

Girls' and Boys' Clubs

Building pupils' knowledge, wellbeing and skills through radio



What are they?

In Sierra Leone's secondary schools, Girls' and Boys' Clubs (GBCs) provide regular opportunities for pupils to access and discuss accurate information on a range of topics related to their wellbeing.

Groups of pupils come together to listen to radio programmes that explore topics from violence and sexual health to disability and gender inclusion, as well as key life skills. Through learning and group discussion, they become more informed, gain confidence and can make positive life choices.

Reaching pupils across 1,658 schools to build confidence and knowledge about violence, sexual health, gender equality, disability and life skills.

Why are they important?

Previously, GBCs were gender segregated and limited to only 20 pupils in each school. They were facilitated by volunteer teachers and an accompanying 150-page manual, meaning they weren't held regularly, weren't engaging, and didn't always cover topics fully.

The new GBCs enable high quality information to be delivered through an interactive format to larger, mixed gender groups. Schools require some training, but the groups don't create additional work and responsibilities for teachers.

"My self-esteem has grown as a result of the Club. I am not afraid to speak in front of a large group."

Female SSS1 pupil, Port Loko

How do they work?

✓	Open to all school pupils
✓	Delivered by pre-recorded, stand-alone programmes
✓	High quality content approved by MBSSE
✓	Shared through wind-up radios or digitally
✓	Combine dramas, music, songs, Q&A and guest speakers
✓	Cover sensitive topics such as FGM and teenage pregnancy
✓	Encourage honest discussion between genders
✓	Easily repeated every year with new groups of learners

Impact and learning three years on

A deep dive study conducted in May 2022 looked at the impact of GBCs in ten junior and senior secondary schools across three districts of Sierra Leone. The study captured responses from 456 pupils, 18 Community-Teacher Association (CTA) members, 18 parents and six district officials. Key findings are shared below.

1. Quality and suitability of audio content

The audio content is well accepted and of value to young people. The topics for discussion were found to be relevant and the format for discussion engaging and clear. Pupils reported that the content is relevant to their lives, and that it engages them and their communities on topics they hadn't been able to talk about before. Learners make reference to knowing more about violence, sexual reproductive health and menstruation. Teachers make reference to behaviour change related to menstrual hygiene management and sexual reproductive health. Members of GBCs also show better awareness of violence reporting mechanisms than their peers who are not in the Clubs (LASS¹). The audio content is still being used three years later, suggesting it is still relevant and of good quality.

Schools community members expressed interest in receiving new episodes on topics, including drug abuse, COVID/health emergency response, and more information on violence, including female genital mutilation.

2. Suitability of radio as a platform to share key information

The radio served its purpose of standardising the quality of content and ensuring all learners, nationwide, received the same quality learning experience. Pupils also commented that radio made the content accessible to more learners, including those with low literacy levels. However, the radio does not appear to have achieved the aim of widening access to learning. Schools still tended to play the radio through the Club, held once a week to 20-40 pupils. Despite intentions, it isn't being played multiple times a week or in different forums. Three years on, many schools are still using the radios provided, showing the quality and durability is good. However, several school communities expressed interest in having more radios available in school and receiving radios that can be solar powered.

3. Suitability of the Club as a platform for learning

Nationwide, 82% of all government and government assisted secondary schools reported that they have a functioning GBC. There are many good examples where the Clubs are learner led, often by a female learner. This leader selects the radio episode for the session and leads the participation of members through song, drama and discussion. The mentor has a valued role as they can provide support and guidance on taboo topics. Club members reported positively about feeling free to talk to their mentor about topics they previously knew nothing about or felt unable to discuss.

On average, the Clubs run once a week for 20-40 members. Whilst teachers reported the clubs were open access, most pupils reported being selected by their teacher as a member and not knowing the reason why, but link it to good performance in school. The Clubs were designed to reach as many pupils as possible and to provide diverse membership, not just for high performing pupils. Constraints linked to time, space, and mentor availability suggest it is not feasible to run multiple Club sessions in a week and therefore other platforms should be explored to widen access to the radio content.

“In exchange for a better grade, teachers used to ask us for money. The Boys’ and Girls’ Club has taught me that I don’t have to pay teachers to get good grades.”

Male JSS2 pupil, Newton District

¹ [Learning and School Safety Study 2021](#)

Opportunities for improvement and scaling the Clubs

The findings from the deep dive study show that the audio content developed by Leh Wi Lan and the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) on sexual reproductive health, menstruation and violence are of high value and could be scaled to benefit more learners and their communities.

The findings also suggest that the extra-curricular Club format has limitations and access to important learning content from the Clubs could also be shared through the curriculum and community platforms to enable more people to benefit.

There are some good examples where schools shared the learning content outside of the Clubs through assemblies, counselling sessions, 'step down' sessions with pupils, and community discussions. However, this is not standardised and there were lots of learners, parents and teachers who were unaware of the Club content, and just knew that the Clubs existed in their schools.

Ideas for improvement and scaling include:

- Integrating audio content within the new curriculum
- Engaging parents and the wider community in the content of the radio episodes. This could be done by engaging them in the future creation of radio episodes and holding community listening groups.
- Incentivising more mentors, especially females, to facilitate learning on the audio content. This would include having clear criteria for their selection and incentives for them to do it more than once a week.
- To get more acceptance on taboo topics, audio content could make reference to religious scriptures and engage the religious community in their development.
- Adapted audio content to comic, video, community radio, and making it available in local languages as suggested by school communities.
- As suggested by school communities, run campaigns alongside the radio episodes, with jingles, flyers, social media, competitions that reward participation and raise profile and awareness of radio episodes.

Similar clubs exist across sub-Saharan Africa and there is an opportunity to learn from evidence, research and experiences in countries with similar contexts.

List of episodes:

1	Introduction to the GBC
2	What is School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV)?
3	How to report violence?
4	Reducing and reporting physical violence
5	Reducing and reporting psychological violence
6	Reducing and reporting sexual violence
7	What is gender discrimination?
8	What is disability discrimination?
9	What is our school safe and welcoming?
10	Adolescence: what happens to our emotions?
11	Adolescence: what happens to our bodies?
12	Menstruation and contraception – let's learn more!
13	Sexually Transmitted Infections
14	What are you saying?
15	What are you thinking?
16	What are you doing?
17	What will you be doing in life?

Find all episodes at:

<https://mbsseknowledgeplatform.gov.sl/material/girls-and-boys-club-radio-transcripts/>

“Being a member of the Club has taught me that caning, sex for a grade, and abusive language are all violence. I am applying what I learned to assist other girls in my community.”

Female SSS1 pupil, Moyamba District

This Information Brief was produced under Leh Wi Lan, a six-year programme that supports the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to improve learning outcomes for boys and girls at secondary school and to increase enrolment, retention and wellbeing of girls and children with disabilities.

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