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# 2024 West Africa Adolescent Girls Summit | Monrovia, Liberia

March 26–29, 2024 | Summary Report

# More than just a summit, the AGS is a powerful adolescent-led movement contributing to a gender-just world.

## The Adolescent Girls Summit: How it all started

In 2021, as part of the [Ending Violence, Empowering Girls](#) initiative, Global Fund for Children (GFC) and its local partners in Liberia and Sierra Leone embarked on a journey to create a safe space for adolescent girls aged 10–19 to connect, voice their concerns, enhance their knowledge on issues affecting them, build their leadership skills, and collectively advocate for their rights. Funded by Tides Foundation and People's Postcode Lottery. The Ending Violence, Empowering Girls initiative aims to find innovative ways to address the root causes of violence against girls, who often experience gender-based discrimination and harm.

The journey started with consultations with adolescent girls participating in GFC partners' programs, which revealed that girls' representation in decision-making spaces is often superficial, with their voices overshadowed by adults. This lack of meaningful engagement, compounded by limited support and capacity-strengthening opportunities, hinders their effective participation in finding solutions to issues affecting them.

The outcomes of the consultations led to GFC, local partners, and adolescent girls co-creating the **West Africa Adolescent Girls Summit (AGS)** to catalyze a movement where adolescent girls are recognized as equal and active participants in shaping their future. At the request of the girls, boys have also been associated with the AGS learning journey. The girls argue that to achieve gender justice, both genders need to critically examine and

challenge harmful gender norms and behaviours that contribute to discrimination and violence against girls.

To facilitate meaningful engagement with the adolescents, GFC provided the partners with the necessary financial and technical resources to support the adolescent girls and boys in leading the planning and execution of the first AGS. The services of YOCEL, a youth-led organization with a track record of successfully organizing youth summits, were also enlisted by GFC to provide technical guidance to the planning process.

The inaugural AGS was held in April 2022 in Monrovia, Liberia, after a year of planning led by adolescent girls and boys, with the technical support of GFC, local partners, and YOCEL. Hailing from Ethiopia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, a hundred adolescents aged 10–19, alongside young people aged 20–25, congregated at the summit, with girls constituting most participants. This 2022 AGS laid the foundation for an adolescent-led movement for gender justice in West Africa.

**"I have never been in a platform where 80% of participants are adolescents, my peers. I was happy to see that the girls can make decisions and discuss the issues they face while leading the process. In many gatherings, it has been older people leading and making decisions; therefore, the feeling of me as an adolescent owning the space was extraordinary."**

*- Adolescent girl participant at the inaugural AGS.*

## Impact of the inaugural 2022 AGS

The inaugural AGS provided a dedicated platform for adolescent girls, whose needs and voices are often overlooked in youth- and women-led spaces. At the summit, adolescent girls and young women found a space where they could assert their rights, voice their concerns, amplify their voices, and collectively call for action.

The first AGS sparked a profound transformation among the girls who were involved in the planning and took part in the event. A comprehensive review conducted after the summit showed how the experience empowered attendees, boosting their self-confidence and inspiring them to pursue leadership roles and stand up for their rights. Many of them emerged as influential leaders and catalysts for positive change within their homes, schools, and communities. The summit also enhanced the capacity of GFC partners to listen; value the experiences of adolescent girls; and believe in their capacity to lead, have agency over their lives, and be agents of change in their homes, schools, and communities.

### Impact of 2022 AGS at the personal level

#### *Spotlight on Jitta Brima, 2022 AGS planner and participant*

Jitta Brima is a 20-year-old girl from Waiima, a rural community in Bo District, Sierra Leone, where GFC partner Center for Advocacy and Sustainable Empowerment (CASE SALONE) implements a girls' empowerment program. In 2022, at age 18, Jitta was elected by her peers to serve on the Regional Advisory Panel charged with leading the planning of the 2022 AGS. According to Jitta, being part of the planning team enhanced her leadership skills and transformed her from a shy girl to an outspoken and fearless youth leader. The summit enlightened her on the negative consequences of female genital cutting (FGC) and child marriage, practices that are prevalent in her community and are promoted as part of the culture.

