Learning Communities on the Move (LCOM) Model Overview

The Learning Communities on the Move (LCOM) model for girl led activism to shift social and gender norms includes the tools necessary to implement the activities following the Minimum Standards alongside insights from CARE and EMpower's experiences. This package of materials pulls together lessons, tips, and specific group sessions that can be adapted and used to find, train, monitor, support, and evaluate girl led programming.

Goal and Structure of the model

The LCOM seeks the following impact: Girls' expertise and dynamic contributions are central (i.e. respected and included) to decision-making spaces that affect their lives and rights.

The implementation of the LCOM activities over the recommended course of six months, at a minimum, to 18 months, at a maximum, supports girl led programming. Beginning from training girls and their mentors on a simple toolkit, the model helps girl

activists voice their choices and opinions and come together as a movement for advocating their rights. The girls decide what they wish to address and together use the toolkit components to implement their actions, monitor progress and evaluate their efforts. This toolkit also supports girls as researchers and hence the tools can guide them on the process to use their research findings for advocacy and influencing. The components of the LCOM package are:

1. **LCOM Model Overview**
2. **Mentors' Training & Facilitation Package**: Guidance for training mentors and preparing them to facilitate the girl activist training and their activities at community level. The toolkit has some sessions for mentors' own understanding about girls and their belief in the girl's capacity. The mentors are also trained to facilitate the girls' training and support them throughout the program period. The mentors undergo the content of the girls training as participants so that when they facilitate, they can see how girls' perceptions are different from the adults.
3. **Girl Activist Package**: Guidance for facilitating activities that are designed by girls, implemented and evaluated by girls. Includes girls training curriculum, guidance for facilitators to conduct girl activists' initial training, support in their issue identification, support them in conducting a survey for the issue identified by them collectively, share their findings, and use the planning and budgeting sheets for implementation of their planned activities.

Complementary model components include the following that can support projects to further support social norms change via girl led activism and learning on and sustainability of adolescent empowerment outcomes:

- Learning Together Toolkit: Monitoring and evaluation tools to be used by girls and mentors (select tools are already included in the Mentor's Training & Facilitation Package and the Girl Activist Package, but this resource provides the complete guidance)
- Structured Allyship Training for adolescent boys and parents
- Connecting Girl Activists with the Women's Rights Movement: Guidance for consultations with girls, women's rights organizations and facilitation of Joint meetings of girls and WROs

Intended user of the LCOM model

The LCOM model and the accompanying packages of resources are designed to be practical and user-friendly for program planners, practitioners, trainers, and mentors for girl led programming and activism. It can be used by programmers working with adolescent girls in the field of education, food and nutrition, economic empowerment, child marriage prevention and humanitarian protection sectors. It can also be used by anyone who is running a program, designing a program, developing a proposal to work with girls or staff working directly with girls who require fresh ideas on how to create and sustain program activities.

Background on the LCOM Model

The content of this package is based on the knowledge gathered during the adaptation of EMpower's Learning Community program by CARE in Bangladesh and Nepal in 2018 and 2019 respectively. It was felt that the tools needed to be refined, adding new content on risk assessment for girl-led events and norms shifting interventions to better suit the needs of girls in different geographies, to develop a training module for mentors, measure results effectively and optimize the training, monitoring and evaluation plan. Therefore, in 2020, the existing tools were reviewed, and some new tools were created based on the learnings from the Tipping Point girl led interventions in both countries. The Learning Community program was adapted then field tested in Bangladesh by CARE and its implementing partner Jashis. Based on the learnings from the pilot, CARE adapted the tools and monitoring guides from the toolkit for the Tipping Point Phase 2that had a component of girl led social norms shifting interventions and movement building in combination with other activities within the Tipping Point Phase 2 implementation package.

LCOM Theory of Change

The purpose of this Theory of Change (TOC) is to describe the pathway for change facilitated by the LCOM model and its activities, which is critical to ensure fidelity to the model when replicating it. By articulating immediate and downstream impacts that we want to see and tying those directly as possible to activities, this TOC helps teams understand what must be done and why – especially since there is risk of harm to girls and communities if done incompletely or improperly or risk of faltering on outcomes (i.e. if you skip an activity or do not follow a strategy, you will likely see harm occur or an expected outcome will not occur).

