

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES FOR CHANGE

A Program Factsheet

March 2021



The issue

True gender equality cannot be achieved by working with girls alone. Studies have shown that while safe space programs can dramatically change girls' internal outcomes (what they know, how they feel about themselves, etc.), they aren't as effective at changing girls' external outcomes, i.e. things that require outside influence that parents, partners, or other community members can limit.

Other studies have shown that programs working with only men or only women on changing gender norms are equally ineffective. Men-only programs can often result in more "benevolent sexism," where things like rates of domestic violence decrease but no change is made on where men rank women socially when surveyed about community roles.

Women and girl-only programs focused on changing gender norms can sometimes receive community backlash if the rest of the community is not engaged.



Drinking water stations donated by a Batonga program participant as part of her community service project (2020).

HOW WE'RE SOLVING THE PROBLEM



Understanding that girls and women, no matter how educated and empowered, will always be held back by the gender norms and attitudes of their communities, we have intentionally woven community engagement activities into the fabric of our programs to give girls and young women the opportunity to share their learnings and growth with their communities.

How we work to achieve young women's economic empowerment:

➤ Hosting community engagement events and community service project competitions

Batonga's Leadership Clubs follow a 6-month cycle structure, in which 5 months of lessons and sessions addressing related themes are followed by a sixth Month of Action. Girls and young women spend this month planning and executing community engagement events and community service projects with their club and mentor. Community events serve as an opportunity for girls to demonstrate to their community what they've learned, facilitate public discussions on important issues, and make their voices heard like never before.

All community service and community engagement activities are designed, organized, and led by girls themselves and give girls the opportunity for hands-on leadership development. These activities allow girls to interact with local leaders and demonstrate to their fellow community members the kinds of positive impact that girls are capable of making. The community service projects have resulted in a rich discussion of communities' needs and the girls' and young women's ideas of how they can positively impact their community in ways that are sustainable and practical.

➤ Broadcasting informational weekly radio messages recorded by adolescent girls and young women throughout local communities

In 2020, Batonga began to supplement our in-person lessons with a COVID-19 radio lesson program. This initiative was so successful that we have integrated it permanently into our larger program structure. Because girls are typically listening to radio lessons at home, they are often listening to them with their families, particularly due to pandemic safety recommendations to stay home. Mentors have reported that many parents have expressed gratitude and admiration for Batonga after listening to the radio lessons, some parents attesting that they had not fully appreciated Batonga's work until listening to the lessons with their daughters. Batonga has also received positive feedback from local leaders about both the mentors' professionalism and the quality of the content of the radio shows. As such, radio programming is not only having an impact on the adolescent girl program participants but also their caregivers, siblings, and other community members.

OUR IMPACT

- **Community members and girl's families are gaining greater understanding and acceptance of Batonga's work.**

Batonga has broadcasted over **50** WEEKLY RADIO LESSONS
 with an average listen rate of **81%** among program girls
 and which reached **200,000** community members

- **Girls and young women are being encouraged to take on new leadership roles within their communities**

1,940 GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN DESIGNED & IMPLEMENTED COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

OUR LESSONS LEARNED

Communities need to be engaged early and often. Following our first community engagement events back in 2018 we received overwhelmingly positive feedback from parents, families, and local leaders. The only criticism received was that Batonga should have held these sensitizations even sooner, as some parents had not grasped the full extent of Batonga's methodology. Batonga's community entry strategy and program structure now account for regularly recurring community engagement events.



Male engagement can be difficult to ensure, particularly for events related to taboo subjects, such as gender-based violence. As part of our efforts to decrease gender-based violence in our host communities, we conducted specific community engagement events in 15 of our host communities. Male community members were a particular focus of these events, given the role men frequently play in GBV. Batonga mentors, facilitators, and local leaders worked together to invite as many men as possible to participate in these events but in the end, 89% of the 1,764 event participants were women. The poor attendance by men, despite targeted recruitment efforts, could be in part due to the occupations of most men in rural communities, that kept them from being in town during the sensitizations. Regardless, the low attendance by men at these first events is a problem we're actively working to solve.