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# **WHERE THE GIRLS ARE**

Finding, Funding and Fueling Grassroots Girls Solutions

**Authored by**

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## About the Grassroots Girls Initiative

The Grassroots Girls Initiative is a consortium of six funders that believe grassroots organizations are uniquely qualified to design and implement effective solutions for the most underserved girls in the communities where they work. Grassroots Girls Initiative members are: American Jewish World Service, The Global Fund for Children, Global Fund for Women, EMpower The Emerging Markets Foundation, Firelight Foundation and Mama Cash.

The Nike Foundation launched the Grassroots Girls Initiative in 2006 as part of its work to support the girl effect: the unique potential of adolescent girls to end poverty for themselves and the world. Learn more at [girleffect.org](http://girleffect.org)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2006 before the United Nations declared October 11th the International Day of the Girl Child, before Malala Yousafzai's courage made headlines, before anti-rape protests erupted in India demanding a safer society for their girls—the world was only beginning to talk about how to include adolescent girls in the development process. Few development initiatives were intentionally designed to address the unique challenges of adolescent girls.

But one corner of the social sector, grassroots organizations, was already reaching adolescent girls and delivering social solutions to problems ranging from safety and schools to literacy and legal rights. And yet, these small organizations were often operating in isolation, unaware of each other's work and in a constant struggle to secure additional funding.

The goal of this article is to share how a consortium of six grantmaking organizations, each with long track records of grassroots investing, stepped into this environment and formed the Grassroots Girls Initiative (GGI), an eight-year, \$20 million program funded by the Nike Foundation. To capture this story, we as leaders at two of the organizations tapped the institutional memories at all six organizations via interviews, reports and document reviews.

The story that emerges is complex. Over eight years, the consortium members funded 300 grassroots groups and reached 400,000 girls. As with any large undertaking, progress was not always linear. Yet over time, the flexibility of the funding, and the commitment to experimenting and sharing, led to the often unexpected learnings presented in this article.

Over the eight years of GGI, each consortium member adapted its systems, staffing and methods to be sure we were finding, funding and strengthening the grassroots groups best positioned to reach vulnerable girls. In addition, each member American Jewish World Service, EMpower the Emerging Markets Foundation, Firelight Foundation, Global Fund for Women, Mama Cash and The Global Fund for Children developed innovative tools and expertise that maximized the impact in local communities and amplified grassroots learning globally to better support the potential of all adolescent girls.

When solving for the fact that 250M girls are living under \$2/day, a grassroots approach is often dismissed as small, local organizations are dispersed, disconnected and reach fewer people. One of our goals with GGI, and we hope our legacy, was to

demonstrate that grassroots investing, combined with the power of networks, can indeed reach large numbers of girls in transformational ways and at a reasonable cost (in GGI's case, less than \$50 per girl).

We also wanted to show that grassroots investing is especially effective when it comes to the most marginalized girls single mothers, ethnic and religious minorities, the disabled, child brides, sex trafficking victims who are often outside the reach of larger-scale interventions. Reaching these girls is essential to ending intergenerational poverty and changing the dynamics that for centuries have rendered girls powerless in their homes and surroundings.

## 2. Origins

*A donor's interest in grassroots*

The Nike Foundation made adolescent girls the singular focus of its work in 2004. The initial two years were a time of listening, learning and looking for opportunities to make investments in adolescent girls.

“As a new organization in the field of investing in adolescent girls we had a lot to learn about what works for girls,” recalls Amy Babchek, Senior Manager at the Nike Foundation. “We wanted to learn from the people who are closest to the girls, living in the same context, who are of the culture and the community, and who are working to address the challenges girls face.”

The challenge for an organization like the Nike Foundation was how to find, vet and fund small groups that were often well below the normal philanthropy radar. They turned to six intermediary funders with proven track records of finding, funding and building the capacity of grassroots organizations around the world.

“We chose to fund a consortium of intermediaries instead of just one because each intermediary was funding different grassroots organizations,” explains Babchek. “We saw this as an opportunity for richer learning and strategic collaboration between those who are best in class funders of locally-driven solutions for children, youth and women globally. How are children and youth groups supporting girls? How are women's organizations supporting girls? What are the commonalities and what can we all learn?”