Problem Statement	Analysis of dynamic: WHY			
Girls' expertise in their own lives and their dynamic contributions (voices, choices, and leaderhip) are visibly absent from decision-making spaces that affect their lives and rights	**Patriarchal Gender Norms** control/fear of adolescent sexuality, violence, mobility, access to technology, limited or no access to knowledge/information on SRH	**Age-related social norms** puberty, particularly menstruation-related norms, adults are still seen as central decision-makers in girls' lives	**Transition to adulthood** increased restriction on girls that limit their life course, many related to gender norms	**CEFM:** girls are expected to follow the choices made by their parents of who and when they marry

STRATEGIES

Challenge gender and age-related norms held by community and family members	**Intersectionality:** different contexts and different ages affect a girl's life and experiens, take the opportunity to talk to girls about sexuality, caste, income level, gender norms, privilege; power analysis—any given girls will have things that will give or take away power in their life

ACTIVITIES

Mentors Training: trusted allies and support systme for girl activists who say "yes" to girls' vision and understand their cause	**Girl Activist Training:** enhancing aganecy with specific focus on activism, leadership skills, understanding of gender norms and inequalities, skills for planning, research, MEL, budgeting and decision-making; fostering space for collective decision-making	**Girl Activist-led Social Norms Shifting:** space and rescources to utilize and pracitce newer skills for activism and collective action (such a mobilizing peers and allies) via 4 norms shifting events: (1) data collection, (2) sharing data, (3) girl activist event, (4) graduation

Increase in Girls' Collective Agency and Action

Shifting Restrictive Age and Gender Norms

Increase in Girls' Visibility and Mobility

Girls' expertise and dynamic contributions are central (respected, included) to decision-making spaces that affect their lives and rights

Increase in the strength of suportive relationships (allies, connection to WROs)

Increase in Girl's Individual Agency (confidence, advocacy, negotiation, leadership, activism, critical thinking and decision-making, knowledge building)

Problem Statement:
Girls' expertise in their own lives and their dynamic contributions (as expressed through their voices, choices, and leadership) are visibly absent from decision-making spaces that affect their lives and rights.

Analysis of Dynamics:
This problem's roots are patriarchal gender and age-related norms, principally the fear of adolescents' sexuality that restricts their mobility, voice, and access to technology, services and information (particularly related to sexual and reproductive health). These alongside the transition to adulthood and child marriage increase restrictions on their lives and drive the expectation that girls should follow the decisions made by adults. In order to counter these root causes, the LCOM model challenges these norms via girl-led activism that takes an intersectional approach. These strategies both expand girls' individual and collective agency, connect girls of different ages and backgrounds, and help them understand the dynamics at play in girls' lives.

These strategies form the basis of the three **core activities** of the LCOM model:

Mentors' Training & Facilitation: young adults who are committed to supporting girls' activism receive a training to learn how to step back and become a mentor, letting girls lead on their own priorities. This 3-day training pushes young adults, whether staff or community members, to reflect on the power dynamics between mentors and girls, learn how to facilitate the girl activist training sessions, practice the monitoring and evaluation formats, and provide ongoing support to girl activists and their networks throughout LCOM implementation.

Girl Activist Training: after the Mentors' Training, mentors facilitate a 1.5 day training to enhance girl activists' skills on activism and planning This is accomplished through reflecting on power equity and rights, identifying the issue they wish to address collectively, practicing activist conversations, risk mitigation, planning and budget for implementation. It is suggested that no more than 30 girl activists participate in one training together. Guidance for identifying girl activists is provided in the training package, however it is up to the implementing organization to determine the most suitable number for any given area or community.

Girl Activist-led Social Norms Shifting: after the initial training, girl activists return to their communities to begin activities to address the priority issue chosen during their training. This occurs principally through four norms shifting activities: (1) data collection on the priority issue, (2) sharing data with key

WHERE DO WE SEE THIS HAPPEN?