After the summit, she went back to her grandmother, who was the leader of the women practicing FGC in her community and convinced her to stop the practice before

she passed away. Jitta also shared how the 2022 AGS inspired her to overcome the challenges she had experienced as a teenage mother and built her determination to further her education and give herself a better future.



*Jitta Brima from Sierra Leone shares her story with her peers at 2024 AGS.*

After 2022 AGS, GFC supported CASE SALONE to continue to offer Jitta the opportunity to further improve her knowledge on general issues affecting girls and enhance her leadership and advocacy skills. She was sponsored to attend the [10<sup>th</sup> Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights](#), organized by Purposeful and held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in June 2022. At the conference, she received funding to organize activities in her community. She used the funding to organize training activities on girls' rights and wellbeing for her peers and other community members with the support of CASE SALONE.

### Impact of 2022 AGS at the organizational level

#### *Spotlight on CASE SALONE, GFC partner*

Before 2022 AGS, according to Mustapha Keita, Program and Communication Manager at CASE SALONE, the organization faced significant challenges in effectively engaging adolescent girls and nurturing their leadership capacities. The staff lacked the necessary knowledge and tools to support girls in making informed decisions to impact their lives. Additionally, there was a noticeable

absence of adolescent girls' involvement in decision-making processes within the organization.

The 2022 AGS served as a practical training ground, prompting the organization to conduct a comprehensive reassessment of its practices. After the summit, CASE SALONE introduced a structured Teen Talk program designed to empower girls to confidently assert their rights. In addition, the staff were trained to effectively mentor and support girls on their journey toward self-advocacy. In a move toward greater co-creation, CASE SALONE invited adolescent girls participating in its program, to have a representation at the organization's Advisory Board to ensure that their perspectives are integral to organizational decision-making processes.



CASE SALONE Program and Communication Manager, Mustapha Keita sharing CASE SALONE's evolution at 2024 AGS.

### **Impact of 2022 AGS at the policy level** *Spotlight on Madam Jewel Howard Taylor, Former Vice President of Liberia*

In 2022, the then Vice President of Liberia, Madam Jewel Howard Taylor, attended the last day of the inaugural AGS. During an interactive session, adolescents presented her with their call to action, articulating their concerns and recommendations on issues affecting them. Madam Taylor remarked that this was the first occasion she had to hear directly from adolescent girls about the challenges they face. In 2023, she established sanitary pad banks and menstrual and health hygiene awareness programs in six schools in southeastern Liberia as part of the Spotlight Initiative, implemented by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in collaboration with her office. The project addressed one

of the calls to action of adolescents to facilitate their access to free sanitary pads to reduce girls' absenteeism in schools during their menstruation. A total of 24,825 adolescent girls received reusable or disposable pads or benefitted from family planning items through the program. Taylor also led a successful advocacy effort for FGC to be banned in Montserrado County, another strong recommendation in the adolescents' call to action. *Jewel Howard Taylor, former Vice President of Liberia, speaking at the 2024 AGS.*



## **Highlights from the 2024 West Africa Adolescent Girls Summit**

Held under the theme "Connecting Girls, Breaking Barriers, Creating Change," the 2024 West Africa Adolescent Girls Summit took place on March 26–29 in Monrovia, Liberia. It was attended by 250 delegates, including adolescents aged 10–19, youth aged 20–25, parents, government officials, civil society organizations, traditional, religious, and community leaders and international non-governmental organizations, UN agencies (UNICEF and UNFPA) and funders. 2024 AGS was an inclusive space, with adolescent participants from both urban and rural communities with intersecting identities, including two adolescent girls with hearing impairment.