GGI is among Nike Foundation's biggest grant making initiatives. Over time, it has provided the Foundation

with a substantive set of learnings, models, stories and inspiration. But before that could happen, the consortium members had to solve a few problems inherent in any start-up: getting the data right.

### 3. A 3-D Approach to Data

*Mapping “who and where the girls are”*

As the initiative took shape in 2006, GGI leaders realized that each intermediary faced key knowledge gaps about the girls their grantees were reaching. For example, were girls in school, married or at home? We had hunches, but no data. Checking our assumptions was essential to getting a better picture about whom each organization was reaching and who was being missed.

Grassroots organizations as small, local groups rooted in their communities had a keen sense of how to reach the most at need in their communities. Indeed, a primary hypothesis of the grassroots approach is that community-based organizations are best positioned to reach and serve marginalized girls. But few groups had any systematic methods for capturing, recording and differentiating data about beneficiaries. GGI leaders decided early on to start with the basics: collecting data about who, what, where, when and how grassroots programs were serving girls.

A key first step was creating and deploying an effective tool for the job. GGI members worked with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) to create and analyze a ‘30,000-foot data sheet.’ Using this new tool, GGI members, beginning in 2007, collected data on grassroots groups, geography, budget size, program type and girls served. What emerged was a fascinating, and sometimes surprising, view of the grantee organizations and the girls they were reaching.

Perhaps the biggest surprise was the age of program participants. GGI members, and the grantees they supported, thought some programs were serving younger adolescent girls. But the data told a somewhat different story. While programs were reaching girls aged 14-17 in many cases, some programs were actually reaching young women aged 18-24. The issues of girls in their early teens are decidedly different than those faced by young women.

The demographic news moved GGI members to take a hard look at how they might more intentionally ensure that girls 10-19 years old are benefitting from the programs they support. This was an important starting point for future mapping, enabling the Initiative to collectively track what profiles of adolescent girls are being supported by which organizations in order

to transition program investment. This mapping also allowed for GGI members to discover programming gaps, overlaps and opportunities to collaborate.

Over time, a powerful story emerged from the data as GGI grantees began to focus on girls more directly and track who they were reaching. After four years of sustained data collection, the 2011 data sheet showed that GGI members were collectively reaching about 300,000 girls (and still some young women) eventually growing to over 400,000 by the end of the Initiative in 2014. These included some of the most vulnerable girls: trafficked adolescent girls, disabled girls, ethnic and religious minorities, street girls, single teen mothers, sexual assault survivors, migrants and refugees.

That data revealed many positive trends. For example, GGI members were reaching relatively equal numbers of beneficiaries in urban and rural settings, so harder-to-reach rural girls were not being left out. Likewise, GGI was reaching many girls who had left school, a frequently overlooked population group, and not just girls still in school, who are easier to find and support with programs.

Data analysis also helped surface the nuanced and contextualized lives of girls, which helped organizations make smarter strategic choices and tell their stories more powerfully. Through initial data collection, Firelight discovered that girls already made up more than 50 percent of beneficiaries served by its grantee partners, located in sub-Saharan Africa.

“The data helped validate that girls are acutely affected by the impact of HIV and poverty,” says Zanele Sibanda, Director of Programs for Firelight, which has a longstanding programmatic focus on children affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. “They not only face a higher rate of infection, they also bear the burden of care within families. As a result, when grassroots organizations set out to meet the needs of vulnerable and marginalized children and youth, girls feature prominently.”

The data also confirmed that Firelight’s grantees were tracking with global trends: in sub-Saharan Africa, where the epidemic is most severe, 76 percent of young people (aged 15-24) living with HIV are female.

### 4. It’s Not Anatomical

*Bringing girl programming into focus*

Being part of GGI was a learning journey for all of our organizations as intermediary funders. It challenged our tried and true models and moved

us from just reaching girls to reaching and serving them. The a-ha moments of what girl programming means and looks like was a critical evolution. As GGI grew, the bar became higher for girls' program investments and expectations. Members became more selective about which types of programs qualified for support. And when girl-programming capacity was low, rigor and development measures were applied.

Over time, GGI members put a premium on funding programs that have a philosophical and demonstrated commitment to the empowerment of girls versus those that serve and view girls as beneficiaries. In the latter case, girls are the subjects of programs helping to design, lead, evaluate and speak on behalf of them rather than being recipients only.

