

A black and white photograph showing a group of teenagers gathered around a table, engaged in a craft or art project. One girl in the center is focused on her work, surrounded by various supplies like paint bottles, brushes, and paper. Other teenagers are visible in the background, contributing to the collaborative atmosphere of the workshop.

REPORT ON TEEN-LED PROJECTS

2025

On March 22nd, a meeting with the teenagers was held at the premises of the Women's Fund Armenia. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate the projects implemented by teens through the Fund's financial support. This is another year of the Fund's cooperation with teenage girls, and it continues to prove its effectiveness and relevance to existing needs. The initiatives implemented within the funding varied from education to art, body positivity, and women's rights. In total, 7 groups were present at the meeting.

Motivation to Implement the Projects and Rationale for Topic Selection

The teenage participants demonstrated a strong and personal commitment to the causes they chose to address through their projects. Their motivations were rooted not only in lived experience but also in a deep sense of responsibility toward their peers and communities. While the topics varied across groups, the common thread was a desire to respond to real issues that often go unnoticed or unspoken among adolescents. Whether inspired by personal struggles, societal injustices, or gaps in education and awareness, each project emerged from a thoughtful and urgent need to spark change.

In many cases, the projects served as a form of advocacy, healing, and empowerment—both for the implementers and for their target audiences. The discussions revealed that these



girls were not only reacting to their environments but also actively shaping new narratives around youth leadership, equality, and social inclusion. Their choices of project topics were thus driven by multiple intersecting factors, including personal relevance, community needs, professional aspirations, and a broader vision of justice and well-being for their generation.

Personal relevance

Many girls selected topics they or their peers had personally encountered, such as body image issues, disordered eating, bullying, and gender-based discrimination. For example, the "Mirror" project team emphasized that "90% of people with eating disorders are teenage girls" and that in Armenia, "local data is scarce, but even international data show that 70% of the cases fall within their age group." Girls implementing projects on body positivity and mental health noted, "We saw that girls our age are often misunderstood, more emotional, and can easily lose hope about their future," motivating them to work on self-esteem and mental well-being.

Lack of awareness and education

Projects aimed to address knowledge gaps in their communities, especially around taboo or overlooked subjects. Examples include menstrual health, sexual harassment,



gender equality, and mental health. Initiative leaders noted that the level of awareness among their peers was regarded as relatively low, and this was voiced by the participants at the meetings themselves. They observed that "most teenagers had no idea they could talk about their problems openly rather than bottling them up, risking psychological and even physical health issues." Many teenagers involved in the information and education sessions reported learning things they were not aware of and could never have considered from such a perspective.

Desire to empower peers

Participants felt a strong sense of duty to support others their age through education, peer support, and raising awareness. "Our peers listen better when the information comes from someone their own age rather than from adults," said one participant from the "Mirror" project. It is important to note that some of the projects were targeting not only girls but boys, and in fact, the boys demonstrated a high interest in participating in and learning new things regarding equality, rights, and zero-discrimination. Projects like "My Body is Not Your Target" saw both girls and boys participate, highlighting a broad interest in gender rights and discrimination issues. Moreover, some of the projects were based on the aim of the project implementers to change something in the lives of



vulnerable teenagers in need of psychological support. Some girls in the communities are reportedly forced under certain stereotypes and circumstances that may cause suicidal thoughts and actions. This was another reason for implementing projects that touch on very sensitive and usually unseen teenage problems.

Post-conflict needs

Some projects were launched in response to the displacement of people from Artsakh, recognizing the need for integration, psychological support, and community building. The project initiators noticed that right after the forced deportation of the people from Artsakh, the newly arrived schoolchildren faced difficulties in adapting to the new realities. As explained by the project implementer, "Newly arrived schoolchildren were struggling to integrate into community life." Therefore, the need to support them in overcoming isolation and trauma arose.

Professional aspirations

The "STEM for Girls" project was driven by the desire to challenge stereotypes and promote girls' participation in science and technology—fields they personally aspired to



enter. Their project emphasized dual motivation: breaking stereotypes and promoting girls' entry into science and technology fields. As one participant noted, "We know that girls in Armenia score higher in STEM subjects than boys, but stereotypes still keep them away from these careers."

