

# Learning and transition outcomes in the GEC-T programme between baseline and midline

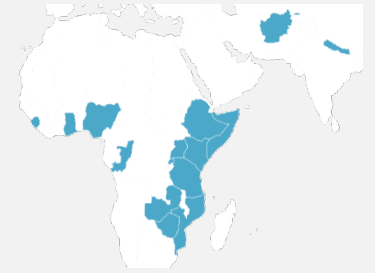
This Study Brief presents a summary of findings from the third Independent Evaluation (IE) study of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC). The study quantitatively assessed the extent to which the 27 projects funded through the Girls' Education Challenge Transitions (GEC-T) Window as a whole has had an impact on girls' learning and transition outcomes between baseline and midline (after 18 months of implementation), prior to the disruptions caused by Covid-19.

## Key findings

- GEC-T projects are associated with some improvement in literacy and numeracy skills by midline, with small increases in learning for the girls it supported compared with girls not supported by the GEC-T. There is also evidence of a substantial decrease in the proportion of girls scoring zero in literacy and numeracy tests.
- At midline, some older GEC-T girls still lack higher order mathematic and literacy skills. Three large projects have shown the most notable improvements in learning, while many of the other projects in the programme were not associated with any significant improvements in learning. Some *subgroups* of girls – i.e., girls who are overage for their grade, girls living in poor households and girls whose primary caregiver or head of household have no education – have learned at a slower pace than other girls
- GEC-T projects support girls through interventions aimed at contributing to intermediate outcomes (e.g., life skills, teaching quality, parental attitudes towards education). We find that intermediate outcomes in several areas improved on average for the GEC-T girls more than for girls in the comparison group. Additional research is needed to better understand how and to what extent improvements in intermediate outcomes were associated with changes in girls' learning outcomes.



## Background to the Girls' Education Challenge Fund





The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) Fund Phase II is an eight-year (2017-2025) programme supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). It aims to improve the learning and education outcomes of over one million of the world's most marginalised girls. The GEC consists of two funding windows: (1) GEC Transitions (GEC-T); and (2) Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB).


This study focused on the GEC-T Window, which supports girls in transitioning to the next stage of their education through 27 projects delivering interventions across 15 countries. GEC-T projects support girls through interventions aiming to improve learning, and by contributing to intermediate outcomes such as: increased attendance; improved teaching quality; safe, inclusive, and empowering learning environments; improvements in life skills, self-esteem and aspirations; and parental and community attitudes toward girls' education.


This evaluation draws on data collected by external project evaluators at the beginning of the programme and approximately 18 months later, referred to as baseline and midline data, to estimate learning and educational progress occurring before the disruptions caused by Covid-19. Transition is defined as progress from one stage of education to another, including training, vocational education and employment. In the GEC-T programme, a successful transition occurs when a girl progresses one or two grades, and an unsuccessful transition occurs when a girl repeats a grade or drops out of school


