development in Practice
- Economic Development and Cultural Change
- European Journal of Development Research
- Feminist Economics
- Gender and Development
- Gender, Place and Culture
- Gender, Technology and Development
- International Journal of Educational Development
- Journal of International Development
- Journal of Development Economics
- Journal of Development Effectiveness
- Journal of Development Studies
- Journal of Human Development and Capabilities
- Oxford Development Studies
- Social Indicators Research
- World Bank Economic Review
- World Development
- Women's Studies International Forum

G. DATA EXTRACTION AND MANAGEMENT

1. SCREENING, CODING AND ABSTRACTION

Systematic screening and data extraction were carried out for included studies as per the screening and data extraction tools (see Appendix 2). The details of the procedure are as follows.

a. Selection of studies

EPPI Reviewer 4 and EPPI Reviewer Web versions are used for data management and data analysis. All the identified studies were imported to EPPI Reviewer for screening followed by data extraction. The identified studies were independently screened by two researchers. The identified records were first screened at the title and abstract level.

Full text screening of the studies included at the title and abstract stage was independently completed by two researchers. Disagreements at both stages of screening were resolved by discussion. If disagreements persist, an arbiter (from the evidence review team) will be approached and the arbiter's decision regarding the inclusion/exclusion of studies was final.

As described above, the search for this review is the one completed for the companion evidence gap map on women's empowerment (Report We Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) diagram for that map, with a final step showing the screening of studies for eligibility in this review.

b. Data extraction and management

The data extraction form has regional and geographical codes, population, setting, study design, codes for interventions/outcomes and their sub-categories. Additional codes related to the characteristics of interventions were also coded.

Quantitative data for outcome measures including descriptive information, outcomes means and standard deviations, test statistics (e.g. t-test, F-test, p-values, 95% confidence intervals), as well as the sample size in each intervention group will be extracted for all the eligible studies for the studies included in the systematic review.

Two researchers will independently extract data and the data extraction reports will be matched for agreements. Disagreements encountered at the screening stage will be resolved by discussion and comparison of notes. An arbiter will resolve any disagreements and the arbiter's decision will be final.

2. RISK OF BIAS ASSESSMENT IN INCLUDED STUDIES

Two researchers will independently assess the confidence in the findings of the included studies and compare the assessment with inputs from the arbiter, if needed, as conducted at the screening and data extraction stages.

H. DATA ANALYSIS

1. CODING AND DATA EXTRACTION

a. Unit of analysis issues

The unit of analysis for this review, and most of the included studies, is the individual woman or man participating in the programme. Studies will usually report data as averages at the programme level, both for all people in the programme and possibly for sub-groups by age, sex, location or other characteristics.

Studies of the same study population will be treated as findings from the same study. However, if the same programme is studied at different points in time (more than two years between data collection), these will be treated as separate studies, unless the more recent study is focused on the long-run effects of participants treated at an earlier point in time. If there are multiple versions of the same paper, the most recent version will be used, unless an older version provides estimates not available in the more recent version.

All relevant effect sizes will be coded, so there will likely be multiple effect sizes for an outcome from a single study (or studies from the same study population). Multiple reports of the same outcome may occur for several reasons, each requiring a different treatment. The following four cases are likely to be found:

- Multiple measures of the same empowerment outcome or sub-outcome level. In such cases, we will use a three-level meta-analytical model to estimate weighted mean effect sizes for all outcomes to account for the dependency between effect sizes (Viechtbauer, 2010). This approach can incorporate the inclusion of multiple effect sizes from the same evaluations for different outcomes (Hedges and others, 2010).

