



Partnering With Adolescent Mothers to Break the Cycle of Intergenerational Poverty



*External Side Event at the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
September 18, 2023*

Agenda

Welcome

Gabrielle Bailey and Saskia Guerrier

Opening Remarks

Sajeda Amin

Uplifting Adolescent Mothers' Voices

Insights from Narrative Research With Young Mothers

Jody Myrum, Ramatu Bangura

Respondents to Insights

Fassil Marriam, Kehinde Ajayi

Audience Feedback on Insights

Saskia Guerrier

Centering Adolescent Mothers: A Panel Discussion

Chernor Bah (moderator), Lisa Bohmer, Lauren Rumble, Josephine Kamara, Hon. Harriette Chiggai

How Can Formal Powerholders Deliver for Adolescent Mothers

Hon. Dr. Dorothy Onesphoro Gwajima, Helga Fogstad

Closing and Invitation to Cocktail Reception

Saskia Guerrier

Diversity in Adolescent Motherhood

Sajeda Amin
Population Council

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Adolescent girls who have given birth

[Data + Analytics – A3 \(popcouncil.org\)](https://popcouncil.org)

Points to make from A3

1. Overall proportion of adolescents who are mothers
2. Variation across countries
3. Focus on Mexico (context of informal unions)
4. Focus on Bangladesh (context of early marriage)

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DOMAIN

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INDICATOR

HIGH-RISK SEX



GIRLS DASHBOARD

BOYS DASHBOARD

POLICY CHECKLIST

Ever given birth i

Respondent has ever given birth.

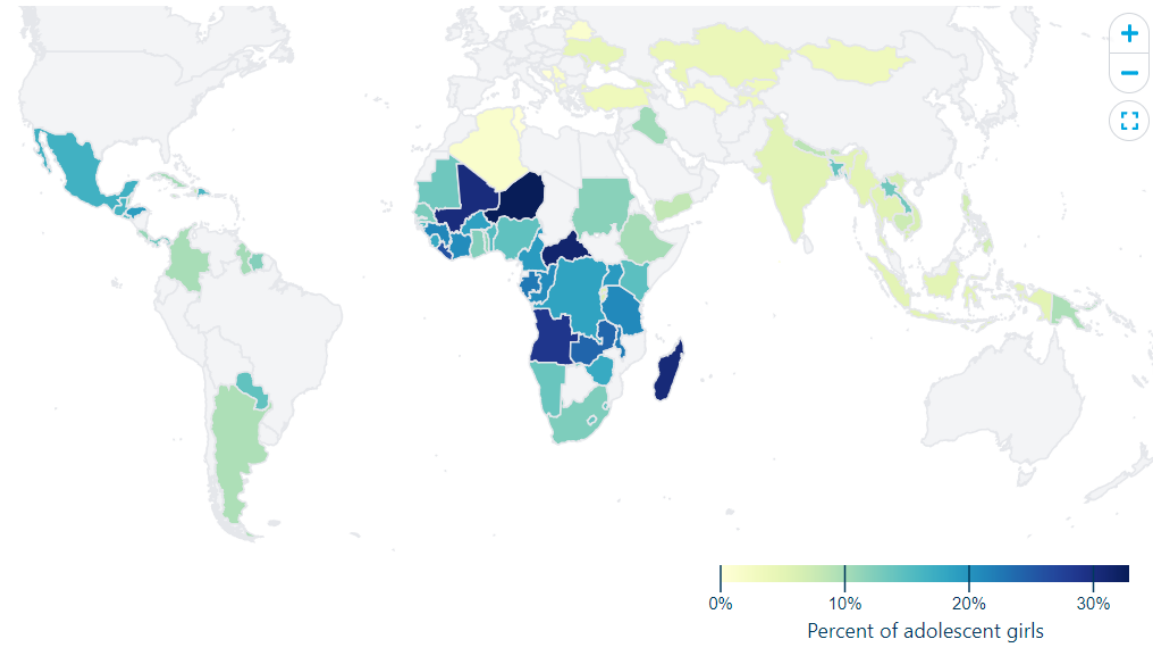
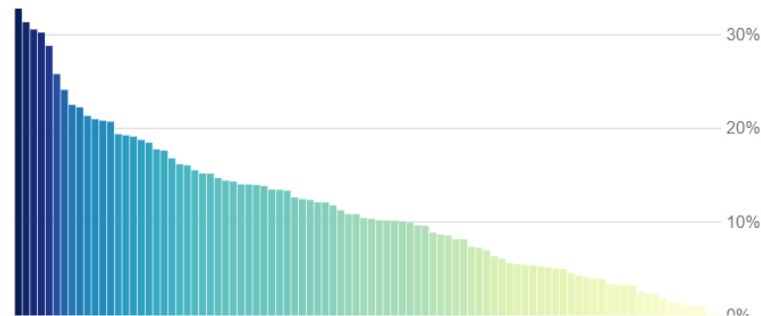
How are adolescents faring around the world?