Effectiveness and Impact of the Initiatives

While describing their projects and initiatives, the teenage girls outlined several important points that highlighted the effectiveness and impact of these actions. They have viewed the outcomes of the initiatives not only from the perspective of the benefits they have gained as implementers of the projects but also from the perspective of the beneficiaries of their projects.

(A) Benefits for the Beneficiaries

- Increased awareness

Many highlighted that their peers learned new information (e.g., about menstrual cycles, body image, or legal rights) and became more open in discussing sensitive topics. The projects aimed at raising awareness achieved their outcomes by recording the high demand for participation in these meetings and inquiries regarding the possible extension of the projects by the participants. Many participants mentioned how their peers discovered new information on taboo topics.



"We had girls who, during our sessions, realized for the first time that their body concerns were something they could talk about and seek help for," shared one group. They have reportedly gained important new information and knowledge around targeted topics, which in fact might later result in overall awareness among other community members.

- Behavioral change

Evidence of increased engagement with school psychologists and open conversations on previously taboo issues (e.g., mental health, puberty) was noted. Some of the groups applied for the project at the suggestion of their school psychologists or teachers, who later became their mentors and supporters during project implementation. In fact, this allowed the teenage girls to develop new communication skills and a different level of relationships with school teaching staff. Moreover, the schoolchildren participating in the projects have also changed their attitudes towards psychological support and interactions thanks to these projects. "After our workshops, girls started visiting the school psychologist and having discussions they had never dared to have before," noted one of the teams. The beneficiaries of the projects have reportedly become more confident and, for instance, revisited their self-perception of their body image, appearance, etc. Others have become more eager to protect their own and their peers' rights, leading to more equal conditions and a more just society.



- Reach and participation

While attendance numbers varied, participants saw interest and engagement—sometimes from boys—as a success. As mentioned above, in some projects that didn't necessarily target only girls, the boys also expressed interest in participating and appeared to be very active, enthusiastic, and eager for project extensions. "Boys asked, 'Why can't we participate if it's about equality?' And of course, we said everyone is welcome," recounted one of the participants.

(B) Benefits for Implementers

- Peer connections and networks

Projects created ongoing support networks among participants and implementers. In some cases, participants maintained contact after the project to continue mutual support. Implementers themselves formed strong new networks, as many of the girls grouped for these specific projects and represented different communities. As a result, they gained friends and future project partners across different communities. As noted by one of the girls: "Before this project, we didn't know each other. Now we're connected for life." Therefore, they have in the first place gained new friends and partners for future projects. On the other hand, while implementing projects for peers, they have ensured an enlarged network among their peers.



- Tangible outputs

Some groups created educational platforms, posters, booklets, or held exhibitions and debates to make their work visible and lasting. The Fund's contribution to the realization of the tangible outputs of the project was highly appreciated and emphasized. One of the groups noted that "If there were no support from the Fund, their ideas would remain on paper and never be put into action."

Implementation Challenges

Alongside all the positive outcomes and results of the projects, each of the participant groups noted that they encountered various challenges during their project implementation. Most of the challenges were common across the groups; however, they can be grouped into two categories:

(a) Challenges related to interaction with the beneficiary groups

- Parental resistance: Especially in conservative communities, some parents questioned the legitimacy and purpose of the programs. Gaining parental consent was difficult for certain activities. "We had to explain again and again to parents why the project was important," a participant said. Thus, many of the teams made





significant efforts to prove the importance of the project, showcase its potential, etc., to ensure that the parents allowed their daughters to participate.

- **Time constraints:** Tight deadlines and short project durations limited the scope and quality of planned outputs. This challenge is a common one for small projects and initiatives, but it often teaches the project implementers how to engage in more purposeful and targeted action planning for future initiatives.
- **Psychological sensitivity:** Facilitating discussions on emotionally charged topics with adolescents required sensitivity and skills many implementers were learning on the go. "Teenagers at this age are so sensitive. You have to be extremely careful not to hurt them accidentally," noted one of the participants. Given that the projects were led by teenagers—who themselves were undergoing the same issues as those to whom they were delivering ideas and motivational support—it appeared quite challenging to become emotionally ready for these tasks.