The opening ceremony brought inspiring performances and thought-provoking remarks from adolescent girls, followed by speeches of support from GFC, UN

representatives, and former First Lady of Nigeria – Dr. Aisha Buhari. The opening remarks of Liberian First Lady Katumu Yatta Boakai were read by former Liberian Vice President Jewel Howard Taylor.

Below are glimpses of what participating girls gained from 2024 AGS.

## 1. They expanded their networks and connected with like-minded peers.

At the request of the adolescent leaders who spearheaded the planning of the inaugural AGS in 2022, 2024 AGS underwent a momentous expansion, encompassing 10 French- and English-speaking countries in West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. This expansion was rooted in the recognition that adolescent girls across West Africa face common challenges and issues, transcending national borders and necessitating a unified and regional response. To facilitate the expansion, GFC leveraged its relationships with alumni partners in Ghana and Nigeria that had programs focused on adolescent girls' empowerment, as well as current partners in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea that had organized a small French-language AGS in 2023, building on lessons learned from the inaugural AGS.

In addition, GFC reached out to regional institutions and networks supporting adolescent girls' empowerment programs in West Africa – including UNICEF, UNFPA, Plan International, Fund for Global Human Rights, Girls Not Brides, African Women's Development Fund, medica Liberia, ActionAid Liberia, Girls First Fund, Purposeful, and RFSU – to leverage their networks, expertise, and resources in order to connect girls participating in various community-based organizations' programs across the region. To overcome barriers to communicating and engaging during the summit, GFC employed the services of English, French, and sign language interpreters. Efforts were made throughout the summit to ensure that adolescents embraced diversity and built on one another's strengths and uniqueness.

*"My experience at the AGS was nice and interactive. I was able to meet new young and vibrant minds while also learning a new culture."*

*"The adolescent panels showed me that this summit is something that can actually change our lives and connect us across language barriers."*

– Adolescent participants at 2024 AGS.



Adolescent girls and boys from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

## 2. They strengthened their self-confidence, leadership, and public speaking skills.

2024 AGS emerged as a transformative platform, empowering adolescent girls to hone their leadership skills through active participation in the planning and execution of the event itself. By entrusting them with leadership roles such as masters of ceremonies and session moderators, the summit provided fertile ground for adolescent girls to cultivate their self-confidence and refine their public speaking skills. The profound impact of this hands-on experience was palpable, as even those who were initially reluctant to take center stage found themselves inspired to step forward and volunteer for leadership roles. Moreover, they had the opportunity to learn from experienced women leaders who shared their personal insights and lessons learned from their own leadership journeys.

A dedicated session on leadership further amplified this AGS focus, offering invaluable insights and strategies for navigating the complexities of leadership. As participants reflected on their experiences and shared feedback, a resounding consensus emerged: the summit had not only equipped them with practical skills but also ignited a newfound sense of agency over their lives as well as a purpose and determination to effect positive change in their homes, schools, and communities.



Adolescent participant at 2024 AGS sharing her inputs during the conversation on girls' leadership.

"I learned that as a leader, you must have the quality of self-awareness – knowing and accepting who you are before leading others. Adolescents must realize that this is their time to claim their space, to recognize their power, and to believe in their ability to change the world positively. I also learned that to excel, you must be ready to be uncomfortable; even when you feel tired, you must try to gather energy."

– Adolescent participant at 2024 AGS.

### 3. They enhanced their knowledge of issues affecting girls across West Africa and gained tools to ignite their decision making, critical and analytical thinking.

The summit included workshops and panel discussions on issues the adolescents identified to be important to them. Topics included child, early, and forced marriage and unions; FGC; strategies to keep girls in school; comprehensive sexual health education; healthy masculinities; leadership skills development; mental health; using social media for advocacy; managing peer pressure and drug abuse prevention; human and child rights; and climate change. Participants had the opportunity to expand their knowledge, ask questions, get facts from the different experts, and listen to lived experience stories shared by their peers. For some participants, it was the first time they had heard about some issues, such as FGC. Adolescent girls who

underwent the practice did not hesitate to openly share their experiences with their peers, fostering the need for collective action to end the practice. Some of the girls realized that they were among the few privileged ones who enjoyed their right to education. They were surprised and disheartened to learn that many girls in West Africa still face significant obstacles in accessing education. These barriers include economic hardship, cultural practices, gender-based violence, early marriage, and inadequate school facilities.