Global insights

[DOWNLOAD DATA](#)

Ever given birth: Respondent has ever given birth.

Countries ranked from highest to lowest prevalence



Mexico v subnational estimates



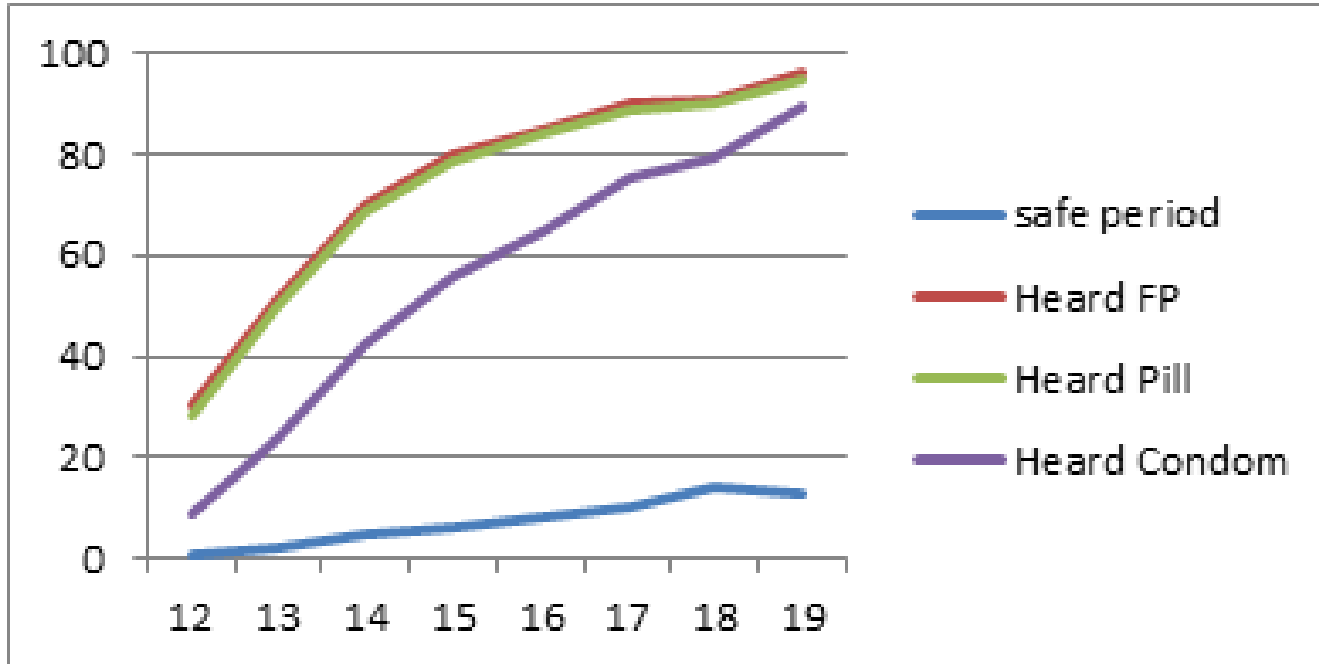
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Most Births in Bangladesh are within Marriage

- Nearly 1 in 6 girls have experienced pregnancy and motherhood
- Context of low fertility and early marriage– 1 in every 3 births is to an adolescent
- Early marriage is a primary driver
- Policy prescriptions– delaying marriage and early exposure to contraceptive knowledge may be key

Contraceptive Knowledge



Child Marriage as a Driver of Mistimed Pregnancies in Bangladesh

“I didn’t realize that I was pregnant. Even my belly wasn’t very big and I had no idea of my pregnancy until very late into pregnancy I used to sleep with my husband. I didn’t know. I did everything (laughing)”.

