



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Haiti Girls Join BRAC's Club for Adolescents**

*A global girl power movement already reaching 270,000 lives has now come to Haiti.*

JACMEL, HAITI – A sense of hope and optimism was palpable in the room as teenage girls gathered in a village near Jacmel in June. It was the first local meeting of BRAC's Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) program, a network of clubs for adolescent girls that now spans three continents. The groundbreaking program has already changed close to 270,000 lives in Bangladesh and east Africa, and it launched in Haiti this summer.

The idea behind ELA is to create "safe spaces" for learning and socializing, opening gateways to social and financial empowerment. Opportunities like these are limited for young Haitians, especially girls, and much sought after in a country still recovering from the 2010 earthquake. "In Haiti, such clubs are rare," says Eva Louis, who was elected mentor by the girls of a newly formed club just outside Jacmel, a town in the south where about 70 percent of the buildings were damaged by the quake.

At a meeting of another newly formed club in the Jacmel area, a teenager named Daveline Alexis expresses similar sentiment. "It's good to have these kinds of activities for youth in Haiti, especially those living in rural areas," she says.

There's indeed something amazing going with ELA – and not just in Haiti, where BRAC launched operations in 2010. BRAC's adolescent clubs are now operating in six countries around the world, adapted to local contexts and going by different names (see table, below). But the approach and philosophy is the same, grounded by BRAC's understanding that the route from poverty can start with teenage girls – not just for the girls themselves, but for whole families and communities.

It starts in borrowed and rented spaces near the home. Away from the pressures of family and male-centered society, girls can discuss problems with their peers in small groups. From older mentors trained by BRAC, they learn about health, family planning and other difficult issues, building their confidence through life

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skills training. Finally, as one of the world's earlier and largest providers of microfinance, BRAC brings an innovative financial component into the mix, knowing that teens from the poorest families will require skills, capital and an entrepreneurial mindset to navigate their way to a more prosperous future.

The ELA program stands apart for its approach, scale and impact. The approach combines "soft skills" with training in financial literacy, livelihood skills and, in some cases, micro-loans. In Uganda, where the ELA program is largest, thanks in part to BRAC's partnership with The MasterCard Foundation there, about 25 percent of the club's 31,000 members had outstanding loans as of December 2011. Default rates are less than one percent.

Borrowers include people like Flavia Mirembe, 21, from a village outside Kampala, who dropped out of school at age 14 due to poverty. After joining the local ELA club in 2008, she took a loan of 200,000 Ugandan shillings (approximately US \$80) and started a small business selling fresh chapattis and samosas for a profit of about \$6.70 per day. Worldwide, girls in ELA clubs have taken \$2.2 million in loans like these, specially tailored for teens.

The programs are subjected to rigorous evaluation to determine the impact on the lives of girls and their families. In Uganda, a study by BRAC's internal research and evaluation division found positive effects on pregnancy rates, contraception and savings. Over a two-year period, among a cohort in which about 10 to 12 percent of girls have children, childbearing was 20 to 25 percent lower in Ugandan villages with an ELA program versus similar villages without one. Self-reported condom usage was significantly higher, too – even among non-participants, suggesting a healthy spill-over effect of family planning knowledge. The randomized evaluation also found that average savings of girls living in ELA intervention villages increased over 70 percent.

In Bangladesh, a Nike Foundation-funded pilot program called Social and Financial Empowerment for Adolescents (Sofea) aims to keep girls in school while teaching livelihood skills and offering loans. The larger Adolescent Development Program (ADP) also offers a mix of livelihood and social skills training.

Rumi Akhter, age 14, from Satiya in central Bangladesh, was torn between the desire to stay in school and the urgent needs of her family after her father couldn't work due to a road accident. Rumi received training as a beautician, and with the help of a loan of about \$37 she earned enough money to both support her family and return to school. She's now focused on her studies again and hopes to open a proper salon one day.

Back in Uganda, an older and more experienced Flavia Mirembe has turned her attention to her younger sister, using her chapatti and samosa business to finance the education she herself couldn't afford to complete. She's also bought new clothes, shoes, mattresses and blankets for her siblings. Flavia may well become the last member of her family not to have finished school, a benefit that will last generations.

#### **Membership in BRAC's adolescent clubs (as of end 2011)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Membership</b>
Bangladesh	Adolescent Development Program	206,674
Uganda	Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents	31,378
Bangladesh	Social and Financial Empowerment for Adolescents	13,158
Tanzania	Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents	7,371
Afghanistan	Adolescent Reading Centres	6,853
South Sudan	Adolescent Girls Initiative	3,000

#### **ABOUT BRAC**

A development organization founded in Bangladesh in 1972, BRAC is a development success story, spreading solutions born in the developing world to 10 other countries around the world. What started as a limited relief operation in 1972 in a remote village of Bangladesh has turned into the largest development organization in the world, a 21<sup>st</sup> century leader in creating opportunity for the world's poor. Organizing the poor using communities' own human and material resources, BRAC (formerly Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) catalyzes lasting change, creating an ecosystem in which the poor have the chance to seize control of their own lives. We do this with a holistic development approach geared toward inclusion, using tools like microfinance, education, healthcare, legal services, community empowerment and more. Our work now touches the lives of an estimated 126 million people. With staff and BRAC-trained entrepreneurs numbering in the hundreds of thousands, BRAC is a global movement bringing change to Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, with operations in our 11th country, the Philippines, launched in 2012. With an office in New York, BRAC USA is its North American affiliate, an independent nonprofit created to advance its global mission. Learn more at [www.bracusa.org](http://www.bracusa.org).

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