"The summit is excellent, wonderful, educational, and inspiring. I learned a lot; this is my first time attending an educational summit like this. A few important things I have learned from this summit are comprehensive sexuality education, female genital cutting (FGC), and how to become a leader. The most important one I learned, and I am happy about, is the practice of FGC because my mom almost subjected me to the practice. Thank God I am now informed and educated about it."

– Adolescent participant at 2024 AGS.

She's the First, an organization specialized in creating captivating educational resources that engage girls in learning about their rights and bodies, introduced the girls to the What Would You Do? card game, a tool designed to cultivate critical thinking and decision-making skills for girls. Girls attending the summit were also provided with My Period Diary, a toolkit that not only helps them track their menstrual cycles but also equips them to be catalysts for candid discussions on sexual and reproductive health issues.



Representative of She's the First and adolescent girls with their tools at 2024 AGS.

#### 4. They dialogued with parents, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organizations, and policymakers on issues affecting them.

During the summit, adolescent girls were provided with a unique opportunity to engage in dialogue with various stakeholders, including parents, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organizations, and policymakers, on a wide range of issues directly impacting their lives. During these discussions, adolescent girls shared their lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations, offering valuable insights and recommendations for action. The dialogues facilitated interaction between adolescents and a cross-section of stakeholders, equipping stakeholders with a deeper understanding of the issues affecting girls and informing the development of more responsive and effective interventions. These discussions with stakeholders also provided the girls with a platform to amplify their voices, influence decision-making processes, and hold policymakers accountable for their commitments to girls' rights and wellbeing.



Adolescents interacting with a cross-section of stakeholders at 2024 AGS.

*"I learned a lot of things from the networking and participation. Particularly, the engagement with stakeholders makes me feel our voices have been heard."*

– Adolescent participant at 2024 AGS.

#### 5. They learned to work with boys as allies to achieve gender justice.

From the initial consultation, adolescent girls made it clear that they wanted boys to be part of the journey to advance gender justice. The boys supported the girls throughout the planning of the 2024 AGS. All the sessions were moderated by girls and boys to demonstrate the importance of working together as a team to achieve gender justice. Adolescent girls and boys both learned to discuss and interact without any sexual intention.

2024 AGS was also deliberate in having an exclusive session for boys to reflect on existing gender norms, deconstruct stereotypes about male and female relationships, and gain insights into healthy masculinities. The boys shared how the AGS and participating in partners' programs have changed their mindsets about girls.



Ble Noel, aged 17, from Côte d'Ivoire participated in a panel discussion with adolescent girls.

*"Before joining ADPF (GFC partner in Man, Côte d'Ivoire), I used to think that boys were superior to girls. I used to make sexist jokes and publish on social media inappropriate pictures of girls. But since I started participating in ADPF programs and taking part in the AGS convenings, I changed my mindset. I respect and support girls to achieve their dreams, and I am a strong advocate for gender justice."*

– Ble Noel sharing at 2024 AGS.

## 6. They lobbied for funders to fund adolescent-led initiatives.

The adolescent girls had the opportunity to engage with representatives of funding institutions, including ActionAid Liberia, African Women's Development Fund, the Embassy of Sweden in Liberia, GFC, Girls First Fund, Plan International, and RFSU on the challenges they face in accessing funding as adolescent activists. They voiced their concerns and shared their recommendations for funders to review their funding mechanisms to support adolescent-led initiatives aiming at empowering their peers, raising awareness, and advocating for their rights.