- Lata, age 19 years, married at 12 years and gave birth at 14 years, Ainul and Amin (2013)

Mexico: Most adolescent mothers are in informal unions

- 16% (~1 million) adolescents are mothers
- Most (80%) of cohabiting adolescents are in informal unions
- Need for social protection
- Motherhood in Mexico (Samano, et al)

I felt lonely before getting pregnant... my parents did not even realize what was happening with me. Now that I live with Rubén [her husband], I am feeling the same thing... he is almost never with me and I prefer it that way... he is almost always angry. Only the presence of my child consoles me... for him I put up with everything. (Sayra, 15 years old, married)

Zambia: motherhood and marital status

- Adolescent mothers are heterogenous
- Premarital pregnancy drives formation of unions
- Important to distinguish between single mothers, cohabiting unions and formal marriages – informal unions are unstable and risky for mothers and children
- *Programs that delay pregnancy either through increased education or through better access to contraception can reduce informal unions.*

Muthengi, Mutoni and Austrian (2022)

Young Mothers Soundscape

Now let's listen to a soundscape created by and centered on the lived experiences of young mothers.



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Following Their Lead:

Experiences of Young Mothers in Kenya,
Mozambique, and Tanzania



CHILDREN EVERYWHERE DESERVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD FULFILLING LIVES, TO SURVIVE, DEVELOP AND THRIVE.

Adolescent girls deserve to live in their **full power and access all of their human rights**. And yet, adolescent mothers and their young children are uniquely vulnerable.