- Sub-group analysis: We will code each sub-group effect size as a unique effect along with details of the sub-group for moderator analysis. A code (full sample or sub-sample) will be included so that only the full sample estimate is used in the overall meta-analysis, but the appropriate sub-sample estimate can be used for the sub-group analysis.
- Follow-up analysis: Where a study has outcome data on follow-up, we will code all effects along with the time of the measure. These effect sizes will be used for an analysis of the durability of effects.
- Model specification: Non-experimental studies may report effect sizes with and without confounders. We will pick the effect size from the preferred model of the study (ideally the most parsimonious model which allows for confounders). If no preferred model is stated, then we will use the effect size from the most comprehensive model specification.

b. Coding categories

Included studies will be coded by:

- Intervention name. This will help identify any studies of the same intervention.
- Intervention sub-categories (since life skills are often provided in combination with other intervention components a single intervention is expected to be coded under more than one intervention sub-category).
- Outcome sub-categories. As described above, outcomes are classified by the outcome domains of self-empowerment, social empowerment as primary areas, and economic empowerment and political empowerment as secondary areas, each with corresponding sub-categories (see Appendix 1). We will also code intermediate outcomes, such as communications skills, where they are available.
- Filters from the evidence gap map, which are potential moderators in the analysis, include study design (randomized controlled trial (RCT)/non-experimental) the scale of the programme, location (rural/urban), population target group (by age, and other characteristics such as poor and disadvantaged, and disability), level of intervention (individual, household or community), implementing agency (government, official development agency or non-governmental organization), and setting (school, training centre, or community).
- Other intervention characteristics, which may also act as moderators, include duration, intensity, and qualifications of staff delivering the programme.

Coding will be done in duplicate, using the EPPI Reviewer software, with discrepancies reconciled by a third party if needed.

c. Data extraction for meta-analysis

For meta-analysis we will code:

- Effect size as reported in the study, with necessary details on calculations, including whether the effect is for the whole sample or a sub-sample (e.g. men/women).
- Sample sizes for treatment and comparison groups.
- Other reported statistics such as standard deviation of the outcome, t-statistics and standard errors of effect estimates.
- Time of measurement for each outcome (e.g. baseline, six-month follow-up).
- Attrition rate, if reported, and whether the estimate is ITT or ATT.
- The control condition as active or passive control.

We will extract the data in duplicate, with discrepancies reconciled by a third party if needed. Appendix 3 provides an overview of the data extraction tool. Results of the meta-analysis will also be shown separately according to high, medium, and low confidence based on the critical appraisal tool.

d. Critical appraisal and risk of bias

The confidence in the findings of all studies included in the review will be assessed using a critical appraisal tool for primary studies developed by Saran, White and Kuper (2020).¹ See Appendix 4 for a version of the tool. Coding for the critical appraisal will be carried out by two independent reviewers, with a third person as arbiter if required.

We will also assess the confidence in the review findings for each reported outcome (effect size) in the summary of findings table. We will follow the GRADE² principle of initially assuming high confidence in an effect, but then downgrade one item (on a scale of high confidence, moderate confidence, low confidence and very low confidence) using the following criteria:

- Risk of bias (if more than half of the studies on which an effect is based are rated low confidence)
- Publication bias (if the Egger's test shows)
- Imprecision (an I^2 of more than 80%)
- Evidence base (effect based on fewer than five studies)

An effect can be upgraded if it is a large ($d > 0.6$) consistent ($I^2 < 40\%$) effect.

2. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

We will provide univariate and bivariate tabulations of the main items coded. Specifically, we will provide:

- A bivariate tabulation of life skills training against other included intervention sub-categories, which will show the interventions which are delivered jointly with life skills training.
- A bivariate tabulation of life skills training against outcomes falling under self and social empowerment domains.
- A univariate tabulation of interventions with a brief description of interventions based on the included studies (a study-by-study description is given in the table of included studies).
- Univariate tabulations of filters: study design (RCT and non-experimental), geographical region, and special population categories (e.g. women with disabilities).

Please note that qualitative studies are not included in this review.