## Recommendations


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The limited progress in learning for GEC-T is in the context of a global learning crisis in foundational literacy and numeracy, and a recognised need for continued support for girls' learning. The results suggest that improvements in girls' literacy and numeracy are needed from an early stage of primary schooling to enable them to learn as they progress through school. This also requires a need to identify and address contextual factors that hold back progress.
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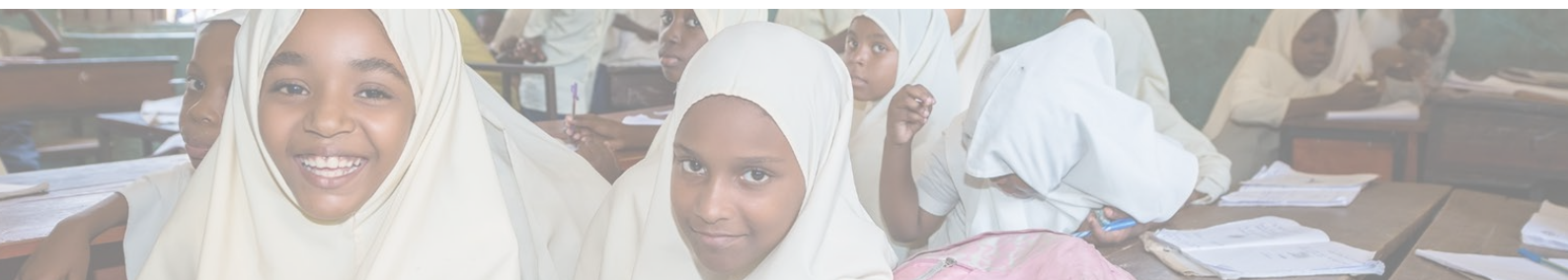
More targeted interventions are likely to be needed to support those subgroups of girl learners who overall have fallen behind other girls in both treatment and comparison areas. Regularly assessing girls' learning and their learning needs is essential to identifying who is falling behind and what targeted support is needed to help those girls catch up.
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Interventions to improve transition through education need well-defined pathways. They require strategies that allow projects to follow girls' trajectories and adapt to accommodate multiple pathways – including when girls drop out of school and/or migrate outside of project areas.
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A more standardised and consistent approach to measuring learning outcomes is needed to aggregate data across the projects, to assess the overall impact of GEC-T Window as a whole, and to compare performance across different girls, interventions and contexts. However, a standardised approach needs to consider the potential constraints on the flexibility of project designs to adapt to context-specific needs.
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Intermediate outcomes need to be measured consistently using suitable scales. The same girls who are being assessed for changes in their intermediate outcomes should also be consistently assessed for changes in their learning outcomes to better establish how the former contribute to the latter.
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Three large projects were associated with the majority of the learning gains across the programme. Additional research will be conducted through subsequent evaluation studies implemented by the GEC's Independent Evaluator to identify and understand the factors driving these positive results.



## Findings

### How did girls' learning levels change between baseline and midline?

**There has been some improvement in GEC-T girls' learning across a range of literacy and numeracy skills for all age groups.** In early grade reading assessments (EGRA), GEC-T girls correctly read 10 words per minute more by the middle of the programme (i.e., midline) than they did at the beginning (i.e., baseline); and the girls' average correct scores increased by 8 to 10 percentage points depending on the subtask assessed. In early grade mathematics assessments (EGMA), girls' average correct scores increased by 4 to 8 percentage points across different subtasks.

**The GEC-T programme is associated with a small improvement in girls' learning compared with girls outside the programme.** Learning scores for GEC-T girls increased by two to three percentage points more than for non-GEC girls in early grade reading and mathematics assessments (EGRA and EGMA), on average.

**Some secondary-school aged GEC-T girls lack higher order mathematic and literacy skills.** Secondary Grade Reading Assessments (SeGRA) and Secondary Grade Mathematics Assessments (SeGMA) were developed for Phase II of the GEC to assess the performance of girls in secondary schools. About one-third of those assessed scored zero in algebra and one-half scored zero in sophisticated word problems at the midline stage of the programme.

**The average learning progress of GEC-T girls is driven by a small number of large projects.** Three projects account for three quarters of the girls in the programme and show better results in both reading and mathematics assessments. Many smaller projects are not associated with any significant improvements in learning compared with non-GEC girls. The reasons for the observed differences between projects have not been explored as part of this study, which focuses on estimating the aggregate impact of the GEC-T as a whole.

### What impact has the GEC-T had on marginalised subgroups?

**The increase in girls' learning scores has been accompanied by a substantial decrease in the proportion of girls scoring zero in the skills tested in the EGRA and EGMA.** This implies that even the most educationally marginalised girls learned between the beginning and the middle of the programme across all literacy and numeracy subtasks.

**Some subgroups of GEC-T girls appear to have learned at a slower pace than others.** This is the case for girls who are overage for their grade, girls living in poor households, girls whose primary caregiver or head of household have no education (for literacy and numeracy), and girls whose father or mother does not live in the household (for numeracy only).

### Did girls successfully make educational transitions?

Taking programme attrition into account, it is estimated that **63% of GEC-T girls transitioned successfully**, 23% did not transition successfully (because they either repeated a grade or dropped out of school), and the transition status for 14% of girls is unknown. There was a small positive difference (i.e., 1.5 percentage points) compared to the comparison group in girls who transitioned successfully.

