



Children's Promise **Great Lakes Programme**

Evaluation Report

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Submitted by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Comic Relief has had a dedicated grants programme to support women and girls in Africa since 1993. It has funded almost 200 projects, in 35 countries, through 80 UK partners. The total spend (in terms of grants disbursed) is around £40m.

This impact study report provides an insight into what the programme has achieved, particularly in the period from 1999 to 2006 and in four main areas – women's rights, violence against women, education and women's leadership. Learning from the study will feed into the new guidelines for the Women and Girls grants programme for 2008 – 2012.

Information has been gathered from a mixture of sources – project visits, evaluations, data collected from funded agencies, a workshop with UK partners, and interviews with Comic Relief staff and key informants (people that have recognised expertise and a good knowledge of the overall context for work with women and girls). The study has been carried out by two consultants (one based in Uganda and the other in the UK). More detail about the study – its aim, learning questions, process and methodology - is included in Section 1.

Section 2 of the report gives a short background to the programme, and looks at the distinctive nature of Comic Relief's approach to work with women and girls and how it has changed over time. What emerges is that Comic Relief is almost unique among funders in having a long-established and dedicated Women and Girls Grants programme, and that during the early to mid-2000s (when there was a precipitous drop in funding for women's organisations) it proved to be an important and consistent donor. Comic Relief should feel proud that some of the organisations it supported and helped to nurture in their early days are now benefitting from new donor funds set up to achieve Millennium Development Goal 3 (MDG 3 aims to promote gender equality and empower women).

REACHING VULNERABLE WOMEN AND GIRLS

Although not too much reliance can be placed on the numbers, data provided by agencies provides us with a broad idea of target groups and types of projects that were funded under the Women and Girls programme between 1999 and 2006. Section 3 of the report shows the most common target group was poor and disadvantaged women but the widest reach has been to women and girls at risk of violence (311,724 women in 25 projects), highlighting that the issue affects women and girls in many projects.

Area of Change	Responses	Total
No. of women and girls aware of their rights	30	1,271,624
No. of women and girls able to access to support services after an abuse of rights	15	882,000
No. of women and girls benefitting from non-formal education	30	222,174
No. of women and girls benefitting from improved sexual and reproductive health	14	167,000
No. of women and girls reporting a reduction in the abuse of their rights	17	65,743
No. of women with increased incomes	21	48,060
No. of women and girls reporting a reduction in stigma and discrimination	32	32,518
No. of women receiving vocational training	12	9,740
No. of girls directly supported to go to primary school	1	7,030

GETTING A CLEARER PICTURE

Section 4 gives a more „human ‘picture of what success looks like (in terms of impact on women and girls lives), approaches adopted, and what has worked well/less well in four areas of Comic Relief funded work (women’s rights, gender based violence, education and women’s leadership). Different perceptions of what constitutes success, difficulties in measuring success in quantifiable terms, and pressure to demonstrate change during the life of a normal project grant were brought up as challenges by many organisations. In this context, it is encouraging that the Women and Girls programme has a good record of supporting follow-on work (30% of all grants) with a number of examples where work has been funded for over 10 years. Some highlights of this section are captured below:

Women’s Rights. “Women and girls as equal partners in family, communities and society”. At the UK workshop, Comic Relief staff articulated this as the long-term lasting change they were hoping to achieve for women and girls. As a result, a strong focus on rights, and on tackling stigma and discrimination, cuts across the programme. In total, over 1.2m women and girls are estimated to have been provided with information about their rights (e.g. the right to protection against violence or abuse or to inherit and own „assets“ such as land, property, or livestock). An encouraging number of projects have helped women and girls to access services (health care, legal advice, police and the judiciary) after an abuse of rights, and preventative work has led to a reduction in the abuse of rights, although organisations found it difficult to put a number on this. In some cases projects have pressed for changes in, or developed new, bye-laws and national legislation affecting women and girls. This was particularly strong in anti-violence projects. Project visits have provided some excellent examples of organisations that are doing rights-based work that delivers practical outcomes (see case studies throughout Section 4).

Tackling violence and reducing stigma. This has emerged as a particularly strong part of the Women and Girls grants programme. Impact is clear at all levels (individual, family, society, policy and practice). Projects supported by Comic Relief have helped to break the silence surrounding violence and abuse; meet the immediate (and in some cases long-term) needs of women and girls affected (medical, legal, shelter etc); and improve awareness and empathy among service providers, police and judiciary. It is the area of work where there has been the most collaboration between organisations, with good results in terms of legislative change (an example being the Gender Centre's work on the Domestic Violence Act in Ghana). There is evidence from at least 3 projects that harmful traditional practices have significantly reduced (KMG's work on Female Genital Mutilation in Ethiopia, HelpAge's work on reducing killings of elderly women accused as witches in Tanzania, and Mifumi's work on bride price and domestic violence in Uganda). Given that 'women and girls' affected by violence are present in projects across all Comic Relief's grants programmes, there is potential to share learning from these projects internally, as well as with grant holders.