Child Marriage: girls are left out on the decision of who, when and if they will marry

Access to education depends largely on decisions made without their participation or consent

SRHR services that are meant to respond to girls' needs are not shaped by girls' priorities or preferences

stakeholders, including parents and community leaders, (3) a norms shifting, community-level event to raise awareness and foster critical dialogue on the priority issue, and (4) a graduation event where girls come together with parents and decision-makers to advocate for solutions to their priority issue.

While girl- and mentor-led monitoring and evaluation is a key activity within each training package and the activities above, projects and programs can also measure the following **outcomes** that are directly related to the LCOM model:

- Increase in girls' individual agency
- Shifting restrictive age-related and gender norms – particularly those related to girls' mobility, voice, and participation in decision-making
- Increase in girls' collective agency and action
- Increase in the strength of supportive relationships

Minimum Standards for Implementing the LCOM Model

The following strategies and activities are considered minimum standards of the LCOM model to ensure:

1. Do No Harm – implementing these activities may put girls at risk of backlash, from their families and communities. However, if these activities and strategies are done correctly, project implementers can reduce the risk of harm.
2. Achieving expected outcomes – as mentioned above in the TOC, these strategies and activities are mutually supportive. Thus, skipping a step or failing to follow a strategy may result in weaker outcomes or not seeing results that were expected.

The following steps and strategies should take projects **no fewer than six months and no longer than 18 months,** especially if the LCOM model is being used within another project as suggested.

Minimum Standard #1: Model Guidance

This document is essential for all implementers to read before replication begins. Understanding the TOC, the potential for harm when implementing such a model, and the necessary steps of the process all directly support program quality.

Minimum Standard #2: Adaptation of the LCOM model and activities for your context

The LCOM model has its origins in EMpower's Learning Community program implemented in India and then adapted for other contexts in South Asia. Therefore, it is essential that implementers review all materials in the package and make each one relevant to their context. It is particularly important to consider the following adaptations:

- The model was implemented in the urban context in India but selectively adapted to rural contexts later, so consider the logistics of how you will bring girls together for planning, training and checking in on a regular basis with mentors.
- Based on the program staffing that uses this model, the mentors can be from the host project staff already working with girls or young women from the community itself.
- The calendar activity has to be context specific depending on the school schedule of girls, holidays and local festivals where the project is located.
- The girl path activity and planning activity must take into account the cultural and geographical issues the girls live with. Girl activists plan their path according to their context.

Minimum Standard #3: Mentors' Training

This training package both helps community members or staff learn about mentorship, reflect on their own power, reflect on how this might affect girls' activism, and then prepare them to facilitate the Girl Activist training. Finally, this package also includes mentor-led monitoring and evaluation tools to use throughout the implementation period.

Minimum Standard #4: Girl Activist Activities are led by girls and supported by a budget

This package provides mentors and other staff instructions for the Girl Activist Training and subsequent activities at community level. Girl-led monitoring and evaluation tools are also included in this package and essential to girls' capacity to lead change. The projects that plan to implement this should allocate budget that will be completely controlled by girls. Projects can base the amount on girls proposing budgets for different activities they wish to conduct. The projects offering to adopt this model must create a clear guideline for providing these funds so that girl activists follow a process of proposal presentation, managing budgets, and submitting financial reports.

> "Organizations working to change social norms need to model the equality and human rights embodied in social justice programming. Practically, this means that organizational leadership is willing to address internal power dynamics and models respect and solidarity."
> – Community for Understanding Scale Up (CUSP) Collective Insights

Minimum Standard #5: Half-day Introduction for Managers and Directors

The model should be introduced to managers and directors so that the program leaders own and believe in girl led programming and the process to be followed for making it truly girl led. The model is generally implemented within an ongoing program that has its own work plan or set of activities. It is possible that girls choose a very different issue than the project's focus and wish to approach the issue in their own way, which might not be in line with the workplan or strategy. Therefore, a complete confidence from the senior management for their commitment for a girl led approach is crucial for the program. To critically reflect on this and facilitate management's commitment to these principles, this half-day session should include sessions reflecting on power dynamics and girl led programming, found in **Annex A**.

Complementary Components

The following components can be used by anyone replicating this package and are in addition to the minimum standards above. These are not mandatory to complete, but they are highly encouraged to support sustainability, decrease the risk of harm to girls and their communities, and support the outcomes listed in the TOC.