3. STATISTICAL PROCEDURES AND CONVENTIONS

Empowerment outcomes may be reported as either dichotomous variables or on an ordinal scale. Ordinal outcomes will be treated as continuous variables. As per the recommended practice in the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions (Deeks and others, 2022), ordinal outcomes will be treated as dichotomous if the scale is short and can be rendered dichotomous in

¹ This critical appraisal tool is used for assessing the confidence in findings of impact evaluations in many maps and reviews. This tool was first used in the EGM on studies of the effectiveness of interventions for people with disabilities in low and middle-income countries.

² Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluations

some clear and transparent manner (based on distribution or names of categories) or as a continuous variable for a longer scale.

Outcomes reported as dichotomous variables will be converted to odds ratios via derivation of a 2x2 table from the reported results (e.g. percentages will be converted to absolute numbers by multiplying by the sample size).

For continuous outcome variables we will calculate Hedge's g (as Hedge's g is expected to be more accurate than Cohen's d for small samples which is expected to be biased in a meta-analysis (see review)). Each study will be checked to ensure that outcomes are coded in a consistent direction so that higher values correspond to greater levels of empowerment. For meta-analysis, the g -statistics for continuous outcomes will be converted to a common metric. A random-effects model will be used on account of the variations in intervention and population which are to be expected.

4. HETEROGENEITY

Heterogeneity between effect sizes reported in the studies will be assessed by reporting the Q -value, degrees of freedom and the value of I^2 . Forest plots will be generated for a visual representation of pooled effect size on all key outcome indicators falling under the self and social empowerment areas. The causes of heterogeneity, if any, will be identified by visual inspection and moderator analysis. Separate forest plots will be presented for important moderators. Moderators to be considered are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Moderators

MODERATOR	CODES
Participant characteristics	Female/male/mixed Young women Women with disabilities
Scale	Local, regional or national
Location	Rural, urban or both
Setting	School, community, other Humanitarian setting
Duration of intervention	Days, weeks or months
Intensity	Activity/session duration Activity/session frequency
Time of effect measurement	Endline Up to 6 months 7-18 months 19-35 months 36 months or more
Confidence in study findings	High, medium and low

5. TREATMENT EFFECTS

High attrition is quite often a challenge in RCTs. Differential attrition will be reported during the coding stage for all quantitative studies as it is one of the items in the critical appraisal tool. Where attrition is high, it matters if the reported effect size is the intention to treat effects (ITT) or the

average treatment effect on the treated (ATT). We aim to report the meta-analysis of ITTs (adjusting ATT, if necessary). This approach requires full reporting of losses to the programme and losses to the sample, both of which are often not available in published articles or reports.

6. PUBLICATIONS

Publication bias will be assessed for the primary outcomes falling under the self and social empowerment domains by constructing a funnel plot for each of the outcomes (Higgins and Green, 2011). The funnel plot will be used for a trim

I. CONCLUSION

This systematic review is primarily estimating the role of life skills interventions on the self and social empowerment of women of any age in developing countries. The findings from the systematic review will guide how climate and agricultural interventions can include such interventions within their projects and programmes. More equal societies with both women and men as equal partners are more likely to be more resilient and adjust to the impacts of climate change. Similarly, equality between women and men can improve the management of natural resources and agriculture. Overall, gender equality is an intrinsic moral value. But importantly, it can also result in better climate and development outcomes.

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[explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1059637&context=L&vid=Lirias&search_scope=Lirias&tab=default_tab&fromSitemap=1.](#)