Education. Over 90% of the projects that responded to the data-mining had some education component. Most commonly this was non-formal education for women - the provision of information (on a range of issues to do with health, income generation, rights) as well as literacy, leadership skills and life skills. Non-formal education has been an important approach (when implemented effectively) in helping to raise the status of women in their homes and communities in many development projects. With the confidence and skills that come with literacy and numeracy, women have been willing and able to take up leadership positions and set up small businesses. The quality and impact of non-formal education across the wider portfolio has been hard to judge, as only 12 projects were looked at in any depth. Although only a handful of projects have focused primarily on formal education, many women benefitting from Comic Relief grants will be using increased income or confidence to invest in their daughters' education so in all likelihood the numbers of girls benefitting is much higher than the figure of 7,030. However, with some notable exceptions, education projects have tended to be localised, with few projects working to influence education policy and practice beyond the immediate communities they are working in. There has also been limited collaborative work with national government on education issues.

Women's leadership. Promotion of women's leadership is another theme identified by agencies that makes Comic Relief distinct as a donor. Section 4.4 shows that Comic Relief has had an impact on women's leadership in three main ways – by supporting organisations that are led and managed by women; by funding work that helps women's groups and organisations to come together (data shows that on average each African partner is working with 18 local groups); and by funding projects that explicitly aim to promote women's leadership (a good example of this is the African Women's Leadership Institute – one alumna of the first CR funded project is now Minister of Gender in Liberia, another is Head of Violence against Women in the refugee camps in Sierra Leone). Comic Relief's funding principle of supporting organisations that are led and managed by women generated the most debate among those interviewed. If Comic Relief wishes to pursue this approach in the future, it needs to be clearer about why it has the principle and define what it means by women-led. One recommendation from this study would be to commission some dedicated research to establish what impact this principle has on Comic Relief's ability to fund a range of effective work.

APPROACHES NEEDED TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS/LASTING CHANGE

Section 5 outlines a number of factors that agencies and key informants identified as important in achieving long-term change including:

1. Successful projects work with women and girls within the context of family, community, employers and others who play a role in their lives, rather than treating them in isolation of this context. Involving men and boys was a common „lesson learnt“ with agencies giving various reasons as to why this was so, and offering a variety of ideas about how it can be done.
2. A high level of genuine participation of women and girls is fundamental to ensuring that projects are relevant to the „target group“ (Women for Change in Zambia is a good example of a project with a strong participatory approach) and vital in considering whether an approach that has worked in one place is applicable in another.
3. Recognising the complex and inter-related needs of women and girls is crucial. Effective organisations have provided a variety of interventions (or a have a good ability to network). Data analysis shows that 87% of projects were working in 4 or more of the areas asked about (education, health, rights, economic empowerment, stigma, and supporting local organisations).

DELIVERING CHANGE

Section 6 reflects on types and style of organisation well placed to deliver change; the implications for Comic Relief of channelling funding through UK-based Diaspora-led organisations (25% of grantees in the Women & Girls programme were Diaspora-led compared with 14.6% across other Comic Relief programmes); and how roles and relationships have helped or hindered change. Different value systems (particularly relating to women's rights) have emerged as something putting a strain on relationships between Northern and Southern organisations; as has confusion over roles between Comic Relief and UK NGO partners.

CONCLUSION

Although it is difficult to evaluate the performance of the Women and Girls Programme as a whole (as no specific aims or outcomes were articulated in 1999 there is nothing to judge performance against) the report highlights that within its rather broad and diverse portfolio of projects, Comic Relief has funded some excellent work that is bringing lasting change for women and girls. According to agencies, Comic Relief's focus for funding makes sense. They believe the grant making principles are relevant and, for the most part, consistently applied. The willingness of Comic Relief to support capacity development both of smaller organisations in the UK and in Africa (as opposed to just funding project costs) is widely appreciated. Things that have not worked so well include:

- The ongoing tension off between delivering tangible work and investing in longer-term work that achieve long term policy and political change. Many projects were not able to do both effectively. This has resulted in a mixed portfolio which limits Comic Relief's clarity of purpose, its learning across the programme and targeted advocacy work.
- A number of projects have remained very localised, with a welfare focus, and have limited scope for wider impact.
- The current model of reactive funding through UK organisations has made it harder for Comic Relief to find good work to fund and has contributed to the mixed portfolio described above.
- There is unhappiness about Comic Relief's new guidelines for reporting which agencies think restrict opportunities for learning.



- Comic Relief has not taken up opportunities to engage in change beyond grant making (e.g. through advocacy, using some of its strategic partnerships & expertise in communications and ICT) to increase impact.
- Finally, despite having a long-established programme which has delivered considerable success, Comic Relief's work with women and girls still has a low profile, particularly in Africa.

SUGGESTIONS FOR COMIC RELIEF FOR THE FUTURE

- Be more focused about what change you want to achieve with women and girls. Options for doing this include a) selecting 2 or 3 main programme outcomes to aim for (for example reducing violence against women or girls or promoting women's leadership) or b) keeping the broad lifecycle approach but focusing in on Comic Relief's niche (for example, in education funding projects that challenge underlying community and parental barriers or that focus on protecting girls from violence and abuse in and around school).
- Increase the impact of established projects by introducing a funding principle which favours applications where community-level activities connect up to the wider movement and decision-making structures at regional or national level.
- Think about introducing a 2-year theme for learning and advocacy work and look for opportunities to facilitate networking and learning between funded organisations and more widely.
- Go beyond grant-making to address issues that are not easily solved through funding individual projects (an example provided by one key informant was the opportunity to help the women's movement re-invigorate itself).
- Consider different funding models that allow you to be more proactive in what you fund. Given the general move at Comic Relief towards bigger grants think about setting up a separate funding line for innovative application from unproven smaller or Diaspora-led organisations.
- Promote women's voices. A unique asset that Comic Relief has is the voices of the African women leaders that it has funded.