WHAT WE'RE GOING TO COVER

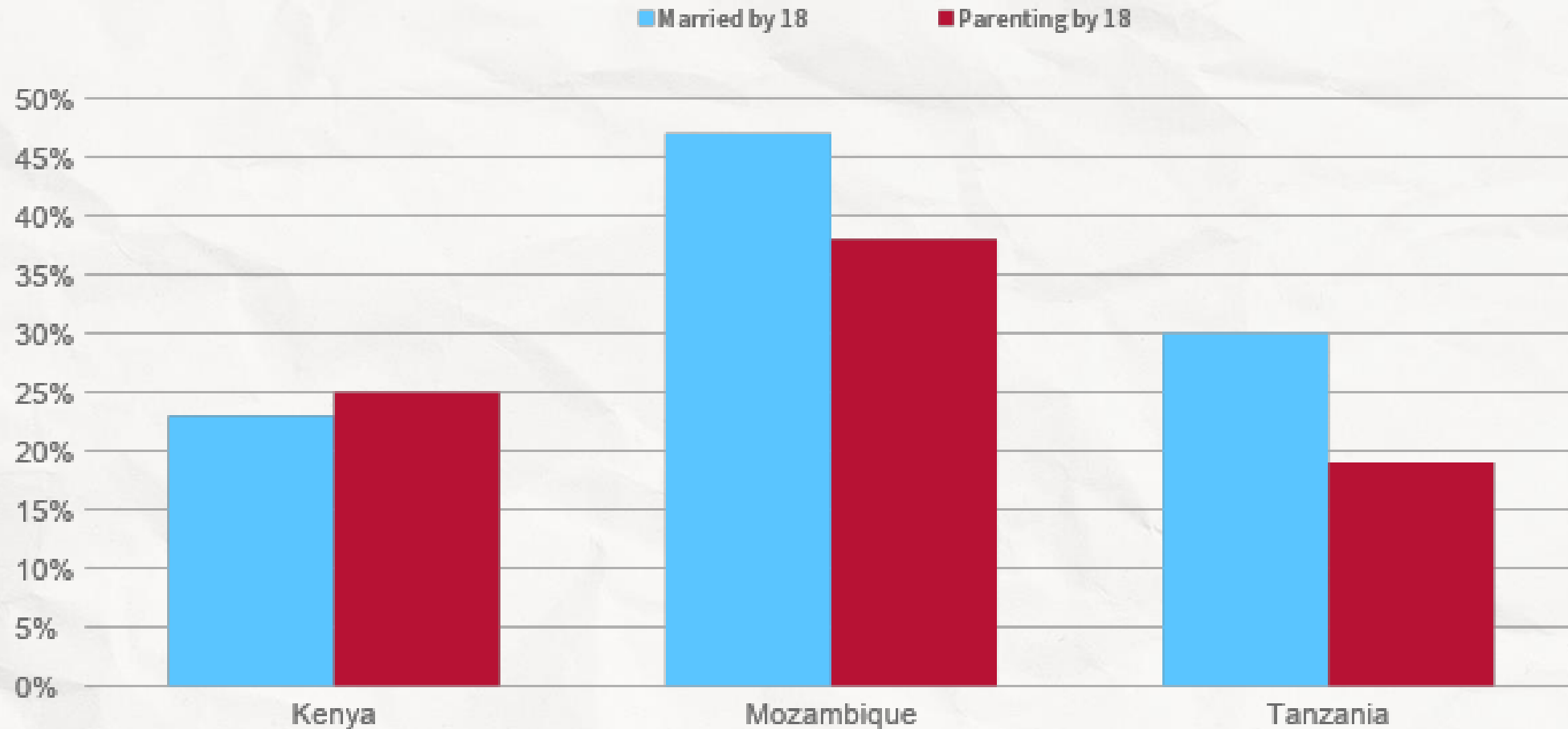
- 01 **Context of Young Motherhood
in Kenya, Mozambique, and
Tanzania**
- 02 **Challenges Experienced by
Young Mothers**
- 03 **Young Mothers Are Not
Hapless Victims: They Have
Solutions**
- 04 **Looking Ahead: Two-Generation
Funding Opportunities**

01

Context of Young Motherhood in Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania



Early Marriage and Childbearing Are Common Experiences



Note: Data on early marriage retrieved from The World Bank, 2022. Data on early childbearing retrieved from UNICEF, 2022.

Gender Inequality Compounds the Vulnerability of Young Mothers and Their Children

	Informal	Formal
Individual	<p>Trauma as a result of gender-based violence and lost childhood harms young mothers' well-being. Stigma and shame keep young mothers isolated and disconnected from services.</p>	<p>Gendered poverty puts girls at risk of early marriage, a key driver of early pregnancy. Absence of affordable, high-quality childcare blocks young mothers from pursuing education and work. Lack of viable livelihoods puts young mothers at risk of violence.</p>
Systemic	<p>Gender-based violence is a pervasive rights violation. Discrimination pushes young mothers from educational and health care settings. Stigma against single motherhood pressures pregnant girls to marry.</p>	<p>Policies meant to protect girls and young women from violence and ensure educational access are not enforced.</p>

This analytical framework was adapted from Gender at Work.

02

Challenges Experienced by Young Mothers



At the Center of It All:

STIGMA & ISOLATION

The fear and experience of stigma and shame from early pregnancy leaves girls isolated and alone. Stigma, shame, and isolation damage young mothers' social and emotional well-being, curtail their education, harm their health, and constrain their futures.

Motherhood Changes a Girl's Social Identity; She Is No Longer Allowed to Be a Child and Is Further Isolated

““

We lose friends when we become moms. No one wants to associate with you. My friends' parents threaten my 'friends' when they see me with them. It gets lonely.

““

I was not prepared to have a child; I was afraid, very scared and bewildered. My dream was to do nursing, but then I had to stop studying.

““

In my community, people were talking about me, pointing at me and saying that I got pregnant while in school. It made me stay indoors to avoid the talk and finger-pointing.