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTION AND OUTCOME CATAGORIES

INTERVENTION	SUB-INTERVENTION	DEFINITIONS
Policy and institutional	Legislation	Laws supporting women's rights, access to resources and options; advocacy for rights and legislation (Addae, 2015).
	Gender-based budgeting	A gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality (Quinn, 2009).
	Governance & accountability	Organizational systems, procedures and interventions by government bodies to provide information and accountability to non-government stakeholders such as civil society organizations and also the general public.
	Access to justice	Use of judicial system to redress rights violations. Interventions to improve access to justice for women.
	Institutional reform & regulations	Changes at the level of institutions in policies, rules, regulations and procedures to serve increase gender sensitivity or gender transformation and gender equity.
Capacity building	Life skills training	Training to enhance life skills, which are defined as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.
	Technical and vocational training	Non-traditional forms of training or learning training may comprise "a series of courses on income generating activities" (Bandiera and others, 2012) or developing soft skills such as "interaction with customers, work in teams, acting professionally and properly representing themselves in job interviews" (Groh and others, 2012) with the aim to equip participants to find employment in any sector or be self-employed. The technical skills training may be around enhancing knowledge about the technical aspects of an occupation/vocation such as the use of certain machines or technology in agriculture, or seed management to enhance productivity.
	Business training & mentoring	Business coaching or mentoring programmes that provide participants with knowledge and skills to prepare for starting a business or "promote entrepreneurship by providing entrepreneurship training" (Pascual, 2008); e.g. financial management and marketing strategies.
	Information And Communications Technology interventions	Training or learning programmes on digital tools and software, and other technologies.
Support to civil society and community organizations	National organizations	Government or civil society national level associations for women.
	Self-help groups	Community groups of about 10-20 members that pool savings and for circular credit. Groups may or may not be supported by a formal lending institution like a bank, and may undertake joint activities.

INTERVENTION	SUB-INTERVENTION	DEFINITIONS
	Farmers groups	Groups or associations among farmers for common activities such as training or input procurement.
	Savings groups	Groups or associations in which a majority of members are women for saving and borrowing.
	Cooperatives	Producer and consumer cooperatives for sales and purchases.
	Other community groups	Any other associations within the community for women or supporting women.
Economic	Cash and in-kind transfers (to households, not firms)	Cash and in-kind or other goods and services given for free to households, either conditionally or unconditionally.
	Asset programmes (incl. land)	Programmes which provide ownership or use rights to assets including land.
	Business loans and grants (inc. in-kind for business)	Cash loans and in-kind or other goods and services for business purposes or entrepreneurship.
	Financial services (insurance, etc.)	Financial services provided by the finance sector other than loans e.g. insurance and forex.
	Employment support	Interventions to provide employment through work placement, apprenticeships and internships, public works and job reservation.
	Access to markets	Interventions that promote women's knowledge of and access to markets and participation in trade-related activities.
Gender awareness activities for social-behavioural change	School-based	Interventions that may be delivered at a classroom level or follow a whole-school approach towards raising awareness among the students and staff about gender inequality and bias and enhance inclusive learning.
	Family-individual	Interventions that are delivered on a one-to-one or family basis (including couples/significant others/partners) to reflect on gender norms, roles and relations to encourage joint decision-making and on aspects of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
	Community-based	Interventions that are delivered in a group setting among the community members who may or may not be influential to reflect, discuss and debate the gender norms and roles to address gender inequalities.
	Media campaigns	Interventions promoting gender awareness through print or electronic media and which may concern sex-selective abortions, girl education, immunization, nutrition and other related issues that address gender inequalities).
	Educational interventions	Various educational materials/activities/programmes on gender awareness.

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DOMAIN	INDICATORS	DEFINITIONS
Self-empowerment	Psyco-social wellbeing	Psychological well-being, self-esteem, self-efficacy, sense of inclusion and entitlement (Addae, 2015).
	Leadership	Ability to lead, manage, and mobilize.
	Attitudes to gender issues	Opinions about gender norms, roles and relations.
	Decision-making	Role in decision-making matters, such as allocation of household resources and sexual and reproductive health.
	Awareness of rights	Knowledge of rights, exercising rights, and rights awareness; collective awareness of injustice.
	Education and literacy	Competence in educational matters; knowledge and know-how; women's literacy and access to a broad range of educational options.
	Time-use	Indicators that measure time spent by women in different activities and may indicate work hours of women and time spent on leisure activities, if any (recognizing multi-tasking).
Social empowerment	Mobility	Women's access or restriction to places and spaces.
	Association and social network	Representation in associations, participation in social networks or groups outside the family that support women.
	Access to social services	Access to different public services including those that support women or particularly vulnerable groups.
	Access to justice	Access to legal services or legal advice and equality before the law.
	Digital access	Access to and ability to use digital tools and services.
	Norms and values	Beliefs and ideals about women's role in the community or society.
	Safety	Refers to a safe environment, community, or society for women.
	SRHR	Women's control over their sexual identity and behaviour, and knowledge of sexual rights and information.
Economic empowerment	Employment	Employment measures including job quality.
	Income & expenditure	Earnings and expenditure.
	Assets (incl. land)	Control and ownership of assets and land.
	Finance	Access to credit/loan/ finance.
	Business	Any outcome of women owning or controlling a business.
Political empowerment	Participation (incl. voting)	Political engagement and participation, exercise right to vote, knowledge/awareness of political system and means to navigate.