This evolution led to significant changes at several GGI member organizations, including The Global Fund for Children. At the beginning of the Initiative, GFC identified grantees by evaluating whether their programs served mostly girls. But GFC leaders quickly concluded that just serving girl beneficiaries does not necessarily mean their unique needs are met. GFC wanted to change how it analyzed and vetted potential GGI grantees so more funds went to groups truly committed to and capable of empowering girls. But how do you make that judgment? What qualifies a group as 'committed and capable'? With GGI funding, GFC tapped Amy Oyekunle the Executive Director of KIND in Nigeria, a GFC grantee and a pioneer in reaching younger girls and measuring empowerment to develop a diagnostic and analytical tool that could guide decision-making.

After mapping GFC's grantees to understand the landscape, Oyekunle devised a gender spectrum for grassroots organizations from gender-neutral to gender-transformative. GFC began to use this approach to take a deeper look beyond a grantees girl participation numbers, and evaluate which have the best chance at addressing girls' needs and transforming their lives.

GFC's leaders point to the deployment of the gender spectrum as a seismic shift in their work with girls. The organization started prioritizing programs that responded to girls and designed for girls, not just those that happened to serve a lot of girls. Achieving the Girl Effect, they concluded, is not about life support; it's about transformation.

Two practical outcomes of the gender spectrum analysis emerged for GFC. First, the organization started looking for grantees that view adolescent girls not as victims but rather as agents of change. For example, does an organization question so-

cial norms about gender and educate girls about their rights, as well as address immediate needs? Second, GFC began looking closely at grantees' staffing structures to determine if women were employed and in what roles. While organizations that do transformative work with girls do not have to be run by an all-female staff, it is important for girls to see women and other girls as role models and leaders.

The Global Fund for Women also made significant changes in its grant-making playbook to overcome hurdles that emerged through their GGI work. Over the first five years of the Initiative, GFW made grants to more than 90 organizations. Such a large number proved challenging: GFW wasn't fully able to dive into analyzing the successful strategies for girls being used by grassroots organizations to inform GFW's grantmaking.

"It was harder to extract deeper learning because we weren't giving multi-year grants," says Anjali Mutucumarana of GFW's Philanthropic Partnerships team. "So we decided to capitalize on the multi-year support provided by GGI to work more closely with a cohort of 10 organizations for the final three years of GGI to follow their impact."

GFW's shift to multi-year grants coincided with another significant change in the organization's strategy for adolescent girls. Traditionally, GFW viewed girl programming as part of their larger focus on women, an envelope within a larger portfolio. Now, with longer-term funding and new data, they started thinking of girls as a distinct programming priority that called for a separate set of solutions. Within two years, six out of the 10 organizations in the cohort launched new programs focused exclusively on adolescent girls. For some of these organizations, this marked their first program exclusively focused on girls under 18 years of age.

Young Women's Action Group in Sri Lanka, for example, realized that the majority of the program participants at their counseling and career center were actually young women aged 17-25. Under the sustained support of GGI, YWAG developed a new program called "Peer Wall," where a core group of girls were trained to be peer counselors. These girls then reached out to other girls in the community, providing them with vital information on sexual and reproductive health, their rights, as well as counseling. The number of girls aged 10-19 participating in the programs more than doubled during this time, from 400 to just over 800 girls.

The flexibility of GGI funding allowed GFW to support a cohort of grantees in using a robust strate-

gy that focuses on the girl's whole environment, not just one factor like education. This coincided with GFW's development of a multi-pronged view of programming for girls:

1. Increased individual awareness, including rights, skills and knowledge to advocate for rights.
2. Changes in community norms, beliefs and practices, for example on child marriage.
3. Increased access to resources, like health clinics.
4. Adoption and implementation of laws and policies.

"This shift helped us qualify why holistic support with activity and impact occurring in all four sections of the matrix is so important for girl empowerment," Mutucumarana says.

EMpower's leadership team began asking grantees questions that resulted in interesting conversations and, eventually, important strategy changes. During a 2006 visit to a potential grantee partner in Brazil, EMpower's team was taken to several community spaces, like public parks. The goal was to understand how the potential grantee, Sou da Paz, worked to end violence in poor, crime-affected neighborhoods. The EMpower team looked around, saw only men in the parks and asked, "Where are the girls?" Sou de Paz didn't have an answer. But they quickly saw the relevance and set out to understand a phenomenon they hadn't questioned previously. With funding from EMpower, they conducted research with girls and their parents on the girls' invisibility in public spaces.

