



Program Brief

Safe Spaces for In-School Girls

Safe spaces are mentored groups for girls to connect with their peers, gain critical life skills and get the support they need to bridge gaps in academic learning. Safe spaces are proven to increase the rate of graduation from secondary school from 4% to 82% and raise the age of marriage by 2.5 years.

Parents in rural northern Nigeria and Niger are forced to make tough choices. Many see that girls' education can lead to highly valued employment and other benefits. However, learning outcomes in rural government schools can be so poor that children can graduate without even learning to read and write. Parents question whether the investment in school is worth the sacrifice and most choose not to enroll their daughters in secondary school. This leaves women with few career choices outside of marriage and child rearing.

Early marriage for girls remains a common practice in the region. The consequences can be dire, including increased risk of maternal and infant death and disability. Staying in school longer is a key factor in delaying marriage and childbearing. Girls who stay in school marry later, earn more, and have smaller, healthier families. They also are the hub of more resilient, peaceful communities and stronger economies.

The Centre for Girls Education (CGE), with technical and financial support from OASIS, is a pioneer in the adaptation of the safe space methodology to meet adolescent girls' need for basic literacy and numeracy skills, vocational training, and crucial life skills. Over 50,000 girls across seven states in northern Nigeria have participated in two years of CGE's safe spaces. In collaboration with CGE and OASIS, Lumière des Filles et des Femmes (LFF) launched a safe space program in Maradi, Niger in 2019. Hilin Mu ("Our Space" in Hausa) started with 250 girls enrolled and now reaches more than 1,500 girls. OASIS' safe spaces partners are women-led organizations with leadership teams from the communities they serve.





"The girls in safe space girls' clubs are remarkably different. They are composed and can speak up for themselves. My daughter reads at home and helps the younger ones with homework. The CGE mentors sit them down and teach the girls in a practical way and when they get back home they share what they learn with their family."

— MOTHER OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

"Everything about me is changing, the way I see things is different. I learned how to talk to and how to treat other people. Every day I learn a new thing...and what I have learned has opened my eyes to the world."

— PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

"When I woke up in the morning, I prepared for hawking while the boys got ready for school. I grew up believing that girls are not meant to go to school."

— PROGRAM PARTICIPANT



"Women who used to reject the idea of losing their daughter's labor during the school day now see the relevance of education. There has been a decline in early marriage and more girls are allowed to grow into womanhood before they get married."

— SCHOOL TEACHER

"The program has proven my [primary school] teacher wrong for calling me a dullard. I have learned so much. I can now read, write, and make simple sentences. I wish my teacher could see me now."

— PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Strategy

Safe spaces are at the heart of the work. A safe space is a mentored girls' club that creates a place where girls feel secure, connect with other girls, gain life skills, and bridge gaps in learning. The girls' participation enhances academic skills and leads to improved school performance. The girls make friends, share aspirations and concerns, visit local health services, and much more. Parents see evidence of learning and growth and are more willing to pay school fees and let their daughters proceed further in their studies before marriage. This expands the critical years in which girls can acquire practical skills and develop and act upon life goals.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- Increase girls' primary and secondary enrollment, performance and rates of graduation
- Delay girls' marriage and childbearing by at least two years
- Serve as a "vessel" where girls can acquire a broad range of critical life skills
- Dramatically increase leadership opportunities for adolescent girls
- Nurture a cadre of girls trained in advocacy to influence government policy measures
- Build community support for girls' education, delayed marriage, and acquisition of a trade
- Share evidence with government, civil society and other stakeholders on what works to keep girls in school and delay marriage
- Accelerate progress towards reaching an est. 3.8 million eligible girls in northern Nigeria and Niger with quality safe space programming

Impact

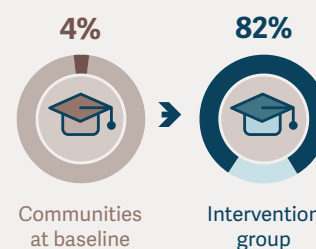
OASIS and local partners conduct evaluations of our girls programming with support from researchers at the University of California, Berkeley. In a study of 1,000 CGE safe space participants funded by the Packard Foundation:

- **girls' rate of graduation from secondary school increased from 4% to 82%**
- **age of marriage increased by 2.5 years**

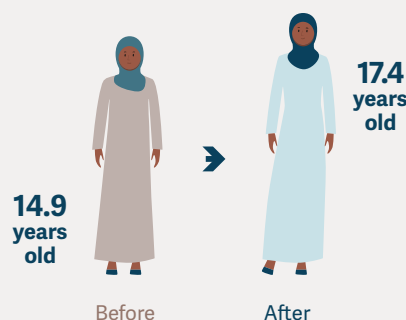
Preliminary analysis by the same researchers found that the girls in the LFF safe spaces in Niger were 38% more likely to have remained in school than the girls in comparison communities.

The vast majority of married women in the communities we serve are expected to practice a form of seclusion in their homes and the homes of their kin and friends. A significant number of participants have renegotiated these mobility norms as they work as mentors, teachers, and health workers—often the first women in their communities to do so. People call them "malama", or teacher, a title of respect in Hausa society, and younger girls in the community see that someone just like them can achieve such an important position. Community norms change quickly as the number of girls in secondary school grows and more adolescent girls are seen in school uniforms.

Girls were twenty times more likely to graduate secondary school.



Girls married 2.5 years later.



Reaching More Girls

Safe spaces are effective in supporting girls at critical times in their lives. Some of the most vulnerable preschool girls are at risk of never going to school. Older, out of school girls are at risk of early marriage. This is why we have pioneered and are testing other types of safe spaces:

- **Montessori-based preschool safe spaces** reach marginalized girls who are at high risk of not enrolling in primary school, boosting their self-confidence and setting them up for success in primary school.
- **Second Chance safe spaces** prepare early adolescent girls who are out of school to enroll in school at an age-appropriate grade.
- **Shops-based safe spaces** allow girls to learn a trade through apprenticeship in shops and microenterprises under the mentorship of local craftspeople and micro entrepreneurs.
- **Safe spaces for married adolescents** help girls acquire functional literacy and numeracy, gain family planning knowledge and acquire life skills.
- **Girls 4 Education and Health** recruits girls in their final year of secondary school to support transition to professional colleges - especially education, community health and midwifery schools.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- 1 Centre for Girls Education
Zaria, Nigeria
- 2 Lumière des Filles et
des Femmes
Maradi, Niger

 Sahel Ecological Zone



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