DOMAIN	INDICATORS	DEFINITIONS
	Political representation	Representation in local government and government bodies or agencies, including formal representation of women's interests or lobbying for women's interests.
	Legal and institutional framework and rights	Changes in rules, regulations, policies, contracts, laws, and legislations of government and other agencies and organizations.

Appendix 2. SCREENING TOOL

No.	QUESTION	RESPONSE
1	Is the study conducted in developing countries, as per the Kyoto Protocol classification of non-Annex-1 countries? (See the list at https://unfccc.int/process/parties-non-party-stakeholders/parties-convention-and-observer-states .)	Yes, screen on Q.2 No, exclude on country
2	Does the study target women/men (of any age, employment or landholding status or engaged in any sector of the economy, be it formal/informal/ self-employed) or programme staff and community-level influencers (youth/elderly) towards empowering women?	Yes, screen on Q.3 No, exclude on population
3	Is it a life skills intervention (in conjunction with technical and vocational training and/or business training and mentoring) aimed at empowering women at any level, be it individual/household/community and may be led by women?	Yes, screen on Q.4 No, exclude on intervention
4	Does the study analyse the effect of the life skills intervention on the empowerment of women resulting from economic or socio-cultural or legal or political or familial or interpersonal or psychological outcomes? (quantitative)	Yes, include No, exclude on design

Appendix 3. CODING/DATA EXTRACTION FORM

- Country
 - List of countries including those not reported
- Region (geographic)
 - East Asia and the Pacific
 - Europe and Central Asia
 - Latin America and the Caribbean
 - The Middle East and North Africa
 - South Asia
 - Sub-Saharan Africa
 - Not reported
- Region (income)
 - Low-income
 - Lower-middle income
 - Upper-middle income
 - High-income
 - Not reported
- Target group of intervention
 - Women (25 and above)
 - Young women (15-24)
 - Girls
 - Men and boys
 - Community leaders
 - Government officials
 - NGO workers
 - Target not stated/relevant
- Population
 - Poor and disadvantaged
 - People with disabilities
 - Humanitarian settings/conflict affected
 - Not reported
- Study design
 - RCT
 - Non-experimental design with comparison group
- Study status
 - Completed
 - Ongoing

- Level of intervention
 - Individual
 - Household
 - Firm
 - Community and community groups
 - Not stated/relevant
- Location of intervention
 - Rural incl. semi-rural
 - Urban incl. peri-urban
 - Both
 - Not stated or unclear
- Scale
 - Local
 - Regional
 - National
 - Not stated/not reported
- Implemented by
 - Government agency
 - Official development agency
 - International NGO
 - Local NGO
 - Private sector
 - Research team
 - Community or individual
 - Other
 - Not reported
- Setting of intervention
 - School and college
 - Training centre
 - Community (centres, public spaces, fields etc)
 - Private sector organization
 - Other
 - Not stated/reported
- Intervention
 - Policy and institutional
 - + Legislation
 - + Gender-based budgeting
 - + Governance & accountability
 - + Professional training

