



## 2024 West Africa Adolescent Girl Summit

### Partner Proposition

*“The summit created the platform to unlock my true potential by raising my self-esteem. Now I am happy with my gender, and it feels great to own the space, and I shall continue owning it.” - Girl participant*

### Overview

In March 2024 we will hold the second West Africa Adolescent Girls Summit in Liberia. The first West Africa Adolescent Girls Summit took place in Liberia, in April 2022 and brought together more than a hundred adolescent girls and boys aged 13 - 19 for a week of skills training, team building, and campaign activities. Adolescents representing Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia and more than two dozen government institutions, UN agencies, and international NGOs came together. The Summit was organised by Global Fund for Children and its local partners in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Adolescent girls are often overlooked in the broader category of “youth”, ignoring their distinct needs, challenges and priorities. Due to gender discriminatory and ageist social norms, girls are also not encouraged to share their opinions or participate in decision-making about their lives. This was the first Summit of its kind where adolescents were in charge. Girls and boys designed almost every aspect of the Summit and were involved in decision-making from inception and planning to implementation. Supported by YOCEL, youth-led organisation brought on in a consultant role, participants built skills in social media and campaigning as well as exploring issues of gender equality including gender roles, FGM, girls’ leadership, gender based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

*“I used to be a shy person, but as a result of the summit, I am now outspoken. In my community, I engage adolescents on a weekly life skills program, and I also engage my peers in school about*

*their rights and responsibilities. I'm now a proud influencer and a champion for change." Girl participant*

The Summit is a space to lift up the voices and experiences of adolescent girls in particular, in allyship with boys and adults, building political education, as well as strengthening connections and networks. It is also a space for strategic advocacy commitments, sparking longer term intergenerational and transnational advocacy efforts.

In terms of advocacy and resourcing outcomes from the 2022 Summit, it led to:

- Direct advocacy with the Vice President of Liberia as well as opportunities for follow up.
- The development of adolescent-led demands and recommendations to decision-makers.
- Strengthening of advocacy relationships with other key stakeholders.
- Unlocking new resources for youth and for partners.

The 2022 Summit would not have been possible without the support of UNICEF Liberia Office, UNFPA Liberia Office, UNWomen Liberia Office, Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation (KTK), Fund for Global Human Rights, RFSU, Swedish sexuality organisation, DKT, CITITRUST, Action AID, Medica Liberia.

## What we learnt

### The impact on girls and boys is powerful and multifaceted

**Summits and the process to design them are powerful spaces to build connections, community, power and political education amongst girls, boys and their communities.** Girls want to be in community with others and see this as a critical way to learn and grow. The Summit provides this space to build community because adolescents are able to see that the challenges they face are shared and solutions to problems can be collectively created.



*"I decided to attend because I always believed that success and learning take place when you leave your comfort zone, and I wanted to gain some ideas and share mine with other adolescent girls." Girl participant*

**By centering girls, from the beginning and throughout, they build confidence. Harmful gender norms and**

**structures are challenged as a result.** Co-designing means starting from the beginning, not when an idea is already half-baked. It takes time and involves trust and flexibility.

*“The decision to allow girls to lead from the beginning came from consulting them on how they wanted the process to be. They came up with a lot of recommendations where they said they really want to lead.” GFC staff member*

**The process increases self-esteem and confidence, particularly amongst girls.** Girls reported transforming from being timid and shy to feeling powerful and able to use their voice, during the summit and beyond.

*“My challenge has always been to speak in public. As someone who was born and raised in a small community with limited opportunities to express myself, I find it super difficult to speak among my peers. Through the support of GFC in bringing us together, I have been able to overcome that challenge.” Girl participant*

*“More of them are really beginning to show up and participate...More girls are now serving as mentors to both boys and girls and even the elderly helping to shape the communities in which they live in!” Grantee partner, Sierra Leone*

**The Summit is a space for political education, to actively challenge perceptions around gender and put forward an alternative.** Girls and boys both reported learning new things, and having their perception around harmful gender norms challenged and changed.

*“The biggest thing I learnt was that the concept of women being the weaker vessel is all fallacy and is a result of culture, tradition, and society, which has led to suppression of our rights and to women having low self-esteem. With time, it can change, but it all has to start with us women believing in ourselves.” Girl participant*

*“I hope to dismantle gender inequity and help both girls’ and boys’ triumph over these challenges.” Boy participant*

**For a gender transformative approach, the role of boys and men is critical and must be handled with care and intention.** Boys and young men have a critical role to play as allies and they are also affected negatively by gender inequality. The process provides a space to reflect on the role of boys and men, and to unpack power dynamics and unconscious biases.

*“As a boy, I had a change of mindset, what we can do, girls can do it a lot better. We can do it equally. Talking about*



*gender equality. It means we can do things equally.” Boy participant*

**The Summit sparks longer term action amongst adolescents.** Excitingly, many of those who participated continue to organise and advocate in their communities.