*"We do not need an age criterion to create change. Adolescent-led initiatives can create impact just as well as adults; we need you to put your trust in us just as GFC has done with CFN."*

*- 2024 AGS adolescent participant*

## 7. They showcased their talents.

2024 AGS provided a unique platform for adolescent girls to showcase their diverse talents, creativity, and skills, expressing themselves and amplifying their voices in a meaningful way. They utilized the art of spoken word poetry, or poetry slams, to shed light on the pressing issues faced by adolescent girls in the region. With raw emotion and captivating delivery, they addressed topics such as gender-based violence, access to education, and economic empowerment, sparking important conversations and raising awareness. They also displayed their rich cultural heritage and artistic prowess through traditional dances and acting performances.

Girls from Ghana shared their passion for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) by showcasing their robotics projects and innovations. Through hands-on demonstrations, they displayed their technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and creativity, inspiring their peers to pursue interests in STEM fields.

Adolescent girls and boys from Sierra Leone seized the opportunity to channel their creativity into producing a [special AGS song](#) that conveyed the objectives and uniqueness of the 2024 AGS.



*Adolescents from Côte d'Ivoire performing traditional welcome dances at the opening ceremony.*

## 8. They presented their calls to action and obtained commitments from representatives of stakeholders at the summit.

On the last day of the summit, adolescents compiled their recommendations for changes they wanted to see in a call to action, which they presented to the different stakeholders or their representatives present, including government officials, funders, UN agencies, international organizations, civil society organizations, parents, and traditional, religious, and community leaders, who all committed to share the call to action and follow up with their various institutions and communities.



*Adolescent spokesperson presenting the call to action to stakeholders at 2024 AGS.*

## 9. They amplified their voices through social and mainstream media.

For the 2022 AGS, due to safeguarding concerns about adolescents amplifying their voices through the media, the latter were provided the requisite support despite their lobbying. For 2024 AGS, GFC and its partners had to acknowledge that these adolescents are living in a digital age and must be supported to use social media and mainstream media to amplify their voices on issues affecting them. A visibility and public relations committee led by adolescents was set up to create and manage the summit's social media handles. In addition, GFC partners supported the adolescents to share about the summit through local radio stations. They were also featured on the [\*BBC's Focus on Africa\* podcast](#).

On the last day of the summit, six adolescent leaders were given the space to share their call to action through a press conference that was attended by various local and international media institutions, including FrontPage Africa (Liberia), Okay 101.7 FM (Ghana), ECOWAS Radio (Liberia), and the BBC. The call to action was also published in Liberia's [\*Daily Observer\*](#) newspaper.

[Links to the AGS social media handles and pages:](#)

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Twitter/X: [@AGS\\_WestAfrica](#)  
Facebook: [Adolescent Girls Summit](#)  
LinkedIn: [Adolescent Girls Summit](#)  
Instagram: [@summitadolescentgirls](#)  
YouTube: [@AdolescentGirlsSummit](#)

## Looking ahead: opportunities for continued support and engagement

The UN organizations, peer organizations, and partners involved in co-creating 2024 AGS expressed unanimous recognition of the distinctive nature of the summit's organization process and the invaluable space it provided for building leadership and empowering adolescent girls.

For local partners, parents, and traditional and religious leaders, the experience of engaging with adolescent girls at 2024 AGS was deeply impactful. By listening to the perspectives and stories of adolescent girls, these stakeholders gained new insights and appreciation for the resilience, creativity, and leadership qualities of this younger generation. This shift in perception marked a significant step toward breaking down barriers and stereotypes that may have previously hindered the full participation of adolescent girls in their programs and communities.

Recognizing the profound impact of the summit on individual lives and communities, participating stakeholders affirmed their commitment to sustaining and scaling up this unique space. They understood that by providing ongoing support and resources, they could further amplify the voices of adolescent girls, expand their opportunities, and catalyze lasting social change.

GFC collaborator from Ghana, [Akua Kuenyehia Foundation](#) upon return from the summit, supported adolescent girls from their organization who attended the summit to share what they had learned at the summit and continue to amplify their voices through appearing on Ghana Broadcasting Corporation's [Women's Voice](#), a national TV talk show.