- + Institutional reform & regulations
- Capacity building
 - + Life skills training
 - + Technical and vocational training
 - + Business training & mentoring
 - + Information and Communication Technology interventions
- Support to civil society and community organizations
 - + National organizations
 - + Self-help groups
 - + Farmers groups
 - + Savings groups
 - + Cooperatives
 - + Other community groups
- Economic interventions
 - + Cash and in-kind transfers (to households, not firms)
 - + Asset programmes (incl. land)
 - + Business loans and grants (including in-kind for business)
 - + Financial services (insurance, etc.)
 - + Employment support
 - + Access to markets
- Gender awareness activities for social-behavioural change
 - + School-based
 - + Family-individual
 - + Community-based
 - + Media campaigns (incl. social media)
 - + Educational interventions
- Outcomes
 - Self-empowerment
 - + Psycho-social wellbeing
 - + Leadership
 - + Attitudes to gender issues
 - + Decision-making
 - + Awareness of rights
 - + Education and literacy
 - + Time-use
 - Social empowerment
 - + Mobility
 - + Association and social network
 - + Access to social services

- + Access to justice
- + Digital access
- + Norms and values
- + Safety
- + SRHR
- Economic empowerment
 - + Employment
 - + Income & expenditure
 - + Assets (incl. land)
 - + Finance
 - + Business
- Political empowerment
 - + Participation (incl. voting)
 - + Political representation
 - + Legal and institutional framework and rights
- Programme name/Branded Programmes
- Effect size (numerical values)
- Type of effect
 - Proportion or percentage
 - Regression coefficient
 - Mean
- Sample or sub-sample estimate
 - Whole sample
 - Age sub-sample
- Sample size – treatment group (numerical value)
- Sample size – comparison group (numerical value)
- Other effect size statistics
 - Standard error
 - T-statistics
 - Z-statistics
- Time of measurement
 - Endline
 - 2 year follow-up
- Attrition rate (numerical value and time at which measured)
- Treatment estimate
 - ITT
 - ATT
- Comparison condition
 - Active

- Passive
- Critical appraisal for primary studies
 - Study design, end of intervention (Potential confounders taken into account)
 - + RCT, regression discontinuity design (RDD), ITT, instrumental variable
 - + Difference-in-differences (DiD) with matching, propensity score matching (PSM)
 - + Other
 - Study design, longest follow-up if applicable (Potential confounders taken into account)
 - + RCT, RDD, ITT, instrumental variable
 - + DiD with matching, PSM
 - + Other
 - Masking or blinding
 - + EITHER masking of outcome measurement OR masking for analysis (or both)
 - + Unblinded or no mention of blinding
 - Power calculation
 - + Mention of power calculation
 - + No discussion of power calculation
 - Losses to follow up are presented and acceptable, End of intervention
 - + Overall and differential attrition within What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) combined levels*
 - + Overall and differential attrition close to WWC combined levels*
 - + Attrition not reported, OR falls well outside WWC acceptable combined levels*
 - + n/a for ex-post studies
 - Losses to follow up are presented and acceptable (Longest follow-up, if applicable)
 - + Attrition not reported, OR falls well outside WWC acceptable combined levels*
 - + Overall and differential attrition close to WWC combined levels*
 - + Overall and differential attrition within WWC combined levels*
 - + n/a for ex-post studies
 - Definition of intervention is clearly defined
 - + Intervention named but not described, or not named
 - + Brief description of the intervention
 - + Intervention clearly and fully described
 - Outcome measures are clearly defined and reliable
 - + Outcome named but not described
 - + Brief description of the outcome
 - + Outcome measure clearly and fully described, preferably regarding validation
 - Baseline balance (n/a for before versus after)
 - + No baseline balance test (except RCT) OR reported and significant differences on more than five measures. Propensity score matching without establishing common support