*“I am now developing content to launch a feminist movement on campus to sensitise women on their rights, ability, and capabilities. In advocacy to end sexual and gender-based violence, I have realised that men must be involved in the process, so we have tried to include both boys and girls in changing their mindsets.” Girl participant*

*“I am educating my community about comprehensive sexuality education because it teaches us about our bodies and how to take care of them, and I am seeing stakeholders in Sierra Leone to discuss adding comprehensive sexuality education into the school curriculum.” Boy participant*

## It is a transformative learning opportunity for local partners

**Meaningful participation of adolescents in the Summit strengthens partners’ interventions and programmes beyond the event itself.** Partners are integrating learning on girl-centred approaches to make interventions better able to respond to adolescents’ realities.

*“The Summit served as a major example to showcase the power of children in handling leadership roles! We changed the perception of stakeholders in our district and major CSOs to a point that meetings and interactions that were not made accessible to children were beginning to be made accessible.” - Grantee partner, Sierra Leone*

**An adolescent-centred approach encourages intergenerational learning and collaboration.** Partners’ perceptions and attitudes to what adolescents are capable of shifted during the course of the planning process. They were challenged to step back and let adolescents step into decision-making roles, which transformed their views on what is possible.

*“We do our budgets and planning in the office and then call the girls to participate. The new revolutionary way the summit taught us and changed our mind on how to engage adolescents. We moved from imposing our ideas. It was a learning journey for us on how they can serve solutions to their own problems and how to build children’s agency.” - Grantee partner, Sierra Leone*

**The Summit opens space for intergenerational dialogue about girls’ rights issues as well as strategic advocacy approaches.** Bringing children, youth and adults together allows for shared learning on advocacy approaches as well as space to challenge adults on how they would traditionally approach the engagement of decision-makers.

*“Partners were from an older generation which led to some interesting conversations on what is the best way to go about things. Some people want to go about things softly and quietly and others [adolescents] want to make some noise. We learned about different intergenerational approaches to activism.” GFC staff member*

**Through intergenerational dialogue, adult allies step up to support the message and demands of adolescents.** This solidarity begins at the Summit and continues after the event

*“Elders began to join in, in support of the young people, saying we are here to hear from the young people and what you are hearing is that CSE is not being taught. We could see how the traditional elders’ voices became supportive of young people. After they joined the adolescents to demand that teachers are trained to effectively teach CSE in schools.” GFC staff member*

## We have an opportunity to do things differently

**Meaningful participation in the design and implementation of the Summit is a process of redistributing power and disrupting business as usual.** True meaningful collaboration and participation take time and the process is as important as the event itself, if not more!

*“The Summit was a year’s worth of work with partners and with adolescents. By the time it got to the event, most of the work had been done. We were expecting more of a traditional youth space but it was the opposite.” GFC staff member*

**Resourcing meaningful participation and co-ownership as a process leads to more diverse engagement of children and young people.** The setting up of regional and local panels of adolescents supported an almost completely adolescent-led selection process of committee members with intentionality in gender diversity as well as the inclusion of both rural and urban adolescents.

**Meaningful participation and co-ownership requires adults to step back intentionally into more of a guiding role.** For all adult-led organisations, this is a process of learning and unlearning. Working with YOCEL, a youth-led organisation helped to build this into the process.

*“Our role was to guide a process, not contribute or try to influence the decisions. We made a conscious effort not to influence the decisions.” Former YOCEL staff, Liberia*

**By collaborating with a youth-led organisation, adolescents are exposed to young role models.** This is often their first insight into youth organising and they have the opportunity to envision how they might continue to engage in collective organising as they age out of adolescence.

**The Summit provides opportunities to explore funding and power with children and young people as they reimagine a more gender equal world.** This sparked ideas for future Summits to explore issues of power and how it intersects with economic rights and power of financial resources.

*“The whole point of violence against girls is lack of recourse and the economic power of men. We need to focus also on moving resources to girls and girl-led initiatives” Youth collaborator*

## What we are doing differently

Based on these learnings, we are adapting and strengthening our approach for the 2024 Summit. We are:

- Investing in learning and documentation
- Starting the engagement with funders early
- Developing a safeguarding plan and having a safeguarding lead at GFC
- Strengthening the participation of adolescents at every step of the planning
- Facilitating ongoing connection and learning within the adolescent groups.

## Partnership and Sponsorship Options

Sponsors, collaborators and funders are critical to the success and long term impact of the Summit and will help to ensure it is inclusive of the diversity of adolescent voices and realities. We are deeply grateful to all funders and partners, particularly those that are able to make early commitments and help shape the Summit with us. Sponsorship options include:

- Provision of flexible grants to GFC to cover Summit design and implementation costs
- Sponsoring of adolescent girls to participate
- Supporting post-Summit work including collective advocacy and follow up

Engaging as a funder or supporter will also provide you with the following benefits:

- Opportunities for collective learning, documentation and influence
- Intergenerational collaboration and action
- Stronger networks and partnerships
- Organisational visibility and brand

Our team is on hand to answer any questions you have and to provide tailored support to you and your organisation. For more information, please contact Kieran Lewis: [klewis@globalfundforchildren.org](mailto:klewis@globalfundforchildren.org).