*Partners and stakeholders during the first day of 2024 AGS.*

## GFC support beyond the summit

For GFC, the AGS is far more than a singular event—it's a crucial component of the broader, long-term commitment to empowering girls and advancing their rights on the African continent. It aims at supporting girls as leaders, addressing the root causes of violence and gender inequality. Through the AGS, GFC seeks to catalyze systemic change by creating a platform for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and action-oriented strategies with girls at the center of decision-making processes.

In addition, as a grantmaking institution, we will continue to fundraise to provide **flexible funding** and **capacity strengthening** to our local partners, that work directly with adolescent girls. These efforts aim to tackle the structural and cultural factors that perpetuate violence against girls, ensuring that solutions are holistic and sustainable.

The 2024 AGS served as a key moment for reflection and growth. GFC will explore diverse ways to uplift and support **adolescent-led initiatives** that emerge from the summit's call to action, ensuring that young people are not just beneficiaries but **active drivers of change**—particularly in advocating for gender justice, safe environments, and opportunities for girls to thrive.

GFC is also committed to continuing its engagement with other stakeholders, including government agencies, community leaders, and civil society organizations, to explore how to sustain and expand investments in these spaces. This includes fundraising to support the participation of adolescent girls from diverse settings at future AGS events, as well as finding ways to support **adolescent-centered initiatives** that have the potential to transform norms and create lasting change. Collaborative partnerships will ensure that the momentum from the AGS leads to actionable outcomes, sustained resources, and a long-term impact on the fight against violence and the empowerment of girls.

A WhatsApp group has been put in place to connect adolescent girls and boys participating in GFC and other institutional partners' programs. The group serves as an online space to continue engaging, enhancing their knowledge and skills, designing advocacy strategies, and following up on their call to action. Adolescent girls and boys who attended the summit are increasingly connecting, amplifying their voices, inspiring their peers, and demanding actions at the community and national levels.

## Conclusion

Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue in many parts of Africa, restricting the rights and opportunities of adolescent girls. The AGS places adolescent girls at the center of decision-making processes on issues affecting them. By expanding the AGS, more girls can be reached, equipped, and empowered to have agency over their lives, achieve their potential and lead initiatives that promote positive social change, driving transformative impact in their communities and countries.

*"The summit is different in how adolescents' safety is guaranteed. It is the first time seeing high-level dignitaries listening to children to amplify their voice."*

– Anonymous representative of a partner organization

*"From our involvement here at the AGS, we now know that there are some things we are missing when it comes to supporting the girls in our communities. What we have learned is to give them the platform in decision-making. We have understood that in the communities' leadership, the girls' voices and opinions must be reflected in decision-making."*

– Traditional leader who attended AGS 2024

*"Working with GFC and other partners has not only been a rewarding experience but a powerful testament to our collective commitment towards empowering and amplifying the voices of young people across the region. The AGS has provided a platform where the aspirations, challenges, and resilience of adolescent girls are not only acknowledged but celebrated, and it has been my utmost joy witnessing and experiencing that."*

– Dorah Muhanuuzi, The Fund for Global Human Rights.

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GFC is indebted to its current and alumni partners in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone – namely Achievers Ghana, Action pour le Développement et la Protection de la Famille (ADPF), Akua Kuenyehia Foundation, Center for Advocacy and Sustainable Empowerment (CASE SALONE), Child and Youth Protection Foundation (CYPF), Children's Forum Network-Kenema (CFN), Club des Jeunes Filles Leaders de Guinée (CJFLG), Community Health Care Initiative (CHI), Femmes Actrices pour l'Education et le Développement de l'Enfant (FAEDE), Génération Femme du 3ème Millénaire (GFM3), Protection contre les Violences sur les Femmes, Enfants, la Paix dans les communautés et l'Environnement (PROVIFEPE), SILOE, Union des Jeunes Dynamiques (UJDM) and Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society (WAVES) – for the opportunity to learn alongside them.

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