



Measuring Girls' Agency in East Africa—Co-Creating Contextually Specific Tools for Evaluation: Lessons from the AMPLIFY Girls Collective (Summary)

The importance of integrating the voices of local actors in the global policy arena cannot be overstated. It is widely recognized that international policy makers and philanthropists rely heavily on quantitative indicators to measure programmatic impact. Often these indicators are a one-size fits all measure that do not take into account context and accurately capture the impact or diversity of approaches utilized by local organizations. The scarcity of grassroots' involvement in measurement processes highlights a concerning reality; grassroots organizations have been shut out of discussions that measure their own effectiveness and success. Although small strides have been made to shift funding to grassroots organizations, much work remains to fully integrate the power, intelligence and programmatic outcomes of local organizations into the global policy arena.

AMPLIFY was founded in 2017 by *Komera & the Antelope Foundation*, to demonstrate the power and impact of community-driven organizations in serving adolescent girls. The idea of AMPLIFY was further developed and expanded upon in partnership with 18 organizations across Eastern Africa. AMPLIFY is a collective of 18 organizations located across Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya who implement a diverse set of programs to serve adolescent girls. During its inaugural year, AMPLIFY prioritized the need for a monitoring and evaluation strategy that would document collective impact, while simultaneously honoring and acknowledging the diversity of community contexts of AMPLIFY members.

AMPLIFY entered into collaborative partnership with Aubryn Sidle, a mixed-methods researcher and PhD candidate at Cornell University to accomplish three overarching goals: collaboratively define success for AMPLIFY, construct a contextually responsive measure of that success, and document collective impact. Our research began by asking 18 grassroots organizations a simple question. **What does success look for girls in your community?** Below are some of the responses.

Girls increase their self-confidence. Girls are proud of who they are. Girls can set and achieve goals. Girls can see that they can achieve what they want if they put in the work. Girls have the skills to make informed decisions. Girls are able to decide when they get married. Girls are able to create positive change in their environment. Girls influence policy and implementation.

A clear theme emerged. Success for girls is characterized by the ability to affect change in their own lives and world. This capacity is best described as 'agency.' Together, AMPLIFY members facilitated by Sidle utilized a transformative participatory approach to construct a quantitative measure of *Agency* that is defined by, and for, the organizations it will serve.

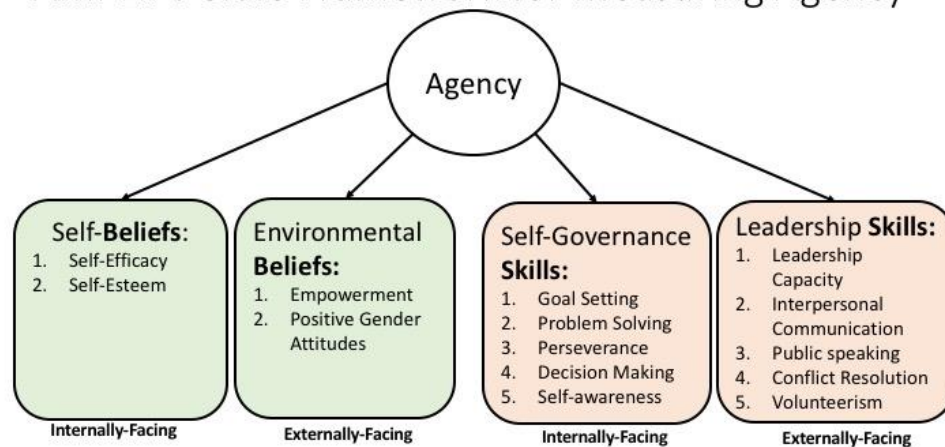
Agency is a deeply contextualized construct—dependent upon how individuals view themselves, their communities, and the specific skills necessary for taking effective action given the opportunities and constraints of each place. The diversity of programmatic approaches within the AMPLIFY collective for producing girls' agency required a contextually flexible definition of agency. Sidle (2019) synthesizes the literature across human development, psychology, and education fields to offer a flexible definition that views agency as “the capacity of individuals to define aspirational goals and coordinate the [necessary] knowledge, skills, attitudes and resources...to take action to achieve stated goals” (4-5). In Sidle's definition, Agency is comprised of a combination of self-belief and life skills, but the specific skills and beliefs included in the measure can be flexibly defined based on context.



Thus AMPLIFY members through surveys and focus group discussions, identified a list of 10 skills and 4 beliefs that they felt were most important for girls' Agency in their communities AND that were explicitly taught by their programs. This list formed the basis of the Sidle-AMPLIFY Agency survey, which was initially constructed from pre-existing psychometric measures and partners' own survey questions. Early drafts of the survey went through multiple rounds of piloting, revision and review based on both AMPLIFY members' feedback and statistical analysis of reliability and consistency.

We establish the construct validity of the final Sidle-AMPLIFY Agency measure by utilizing confirmatory factor analysis to test the hypothesized relationship between constructs as suggested by Burton and Mazerolle (2011). To strengthen our evaluation of construct validity, we involved AMPLIFY members in building that hypothesis—expanding Sidle's definition of Agency as skills plus beliefs to include four categories: internally and externally-facing skills and internally and externally-facing beliefs. Roughly we identify these categories as: self-beliefs (internally-facing), environmental beliefs (externally-facing), self-governance skills (internally-facing), and leadership skills (externally-facing). See below.

AMPLIFY-Sidle Framework for Measuring Agency



Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on cross-sectional data from 15 of the 18 AMPLIFY members, making up 1,477 unique observations of girls ages 10-35, representing four countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda). The final Sidle-AMPLIFY Framework (above) was adopted following satisfactory fit statistics of our structural equation model. A collective *Agency* score was predicted and tested for normal distribution. Validity was further investigated by confirming the hypothesis that individuals joining programs at baseline have lower scores of *Agency*, compared to those completing programs.

The outcome of our work – the production of a rigorous and reliable tool for measuring Agency – offers an important example for how local expertise can drive measurement. To date, 17 of 18 AMPLIFY partners have implemented this survey and are using it to track impact. We hope that the Sidle -AMPLIFY Agency survey will be an important contribution to global policy discussions on how to accurately assess progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By centering the voices of local organizations, our measure of *Agency* offers a versatile way to evaluate progress on social emotional learning competencies across several countries. This method should be instructive for many sectors beyond education seeking to ensure accuracy of evaluation and ability to capture the importance of the diverse range of approaches offered by community-driven organizations.