““

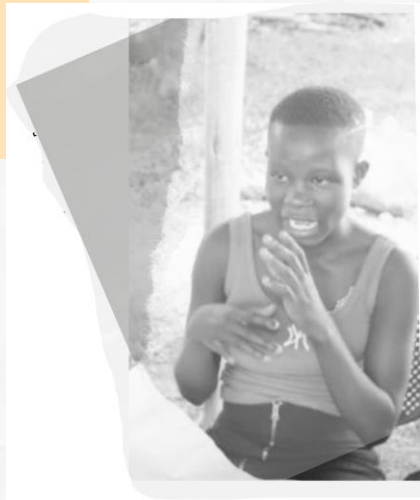
When my child came the father ran away and abandoned us. I missed school and now I am focused on trying to save my life, find something I can do to make money.

Violence Is Everywhere—It Is Pervasive and Systemic

On participant shared, while she was living with her aunt, an unknown man broke into the room and defiled her. The following day, instead of supporting her, the blame was put on her as if it were her fault and she had planned the whole ordeal. She could not continue to live in the home. She described that her decision to leave the aunt's house was to seek safety and restore her dignity.



First, he forbade me to leave the house, then he beat me a lot. I heard from the older women that home is just the way it is. My husband sometimes gave me money, so that helped me. When I got pregnant and told him, he denied it; said that it was from other men.



The Systems Meant to Protect and Support Young Mothers Discriminate Against Them and Their Children

““

I've experienced physical abuse from doctors and nurses. Sometimes I've been hit by doctors when getting prenatal X-rays.

““

Doctors are not consistent in the information and services they provide for young mothers. They judge us.

““

I had to stop going to school because of my belly. It wasn't exactly because they expelled me, but because I felt ashamed to be there; to hear the teachers point to me as an example of a person who chose a bad path.

““

Even when I got pregnant, I didn't get an abortion because I knew of the dangers. One girl I know aborted a very big baby, using traditional methods. Now I worry whether she will get pregnant again.

Marriage Is Often at the Center of Young Pregnancy



I suffered violence at home with my partner. I ended up running away to my cousin's house. My cousin's husband harassed me, and I had to go to my aunt's house. I ended up getting pregnant to have someone to help me.



Parents become very uncomfortable when a daughter becomes pregnant before marriage. Whenever this happens, they become anxious to marry off their daughter in order to escape being mocked by society.



I had my first child when I was in high school. And I just wanted to continue to go to school. I did not want to be poor. I wanted to continue my education to give my child the best I could. When I finished, I only had two months to join the university. After graduating, I immediately got married and then had my second child. It's not like I really had time to process what happened to me in the first place. Some friends see me talking and doing many things, and they think I am a superwoman, but I am also vulnerable. I still carry the pain, rage and anger of my pregnant 15-year-old self. I still want to see a change in my life.

Young Mothers Have Limited Opportunity to Become Financially Self-Sufficient and Provide for Themselves & Their Children

““

I would love to be supported to start a business, so I don't keep depending on others, I want to be able to provide for my child.

““

I cannot go back to formal education as I have many new responsibilities, maybe vocational training so I can also have time to take care of my daughter.

““

We are discriminated against when looking for jobs. People say because you have a baby, you won't do the work as expected. For household jobs, they discriminate against our babies, they don't want their babies to play with our babies, they are denied food and at times they don't take you back because your child fed on their child's food.

03

Young Mothers are Not Hapless victims: They Have Solutions



Young Mothers Are One Another's Best Resource & Support Systems. Being in community together are "shelters in times of hardship."

“

I feel good to be able to share my issues and challenges and be able to find community in young mothers going through the same issues as me.

“

Some of us have felt fear and doubt when seeking solutions to our problems. But joining with others in solidarity has created a sense of belonging and community and has been a solution to feeling isolated.

Young Mothers Deserve And Demand Health Services That Treat Them With Humanity and Access to Full Reproductive Justice

“

At the school I went to there was a women's group of people who gave advice and contraceptive methods. But I think what often happened to me was that I believed that just once it was not possible to get pregnant. I often went looking for information, but at a younger age, the urge to experiment was so great that I did.