**Large variations in transition figures were observed across projects due to projects** targeting girls of different age groups and disability status, and because some projects operated in complex environments including situations of armed conflict.

### Why some girls may have learned more than others?

**Improvements in learning can be linked with improvements in intermediate outcomes** including life skills, teaching quality indicators, reduction in school corporal punishment and teacher absenteeism, and parental attitudes to girls' education.

**Improving intermediate outcomes may not be enough to raise learning levels alone.** Girls largely remain constrained by the context they live in, teacher quality, social norms, appropriateness of learning resources, adequacy of school and classroom facilities and infrastructure are all necessary enabling factors to improved learning.

**Intermediate outcomes in several areas improved on average for the GEC-T girls more than for girls in the comparison group.** These included specific life skills (academic self-confidence, and leadership and communication), most teaching quality measures (gender-sensitive pedagogy, teacher attendance, child-centred practices, interactive learning, school corporal punishment), and parental attitudes to girls' education. GEC-T girls did not improve more than the average comparison girl in terms of attendance or facing lower economic constraints to continue schooling.



## Methodology

This study's objective was to quantify the changes in girls' learning outcomes and their transitions to the next stage in their education associated with the GEC-T projects that occurred before the disruptions caused by Covid-19. This study relied exclusively on quantitative data collected as part of external evaluations of GEC-T projects. The complete sample at the portfolio level consists of 63,342 girls participating in between 17 and 20 out of the 27 projects in the programme, depending on the data available for each project.

The effect of the GEC-T programme was estimated through the difference in learning outcomes between the baseline to midline progress achieved among the treatment group (girls in GEC-T projects) compared to that achieved among the comparison group (girls not supported by GEC-T projects), also called difference-in-difference. This is equal to the progress achieved by girls in the treatment group over and above the learning progress achieved by girls in the comparison group i.e., those not supported by GEC-T projects.

As part of the analysis, the Independent Evaluation Team created a unique portfolio-level dataset which the FCDO will publish providing public access for further research and analysis in the future.



## Limitations

GEC-T projects operate in many different countries and local contexts, with target populations of different ages, marginalisation levels, and social and economic characteristics.

Some projects operated in complex environments including fragile and conflict-affected situations, remote rural areas, and refugee camps.

Each project intervenes through a range of different activities which are not captured in the data. This makes it impossible to attribute differences between projects to specific contextual factors or interventions.

Treatment and comparison groups are not fully comparable within each project, and the estimated effects show correlations rather than causation. Instead of 'impact', we therefore refer to 'correlations' or 'associations' between GEC-T interventions and observed changes in learning and transition.

All GEC-T projects used standardised tests of reading ability and mathematical ability, but projects often used only a selection of subtasks, or gave different subtasks to different cohort levels. This means that aggregate literacy and numeracy scores were not directly comparable across projects, across different girls within the same project, or across time for the same girl. So, only the scores from comparable subtasks were used to assess changes between baseline and midline and across the portfolio of GEC-T projects.

Transition analysis can only be examined with accuracy for girls whom the projects were able to contact at the time of the evaluation. Most of these girls are still in school, so the findings may suggest a more optimistic picture than reality because they do not account for girls who most likely dropped out of school. Only nine projects estimated the number of girls lost to attrition; for other projects, the status of lost girls is largely unknown.

### For more information

This research was carried out by the Independent Evaluation Team of the Girls' Education Challenge Fund Programme. The Independent Evaluation Team is a consortium of partners led by Tetra Tech International Development together with the Research and Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge and Fab Inc. **Authors:** Poli, Florian; Ogando Portela, María José; Atherton, Paul; Kim, Youngjin; Koutecky, Tomáš; Tangpornpaiboon, Sirin

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This policy brief is a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the complete evaluation report which is available at: [https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/seqa122n/gec-ii-evaluation-study-3-gec-t-impact-report\\_aug2022.pdf](https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/seqa122n/gec-ii-evaluation-study-3-gec-t-impact-report_aug2022.pdf)

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