(b) Challenges related to the lack of administrative or project implementation skills

- **Budget management:** Several teams, especially those new to grant funding, struggled with understanding how to effectively allocate and spend the funds. "We were so used to doing everything on a volunteer basis that when we had funding, we didn't know what to do with it," a team shared. Most of the projects ended with positive balances

in the budget, as the teenagers were used to doing many things on a voluntary basis and had enrolled a lot of supporting staff in the same way, resulting in unspent budget lines.

- **Low initial turnout:** A few teams had difficulty attracting participants, especially when dealing with niche or stigmatized topics. Thanks to the commitment of the girls, this initial problem was overcome, and all of the groups eventually reached the required number of beneficiaries. In fact, this challenge was turned into an achievement after the meetings, when the first results became visible and new groups of teenagers expressed interest in participating. Moreover, from previous years' projects, many new teenagers in the community inquired about the possibility of new sessions and projects, having learned how interesting the earlier sessions had been.
- **Lack of early guidance:** Many would have benefited from mentorship or technical guidance early in the process, particularly around budgeting, evaluation, and project planning. This issue was voiced by the majority of the participants. Many of them were new to such actions and didn't have enough knowledge of project management, implementation specifics, and more. They believed that if they had more experienced mentors attached to their projects, they would have recorded better results than they achieved.

Despite these difficulties, the participants consistently demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to learning.



Interests for Future Participation

Across all participating groups, there was overwhelming enthusiasm to remain engaged in community initiatives and to develop further, both as individuals and as peer leaders. Their interests for future participation can be grouped under five main categories:

Continued Project Implementation and Scale-Up

Many teenagers voiced a clear desire to continue and expand their existing projects, either by:

- **Reaching more beneficiaries:** Several groups mentioned that their initiatives had not yet exhausted their potential, especially in rural or conservative areas. "If there's a chance, we'd love to continue our school visits, especially in regions—because once we got there, we saw how much more is needed," said one of the participants.
- **Deepening existing activities,** based on demand from communities and schools that were not involved in the previous cycle. "Our project is still ongoing, and there are more groups of schoolchildren that want us to come and present the topic," another teen mentioned.
- **Producing and distributing more materials:** Some participants expressed a wish to finish or expand tangible outputs, such as booklets or platforms. "We wanted to publish a book, but we didn't manage it within the timeline —so we'd love to continue and finish it," said the team working on mental health support.



Training and Capacity Building

Participants unanimously expressed the need for more structured learning opportunities to enhance their effectiveness in project development and leadership. Key areas include:

- Financial Literacy and Budget Management

Many found it challenging to plan, allocate, and spend grant funds properly. "We're used to doing things for free, so when we had money, we didn't know how to use it strategically," one teen explained. The participants requested workshops on budgeting, tracking expenses, and avoiding under- or overspending.

- Project Evaluation and Impact Assessment

Several girls admitted they lacked tools to assess the real outcomes of their initiatives. "We didn't know how to evaluate our project's effectiveness. If someone had guided us early on, we'd have done better," a participant noted.

- Strategic Planning and Implementation

Teens asked for support in better structuring their projects, especially when managing short timelines and multi-step initiatives. "We'd like to learn how to plan when we have a short deadline but a big goal," mentioned one of the girls.



- Training on Global Funding and Youth Engagement Opportunities

Many participants, especially those with early experience in local fundraising, voiced their desire to learn how to (a) find appropriate international grant opportunities tailored for youth, (b) understand application requirements, proposal structures, and budgeting practices used by international donors, and (c) present their local initiatives in a way that resonates globally. "We'd love to learn how to apply for international grants or be part of global youth movements," they shared. They admitted that navigating the world of international fundraising seems overwhelming and inaccessible without support.

Participatory Grantmaking Involvement

Among the teens participating in the meeting and currently involved in project implementation, a few girls were from previous cycles who had the opportunity to be included in the participatory grantmaking process. For those who had the chance to be involved, there was excitement and pride around the experience. One of them shared her experience: "It was empowering to know that our voice mattered in choosing which ideas to fund... I'd love to do it again." Others, who hadn't yet participated, expressed curiosity and interest: "We didn't know teens could help make decisions. That's something I'd love to be part of in the future," said another participant.

In general, the process was viewed as a meaningful learning opportunity, building leadership and critical thinking while reinforcing values of justice and equity.