“

I want to see friendly service from nurses and doctors towards young mothers. This means kind language, not rushing them right after birth to leave. Providing better services, such as warm water in the hospital to shower and clean themselves after birth.

Young Mothers Need a Chance to Continue Their Education, Safely



Support for returning to school for those who would like to, so girls can pursue their dreams. Plus, skills development for those who return and help getting capital to start their businesses.

Young Mothers Need Livelihood Opportunities to Care for Themselves and Their Children



I would like to own land and have a space to raise my child. I would also like to have my own business and the training to generate my own income.



We need financial resources for ourselves and our children, so we can provide school fees, money for food, diapers and baby food. We need access to capital and a technical course so we start a business but also training so we can run that business.

Young Mothers Need Access to Relevant Resources, Parenting Information, and Non-Judgmental, Accessible Support to Care for Themselves and Their Children



We want to learn how to care for our children [ourselves], and to have persons who can also care for them. Persons caring for our children should be local, and selected by us. It is also an opportunity to offer jobs to those within our community.



We want our children to benefit from opportunities that stimulate their minds, with toys and activities that foster cognitive growth. Our goal is to offer the best possible care for our children, as we understand the critical importance of brain development during the ages of zero to six.

Young Mothers Need to be Centered in Programming & Supported for their Organizing, Collectivizing and Power Building.



Women in both rural and urban areas are fighting for social space, opportunities beyond domestic work and participation in political decision-making. We are deconstructing old norms and resisting them to construct new ways of being.



Our joint slogan is “Mexeu com uma mexeu com todas”. This loosely translates to “You mess with one of us, you mess with all of us”. We are in this together.

04

Looking Ahead: Two-Generation Opportunities



Adolescent and Very Young Mothers Who Face the Most Risk

EXAMPLE

Prioritize work that specifically serves adolescent (<18) mothers' needs for social support, education, livelihood opportunities, and health.

Support work that specifically serves very young adolescents (<15) to help prevent pregnancy and/or support those that become pregnant.

Building Young Mothers' Power and Social Capital

EXAMPLE

Resource work led by young mothers that provides opportunities to challenge the systemic harms they face, build their social networks of support, and work collectively to meet their needs.

Support girls' and young mothers' groups, NGOs, and projects that integrate empowerment with livelihoods, childcare, and SRHR training.

Meeting Young Mothers' Holistic Needs During and After Pregnancy

EXAMPLE

Increase access to affordable, high-quality childcare to allow young mothers to go back to school; develop programs explicitly focused on girls who are pregnant and parenting.

Invest in CSOs to develop programs explicitly focused on girls who are pregnant and parenting

Changing Systems to Ensure Young Mothers Have Access to Critical Services Such as Health Care, Education, and Services for Their Children

EXAMPLE

Design and support programs and advocacy efforts that respect young mothers, while also building positive norms around adolescent girls' childhood, schooling, and future opportunity.

Shifting Norms to Challenge Shame and Stigma Around Early Pregnancy

EXAMPLE

Support campaigns targeting patriarchal norms around marriage, pregnancy, and men's and boys' responsibility as parents.

SRHR Programming and Youth-Friendly Health Spaces—Both Prevention and Safe and Supportive Pre- and Postnatal Care

EXAMPLE

Increase SRHR knowledge and access to judgment-free contraception and health services, including abortion.

Investing Holistically for Gender Equity and Nurturing Care

	Informal	Formal
Individual	Support safe spaces to build community with other young mothers and disrupt internalized shame, breaking down obstacles to responsive caregiving .	Promote young mothers and their children's access to access health care, education, childcare and livelihood opportunities, to increase access to improve the health and wellbeing of young mothers and their children.
Systemic	Invest in building young mothers' power and social capital to shift cultural and social norms around gender-based violence, early marriage, single motherhood and young motherhood, and increasing safety and security for very young children and their mothers.	Support advocacy efforts to ensure an enabling policy environment for girls who are pregnant and parenting to access health care, education, childcare, and livelihood opportunities.

This analytical framework was adapted from Gender at Work.

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