Sou da Paz found that adolescent girls have less free time than boys due to their household responsibilities and that their parents worry about what would happen to their daughters in public squares where males congregate. EMpower supported Sou da Paz in a range of activities for girls, such as girls soccer in fields previously used only by males. Sou da Paz also found ways to make girls visible in the day-to-day culture of a community. For example, they used street art with girl empowerment themes (such as "super girl" showing a girl with a cape) and messages of non-violent, "new masculinity" roles for males.

EMpower's leadership found that the initial study led to a variety of initiatives often in unexpected ways. Sou da Paz staff reported that they started considering gender throughout the organization's programs, such as rethinking how to include women in a program designed to work with the military. Rethinking the role of girls thus triggered an even bigger step at Sou da Paz: mainstreaming the use of gender analysis across

its entire programming portfolio.

## 5. Girls in the Front

*From funding girl programming to funding girl-led programs*

As the GGI evolved, adapted and learned, so too did our collective expectations. For several members, the GGI experience influenced long-standing organizational practices and methods. For others, it served as a pivot point toward a new way of doing business from girl-focused to girl-led.

As other GGI members were developing ways to bring girls into focus, Mama Cash, an international women's fund based in Amsterdam, built on their existing dedication to funding girl-led organizations in the Netherlands.

"The learning curve was different for us because we did focus specifically on girls from the start," says Esther Lever, Mama Cash's officer for philanthropic partnerships. "What we tried to explore more throughout the Initiative was funding girl-led organizations internationally and how to have girls be seen as having valid opinions in the women's rights movement. It's not women speaking on behalf of girls, but girls speaking on behalf of themselves and saying these are the issues that matter to us."

Mama Cash dedicates five percent of overall funding to girl-led organizations, but has struggled to reach that target. In analyzing the reasons for this, Mama Cash acknowledged that their grant criteria, which requires detailed reporting, and distance made it harder for girl-led groups in developing countries to obtain funding. To seek solutions, Mama Cash and its grantee partner Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres set up a community of practice in July 2011 comprised of 10 women's funds from around the world. Its goals were to research funding sources for girls' rights initiatives and to better understand how to fund girl-led organizations. Members of women's funds from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe came together along with a number of girl representatives rising from four girls in the first meeting to 12 girl representatives in the third meeting who acted as expert informants about the needs of girl activists. The girls helped members of the community of practice to understand that where and how to look for girls was a critical first step that makes or breaks the success of a girl-led program. They also made the case that solutions must be designed together with girls from day one.

The women's funds heard the girls' message loud and clear. At the start of the community of practice, just four out of these 10 women's funds were



funding girl-led groups. After two years, the number doubled. Many of the members started embracing Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres' model where girls are actively involved in decision-making. Some of the women's funds added girls to their boards in advisory roles to provide girls more access to funding and decision-making.

"From this experience, we learned that local and regional women's funds are a critical partner in scaling up programming for girls as they can drive new resources to girls at the grassroots level," Lever says. "These women's funds can foster the development of girl-focused networks, grow learning tools for funding girls' human rights that are rooted in local or regional contexts, offer mentoring and budget support and even directly engage with the girls' parents when needed."

## 6. Building Better, Not Bigger

### *Investing in capacity building*

A unique value proposition of intermediary funders is that they not only identify and support grassroots girl solutions, but also ensure their strength and longevity. If great girl programs are going to continue to be built, the focus must be not only on more, but on better; not just for right now, but for the future.

Several GGI members found creative ways to strengthen their grantee partners in important strategic areas. As a group, we felt this was especially important because people often dismiss grassroots organizations, citing a "lack of capacity." But to get capacity you must build it! And we wanted to prove it could be done at the grassroots level.

The task was not easy. Helping strengthen organizations overall work strategic planning, evaluation, board development, advocacy, financial management can be labor intensive and requires an understanding of and respect for boundaries between funder and grantee. Such capacity building generally requires more intensive inputs and accompaniment than a financial grant alone, but GGI members believe that such support is crucial for grassroots organizations to be more effective and have staying power. In turn, this gives their programs for girls the best chance at succeeding in the big picture, and for the long haul.