- + Baseline balance test, imbalance on five or fewer measures
- + RCT or baseline balance report and satisfactory (imbalance on two or fewer measures)
- Overall confidence in the study (end of intervention)
 - + Low: Low on any one of items 1a, 4a, 6 and 7
 - + Medium: Medium on any one of items 1a, 4a, 6 and 7 AND NOT LOW
 - + High: High on all of items 1a, 4a, 6 and 7
- Longest follow-up (if applicable)
 - + Low on any one of items 1b, 4b, 6 and 7 (n/a if 1b and 4b n/a)
 - + Medium on any one of items 1b, 4b, 6 and 7 AND NOT LOW (n/a if 1b and 4b n/a)
 - + High on all of items 1b, 4b, 6 and 7 (n/a if 1b and 4b n/a)

Appendix 4. CRITICAL APPRAISAL TOOL TO ASSESS CONFIDENCE IN THE FINDINGS OF INCLUDED STUDIES

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	KEY
Intervention	Is the intervention clearly named and described, including all relevant components. See examples below.	High: full and clear description, so that the main components and how they are delivered are clear Medium: Partial description Low: Little or no description
Evaluation questions	Are the evaluation questions clearly stated?	High: full and clear description, so that the main components and how they are delivered are clear Medium: Partial description Low: Little or no description
Study design	Use the study design coding	High: Experimental Medium: Non-experimental Low: Before versus after
Outcomes	Are the outcomes clearly defined? Where appropriate do they use an existing, validated measurement tool?	High: full and clear definition using validated instruments where available (a researcher wishing to use these outcomes would have sufficient information to do so) Medium: Partial definition. May use validated instruments but without sufficient references to the source. Low: Little or no definition
Sample size (power calculation)	Do the authors report a power calculation as the basis for sample size?	High: Power calculation report and sample size meet necessary sample size Medium: Power calculation mentioned and sample size meets necessary sample size Low: No mention of power calculation.
Attrition	Reported for endline and longest follow-up. Calculate overall attrition and differential attrition (see example below). It is often necessary to calculate from the table of results. If sample size varies by outcome calculate for the highest attrition.	High: Attrition within Institute of Education Sciences (IES) conservative standard Medium: Attrition within IES liberal standard Low: Attrition outside IES liberal standard

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	KEY
Baseline balance	Are the treatment and comparison group comparable at baseline (same average values of observed indicators)?	High: Balance observed for 90% or more of reported indicators Medium: Balance observed on 80-89% of reported indicators Low: Balance observed on less than 80% of report indicators OR balance not reported
Overall (Including questions for all studies)	The overall score uses the weakest link in the chain principle i.e., is the lowest score on any item.	High: High on all items Medium: No lower than medium on any item Low: At least one low

Appendix 5. SEARCH TERMS

The following search terms were used:

Population

"adolscen*" OR "mij noreni" OR "youth" OR "young adult"
OR ("school adj 6 student") OR "teen*" OR "schoolgirl"
schoolboy* OR male or female or gender

Intervention

(Legislation OR "Sensitisation campaigns" OR "Gender awareness" OR "Information provision" OR
"Multifunctional platform project*" OR "Safer spaces" OR "Civic education" OR "Reform village-
level" OR "Inclusive community" OR "Cash transfers" OR "Financial literacy" OR "job skills
training" OR "Active labor market") OR ("Transport infrastructure" OR "Business grants" OR
"Public works programme*" OR "Women co-operatives" OR "Self-help groups" OR "Gender based
budget*" OR "In-kind transfers" OR "group education" OR "Gender equality champions" OR
PRADAN OR Priyadarshini OR STEP OR Kudumbasree OR NREGS OR "BRAC Project*" OR
Insurance)) OR (Kiosks OR "Mahila E-Haat" OR "Rashtriya mahila kosh" OR "SWADHAR
scheme" OR "Advocacy group" OR "small enterprises" OR "social-enterprises" OR "BRAC'S
PROGRAMME" OR "Young women citizen center*" OR "Joint gender programme" OR "One-stop
centers" OR "media advocacy" OR "Gender focal points")) OR ("educational incentives" OR
microlending OR "Women on wheels" OR NGO OR "National skill development corporation" OR
"Beti bachao beti padhao" OR "micro finance support" OR "Emerge center for reintegration