Networking and Peer Collaboration

Several participants emphasized the importance of continued communication and exchange between teen groups. The participants proposed having regular networking events through periodic gatherings to share experiences, build partnerships, and support each other. “We wish meetings like this happened more often—not just at the end of projects,” a participant emphasized.

This was viewed as a good opportunity to cooperate and do joint events within projects that have similar topics and interests: “This meeting made us realize how much we can do together. We’d love more chances to collaborate across teams.”

Moreover, some participants noted that it would be beneficial if the Fund’s team communicated with all group members, not only the group leaders, so that everyone would be aware of the process and could contribute at their best abilities.

International Exposure and Youth Representation

Some teenagers were eager to explore opportunities beyond Armenia, especially through connections with international partners and organizations. “We once met women from global funds who toured different countries—we want more of that!”



Such exchanges were seen as pathways to growth, learning, and gaining confidence in global citizenship. Many girls expressed a desire to learn from and connect with youth movements in other countries, especially those focused on gender equality, mental health, education, and peacebuilding. “We’ve seen that similar issues exist everywhere—bullying, body image, inequality. We want to know how girls in other countries deal with it and what kinds of projects they run.”

Conclusions

The teen-led initiatives supported by the Women’s Fund Armenia have proven to be both impactful and transformative, not only for the direct beneficiaries but also for the young implementers themselves. The projects addressed a broad spectrum of relevant and often under-discussed issues, such as body image, gender discrimination, psychological well-being, menstrual health, and equality in STEM fields. The diversity of the topics reflects a keen awareness among young people of the social, emotional, and structural challenges affecting their generation.

Through these projects, teenage girls demonstrated initiative, creativity, and leadership, navigating complex processes such as peer engagement, workshop facilitation, budget management, and advocacy. Importantly, the discussions revealed that for many of them, this was their first experience



with project planning and implementation, making the achievements even more significant. Their ability to overcome emotional, logistical, and technical challenges further underscores the value of trusting youth with resources and responsibility.

The projects also contributed to strengthening community bonds, increasing psychological openness among adolescents, and challenging harmful stereotypes. Several participants shared how their work sparked new dialogues within their schools and communities, including engagement from boys and parents. Moreover, the initiatives had a ripple effect, inspiring interest and participation from students who had not been involved in previous cycles.

However, the discussions also surfaced gaps in knowledge, experience, and support—especially in budgeting, evaluation, and project sustainability. These are areas where additional mentorship and structured capacity-building would significantly enhance both the process and the outcomes of youth-led work.



Recommendations

Based on the insights gathered through the focus group discussion, the following recommendations are offered to strengthen future programming and support for teen-led initiatives:

1. Provide Ongoing Mentorship and Technical Assistance

- Where possible, establish a structured mentorship component for each project, pairing teens with experienced facilitators or youth workers who can support them with planning, budgeting, implementation, and evaluation.
- Include optional advisory support on thematic content (e.g., mental health, feminism, youth advocacy) from relevant experts.

2. Offer Thematic and Skill-Based Trainings

- Organize trainings on financial literacy, budgeting, project monitoring and evaluation, public speaking, and proposal writing.
- Include modules on global funding opportunities and navigating international youth spaces.

3. Support Project Sustainability and Scaling

- Consider small follow-up grants or support mechanisms for groups that wish to continue or expand successful initiatives.
- Provide opportunities for experienced groups to mentor new applicants or lead peer-to-peer training.



4. Strengthen Communication and Inclusion

- Ensure that communication from the Fund reaches all group members, not just team leaders, to foster transparency, engagement, and shared ownership.
- Encourage horizontal collaboration between teen groups by facilitating inter-project dialogue, joint sessions, and co-creation events.

5. Increase Opportunities for Networking and Visibility

- Hold regular in-person and online networking gatherings for all current and past teen project implementers.
- Support participation in local, regional, and international youth and feminist forums where girls can share their experiences and represent Armenia's youth sector.

6. Improve Participatory Processes

- Expand participatory grantmaking opportunities for teens who have shown strong engagement in implementation phases.
- Offer training and follow-up support to those involved in participatory decision-making processes to enhance their understanding of power, equity, and accountability.

7. Extend Implementation Timelines Where Feasible

- Consider allowing more flexible or extended timelines for implementation, particularly for initiatives that involve layered components or field visits in rural areas.