While Firelight has long placed priority on investing in building the capacity of its partners, GGI funding helped Firelight deepen this support by establishing three learning communities networks of organizations in Malawi and Rwanda and offered training,

mentoring, peer learning and inquiry over a sustained period of time.

"We placed them at the heart of our goal to strengthen, document and leverage the capacity of grassroots organizations to further reach and support adolescent girls," says Zanele Sibanda. "The consistency of the long-term support led to significant shifts in insight and action among the participating organizations. We saw substantial gains in both organizational development and programming capacity over the three years." On average, Firelight recorded organizations gaining 40 percentage points on the Program Development Tool, moving from novice to competent.

In total, 23 organizations were networked through these learning communities. From April 2012 to March 2013, there were eight meetings and nine exchange visits between the members, with more planned. To help the learning communities build their capacity around girl-centered programming, Firelight facilitated trainings using the Population Council's Girl-Centered Program Design: A Toolkit to Develop, Strengthen & Expand Adolescent Girls Programs.

One area of the toolkit that grantees quickly implemented was financial literacy and creating systems that helped girls open savings accounts. Now grantees are able to provide Firelight with data on how many girls are saving, how much they are saving per week and how girls use money they withdraw. The toolkit also provided a framework for grantees to track how girls are gaining social, human, physical and financial assets. Better data leads to better programs.

"The introduction of savings accounts has been transformative for girls personally and for their families. For the first time in generations, a member of the family has a bank account," Sibanda says. "When you are poor it is extremely difficult to imagine you can put money away for a rainy day. But the girls are doing it. And their mothers are following their example. So now, a family emergency no longer means financial crisis. By demonstrating the power of having savings the girls are enhancing their family resilience to overcome unforeseen financial shocks."

GFC took a different approach to build grantees' capacity. The organization utilized a "GrantsPlus" model that provides grantees with funding for capacity building in addition to direct support of specific programs. GFC's leaders saw themselves as more than just grant-makers and check-writers. To multiply the effect of every investment dollar, they applied value-added services such as organizational development awards, knowledge

exchange workshops and leveraging additional resources from other funders.

Gauging the effects of capacity building efforts is notoriously difficult. To track progress, GFC created the Organizational Capacity Index (OCI) score. Grantee partners are asked to score themselves once each year in the following areas: planning, fundraising, governance, human resource development, financial management, monitoring, learning and evaluation, community and external relations, and information technology.

The results have been significant. For example, the baseline OCI score for Manav Ashrita Sansthan, a grantee partner in India, was 1.71; after four years of GFC funding and support their score rose to 3.14. Perhaps even more important, tracking and analyzing capacity building scores can help GFC and other funders identify how to better support grassroots organizations.

## 7. One is a Lonely Number

*Networking for greater impact*

By nature, community-based organizations are small and locally nuanced; they are adaptive and devise solutions to address gaps in one place. When trying to solve for national or global issues that adolescent girls face, community-based organizations are sometimes dismissed as an answer. Indeed, many grassroots organizations have no interest in scaling beyond their community, let alone across a country.

But grassroots organizations can benefit enormously from compounding using the power of networks to make them stronger than the sum of their parts. GGI members used this strategy in creative ways to connect, convene and network for greater impact.

There are multiple opportunities to capitalize on the informal and formal links grassroots organizations have with government agencies, community leaders, health institutions and other non-profits. While many grassroots organizations are based in faraway villages or under layers of urban slum, their work is rarely isolated. Grassroots organizations have an innate ability to connect and the nature of their work requires having allies and relationships of trust.

When grassroots organizations connect with each other, it provides them with different strengths including even moral support in the face of challenging circumstances. Having a common goal makes them more effective by coming together to advocate at the government or international level. Instead of just one group showing up, it's a critical mass, and they can

leverage strength in numbers.

Firelight supported their learning communities to spread successful strategies. For example, the Malawi learning community took on an advocacy role and mobilized funding to end child marriage. One way to keep girls in school and out of marriage is to make sure she has the funds needed to pay school fees. So one learning community member shared their Mother Group program where mothers make sanitary towels to sell and use the profits to pay their daughters' school fees with other learning community members, who then used the strategy in their own work.