Structured Allyship Training: this series of sessions for adolescent boys and parents is meant to reinforce understanding of gender and girls' rights before preparing participants to act as allies to Girl Activists before, during and after their community-level norms-shifting activities. These sessions include particular emphasis on learning and acting out the difference between protector and ally – this helps ensure that adolescent boys and parents promote girls' leadership in their activism and not "take over" the process.

Connecting Girl Activists to the Women's Right Movement: through a series of dialogue-based activities, Girl Activists can connect to women's rights organizations and other actors within the feminist movement that also advocate for girls' rights and empowerment. This step is particularly helpful for girls to continue their activism, whether on their own or in coordination with other stakeholders. These dialogues also offer the opportunity for mentorship from older activists.

Resource materials to complement this model

The following resources can be used alongside the LCOM model toolkits and resources when implementing an adolescent empowerment program.

1. Tipping Point Phase 2 Manuals: These implementation manuals served as a base for girl activists before the LCOM model was implemented; there are also manuals for adolescent boys, mothers, fathers, religious leaders to help them reflect on gender and power norms related for a course of 18 months. Sessions can be shortlisted from the manuals for use for mentors and/ or girls as per need of the program.

2. Girl led Activism and Structured Allyship Brief: The brief helps programmers see how the girl led programming can be strengthened with allyship support. The structures and relations the girls negotiate within their day-to-day activities can be tapped to make it more conducive for the girls while they stand alongside girls without patronizing their support.

3. Structured Allyship toolkit: the toolkit is a curriculum for parent and adolescent boy allies that can be used to facilitate discussion with allies in the community who can then work alongside girls.

4. EMpower's Learning Together Toolkit: This toolkit was borne out of EMpower's work with their grantee partners in India who are a part of the Learning Community. It comprises of user-friendly tools and guidance for different activities, and monitoring and evaluation formats along with guides for mentors and girls to use it for implementing girl-led programs.

Annex A. LCOM Managers and Directors Orientation package

Time	Topic	Content
15 min	Introduction	Introduce yourself with one sport you loved to play as an adolescent
45 min	Reflection on adolescent empowerment across agency, relations and structures	Reflection imagery of adolescence: In pairs, discuss the following: 1. Where were you born and brought up, rural or urban, who were your siblings, any difference in upbringing, what were the barriers you or your siblings faced 2. Were there any opportunity to come together as a group of adolescents for you, your siblings or classmates in school? 3. What issues boys and girls have at that time, were they similar, were they different? 4. Were there any incident(s) that stood out when an adolescent girl from your adolescent age was able to overcome a difficult situation and was successful? She could be anybody known to you, from friends and family from people working in your house or in the school. 5. Talk about the incident and the factors that helped that adolescent girl to overcome the odds. Come back together as a group: Ask a couple of the participants to share their examples with the larger group. Highlight the factors that are related to building girl's agency, support from family and allies, and the larger environment and norms that helped her overcome a situation.
45 min	Girls at the center of change	1. Brainstorm: Do you think having girls in the center of all interventions can work? Why? 2. Share the original model of Learning Communities in Mumbai, India that worked at the community level, bringing together girls from different organizations together to work on a common issue together. 3. Share examples of girl led initiatives in India, Nepal and Bangladesh and/or your context.
45 min	Model components	Components of the model: • LCOM overview • Mentor's Training and Facilitation Package • Girls Activist Package Provide an overview of the model's complementary components: • Learning Together toolkit • Structured Allyship Training (for boys and parents) • Connecting girls with WROs and movement guides for consultations with girls and WROs and for facilitating joint meetings
30 min	LCOM Theory of Change	Share the theory of change and ask how participants feel about the problem statement, if the strategies resonate with them? Why, why not?
45 min	Minimum standards	Discuss minimum standards and how easy or tough it is to keep these in their context. 1. Working in pairs, give 1 or 2 standards to each (given the number of participants) and ask them to list what are the barriers, how can they ensure fidelity to the minimum standards. 2. Ask each group to present and rest to add to the commitment for fidelity to the standards.
15 min	Closing	Share resources