Location

Afghanistan Or Albania Or Algeria Or Angola Or Antigua And Barbuda Or Argentina Or Armenia
Or Azerbaijan Or Bahamas Or Bahrain Or Bangladesh Or Barbados Or Belize Or Benin Or Bhutan
Or Bolivia Or Bosnia Or Botswana Or Brazil Or Bulgaria Or "Brunei Darussalam" Or "Burkina
Fasso" Or Burundi Or Burundi "Cabo Verde" Or Cambodia Or Cameroon Or "Central African
Republic" Or Chad Or Chile Or China Or Colombia Or Comoros Or Congo Or "Cook Islands" Or
"Costa Rica" Or Cote D'ivoire Or Cuba Or "Democratic Peoples Republic Of Korea" Or
"Democratic Republic Of The Congo" Or Djibouti) Or (Dominica Or "Dominican Republic" Or
Ecuador Or Egypt Or El Salvador Or "Equatorial Guinea" Or Eritrea Or Eswatini Or Ethiopia Or
Fiji Or Gabon Or Gambia Or Georgia Or Ghana Or Grenada Or Guatemala Or Guinea Or Guiana
Bissau Or Guyana Or Haiti Or Honduras Or India Or Indonesia Or Iran Or Iraq Or Jamaica Or
Jordan Or Kazakhstan Or Kenya Or Kiribati Or Kuwait Or Kyrgyzstan Or "Lao Pdr" Or Lebanon Or
Lesotho Or Liberia Or Libya Or Madagascar Or Malawi Or Malaysia Or Maldives Or Mali Or
"Marshall Islands" Or Mauritania Or Mauritius Or Mexico Or Micronesia Or Mongolia Or
Montenegro Or Morocco Or Mozambique Or Myanmar Or Nauru Or Namibia)) Or (Nepal Or
Nicaragua Or Niger Or Nigeria Or Niue Or Oman Or Pakistan Or Palau Or Panama Or Paraguay Or
Peru Or Philippines Or "Papua New Guinea" Or "Republic Of Moldova" Or Rwanda Or ("Saint
Kitts And Nevis") Or "St Lucia" Or ("Saint Vincent And The Grenadines") Or Samoa Or ("Sao
Tome And Principe") Or "Saudi Arabia" Or Senegal Or Serbia Or Seychelles Or "Sierra Leone" Or
Singapore Or "Solomon Islands" Or Somalia Or "South Africa" Or "Sri Lanka" Or Sudan Or
Suriname Or "Syrian Arab Republic" Or Tajikistan Or Thailand Or "The Republic Of North
Macedonia" Or "Timor-Leste" Or Togo Or Tonga Or ("Trinidad And Tobago") Or Turkmenistan Or
Tuvalu Or "United Arab Emirates" Or "United Republic Of Tanzania" Or Uganda Or Uzbekistan Or
Vanuatu Or Venezuela Or Vietnam Or Viet Nam Or Yemen Or Zambia Or Zimbabwe)) Or

("Developing Country*" Or "Less Developed" Or "Under Developed" Or Underdeveloped Or "Low Income Country*" Or Deprived Or "Fragile States" Or "Deprived Nation" Or Lmic)

Outcomes

women empowerment index" OR "Self confidence" OR "Self esteem" OR "Self image" OR "Decision making" OR "" OR Bargaining OR "Freedom of mobility" OR "Freedom of movement" OR "Reduced age of marriage" OR "family size" OR "Women leader*" OR "Women entrepreneurs" OR "Awareness of rights" OR "Gender transformation" OR Education* OR "inheritance of property" OR Negotiations OR "Voting rights" OR "land rights" OR Empowered OR Capability* OR Autonomy OR "political empowerment" OR "Digital access" OR "Gender equality" OR "Political inclusion"

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