In Rwanda, one organization conducted research in their community to document the reality of teen pregnancy with solid data. That research helped the group design a program that brought in multiple strategies to address the complex and layered issue of teen pregnancy. Armed with this data, the Rwanda learning community positioned themselves as experts within their districts, and now district officials are turning to the learning community to increase their understanding of how to deal with teen pregnancy.

"The value in the learning community is that it not only increased capacity in knowledge, relationships and practice among participating organizations, but it also raised the visibility of issues facing girls at a district level, and made collective action around girls a priority," Sibanda says. "They are agents of change inspiring action that is having a ripple effect in a wider sphere than any of them could individually achieve."

Efforts at AJWS focused on creating learning communities in Ethiopia, where one AJWS grantee led a network of 16 school girls' clubs, and in Kenya, where AJWS grantees brought together 26 local organizations focusing on adolescent girls' sexual health and rights, resulting in varying degrees of success. At the beginning stages of development, there were no specific end goals beyond shared learning, and each learning community therefore struggled with a lack of on-going engagement. There would be an initial surge in enthusiasm, but without a clearly defined focus, interest waned. This led AJWS to support a strategic planning session for the Nairobi learning community. After a year of starts and stops, this process brought clarity and the Nairobi group became focused on their future direction.

"Nairobi has truly become a network, whereas in Ethiopia relationships were built but they didn't fully become a network," says Jaron Vogelsang, AJWS' former program officer for Kenya, Ethiopia and Ghana. "A network should go beyond sharing



experiences and needs to be outcome-oriented.”

In Ethiopia, groups shared their programs, but felt forward momentum was not possible as the cost of implementing shared programs was prohibitive and unrealistic.

Beyond shared learning alone, the Nairobi learning community, meeting at least quarterly, began organizing around the issue of sexual and reproductive rights of adolescent girls. The learning community initiated and conducted a baseline study with eight focus groups of adolescent girls and in-depth household interviews with 255 adolescent girls aged 10-19, which AJWS considers a ground breaking piece of research in a landscape where this information is hard to come by. The study revealed that girls aged 10-19 years are sexually experienced, with more than 50 percent having had penetrative sex. Over 20 percent of girls interviewed reported to be in multiple sexual relationships, while 19 percent, the majority of them below 18 years of age, are engaged in commercial sexual activities. Twenty-four percent of adolescent girls interviewed experienced non-consensual sex, either coerced or forced. The study found that girls only talk to each other and their information about sexual and reproductive health is often inadequate and incorrect. Adolescents also were not accessing contraception because of misinformation, stigma and religious reasons; girls aged 10-13 years “were completely cut off from sexual and reproductive health information and services.

“All the learning community members can now use this in their advocacy and they have real data that they can show stakeholders and take to government agencies,” Vogelsang says. “They are now advocating not based on frustration and anger, but on real data that can be verified.”

Focusing on systemic change around one issue led the Nairobi learning community to become highly effective as a network. Collectively, they demonstrated at health centers, spoke to local leaders to make sure gender-based violence cases against girls were taken seriously and advocated at the national level for sexual and reproductive rights to create lasting change for adolescent girls in Kenya. EMpower’s learning community in Mumbai brought together adolescent girls and young mentors from four grantee partners representing four distinct populations: Muslim, tribal, internal migrant and native Maharashtra communities. After taking part in an EMpower-led workshop on goal setting, programming to achieve goals and basic budgeting and monitoring, the girls chose the issues they most wanted to change in their communities. They landed on three huge challenges: reducing superstitions and stigma related to

menstruation; reducing sexual harassment; and reducing restrictions on girls’ participation in public life.

The girls then organized community events to attack each problem. For example, they organized a flash mob to call attention to the right to safe mobility and also formed a watch group of girls to reduce sexual harassment around schools.

EMpower’s team recalls that the make up of the groups varied greatly, with girls coming from different cultural backgrounds and speaking different local languages. Without the learning communities, the girls would likely never have interacted. But once together, the girls developed bonds around the common experience of being a girl and the shared success of creating change in their communities.

After a year, the original learning community expanded to three new organizations working with girls, nearly doubling in size. Staying comfortable and contained would have been the easier route. But the participants had a strong desire to reach out to sister organizations and expand their network and their potential for collective impact. At the grassroots level, self-perpetuating networks like this are the overlooked path to scale.

## 8. Girls on the Global Stage

*Investing to lift girls’ voices*

The grassroots approach can be quieter than other international development initiatives. Community-based organizations and the girls they serve have limited exposure and influence. If they have something to share, they shout it from the rooftops. But their voices don’t often carry from those rooftops to the global stages with celebrities, heads of state, media and simultaneous translation into six languages. And yet, it is these models and voices that most need to be amplified if the world is going to respond.

Toward the end of GGI, members increasingly focused on this “voice gap” and explored how to use our role as intermediaries to get the most marginalized girls and their issues on the global stage.

Three GGI members American Jewish World Service, Global Fund for Women and Mama Cash worked collaboratively to pull together an international convening of adolescent girls from four countries at the 2012 International Association for Women’s Rights in Development Forum in Turkey. AWID an international membership organization dedicated to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women’s human rights centered the 2012 forum on issues of transforming economic power for women.

These GGI members hosted the only panel focused on adolescent girls at the conference, titled “Where Is The Money For Girls’ Rights?”

“This was an opportunity for us to capitalize on the relationships we built in the GGI and maximize our impact with girls at an international level,” says GFW’s Anjali Mutucumarana. The three GGI members facilitated a pre-AWID orientation to ensure that the 11 girls attending from seven grassroots organizations in Tanzania, Ethiopia, Armenia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and India could meaningfully participate in the forum. Many had never left their communities, let alone traveled to a different country to take part in one of the world’s largest development forums. The orientation aimed to enable the grantees and girls to network with other grassroots organizations, create shared learning platforms for the forum and to connect to broader networks of girls. Each organization set goals for the conference, identified relevant sessions and mapped out “work plans” to follow each day. Thus armed, grantees were able to enter the controlled chaos of such a large convening with existing relationships and action plans.

“Having three organizations working together to bring in girls from different parts of the world, creating a space for them to bond and build solidarity before the conference and then seeing the way the world was opened for these girls during the conference was a high point of the GGI,” AJWS’ Vogelsang says. “By the time the GGI panel took place on the last day of the conference, the GGI grantees and girl participants spoke as one powerful voice about the need to invest in girls as future leaders.”

## 9. The GGI Legacy

*A shared commitment to adolescent girls*

Too often in philanthropy, known best practices investing in general or operating support, supporting evaluation, paying real attention to gender can be sidelined when they seem to cost too much or have intangible short-term returns. The solid, long-term funding from the Grassroots Girls Initiative enabled six intermediaries to demonstrate the effectiveness of grant-making, and the impact possible when investing in girls.

Over nearly a decade, GGI members were able

to make many multi-year grants and deliberately invested in learning and better measurement. We funded organizational strengthening so grassroots organizations had more funding predictability and stability, enabling them to develop deeper benches in their staffing.

Investments in networking meant that organizations doing brave work with the most invisible and marginalized populations ending violence against girls, fighting trafficking and slavery, fostering sexual health and rights, opening up dignified and paid work opportunities gained a new forum to share and borrow strategies from each other, their force and impact.

Participating in the GGI made each consortium member smarter about how to invest in programming for girls. We began asking new questions of ALL applicants for funding, even those without an obvious link to adolescent girls. Where are the girls in your math classes, leadership councils and sports playing fields? How many of your staff are female and under 25 years old? How do you get girls’ perspectives on the programs you offer? What are the questions you would like to learn about from current or potential girl participants and how can we support you in finding the answers?

Such inquiry often led to interesting conversations among a grassroots organization’s staff and with its funders. New programming ideas emerged, and with them new funding possibilities. As a group, GGI members became more incisive about what information we sought from grantees and how we and more importantly they used it to learn more about their programming.

While GGI is ending as a formal funding initiative, each consortium member remains committed to the idea that grassroots organizations are a force for transformation in the lives of adolescence girls. And each of us has new skills, staff and systems to continue the work. But the biggest legacy, as GGI’s framers had hoped, is at the grassroots level itself.

“Today the grassroots landscape for girls is immeasurably stronger than it was when we started in 2006,” says Babchek, at the Nike Foundation. “There are at least 300 groups out there that know, at some level, how to reach girls, how to include girls and why it’s important. It’s a better equipped world.”